



chouette



issue 04



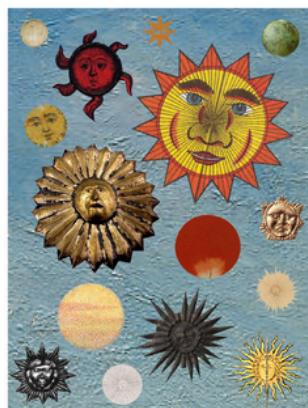
summer 2025



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COVER ART

Judy Yun

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A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Reader,

Summer is the season of passion, transformation, and introspection—in short, everything. In this fourth and very first print issue of *chouette*, we offer you prose, poetry, and art about everything. Take some time to revel in the words and imagination of our wonderful contributors, without whom this issue would not be possible.

We would like to extend a hearty and very appreciative **thank you** to everyone who donated in support of *chouette* and this issue. Please sit back, relax, and enjoy our latest literary offerings.

Love,



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Good tidings by Nora Bartram-Forbes.....	6
The Fable of a Lifeless Bird by Ryan Schwartz.....	7
Morsdag by Lina Züchner.....	13
When My Father Was a Pilot by Jordan Cobb.....	14
symbiosis by Micaela Day.....	15
HERMES by Kubra Iqbal.....	16
Elle attend sa réponse by JC Alfier.....	20
cats tail, weed twigs by Simon William Lynch Wellwood.....	21
Geranium by Beth Sherwood	22
rarified air by allison anne	25
Motherland by Eileen Grant.....	26
A Love Letter to My Body Hair by Sarp Sozdinler.....	28
How It Feels to Live With Girls by Kale Hensley	35
Pits by Lizzy Lewis.....	36
Storms by Adrienne Weiss.....	37
June Blitz by Al Dervisevic	39

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Sete Cidades by Christine Seaton.....	40
Anzio by Ashley Fish-Robertson.....	41
Puerto Vallarta by Ella Bachrach	42
PLACIDO DOMINGO by Mark J. Mitchell.....	45

Good tidings

Seeing a new side of the morning,
I split the difference &
Cross the street diagonal.
I speak the names of flowers growing
Out of the unweeded parking lot,
Leaning my fingers to touch wet grass

After sticky still nights,
Waking up to her elbow in my throat.
We walk each other home
And make eyes at boys on passing trains.

Lately I live in an emotionless world,
Suffering nothing,
Thinking about the money
And the sleep and other things
That count up from zero.
To be here, can I just say I am?
Do I have to prove something,
Spit a stain onto the sidewalk?

A moth flies via the broken window
Into our hazy sleep,
And I fling it by the wing
Into the open dark.

NORA BARTRAM-FORBES

The Fable of a Lifeless Bird

by Ryan Schwartz

“Follow me,” cried Jana as she hopped, one foot at a time, through an icy stream toward a neighbouring field. She was drawing a map of the forest nearest the house, but could not see over the crops ahead. The wheat towered as tall as children reaching for the sun. Miroslav followed, carefully steadyng himself on a path of stones peeking out of the water. He felt as though he were playing an extremely high-stakes game of hopscotch. Despite having walked this path thousands of times, both children were mindful not to get swept away by the strong current. A child had drowned in the next village over, only a week before.

Miroslav noticed a foreign shadow being warped by the gentle motion of the water. Despite his reluctance to get wet, he plunged his hand into the stream and pulled out a lifeless baby bird. The bird lay in his small hand like a broken toy discarded by a child who'd been there before them. The frigid temperature of the water sent a chill down his spine that almost made him lose his footing. Fearing the fate of the drowned child, his feet unwillingly froze, and his limbs hung loose like those of a porcelain doll. Jana peered over her shoulder to see what had made Miroslav disobey her order.

“What is it that you’re holding?” she yelled after him.

Miroslav, smelling the sweet rot of decay, held the bird out

far from him for Jana to see.

“Bring it here,” she ordered.

Despite his unease, his body thawed, and he obeyed.

An echo of bird song permeated the forest, though the children barely took notice. This was the only childhood they had, and it would never leave them, nor them, it. Death was no longer astonishing. It had been once, but now it was something else. It was only something that every day you overcame. If you ended the day and had not been met by death in some way, you celebrated the small victory and then moved on. Repeat.

“Put that down and come,” Jana pleaded, jamming her foot into the wet soil beneath her.

“Can’t we bury it,” Miroslav retaliated.

“For what,” she said. “It’s dead. It doesn’t even know up from down anymore.”

Miroslav looked down at his hand and envisioned it as the bird’s nest, decorated in wools and cottons so irresistible that the bird, even in death, had found a way to succumb to its eternal rest. He felt a sick clinical satisfaction in being able to look at it so up close and didn’t want to let it go. He told Jana that he was going to bring it home and keep it in a box.

“If you do that, I’ll feed it to the dog.”

“If you feed it to the dog, I’ll rip up your map, eat it, then die, and then mother will be mad at you.” He crossed his arms, delighted by his threat.

“Oh, whatever. Keep it then. See if I care.”

She stomped ahead. Miroslav breathed a quick prayer that the bird had died happily and then shoved it in his pocket. The wet feathers hung heavy in the small cavity, pulling his pants down so that, every few steps, he tripped.

There was a time when he would have wept for the bird. In so few years he’d been so many people. He knew that, and it scared him. But, more than fear, he felt sorrow. Sorrow because he knew that his sister too would have once cared for the bird. Would have found it a resting place. Would have fashioned it a tiny grave from earth and stones and written a speech about how, like the bird, life flies by. Now, at this moment, she only cared about her map, and he guessed, in a way, that he did too.

Using both hands to hold up his pants, they trudged through the forest, and eventually through the wheat. The golden plants, unaffected by the emotional weight of the war, swayed freely as though they were dancers in the wind, while the two kids stomped through them like an army on the lookout for opposing troops. The air around them smelled of hay and freshly cut grass and Jana said that when they got to the end of the field, they could lay down and imagine what it would be like if they could live there. Eventually, she said,

they could go back to civilization, but only once she'd finished her map and could become a cartographer.

