

*the engine(idling*

*Issue 3*



*... by the dim light of the dash*



the engine(idling)  
Issue 3: ... *by the dim light of the dash*  
Summer 2024

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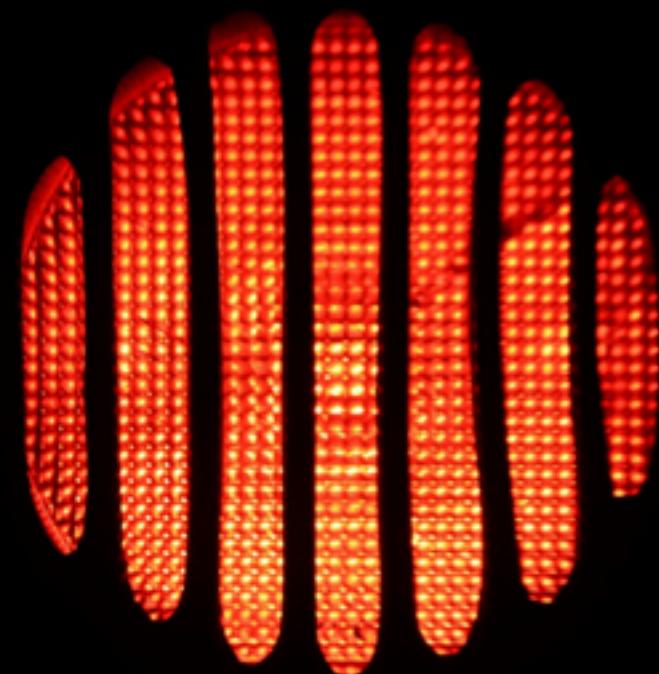
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*the engine(idling*

*C.E. Hoffman ( our song came on and I reached for your hand*

I pray we hit every red light  
to make up for last night.  
I pray we hit every red light  
to make up for lost time.

*the engine(idling*

*Darryl de Prez (For Keith*

Always - the same.  
Never a place  
we visit but choose  
not to stay.

Headlights flicker into distance,  
sparks fugitive from the fire.

Each car contains a universe I long to know.  
Time spreads like rice fields along the road,  
wet surfaces refracting neon from the bars.

Past lives weave and weft  
and worry loose.  
They go where we go.  
The air is thin  
and then  
is gone.



almost fully energized  
in young freedom

i clearly vibrate  
for a modern sharpness

to alter  
and briefly seat me  
in this nearly new car

where side-chick company  
revs the silence

before a spider appearance  
dashes the mood

and crash tackles  
our open road drive  
with a frightening scream

that demands i kill it.

and so  
for the nightmarish possibility  
it presents

i step on it

I'll grab the keys  
and we go, yeah?

Lay down some sweet rubber  
& all those reasons  
why not,

leave 'em dripped out  
in the parking lot

I see now  
in shades of you  
back light gas station halogen halo  
asphalt & blue

So yeah, let's go!

Scenery blurs  
bath-tub dish-water grey  
against the rushing mountain of you

& I'm tired  
of shrouds

I want to be un-wound  
Show me how

good things happen

Paradise by the dashboard light, right?

Take my hand, sweetheart  
It's right there

Let's go!

*Ennis Rook Bashe (despite not driving I think I could still be in the Fast and Furious franchise*

I think the villain should be obsessed with me

bombing cathedrals. gleeful with destruction. scooping the corpses into deck chairs for pedicures.

I'd be the pendant dangling over his heart. His feelings' spare tire.

If his convertible drifts down a Mediterranean beach I'm backlit hacker, neon-green screen. He's a lion in the sunlight, rough tongue on his enemies' faces. Golden in explosions. I'd be his wide-eyed remote-control symbiote skittering in the dark.

Pitiable, childlike-creepy, like a plastic babydoll head on remote control spider's legs. Humming lullabies. A lair of half-built bombs with engines crunching underfoot like bones.

I can't jump into the front seat of protagonist. Can't drift on two wheels or walk on two feet. Highways make me woozy. The concrete would skin me. I'd puke down the Lambo, spit up beer.

