



Writing: Dean Leetal, Chris McManus, Jason Haaf, , Evan E. Lambert; **Poetry:** Daniel W. K. Lee, Daniel Edward Moore, Michael Paras, Kit Cerda, Chris Cotrina, Lkhamaa Sanjaadorj; **Artwork:** Bajú Wijono, Aleksei Pozdnovato, Meryl Meisler, John Douglas, Uģis Zauerhagens

Intimacy
Issue 2

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Editor's Note



Intimacy is a loaded concept, I realized when I launched the open call for this issue. The word has been used as a euphemism for sex for so long that it's easily reduced to the physical act. I wondered if we'd get mostly explicit submissions bordering on pornographic. (To be clear, there is always a home for that in The Ramble.)

I was thrilled to see the work we received go somewhere broader.

Found Family, for example, explores how two strangers can build intimacy by inhabiting one another. JayBoy addresses intergenerational intimacy with daddies. Pomelo captures a past intimacy, perhaps lost. Familiar Stranger looks at what happens when fuck buddies push beyond sex and find something more.

Our special feature, Prompted: Meryl Meisler is dripping with intimacy, from Meisler's photo of three men on a Fire Island dock to the beautiful poetry, stories and art it inspired.

It's intimacy between lovers, strangers, friends, creators and readers that brings this issue together. I hope you enjoy it as much as we did putting it together.

