

to those in isolation — may sonder be your path to connection

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Letter from the Editors

sonder: the realization and awareness that those around you live rich and nuanced lives that are just as complex as your own

When the *Caesura* team sat down to select a theme for our 2025-2026 edition, we were immediately drawn to “Sonder.” Though we knew we would spend a significant amount of time defining and explaining the word to those of you who are unfamiliar, we believed it was worth it. Sonder caught our attention, again and again, because it verbalizes a feeling many of us have felt, but could never quite place. In fact, sonder captures the feeling many of us experience when we read poetry or experience artwork — windows into the complexities of others’ lives.

Sonder is both isolating and connecting. Sonder can be confusing, or frustrating, or exciting. It is a strange experience to look around yourself and realize: none of this is about you. In a world where individualism and self-centered outlooks dominate our culture, we want to encourage you to set that aside. Consider those around you. And then consider their Maker.

Ultimately, sonder points us to God. What better way to experience the beauty of His creation than to acknowledge the multitude of ways He is working in the lives of each of His children? What better way to celebrate the talents He has given us than to create writing and art that help us understand one another?

As for the reader — we hope this edition of *Caesura* helps you experience sonder in a new light. We hope these works lead you to empathize, understand, and connect with your neighbors. And through that, we hope these works lead you closer to the One who connects us all.

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To Know

Adalynn Wollan

I wanna live one day in your bones,
Behind your eyes, in your home.
I wanna put on your steel-toed boots,
Go to work, spend time alone.
I wanna see your thoughts from your eyes,
I want to know.
I feel it there,
With my hand on your chest.
I feel the darkness you promise I lighten,
But I'd like to be certain,
I'd like to know.
Let us switch vessels,
I'll prove that I need you,
And I'll feel how I love you.
I'll know if it's too much or not enough.
And you'll know you're not too much,
Not ever too much,
I need you to know.

I'll laugh at my pink hair,
And finally like my brown eyes.
You'll feel my aching bones,
And I'll feel your aching stomach,
And we'll look at each other
Through the other's eyes
And we'll finally know what it's like
To know.

Piano Bird

Mitchell Eltzeroth

Peeking between timber
door and frame,
I watch
the old bird
perched
on a black bench.
Safe from her squawking
I wonder
what kind
of bird
is she.

Her craned neck
stretches
over the ivory,
hawk nose
buried
in the sheets.

Crow's feet crinkle
as she reads.
Her pigeon toes press
pedals, preparing
for her flight.
Bony talons
preen the piano,
plucking keys.
Then she plays.

Notes flutter
through the air.
Her voice joins
the soaring song.
Swooping harmonies
send her gliding
from note to note.
She sings
simple
sweet
somber.
A songbird.

Fish Poem

Noah Hayden

Please forgive me; I know nothing about fish
My hands do not remember the slick granite scales
As she, half alive, slides back into the pond
Every line I pick up tangles, due to clumsiness
Or perhaps subconscious intent
For I hate to stifle living things

—

Maybe I'm worried
That it is true what they say
“It gets easier with time”

—

This is the paradox of being:
Today I wanted a fish poem
But yesterday I preferred to watch
Those dim shapes shifting against the bank
And keep my distance

The Hiding Poem

Emmylou Kunze

Five poems

I laugh in their face

As they shake their fists

Lock me out

In disgrace

I wander the empty roads

Looking for a

Wayward poem

To tuck under my arm and

Haul back home

Past forests dribbling dew

And stone fences ill-hewn

Through fields, like a net

This bluegrass carpet

Too thick for my

Ankles

Struggling to wade

along, but

wait

In the silent

Heavy calm

Rises a voice

Like a whisper of fog

- and it sings -

Here i am, poem-catcher

Here i am not

As you have been wading

I have been hiding

Don't you see

You are lost

Where is here

I echo back

Where do you curl your

Tiny bare feet

Through this bog i cannot

Hope to find

any stray footprint you
maybe dropped

In the dimness, in the light
Melting off the treetops
I hear a chuckle and
Wonder
As the cold mud sucks at my
Angry knees and
The bugs pluck fitfully at my
tangled braids
The voice like a
New old friend
comes from
Somewhere inside of
Me

God, bless the small things

Noah Hayden

Often when I walk I imagine
The thunderous earthquakes my
Footsteps produce
To the worms, who have not
Hands to cup their ears
And stifle the thuds
Maybe they lack ears entirely?
In which case they feel the
Reverberations all over
And sense
(Behind them the devil cartoonishly cackling with glee)
The false signs of rainfall
Which is probably worse

