

**BUDS & BLOOMS:
VOLUME TWO**



ISSUE XIV

COSMIC DAFFODIL JOURNAL

BUDS & BLOOMS: VOLUME TWO ISSUE XIV

Cover Art by Swati Singh

Collected by Madisen D'Ascenzo & Kelly Brocious

Chosen by Cosmic Daffodil Journal Members

Ebook Design by Madisen D'Ascenzo

Formatted & Edited by Madisen D'Ascenzo & Kelly Brocious



Cosmic Daffodil Journal: BUDS & BLOOMS:
VOLUME TWO

Copyright © 2026 by Cosmic Daffodil Journal
All rights reserved. No parts of this book may
be reproduced in any form without permission
from the authors or publisher, except as
permitted by U.S. Copyright law.



"The earth laughs in flowers."

Ralph Waldo Emerson



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Decorative floral elements in the top corners of the page, featuring various colored flowers and leaves.

INTRODUCTION - 6

BIOGRAPHIES - 7

SPECIAL THANKS - 65



INTRODUCTION

Like buds on the cusp of opening, this issue gathers work that hums with anticipation—of change, of becoming, of all that waits just beneath the surface. *Buds & Blooms: Volume 2* is rooted in those quiet, transformative moments where something small begins to stretch toward light.

Within these pages, you'll find pieces that unfold in their own time—some tender, some bold, all reaching. Together, they form a landscape of growth and emergence, a reminder that even the softest beginnings can lead to something vibrant, unexpected, and alive.



BIOGRAPHIES

Kristi's Garden - 17

Valentina Fulginiti (1983) is a scholar, educator, and writer from Ithaca, NY. Her debut novel ("Nessuna di queste vite mi appartiene", ExCogita 2025) won the premio Bianciardi inediti in 2024. Her poetry has appeared in *Merion West*, *Ovunque Siamo*, *Sky Island Journal* among others.

Perennial Care - 18

D.W. Baker is a poet, critic, and editor from St. Petersburg, Florida. His writing appears in *Sundog Lit*, *ballast*, *Version (9) Magazine*, and *Cosmic Daffodil*, among others, and has received nominations for Best of the Net and the Pushcart Prize. See more of his work at www.dwbakerpoetry.com

Limn - 19

L.L. Hannah is an emerging writer completing a Master of Arts in English while working on her first full-length manuscript. Her poetry has been accepted for publication by *Wingless Dreamer*, *Mouthful of Salt*, and *Fish Girl Collective*. You can probably find her exploring the forest, tending the garden, or on Instagram under [@hannah.landslide.lusus](https://www.instagram.com/hannah.landslide.lusus).

Trumpet Vine - 20

Eric Machan Howd (Ithaca, NY) is a poet, musician, and educator. Their work has been seen in such publications as *Slant*, *Slab*, *Caesura*, *The Scop*, and *Nimrod*. Their seventh collection of poetry, "Myths, Fables, and Philosophies," was published in 2025 by *BookLeaf Publications*.



Amaryllis Belladonna - 21

Kenneth Pobo (he/his) has a new book out called *Raylene And Skip* (Wolfson Press). He's retired and enjoys the flower garden.

Sun Child - 22

Bridging the gap between the American Midwest and the American Southwest through themes of visceral womanhood and romantic longing, **Sophie Hall-Schorn** presents a body of work as raw and intimate as the landscapes themselves. She currently lives in Riverside, California.

At a Painting of Tulips - 25

Holly Guran is author of *Now Before and Ever*, *Twilight Chorus*, *River of Bones* and two chapbooks. Selections from narrative poems, based on a 19th century correspondence between a mill girl and the editor she married, have been performed in Boston and at the Lowell National Park.

Bougainvillea - 26

KJ Hannah Greenberg tilts at social ills via visual art. Her bold, textural, colorful images have appeared in various places, including, but not limited to: *Bewildering Stories*, *Foliate Oak Literary Magazine*, and *Kissing Dynamite*. Additionally, her art is featured alongside of her poetry in *One-Handed Pianist* (Hekate Publishing, 2021).



Lilies For Laura - 27



Sandra Beth Levy is a retired psychologist who practiced the healing art of psychotherapy for forty plus years and is now pursuing immersion in creative writing. She's been published in numerous literary journals and anthologies, including *Anomaly Poetry*, *Arcana Poetry*, *A Curious Moon*, *Vagabond's Verse*, *SHINE*, *Veridine*, *Redrosethorns*, *Orange Rose*.

Carnations: Set 2 - 28

Writer/immigrant **Joãowow** can neither confirm nor deny the creation of dozens of graffiti carnations all over Lisbon - symbols of the "Carnation Revolution" of 1974, when Portugal freed itself from dictatorship. These carnations serve as reminders that, even in the darkest of times, we will always pursue the light.

Yellow in Late Winter - 29

Isabel Fontes was born in Lisbon and is based in London. She is the author of novels and poetry collections, and her work has appeared in literary magazines and anthologies across the UK, Europe, Canada, and the United States (Honourable Mention). Her work will appear in a forthcoming Portuguese-Russian anthology of contemporary Portuguese poets. She advocates for transformative arts, amplifying female voices in Portuguese culture, combining poetry and music. On Instagram @isabel0fontes, she shares glimpses of her life and creative process.