Happy Rambling,
Chris McManus
Editor

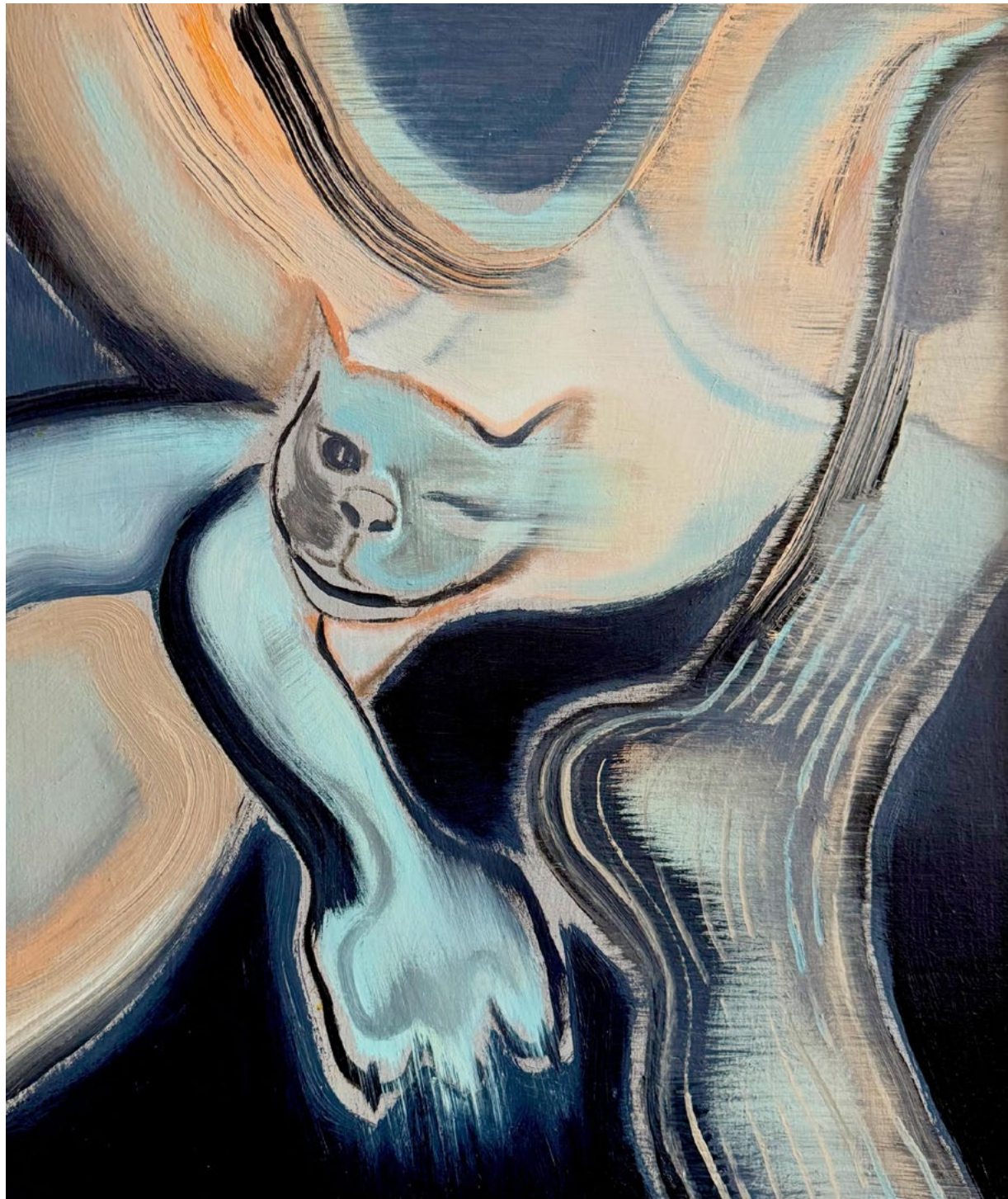
Sacred Fire
by Aleksei Pozdnovato

Found Family

Short Story
by Dean Leetal

Art
by Baju Wijono

Fluff finally returned home the next day, still wild-eyed, his fur soggy with mud. His tail dragged in a long twig with some dry leaves. He sneaked in through the window and tried to make it to his food unnoticed. Aviva noticed. She tried to behave as if she hadn't, tried not to actually hold her breath. Fluff crouched and made his way towards the plate at an uneven speed. When Aviva made the smallest move, Fluff shot back out the window. Over the next few days, Fluff briefly came in for a few minutes here and there. Every time he saw the crate, he hissed and jumped away. Aviva ended up giving it to a friend with fosters. It was not going to work with Fluff. Aviva didn't know what Fluff had gone through as a stray, but it was not good. When they first met, it had taken about a month of gentle reassurances, and tuna, before Fluff allowed her to pet him. It had taken the entire fall for Fluff to agree to sleep inside. Aviva wondered how much of it was their shared trust, versus the weather, but she was happy to take it. Aviva had taken Fluff to the vet recently. Mewing pitifully in the carrier, panicked,



his trust broken, Fluff had managed to open the door and flee. Aviva had been mumbling gentle assurances. "It's okay, you're safe, I'm here." She wasn't sure those were ethical. Was Fluff safe, while she was traumatizing him? After the next attempt, Fluff was gone for over a week. He managed to actually tear his way out of the new carrier. The calming pill the vet prescribed for the trip didn't seem to have any effect. Fluff only returned for short bits of time, grabbing some bites of wet food, and running to the window every time Aviva moved. It was perfectly justified. Aviva would have done the same in Fluff's place. Or, truthfully, she wished that ability on herself. Knowing how to walk away when someone really broke your trust. She kept giving second, third, hundredth chances. After a few weeks, things returned to a cautious peace. Not the gentle vulnerability of before with Fluff hiding his little black nose in her palm. But at least Fluff was home sleeping, eating, and safe. Aviva knew a third time would be the last. It would be too traumatic to come back from. Was it amoral on her part, to tell him that he was safe? To teach Fluff the word for I am sorry? Sorry doesn't mean a lot when you intend to do it again.

Sorry doesn't mean a lot when you intend to do it again

She procrastinated, unsure what to do. Asking cat people for advice, searching horrible clickbait online. There was nothing. Nothing until she got a call from the vet. She had never actually met them in person. She always called, sobbing, to say Fluff got away and they wouldn't make it. The vet must have taken pity on her or just chalked it up as insanity. Either way, she had a suggestion. Something very weird, very experimental, with unknown results. Aviva jumped at the opportunity. Fluff was again willing to touch. He liked climbing on the shelf behind her head and rubbing against her messy bun. In special moments they would put their faces together and rub against one another. Was it horrible of her to use that for experimentation? The next nose-to-nose moment they had, Fluff rubbed his cheek against hers and the transformation happened. She immediately realized she hadn't planned it well enough. Who was going to make sure Fluff didn't take her body for a walk in the neighborhood, scratching strangers, biting birds, trying to crawl into car engines? Who was going to bring her to the vet, even if she did voluntarily climb into anything necessary?

She ended up walking herself to the vet. It wasn't far, especially not far for a cat. She waited for the green light to cross the road, and then screamed outside the vet's door till someone opened it. That was completely doable! The vet guessed at who she was. She nodded. Yes, Fluff. Honestly, it was a bad experience. The table was cold, everyone around her was huge and not at all gentle about moving her here and there. They talked about her, not to her. There were a lot of large instruments she didn't recognize. A lot of smells that brought up flashbacks she wasn't sure were hers. But underneath it all she found knowledge of family and stability. She was almost sure those were Fluff's emotions before they transformed, which she had been graced with experiencing for a moment. She returned home prancing, graceless movements for a dignified cat. It was really weird to have a dick flopping around. Not bad weird, though. She also enjoyed touching her fur with her tongue. It was so, well, fluffy. It was a weird sensation for tongues, but she got why Fluff was always licking and combing himself. Fluff had thankfully stayed inside. He had taken down every decoration in the room, seemingly in slaps and swats. He killed whatever paintings were within reach, weird human toothmarks in the canvas. Now he was happily asleep on her bed, spread-eagle and head draped beyond the frame. Aviva rubbed against Fluff's leg. Fluff picked her up, patting and swatting her up with unskilled human hands. They touched nose to nose, and switched back. The lingering emotion-thought in her body was that Fluff found her cat form to be cute. She was deeply moved, even knowing on some level it was a compliment for himself. They switched from time to time, whenever Fluff needed a checkup, vaccinations, or pills. She hoped this calculated body snatching was less harmful emotionally and physically than the other options.

Before transforming, she tried to think and feel things she wanted to communicate: “We are a community, a family, a chosen family. I choose you. I’m here.”

And they were. More of a family than her biological one, for sure. They were really there for each other. She loved Fluff for Fluff, not some fictional alternative.