- sonder -

A sweet pup in Assisi

Annie Lingren



A Pocket Poem

— *Found in Goodwill (Translation: we buried my grandmother on a Wednesday)*

Ariel Zhang

when the chayote skin dried out
& its roots withered
like fish vertebrae in my hand
I took her clothes from the closet
& splayed them out in front of
me, kneeling on the wooden floor:
meshes of azure & coral pulled
from sea. it was like
watching a sailor in shipwreck, afloat
among the algae blooms. not knowing
if he is struck with foaming beauty
or home-longing because his eyes
never tipped & leaked. I saw:
a few scattered jumpers a wind-blown
blouse. a purple sweater with a bleeding lip.
a screaming orange shirt from volunteering
at the children's hospital. a home-knit

shawl. jackets with secrets tucked
in its pocket: a love letter, a recipe,
 a grocery list with five different
types of squashes, a sleepy haiku. then
perhaps another to-be shawl or scarf or vest, with the hems
 still loose. a green linen dress,
that she always wore when she danced. she never danced
 in front of me. it was always in private,
in the corridors without eyes & only teeth. outside,
the earth was set to simmer
 & the cicadas
burned & the moon embers
 plucked a song
 & the floor held
 its breath
 &
 she
 danced
sometimes, when it rains soft
enough to wash the city
away from itself,

when the sky becomes
a constellation of unfastened fish jaws, you might
find
these phantoms
clipped to cloth
leaking from beneath the closet.
this orange shirt might rock in the air
with a cavity in its arms. this shawl/
scarf/vest might
unknit itself. this dress,
you might find in a corridor, or
you might not.
what I mean to say is:
I am counting days
by the amount of time it takes
to press a dried squash into my palms
until it breaks
 butternut, honeynut,
 red kuri,
 kabocha,
 chayote

- sonder -

Riflessioni su Venezia

Katie Todd



All My Life

Anna Blower

I can only hope that I'm like the moon.
To reflect another's light.
To be content alone or crowded by clouds.
To continuously realize myself.
My crevasse cherished.
My shadows explored.
To inspire.
To show colors from within.
Touched by man but belonging to the universe.
To be framed by nature through the eyes of humanity.
So close,
Someone's night light.
So far,
Someone's reach.
Strung between gravity yet holding strong.
I wish to be like her.
Or to at least admire her,
All my life.

Clean Break

Lleyton Kane

I write breakup texts for a living.

Not like a side hustle. This is my actual job. I have a website. I have a rate card. I have a Calendly. Mondays and Thursdays I do consultations. Tuesdays and Fridays I deliver. Wednesdays are for the people who chicken out on Tuesday and need a pep talk before I press send on their behalf.

The business is called Clean Break. My mom thinks it's a cleaning service. I have not corrected her.

Here's how it works: you fill out an intake form. Length of relationship. Communication style of the recipient (I give you a dropdown: texter, caller, voice-noter, emoji-heavy, dry). Reason for breakup (also a dropdown, but with an open field because people are creative). Whether you want to leave the door open, close it gently, or weld it shut. I draft. You approve. I send from your phone, which you've handed to me across a coffee shop table while you go to the bathroom so you can have deniability with your own fingers.

I have a 94% client satisfaction rate. The 6% are people who got back together and blamed me for the text being too effective.

My best work was a four-sentence breakup of a three-year relationship. The client cried when she read it—not because it was sad, but because it was so precisely her voice that she couldn’t tell where she ended and I began. She said it was like watching someone do your signature and getting it right. I charged her double.

My worst work was Kevin.

Kevin came in on a Tuesday in November wearing a Patagonia vest over a Patagonia fleece, which is a look that communicates a very specific relationship to emotional vulnerability: amenable but only in REI lighting. He wanted to break up with his girlfriend, Margaux—yes, with the x—who he’d been seeing for eleven months. He described her as “a lot.” When I asked him to be more specific, he said she had strong opinions about sourdough.

I wrote the text. He approved it. I sent it. Margaux responded in fourteen seconds with a voice note that was six minutes long and included, by my count, three references to attachment theory, one to Esther Perel, and a forty-five-second stretch of what I can only

describe as structured weeping.

Kevin looked at me across the table at the coffee shop. He was holding a cortado in both hands like a baby bird.