But the villain could lift me. His baby sibling whose decay maddens him. His fraying cables beat-up roadster cut fuel line. Roll down the garage door. Tuck me into bed.

*Nicky Renee (wing-dusting*

Dying by the dipped shine I took for up, twisting back to bright—car headlights form the stars

whirring, sweat passing through cracks of clear surface spreading sick lavender melded in noxious cedar, trap drumming from machine-holes, halting flight with our backs to the speeding bulk. Wings beat, rhythm-wild orbiting and orbiting and orbiting our collision point as the animals screech to song. Caught in choking glass, a spatter for scraping when day returns and up is right, and we are thin dust.

*D.W. Baker (last of all*

*We're made for the light of a cave and for twilight. Twilight is the time we see best.  
When we dim the light down, and the pupil opens, feeling comes out of the eye like  
touch. Then you really can feel color, and experience it.*

—James Turrell

drifting when  
warm, we  
wind dim

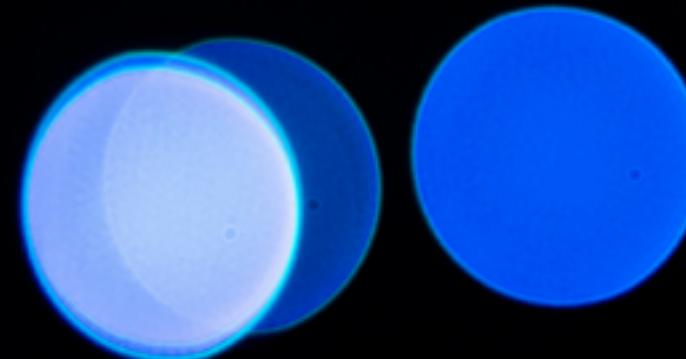
-swept the  
fading light  
humming down

into and  
within the  
horizon's pupil

limit opens  
animal feeling  
kingdom comes

rapture out  
last of  
all the

extinct eye  
almost like  
heaven's touch



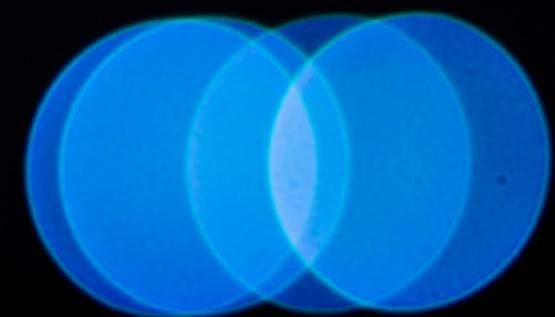
*John Grey (LONG NIGHT'S DRIVE*

Thinking of how much I want to sleep  
becomes a kind of sleep.

Chilly wind breathing hard and fast  
through window crack  
is a willing enough dream.  
So are my headlights  
on the straight black road  
and the brief candles  
I make of tall pines.

So this dream is of a man  
with his hair blown back.  
It's of a tongue, a tonsil,  
wrapped around a radio song.  
The smell of oil is in it.  
So is the windshield dirt  
and insects that flare and die  
upon the glass.

Watched over by dashboard lights,  
I rest my head on a pillow of speed.



*Kathryn Reese (Newell Highway, Moree*

It wasn't long before the glowering clouds were scattered, rattled from the mountains the way  
cotton shales loose from the road train and catches in the stunted sunflowers and thistles that line  
the road. I wanted to stop, to pluck fibres from barbed wire, see if we could gather enough to spin a  
blanket, a scrap blanket to toss across the whole sky, rib-stitch. You laughed, kept driving, one hand  
on the steering wheel, the other raised to the open window—as if to grasp the wind.

*Damon Hubbs (Upper Valley*

we love the hot light that doesn't last  
and always fall for the girl who is one road trip  
away from mental collapse

who hand-draws maps  
of Cornish, New Hampshire and says  
*let's find Salinger*

although Salinger is dead  
as the hot light  
you use italics like musical notations

string and clef the Connecticut River  
below the kissing bridge  
where you kiss me

like phosphenes  
and banana fever  
and say, I'm sick of just liking people

*me too*, I say and we hold that note  
and later, you mail me your sandal like a Persian queen.  
My foolish heart. My heart. O it can't see more glass.

