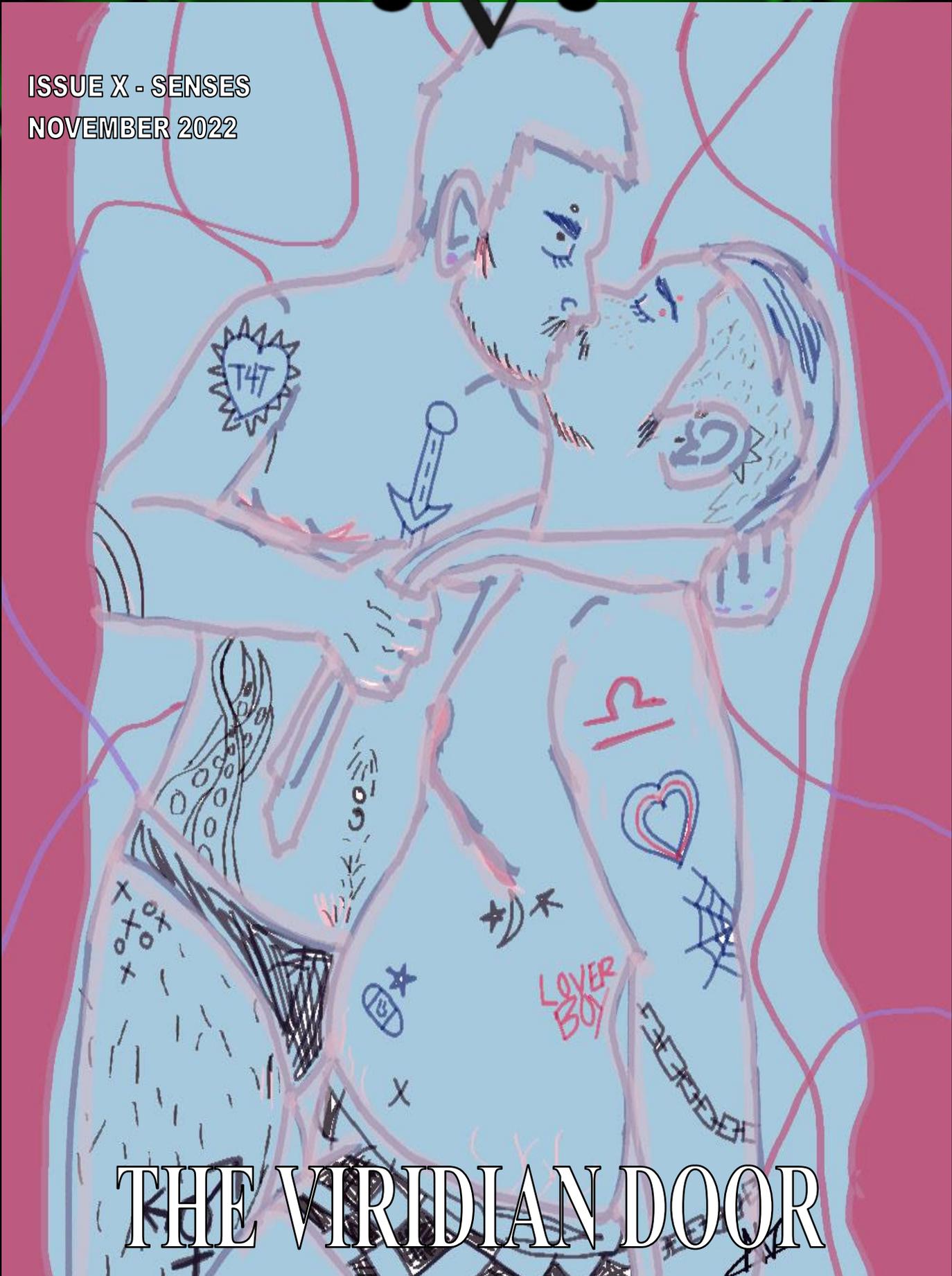




ISSUE X - SENSES  
NOVEMBER 2022



# THE VIRIDIAN DOOR



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## Editors' Notes

Issue X has certainly been a while coming. From being housed in one Lit Mag to being housed anew, it has done its travelling. This issue we requested the contributors to make us feel using all senses bar one – sight. They delivered. We also requested the pieces be erotic and queer, and I think you will all agree they delivered on that too. Erotica isn't always pom poms and joint orgasms, sometimes- like real life -it's a mess.

There are far too few erotic queer lit mags and/or issues in the world. People don't often talk about sexuality involving queer people because to them it may seem controversial. We lacked a space to express ourselves as queer individuals and needed somewhere to openly be ourselves. So, we decided, why not make it ourselves! Literature gives us the comfort and openness to say the things we usually can't. The poems and fiction here tells the story of acceptances, the joys and challenges of being queer. I hope you enjoy this collection as much as I enjoyed reading it myself. I hope you always find the strength to be you no matter what the world says.