“What do I do?”

“That’s not included in the service.”

“Can I upgrade?”

I should have said no. I should have handed him his phone and wished him well and gone home to my apartment where my cat, Ender, was waiting to be fed exactly seven minutes late, which is the amount of lateness he tolerates before knocking the BRITA off the counter.

Instead, I said, “Okay.” I drafted a response to the voice note. Then a response to her response. Then a response to her friend Chelsey’s response, which arrived from a different number and opened with “I just think it’s interesting that—”

By midnight I was sitting cross-legged on Kevin’s couch, operating his entire phone like mission control, fielding texts from Margaux, Chelsey, Margaux’s therapist’s after-hours service (I did not

respond to this one), and a group chat called “Kev’s Boys” where his friends were sending fire emojis and a GIF of someone throwing a chair off a balcony.

Kevin was asleep. He’d fallen asleep around 10:30, mouth open, one sock on, the Patagonia vest still zipped to his chin. I was managing the dissolution of his eleven-month relationship from his living room while he snored into a throw pillow that said LAKE LIFE.

And here is the thing I won’t put on my website: I was good at it. Not good like competent. Good like lit up. Every text was a tiny negotiation, a calibrated detonation, and I was placing the charges with the care of someone who understands exactly where the load-bearing walls are in another person’s love. I knew when to concede and when to hold. When to use her name and when to use “you.” When a period was a weapon and when it was a door.

At 1 a.m. Margaux sent: *I just want to know if any of it was real.*

I held Kevin’s phone. The cursor blinked. Ender was home, definitely furious, probably mid-BRITA. Kevin shifted in his sleep. The throw pillow had pressed a crease into his cheek that looked like it might be permanent.

I typed: *The parts that were real were real. The parts that weren't, I'm sorry.*

She wrote back: *Okay.*

And that was it. Eleven months, collapsed to a single okay. I set the phone on the coffee table. Kevin's mouth was still open. A small thread of drool connected his lip to LAKE LIFE.

I let myself out. I walked six blocks to my apartment. Ender had knocked the BRITA off the counter and was sitting in the puddle, looking at me with the specific contempt of someone who has been abandoned by the one person who was supposed to show up.

"I know," I said.

He didn't move.

I sat on the kitchen floor in the water and opened my own phone. Fourteen unread texts from my mother, which is not unusual. She texts in fragments, one thought per message, like a telegram operator who discovered emojis. The last one said: *are you eating enough protein* 🍖

I hadn't responded in four days.

I thought about drafting something. I'm a professional, after all. I could write the perfect daughter text. Warm but not needy. Engaged but not overwhelming. The exact right amount of exclamation points to communicate health and happiness without triggering a follow-up call.

Instead I typed: *Hi mom. I'm sitting on my kitchen floor in a puddle. My cat hates me. I had a weird night. Can you call me tomorrow?*

She called immediately.

I answered.

For Mom

Abbey Toner

I used to pick you dandelions instead of daffodils
I believed they were your favorite
Roots hung loose, spikes jutting out
Each stem sat at a different length
I always pulled too hard
Always accidentally plucking the heads straight off
Perhaps in hopes you would throw yours back too
In a hollering laugh to the sky
You grabbed my hand in yours, and in a series of twirls
We reached the cabinet of glass
And as you pushed your glasses back
We set out to select the nicest vase
To hold water for your favorite weed
Displayed as a centerpiece for all to see
I believed they were your favorite
Ever since I began to bring dandelions instead of daffodils

Poached Poetry

Emmylou Kunze

I write poetry
Like my sister fries eggs
Haphazard, somewhat out of hand
Never twice the same way
Trying new styles, new
Twists of the wrist
A few crumpled pages
Are what i end up with

She reads my new poetry
I taste-test the eggs
Scrambled one day,
Poached and then coddled;
I'm whitman one day,
Maybe byron
or no one at all

Sometimes we laugh or cry

Sometimes we merely grimace
I spit the eggs back in the sink
And she says
Not your best, sis
And as i choke on her endeavors and she
Trips through half-writ poems
I think to myself
isn't this infinitely
better than being
perfect alone

On the waterbus

Annie Lingren



To the Elderly Man at Meijer

Ella Wortley

The elderly man sitting at the store watches me come and go.
He sees me ponder indecisively over the color of flower to choose—
He wonders what they're for.
I used to avoid going through his door,
I neglected eye contact as I quickly returned to my car.
But years have passed, and I have learned to decipher—
Between the heinous intent of a glance,
And those simply curious about the world around them.
The world is an incredible place, and I'm curious.
So is he.
I feel his eyes upon me as I choose the flowers,
And I let my actions remain mysterious—
Which is the best way to do things, I suppose.
I offer him a smile and wish him a good day as I leave the store.
I wonder about his life.
He wonders about my flowers.
Mystery makes the world go round.