*“25 years and my life is still  
Tryin’ to get up that great big hill of hope  
For a destination.”*

*—What’s Up, 4 Non Blondes*

We stop where our spirits take us. To meet our muscles and relieve ourselves of falling into confusion, when instead you can get support served hot. The whole world can be scooped in a ladle. I eat my fill. In a room of patrons, we all help ourselves to it. There is enough world to go around several times, so much to be savored, a moon-slice to save a seat for. And it’s quiet. Like an adoration is quiet. The road we were on curves, taking us with it. The road we were on curves like a bowl placed finely against wood much older than it. I can’t identify from where it came, and I won’t ask the way a stranger passing through here asks, curiously, because we’re all coming and going. Someone has been driving without a map. The whole world can be scooped in a ladle. I eat my fill and still have room for more, opening the way a letter opens. Heartily.



i.  
With the top down  
echoes of fox cries—  
wing flaps,  
low-flying geese.

ii.  
Breezes pull placidly  
over sweet potato acres.  
Corn stalks a-shuffle. It's a joy  
to be off the Interstate.

iii.  
Beyond the barn  
along the river,  
evening's  
first star.

iv.  
The dashboard lights  
line up like Orion.  
I tend to look  
for beauty everywhere.

v.  
A tipped crescent moon  
so low against the field  
that I regret  
not risking  
a second glance.  
If you want the truth,  
the deer were running.



the river bends its elbow at donora, where they say decades ago, the folks dropped dead. the mill a fire-breathing monster stacked with secrets, the river running east like a thief to the boat launch, from black diamond where we lived. you taught me how to pop the clutch. *lean into it*, you said, the beetle grinding up the black-veined hills to the bridge that led to river road, where vanderslice at 90 miles took out the guard rail. we passed the aquatorium, where every fourth the fireworks lit up the pale, choked stars, where railroad street split off before the eat'n park, where we drenched greasy fries with heinz, nursed milkshakes after games, before montana made a name, quarterbacking. it was high school, i was new to spinning donuts at the kroger, new to skidding asphalt, the light ticking red ( . . . no, not now, yes!), your hand on my hand on the stick. what did we care about the risk? lurching past the squat and sooty houses, the river like sinew on the right arm of a world walled in by smoke and cinder. we knew it all, we asked too many questions, laughed until our guts tied up like tourniquets around the wound that was the future. when the blue fox opened doors to lines around east main, we fevered to the antics of chuck berry, galloping "maybellene" across the stage. to the leopard-mink of the supremes that brought the limousines from pittsburgh. that night under the mirrored ball you kissed me, your hand under my hem, your hand reaching into everything that was untouchable. i lived in your skin, with you i was more myself than i had ever been. so where did you go in that white stretch limo, with fur-covered seats, tinted windows . . . in that space between steel mill and tracks, where did he take you, after the dance?

*Eartha Davis ( a ‘cumail air ais*

*“One hand on the wheel  
and the other one, your right one,  
gently clutching mine.”*

*— David Trinidad*

We listen *hard*  
to each other's  
voices / two heartbeats  
unknitting  
the feather of  
*themselves* / (the quietest  
revolution) / together,  
we worship  
fluttering  
chests / tuck prayer  
under  
flesh / praise  
light's  
pollen  
as it  
*falls*,  
*falls* / patterns  
the road  
with her  
honeyed  
*floodwater* / here,  
light  
trespasses / blows  
on the bodies  
of distant  
mountains / paints  
a forest  
on  
your  
palm &  
demands  
*holding* / window  
is  
our  
witness / a porcelain  
*underbelly*

rippling  
the face  
of the one  
we most  
*love* / (your  
*face*) / (my  
*face*) / soon,  
dawn  
will crisp  
the engine's  
purring / hobble  
towards  
passing  
*streets* / birds,  
fluted  
honeycomb: a feathered  
sacrament / then  
*your* hand,  
*my* hand / (a fleshed  
sacrament) / paired  
together  
as they drink  
each other's  
warmth  
&  
*flutter*