The contributors of this issue have somewhat colloquially decided that the real topic was Desire, but what is desire if not the longing of the senses? It being queer erotica, We were enthused to see so much empathy shine through at the same time. So much life lived between one breath and the next. We really had a gorgeously mixed bag of experiences – LGBTQ were all present for this issue. The IA+ were sadly missing, but we hope they will come through as well in the next one.

Atlas Booth, Brennan Thomas and The Maenad

## Contributors' Page

### Ash Bainbridge: (They/He)

Ash Bainbridge is a trans non-binary poet, student midwife, and relationship anarchist based in Worcester, UK. Their work celebrates these identities through language as safety, progress, and glue. In 2022, Ash was awarded a full mentorship with The Word Association, and shortlisted for the Mary Seacole Award for Outstanding Contribution to Diversity and Inclusion. Their poems have been published by The Mum Poem Press, Bite Poetry Press, Spoonie Press, and Bleeding Thunder. Open mic praise includes, "Bloody hell, spot on," Jonny Fluffypunk; and "Sparky spoken word. Definitely one to watch," Emma Purshouse.

Instagram: @ash\_bainbridge

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### Nat Raum: (They/Them)

Nat Raum (b. 1996) is a disabled artist, writer, and genderless disaster from Baltimore, MD. They're a current MFA candidate and also the editor-in-chief of fifth wheel press. Past and upcoming publishers of their writing include Olney Magazine, perhappened, CLOVES, and trampset. Find them online: [natraum.com/links](http://natraum.com/links)

Twitter: @gr8earlofhell

## Contributors' Page

### Lyndsie Conklin: (She/Her)

Lyndsie Conklin is a Montanan transplanted to Colorado, living with her husband and cat, Beans. She enjoys getting outside, being a cat mom, breakfast foods, Diet Coke, oversharing Type 1 Diabetic memes, and writing poetry and erotica. Lyndsie attempts to find romance, beauty, and darkness hidden within the little things while highlighting these little, gross beauties within complex, current topics, such as mental health and LGBTQ+ and women's issues. Lyndsie holds a Bachelor of Arts in English from Western Colorado University and a Masters of Education in Higher Education Administration from Post University. Some of her work has been featured in Soupcan Magazine, The Sleeve Magazine, Pile Press, and Dreamer by Night Magazine.

Twitter/Instagram: @lc\_poetics

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### Florence Susanne: (They/Them)

Florence Susanne is a 25 year old Poet/photographer/parent from Pennsylvania. They are one of the co-founders of Poetry as Promised Magazine and their chapbook Trigger Warning is available for purchase through Two Key Customs!

Instagram: Schizo\_Trash\_Poet

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## Contributors' Page

### Geyl Wells: (She/Her)

Geyl Wells is a queer graduate student of English literature at Middle Tennessee State University. Much of her work focuses on coming-of-age experiences of female-identifying people, fraught relationships, & yearning. She has been published a handful of times & in 2021 was a recipient of the Richard C. & Virginia Peck Award for poetry & fiction. Wells was born in the heart of Mississippi, raised in the shadows of Arizona's Superstition Mountains, and lives in the suburbs of Nashville.

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### Laszlo Aranyi: (He/Him)

Laszlo Aranyi (Frater Azmon) poet, anarchist, occultist from Hungary. Earlier books: (szellem)válaszok, A Nap és Holderők egyensúlya . New: Kiterített rókabőr. Some English poems published: Quail Bell Magazine, Theta Wave, Crown & Pen, Dead Fern Press, Coven Poetry Journal, Journal of Erato, Lothlorien Poetry Journal, Spillover Magazine, Fugitives & Futurists, Mausoleum Press, Nine Magazines, Misery tourism, Terror House Press, Journal of Expressive Writing, Amphora Magazine, All Ears (India), Utsanga (Italy), Postscript Magazine (United Arab Emirates), The International Zine Project (France), Swala Tribe Magazine (Rwanda), The Quills Journal (Nigeria). Known spiritualist mediums, art and explores the relationship between magic.

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## Contributors' Page

### The Maenad: (She/Her)

The Maenad. Transgender Goddess Activist, Artist, Performer and Publisher Author of Creative Non-fiction, Erotica, Fantasy, Science Fiction and Social Criticism.

The Maenad writes voraciously about gender, class, sex, inequality, mental illness, and the intersection of these points, also writing about culture, games, space, futurism, and the human condition. Always, thinking of other possible worlds and how best to help this one we all inhabit.

Co-editor of Viridian Door, Reader: @farsidereview

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IG: @scarlet\_Maenadum

**Tipping: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/ScarletRed>**

**Tipping: <https://account.venmo.com/u/Gwen-Scarlet>**

### A.L. Davidson: (She/They)

A. L. Davidson is an author who specializes in massive space operas and tiny disturbances. She loves crafting stories with a heavy focus on relationships, eco-horror, space exploration, inclusivity and diversity, ghosts, grief, and isolation. She currently lives in Kansas City with her yellow-eyed demon of a cat, Jukebox.