She had Fluff try human food in his human body. Chocolate ice cream and garlic bread. Things that could have been poisonous for him in his cat body. Fluff picked her up in her cat form, and rubbed under her chin. She got it, now. Fluff put her on top of the kitchen cupboard. She looked down upon her world, to rule it from this vantage point. It was really satisfying to jump down on Fluff’s human head. It didn’t matter that she was going to have to experience the scratches healing.

One time, Fluff returned her body with some missing acrylic nails. Another time, she returned his body with a shaved patch where he got vaccinated.

She started stocking the fridge with things he might enjoy tasting with human senses. He didn’t like tuna as a human, apparently experiencing the flavor differently. She batted her hand against the tin, miffed. She saw it happening. She knew it was going to happen as it fell—but when the tin crashed to the floor, splattering water, she still jumped. Her tail fur was standing on end. She was huge! It made her feel safer.

Aviva loved the retractable claws. She was wolverine! Laura, not Logan. But maybe... looking like Logan. She spent long minutes popping her claws out into different materials. Fake leather and plastic wrap were the most satisfying, popping at her claws like creme brulee.

Fluff seemed to love standing up tall, above the neighborhood cats, dogs, and other humans.

They did that for a while. As the weather got warmer, Fluff grew restless. Yowling those long yodels of suffering that she never knew how to understand. Stranger cats buzzed past their window, lapping at the water bowl she

We are a community, a family, a chosen family. I choose you. I’m here.



left outside. Fluff didn’t join them. Didn’t play, didn’t even want tuna. Worried, Aviva switched with Fluff and immediately picked up one clear feeling-thought. Babies.

Fluff wanted to be pregnant. Aviva thought about that again and again, stunned, as the vet poked and probed and did whatever vets do.

Fluff wanted babies. Aviva herself didn’t have strong feelings about having children. She always knew she could never birth anyone new into her family. She had been through too much with them. She would do that to no one. But now, Fluff wanted to be pregnant. To feel a baby live inside him. Birthed from him.

It would take a lot of coordination. Help with care, and maternity leave. Her thoughts were already rushing forward making plans.

She would make no one experience her family the way she’d had to—no one.

She researched options. Told Fluff about them as they switched back and forth.

*** Aviva delighted in curling up on Fluff’s growing middle. She didn’t have human words to describe it, but she could sense something exciting going on in there. Something special. Her growing family.

Spending the year mostly in feline form was going to be a challenge, as well as intriguing. There were so many things she was going to try to eat. A few months with a penis might bring some insights. She wondered what the baby was going to be like. Would they be human and cat, regardless of their physical shape? Would they connect to all their heritages? Would she know how to be a good parent to someone like that? She tunneled her way through Fluff’s long hair and curled up comfortably for a nap. However it was going to be, she had her family. Her real one. TR

Dean Leetal (they/them) is a Gender Studies PhD candidate. They publish about alternative disability activism, as well as different trans and non-binary readings. *Their coauthored book, The Trans and Non-Binary Hero’s Journey: Quests for Empowerment in Science Fiction and Fantasy*, was published with McFarland. They are a member of the En-Gender journal editorial team.



Pomelo

Daniel W.K. Lee (李華強)

Treason
that our bodies
did not crash into carnality
considering the succulence of your
fruit. You rebuffed my request that
you sit on my face, our sex like sand
bags in hurricane season—needing to
be filled to save us. But waiting can
thicken the pith: the memory of you
once dripping on my tongue now a
pomelo, white mouthfuls of
bittersweetness.

Previously published in fourteen poems,
issue 12

Daniel W.K. Lee (李華強) is a third-generation refugee, queer, Cantonese American born in Kuching, Malaysia. He earned his MFA in Creative Writing at The New School, and his debut collection of poetry, *Anatomy of Want*, was published by Queer Mojo/Rebel Satori Press. He lives in New Orleans with his whippet Camden. Find out more about him at danielwklee.com or join his Patreon at patreon.com/danielwklee.



Familiar Stranger

Flash Fiction by Chris McManus

Art
by Baju Wijono

FUUuck
FUUUuuuuuhhhhhuck," he whimpers, eyes clenched tight as his face twists into a feral snarl.
Why do cum faces look so angry? I think. He lingers over me before falling clumsily onto the bed. He exhales loudly, his savage grimace melting into a rapturous grin.

"I so needed that," he says, looking straight up at the ceiling. He lets out a deep sigh. A moment later he rolls out of bed and heads for the bathroom. I watch the bounce of his ass and smile.
I fumble through the sheets for my underwear. No, these are his. I place them on the side of the bed as I reach for my own.
I'm zipping up my fly as he re-emerges from the bathroom, still smiling.
"That was great," I say. "I'm so glad this worked out."
"It's been a while," he replies. "How's the job? Last time you mentioned drama at work?"