*Eartha Davis ( an dàrna turas*

Park  
your hand  
in  
my  
hand  
&  
*drive — / our palms*  
are dilated  
with  
*holding / press*  
their muzzles  
into plumes  
of  
*music / outside,*  
the closing  
ritual  
of a  
day: shadows  
unbuttoning  
themselves, taming  
the faces  
of life-  
drenched  
*faces / little*  
loves  
bowing  
to worship  
a budding  
*moon / inside,*  
stars  
freckling  
the dashboard / trailing  
the human  
hinterland  
of a  
second / *drive,*  
you  
*say / park*  
*your hand*  
*in my hand*  
♂  
*drive —*

*Jeff Burt (Seeing by Ear*

My older brother lent me his Rambler Ambassador  
when I wanted his Dodge Challenger for a date.  
The names alone tell what type of boyfriend he thought I'd make.  
He told me he knew all about leaving on the headlights  
when parking at an angle to see the stars at Lover's Cliff,  
the light lost in the abyss of space,  
that before I shut off the engine and got that first kiss  
to give the Ambassador a second start  
for a squeal of a stuck solenoid or the click  
that comes from a dead battery, or that awful groan  
of a weak battery that means it's too tired to give an oomph,  
or that ping from low oil and not the ping from the lifters  
gone feeble, or listen for the pinhole whiz of the radiator hose,  
the engine burping from a failing inductor,  
not the clicking of the mis-tuned carburetor  
but the high snaps of the engine about to overheat,  
the flap of a tire that mimics the miss of a piston,  
the sudden lightning bolt of a fuse gone out  
that sounds like a ball bearing left on the highway  
has jumped under your feet, the steady clicking of the belt  
when not fully tight versus the steady ticking  
of the alternator like a bomb ready to go off.  
If all that sounds fine, he said, you and she are good to go.

*William Slatterly (Learning to Drive*

At seventeen, scrambling metal  
was all my desire, squealing rubber  
and deep bucket seats.  
Often on back roads, usually at night,  
always in other people's cars,  
I was learning to drive.  
Someone would say, "Hey, you wanna . . ."  
and quicker than 0 to 60  
I'd be pistons and rods, I'd be thunder and sin  
sliding into the driver's seat.

With the slant six, V-8,  
2-barrel, 4-barrel,  
mags, glass packs, with racing slicks,  
after a few trial runs at night . . .  
I knew I was good, I knew I was ready,  
on my way to the most amazing places.  
With Chevies, the Dodge,  
any Mustang, with overhead cams  
and Holley carbs, with the Hurst transmission  
after a few trial runs at night . . .  
I knew I was good, I knew I was ready,  
on my way to the most amazing places.

I couldn't drive slowly to save myself.  
I'd hear the squeal on another street  
that means some rod is grabbing speed,  
I'd moan myself with ecstasy  
while floating at the edge of traction.  
On the last curve of the road to the lake  
where we'd park, kiss, go all the way,  
if I couldn't get my rubber singing  
I'd screech figure eights in the parking lot.

Talk fast, drive fast, go all the way:  
these days I'm not so particular.  
After all the speed and fury,  
I don't care whether I drive or ride,  
I don't care whether I go or stay.  
Stripped down, beefed up, four on the floor,  
or a Chrysler, old and slow and roomy,  
I'll sit in the back seat, holding hands.  
Maybe it's raining, maybe it's clear,  
but every girl loves moonlight on water,  
a hand on her knee, her head on a shoulder,  
loves to park while the engine's cooling.

There is a poetry of raindrops on a windowpane  
in a still car as dusk comes on.  
There is a restlessness that's lulled to rest  
by wipers on the methodless  
splash and dribble  
of rain that's driven by the wind,  
and a sense of edgelessness when night comes on  
and the conversation in the front seat drifts.  
One has only to lean back and listen.

*Kiki Adams (Austin, Texas; c. 2012)*

When we were all teenagers,  
(my city, my car, and I)  
I was a girl with a tiger tooth key chain  
for a golden station wagon,  
a smokers' lounge in the trunk,  
and a constant stream of passengers.