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Instagram: MaybeMockingbird

Patreon: Alycia Davidson - Author

**Tipping: Venmo MaybeMockingbird**

## Contributors' Page

### Jeannie Marschall: (She/Her/Any)

Jeannie Marschall is a teacher and writer from Germany who lives in a little witch's cottage with a wonderful partner and crazy pets, caring for a semi-sentient wild garden. Jeannie enjoys reading and writing SFF stories, preferably queer ones, and sometimes writes poems too. Some of these pieces have been or are scheduled for publication this and next year, for example with Snowflake Magazine, lit. 202, Black Spot Books, or QueerWelten Magazine. Longer works are in the pipeline.

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### Dia VanGunten: (She/Her)

Shane and Atom are part of Pink Zombie Rose.  
[www.pinkzombierose.com](http://www.pinkzombierose.com) @pinkzombierose

Dia VanGunten can be seen in Polyester, Outlander, Kinda Weird Magazine, Cringe, Deadbeat Poets, Run Amok Books, Caustic Frolic, 100 Subtexts, Open Sewers and NoNothing Magazine.

### Beppi Isbert: (She/Her)

Beppi is a Fine Artist/Comic Book illustrator & more living in Baltimore, Maryland. For those of you who have watched The Wire, she has street cred.

Instagram: @beppiisbert

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*White Teeth/Black Leather is one installment in an ongoing collaboration between Dia VanGunten / writer and Beppi Isbert / artist.*

## Contributors' Page

Max Natalna: (He/She/It)

Max Natalna is writer based in Queens. He likes dragonflies and the color green. It was first published in Sweet Tooth.

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**Tipping: Venmo @maxnatalna**

Shockoe of Roanoke

Writer of Titian Kneeling

Micky/Moth: (They/Xa/Fang)

Micky is a trans nonbinary artist who loves creating pieces that celebrate trans joy. This piece was created to show the joy that t4t relationships hold.

*Artist of Front Cover Illustration*

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Instagram: @caring\_cryptid

**Tipping: CashApp \$spookymicky1**

**Tipping: Venmo Micky-cryptid**



## **She's a 10 but she's writing her PhD**

By Ash Bainbridge

I ask if she  
still plans – today – to review The Literature. She  
nods, flinting tinderbox freckles on my  
half-ginger, droughty skin. My  
pores – scorched – fan drier, smoke higher with each of her  
beating eyelash tugs. I  
want her  
to melt my  
structure into any form she  
wants. I want her  
intellect – shimmering – and  
chaotic clarity to explore, expose, mix me  
for fuel to set her  
controlled burn alight. Wildfire. I  
want to be devastated, by her.  
I want her  
sigh as she  
flicks through my  
ashes – gnawed thumb licked – to unearth her  
needs.  
To be her  
watchfire, smouldering beneath her  
fingertips.



## Shower Thoughts

By Nat Raum

i languish with only lukewarm shower  
water to slake the pinpricks of desire  
between my legs. they swell to bee-  
stung lips, ripe to swallow in gulps

if not begging to slurp itself something  
far hotter than the water from these  
leaky pipes, a delta spread across  
folds i stroke for good measure. slick

fingertips and faucet drips can hold  
me here in the meantime but i'll need  
to find myself splayed into her like we're  
tangled in a desk drawer to feel full..



## Mutual Markings

By Lyndsie Conklin

Please. Start slow.

I'm ticklish and sensitive

to the cool decoy ink

we plan on using.

Perhaps first emblazon

my soft milk skin

with your name, subtle

in a proclamation

that I am now yours.

I'll take the quill

and mirror your possession.

Consequently, increase

the intensity of stains.

Wet my natural marks,

freckles and waning scars

where life's ligatures

have held too tight.

Wet them with lashes

lining out my curvature

and I will nibble



at the enfolds of bone  
peaking out of your shoulder.

Please, wear my dentition  
along the definition  
of your freckled arms.

Now that we have begun,  
please, never cease.

My tickles have morphed  
into dynamic intrigue,  
forming in temporary bumps  
accenting the rest  
of your canvassed art.

Only we need to observe  
the passionate masterpieces  
for ourselves.

Let us be covered  
in mutual markings  
professing ownership  
with a couple scribbles  
and painted, lasting kisses.



## **I've been watching you for too long**

By Florence Susanne

I've been spending the inklings of my time watching the way your arms move in the space between us.

Observing the feathering of muscles,

the almost indiscernible thump-thump of the blood pumping beneath your jaw.

That perfectly shadowed mandible;

carelessly breaking my heart with every wayward grin.

One hand flourishing your words, the other languidly ashing your cigarette off the side of the ashtray.

and oh those fingers.