As a Child, I Enjoyed the Suffering of Others

Zoe Cook

“Just let her sit there, Mom, she’ll eat it eventually.”

My face is hot, and my throat is tight. I look down at my pink princess plate defiled by bitter, dry broccoli. I kick my legs against the chair and huff. I prepare myself to sit here for the rest of eternity to avoid ingesting this disgrace of a vegetable.

As Dad walks out of the kitchen, Grandma gives me a sly smile. She picks up my fork, spears a piece of broccoli to the top, and begins marching the fork around my plate. “Oh, how I just *love* my new hat!” The fork says in a falsetto voice. “Just *look* at how amazing my... OH NO!”

I’ve grabbed the piece of broccoli and shoved it into my mouth.

“Not to worry, I’ll just go into this hat store and put on a new...
MERCY SAKES ALIVE!!!”

I stuff a new broccoli hat into my mouth without having finished chewing the first. Ms. Fork’s hilarious distress increases as her cruel overlord crams her mouth as full of broccoli as she can without

choking. Between chewing and laughing, I can't catch my breath until the plate is clear. Grandma picks up my plate, congratulates me on finishing my dinner, and dismisses me from the table. I linger, staring at the swirly dark green tablecloth hoping more broccoli will magically appear so we can keep playing the game.

I am an adult now, and I've left Ms. Fork, my hatred for broccoli, and Grandma in the distant past. I wish I could reexperience the glee of ripping Ms. Fork's hat off her head and forcing her to watch in horror as I devoured it. I wish my problems could be solved by pretending to be a hat-eating monster. Most of all, I wish I could hug my grandma and thank her for taking the time to turn the broccoli of doom and despair into the highlight of my day.

RAWR!

Katie Todd



Pigtails & Pineapple Skirts

Adalynn Wollan

What is it that fuels that smile?

The pink and purple hairties

Artfully mismatched in crooked pigtails?

The gap in the top row of teeth

That only seems to make the smile wider?

The yellow and pink pineapple skirt,

Or the glittery, light-up princess sneakers?

Is it something not visible in these photographs?

Why is she wearing a bright yellow shirt with the pineapple skirt?

What was the thought process there?

Likely, it was a simple love of colors.

A child who wasn't worried about

Appearing distracting or obnoxious,

Who said she loved the rainbow best

Without worrying about what it *meant*.

A little girl unbothered by the fact

That her two front teeth had yet to grow back,

Who was simply proud to have lost teeth,

Who knew the tooth fairy was pretend,
But still loved to make-believe.
Who didn't mind the lisp the gap created,
Who was content with what was temporary.
A child who loved the swish of her pigtails around her ears
As she pushed higher and higher into the air on the swingset,
Who did not view the pigtails and pineapple skirt
As symbols of innocence waiting to be exploited.
Whose hair had not been pulled,
Whose tooth gap had not been mocked,
Whose light-up shoes had not been labeled contraband.
I remember telling my mother I hated
My pigtails and my pineapple skirt.
I don't remember loving them,
But the girl in the photos did.
What is it that fueled that smile?
Innocence? Ignorance?
Pure, unadulterated bliss?
I wish I could remember.
She looks so happy.

Chaos Within

Isabella Gusmano

I don't cry loudly, as not to cause a scene.
You see, I learned to cry softly, and to breathe...
Making noise never did a thing for me.
To bring my chaos to the foot of another was selfish
Rude "Shh, they'll hear you" is what she'd say.
But keeping the chaos in never eases the pain
It only dissipates...
I need only to be seen, heard, to be allowed to breathe again...
Other people make too much noise in my head—
I've got my own chaos within.

The Hole I Didn't Dig

Brittany Brown

Most of the time
they only get to the *no*
nothing more,
nothing less.

A door half-open,
a sentence cut short,
my voice
folded back into my chest.

Is it worth it?
Maybe that doesn't matter.
Because I know
Who stays.
Who never leaves.
Who loves me without condition
or interruption.