On boiling summer nights,  
windows cranked down,  
we drove spirals up empty  
parking garages reserved for employees  
long since home with unhappy families,  
lighting up new suburbs.

In the clarity of streetlamp-light,  
we could see a mad decade  
stretch itself before us, a waking wildcat,  
a road merging towards a freeway.  
The hatch-back gave us shelter,  
an embrace of *soon, but not yet.*

Safe up on a cement mountain,  
we stargazed at the lights of  
a city coming of age.  
We pointed with glowing cigarettes  
at the beacon on a new crane  
and the constellation down a new tower

as though we marvelled  
at the ancient milky way.

Good morning Goodbye I love you  
The window is now a black horizon  
memory loss tracked integrity in-out:  
what is outside is what is inside  
When: the sound matrix forces  
re-memory— car rides & mix tapes &  
*If you cannot be a person of integrity*  
w/ everything you have unsustainable  
The hand waving The drunker body  
The arc of the guitar electronically  
awash You look out the window, you  
remember you remember C— & you  
are just holding a cat in your arms &  
yesterday I can tell you: *hard rains*  
*blew in swiftly They hammered into*  
*glass* & does this amount to engaging  
but technically valueless poetry?  
Cities in the sky tell us we must make  
each and every 1: of our own heavens



## Contributors

**Kiki Adams** is fascinated with the structure and patterns of language. She explores these patterns in her work as a linguist, but has also been writing poetry since she was a child. Her poetry often plays with themes of displacement, isolation, and the liminal. Kiki studied linguistics and poetry in her hometown at the University of Texas at Austin, and now lives in Montreal, Canada. When not working with words, she can be found watching birds or practicing aerial circus gymnastics.

**Geoffrey Aitken** writes on Adelaide's unceded Kaurna land, an awarded minimalist poet who communicates his 'lived experience disability' for publishers [AUS] and [UK, US, HR, CAN, FR & CN]. Recently, *STREETCAKE*, *Impspired* [UK], *Panoplyzine Mag* [US], *ZinDaily* [HR] & *unusual work* [AUS]. Now at *Stepaway Magazine* [UK] & soon at *Vilas Avenue*, [US] & *Social Alternatives* [AUS]. Nominated Best of the Net in 2022.

**D.W. Baker** is a submerging poet from St. Petersburg, Florida, where he writes about place, bodies, belonging, and the end of the world. His work appears in *Identity Theory*, *Heimat Review*, *Feral Poetry*, and *Modern Haiku*, among others, and has been nominated for Best of the Net. He volunteers on the mastheads of *Variant Lit*, *Divinations Magazine*, and *Cosmic Daffodil*. See more of his work at [www.dwbakerpoetry.com](http://www.dwbakerpoetry.com).

**Ennis Rook Bashe** is an Elgin and Rhysling Award-nominated poet and Lesfic Bard Award-winning romance novelist whose work has appeared in *Strange Horizons*, *Cricket*, and *Liminality Magazine*. Their recent chapbook *Beautiful Malady* (from *Interstellar Flight Press*) includes work nominated for the Pushcart Prize. Find more of their writing at <https://linktr.ee/ennisrookbashe>.

**mari britt** (they/he) is an experimenting poet, scare actor, and organizer from Philadelphia. His work has been featured in *Colors: The Magazine* "Green" issue, *Moss Puppy Mag*, *Marias at Sampaguitas*, and his long distance friends Discord server. You can find them putting rice in their soup, on BlueSky @meaningruiner or everywhere else @septapiercing.

**Jeff Burt** lives in California and has two chapbooks available. See his work at <https://www.jeff-burt.com>.

**Earthá Davis** is a 19-year-old Ngāpuhi-Albannach woman living on Wiradjuri land. She placed second in the 2022 Global Woorilla Poetry Prize Youth Section and has been nominated for Best of the Net, with work published or forthcoming in *Wildness*, *Rabbit*, *Frozen Sea*, *Minarets*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *JMWW*, *LEON Literary Review*, *Arboreal Magazine*, *EJ Editions*, *Boats Against the Current*, *The Basilisk Tree*, *The Stirling Review*, *Where the Meadows Reside*, *Eucalyptus Lit*, *Uppagus*, *Discretionary Love*, *Sour Cherry Magazine*, *Revolute*, & *Eunoia Review*, among others. She is a poetry editor at 3 journals.