Roses for a Daisy - 32

Katie Collan (she/her) is a Jewish neurodivergent author who received a B.F.A. in film from NYIT and wrote a short film that won the Best of Film award in the 2022 NYIT Film Festival. Off-screen, her short fiction has appeared in *FLARE Magazine*, *Micromance Magazine*, and *Audience Askew*, with one story winning first place in *FLARE's* "Strength in Stories" contest.

Synergy - 36

Hugh Findlay's writing and photography have been published worldwide. In addition to many awards, his nominations include: a Pushcart Prize for poetry 2020, Best of the Net for poetry 2025, Best Microfiction 2024, and Best of the Net for photography 2024. IG: @hughmanfindlay. Web: <https://www.hughmanfindlay.com>

Sunny Carnation - 37

Tinamarie Cox lives in an Arizona town with her husband, two children, and rescue felines. Her written and visual work has appeared in a number of online and print publications under various genres. You can explore her work at tinamariethinkstoomuch.weebly.com.

This is just to say I've listened to Enigma - 38

Linda Ann Strang's poetry collections are *Star Reverse* and *Wedding Underwear for Mermaids*. *Star Reverse* was shortlisted for the 2023 Glenna Luschei prize for African Poetry. Her poems have appeared in *New Ohio Review*, *Image Journal*, *Lily Poetry Review*, and elsewhere. She teaches at Nelson Mandela University in South Africa.



What if beauty needs no observer? - 39

Melanie McGehee leads writing workshops for women and is co-editing an anthology of their work, *WRITE HOME: Letters to a younger me* (The Athenaeum Press, 2026). Melanie's words have appeared in *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*, *Hippocampus*, and *The Sunlight Press*. Find her current projects at www.melaniemcgehee.com.

Another Way to Pray - 40

Heidi Spitzig (she/they) is a poet, artist, and counselor living in the Finger Lakes of NY. Her poems and photography have been published in *Ink and Marrow*, *Humana Obscura*, and others. She's an avid nature-lover who can be found in the forest, reading poems to any tree that listens.

Self-Portrait as *Salix matsudana* - 42

Amanda Trout is a Midwestern US writer with a love for sound and form. Her work has been featured or is forthcoming in *Barzakh*, *Pleiades*, *NOVUS*, and other publications. Her micro-chapbook, *Still Life*, was published by *Yavanika Press* in 2024. Find Amanda on Instagram @atrout2972.

Spring Bud - 43

Rod Raglin is self-published author, journalist and photographer living on the west coast of Canada. His fourteen novels, two plays, collection of short stories combine romance and action with environmental themes and societal issues. His short fiction and poetry have appeared in numerous online publications and anthologies.



Defiance in Bloom - 44

Kaycee Painter is a writer and photographer from Georgia. Her work explores themes of resilience, memory, illness, and the natural world. Drawing on personal experience and the landscapes around them, she creates images and writing that examine fragility, growth, and the quiet ways life continues to bloom.

Snapdragon - 45

Jessica Barksdale has published a short story collection, *Trick of the Porch Light* (2023), and three poetry collections: *When We Almost Drowned* (2019), *Grim Honey* (2021), and *Let's End This Now* (2024). Her seventeenth novel, *What They Found at the Lake*, is forthcoming in 2027.

Rewilding - 46

Laurie Rosen is a lifelong New Englander. Her poetry has appeared in *One Art: a journal of poetry*, *Gyroscope Review*, *Oddball Magazine*, *The New Verse News*, *Minyan Magazine*, *The Inquisitive Eater: New School Food*, *Zig Zag Lit Mag*, and elsewhere. Laurie was nominated for a 2025 Pushcart Prize.

bees of abandonment - 47

Eileen Porzuczek is the author of "Memento Mori: A Poetic Memoir in Three Parts" (Finishing Line Press, 2025). Her poems appear in numerous anthologies and literary magazines. Eileen's work has also won awards, most recently including the 2026 Polk Street Review Best in Book Award.



Untitled - 48

Josiane Kouagheu is a journalist, writer, photographer, painter and poet from Cameroon. Her works have appeared or are forthcoming in *Brittle Paper*, *African Writer Magazine*, *Kalahari Review*, *Frontier Poetry*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Nomad review*, *Apricity Magazine*, *Al Dente Journal* and elsewhere.

Rhubarb Crumble - 49

Danielle Marie Cahill writes from leafy North London. She holds a degree in English from the University of Cambridge. Her credits include (amongst others) *Witches*, *Suburban Witchcraft*, *Underbelly Press*, *Quarter Press*, and *Kaleidoscopic Minds magazines*, her debut chapbook, *Burnt Offerings*, was published by Alien Buddha Press (September 2025).

Surrender - 50

Elanur Williams is a teacher whose writing has appeared in *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Eunoia Review*, *Door is a Jar*, *3Elements*, and elsewhere. She has taught reading and writing to elementary school students and to adults pursuing their GEDs. She lives in New York with her husband and daughter.

