

EXIST OTHERWISE



Issue 18, April 2026

Joshua Chen Cavalier

Cassie Urquhart

Cleomé Morra

Zar Mohseni

Mario Loprete

Jessica Bao

Coriander Focus

Edylan Liu

Deanna Faye

Adam K. Bechtold

Ari Cottingham

Mike Dressel

Maria Zafar

Susan L. Lin

Seanice Lenay

Azalea Withrow

i nO lOnGEr EXIST?

PERFECT, nOW
nOTHING Can
COMÉ
BETWEEN us!

—claudE cahun





Joshua (he/him) is a photographer, writer, & filmmaker with a decades-long background in movement arts (parkour, martial arts, & dance). His work thematically explores grief, mortality, collective identities, & expressions of the human body. His work has been published & exhibited across numerous physical imprints, exhibitions, and film festivals. His debut photographic book “Vassal of the Sky” has just been released with the publishing imprint Holler Books in a first edition print run.

Autobiography of a Queer Bug Child

Cassie Urquhart

Insects were my very first,
to hear my mother tell it,
baby me, presumed cursed,
found a wasp and held it.

I crawled across the grass
one day and smiled ear to ear.
Upon a little flower sat
the pointy little dear.

Lacking friends, I didn't care,
I solaced in the knowing
that insects would be everywhere,
all while I was growing.

My mother then, she called me queer
(the strange one, not the dyke).
Yet I was there and saw it clear
the ways she got me right.

They warned me of the risks,
the bullies, and the pain.
But I already knew the tricks
the inverts taught the game.

cont'd



Cassie (she/her) is an entomologist, poet, animal rescuer, and part-time editor. Her semi-slug poem can be found on the *Young Voices of Science* website (Fall 2025 cohort) and she has other poems pending publication. She's currently a sister, daughter, cousin, partner, mom, auntie, friend, granddaughter, and probably something else to someone else. Everyone matters, take care of each other.

Autobiography of a Queer Bug Child (cont'd)

Cassie Urquhart

The smallness of my ears, you see,
the way my clothes were old.
So many ways to torture me,
young minds are sharp and bold.

Insects were my very first,
the way I'd like to tell it,
teenage me, embraced the curse,
became The Swarm and felt it.

How Does War Affect the Stock Market?

Cleomé Morra



A Requiem for the Fallen/Apart

Zar Mohseni

It is foggy and cold. I sit in the darkness; the day is done. For hours, I haven't moved. I lie beside the darkness, an earache born of silence. The night's only lamp is the cigarette burning in my hand, The smoke stinging my eyes, tears streaming from a gas that won't enter them.

Over there, it burns in fire—bright and red, the colors of hell. A hell where the Devil, with a ladle, pulls little pigs out of his own arse. Pigs who know how to shout Allahu Akbar loudly, and how to aim even better. They hit the mark because blood whets their appetites and leaves the Devil thirstier; for this blood is salty, acrid, and warm— like hot iron. The blood of the living; the tears of the dead; mirrors in the hands of swine; footprints on the ground—all fading away.

Here, people walk the earth, they pedal, they smile. But I don't blink, held in a fragile balance between pills and alcohol, Listening to a song on repeat. I've pressed my head against the bus window; I'm not going home. I am staring at you through the glass—you, who have made a sidewalk out of my nerves. I've been waiting for your call for days. I saw your picture on the news; for once, you didn't look your best.

Something was missing in your eyes, and there was a hole in your heart that you never told me about. Surely you know what is happening there. Surely you are happy that freedom is near, And you, too, are



Families search for their loved ones among bodies placed in body bags outside the Kahrizak forensic center in the suburbs of Tehran, Iran, after the massacre on 8 and 9 of January 2026.

Zar (she/they) is a writer, theatre maker, dramaturg, and performer from Iran, based in The Netherlands.

cont'd

www.existotherwise.com

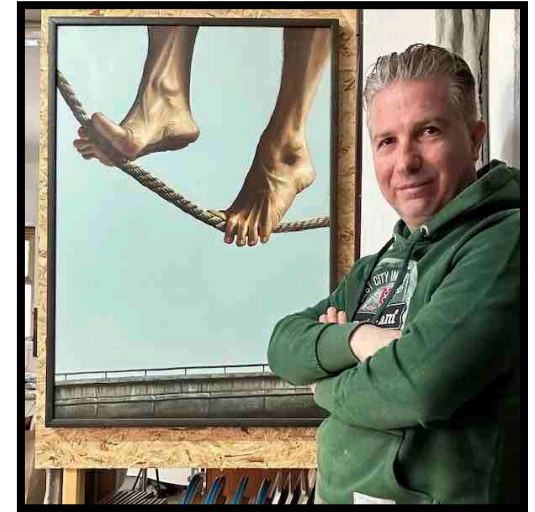
A Requiem for the Fallen/Apart (cont'd)

Zar Mohseni

waiting for my call. Know that I've called you many times, but it doesn't ring—just a long, continuous tone, Like the sound of a flatlining heart in the movies.