It was nearly an hour before they were able to free themselves from the claustrophobic confines of the tall crops. Their eyes had to adjust to seeing colours other than beige and the powdery blue of the sky above.

Miroslav collapsed to the earth, cursing his sister for making them walk for so long.

"How was I to know that it went on for this long," she said, dropping her writing tools and joining her brother on the damp ground. The moisture seeped through her pants and greeted her skin with a welcomed coolness. She longed to push her cheek into the mud to experience the chill there too, but did not want to risk her mother's scolding. Instead, she closed her eyes and let the breeze's murmur lull her into a fragile sense of security that was soon disrupted when seconds, or maybe minutes later, Miroslav grabbed her by the shoulders and began to shake her like a child with a piggy bank.

"WHAT," she hissed at him, only bothering to open one eye.

Wordlessly, he pointed out into the forest beyond them, where a rabid-looking fox stood, watching them. Scrambling for a thought, Jana told Miroslav to throw the bird.

"No," he said defiantly.

“Throw it,” she spat again, unable to think of any other way to get away unnoticed by the animal.

“It’s mine,” he whined.

“It’s dead. It’ll rot in a day. Just do it.”

He gently pulled the delicate creature out of his pocket and held it close to his face, whispering something unintelligible to it. The colour of its blue feathers had already been muted by death and its beak hung open, allowing an unnatural view into its miniature soiled body.

Swinging his arm behind his head, he threw the bird. Hard. It landed near the fox and the two children got up and scrambled back through the path of crushed wheat they had previously created.

Eventually, when his legs ceased to burn and his breath was no longer something far out of reach, Miroslav said, “I really wanted to keep it.”

All at once, Jana felt a pang of unplaceable pity for her brother. Her clouded recollection of what it had been like to be so young had suddenly, just for a moment, lifted.

“The kids at school kill birds with the stones from the yard all the time. You can bring home one of those.”

“It’s not the same,” he shrugged. “No one had to kill this one for it to be mine.”

“Yeah, okay,” she said, placing her tools back in her bag.
“Maybe I’ll finish up my map tomorrow. You can come with
me again if you want.”

“That would be good,” he responded, sticking his hand into
his wet, empty pocket, finding a moment of premature
nostalgia in the only evidence left of his former new
companion.

He had named his bird, but he kept that name to himself.

RYAN SCHWARTZ



Morsdag, Lina Züchner

When My Father Was a Pilot

I stole the idea from him.

Found a miniature of his flight suit at the Spirit Halloween off the highway.
The combat boots, practically army-issue, from the SuperTarget two towns over.

It was the perfect costume for the fourth grade field day
held exactly on the holiday, where our classes, full of princesses

& Power Rangers, were lined up in height order to march
across the blacktop, towards our parents who waved from the other side.

& despite the deployment, the desert I couldn't name,
I spent the exercise scanning the crowd, searching for a bald-headed man
who would match me, jumpsuited in green.

JORDAN COBB

symbiosis

when summer strikes
you worship the wasps
in all their fertile
glory. watch
while they
bury themselves
in floral folds
as though violets in filth,
succumbed to a
depraved fate.
they're chewed by toothy
fig seed
til they're mud.
watch while they
cherish their own
decomposition, peeled
open and resurrected
as fruit
you dig against
on warm,
sun-seared evenings
with people who
keep you
alive.

MICHAELA DAY

HERMES

by Kubra Iqbal

The night I met Hermes, he was trying to talk his way into a club. I heard his voice before I saw him, high-pitched and loud enough to compensate for his slight build. He was pure skin and bone and the wind seemed to sway him as he stood. The stone-faced bouncer, whose broadness rivalled a great oak tree, remained unimpressed as Hermes rambled at him. “My friend is inside,” he was saying. “I swear. I can call him if you want.” I snorted loudly, standing to the side with a cigarette in my hand. He stopped talking and snapped his gaze in my direction. His eyes were ablaze—bright white like the edge of a gas-fire bleeding into his pupils. I started and glanced away, unable to meet his radioactive glare. He stopped arguing and dragged himself to my corner. I avoided meeting his eyes as he asked me for a cigarette. I felt bad for him, so I gave him one, and even lit it for him as his clumsy fingers struggled to spark the lighter. “Why won’t they let you in?” I asked him. “I don’t have a government ID,” is all he said. I studied him—rounded jaw and cotton cheeks, each one of his curls carefully sculpted. A face shaped by naivety, a face that was used to the world falling at his feet. “You’re a minor?” “No. I just don’t own an ID.” He didn’t elaborate so I didn’t ask him to. His shoulders hunched, sandaled feet kicking a nearby pebble. I could tell it was all a performance, playing the part of a puddle-drenched puppy, nipping at my feet for shelter, but I chose to play a supporting role anyway. “Do you have a pen?” I asked him.

He nodded, and a black ballpoint pen appeared between his fingertips, as if it was always there. “Why?” Instead of answering, I snatched the pen from him and grabbed his wrist. His skin was ice-cold. An electric chill ran through my body, like being shoved under a frozen lake. I clenched my teeth through the full-body shiver, jaw aching from the effort, and brought the tip of the pen to his skin. I copied the stamp that the bouncer printed into my skin onto his hand. Licking the tip of my thumb, I used it to smudge the drawing. “Wait until this security guard’s shift ends and show the new one your stamp.” I told him. Maybe I expected him to thank me. The kind of gratitude you got from feeding a sick dog your leftovers. But all he did was stare at me with his white eyes. “See you inside.”