I want those dangerous appendages to disappear into the mess of my hair,

to feel them sliding up the more delicate areas of my thighs,

vanishing inside the spaces I have reserved for you alone.

I need them to wrap around my throat,

your voice demanding your title to slip from my mouth.

Push me,

pull me,

cut me,

throw me down.

Lap up the blood that spills.

Frenzy,

fucking,

fulfillment of desires we never dared share with anyone else.

I'm addicted to the way I taste on your tongue.



## Strawberry Preserves

By Geyl Wells

like a paperback book,  
you bend me at the spine  
& phonemes fall out of my mouth in  
indistinguishable order.

*I have wanted this for so long* say the sweaty palms,  
making their way up my skirt.  
*I am sorry I did not do this sooner* lament the lips,  
journeying down into uncharted canyons.

how many times will you tell me I am perfect?  
how many times will it take me to believe it?

bite marks & patches of plum-colored flesh remind me  
that I am fruit falling into your lap.  
ripe, yours to be harvested.  
you say you have never tasted anything so sweet.

hands slap, shake, caress, cling.  
my heart wishes this will never end,  
so my mouth begs you for more—  
& you smile, forcing me to say it again.

# V



# Epistrophy

By Gwendolyn Harper

**CW Immediacy, Intimacy, Jazz, Love, Romantic Erotica, Sex, actual Trans bodies**

**TW detailed sexual encounter, polyamory, very light blasphemy**

All in a rage as the blood comes to me roughly, savaging its way into my nethers.

I'm on my back. My skirt has clasps at the waist that keep it closed, but right now they're undone, laying to either side of my narrow hips. My blouse is unbuttoned, and my bra – a front clasp – is buried in the nook betwixt my breasts and my armpits.

Such is the way of spontaneity.

My boyfriend is astride me. The moment of spur came and so it is that I am on my back, with my panties in a ball tangling my ankles like soft kink, and my skirt open like a flower,. My boyfriend is finally having his way with me. It's been at least three months in coming and now he's getting what he wanted. I have mixed feelings about this.

He is naked to the waist, and I note with some delicious alarm that his hips are wider than mine, and able to sit astride me quite easily. There is a thick, musky incredible scent rising up from where our bodies connect, and he has my body pinned perfectly underneath his own. My hair is a corona over my head as The Ionious Monk goes Off Minor in five takes inside my stereo, filling my room with horns and piano and -

I exhale a deep breath, my eyes widening in fear and wonderment. That surge of blood has erupted below my navel. My boyfriend smiles a secret, playful but savage manly smile, as he slides my cock inside him. I find my brain tracking a passing thrill that he does not shave like I do, and so he is wilder and -

my shaft sinks in, getting harder, my nipples screaming with the intensity of it all. Monk begins his Epistrophy as my boyfriend crashes into me, throwing his weight forward, hands balled into choppy seas for fists, as he locks my prick deep inside him, parting his swollen labium and making him cry out a little.

This is all too much for me; the dissonance of our bodies, singing an impossible song as my boyfriend begins to ride upon my cock, briefly hooking a thumb in the ring I have through one nipple; not intending to pull on it but he does and it does and I do and my hands bite deep into his pale wide hips and for a moment it is as though he is penetrating me, even though we don't – yet – find ourselves precisely equipped for that kind of jazz.



The Epistrophe continues and in the living room I can hear my phone ringing. I can't tell which ring it is, so it's probably not my wife, or my girlfriend, or or

I'm close and my nails are biting into my boyfriend's flesh as he hits the sweet spot, the swelling ridge of my cock tickling his g even as I'm arching my back, my tits jostling from the motion. We are each, momentarily, our own little worlds, our own head spaces, and something about that gulf offends me. I slide a hand up underneath his shirt, feeling his muscles working around his navel as I pound into him. Lightly grazing over his navel grabs his attention as though I yanked upon forgotten umbilicus – the connection that rocks between us lightning captured between our genitals, flaring out like a dead star and locking us into place.

He leans forward to kiss me and I'm close, I'm so close and I don't want this to stop but gods damn I love him and this is all too much for me and I love the dissonance because it is such beautiful music and the hard bop changes to Crepuscle with Nellie and our bodies are clashing together in a tidal wave of needful flesh and oh why can't this last longer-

his hand finds my cheek as I scream out; His name, God's name, Mary's sisters, and the nine muses all breathlessly hesitating as I feel his tight vaginal warmth contract around me like a gentle hand and draw the cum out of me like a surgeon. Somewhere the phone is ringing still.

Over too soon, but his hands are around my head and again it is as though he is bucking within me, filling my soul with the tortured build up of three moons as the horns slow down and it's the sixth take and oh my gods I love him so.



## The Devil Kissed His Back

By A.L. Davidson

The devil kissed his back.  
Tenderly.  
Seductively.