You should be nominated for Cannes or the Oscars this year; no one has ever died as realistically as you did. The way you screamed, the way you played your part, the way you died and were torn apart... How you held your breath inside black plastic bags and endured the stench of blood. The way you left your brains on the asphalt and played dead so perfectly... You'll sweep all the awards this year. I've seen the other films; they don't come close.

It is foggy and cold. People quickly forget everything, good or bad. They are kind and good, but they exhaust me quickly. I just miss you. Get up already. Give me a call. There are still things to do, there is still pain left. Rise from hell or heaven; rise and take my hand out of this limbo and take me with you. Here, I constantly feel like I've lost someone—But I still don't know who.



Mario, (he/him) Catanzaro 1968
Graduate at Accademia of Belle Arti,
Catanzaro (ITALY).

Painting for me is my first love. An important, pure love. Creating a painting, starting from the frantic search for a concept with which I want to convey my message, this is the foundation of painting for me. Sculpture is my lover, my artistic betrayal to painting. That voluptuous and sensual lover who inspires diverse emotions that strike forbidden chords.

The cafe reminds me of a co-working space, but with a cruller or a croissant for the entrance fee rather than some monthly payment. It would have been perfect for certain days when I needed to do work—business work: logistics, scheduling, emails, and so on—but it is not suitable for curling up with a good book. Or for writing. Not least because all the seats are bar chairs with low, hard backs, designed for an elevation of the head to some 13-14 inches above the countertops. Not hunched. It is also not a place suitable for writing because I am always terrified about the people near me reading what I have written. Crazy, blackened thoughts—often short thoughts—which look too prominent on a single white page. Too glaring.

For example, today I write:

After I was assaulted sophomore year, I started seeing the body of my perpetrator hanging from trees everywhere. I'd walk down under the luscious foliage of College Walk and see bodies cropping up and swinging ahead from each tree, like I was a magical lamplighter illuminating the walkway, decorating the trees one by one with backlit bodies instead of lightbulbs. Until, finally, I was shuffling along one of those tunnels formed by mirrors on each side—endless, parallel rows of bodies. A body there on the left, a body there on the right, swinging in sync, and me in the middle, walking. Camera behind.

In the earlier days—which were of friendship—with my perpetrator, we had shared small and big things with each other. The inklings of truth behind joking statements such as, "Oh my God, I'm going to kill myself." Statements partly real and partly due to the budding desire to fall in line and in fashion with wonderful, throbbing teenage



Jessica (she/her) is a writer-producer based in New York City. She graduated from University of Pennsylvania with a BA in English, where she received the Phi Kappa Sigma Fiction Prize, Nancy Rafetto Leach Sweeten Essay Prize, and Lilian and Benjamin Levy Award for Reviewing. Her work has been published by *34th Street Magazine*, *The F-Word*, *Write or Die*, *t'ART*, and the *A/PI Domestic Violence Resource Project*. She is from Shanghai, China and Rochester, Michigan. She has a cat who loves to sit on books. [Website](#)

melancholy. I do not know how much of my truth was the truth, and how much of his was. But after the assault, I prayed that his was real. That he was indeed hunted by something—not beautiful and languishing like in *The Virgin Suicides*, but more repulsive and brutish—and that it would get him. I hoped he would be as alone then as he had now made me, that this loneliness would be part of the thing that gets him. But I knew that he was likely not alone, and as such would not be hunted down.

In the cafe, I try to angle my body around the notebook like a praying mantis. You can see how these words could be alarming, should you happen to glance them upon my page. These are thoughts so ugly that I hadn't wanted to include them among my other writings, but to isolate them, to leave them alone, with a scribbled line before and after. A section confined to my college life and campus years ago.