Hermes slept on his front with his face pressed against the pillow. He lay completely still and never made a sound. Every now and then, I would place my finger under his nose to check if he was still breathing. It was never helpful. Even awake, it never seemed like he was breathing. No slow breaths to calm himself down, no panting to catch his breath, no sighs of frustration. He was easier to look at when his eyes were shut. Boyishly beautiful; made of slender lines and wispy hair. His face was shaped by shadows, the dip of his brow bone, the curve of his cupid’s bow. His cheeks littered with red bumps and scars. “I didn’t know gods could get acne,” I told him once, as he was washing his face in my tiny bathroom. I was sitting on the closed toilet seat, brushing my teeth as I watched him carefully dab every drop of water from his skin with a to-

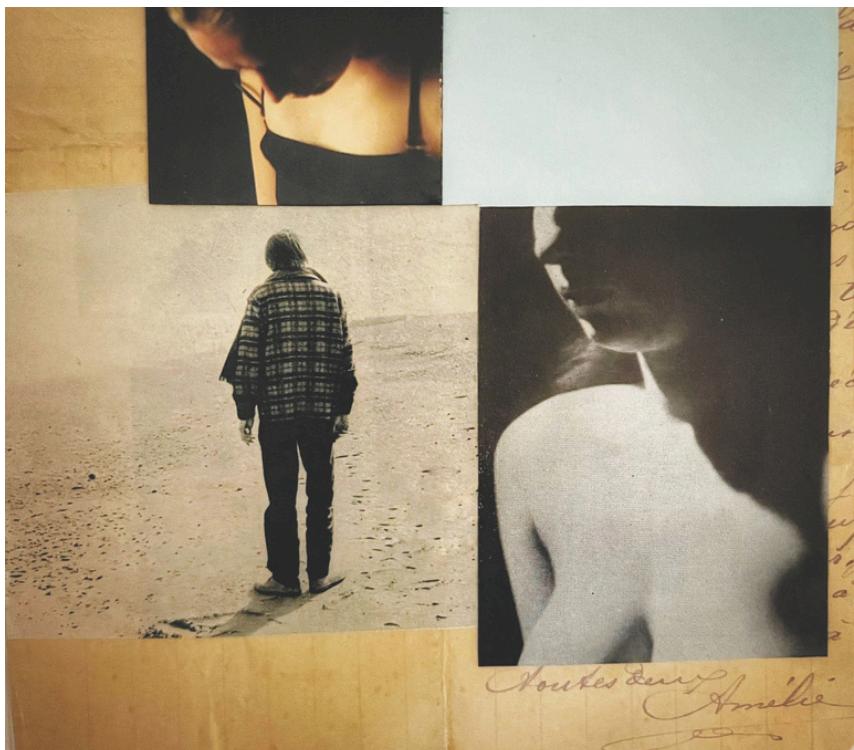
-wel. He didn't reply, only frowned like it bothered him too. He never let me touch his hair. Not even during our nights together, when my fog-clouded brain needed to grasp onto something real and grounding. He would pull my hands away before they could clutch a single strand of tousled curls and direct them to his back. In turn, I ran my nails over and dug out whatever bumps my hands could find.

He was a workaholic. Always awake before dawn, when the morning star winked through the window of my studio apartment. I would wake up to the sound of him strapping up his sandals, barely cracking my eyes open before he flew out the door. He never told me where he went or what he was doing. When I asked him what he did for work, he replied with, "I'm a messenger." "Of god?" I asked. "Like Mohammad?" He blinked at me with those magnesium flame eyes and then laughed like it was the funniest thing he'd ever heard. When he wasn't working, he was with me. I could never predict if we would be together for thirty minutes or three days. He was always in a bad mood when he returned from work. Twitchy and bothered, shaking his leg or muttering to himself. He was manic, paranoid, and perpetually vexed about something. The only thing that calmed him down was crossing the altar of my paper thin twin mattress, me distracting him with my hands. We went to different bars, experimented with ways to sneak him in—through the bathroom window, dressing as the staff, walking through the front door and daring anyone to question us. He liked to stand at the edge of rooftops and let the wind cut his cheeks. He told me he could

fly. I told him to prove it. The sound of his laugh carried through the open night air like church bells. He never proved anything. I believed everything he told me.

Hermes was finite. Limited. A celestial body trapped in a squeezable bottle. Each moment I spent with him felt like the last. Each time he crossed my welcome mat I never expected him back. Once when we were walking home together, the strap of his sandal broke. He wrapped his ice-cold fingers around my wrist and fashioned the broken strap into a bracelet. It was an eyesore, and the sharp metal buckle dug bruises into my skin. The next morning, he kissed the top of my head as he was leaving. I watched the curve of his back as he crouched to fasten his sandals. At the sound of shuffling sheets, he turned to look at me. Under my breath, I bid him goodbye. I was no longer afraid of the vast white of his eyes.

KUBRA IQBAL



Elle attend sa réponse, JC Alfier

Cats tail, weed twigs

seein' things off the balcony
great horror-like things
a cat's tail
just the tail
bouncing merrily along

off-hand men who tumble their way through the city give it to me
in handshakes they pass me oil and sunshine and smokes
and i take them all

at night, bikes get ridden in place
tires click back and forth
sometimes racing
as i pick at weed twigs
bones of giants
and my old man's rib cage
which i've inherited, much like this cough

there's a pretty recognizable eye swirling in the floorboards over there
and when i look in through it i can see why

i end up the man face down
at the end of my hallway
struck through the back
twenty one arrows

SIMON WILLIAM LYNCH WELLWOOD

Geranium

by Beth Sherman

I'm backing my car out when I see it: a hint of green where there should be nothing. On the shelf between turpentine and gardening tools. Four spindly shoots sticking out of a pot. There are dozens of pots, all filled with dirt because the first frost killed flowers that used to be there, and I finished the job by pulling out their roots.

I take the pot, set it on the hood of the car. Honk the horn.

Louder.

Again.

Smashing my hand against the steering wheel.

“Elisa,” I shout. “You have to see this.”

She appears, blinking sleep away, dragging her bad leg behind her. She has forgotten to put her kerchief on and remnants of her hair, fragile and patchy, cling to her scalp.

“Look,” I say, pointing to the pot, waiting for the next miracle to happen, for the plant to curtsy or fly.

We both stare at what is unmistakably a geranium that has managed to survive in the garage with no light and no water for five long months. It’s a sickly shade of green. The color of a 70s ottoman. Of jaundice and dried sage. The bedraggled feat-

-her of a caged parrot.

“I don’t believe it,” Elisa says, reflexively shoving her knuckles in her mouth to stop coughs from erupting.

Her breath is sour. The plant’s clover shaped leaves droop over the front of the pot.

Elisa reaches for my hand and I feel her nails, raggedy and brittle. She has lost so much weight, her nightdress sags like a flag on a windless day. The garage smells like mulch. Spider webs crisscross the ceiling.

