EXPOSITION REVIEW

10 YEARS OF EXPO

AN AWP 2025 OFFSITE CELEBRATION

Fiction · Nonfiction · Poetry · Experimental · Flash



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Tidal Friction (The Moon Moves from Earth at the Same Speed Our Fingernails Grow)

by Matthew Woodman

Vol. I: "Nine Lives" – Poetry

We're here because we love you.

We need you

to know, no matter the orbital velocity, we respect volition, we acknowledge internal agency.

But—and this is not easy for us the evidence is irrefutable: you've chosen withdrawal through conservation of angular momentum, an anchor accelerating without restraint or absolute necessity into ... what? Abeyance? Vita contemplativa?

Last night I came to you and couldn't wake. You wouldn't even try to remember, the shrapnel of eggshells ensconced even here, on the kitchen counter, the hangnails a mosaic salting our hands.

Last night

I sang to the dissolution.

Last night

I swore to the synchronous rotation and bleached the bloodstains from our marble floors.

No more.

If you won't slacken the axis, if you won't arrest the greater distance or explain the irregularities, we can't have you circulate the children, we can't have you illuminate the lovers, we can't have you wreath our intimacy.

This isn't about bringing you to heel.

This is for us.

This is for your own good.

Founding editor of the deceased literary journal *Rabid Oak*, **Matthew Woodman** has collaborated with the Bakersfield Museum of Art for Art After Dark poetry readings, and his poems have appeared in *Fourteen Hills, Sonora Review*, and *Juked*, among other journals and collections. He is the author of *This Is Not Your Moon* (2020) and was the contributing editor to a series of community-based themed anthologies, most recently *Writing Covid* (2022). His poem "Tidal Friction (The Moon Moves from Earth at the Same Speed Our Fingernails Grow)" appeared in *Exposition Review*'s "IX Lives" issue.

I Pencil Grieving You in My Planner

by Bree Bailey

Vol. VIII: "Lines" – Experimental

Day 1

Attend Pops' party.

Order three new bras that boost my confidence. (Give myself enough support to look like my dad isn't dying.)

Day 2

Apply to some big-girl job to make money and leave this town behind.

Pay the bills—my birthright for being born in a single-parent household.

Buy waterproof mascara.

Day 3

Refinance my face and enroll in a class to learn to smile more.

Stop answering my phone—it's always bad news or loan collectors.

(Not sure what scares me more these days: Death or my growing interest in it.)

Day 4

Attend open bar 3 p.m.-6 p.m.

Dinner—Taco Bell with Pops.

Hospital. (Uber home.)

Day 5

Skip work. (Or maybe it's closed—I don't know anymore.)

Call hospice. (When they ask for his name, pretend I dialed the wrong number.)

Day 6

MRSA—wear a hazmat suit to see his sweaty body.

Attend Pops' first and only art exhibit—hanging from these twinkly lights, piss-yellow bags float in front of my eyes in the city I escape to.

Buy new shoes on Amazon. (Magic carpets are out of stock.)

Day 7

Start applying to jobs. Out of state.

Look up plane tickets. Print an itinerary—how to cope from far away.

Make myself smaller.

RIP everything up by midnight.

Day 8

Skip breakfast.

Skip lunch.

Skip dinner.

Day 9

Drink so bad my phone won't wake up so that I can finally ask for help

when I think I should.

Day 10

Attend Pops' burial at 10 a.m.

Order a new planner.

Learn to grieve without reminders.

Day 11

Hospital.

Another art exhibit—my turn.

Bree Bailey (she/her) is a queer Latina poet who is a New Jersey native now living in Southern Austin, Texas, with her tiny delightful family. As a mental health advocate and former high school educator, she speaks about her experiences with PTSD, depression, and anxiety, while doing her best to bask in the light, beauty, and grace of the world. Her poems have been featured in *Olney Magazine*, *Exposition Review*, *West Trade Review*, *Gulf Stream Magazine*, and *South Florida Poetry Journal*, among others. Most recently, she won the 2023 Write Bloody Jack McCarthy National Book Prize, and her debut poetry collection, *Wailing on Whisper Street*, is currently available with Write Bloody Publishing and anywhere you buy books. Follow her on Instagram @breebaileypoetry or visit her at www.breebaileypoetry.com.