He marked him. His lips made welts on the ridges of the younger man's concaved spine. Blush red flowers bloomed across the pale tundra of the clergyman's flesh, trailing off toward the crescent shaped birthmark placed upon his shoulder. Like a soft breeze carrying the petals onward to the heavens that exiled him long ago.

Every place the devil touched him felt like the hot end of a cigarette. It was so warm. Painful, yet not unbearable. The heat was a welcome sensation against the cold, dreary air that nipped at his cheeks like angry vipers.

This man, this demon, was an inferno against him. A heater cranked much too high, scalding flesh and leaving war wounds in the form of blisters and burns. He felt as if he would melt in his unfamiliar hands like candle wax. That his spine would crumble from the pressure into ash. He swore the ridges and trails of this wildfire's fingerprints would permanently be etched into his ribs, his hips, and neck.

He did not mind in the slightest. The clergyman succumbed to it freely.

The devil's hand cupped the priest's chest and held his trembling body close. The unsteady motions of the mortal's weakened frame caused his arching back to curve and his trembling forearms to buckle from those red-hot fingertips, from the unfamiliar touch of intimacy. The devil pawed at his pectoral and continued marking his shoulder blades with bruises and bite marks.

"Little priest," the stranger cooed seductively as he set his nose into the slit between his shoulder blades. He smelled of sage and pinewood, smelled of winter nights and holy actions, and he desperately wished to dirty his soul.

The devil shuddered an exhale of arousal, "You gave in much too quickly."

How could he not have? The young, wide-eyed clergyman was overcome with emotion as the sound of the stranger's voice trailed off into the blistery winter night. It carried out through the open window of the bar on Main Street, his crooning was smokey and pain soaked and enchanting. It was sinful and he craved it.

He stood so long in the storm listening to the melodies. He was swept up in the current of the music, it turned his stomach and possessed him, called to him like a siren. His golden curls became white with powder, nose reddened and teeth chattering. He became desperate for the warmth that slipped from the musician's lips. Those liquor soaked words were powerful. When the stranger approached him on the corner he knew it was all over. It all happened so fast.

How could young Father Strauss not have shifted his eyes to look? How could he have turned away when he caught the fire in those whiskey hued eyes as they blinked closed to the call of the music? How could he not have thrown it all away for the touch of this possessed man's hands? How could he have known the black-clad rock'n roller housed the devil inside his handsome mortal coil when he said yes? How? How? Dear God in heaven, how?

Lord above, forgive him his transgressions.

The clergyman gasped as the musician's calloused fingers moved down his stomach. He buried his face into the quilt beneath him to stifle a gasp. He felt the weight of the other man press down upon him.

"Marcus," the priest whispered.

The singer claimed the name Marcus Santiago. It was written in golden ink across the guitar case that rested in the corner of the small room. A signature that looked contractual, prominent, as if the evil that wore his husk wanted the world to know this handsome face and remember it fondly. Johann Strauss' heart cried out in distress over the loss of such a beautiful man's soul to such darkness but damn it all to hell, he was tempted by the evil within that frame and he liked it.

Calm and collected, his touch showcased that his palms easily handled men before. Dealt with soft, unmarred flesh. It was a delicate thing, the way his digits danced over Johann's flesh. As if he were merely fingering a guitar, as if the motions of his teeth as they gnawed into his skin were akin to crying out a pained melody.

Carefully, Marcus cupped Johann's face with his free hand and pulled his skull up to gaze at the fingerprint smudged mirror across the way. His seducer's face was blurred, unrecognizable as human. Father Strauss' own face was reddened. Licked by the summer-like heat that soaked through his flesh. His wheat gold curls twisted with perspiration at the ends. A perspiration that forced his locks to fall in front of his china blue eyes. He was unabashedly unashamed at the perversion on his expression, yet he set his hand against his rosary in embarrassment when he saw it shift around his throat. Desperate to hide the prying, omniscient eyes of the one he plead fealty to from his sin.



Sin he found no guilt in.

“Look at you, little dormouse,” Marcus whispered as he set his lips against his ear, “You look like an animal in heat. So far gone you can’t even hear the world outside screaming.”

“Let them scream, demon. So long as you still speak softly I’ll refuse to acknowledge them. Drown out those wails, Marcus, drown out my senses in your seduction. Please,” Father Strauss begged, lip quivering with weakness.

Marcus smirked and kissed his jaw. He savored the moan that slipped from the clergyman’s lips. A soft, raw sound like a violin string being plucked, groaning out in wear and resistance before finally giving in. The poor little mortal. How desperately he wished to be played, to be held and manipulated. He would happily oblige. He was glad he decided to walk the earth tonight.

The shadows of the demons that crawled over the church roof stretched out across the rectory wall, draping the two men in darkness like the swift motions of spinning clock hands. The legions of hell screamed in delight at the rising ecstasy of their master, an ecstasy felt through the sacred walls of St. Thomas’ Cathedral as the building creaked and groaned in protest against the winter storm. They scattered across the peaked rooftops with swiftness in their movements.