Setting Sun - 51

Janina Aza Karpinska is a multidisciplinary artist-poet with an eye for visual poetry whose photographic work has featured in: *International Photographic Exhibition, Ark-T Centre, Oxford*; as *Artist Book, Picture House, Leicester*; *Front Covers: Heart of Flesh Literary Magazine*; *Chichester Magazine*, and *Hovarian*. She lives on the south coast of England.



The grandest and the tiniest - 52

Swati enjoys collecting moments - through words and quiet images. With a deep reverence for the natural world, her work interlaces nature and quiet spirituality, tracing how these unseen threads shape our inner landscapes and sense of reality. Her work has been featured in several magazines.

I Learn to Love Dandelions - 53

Jeanette Barszewski is a queer writer whose work has appeared in *Inkfish*, *The Mom Egg Review* and *The Bitchin' Kitsch*. She received an MFA in Poetry from Brooklyn College. She resides in Hamilton, NJ with her family. You can find out more about her at www.jeanettebarszewskiauthor.com.

Flowers & Vases - 55

CA Fichtelman is an artist and writer whose work has appeared in print and online: *The Helix*; *Glass Mountain Review*; *Brussels Review*; and *The Scop Literary and Fine Arts Review* - 2026 Edition by Kings College of Wilkes-Barre, PA. A member of the St. Louis Artists Guild and Missouri Writers Guild, they currently live in St. Louis, Missouri.

Soothed - 56

Susanne von Rennenkampff is a long-time farmer and gardener. Her poems have appeared in literary magazines in Canada and the US, including "Room", "The Antigonish Review", "Prairie Fire", "Grain" and "The Banyan Review". Her chapbook "In the Shelter of the Poplar Grove" was published by the *Alfred Gustav Press*.



False Spring - 57

Luisa M. Giulianetti is a Bay Area writer. Her debut collection, *Agrodolce* (Bordighera Press), was released in 2023. Her work appears in various journals. She enjoys cooking, gardening, hiking, and exploring the expansive beauty of the place she calls home. Her poetry group keeps her energized and hopeful.

Ice Rose - 58



AV Rasmussen is an avid teacher, writer, backpacker and photographer. Their photography has appeared in *Lifting the Sky: Southwestern Haiku* and *Haiga and Corpus Collosum*, among others. They were the featured photographer for the Winter 2022 issue of *Susurrus*, where their work was nominated for Best of the Web.

How to Speak Fluent Flora - 59

Cherry lives in Yorkshire, with her husband, two children, dog and cat. She enjoys nature, witching, reading, writing and scaring herself with the supernatural. She completed the A215 Creative Writing course with the Open University in 2012 and was published in the *Ink Pantry Anthology*. She holds a BA (Hons) in History from Sheffield Hallam University, and her favourite flowers are daffodils. Find her on Bluesky: @cherrypits.bsky.social

Chloris - 61

Angela Patera is a published artist, writer, poet, and photographer. Her art has appeared in numerous publications, as well as on the cover of *Small Wonders Magazine*, *Indie Bites Magazine*, *Gnome & Bone Magazine*, and a few more. You can find her on Instagram @angela_art13 and Bluesky @angela-art13



Daffodil Dreams & Song of Narcissus - 62, 63

Rebecca is a photographer, educator, and writer from New York City. She enjoys gardening, poetry walks, and spending time with plants and animals. Her work can be found in various art and literary journals, or on her instagram page @moon.flowerphotography.

Stargazer and Bee - 64

Martin Fisher is a debut poet. His poems have appeared in Ink Sweat & Tears and Poems, Tales & Other English Words. His working life has taken him across Africa and Europe. He now lives in the UK, where he works as a gardener.



Kristi's Garden

She stalks every season
plucking, one by one,
wooly plumes out
of ragweed.

Grains of dirt harden
under well-trimmed
nails. Through bony
fingers she squints,
her back a gothic arch
under faded skies
of matted cardigans.

She doles justice out
of curved shears. With velvety
sheen of petunias she crafts
her fashion show. Her sitting
room is furnished with a feisty
brocade of rhododendrons.

It is of little consequence,
to her, that she and her son
no longer speak. Snapdragons
have fiery lips that can't talk back.

Perennial Care

After Sylvia Plath's "Tulips"

white like linen
red like blooms
rebarred window

sterile room
white like neutral
red like wrong

flashing judgement
whittled numb
white like frozen

red like flame
mothwing sleepwalk
lovely harm

white like snowed-in
red like wound
psychic blizzard

mind consumed
white like cobwebs
red like rust

sluggish battle
dimly lost
white like forfeit

red like dawns
recognition
corresponds

Limn

a word to describe something in painting or words;

to accentuate with a light or bright color. As in a single white flower in a garden of violet blue, the guilt on a bloom's drooping face; a yellow smear on Vincent's brush; wondering what hue he'd paint my eyes in a side-by-side. His self-portrait reminds me of a pollen-drunk bee whispering into the ear of a cut sunflower, like the moment I brushed my fingertip to its velvet fur, and it touched me back;

it was the first time I recognized the face in the mirror, bristled raw and framed by brushstrokes; a salt stream illuminating gently spun stars, piercing the darkness in my canvas—a single ray of light rushing through its hollow.