Hide and Seek

by Doug Van Gundy

Flash 405, August 2018: "Mystery" – Fiction

She didn't know that she was lost, she only thought that she was winning the game that she'd neglected to tell the rest of us that she was playing, and so we did as she wanted without even knowing it: we sought her—in the toy chest at the foot of her small bed, in the wicker clothes hamper in the upstairs hall, beneath the guest bed in the extra room. After exhausting the familiar places, panic drove us to the backyards of neighbors, to the alleyways bisecting the blocks around the house; to the backseats of parked cars and the berry-choked hedge of Pyracantha along the side of the Presbyterian church. We yelled ourselves hoarse, saying her name over and over again until it sounded nothing like a name, until our voices were night birds emerging from the high branches of the Norway Spruce. Not one of us thought to look in the crawlspace under the eaves, the place that always frightened her as if it were haunted, or inhabited by something more terrifying and famished than any monster in her frequent nightmares, but there she was – curled up with a picture book and a flashlight; a bottle of water and a sleeve of saltine crackers. She'd looked behind the low door in the baseboard and found it cozy—not the expected danger, just boxed coats and Christmas lights and the comforting smell of hot dust and trapped air. She'd shut the door behind her and waited to be found, our shouting voices scarcely audible through asphalt shingles and fiberglass insulation. For the first time since she could remember, she wasn't afraid—not even a little.

Doug Van Gundy directs the Low-Residency MFA program in Creative Writing at West Virginia Wesleyan College. His poems and essays have appeared in many journals, including *Poetry*, *Guernica*, *Poets & Writers*, and *The Oxford American*. He is the author of a book of poems, *A Life Above Water*, and co-editor of the anthology *Eyes Glowing at the Edge of the Woods: Contemporary Writing from West Virginia*. In addition to teaching and writing, Doug plays fiddle, guitar, and mandolin in the traditional string band, Born Old.

Ballet Is Never Enough

by Lynda V. E. Crawford

Vol. VII: "Flux" – Poetry

For Caribbean girls who want to point toes tighten, lessen their backsides into the unnatural stretch to strings of violins—having lost the kora

For Caribbean girls who strain to keep arms above heads pirouetting away from ancestral earth skin

Be wise

Listen to your mothers who laugh with teeth and tongue watch them grabble flared poplin dresses above their knees; gyrate hips into a curved spoon-bowl a cycle of earth life, circle of star life

Be carefree

Follow *Mudda Sally*, caress fertility ripples blue/green clear from across the ocean of your future, your past, your present musk life look askance at small-bone-breaking dances that bend and bleed phalanges

Be swift

Push past advents: Spain, Portugal, England, France push past interims: kompa, kalenda, bele, kaiso wuk down into deep dance—a dingolay on a sea path to reclaim your original womb **Lynda V. E. Crawford** is a poet born and raised in Barbados. She lives in California. A Pushcart Prize nominee, her work is in journals including *Prairie Schooner*, *The Caribbean Writer*, *The Bookends Review*, *Arts Etc Barbados*, *The Galway Review*, *Exposition Review*, *Mayari Literature*, and *California Quarterly*. Crawford is the author of the poetry collection *Washing Water*

(World Stage Press, 2024).

Einherjar

by Kevin Flanagan

Flash 405, April 2019: "Magic & Myths" - Fiction

You have been fighting well, my warrior.

I have known many warriors. People of the longships, souls that fought for the glory of Asgard. Those cradled by the rocking of the black sea beneath them—your forebearers, who travelled far and saw the strange places of this world.

Gaange Rolf, who fought the Franks and was made ruler of Normandy. Harald, who was a boy when he served the Prince of Kiev, who traveled as far as Constantinople. Erik, who traveled west to unknown shores. Erik, your namesake, which you have duly earned. You fight as well as any of them, and have done so every day of your short life.

Come, little Eric. Your fight ends. I am the valkyrie of this battlefield, and I bear you to Valhalla. Let this incubator be your longship, this ventilator your warhorn.