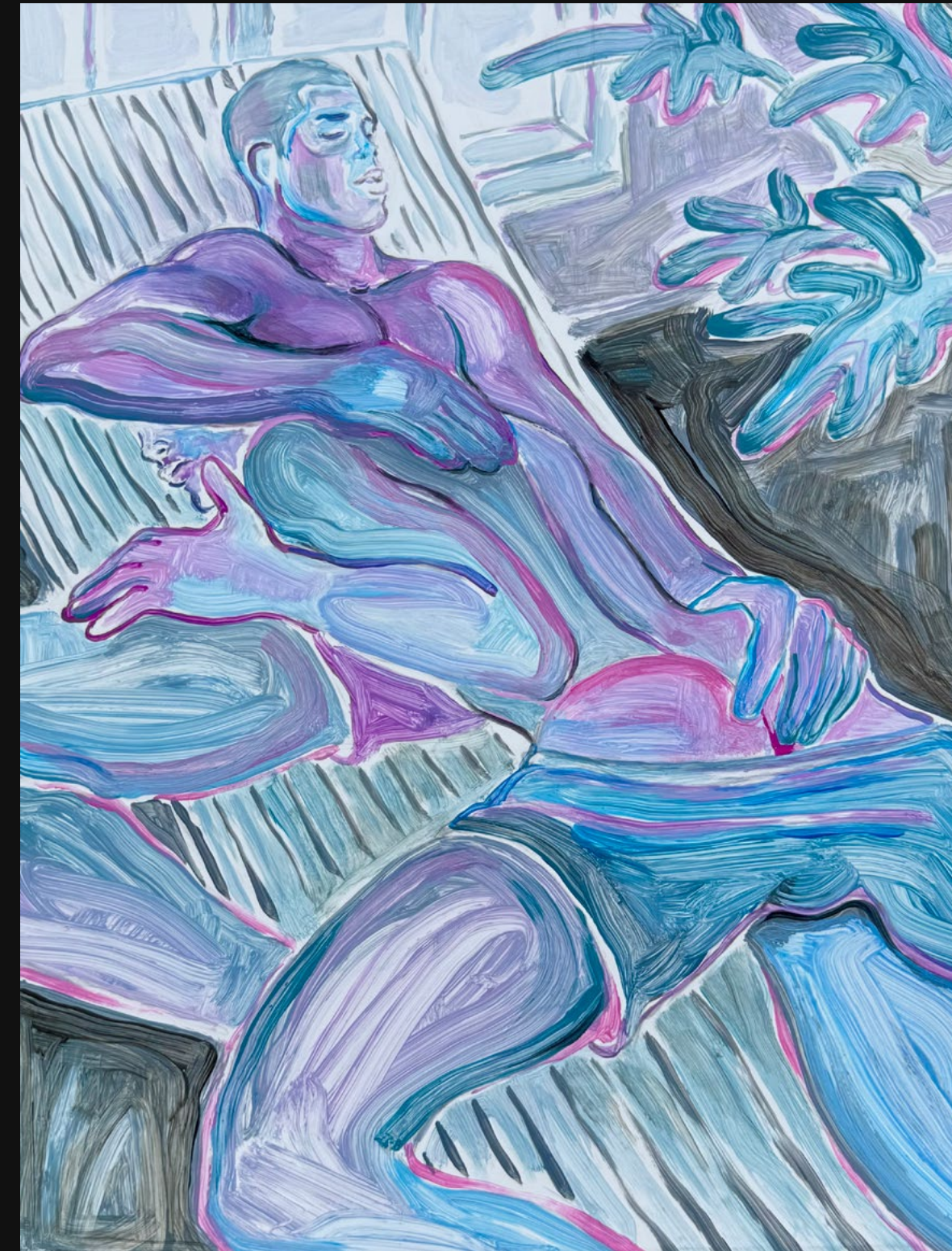
I pause, surprised that he remembers. His fuck-me eyes, now warm and kind, meet mine.
"Yeah, my new boss. He's been really aggressive toward me," I confess.
"You in a hurry?" he asks. "I can make some coffee."
We'd gotten together three times, always at his place and purely for sex. I'd take the elevator to the eighth floor, walk down the corridor and look for the door slightly ajar. He'd be waiting for me naked in his bedroom.

Now we're on his sofa, drinking coffee. I know that kissing his neck just below his ear arouses him. His nipples are sensitive and he likes when I cup his buttocks. Firmly. His orgasm routine is etched in my mind. Aside from that, Max is a stranger.
I take a sip of coffee before admitting my fear of getting fired. I hadn't even shared that with my boyfriend yet. I'd dreaded saying it aloud, yet telling Max brings me an odd sense of relief.
He puts his hand on top of mine. I'm familiar with his touch, but this is different. He tells me about a similar situation he faced at work. "I'm not saying you should quit, but it doesn't hurt to start looking for something else."

"I don't know why that was so easy to tell you," I say. "You're a good listener."
He arches an eyebrow. "Tell that to my husband. He's always complaining that I don't listen."
"How's that going?" I ask. Max tells me they are fine and planning a trip to Italy. His eyes light up as he talks about Florence and how much his husband loves gelato.

I look at my watch and explain that I need to get back to work. He walks me to the door. I give him a warm hug, then lean in to kiss him. His mouth opens slightly.
"We better not, or you'll never get back to work," he says, gently nudging me away. "And then your boss will have reason to fire you." I lean in for one final kiss, a peck on his lips, then I'm in the hallway. I hear the door close behind me. The deadbolt clicks as I reach the elevator. [TR](#)

Chris McManus is the founding editor of *The Ramble*.