It's in the rise from an empty bed to glaze lapis strokes, fumed in oil glow; the moment I realized how blue sunflowers can be. It's in the impermanence of a steady hand, the envoi: *La tristesse durera toujours*.

It's the peace I found in a healing wound: olive tree melancholy; kindness from a gnarled body. Like the pause of a brush before it spirals into an unknown future; I recognized its soft curl grasping at a swirling sky—earth and moon unfurling one glow at a time, surging in color too true for words. It was in the moment I saw honesty in art, and became a mark in its swell.

Trumpet Vine

He wanted to learn
trumpet to connect
with his father's
drum and bugle corps mind
in the hope violence
would decrescendo
- that swung
hands would be replaced
with music.

Before quietly leaving
for lessons he pops
the un-opened flowers
to hear the snap
of breaking. His father
sleeping in on Saturday
does not wake up
nor does he care
about this architecture of flowers
dropping petals
before they have the chance
to bloom.

Amaryllis Belladonna

In early August
Naked Ladies
show up beside

a pink hibiscus. My, my,
so bold, rising quickly,
blooming in a matter

of days. Six pink
blossoms with a slight
yellow center. I'm fine

that they're naked, giving
the mail box something
to swoon over. I'd join

them if I could, but I'd
be arrested. I'll settle for
being barefoot. The Naked

Ladies don't linger.
Gone in a week or so.
They'll be back

next year, daring us
to look at them
without blushing.

Sun Child

So barely touching it, still I kissed the pond. I had grown that far now, and felt sturdier, and felt somehow as if the brown of shedding time had grown stronger; I had only become vibrant as I grew old. I could feel the rust of years which had found me only in the way the blossoms outgrew from me. They became more painful now, and felt as though they were a spur of amalgamating flesh which barely found a thin veil to crawl most fetus-like out of. Here I gave them their last time to shuffle through me into the wild outside air.

Bee season came as all the years before. Carried to me I felt the first shouldering of fruit begin to crawl through the life breath of the stems which ran through branches. Feeling much like a sac made of the bubble of life protecting itself, I carried them through and felt life anew come through me. Here they became like children waiting to be loved. As all the years before they latched and suckled and flowed and made buds then blossoms of themselves; life stems found ways to crawl where years had caused the innermost tubes of my branches to grow into crumbling tar.

The flesh was more gray now, purple in spots where it should have been yellow and pulping. What the gray and purple gave me was solitude. I hadn't felt the wrapping claw of a human hand for all those years I had grown old.

When you have lost what you always were, there may be panic, a violent shake and tremor of branches which lasts seasons, shaking all of the pulp and flesh of the fruit to the earth floor, as if begging, *please take me. I am still here*. But afterwards there is only a calm as drifting and twinkling as the pond, when you must make a new purpose

Sun Child

for yourself. My purpose now was to remember. That was all I could do as the shouldering became worse, as I thought of my colors and the way the stiffness of my branches felt.

Here was my favorite memory: I remembered a man once, from years past these years ago, who came with a chestnut tan and a ragged moth-eaten shirt. And he came from beyond where the old house once stood, which of course in all of its glamour stood as a marble doll among overgrown wildlands. He was not one of the people who normally picked my fruit. He was calloused and steady, loose where others were standing rigid, bare footed where others wore patent shoes and killed the most ancient clay dirt and grass beneath them. When he crawled through the lady's window at the big old manor plop in the middle of everything else I didn't say a word. As he came to find me and my fruits every day, still I said nothing. As his feet carried on making a concave sponge into the wetness of the earth, still I kept quiet and watched him pluck life to come into new life, there standing next to the pond as I always had. The last time I saw him he pat-patted me and thanked me. That was the memory I thought of every day before they arrived.

When they came with the truck I was ready. When they came with their tools I shed only leaves and swallowed my last breath of the wild air. I kept the last purple and gray fruits and forgave their pulp for leaving and kissed the pond a final time. When they came for me I forgave them silently. And when I was taken, when finally I left the pond and knew soon my tar branches and my mind would be nothing, I felt a panic and a peace at once, and I felt my

Sun Child

fruits begging as they shook on their branches, growing from me, growing still as they stared into a future already gone, outreaching towards the human hand, *please take me. I am still here.*

At a Painting of Tulips

Memory digs into layers of soil
beneath rows of tulips
my grandfather stooped to reach.

Ninety when he left, and no one said.
In his room only his bed
until that, too, was gone.

Tulip buds rise,
their pink lips
pressed to kiss.

As though
touched by his fingers,
the emerald stems sway.

Bougainvillea



Lilies For Laura

at Swan Point Cemetery
your headstone sits in sunshine
lilies etched at corner tops
for innocence you clung to in a mist of deception
your fertile generosity grieving the soul's departure from your body

today I sing Happy Birthday to you
feet rooted in grass; eyes fixed upon a pink granite stone
imagine what you would look like at ninety-five
white hair aglow, tender moon around your smile
frail frame propped upon a throne

i hear a hum of contentment from lily lips
watch your swan neck turn in magnificence

one day, beside you
my sons will sing Happy Birthday to me
reveal their secrets, trust an invisible bond -
i wonder what flowers they will etch
at the corner tops of my headstone?