Still

there is that human ache,
that quiet yearning
to be heard
by skin and bone,
not only by spirit.

Even trying to bind myself
only to You, Jesus,
I feel it
that small tremble of wanting.
I'm not perfect.
No one is.
But I know where I belong.

So I grow quiet.
I keep to myself.
Because when I speak,
I am denied.
When I rise,
I am talked over

like wind against closed windows.

Yet my Father listens.

He bends low.

He does more
than anyone else ever could.

What is this feeling?

It comes again.

Not new
just deeper.

The wounds don't leave.

They carve further inward,
harder to climb out of.

How do you escape
a hole you didn't dig?

Someone carved it into the earth,
left it uncovered,

and I fell in.

They don't come back.

They don't hear me.

They don't see me.

They don't try.

But something new is coming

I feel it in the dark soil.

And whatever it is,

I am ready.

I may not have their voices.

I may not have their choosing.

But I have my Lord

and Savior.

Thank You, Jesus.

Party Games

Elise Adams

The guests played games

Making toilet paper into diapers

Molding babies out of clay

The family made food

Carving fruit into cradles

Cutting cookies into onesies

The mother opened gifts

Shouting over the new stroller

Sniffing at Susan's knitted hat

And the lady in the corner smiled

Her hand resting on her flat stomach

Her fingers tracing an absent weight

- sonder -

Fragile Growth

Katie Todd



Etymology of a Crush

Matthew Lacy

I had never really considered

why we call it a *crush*.

It seems a bit odd.

Doesn't it?

Strange how an awful, heavy word

describes a light and airy thing,

a feeling for the vernal months

when flowers blossom and

happy woodland creatures rear their young.

Sometimes I feel it in that way.

The butterflies in my stomach

reach such preposterous proportions

that they suddenly force me afloat

from the flurry of their wings

at the reminder that a certain woman exists.

At other times, I find myself fearless.

The very thing that should freeze me
becomes an overwhelming good
so that I can push beyond my mind
and do whatever needs to be done
to demonstrate my devotion.

I understand now
why we call it a *crush*.

I assign such importance to the requital
of my fervent feelings that it becomes a burden,
a vast emotional trap of my own design
forcing me like Atlas to bear the weight of the world,
for I make my love my whole world,
and the same thing that gives me strength
pushes me downward with every passing minute.

A friend told me
that I should savor this sentiment,
but it's hard for me to
just go with the flow
when most of the time

I don't know
what the flow is
or where it happens to be going,
and I'm trying to figure that out
without getting caught up and swept away
by the river I'm dipping my toes in.

The truth is,
I mostly deal in extremes.
The empty forge of love sits
barren from my pain
until it roars to life
with no warning or consideration,
leaving no time to guard myself
against the flames that call out to me,
begging me to make something
out of the scraps of hope
I left lying around last time and
some sparse bits of attention
from the one I admire.
Perhaps I'll listen to the flames again,

- *sonder* -

and melt my hopes, memories, and aspirations,
crafting something greater and sharper than ever before
with the forceful collisions of my dreams.

Perhaps, if I am quite careful,
I will not burn myself in the flames.

The Nature of Things

Abbie Beliles

I wish I had the words to tell you.

The little white cursor blinks on the blank Word document for what feels like hours. My head aches as I fold up my glasses and set them on the table.

I wish I had the words to tell you back then. I'm not sure if it would've changed much, but at least you'd know that I cared.

I don't know if you would've stayed, but at least I would've put up a fight. I wouldn't have just sat there as you walked out the door. I wouldn't have to stare at your scuffed-up wedding band on my coffee table for the next three days as I started the draft of my next romance novel.

Back then, you said that I didn't care about you, that I didn't notice how far apart we were becoming, that our relationship was like an electric guitar and a showtune piano. I knew that these things were true, but I couldn't bear to hear it come from your mouth.

The fickle thing about words is that you have them after the

moment has already passed.

I'm an author, a master of words. Still, I couldn't change our ending. No matter how unsatisfying it was. I couldn't change it, and that's what kills me.

So, I begin typing.

Love is like a moth to the flame. I am devoured by a power beyond my comprehension.

No.

Marriage is a life sentence.

No. No. No.

Love is a blob of paint that stains an off-white T-shirt.

No, that's disgusting. Is that really what love is? Is that all it is?

Love is a poem that rhymes.

I sit here writing lies — fluffy romance stories so corny it would make a Hallmark writer gag.