You have fought bravely, my warrior, since that day not so long ago when you were born, blue and silent. Your life is short, other's lives will be much longer. This is the fate woven for you. Your mother and father have watched over you these three months, but now I have come to take you beyond.

You have battled the greatest foe since they placed you in this natal isolette and ran tubes into your nose to make you breath. Unable to move your limbs of your own power, unable to cry. Many of the warriors I have taken to the great hall cried in one battle or another, but not you. Not in this battle.

The nurses of this place hang beads on the outside of your isolette—"Bravery beads" they call them, but they have no idea. A day will come, when three roosters crow and Garmr will howl and break his chains, but that day is far from today. When the dawn of that day breaks, we will need souls as strong as yours. The chosen await you as comrades and friends, fellow einherjar. Odin expects you, hero come from this world, and glad is his heart to meet you.

You have fought well in your little life. There are many things of this world you will never know, but there is glory that awaits you beyond. Come with me now, on wings of swans and ravens. Cattle die. Kindred die. Every man is mortal, but the good name never dies of one who has done well.

You have d	one well.		

Kevin M. Flanagan is a writer, performer, and artist living in Phoenix. When Kevin was three years old, he pushed a sheet metal screw up his nose. It was there for some time before being discovered, and required a trip to the emergency room to remove. This is Kevin's earliest memory. His work has been published in the anthologies *Myths Subverted: An Anthology of Mythical Short Stories* and *Horror Sleaze Trash: Prose in Poor Taste Vol. 3*, as well as by *Exposition Review*, *Dark Fire Fiction*, and *The Daily Drunk*. He has other ill-conceived projects that can be found at KevinMFlanagan.com or @kevinmflanagan.bsky.social. He is currently working on a sword-and-sorcery trilogy about growing old.

Perfect Dark

by Lisa Eve Cheby

Vol. VIII: "Lines" – Poetic Essay

I am forced to speak the language of men. They study the craft of violence in film, rate movies in explosiveness, celebrate the artistry of war. I resist

history lessons that discard the frames of Alice Guy-Blaché's pantomime, plucking babies from cabbages seven years before the great train robbery. My teacher refuses

to splice her back into the lesson. Before each class, my male classmates line the hall, form

the gauntlet (their phrase) of masculine affection (mine). Hands push shoulders and slap backs, elbows poke ribs, each man (boy) tossed side to side on waves of laughter. As I approach down the hall, the ritual pauses until I pass them to enter the classroom.

Even in the dorms, I retreat to my room to study as the guys bond over video games. This year it is *Goldeneye*. Four shooters playing all at once. One day, they invite me to join. I learn negotiation

is never an option to break into the guarded facility, to complete the mission. Everyone has to die.

To face violence with anything less than more violence is foolish, not part of the game.

Superhero stories once kept a strict code that the good guys never kill.

Now we want heroes who are flawed, alluring because of their darkness, their struggle to keep the code.

007 is not a superhero.

When not in midnight labs splicing tape, I practice how to loosen my hold on the controller, to coordinate my trigger finger with right thumb on the arrows, left on the joystick. I try all the weapons, favor a light, quick rifle with lots of ammo, decent accuracy. Then I graduate to the more elegant Russian Glock-like handgun, learn to strategize. I hunt my prey with the soundtrack's anxious motif looping under incessant bursts of bullets that precede soft groans of death.

When Bobby calls me a floozy, I know I've won their friendship. Walking out of film school onto the streets of New York, we speculate routes for escape, admire the chiaroscuro of alleys, perfect for angling a hidden camera—that other tool we train to shoot to bring some dream to life. Imagine

Alice in 1896, gripping her camera, the deafening stutter of the shutter, gears moving film from one side of the magazine to the other as bursts of light expose the nitrocellulose to explode her vision onto a screen

in language unschooled in violence.