Marcus slid his hand down the dip of Johann’s waist, his palm spun across the valley until it comfortably cupped his hip. He pressed himself into the clergyman’s body, causing the young man to gasp at the pressure of his hardness against him.

“Oh... God,” Father Strauss cried out.

“He can’t help you. Not tonight,” Marcus chided lowly into his ear.

The shivers that ran down Johann’s spine were almost painful. He felt it down into his sinew and marrow. The remnants of the honeyed liquor that lingered on the handsome stranger’s tongue filled his nostrils. His vision blurred from second-hand intoxication, more so from the sensation than anything. It was all so new, so vivid and raw, and he would be damned if he let this last night be spent alone.

He was damned either way and something about those earthen hued eyes comforted him.

Their lips found each other. The full heat of hell was exuded between the breath they shared. Anticipation swelled like a storm as Marcus undid the clasp of the clergyman’s jeans and tauntingly traced lines over his flesh with his fingertips. The young priest felt blood and arousal and desperation pool in his low abdomen. Yes, he was damned this rapturous night.

To hell with it all. Let the end come.

The devil truly was a handsome man. One he felt a desire to relent to. He took hold of the stranger’s fingers and guided them downward with expectancy and desperation. His hips rocked instinctually, eliciting a chuckle from his seducer. The little dormouse was trapped and his to devour.

So devour he did. What a glorious night for a rapture. What a glorious night for sin.



## Titian Kneeling

By Shockoe of Roanoke

My tongue glides  
like a sheathe  
upon a gladius.

The Roman's sword  
is thick and heavy  
in my mouth.

My heart beats  
like the wildest,  
free mustang.

My grey ocean eyes  
look up upon what  
seems to me a god.

His hands sojourn  
through my dark  
roaming curls.

Suddenly, they grip —  
pain has never  
felt so sweet.

My soft hands upon  
his muscled calves,  
sculpted by Canova.

They tense — and  
then a warm flood  
explodes in my mouth.

As if Moses crashed  
a great, white sea 'pon  
this blessed pharaoh.

The sword withdrew,  
saliva trailed from it  
to my angelic lips.

He looked down at me,  
this half-dust, half-deity,  
as if I were painted by Titian.



## Heft of Sound

By Max Natalna

after was slapping  
toothpaste back into the tube

or a chafe on the walls  
of my favorite shot glass

before you set it to dry.  
on my tongue: three

fingers to pull  
out a paper jam,

until I hear a small tear running down.  
wrung out between teeth,

caught in the folds of your lap:  
one sound

of a tongue to the roof of the mouth  
with air hushed like through a paper straw.

you said that if you wanted someone to  
make out with your thoughts

you'd have to touch yourself.  
everything we made

we had to fine tune—  
skin to skin to static.



## Not Good Enough

By Jeannie Marschall

Okay I'll be honest

I'm tired of their lazy porno horseshit

It's nothing but the same old mechanical

touching-only-genitals with that full-on, white-light, crude closeup of the same

with all the truly engaging enthusiasm of a dilapidated diesel engine

ridiculous, repressed repeats of oh and fuck and yeah ah ah

with some unimaginative cocks and pussies thrown in

and guys in particular hardly giving a peep beyond that

unless they're scripted to be vile and tasteless

with hardly ever anything more nuanced than does/done takes/taken

unless they're treating it like a freakish joke-act of freakish joke-bodies

and then they dare call that "hardcore" gimme a break

You need a dictionary and anatomy classes

Move over

Let me demonstrate

What good can be done with some gab

And a few broken binary power dynamics under a rainbow flag

We might for example

Damn, yes, that, put your hands on my skin

drag them, and *mean* it,



all the way from my scalp to my feet and back up  
slide a wet thumb across my palm over my wrist my bicep my neck into my mouth  
- I want to make you feel the smooth mobile flesh behind my lips  
licking the salt from your finger and stroking the joints there, not just  
some cheap tease of anything scheduled for later in the plot, just  
your senses, my spit, our heat -  
and back out and then drag your nails down my throat  
suck the crook of my elbow while  
one of your hands rakes my hair as if despairing  
bite down on the tendon connecting my  
inner thigh to my pelvis, just a little harder now  
and then run your tongue eagerly up to wherever makes me gasp the loudest  
We could have more  
conscious palms sweeping up limbs and greedily squeezing  
shoulders backs buttocks knees ankles  
just because we feel good doing it having it done simultaneous  
more listening to what makes us choke on the size of sensations  
more sweat-slicked limbs losing hold in the middle of  
grinding up closer forgetting how eyes work as scents drag us under  
the noises somehow making us both laugh and shudder all over  
because it just feels so good to throw one's head back and take it all in  
more chasing of what put that unseeing look on the other ones' faces  
and repeating it just to make them look like that again  
blissed the fuck out, blind and deaf and wrecked in the best way



and we are drunkenly losing track of how this should not  
feel like both my skin and our skin at once, gliding scratchy-sticky  
this weird-numb-feel-everything state of being everywhere in our bodies  
while don't ask me how we are also so intensely focused  
seemingly nowhere but right on our sex which is  
more of everywhere again  
and afterward we look at each other breathless and grinning and have nothing left but  
I have no idea what just happened but fuck, that felt great.