In fact, up until now, I had not thought of my trauma as location based. I hadn't liked to think of it as trauma at all. I hadn't wanted to think that the event had affected me in any way that I could not control with the right mindset. Back then, I had even started to like my personal puppet show on the way to class. With the right soundtrack, it made the walk to and fro much more interesting. Yet it was not until I was walking in between the subway pillars earlier today and caught a glimpse of some bodies swinging—no longer a tunnel of light, but more like ghosts in the forest—that I realized how long it had been since I had thought about him and the joy of another person's potential suicide.

Though I am still waiting for it.

Surely.

Before you chastise me for thinking that strangers care about what I am writing in a co-working cafe, I know it is possible for I was always doing it. Glancing at another person's screen or notebook, checking or judging what they were reading or writing. We are all sitting so close together here that it is almost unavoidable. I cannot turn my head without being greeted by another person's email or the next event in their calendar. One man is making a presentation set to the format of a cell phone screen, and I find that quite interesting. He leaves and the girl who replaces him begins to fill out a spreadsheet, and that interests me less.

I move to a different cafe for writing. This one is much more suitable. It has low lights, brown wood, and some cafe benches with shoulder-height backs and thin cushions. So I could lean back and read a book if needed, in between the writing. Some people are sitting by themselves, reading or writing or checking their phones. The many other pairs or groups in the cafe are all engrossed in conversations, and though the place is small and semi-crowded, it has much more distance between the tables than the countertops at a coworking cafe. Even my arrogance or paranoia cannot convince me that anyone here would be likely to read or glance at what is in my notebook.

My phone rings. It is a message from a dating app. Under the prompt for my profile, "What do you hope to accomplish in the new year?" I had answered, "Write more." He asks what I like to write about. I do not tell the truth.

"On Writing" was originally published in the Spring Edition 2025 of t'ART Online

Earth Cradle

Coriander Focus



Coriander (she/her) is a full-time creator, working most in the mediums of photography and written word. Coriander creates thousands of photos per year and shares her art alongside poetry, short stories, and other creative exploration. Coriander grew up with a love for wild places. She has since captured that love in her art for more than a decade. She has had her work displayed nationally across galleries, shows and publications. [Website](http://www.existotherwise.com)

The only retort to
be a good girl

good for her
microscopic glare.

in a school of
tailing suits & dresses:

As she did my first
windsor, or they

copied mechanism.
Dressed to

I stole a tie cut
on its back. An

in a monochrome

a slur.

is I am not

The skin allowed

sweatpants, shirt.

maybe, knighted my

dress up.

accident to allege
a misprint

dictionary, where
my entry is

Edylan (they/them) is a queer migrant poet and theatre-maker exploiting the capitalist system by writing during their day job.

Why Bother?

Deanna Faye



Deanna (she/her) is a fine art photographer from Houston, Texas. As a disabled artist who struggles with mental health issues, art is her way of navigating both the joy and despair of the human condition. Find Deanna on [Instagram](#).

Does it matter if the angel in my dream was of celestial seraphim;
or was Mary; or Mommy; or my own earthly mother showing me things
I had already known but refused to acknowledge?

The woman I met the day I tried to confess knew nothing of mass times
or reconciliation, she knew only to pray and to change daily the flowers
on our mother's crown, in her hands, and at her feet.

You, who have kissed the concrete soles of a thousand angels and washed them
and tried to lift their skirts, and cheered too when they came crashing from their pedestals,
carried by momentum, flying briefly.

And my own hand, now almost as comfortable putting a five dollar bill
in the collection basket on Sunday as it is putting five singles in the hands
of a drag queen on Saturday. Almost.

My wife's sister's wife tells me "only you can define your queerness,"
but I often think the opposite; I have no say but to circle the throne
crying out "Holy Holy Holy"

Oh star of Bethlehem or Manhattan or San Francisco,
take my hand and lead me home.