“Look how it’s grown,” I comment, pointing out the long, thin stems. No buds. I can’t remember if the flowers were red or pink. The memory of last summer has faded to old snapshots: picnics at the beach, shopping for baby clothes, watching swallows caper at dusk. We wanted to adopt, had completed the necessary paperwork. I can’t do it alone.

We both stare at the geranium, which looks even more sickly in the morning sunlight.

“There was nothing left,” I say. “Just the root ball. But somehow it managed to...”

“Don’t.”

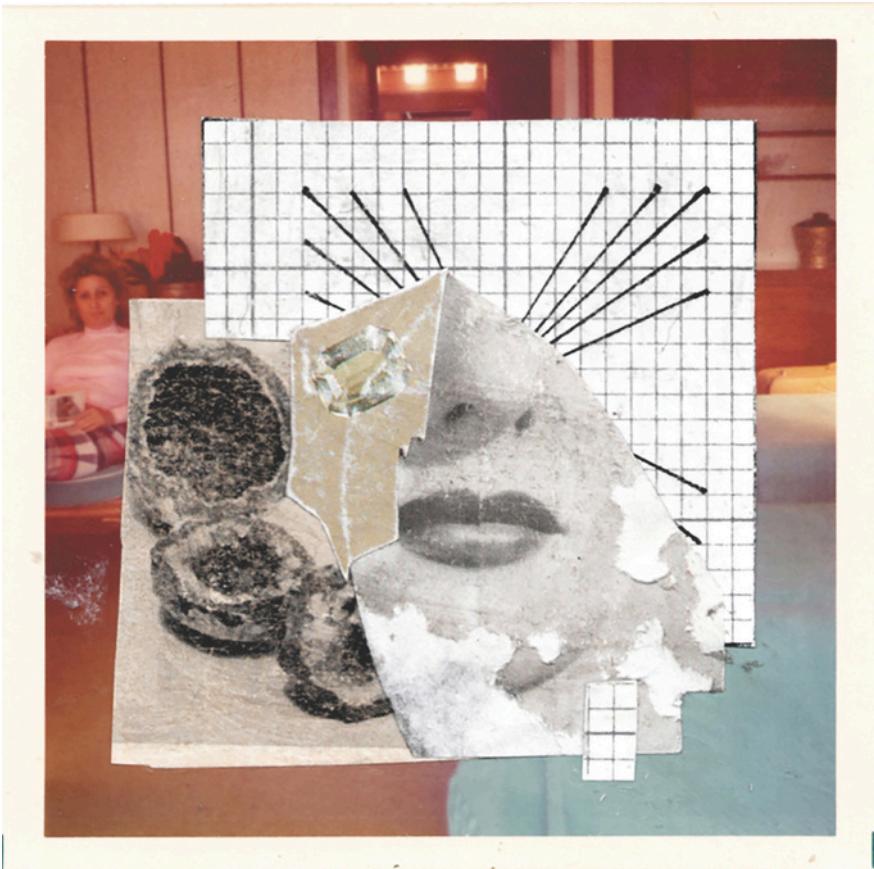
Elisa yanks the plant from the pot, as sudden as a slap.

“Call me later,” she says.

She limps back to the house, shuts the door.

The geranium is a weed on the asphalt, spindly leaves crushed. I leave it there and get in the car. The only sound is the motor as I back over the plant and head for work. But I hear it anyway. A pitiful noise. Crying for love. Spilling weak green tears.

BETH SHERMAN



rarified air, allison anne

Motherland

Humid headache mornings give me curly hair—
I think I inherited bedhead from my mother.
She gave me a crepe recipe for days marred by rain
because that's the only way I'll eat eggs
(except one time with my dad in Ireland
but I had had far too much wine).

Stomach bubbling with last night's wine,
I use my finger to twirl a coil of hair.
My baby sister told me I have Irish curls
not unlike my father's mother;
every Monday she serves him eggs.
Undeterred by threats of rain,

breakfast is her time to reign.
She can nurture without whining
like I do. The tiny fridge is eggless and
I cannot go outside with this hair.
Brush from the bottom up (advice from mother)—
this wisdom would prove null in Ireland.

The weather characteristic of Hibernia is
wet. All grey and clouds and rain.
Once I went to a pub with my sober mother,
face as red as bittersweet wine,
and sweat frizzed up my hair.
She was round and white, an egg;

how I must have looked as an embryo,
the center swatch on the flag of Ireland
before I developed that infuriating hair.
Eyes closed in the womb, safe from the rain,
mom drank water while dad drank wine,
she said she always wanted to be a mother.

She said this to my grandmother
before she served her eggs.

She said this to me before I had any wine.

She said this to friends on a school trip to Ireland
(anyone who could hear her over the pouring rain).

She wore a hood to protect her curls

like so many of my mothers in Ireland;
sheltering a dozen eggs from the downpour,
they keep wine safe, overlooking tangled hair.

EILEEN GRANT

A Love Letter to My Body Hair

by Sarp Sozdinler

For most of my life, I assumed body hair was something you endured, not something you celebrated. Like subway delays or Aunt Frida's coleslaw. It was a fact of life, slightly embarrassing, never quite welcome, and always a little out of control. I can remember the exact moment I realized my body hair might actually be a defining feature: seventh grade gym, when I took off my shirt and my friend Greg asked if I was "part wolf." In that moment, as thirty pairs of adolescent eyes zeroed in on my prematurely swarthy chest, I wished fervently for a zap of lightning, an invisibility cloak, a sudden and total system reboot. Barring that, I thought, maybe a good pair of tweezers.

But this isn't a tragedy. Or if it is, it's the kind of tragedy where the main character also eats three slices of pizza and texts his mom for a ride home. My family history, like most Jewish New York family histories, is a tapestry of strong opinions and inherited traits: anxiety, lactose intolerance, the inability to pronounce "croissant" without sounding like a pretentious French waiter. And body hair. Lots and lots of body hair.