Carnations: set 2



Yellow in Late Winter

When I moved into this house, I did not bring much with me. A kettle. Two suitcases. A silence I did not unpack.

The walk to work takes fifteen minutes. I learned the rhythm of it quickly — the uneven pavement, the bakery that opens too early, the park that London insists on calling a garden. In February it was still brown, pressed flat by cold. Nothing offered itself.

Before this, there was Cardiff. There was Bute Park stretching out like a promise. In late winter, I would walk toward the castle at dusk and wait for the first daffodils. They never arrived loudly. Just a tremor of yellow against the earth. A small insistence. Then another. Then hundreds, as if the ground had decided to forgive itself.

This year, in London, I noticed three.

They were at the edge of the park, near the iron fence, where dogs pull against their leads and no one lingers. Three tight green stalks at first, unsure of themselves. I began to look for them each morning. Not consciously. My eyes simply drifted there, as if checking on something fragile.

For days, they held their heads down.

I thought about how roots work in darkness. How they split stone quietly. How they know, somehow, when to rise.

Yellow in Late Winter

Work has been heavy. The kind of heaviness that settles in the bones and does not ask permission. I walk home most evenings feeling reduced to function — step, breath, step. London moves around me without noticing.

And still, I looked for the three.

One morning, the outer casing had loosened. A seam of yellow, barely visible. I slowed my pace. It felt like watching someone decide whether to speak.

Today, after a long day — the kind that leaves your shoulders lifted toward your ears — I passed the fence and almost did not look. But there she was.

Open.

Not fully, not extravagantly. Just enough. A small, deliberate flare of yellow facing the path. As if she had been waiting for me to arrive. As if she knew the hour.

I stood there longer than I meant to.

In Cardiff, the daffodils came in fields. In London, it is three. It is enough.

No one else seemed to notice. A child dragged a scooter past. A man spoke loudly into his phone. The sky held its colourless breath.

I thought of the things we do not say. The ways we carry

Yellow in Late Winter

winters inside us. The decision to stay. The decision to leave. The way a woman can begin again without announcing it.

The flower did not look brave. It did not look defiant. It simply existed where the cold had been.

Tomorrow there will be more yellow. Or there will not. It does not matter.

Something has already opened.

Roses for a Daisy

One door is all it takes. I leave behind the depressing city streets ridden with muddy sidewalks and twenty-mile-an-hour winds, and am transported to a floral paradise. Arranged bouquets decorate the store in a botanic rainbow, from carnations whiter than the snowbound sky to pansies outlined in a delicate purple with the occasional Peruvian lily poking through a bundle of blue hydrangeas.

A woman pops out from behind a green checkout counter, wearing a matching apron and a cocked eyebrow that complements her inquisitive smile. "Well, good morning. It's rare to have a customer so soon after Valentine's Day."

I laugh awkwardly. "Better late than never, right?"

She hums, satisfied with my answer, and strides over to a display wall of overwhelmingly pink bouquets marked on sale. "If you're feeling brave, these are the last of our Valentine's arrangements. Does your partner have a favorite flower? Color?"

My gaze darts to a collection of yellow daisies, and several conversations regarding Daisy's ironic hatred of daisies run through my mind. That was back when she could stand my presence without throwing a sneer toward me.

A bitter taste seeps into my tongue. I swallow hard and turn away.

"Maybe not pink," I say. "Something that won't offend her entire family."

That gets a chuckle out of the florist. "Are you planning to propose?"

"It's more like an apology."

Roses for a Daisy

"Oh, dear. White it is, then." She leads me over to the right wall, where white petals drape along the middle shelf. "We have a wide selection to choose from. Typically, tulips are our go-to apology flower. Paperwhites are in season, though, so I can get you a discount—"

"The money doesn't matter," I cut her off, a little too quickly. My body's starting to get restless at the idea of waiting any longer. "I just want whatever will show her I'm really sorry."

The florist nods solemnly. She picks out a bouquet of white roses that would outshine a bride at her own wedding. Each petal folds in on the next like handcrafted origami atop a prickly stem, simultaneously radiating beauty and danger. They couldn't be more perfect for Daisy.

We bring the roses over to the checkout counter. The price is expectedly steep.

I dig into my wallet and slide a hundred dollar bill beside the register. "Keep the change."

The florist purses her lips. "That's really not necessary."

"Maybe not, but I want to." I push the bill further. "Consider it, uh, a late fee for the sale you should've gotten yesterday."

Something shifts in the florist's expression. Her smile returns as she gently accepts the hundred, gleaming with a warmth I haven't felt in a long time. "Whoever these flowers are for, she's a very lucky girl. I'm sure she'll forgive you."

I mimic a stiff version of her grin. It's too late for forgiveness.

Roses for a Daisy

All I can hope now is to atone for my sins.