Put that one on, and then I'll reconsider.

# V





## White Teeth / Black Leather

By Dia VanGunten

Fall was a relief. It had been a motherfucker of a summer. He'd been halfway nuts. His mother had caught him by the ear, peering into his eyes. She'd let him go and he'd scampered off with his heart in his throat. The way his mother looked at him sometimes, man, she had that oracle eye. Factor in the Turkish ancestors (that she supposedly didn't have.) Oh well. That was the unit for ya. One more cog in the machine. A stark raving cog-in-the-machine success story. Nothing brought him more shame than his father on TV, hawking the American dream. He was a gollum for his father -- a flesh and blood talisman. THE AMERICAN SON. That was some junk.

He was a cesspool. His apartment was a bubbling ogre's den of snot n' jizz n' shame. There was a regular river of ogre cum, the motherfucker of a summer, the suspicious mother, all that business, because he was restless and nuts and in love. With a phantom!

The man didn't belong to him. The man didn't even know that he existed. All summer it went on like that. He'd sweated through a sticky July -- heavy, fetid and gross. They couldn't even swim in Lake Erie because the water was "blooming" green with toxic algae. He'd thought to himself - just drive up to Maumee Bay in the moonlight with only the frogs on their lilly pads & the gargantuan noise of the swamp. Walk the boardwalk. Let the algae have you. But he was an ogre, after all. He'd like it! He'd just muck about in it!

Sweaty, stinky, sexy summer. He'd scolded himself: He is a stranger. He is a phantom. He is not your boyfriend. Then, all in one morning, a whole series of weird things happened and the phantom was his boyfriend. It went pretty much exactly like that. Hey, so, weirdo, ya know the object of your maniacal affection? Have him. Notoriously impossible to have him, but ok, even he's going for it. Just BOOM! A bomb went off in his heart! Blown to smithereens! And the whole time he'd told himself, wait, where's the catch? Cause there's always a catch. Every moment of happiness he'd ever known had a trapdoor in the floor. The whole game was a grift.

Sure, sure, the boyfriend experience: homework & heavy petting & dry humping. No wonder he felt like a character in some godforsaken gay movie. He'd seen them all. There was always a motorcycle or a scooter or a horse: one boy clinging to the other boy's ribs, his cock against the driver's ass, there where a tail should be, vestigial remnant of mythic times. There's always a water scene. Obligatory splashing. It's ok so long as you're swimming or bathing; so long as you



didn't do it again or mention it later. They always did it again. They always mentioned it later. Then someone had to die. Give in to your deviant desire and die. He'd once fought for these movies. Not the porn even, but the cheeseball stuff. He'd said "They're dear to me! The only thing that keeps me alive is a love worth dying for!" She'd slapped him across the face and spit on the floor. She wanted to spit on him but she would never. He could be a serial killer and his mother would still spit at her own shoes.

Sure enough -- trap door. The phantom was no longer his boyfriend. The phantom was a goddamn ghost in the wind. He wasn't gonna take a ghosting like a good boy. He pulled his leather jacket from the closet. It was cool enough, this late at night, with the wind blowing in from the lake. Jacket, headphones, armor. He was Ulyseus! Ready to kick some ass. Ready to solve the seven riddles or whatever. By the time he arrived at his destination, he was jacked on tunes and feeling halfway hopeful. He stood on the corner, almost laughing at how easy it was.

Twin veins pulsed neon pink in the diner's futuristic skin. He stepped into the fragrant steam. A faux maple syrup scent clung to everything. The phantom looked up from his sketchbook with stitched brows. Atom said his name -- Shane -- like a groan.

"How'd you find me?"

"You're not the man of mystery you think you are. You're a creature of habit."

It was 2am and the tramps were tramping in for 99 cent pancakes. Attentive waitresses didn't expect tips so the pancakes were a late-nite kindness. This place had compassion. Atom sought compassion. He preferred the comfortable booth near the rotating tower of pies; set off from the window, facing the door. No one got the drop on Atom Verne. He'd wait for this booth before he'd sit in another. The ladies expected Atom on certain days. They'd save the booth with a plate of pancakes. Atom hated pancakes but tipped a fiver for every stack they served the homeless.

Atom said, "You bombing down on me like this, it's kinda psycho."

"Babe, don't. I feel sick."