My dad is a man who believes in the sanctity of chest hair. His is like a declaration of intent, sprouting robustly from the collar of his shirt like a tiny forest eager for sunlight. "A man's chest should be as God made it," he used to say, when I was eleven and wanted to shave my arms. I'd sit at the kitchen

table, staring at the stray hairs coiling from my knuckles, imagining a future in which I'd be forced to flee society and join a community of similarly afflicted wolf-boys, living off the land and comparing beard oils.

Meanwhile, my mother, who has the smooth, hairless arms of a Renaissance angel (she credits "good genes" and "constant stress"), would pat my shoulder and tell me, "Your father's people are Mediterranean. It's a sign of virility." She said this as though virility was something prized among sixth graders. I'd look at my cousins—all blond, lightly dusted, not a shadow of a unibrow in the bunch—and wonder if maybe I'd been adopted, or perhaps left behind by a group of Armenian circus performers on their way to Coney Island.

By high school, my hair situation had evolved from "prematurely furry" to "unrepentantly lush." Puberty hit me like a wave and left nothing untouched. Chest, back, arms, legs, feet. A pelt that would have made a caveman proud. This was the late 2000s, and metrosexuals still walked the earth. The Abercrombie & Fitch catalog, a text of holy importance for my female classmates and a source of anxiety for me, promised that real men were tanned, smooth, and only hairy in the places where a light dusting looked artistic. Zac Efron had a six-pack and exactly twelve chest hairs, all of them perfectly spaced. My body was sending an entirely different message—one that read less "teen heartthrob," more "extras casting for a reboot of Planet of the Apes."

I tried everything. Razors, trimmers, waxing strips. I read somewhere that Nair would “melt” the hair away, and gave myself a chemical burn that made my armpits look like a modern art project. At one point, in a fit of desperation, I borrowed my mother’s facial epilator, which resulted in me screaming into a pillow so loud that our downstairs neighbor called to ask if everything was “domestically stable.” I told her I was fine, just “exploring self-care.” I doubt she bought it.

Some guys get to perform their masculinity with sports, with abs, with confidence. My masculinity was mostly expressed via shoulder tufts and awkward towel changes in the gym locker room. I developed a complex relationship with mirrors. Full-length? Bad. Medicine cabinet? Acceptable, as long as I could angle it to see only from the collarbone up. Beach vacations were torture. I learned to time my shirt removal with the exact moment when everyone else was distracted by seagulls or snack vendors. At summer camp, my cabin nickname was “Sasquatch,” which at the time felt like a hate crime but now, in retrospect, was probably just what passes for affection among boys too insecure to admit they’d kill for sideburns.

College was no better. The dorm showers were a circus of exposed flesh and toxic self-assurance. I met my roommate, Jared, on move-in day; he had abs like a geometry problem and a chest so smooth you could project movies on it. He played lacrosse, and the team would come by, strip to their shorts, and admire their own reflections. I would find excuses to avoid showering when they were around, lest my yeti credentials be confirmed.

The women I dated had opinions, too. My first college girlfriend, Maddy, said my chest was “very masculine,” but when we broke up she referred to me in a group text as “Chewbacca, but with less emotional intelligence.” My second girlfriend, Tara, told me she found it “comforting,” which is what you say about therapy dogs and oversized sweaters. By my twenties, I’d learned to preempt the conversation by making self-deprecating jokes—“It’s not a sweater, it’s just me!” “At least I’ll never be cold!”—which worked until someone pointed out that “jokes are sometimes a shield for deeper pain.” (Thanks, Rachel. You would have made a great therapist, if only you didn’t hate people.)

The truth is, I internalized every signal that said “smooth is good, hairy is bad.” The world is full of men pretending not to care about these things, but I would have traded my mom’s home-cooked meals for the rest of my life, if it meant the chance to wake up hairless, even just once. I stared in horror at Instagram influencers doing “manscaping tutorials,” watched YouTube dermatologists with PhDs in product placement, tried to make sense of the endless parade of creams, waxes, and lasers. I learned, to my eternal disappointment, that the only thing more expensive than removing body hair is trying to keep up with the Brooklyn brunch scene.

It wasn’t until I hit my late twenties—a time when you’re supposed to be “coming into your own,” whatever that means—that I started to think maybe, just maybe, I was missing the

point. It happened, as all great epiphanies do, while eating ramen in a friend's apartment in Astoria. We were watching an old episode of *Miami Vice* (ironic appreciation only, I swear), and Don Johnson appeared on screen with a chest that looked, well, not so different from mine. I laughed and made some quip about the “fur pelt aesthetic,” and my friend Ben—six-two, blonde, blessed with a body like a golden retriever—turned to me and said, “Honestly, man, I’d kill for your chest hair. I look like a giant baby.”

I didn’t know what to do with that. It was the first time anyone had expressed envy for something I’d spent years trying to sandblast away. Later, my friend Mara told me, “Body hair is hot. It’s, like, primal.” She said it while eating spicy noodles and scrolling through Tinder, but I chose to believe her. That night, I googled “famous hairy men” and fell into a rabbit hole: Burt Reynolds, Jeff Goldblum, Jason Momoa, that one guy from *Queer Eye* with the great beard. These were men who didn’t seem particularly tortured by their follicles. I wondered what it would feel like to just... not care.

I wish I could say I immediately achieved enlightenment, became a champion of body-positivity, and started posting thirst traps on Instagram. I did not. Change, for me, is like waiting for the G train: possible, but not reliably on time. What happened instead was smaller. I started wearing my shirts with one more button undone. I stopped apologizing for my legs at the beach. When a girl I was seeing said she liked the way my chest felt under her cheek, I didn’t laugh or self-depr-

-ecate. I just said, “Thanks,” and tried not to look like someone who’d just won the lottery.

My dad, for his part, was delighted. “I told you!” he said, when I mentioned all this over bagels one Sunday. “We come from a long line of hairy men. It’s our thing. Be proud.” He then tried to set me up with the daughter of his friend from the JCC, which is his way of expressing approval. Somewhere along the way, I realized that being a hairy guy in 21st-century New York is its own kind of rebellion. In a city where everyone is microblading and face-tuning and waxing things you didn’t even know could be waxed, there’s something kind of punk about refusing to shave your shoulders. My therapist calls it “radical acceptance.” I call it “being too lazy to buy more razors.”