With a final goodbye, I cradle the bouquet in my arms and venture back outside. The wind is only blowing stronger, as if trying to keep me from visiting Daisy.

Another day, I would've used that as an excuse to stay home. Not anymore. This guilt can corrode me from the inside out and I'll still give Daisy these flowers.

"You didn't even bring me flowers?"

Her face appears in my mind, clear as day. Goldilocks curls framing brown skin. Forehead creased in anguish. Deep umber irises, glossed over by the tears caught on her lashes.

Everyone else brought flowers to the recital. I didn't know I was supposed to.

My throat tightens. I keep walking.

The wind gains another breath. I tuck the roses closer to my chest. The white petals threaten to rip right off.

"You ripped it?"

I see it again. The same disappointed tone and face, a tattered wool sweater cushioned in her arms like a wounded animal. It was a laundry accident. She didn't care.

"Do you even care about me?"

That same haunting face, exaggerated with tear stains and bloodshot whites. It took me until that moment to realize just how broken she felt.

Then the last thing I ever said to her shattered her completely.

"This is exhausting."

My own words stab me through the heart. It's too late to set things right. Now all I can do is keep moving forward

Roses for a Daisy

while past memories project nightmares across my vision.

Down the block. Through the intersection. Over the stone bridge. Each step is thwarted by another violent gust of wind.

To make matters worse, white spots begin to descend from the sky. One floats down onto my nose, instantly lowering my temperature upon touch. I just hold the roses tight to my chest and push through. A snowstorm is nothing compared to the numbness that drove away Daisy.

Only when the flurry turns hazardous do I reach the gothic black gate that's been separating us for months. As my surroundings fade behind the sleet, I duck through the gate entrance, eyes squinted. Searching.

Then I see her. Far into the field, almost out of view. I break into a sprint.

"Daisy!" I scream.

The storm puffs a gust at me, as if laughing at the absurdity of my helpless cry. I don't care. I keep running until it swallows me whole, and suddenly I'm alone with Daisy in a hidden pocket of snow.

Here she is, just as I remember her. Golden curls. Brown skin. Intimidating eyes that steal my breath away. The essence of Daisy forever captured.

I kneel down and run my thumb along the picture, clinging onto its designated tombstone by a flimsy piece of tape, and my heart sinks. Below the elegantly engraved epitaph and heartfelt mementos is a pile of wilted yellow daisies.

A bitter laugh escapes me. I set the roses in front of Daisy, covering her namesake. Tears stream down my cheeks.

"Hey. I brought you flowers."

Synergy



Sunny Carnation



This is just to say I've listened to Enigma,

recalled *Des Fleurs Dans Le Monde Entier*.
So don't divorce me, unmarry me.

Let every unkind expression you gave
fall right back into your soapbox face.

Their spirits frozen in real-time action -
brushing their teeth or parallel parking -

return our kids to the seeds that held them,
no trace of body fluid to fluoresce

beneath the violet lights of the CSI.
Send all the bouquets you gave, at first,

in reverse to the florists via Interflora -
roses returning to the rising sun,

baby's breath to villages in vintage Provence.
And when, in '94, I come to wither

in that stupid street, rewind yourself
fast into the Hard Rock

Café. When I glance, in black chiffon,
at the flower seller, all that peony repartee -

a girl seeking refuge from her mother's funeral -
please wave your fork and look the other way.

What if beauty needs no observer?

They say it resides within the eye
of some beholder—
yet once I walked a lonesome field,
trod the single, freshly mown
path that stretched into the sky—
heard a wanton bull thistle
shout, her posture erect,
her spiny leaves proud.

She prickled the emptiness,
held tight her loveliness—
her bulging top pregnant and paused.

I say beauty is that kind of confidence:
to survive in such harsh unwantedness
and shoot forth purple flowers
only after I am gone.

Another Way to Pray

Notice how morning enters
as a golden shoulder leaning
on trees, its rapturous
slant of sunbeams, the way

it touches the peonies first.
All night they have been fists,
pink-blushed and stubborn,
holding their secrets.

The light, so patient, unravels
them, one by one, soothes
each petal into remembering
how to open.

You, too,
are asked to remember.

Before the blossom,
there is the tightening,
the same small, hard ache
you carry behind your ribs.

Stand still in pining fields
long enough and even
a dewdrop will speak,
gathering the whole landscape

into its shining globe of tension:
sky, grass, your bent face—
notice how it trembles
without breaking.

Another Way to Pray

The earth will not hurry you.
It knows about seasons
of pressure, about roots
working in the dark.

Walk as far as you must for the body
to reach what your heart holds.
Let the sorrow
of that distance polish you.

Then, when you can,
kneel.

Lay your body down
in the grass' cool whisper.
Let your hands wander
over each green syllable,

then back over your body.
Return to your own breathing
as if it were an orphaned animal
you've been asked to tend.

There is no tabernacle but this—
the bright field,
the opened flower,
your listening body.