When I watch porn now, I prefer it features an older man. I want the intimacy to feel real. Not sappy, per se. I have to be in a really gentle mood to type “boyfriend” into the search bar. What I look for is “needing,” or maybe “yearning” is a better word.

The Psychology 101 handbook would say that I’m searching for something absent from my own father. That’s not untrue, but I find it limiting. It doesn’t include faint memories of intimacy topped with narratives that fill in spaces.

Sometimes, I don’t even need a visual. I’ll just put on my headphones and listen to someone twenty years older say my name over a voice message as he jerks his cock. There may even be an “I love you, son” as he climaxes.

I don’t aim to see a muscle queen, 35 years old, being called “Daddy.” He may be someone’s Dad but not mine. I want to see gray hair on its way to white. Dad’s days of

blonde are over. Aged muscle flexes under skin kissed by gravity.

Last week, I met someone at a semi-fancy, scrubbed-clean sex club in Manhattan. When I saw him in person for the first time, waiting by the doors with his white-as-snow hair, tan skin, and muscled calves, I knew I wasn’t short-changed. Inside, we called the tiny, rented black-walled space, “our room.” He stroked our cocks together and called me a good boy. My white-haired Dad was so loud when he came and the walls were so thin. I’m sure the entire hallway heard. It’s kind of funny that I think about decorum in a sex club at 2 PM on a Tuesday.

One time, I lay in bed, post-coital with a know-it-all who was my age and he said, “I want to get to the bottom of your relationship with older men.” He said it as if it’s something to be wished away, a condition to conquer. I don’t think of it

like that. I think of it as an arrival. I think of it as an energy source. To find an innate desire, a specific one that some find sordid, and to match your desire with another is a current and a charm.

It can be deceiving who is a Dad and who is not. I wrote a book about a gray-haired man, with giant hands and a devilish smile. At times, my words boiled with anger. I dissected him, tried to analyze him, and then I overanalyzed him. I later realized that I was making him into something he never was. He reminded me so much of men in my own family, my upbringing, my home. A home that was full of love and a flighty affection that felt far away.

When a Dad wakes up in the morning, he thinks of his son. His son knows and trusts that a “Good Morning” is coming. As I come to consciousness, I crack open my ribs and spread my legs and kiss the temples of those who greet me. [TR](#)

Jason Haaf (b. Coral Springs, Florida) is a Brooklyn-based writer and visual artist. Largely influenced by diaristic writings and memoir, Haaf’s work utilizes intimacy and confession at its root.

JayBoy

Memoir
by **Jason Haaf**

Art
by **Aleksei Pozdnovato**

His debut novel, *Harsh Cravings* (Polari Press, 2022) is a 90-day diary taking place during the summer and fall of 2020. *Can I See Your Niche?*, featuring Haaf’s cut-ups and collages is published by Trapart Books, 2023. *Watchword*, a collaborative unbound art book, featuring prose and collage was published by @ND in 2023.

His writing and art have also been featured in *Truant*, edited by Nate Lippens, *Rendering Unconscious: Psycho-analytic Perspectives, Politics & Poetry* and *The Trapartisan Review* (Trapart Books), *Shower with Affection: Group Shower* (Raw Meat Collective), and *Hello Mr. magazine*.

Haaf was a recipient of the Seattle Erotic Art Fair’s Foundation Award for Literary Art (2025).



Meryl Meisler

Three Wait on Dock, Cherry
Grove, Fire Island, NY

1978

Prompted



Her eyes lit up when I explained the concept for Prompted: an open call to writers and artists to create work inspired by one of her photographs. The challenge was choosing which one.

Meryl Meisler has been capturing New York street scenes, nightlife, and queer moments for decades, with a stunning portfolio dating back to the '70s. I went through her Street Walker series, A Tale of Two Cities: Disco Era Bushwick, and finally Purgatory & Paradise: Sassy '70s, Suburbia & The City, where I found an iconic photograph of three men waiting on a Fire Island dock.

Titled Three Wait on Dock, Cherry Grove, Fire Island, NY, the photograph inspired poetry, short stories, and work by fellow artists. We are pleased to present the pieces that Meryl's photograph prompted.

Meryl Meisler was born in 1951 in the Bronx and raised on Long Island. Inspired by her father's family photographs and Diane Arbus, she enrolled in a photography class at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, setting her on a life-long path as a photographer. She moved to New York City in 1975 to study with Lisette Model and fell in love with the city. After teaching art in NYC public schools for 31 years, Meisler began sharing her vast archive of photographs, work marked by a strong sense of place, humanity, a distinctly queer eye, and a Jewish sense of humor. She is currently working on Queer-Friendly Nightlife Now, a project documenting LGBTQ+ nightlife today. Meisler is represented by CLAMP in New York City and Polka Galerie in Paris and continues to document the world with the same sharp curiosity.

Unsheathed by Daniel Edward Moore

When the gladiator’s song ended with the question, am I luminous enough, love proved to be a shimmering tune on the battlefield’s need for each bloody note to paint the grass like a weeping Van Gogh. The truth is we liked it rough, forcing our hands to ponder the strength it takes to make tenderness King. Since we’re never guilty of going too far, of digging too deep in those quiet places lovers of violence avoid, tell courage to rest his head on my chest. Stroke his hair’s curtain of swords. Gently untangle the fear.