Lisa Eve Cheby, poet, librarian, and daughter of Hungarian immigrants, has poetry and essays published in various journals and anthologies and three chapbooks with Strikethrough Press. She was writer in residence at Sundress Academy for the Arts' Firefly Farms and Dorland Mountain Arts. lisacheby.wordpress.com

Chile Season

by Lorinda Toledo

Flash 405, August 2024: "Otherworldly" – Nonfiction

Grown now, I've moved away to a sprawling Western city where everyone asks,

-What are you? Where are you from?

-New Mexico.

-And your parents?

-New Mexico.

—And your grandparents?

-New Mexico.

—And their parents?

—Them, too...

The truth is complicated. To strangers on the bus, I don't try to explain the convoluted lacings in my veins, the shadowy legacy of Spanish settlers and hidden-away Native survivors. My ancestors worked the land, and raised livestock, and prayed and prayed for rain. Though I roam, New Mexico roots run deep. I visit in September, when the sweet smoky scent of green chile weaves through the air. Bright green peppers toasting in black iron cages at the market, spinning over fire.

On the patio of the house my parents built, we sip coffee with sticky chile juice-covered hands. Peel papery chile skin from silky chile flesh, juicy as mandarins. We will chop the chile, pile it high on enchiladas or burgers. Or simmer patiently in posole. Chile warms us through, burning away weariness of body, mind, spirit.

My father works the land when he comes home from earning a living. Just three acres, but difficult to weave nutrients into that sandy valley soil—bed of an unbridled Rio Grande generations ago. Irrigating through the night, he rises in the darkest hour. Dreaming of alfalfa so tall and green it begs to be cut and baled.

This is the desert, though. Rain scarcer each year, and-strewn seed lays to waste, or hay comes up weedy and apologetic. Fine for feeding cows, but horse hay runs for seven now. My father will want to sell the three mares. He will relent when, together with my mother, we race across the fields, hooves beneath us, wind pressing onward.

My father's eyes always dance when we peel chile in the autumn. His black mustache tipped with more silver than I remember, he tells me that, as the air cools, chile left in the fields transforms from green to red. Red chile is strung into ristras the shape of trees with many branches, hung upside down to dry. These aged peppers will be ground into finest powder. Blended with aromatics—garlic, onion, cumin, oregano—until we've formed a blood-red sauce. Dark as rich clay soil.

Lorinda Toledo (she/her) was born and raised in New Mexico, while Los Angeles has been her home for fifteen years. Her novel-in-progress, *The Nature of Fire*, was named first runner-up for the 2019 James Jones First Novel Fellowship, and she is currently revising the completed manuscript with her agent. Her short fiction and creative nonfiction have appeared in *Mississippi Review, The Normal School, Lit Angels*, and others. She holds an MFA from Antioch University Los Angeles, and she earned a PhD in literature with creative dissertation from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, where her writing was supported by multiple awards including the Barrick Graduate Fellowship and a Black Mountain Institute PhD Fellowship. Her nonfiction piece "Chile Season" is the second-place winner of *Exposition Review*'s August 2024 Flash 405 contest, judged by Dr. Cecilia Caballero.

to the brown nippled girls and the daughters of immigrant fathers

by Sofía Aguilar

Vol. VI: "Hunger" – Hybrid Nonfiction

My father tried to teach me to love.

In Mexico, cooking a meal is the same as offering yourself, the kitchen a woman's first home, an apron tied into a knot at the neck and then at the waist as though her second skin. But I'm not the kind of woman who always does what she's told—don't pick your skin, don't talk that way, don't open your legs like a man at the table. My hands have never known how to carry my people in the palms or lay my heart beside the food or serve my father's plate and push in his chair before my own. To boil guavas after plucking them from their tree or to melt chocolate and chile into mole into chicken bone and learn to do without its sweetness.

Instead, I'm the daughter who chooses both halves of herself, who is made of two tongues but burns brown the arroz and brushes slight against the stove and finds my skin weeks later still peeling from a past heat. Neither my food nor my mouth has ever understood how to speak for me.

I never learned how to love my body the way white girls did, how to describe it in words that weren't already taken—caramel and cinnamon, coffee and the kind of sugar my father has never believed in. As though I am meant to be eaten, swallowed and consumed. I was never told that my brown nipples were as beautiful as pink and my belly filled with food could round itself that way and my waves didn't have to be the victims of heat. Never understood that my body was mine, that men couldn't shame me, couldn't see me and crave me, couldn't touch me unless I said yes, couldn't abuse me and blame me, didn't own me even if we shared the same blood.