Self-Portrait as *Salix matsudana*

A corkscrew willow does not weep
like her sisters. She tortures
her foliage to twist, contort
better than any acrobat. She thrives

in her kinkiness, exposed limbs
and full sun, flings her fuzz
pell mell in all the yards. Her bark
is weak, but her roots rend pipes,

indiscriminate in their shattering
these corrupted systems
where she's sown. Tell her
willows like her have short lifespans—

she'll ask how to wear her arms tonight:
wilting gold or bloody scarlet?

Spring Bud



Defiance in Bloom



Snapdragon

Maw open, color startling, brilliant, snap,
a dragon with sharpened, golden
teeth. Summer heat in the big backyard.
Flowers ring the cherry tree,
snapdragon blooms with jaws,
ready to whack. Snap. Dragon!
Red, yellow, white, bright
snap, big bite. No pansy,
no violet, no tidy marigolds,
but blooms with blood, motion,
sway, snapping in the wind.
Pick one, my sister whispered.
No, I wanted to say, but
I reached out and grabbed
a thin, green wick,
dangerous, like
everything. Snap,
I cracked it free,
a roar, dragon.
We ran.

Rewilding

Don't get me wrong, I'm grateful for all of it—the bed linen, plumbing and shelter, even the coffee maker that works with the press of a button. Still, I crave my past wildness—I feel responsible and restrained. Always another dish or towel to wash, another chore to check off the list. I'm inundated with unread emails, doctors' appointments and diagnoses. I want to hightail back to the days when every weekend was another mountain hike, another campground. Water boiled over an open fire, coffee dripping through my red Melita. Junk eggs and ramen. Skinny dipping and night swimming. Wanted nothing to do with sleeping indoors and sometimes even did without a tent. Cool air lingering on my face, I trusted the stars and moon to keep me safe. The back half of our property used to run feral and overgrown. Wild flowers and grasses. Lately it's been mowed—a yellowy-green lawn bleached by sun and wind rolls from house to woods. I'd like to rewild it, too. Let it ramble untouched. Grow weedy and tall. Maybe it's nostalgia or the years speeding by—I want to fall back the days by decades, have a restart and a do-over, barrel down my hill, abandon myself in the overgrown meadow, emerge immune to ticks, mosquitoes, the ozone, and illnesses all plotting their sneak attacks.

bees of abandonment

honeyed wings shadow my petals
with caressing kisses of promises—
but these aren't lovers, rather
thieves with golden crusted lies.

they drink from my flesh,
leaving me hollow in a hurry.

i learn the names quickly:

narcissist,
sociopath,
alcoholic

warnings found and overlooked as i
still offer nectar, hoping one stays.

i can't let them take more of me,
i can't let them drain all my sweetness.

Untitled



Rhubarb Crumble

There is rhubarb at the bottom of the garden
planted long ago by a woman living here.

I harvest the stems with kitchen scissors, and they
shine fuchsia-bright in the summer afternoon.

There is more than enough.

I offer my neighbours stalks over the garden wall.

Later, I tumble diced pieces into a dish with caster sugar
and think of the sad packets of fruit I usually buy.

Flown in from Spain, and mummified in plastic;
a vain attempt to prevent decay.

Two strawberries arrive crushed in every packet.

I am lucky to have a friendly ghost, who lets me borrow
her rhubarb to make crumble for my ravenous daughters.

As I rub the butter into the powdery softness of the flour,
I look across the garden at the wide leaves of the remaining
rhubarb waving in the breeze, and I think how plants will
outlast us all - a little like furniture - in the end.

Surrender

Here's how a rose surrenders her neck:
She does not collapse, but leans
until her petals drop like burnt paper.

Too heavy a weight for the spine
to carry, she turns her silvered face
back into the soil. Roots clotted with rot

of old winters, a knotted, sightless grit.
She is subterranean first, holding light
in cold, papery fists.

We call it waiting, but it is work.
To be dormant is not to be empty:
It is a dark labor of remembering

the architecture of stems, slow pulses
of red. To wither is to begin
the long journey back into becoming.

Setting Sun



The grandest and the tiniest



I Learn to Love Dandelions

If you pull up the bloom and spiky plumage
but miss a bit of root in the dirt
a dandelion will regrow a thousand-fold
swarm the yard with defiant yellow heads.

They flower in the crevice between the curb and asphalt
insist on survival in the moistness under holly bushes
or the rocky spot behind the garbage cans.
I used to spend hours on my knees in the grass

sweat and dust itching between my breasts
trying to pry golden invaders from the sacred green.
My battery-operated spreader wheezed like an old man
coughing up phlegm, sowing pounds of poison over the turf

to curdle dandelion roots from the wormy dirt.
New to the suburbs, I wanted our yard
to conform the rule of lawns in our development
green space dotted with fiberglass frogs

mildewed Madonnas in plastic grottoes
Japanese maples pruned beyond melancholy.
The years have worn on me in the battle against weeds
As my heart calcifies and my knees crackle

I have learned to let the lawn go.
When I shuffle out my back door
gray-haired in orthopedic sandals
I ascend into a meadow

of buttercups and fescue, violets in spring
wild strawberries in summer
ivy creeps from under the shed
while purple clover cushions my steps

I Learn to Love Dandelions

and all over the green
a tribe of dandelions wink
and nod their honied heads at me.