Daniel Edward Moore lives in Washington on Whidbey Island. His work has appeared in Southern Humanities Review and others. His work is forthcoming in New Plains Review, Action Spectacle Magazine, Common Ground Review, Emerge Journal and The Heartland Review. His book, “Waxing the Dents,” is from Brick Road Poetry Press.

Pietà by Aleksei Pozdnovato



Aleksei Pozdnovato is a Russian-born queer artist based in Spain. His practice explores male beauty, intimacy, vulnerability, and desire through contemporary figurative imagery. Drawing on references to classical sculpture, religious iconography, and art history, he creates intimate compositions that place the male body between tenderness, sensuality, and quiet introspection. You can find his other works on Instagram at [@pozdnovato](#).

Unbridled by Chris McManus

That smile on Bill’s face. Joyous. But it’s more than that, Jim thought, warm sun on his face. Blissful? Closer but still not there. Unbridled? Yes, that’s it. Bill’s smile was unbridled. And delicious.

Jim drew in a deep breath of that fresh, briny air, savoring it in his lungs. By nightfall, they’d be back in the city, reacclimating to their daily routines. But for now, they were still on Fire Island, enjoying every minute until the ferry arrived. No business suits, no fake girlfriends, and no awkward nights at a strip club with clients.

Bill was sprawled over Doug, whom they’d met in the Dunes on their first day. The three had been inseparable since, enjoying that delicious desperation of getting to know each other. Sure Doug was more into Bill, but they shared a genuine connection too. Jim liked exploring new love with Bill,

encouraging his boyfriend to let go and lean in.

They’d had the talk at breakfast, all agreeing that they would stay in touch. Doug suggested they all go out a week from Saturday. Rawhide, thought Jim. He was pretty sure he’d seen Doug before at Rawhide. Or on the Pier. One of his sanctuaries in New York City.

Jim noticed a woman hovering nearby, his guard instantly rising. They came to Fire Island to escape the judgment and preachy diatribes. But the woman had a kind face, and meeting Jim’s eyes, approached gingerly. “You guys are fabulous. Do you mind if I take a shot?” she asked, reaching for her camera.

Jim exhaled a sigh of relief. “Sure,” he said. “Make sure you get all three of us.” The woman winked before lifting her camera. Several clicks later

she lowered it, flashed a warm smile and thanked them before joining her companion, a striking woman carrying a colorful beach bag. The three faded back to their daydream state.

A sharp blast from the ferry horn pierced their reverie. Getting to their feet, Doug threw his arms around Jim, pulling him in close. “Thank you,” Doug whispered, leaning in to Jim’s ear. He then turned to Bill, hugging tightly while landing a passionate kiss on his mouth. Jim reached for the red Radio Flyer wagon holding their bags. He then took Bill’s hand as they climbed onto the ferry. Once aboard, they turned and waved to Doug.

“See you next week,” Doug shouted as the ferry pulled away. A final wave, then Jim watched Doug turn around and walk toward the Dunes.

I Am Desire by Michael Paras

I am desire
My eyes twinkle with fairy dust
Body basking in the warm glow
I come back with the tide
It’s dark now
The foxes on the beach are screaming
I’m dancing on the sand now

My Name Is Night by Michael Paras

fallen tree on the ground
the light of the moon shining on my back
my name is night.
you pull my ass backwards.
my feet rooted in dirt.
your hands on my hips
guiding me into place.
palms pressed into the trunk
bark rough and warm.
the sky above us
I stare into the void
feel you and the night pour into me.
empty sky with no stars in sight.
and then me

Michael Paras (he/him) is a Brooklyn-born, Brooklyn-based writer whose work is shaped by New York, pop culture and being a gay guy. You can find him on Instagram at [@aelmichh](#) or follow him on Substack [@MichaelParas](#) to read more of his work.

Good Grief by T.A. Muir

‘I mean, I have less answers now than when I arrived! Well. That is to say, I most certainly have more questions. Listen, I want to say again, I am terribly sorry for what I said when we first met. You—well, you caught me off guard is what you did. It’s just that where we are from, that is, where Benjamin and I are from, we simply don’t see a lot of men wearing lipstick, let alone—I’m sorry, what would you call this? A kaftan, okay, got it. But you’ve been so kind to me, and I am truly sorry for saying good grief, when you sat down. I knew coming here would be upsetting, I did, but I had no idea. I didn’t think I would be crying, and in public! My stomach was in knots on the ride over. I was the last off the ferry, can you believe that, Amber? It is Amber, right? Yes. I was so nervous, Amber, I had no idea what to expect. But from what I’ve seen, it’s just not all that different to some of the beach towns we drove through on Long Island. There are certainly a lot more families than I had expected.