But so much of my father is myself. So much first belonged to him that it's hard to remember whose body this really is. My eyebrows always wild, overgrown, my locks of hair so thick that just a few loose strands stop the shower from disappearing into the drain, my face that has always had its own mind and never learned how to lie. My fear of darkness, barren places, and hollows in the chest, of one dollar too little, of inhabiting the earth without wearing shoes, of lying down and feeling the ribs of the mattress through our bellies on the bed—what's mine has always been ours.

He taught me to ache. To take desire as my birthright, to never be full, become satisfied, run away from the world without leaving my touch or both my names behind, braided into blades of grass, tattooed in the ear. Emptiness, his greatest fear passed down to me like inheritance.

Sofia Aguilar is a Chicana writer, editor, and library professional in Los Angeles. Her work has appeared in the *L.A. Times, Refinery29 Somos, Exposition Review*, and *New Orleans Review*, among other publications. She is the author of zine and chapbook publications including *STREAMING SERVICE: golden shovels made for tv* (2021) and *STREAMING SERVICE: season two* (2022), both self-published; *LOS ANGELES: the zine*, co-edited with poet Paula Macena; and *amor.*, published by Bottlecap Press in March 2025. Her debut children's picture book *Queer Latine Heroes: 25 Changemakers from Latin America and the U.S. from History and Today* is forthcoming from Jessica Kingsley Publishers in September 2025. You can find her at sofiaaguilar.com.

.233 Remington

by luna rey hall

Vol. V: "Act/Break" - Poetry

Brother, you are no longer human in my mind.

I think of you, bullet. I think of you, death.

At home I roll between my fingers

& wood table, a bullet you lent me

to write a poem. So I could witness

the gaudy brass jacket, the red lipstick tip.

You are the Remington under my thumb,

saying I did not ask for this name,

I did not ask

for skin or muscle.

I do not want to be some proxy,

some stand-in for all that you deem wrong.

luna rey hall is a queer nonbinary writer. they are the author of four books including *the patient routine*. their poems have appeared in *The Florida Review*, *The Rumpus*, and *Raleigh Review*, among others.

Beware of the Boys (excerpt)

by Natalie Mislang Mann

Vol. VI: "Hunger" – Nonfiction

"Ladies first," a smiling, drunk, turbaned man said. He guided me to the front of the bar since I was the only woman waiting in line for alcohol. While the crowd of men looked amused, the Indian bartender didn't look surprised when I ordered my whiskey straight. I ordered a couple more with Coke. If I brought my cousin's married daughters drinks, their father wouldn't notice the alcohol in the dark, bubbly liquid.

With alcohol, I could ease loneliness. Through alcohol, I could commune with my female cousins who were forbidden indulgence. As a half-Indian, I felt like an imposter, an imposition, in a culture that I felt I half-belonged. Without knowing my father's tongue, I learned to be silent. I shape-shifted to be invisible. I sat with my non-dancing cousins. My black sequined T-shirt blended into the background.

I observed.

Other female members of [my father's] "clan" paraded like peacocks wearing bright pink, blue, or turquoise saris. Gold embroidery or delicate beadwork glistened on the silk. Henna-tattooed hands screwed in invisible lightbulbs as the young women danced bhangra to Punjabi MC's "Mundian To Bach Ke." The song translates to "Beware of the Boys." In Punjabi, Rajinder Singh Rai compliments and warns the dancers. He acknowledges their good looks, their thin waists, their nice hair on top. He tells them not to give their love to just anyone. He tells them to beware of the boys. In Indian culture, a fine line exists between coy flirtation and expressing sexuality. To give dancing women privacy, men drinking whiskey gathered around the bar.

As I watched the multichromatic women dancing in a circle, I noticed that their connection bound sexuality with unapproachability. To gain entrance, an outsider must interrupt their content. On the outside, it seemed to gain entrance one must look like them.