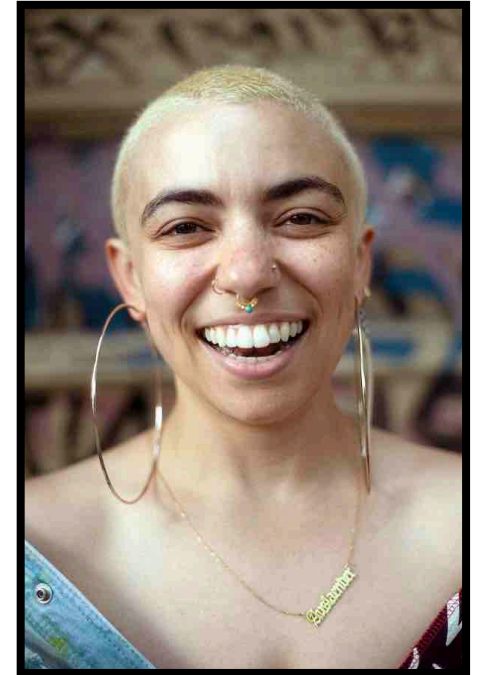


Adam is a Cuban-American poet residing in Central Virginia; a seafarer on merchants ships; and the Managing Editor at *samfiftyfour* literary journal. His work has recently been featured in *Prosetrics*, *Fourth River*, *Rill & Grove*, and *On The High Literary Magazine*. He was selected as a finalist for the 2025 Arts & Letters Rumi Prize for Poetry and has been nominated for Best New Poets.

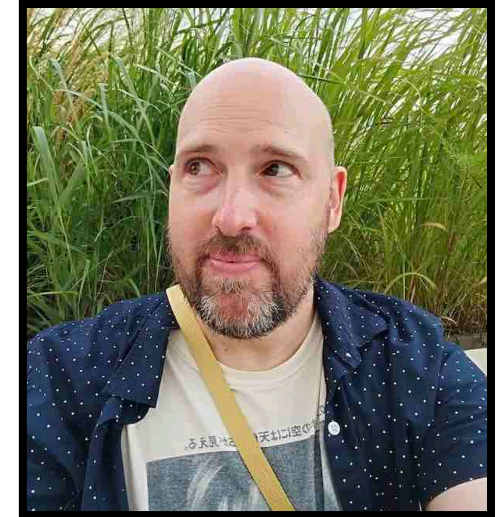
gender is a scam

Ari Cottingham

this was what i was given to work with
if we still heed words of dead white men
are we each of us not a stage, fretting in our performances?
the role assigned to me curves into stock-standard soubrette
does poetry not spring from the creativity borne of constraints?
what fantastical masculinities could i muster with breasts?
are we not all artists? all performing?
i used to woman so well



Ari (they/he) is a poet/gastronomy worker whose writing has appeared in SAND Journal, BOOTH, and elsewhere, and who has performed at the Alley Theatre, MONA, Glastonbury, and the Sydney Opera House. They are a 2025 Brooklyn Poets Fellowship recipient, and they pray for good tips in Berlin, where they have co-organized and hosted Berlin Spoken Word for five years.



Mike (he/they) lives and works in New York. His artwork can be seen in *Wireworm* issue 4, *Dirt Child* Vol. 4 and *Old Pal Magazine*. His writing has appeared in *The Berlin Review*, *Warm Bros*, *Chelsea Station*, and other publications. Find Mike on [Instagram](#).

Our Neighbours Are Making Love

Maria Zafar

My tongue involuntarily pushes against the back of my front teeth, my mouth a swamp of saliva. I tilt my head to the left, and the somatic response intensifies. My neighbour's wife is dragging the newly bought indoor plant towards her kitchen. I can tell by the intensity of the screech, which is a low-grit sandpaper against my teeth. My wife comes running out of the kitchen. We stand a few feet apart, pieces of yellow packaging tape stuck to her left arm—flailing. I have our mint-green coffee mug in my hand, half wrapped in an old issue of Sunday magazine. We stare in anticipation; my neighbour smashes the plant into the paper-thin wall. The wall holds. His wife will bring another and another, and the wall will hold.

At night, I listen to my neighbours snoring in harmony. The guttural rhythm leaves my chest pitted. I watch my wife sleeping—sprawled like a toddler, half-hugged by the only blanket we haven't yet packed. Over the dull sound of our TV, I dream of their ribcages swelling in sync. Their flesh fused. They lay on a bed of loose soil and terracotta shards.

Once every few weeks, I have heard him kicking down the main door, demanding to be let in. His wife forgets to snore on those nights. In the mornings, I trace the sounds of their lips smacking, naan being chomped between teeth in synchronized swings of their jaws. The sticky sound of their fingers peeling away from each other after a hearty breakfast of trotter soup.

I have seldom heard them speak in words, but whenever they do, it is a vile exchange. He is fond of calling her a slut, and she responds by calling him a useless cunt.