**Darryl de Prez** is a queer poet and writer whose work explores his lived experience through the imagined lives of saints, childhood memories (real and fictional) and the archaeology of myth in the modern world.

**Thom Eichelberger-Young** is an artist and PhD student at SUNY Buffalo. They founded *Blue Bag Press* in 2021, which publishes chapbooks of innovative writing. Their first book is *BESPOKE* (2019), available through *Saint Andrews University Press*. A new book is forthcoming this fall (2024) with *Antiphony Press*. Recent work appears or is forthcoming in *Bombay Gin*, *Mantis*, *Canary Magazine*, *1*, *Belladonna*\* Collaborative's *GERMINATIONS*, and elsewhere.

**cm ellis** (Michael C.) is the fiction editor for *Ghost City Review* and lives in Texas. Their affair with writing has been wildly inappropriate and deeply embarrassing for all involved. They also really like pistachios. If you're lookin' you can find them through this thing: <https://linktr.ee/poemsandwhiskeypod>.

**John Grey** is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in *New World Writing*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, and *Lost Pilots*. Latest books: *Between Two Fires*, *Covert* and *Memory Outside The Head* are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in *California Quarterly*, *Birmingham Arts Journal*, *La Presa*, and *Soul Ink*.

**Kathleen Hellen** is the author of three full-length poetry collections, including *Meet Me at the Bottom*, *The Only Country Was the Color of My Skin*, and *Umberto's Night*, which won the poetry prize from *Washington Writers' Publishing House*, and two chapbooks. She is the recipient of the James Still Award, the Thomas Merton prize for Poetry of the Sacred, and prizes from the *H.O.W. Journal* and *Washington Square Review*.

**C.E. Hoffman** is a grant recipient, Elgin Award nominee, and winner of the 2022 *Defunct* May Day Chapbook contest. They edit *Punk Monk Magazine/Press* and host the podcast *Scribbles & Spills*. Find more weirdness at [cehoffman.net](http://cehoffman.net).

**Damon Hubbs** writes poems about Thulsa Doom, Italo disco & girls who cry at airports. He's the author of three chapbooks (most recently *Charm of Difference*, from *Back Room Poetry*). Newer work appears/is forthcoming in *Bullshit Lit*, *Lothlorien Poetry Journal*, *Misery Tourism*, *The Argyle Literary Magazine*, *Don't Submit!*, *Antiphony Journal*, & elsewhere. Twitter @damon\_hubbs.

**J. A. Lagana**'s poetry has appeared in *Burningword Literary Journal*, *Cider Press Review*, *Heron Tree*, *Rattle*, and elsewhere. She is the author of the poetry collection *Make Space* (*Finishing Line Press*, 2023) and the forthcoming *Edge of Highway*. She was a finalist for the 2023 Julia Peterkin Literary Award in Poetry and is a founder and former co-editor of *River Heron Review*. She lives in Bucks County, PA. Learn more at [jlagana.com](http://jlagana.com).

**Kathryn Reese** is a poet and an occasional writer of flash fiction living on Peramank land in the Adelaide Hills, South Australia. She works in medical science and enjoys road trips whenever possible. Her work can be found in the "anti-lit mag" *JAKE*, the hybrid home *Cutbow Quarterly* and eco-poetic destinations such as *Paperbark* and *Kelp Journal*. Her flash fiction *The Principal and the Sea*, was published by *Glassworks* and received a Best of the Net nomination.

**Nicky Renee** writes speculative fiction and poetry, and their work can be found in previous *Strange Horizons* publications. They can be found creating crafts, working in the mental health field, trying to build community, and @nickyreneepoetry on Instagram.

**William Slattery**'s poems and essays have appeared in *The Magazine of Speculative Poetry*, *Poetry LA*, *Santa Clara Review*, *ONTHEBUS*, *The Herman Review*, *The Los Angeles Review of Los Angeles*, *Antioch Review*, and elsewhere.

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