He should get a parting gift. He had a consolation prize in mind. His saliva thickened in his



mouth, lusty and viscous. Shane needed this. So bad. Most of the sex he'd had was shit so he mostly didn't have it. He rarely liked someone enough to want their tongue past his teeth. Ew. No. The ogre would rather swallow slugs. If he thought he might tolerate a particular tongue, he tried it, but he didn't keep liking the person. That had never happened. Once. It happened once.

Shane said, "Some rando gets to blow you. Not me though. I get homework and dry humping."

"Hey, you wanted your rom-com high school fantasy."

On the table, among the empty sugar packets, a phone blew up with texts. Atom leaned forward, a glancing read, and liked what he saw. A half smile slipped from one corner of his mouth. So yea, the second phantom, an identical twin. Atom couldn't fathom the untethered loneliness of a test tube baby. At nearly 30, Shane's adolescent longing was more than just a sexy game. It was a crater in his heart. Verne had an automatic ride-or-die. A built-in someone.

"Atom, you say Aton is a doorway but he feels like a wall."

That got a smug chuckle: "Normals need love to be as normal as themselves."

"Are you calling me a normal?"

Above the glowing phone, in a rainbow arch, a line of colored pencils begged Shane to sharpen them. Atom liked them to have pointy tips, even when they were just waiting. He wanted them to be ready for him. Shane sat down opposite Atom. He picked up the first color in the rainbow.

"Babe, what about your quest? You said you were in a cave mistaking shadows for reality, just reading love stories. You said you wanted your own. You said I was it."

"Ya, that's from Plato's -- "

"I don't care about Plato."



The rainbow rolled under Atom's fingers, pencils rattling against the pink Formica tabletop. Shane turned the pencil in the sharpener, red skin, an unfurling ribbon. He peeked through his falling hair. Atom was weak for that white stripe so he relented. Sorta.

"We'll see what Aton thinks of you."

Enormous relief. Phew. Shane slowly sharpened the oranges and then the yellows. Atom colored in a tailfin. He switched pencils and made the rear-lights gleam bright. He traded red for yellow. Shane had sharpened them just in time.

Shane said, "So wait. If your clone doesn't approve, you're not gonna....finish me?"

He leaned across the pink formica to whisper the last part. Atom heard that helpless fluffed up sound and it pleased him. He relished the power he had over this starving lover who he'd ever so expertly edged into deep space. Shane was a glob of nebulae. On one side of Atom's face -- a pucker, one sucked in cheek, a snapping sound of inside-pink against white teeth.

"I'm still gonna do ya either way. Right?"

"Ya know what? No. If we get the thumbs down, I will chain myself to my radiator like a werewolf during the full moon."

Atom said, "Wow. Now I really want it."

"Good. I want you to want it."

Shane had done his assigned homework. He filled out worksheets about emotional needs, love languages and attachment styles. He did all of the recommended readings. He studied up on autism and the psychology of enmeshed identicals. Atom demanded massive preparation for a relationship that was already dead in the water. Shane should get a gold foil star at least.

"Now. Tonight. While there's still a chance for us. Make me feel like the one."

Atom leaned back as if settling in. That willful gaze. The worst. A waitress brought Shane a coffee with the exact right number of creams and sugars, like she was his mother. That's how many nights he'd sat here sharpening pencils and pouring his heart out.



“There ya go, gorgeous. Ya hungry, doll? ”

Fine. The ogre gave in to “pretty” since that’s what it took. He made an effort to fill his own face. He puffed his lips and lifted his chin. Pushing dark hair from his brow, he smoothed that white stripe, stretched luxuriously and feigned a yawn. The waitress, a woman of aforementioned compassion, was complicit. She’d set him up for this performance but she enjoyed the show.

He said, “Mmm. It's late and we’re off to bed. Right, babe?”

Atom piled his pencils into a leather envelope while Shane paid the check plus the pancake tips and more. The waitress had earned every cent. Eternal devotion! Atom held the door and Shane got a whiff of armpit. They stepped into the neon night and rounded the corner. Atom pressed him to the bricks, breathing hard. Shane rolled his head into that expansive palm and Atom tightened his grip; a fistful of hair. This stressful day was stinkier than usual; a subtle edge of sweat on soapy, woody skin. The scent filled Shane like a physical thing; a pressing pleasure, from the inside. He whimpered because the sensation had density. Atom whispered into his ear, more feeling than sound. Hey hey.

Shane held tight to that black button up, damp at the small of Atom’s back. He wanted to rip it off and press it to his nostrils like a gasoline soaked rag. He’d like to take it home with him. He already had a shirt that he’d stolen from Atom’s gym locker at work but the scent had faded.

Shane said, “Your doorman’s watching you maul me.”

“He’s seen worse.”

Shane squeezed his lids shut. He had tears in his eyes when he opened them.

“Your doorman thinks I’m a dreamer.”

“You are.”

Atom angled his body, to block the bright lobby. He pulled Shane into a rough hug, tousled his hair and pressed his lips to the spot that grew the white lightning bolt. There, at the mutant root.

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