Of course, there are still awkward moments. The time I tried hot yoga and my chest hair stuck to the mat, prompting a horrified “ohmygod” from the girl next to me. The time a barber offered to “tidy up” my neck and kept going, as if she was preparing me for military service. The time my little cousin asked if I was “turning into a bear.” (I said yes. He seemed impressed.)

But now, when I look in the mirror, I see something different. I see a guy who survived middle school locker rooms and Abercrombie propaganda. A guy who, despite himself, learned to stop treating his body like a mistake. A guy whose chest hair is not a flaw, but a fact. I am, for better or worse, exactly as hairy as I was always meant to be.

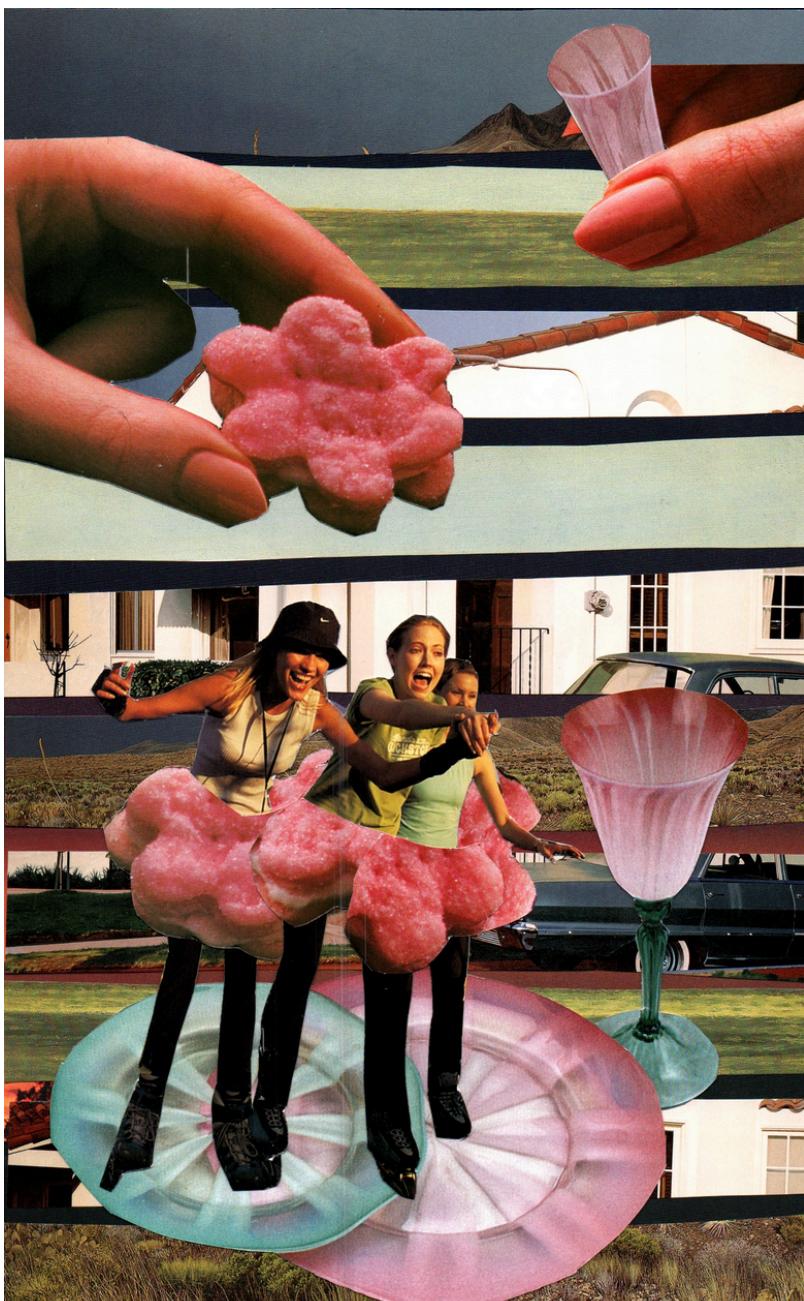
There's power in that. There's even, dare I say, joy.

So here it is, my love letter to my body hair: You are not what I asked for, but you're what I got. You have inspired fear, loathing, the occasional compliment, and more than a few awkward conversations.

You are my inheritance. You are my punchline and my punctuation. And after all these years, I wouldn't change a thing.

(Except maybe my back. I'm not a monster.)

SARP SOZDINLER



How It Feels to Live With Girls, Kale Hensley

Pits

Reaching into a dirty coffee mug
filled with cherry pits,
spit, cast out from mouths.

I cherish
surprise gatherings,
mucky fistfuls. I,
repulsed and afraid of so much–
messes, touching–
relish the pulpy ruddy discards,
relief and joy in holding something,
bits of someone
beloved.

You offer your palm
to a child,
accept his sticky wrapper
so that he might run,
hot fingers free to grab the world.

The pits leave stains,
dark pink on my fingertips,
pink I wish
would stick.

LIZZY LEWIS

Storms

You squint through rain-streaked glass, breathe night through a screen, wonder how long it'll take before the heat boiling beyond your bedroom door dissipates or the house's anger curls around you, sticks to your lungs. You sit on the unmade bed, listen to the mixtape Sandrine made you, day dream of driving past the lights of the industrial complex that neighbours the ancient subdivision to the east. You can still smell yesterday's tumult as you sat by Sandrine's pool, drinking cheap wine and eating culled strawberries out of a Tupperware bucket. You can hear her mother calling out, *Don't drop any berries in the water, what a nightmare that will be to clean*, Sandrine waving the voice away the way one shoos mosquitos, then spinning her endless tales of Montreal and what it's like to party there. Fluttering her eyelids, she balked when you told your stories, tongue digging for seeds in-between tooth and gum, always unbelieving and inching ever closer to calling you a liar.

How long you sat there, shoulders
hunched and burnt from sun, you couldn't
say. It was only when the last strawberries
drowned in their own juice and the clouds
advanced that Sandrine jumped into the
water, a shield from a rolling grey sky and
lightning strikes. You ignored all warnings,
stood and pointed your chin up, let rain
and wind seize all senses while she called
you "dramatic," and then didn't call when
you picked up your towel and walked out.
Now, clouds gather like gossipers outside
the window and petals fall from the magnolia
tree, surprising you with their heaviness as
they tumble through space. Leaning your
head against flowered wallpaper, you tell
yourself that all storms, like yesterday's,
like the one still bubbling in the rooms below,
eventually blow over, and some people
disappear in their wake.