Is it always this hot? There was a woman back there taking a photo of some men. Oh, you can still see them. Can you see them? I suppose she’s about my age. A bit younger, perhaps. As I walked past, I wondered if perhaps mine was the only bra being worn on this entire island! I know this is not proper to say, Amber, but, well—this

underwire? And these straps? In this heat, they are so very painful. you should count yourself lu—I don’t suppose you’re wearing a bra? Ha! I’m sorry, but I am glad for you. It is a curse. What’s that? Oh my stars, I could not! Amber! Could you even imagine? What would my father say? What would my husband say? No, you’re right, I suppose neither of them are here. My father is waiting for me over in Sayville. But, I’ll stop you there, I am not interested. I would never. It serves a purpose you know? Believe me, we are not wearing them for the fun of it.

Oh, thank you. What is it? Oh, it’s a fan! It’s beautiful, what is it made from—wood? I’ve never seen anything like it! That is just gorgeous. It is so intricate, it must have taken a long time to carve. Where did you get it? I’ve never been to Spain. My husband promised to take me to Acapulco, but—it’s been hard to find the perfect time to go. I suppose. I haven’t really thought about it in years. We’ve been to Miami, twice, which I suppose is the same. Well, similar. Is that the ferry, coming back? No? It’s hard to see. It is very glary today. There’s not a cloud in the sky, is there? I haven’t even checked the timetable. It would be a beautiful day, well, I suppose it is a beautiful day. For everyone dressed appropriately. You know, back at the motel, Amber, I have

a lovely yellow sundress that I could’ve worn. Yellow with small white flowers. But I wore these jeans—do you know why? I thought I would fit in better here! Would you believe that? Today is the first day I’ve worn them, in fact. I bought them especially. I didn’t think I would be banished the way I have been. I’ve got no place I’d wear them back home, that’s for certain.

...

The full version of “Good Grief” is available at the following link: theramblepress.substack.com/p/good-greif

Paradise Unattended by Baju Wijono



Baju Wijono is a multidisciplinary visual artist whose life and work refuse easy borders. His work has been shown at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, reviewed in the New York Times, and exhibited worldwide.

Untitled by Kit Cerda

We had dreamed of days of like this
Omar’s mother made us sandwiches
Chicken salad
Good, but I hate the pimento she added
I couldn’t remember the last time
The sun was this warm
My skin baked
My fingertips greasy, salty
A bag of open chips
Flies buzzed around my drink
We laughed
At nothing
At everything
The warmth of the sun filled our bellies
Bellies full of laughter
Sun
Chicken Salad
One day
We’ll dream of days of like this

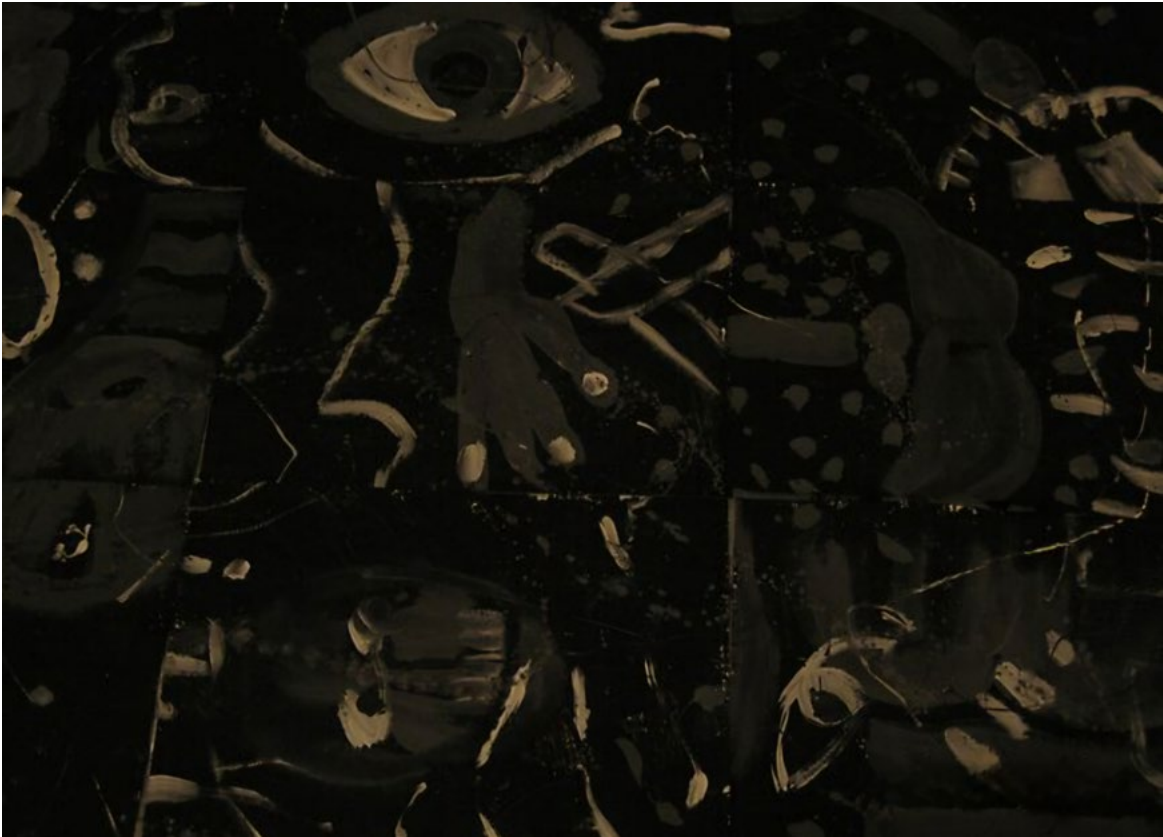
Christopher Cerda is New York–based and writes about masculinity, desire, memory, and Mexican American identity.