I yearned to be like my cousins: svelte, tall, elegant.

There was no deviation from the Sikh rule of not cutting hair.

Their long hair swayed.

There were no flyaways.

I have the kind of hair that men like to pull during sex. They perceive curly hair as wild. It goes in different directions. It looks unkempt. It looks rough. They perceive curly hair as a signifier of a woman's temperament. Men push curly hair away from their faces. It scratches their five-o'clock shadows. The dancing women are the type men want to marry. I imagine the dancing women alone with their husbands or boyfriends at the end of the night. When they get home, their drunk partners smile and brush loose strands of hair away from their faces. They tell them they are beautiful before gently kissing their lips.

Men can sense when a girl with curly hair wants straight hair, serious hair. They can sense when she wants to be the kind of woman who can dance all night in eight-inch stilettos. She wants to be the kind of woman who can't handle her liquor. So, when she is drunk, she giggles like a hungry hyena. Hungry hyenas are deceptively strong. Like the dancing women, they travel in clans. They choose their mates. They chase their mark. If she were a hungry hyena, she would mark her territory and catch her prey. Men would think she's cute because she would know how to play the game. And, instead of a rough diamond [on her right hand], she would land a shiny, blood one on her left.

Natalie Mislang Mann, a 2024 recipient of New Literary Project's Jack Hazard Fellowship, is a graduate of Bennington Writing Seminars. Supported by the PEN Emerging Voices fellowship, Tin House, and VONA, her writing has been published in *Angel City Review*, *Exposition Review*, and *The Rattling Wall*'s anthology *Only Light Can Do That*. Her latest essay about distance teaching during the pandemic appears in West Virginia Press's *Essential Voices: A Covid-19 Anthology*. She is currently revising a memoir based on her experiences growing up as a Mexipina Sikh in Los Angeles's San Fernando Valley.

Ghost Interview in the Peach Orchard

by Xochitl-Julisa Bermejo

Vol. III: "Orbit" – Poetry

After Ghostlines Collective

In your final moments, whom did you think of? Was this someone waiting for you to return? I worry I will never find that someone waiting

behind a thick front door of a home we made together. Was your front door always locked or opened? Was it left open for you even after you were gone?

If you could say one thing to your father, what would you say? What's one lesson you wish you could have taught your child? I still hope to have a child, so consider this advice.

Dried peach pits litter the ground reminding me of bones. Are your bones below the soil? Is this why you cling to the fields snagging on branches like morning fog?

How do you want to be remembered? If you could write anything on one of these monuments riddling the orchard, what would you write?

Have you ever pledged allegiance to a flag, any flag? Have you ever loved a flag like your mother's arms? Speaking of your mother's arms,

what did they smell like when tucked tight below your nose? Fresh baked loaves or maybe stone? I want a better simile, but I need you to tell me. I come to you alone at twilight because I'm always alone, and I'm afraid. Are you here with me? Do you stalk the trees? I ask because I don't want to be afraid.

Do you hate war? Did you ever love war? Am I totally off, and is War like God, unknown, all around, a mystery too big to understand?

I wish I could tell you there is no more war, that your sacrifice has been remembered as a warning, but I can't, so let's talk about letters.

Did you write love letters home with sign offs like I wait to hold you and Forever yours? I want to believe in love like some believe in God. Will you help me?

Do you think I'm crazy? Do you think I'm beautiful? No, really, like would you date me? Don't answer that.

Did I at least make you laugh? What can I say to make you smile? Please tell me there is something I can write to help us both let go.

Xochitl-Julisa Bermejo is the daughter of Mexican immigrants and author of *Incantation: Love Poems for Battle Sites* (Mouthfeel Press) and *Posada: Offerings of Witness and Refuge* (Sundress Publications). A former Steinbeck Fellow and Poets & Writers California Writers Exchange winner, Bermejo's poetry and essays can be found at *The Acentos Review, Huizache, Los Angeles Review of Books, The Offing, [Pank], Santa Fe Writers Project,* and other journals. She teaches poetry and creative writing in Antioch University's MFA program and UCLA Extension and is the director of Women Who Submit.

Thatpe you