ADRIENNE WEISS

June Blitz

Discovering the rainbow bokeh quota of a gay reality TV show.
The bruise on my shoulder ripening to dark purple in seconds.
Bixi cowboys in the night. The flash of your skin. Waking up
already crying laughing. Not being in Iowa. Thanking god for
not being in Iowa. Gaining five handsome pounds. A new hot
pink poster on the wall. Spelling out my name with a finger in
the throaty scream of a club. Ayeeee-El.

AL DERVISEVIC



Sete Cidades, Christine Seaton

Anzio

Tender hands have grazed the small
of my back before; this is not new

what is new: we are wrapped around
one another

 legs, arms
 in the Tyrrhenian,
 pointing to distant mountain ranges,

as if naming them
might make them ours

ASHLEY FISH-ROBERTSON

Puerto Vallarta

by Ella Bachrach

He reaches for his phone. Responds to a text from his roommate about the washing machine, skims a few news articles. Mutes the volume. Opens Twitter, clicks the search bar and then, underneath that, the most recent search. Scrolls through videos captioned with various descriptive hashtags. Picks a video, skips fifteen seconds ahead by double tapping the left side of the screen. Double taps again, thirty seconds. Turns the phone sideways and shakes it until the video rotates to landscape. Jerks off methodically, rhythm steady until he's about to finish. A sharp inhale, and—. Softens. Clicks the power button and tosses his phone to the end of his bed. Cleans up using a dirty shirt. Turns off the light.

Wakes up to squeaking, tiny tapping sounds. Fumbles for his phone, squints. It's three in the morning. Closes his eyes and tries to sleep again. Ten minutes pass. Twenty. He gets up and stumbles into the kitchen. Shines his phone flashlight, glare reflecting off the sink. Peers into the corners under the countertop, the stove, the fridge. Nothing. Gets down on his hands and knees and tries again. Dust, hair. A handful of uncooked pasta. Pauses. Holds his breath. Listens. Silence, until... there. Scratching. Over by the table. Stands and steps towards it. Hears the skittering. Sees it then in the dim beam of the flashlight as it scurries over to the cabinets. Grabs a Tupperware container off the counter. Corners it. He crouches down and holds the container out.

The Tupperware is too big, won't fit in the space between. Will squish a leg off or something. Wouldn't take much. Puts it down and flexes his fingers, strains. Reaches out. Moves so slowly it's like he isn't. Steady. It doesn't see him coming. Grabs it, quick. Tiny body in his rough hands. He could kill it if he wanted. Cups his hands, making sure it can breathe. Feels its claws, pinpricks on skin. Skittering around. Warm. Can feel its heartbeat going a million miles a second. Holds it against his bare chest. Feels his own heartbeat matching pace. His face is wet. Tries to steady his breathing but can't. Shaking. Stiffens hands, makes space. Makes room. Warm. Can't get air in. Thinks about being in Mexico with his dad the summer after grade seven, the breeze, playing Speed, the cards scattered across the table, his dad passing over his Corona, the acrid taste, the fuzziness spreading from his stomach up his throat to his face, the warmth, getting up and throwing around a football and being total shit but pretending just for a moment that he was the kind of boy who threw around a football with his dad, liking that everyone on the beach could see them, the stitches under his fingers, hand too small to fit around the ball properly, unsteady in the sand, the ball wobbling in the air and his dad correcting his form, showing him to hold it up by his ear, how to follow through, where to put his index finger, stepping back, squinting into the sun, whipping this one beautiful spiral straight into his dad's hands. The look on his face. A year later finding the court documents online, his dad's name in capital letters, reading her statement, going over the same sentences again and again, having to stop to dry heave into his garbage can, nothing coming up. The photos weren't

included in the documents but someone typed a description of them. Searching up the words he didn't know. Thinks about living in his childhood home and answering the landline and saying hello and the neighbour on the other end mistaking his voice for his dad's.

It's minus twenty outside and he's in his boxers, can't go down three flights of stairs like this, can't remember if mice can survive in the cold, can't reach his phone to Google it because his hands are pressed against his chest. Stays there, keeled over on the kitchen floor, tiny heartbeat against calloused palms.

ELLA BACHRACH

PLACIDO DOMINGO

Done in by a lazy Sunday—
The radio ballgame and walk
through the parks. Far too early to lay
our heads down, she and I past talk,
our quiet in common. “That hawk,”
I say. She nods, recalling the sight
I mean, returns to her notes. Clock
ticks. We are content in the night.

MARK J. MITCHELL

CONTRIBUTORS

JC Alfier's (they/them) artistic directions are informed by photo-artists Toshiko Okanoue, Deborah Turbeville, Francesca Woodman, and especially Katrien De Blauwer. Their most recent poetry book, *The Shadow Field*, was published by Louisiana Literature Press (2020). Journal credits include *The Brooklyn Review*, *Faultline*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Penn Review*, *River Styx*, and *Vassar Review*.

allison anne is a queer, nonbinary artist working in a variety of mediums including paper collage, zinemaking, artist books, design & independent publishing based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. With a focus on texture and abstraction, allison's work prioritizes that which is found, discarded and left behind, exploring intersections and interactions between context, materiality and creativity. They are a founding member of Twin Cities Collage Collective, a volunteer at the Workshop for Independent Publishing in Minneapolis, and co-run the small press NONMACHINABLE with artist Jeremy P. Bushnell. Connect with allison at allisonanne.com and on Instagram at @allisonannecollage.

Ella Bachrach is from northern British Columbia and now studies in Montreal. Her work can be found in *Crab Apple Literary*, *Aôthen*, and *Mai/son*.

Nora Bartram-Forbes is a lover of crossword puzzles, spring flowers and long division. Her poetry has featured in *The Veg*, *The Imagist*, *Mister Magazine* and more.