My neighbours have a ritual of eating omelettes on Sundays. He asks her to slice the tomatoes thin; she always dices them into chunks, insisting the tomatoes couldn't



Maria (she/her) is a short fiction writer from Pakistan. Her works revolve around issues faced by women. Her works have appeared in south-Asian and international literary spaces, such as, *Brilliant Flash Fiction*, *Tasavvurnama*, *Scribled.Online*, and elsewhere. Some of her writings can be found on her Instagram and BlueSky as @sullenchaos. [Website](#)

cont'd

www.existotherwise.com

Our Neighbours Are Making Love (cont'd)

Maria Zafar

have been sliced thinner. He would smash a mug or two into the wall, the wall holding up. Her throat would make gargling sounds, followed by his saliva-laden screams and the lilt of the knife against a cutting board.

On a slimy July afternoon, my wife decides the packed cartons must be moved into the car. That's when I hear my neighbour speed off, leaving his wife standing in the doorway. Dressed in a scarlet silk saree, she sits on the stairs, hugging her faded plastic watering can. With her maroon lipstick, she is a sun-bleached dog with hopeful eyes, expecting its master to come back any minute. My wife and I take turns peeking at her through the curtain as we pack away our thin-walled house. She only gets up from beside her watering can and goes back inside when my neighbour comes back; his legs are squiggly. That night, I heard her fight with him about how the liquor had made his breath stink.

On Friday, our real estate agent drops by and asks us to vacate the house by Sunday so the repairs can be started.

On Sunday morning, our butts are cold against our bare floors, and the curtain on our window now hangs in our new apartment. We sit beside the paper-thin wall, our hands folded into our laps in reverence.

As clockwork, it begins—their little dance of sounds. The rattling sound of her being choked, the rhythmic clunking of the knife against the cutting board, juice oozing out of the limp tomato chunks, him screaming—probably into her ears—demanding the tomatoes be sliced thinner. The louder he screams, the faster the knife clunks, the thinner must have been the slices of tomatoes—their language of love.

NOT WAS THIS

Susan L. Lin

The Human Animal hates watching other human animals fight. Her friends are in the middle of a blowout when they learn their teacher lies in critical condition at a nearby hospital. A terrible wreck, the other teachers say. A bad human animal ran a red light at an intersection. She was on her way to a teaching seminar, they say. *This happened because she loves you all so much.* The Human Animal knows she has been carrying this around for decades, much like that other thing she refuses to think about. A childhood security blanket fattens into a heavy quilt, decorated with squares of toasty guilt. She searches everywhere for an ending, failing to find evidence of the healthy thriving human animal who healed, recovered, survived the whole ordeal. Their teacher once shortened her name while signing yearbooks, unable to hold her pen steady, and maybe her life ultimately followed the path that had been laid out: shortened just the same. The Human Animal can't allow her life to be shortened, too. This was not her fault. It was not the fault of any of her classmates. Yes, their teacher did care about all of them. She was a good teacher. A good human animal.