Don’t Ask Because I Won’t Tell
by Christian Cotrina (aka Chris Cotrina)

When I’m ready,
I’ll tell.
But for now,
Please don’t ask.

Christian Cotrina was born in Lima, Peru, and lives in Jackson Heights, Queens, with his husband and three pet squirrels. A born community activist and rallier, he likes to write horny poems and explore vernacular photography in his spare time. You can find him on Instagram at [@Christian_cotrina_](https://www.instagram.com/Christian_cotrina_)

Sex in the Dark by John Douglas



John Douglas is an award-winning Australian multimedia artist whose exhibitions have received acclaim and caused controversy in Australia and abroad.

He has exhibited widely in Australia, including the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras festival (1994-2005) and Sydney’s 2002 Gay Games cultural festival.

International solo shows include Paris, Fort Lauderdale, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Geneva and Shanghai.

His art is held by The Australian Queer Archives, Qtopia Sydney, and the Erotic Heritage Museum, USA.

Chemical Rose Blossom by Uģis Zauerhagens



Uģis Zauerhagens is a Latvian artist and fashion designer working between the body, material and space.

His practice explores transformation, repetition and the strange relationship between the organic and the artificial. Through experimental textiles, plastics and sculptural forms, he creates works that blur the boundaries between garment, object and living form.

The Sixth Trip to Fire Island by Evan E. Lambert

Frankie, Stephan, and Jules traveled to Fire Island six times before their friendship ended.

A lot happened before that, but here’s the gist:

They’re all from small towns and they all arrived in New York City on the same night. They met in the bathroom of the Stonewall Inn (no, not doing that ... or that), and they’ve clung to each other ever since. When you’re freshly out and new to New York, it’s better to have a gay friend than no friends at all.

By their sixth Fire Island trip, though, they realized that “gay” was not actually a personality. Jules had recently discovered queer theory, Stephan had recently discovered investment banking, and Frankie had recently discovered cocaine. The only thing the three of them still had in common was an aversion to shirt sleeves.

They were on a dock, a random dock, when Frankie, on the verge of blacking out (it was 11 a.m.), slurred something about doing a photo-shoot. Stephan, who was already looking around for better people, merely grunted. Jules, who would have preferred to stay home and edit his new hour-long video about why RuPaul’s

Drag Race was colonialist, perked up at “photoshoot.”

“Oh my God, we should recreate that Meryl photo,” said Jules.

“Wait, she’s a photographer, too?” asked Stephan. “Is there anything she can’t do?”

“No, not Meryl Streep,” said Jules, rolling his eyes. “Meryl Meisler. She took a photo of three gay friends here in 1978. I literally showed it to you in a museum.”

Frankie muttered something incomprehensible. He was officially blacked out now.

“Ok, whatever,” said Stephan, shrugging. “What do we have to do?”

“Well, one of us needs to be lying down.” Jules looked at Frankie, who was leaning over the edge of the dock as if he was about to vomit. “Maybe that should be Frankie. And you can sit behind him like ... Well, just look.”

He pulled up Three Wait on Dock on his phone and showed Stephan, who frowned. “No, I want to be the one in front,” Stephan said. “He looks like the top.”

Jules, who was all too familiar with Stephan’s lack of flexibility in that department, put his phone away. His

mouth tightened. “OK, well are you going to hold up Frankie’s head, then? Because he needs to be looking at the camera. And look at where your arm will be.”

They both glanced at Frankie, who was now on his belly mumbling platitudes at the ocean waves.

“Yeah, OK,” said Stephan, getting into position. When he placed his hand on Frankie’s neck, Frankie began singing “Rain on Me.”

Jules handed his camera to a nearby lesbian and asked for a photo, then glared at Stephan. “Stephan, why are you making that face? You’re supposed to look happy. Like we’re friends.”

“How do you know those three guys were friends?”

“Because why else would they be hanging out like that?”

“Because maybe they were just all gay and they hadn’t found anyone else to talk to yet.”

“Well, that’s not our situation, is it?”

Stephan sighed and looked at Jules for a long time.

“Isn’t it?”

And that was when Frankie finally looked up and projectile vomited directly into the camera.

Evan E. Lambert writes one 500-word story a day. EVERY day. He’s also a sober, ND professional writer and editor whose work appears at People, Business Insider, BuzzFeed, Queerty, and lit mags. He’s here to tell stories. See them on his Substack: [@evanelambert](#)

Souvenirs by Lkhamaa Sanjaadorj

Are the sweet words
I would keep
Waiting all day
Just to get a little
Moment

Lkhamaa Sanjaadorj lives in Albany, New York, and writes poems in her free time.

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Thank you for wandering The Ramble. We hope you
enjoyed this issue as much as we loved putting it together.

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Til then, happy rambling!

Chris McManus