Jordan Cobb (she/her) is a queer American poet raised across the south & Midwest. Previously an oncology nurse, she is currently completing her MSc in Creative Writing at the University of Edinburgh. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Anthropocene*, *The Shore*, *Rise Up Review*, *Outcrop Poetry*, *Chouette Literary*, *Gently Mad Literary Magazine*, *Wrong Directions*, & the 2024-2025 edition of the anthology series *From Arthur's Seat*. She is @cobbcorner on Instagram.

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Micaela Day is a South Ontario transplant now residing in Montreal. She is an academic (in theory) and a dyke (in practice) who is currently pursuing a BA in English Literature with a minor in Interdisciplinary Sexuality Studies at Concordia University. Her involvement in literature fluctuates between creation, formal study, and editorial work; she is motivated entirely by her intense passion for the craft. Currently she holds the position of Co-Editor-in-Chief for *Soliloquies Anthology*.

Al Dervisevic is a student of anthropology and gender studies at McGill. You can find Al's other work in *Stimulant* and *The Veg*. Al also enjoys being a dyke and fighting Muay Thai.

Ashley Fish-Robertson is a journalist and poet based in Montreal. Her work has appeared in *Room Magazine*, *Funicular Magazine*, *Ahoy*, *Soliloquies Anthology*, *Eavesdrop Magazine*, and more.

Eileen Grant is a writer from Ontario whose prose and poetry have been published in *Slug Magazine*, *The Veg*, and *The Scrivener Creative Review*. She recently graduated from McGill University where she studied English Literature. Her hobbies include playing music and baking delectable desserts.

Kale Hensley is a poet and visual artist from West Virginia. Her collages appear in *Gulf Stream*, *Phoebe*, *Redivider*, and other literary venues. She lives in Texas with her wife and a menagerie of clingy pets. Find more of her lore at kalehens.com.

Kubra Iqbal is an emerging writer who is finding new ways to utilise their creative writing major. Their writing is an exploration of religion, self, and the thin lines between romantic and platonic relationships. Their work has previously appeared in *DominAsian Magazine* and *Debate Mag*. Their hobbies include overstaying their welcome at coffee shops, rereading the same three books, and taking the bus. They lived in Montreal for two years, and now live in Brisbane.

CONTRIBUTORS

Lizzy Lewis is a Chicago-based interdisciplinary artist, working as an actor, singer, and writer. She is also a researcher and editor for American history and music book projects. She holds a B.A. in Comparative Literature (focuses in Music and French Literature) from the University of Chicago and an M.F.A. in Acting from Brown University/Trinity Rep. Her in-progress poetry collection, *Static Sounds*, was selected for a Theater and Performance Studies workshop at the University of Chicago. This writing and research takes as source material the Alan Lomax Archive of 20th century field recordings held at the Library of Congress.

Mark J. Mitchell has worked in hospital kitchens, fast food, retail wine and spirits, conventions, tourism, and warehouses. He has also been a working poet for almost 50 years. His latest novel, *A Book of Lost Songs*, was just published by Histria Books. An award-winning poet, he's the author of five full-length poetry collections, and six chapbooks. His latest collection is *Something To Be* from Pski's Porch Publishing. He is fond of baseball, Louis Aragon, Miles Davis, Kafka, Dante, and his wife, activist Joan Juster. He lives in San Francisco, where is makes his marginal living pointing out pretty things. He can be found on Bluesky @MJMitchellwriter.

Ryan Schwartz is a 21-year-old writer from Montreal. She studies English Literature at Concordia University, where she explores her love for reading and writing. She writes both fiction and poetry, often inspired by everyday life and the people around her. Ryan hopes to keep growing as a writer and sharing her work with others in the future, hoping to one day create a career from it too.

Christine Seaton is a multimedia artist focusing in 35mm film photography and collage. In terms of her photography, Christine is interested in light and the way it can shape a photograph. She's drawn to film's cinematic qualities and the unexpected results that come from it. On the other hand, collage is a form of catharsis for Christine, and she mostly uses it to capture the emotional release of music. The medium's meticulous nature focuses the artist to spend time with herself, a feature that Christine very much enjoys.

CONTRIBUTORS

Beth Sherman has had more than 150 stories published in literary journals, including *Flash Frog*, *Fictive Dream*, *Bending Genres* and *Smokelong Quarterly*. Her work is featured in Best Microfiction 2024 and the upcoming Best Small Fictions 2025. She's also a multiple Pushcart and Best of the Net nominee. She can be reached on social media @bsherm36.

Sarp Sozdinler has been published in *Electric Literature*, *Kenyon Review*, *Masters Review*, *Flash Frog*, *Vestal Review*, *Fractured Lit*, *JMWW*, and *Trampset*, among other journals. Their stories have been selected or nominated for several anthologies, including the Pushcart Prize, Best Small Fictions, and Wigleaf Top 50. They are currently at work on their first novel in Philadelphia and Amsterdam.

Adrienne Weiss is the author of two poetry collections: *Awful Gestures* (Insomniac Press, 2001) and *There Are No Solid Gold Dancers Anymore* (Nightwood Editions, 2014). She lives and works in Toronto.

Simon William Lynch Wellwood is a Montréal-based writer, concert photographer, and film editor originally hailing from the small town of Smiths Falls, Ontario. He has been published in *Squid Literary & Arts Magazine* as well as the anthology series *Lake Effect*. His writing typically revolves around the surreal, unspoken parts of his own life. If needed, he can usually be found in the nearest mosh pit.

Judy Yun is a graphic designer and artist based in Montreal. She has an eye for the silly and a passion for new and innovative ideas. Having worked with various organizations and festivals in Montreal, she hopes to continue working in the city's arts and culture scene.

CONTRIBUTORS

Lina Züchner is a Montréal-based artist and writer with a passion for all things quirked-up, whimsical, and bizarre. Her works are a portal into her mind palace, a space teeming with vibrant, playful characters and an absurdity that demands to be externalized. Inspired by childhood, adulthood, humor, neurodivergence, and the horrors and delights of daily life, she experiments across styles and media in attempts to capture ephemeral thoughts and experiences, access the Self, and engage with the world around her. More of Lina's work can be found @thumblyfe on Instagram.