Flowers & Vases



Soothed

On my hands and knees
weeding in the garden
sudden coolness
surprises the bare skin
of my arms:
long-lanced onion leaves
striving from bulbs still
barely a possibility.
Without thinking, I brush off
a spider web's white strands.
Homeless, pale body quivering
over translucent legs,
he hurries away.

Sweet scent of lilac
drifts from the hedge,
purified in the still air
of early evening.
Blossoms, foamy clouds
of lavender and white,
stir with bees
their drone melding
with the dark voice
of a single bumble bee.

Lines soften
at this time of day
like taut muscles of a face
cupped by a hand
it had missed too long.

False Spring

Pink heads peek from green crowns.
Shasta daisies flaunt sunny faces.
Too soon, I know. Yet I throw patience
to the breeze, clear beds, turn soil—
venture pansies, zinnias, sweet alyssum.

This year, especially, I crave softening
earth, ripening light, crave breeze
spinning freesia and honeybee
spinning chirps, coos, warbles.
The nest-making doves to return.

I know everything has its season—
this improbable spell will end: storms
resume, rows muddy, knotweed
stealing sun, buds tucking back
under their caps like shy children.

Yet I continue my fool's errand.
Even as war rages, as troops
break fences, trample gardens,
fell souls like saplings
violets sprout in snowy graveyards.

Ice Rose



How to Speak Fluent Flora: A Family Guide

It is December and I forage for holly with my dad. It is not Christmas unless we have a tough stem of spiky green leaves, threaded with bright red berries, resting atop the mantelpiece. I climb over the stone wall at the bottom of School Hill in navy blue trainers that fasten with Velcro, and land in the overgrown gardens that smell of mildew at the back of the church.

Holly fights back, it does not appreciate thieves, and its waxy spikes bite my woollen fingers, but I eventually triumph, returning with a barbed trophy held between my fingers. My dad does not praise me for rescuing Christmas and, in the field opposite, a black horse with a white stripe on its nose fixes me with a judgemental stare. I feed the horse polo mints, that crunch noisily between white teeth stained in stripes of teabag brown, while my dad shares with me memories of his schooldays.

“Your grandma has died.” My mum announces this and then goes into the kitchen to prepare dinner. The living room door closes behind her and the words are locked away behind its frosted glass panes. World at War is on the television and I learn that the biggest mistake one can make in modern warfare is to invade Russia in the wintertime. I make a mental note of this and store it for later.

The day after my grandma is buried, we re-visit the graveside to inspect her flowers in solitude. My mum comments on the arrangements, the notes of sympathy and who sent what, while I breathe in a perfume that stings my nostrils from the white, pink tipped lilies. I look

How to Speak Fluent Flora: A Family Guide

at the long stamens dripping orange powder paint, and I sneeze. Yellow chrysanthemums spell the word "MUM" at the head of the mound, the petals fold in on themselves and glisten, a constellation of stars against the freshly dug earth.

My mum is admitted to hospital. No one tells me why and when the neighbours ask, I tell them she fainted. We take pink carnations, with fragile, tissue paper petals pushing free of their green bud casing, to the ward for her. I sit on her knee, and we watch a soap opera, on a small, square television screwed by a pole to the ceiling. At home I sit behind the sofa in the dark, running my fingers across the rise and fall of the anaglypta.

When my mum returns, she brings with her a prescription for thick, white tablets that she swallows with a cup of tea before bed. The carnations come too, now baby pink, cotton wool balls, and she puts them in a glass vase on the windowsill, where their outstretched petals soak up the sunlight.

Every March I take daffodils to the cemetery for my dad and my brother. As a child the little ones with the bright orange middles were my favourites because they reminded me of fried eggs, their tender yolk trumpets encircled by folded white petals. I watch them sway against the black marble headstone, their joy resolute in its opposition to the last frosts.

Chloris (The Spring Nymph)



Artist's Statement: "The title of my piece is "Chloris (The Spring Nymph)" and the mediums I used for it are watercolors, acrylics, and gel pens on sketchbook paper. It depicts Chloris, the Greek goddess of flowers and spring.

Daffodil Dreams



Stargazer and Bee

One bee,
grounded.
Pollen-bright,
electron hum.

Blue flower nods.

It lifts—
orbits thirst,
orbits light.

Aphelion.

Here or there.
Never both.
Never neither.

Nectar spikes.
Constants tremble
into wings.

Perihelion.

Nearness burns.
Gravity sings.

Stargazer.
Bee.
Same equation.

SPECIAL THANKS

As we bring *Buds & Blooms: Volume 2* to a close, we want to extend our deepest thanks to everyone who made this issue possible. To our contributors—thank you for trusting us with your work and for sharing your voices, visions, and vulnerability. To our readers—thank you for spending your time with these pages and for supporting the art we believe in.

This issue exists because of you, and we're endlessly grateful to be part of a community that continues to grow, create, and bloom together.

With love,

Madisen D'Ascenzo - Editor-in-Chief
Kelly Brocious - Managing Editor