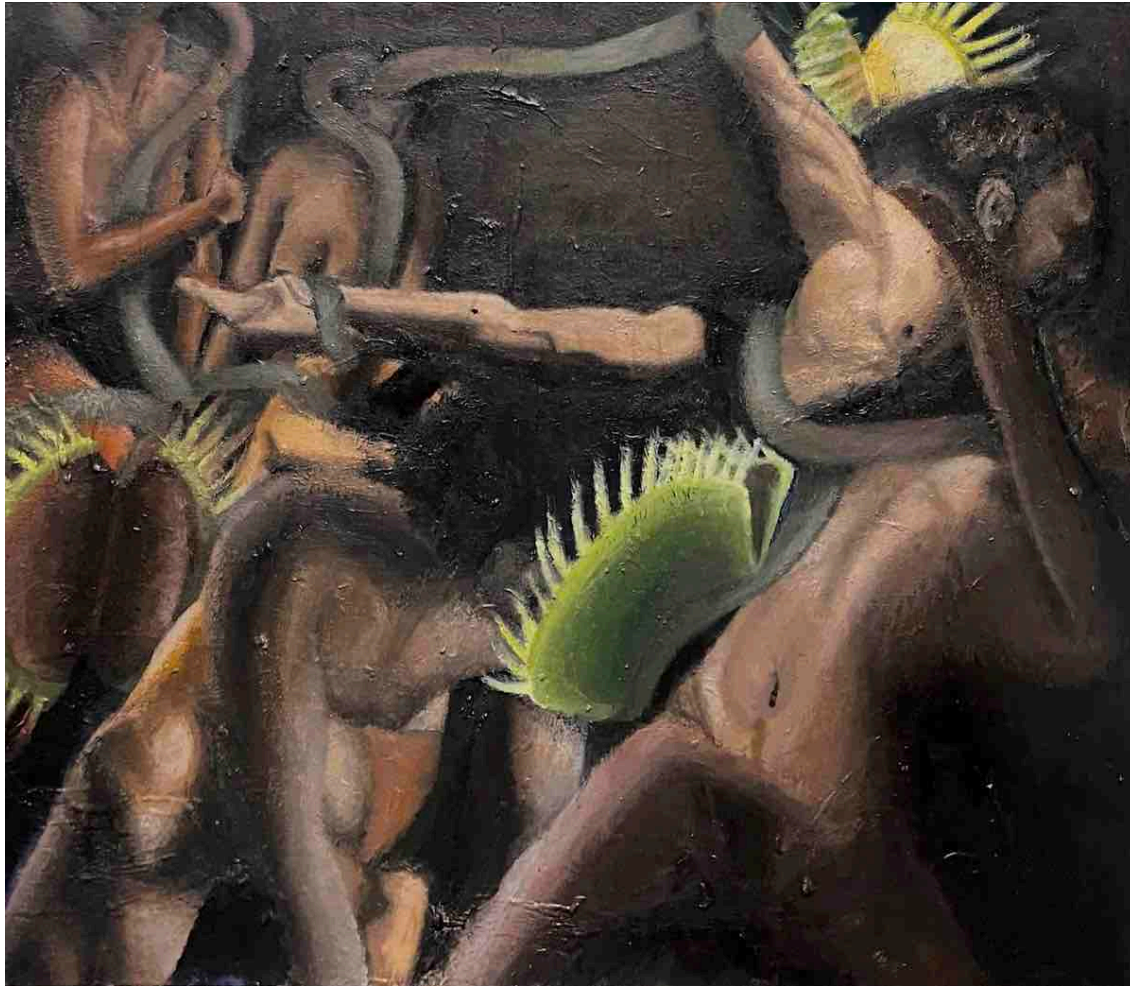


The Human Animal [redacted] in the middle of a [redacted] terrible wreck, [redacted] A bad [redacted] animal ran a red light [redacted] they say [redacted] *she loves you all so much.* [redacted] A childhood [redacted] decorated with [redacted] an ending, [redacted] healed, recovered, survived [redacted] to hold her pen steady [redacted] This was not [redacted] about all of them. She was a [redacted] teacher.

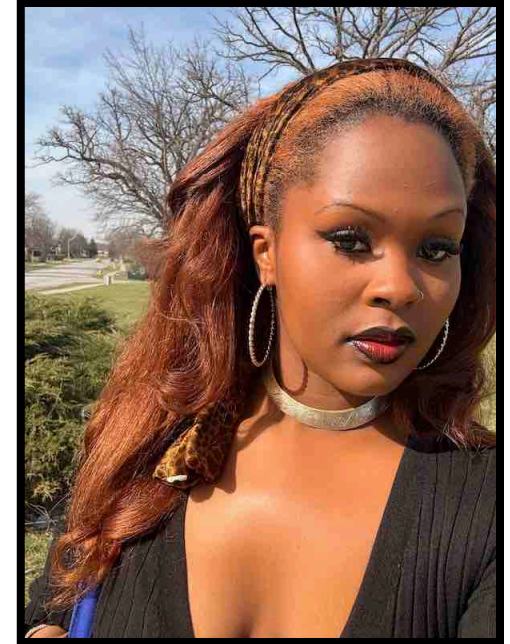
Susan (she/her) is a Taiwanese American storyteller who hails from southeast Texas and holds an MFA in Writing from California College of the Arts. Her novella *GOODBYE TO THE OCEAN* won the 2022 Etchings Press novella prize, and her literary/visual art has appeared in over a hundred publications. She loves to dance. Find more at susanllin.com.

the human a wreck
red light *she loves you so much*
an end, this was not

Gluttony



Seanice Lenay



Seanice (she/her) is a surrealist and representational artist and writer whose art focuses on the wild and erotic within women's psyches, showing how healing and powerful these sides can be.

My Girlfriend's Ex-Girlfriend Has a Gun

Azalea Withrow

My girlfriend's ex-girlfriend has a gun.



Azalea (she/her) is an author born and raised in the South. She primarily writes fiction and non-fiction.