Who am I kidding? I don't know the first thing about relationships. I just use these fictional characters to keep the electricity on.

Maybe that's why I like keeping it on the page instead. On the page, I always know how the story will end. Then again, I wonder what it would be like if real-life relationships were like this, rational, predictable, easy to describe.

Maybe we were too easy to describe.

If that were the case, then maybe a romance story wouldn't be worth telling.

Stomping Ground

Elise Adams

A stomping ground doesn't move—
You do.

A stomping ground stays still.
It allows people and time to pass along its surface,
Existing in a constant state of welcome,
Embracing the hand it has been given.

You, on the other hand, could never stay still.
You decided that you didn't need that stomping ground after all.
You left it behind, discarding it like an inconvenience,
Moving on to the next new and shiny thing.

But now you have the audacity to try and claim it,
Getting mad when you see the new occupants moving in.
You're like a toddler stealing from a baby,
Demanding possession of a toy you haven't played with in years.

Well, news flash: you don't own the stomping ground.

It doesn't want you.

It's not indebted to you.

In fact, it owes you nothing.

Its value doesn't depend on whether or not you call it a stomping
ground.

It existed before you, it existed during you, and it's still existing
after you.

You just can't stand the fact that it *can* exist without you,
That it doesn't and has never needed you.

You only claim it when it's useful,
When you can pass it by and say, "There's my old stomping
grounds."

You don't get to use it as a way to center yourself in the now,
To force the world to acknowledge your presence.

But most importantly, the stomping ground isn't just another piece
of your past.

It isn't a memory for you to shove into a dusty photo album or

- *sonder* -

Another trophy for you to show off to your future grandkids,
Saying, “This was a girl I knew once upon a time.”

I guess you haven’t moved on then, not really.
Maybe you should.

Rosemary for Remembrance

Natalie Shiels

of course you mourn her. Why not? that's the part
you wanted. Your beloved by your side.
but, when she reached for your hand, you dismissed
the words she spoke, the love she had for you.
Now, our tragic hero, you can find
the way to justice, laying daisies, rue,
and violet at her graveside. Did you love
her more than childhood friends? She needed you,
a shoulder to cry on. Instead, you left.
your letters tossed with little care. By earth,
the creek, the peace of willows, she sings as
the flowers smile and bend to face her grief.
You left her there. So let this guilt find you
within your coffin. Jilted lover, mourn.

You needed someone softer

Abbey Toner

I met her once,
You know, the girl.
I saw her crying,
Sitting silently across the great divide.
I couldn't understand.
She was seemingly sensitive and sweet,
With her smooth highlights and soft jeans.
I was like her once.
You know nothing of that,
I would have been too much.
Too honest, too loud, too abrupt,
Too much to be with someone unseemingly cold and contrary,
With coarse curls and confident conscience.
I was afraid then,
That she would end up like me,
Sitting alone across the table.
I almost reached out,
As I pretended not to watch her weeping so openly.

- *caesura* -

But I understood then,
Why we shouldn't, couldn't have been.
I know now that you needed someone softer.
Someone like her,
I saw her once,
And I understood.

Molasses

Adalynn Wollan

Molasses

Or tar

Sweet

Completely opaque

Eyelids like doors

Lashes like weights

Sleep escapes

Pain stays

Lead-laden limbs

Vanilla and lavender syrup

Lavender

Like a late summer sunset

Lavender

Like oil, heavy on my sleeve

Lavender

Nothing to do with you at all

Lavender

Everything you meant

- *caesura* -

I think

I was already sick

Somehow sicker

Than what I'd out-lived

The air is

Ever heavier

Like tar

Or molasses

A Narrative Between Myself, God, and Others

Gibson Wing

Ever since this started I've felt so hollow

A deep hole within myself

Some days I wake up angry

Some I wake up sad

And most I feel nothing at all

I want to feel again

What did I say

Why did I say it

How can I fix it

What is wrong with me

Why do I ruin everything

How can I fail so much

I eat less

I drink less

I laugh less

I smile less

- *caesura* -

I enjoy less

I am less

Is this guilt?

Is this judgment?

Is this anger?

Is this sin?

Is this depression?

Is this delusion?

I'm so sorry

I don't know what to do

The brakes are cut

And the wheel is loose

The windshield is shattered

And we're crashing through

I regret everything

I live in that regret

I hate who I am

I live in that hate

- sonder -

I sin every day
I live in that sin

God, help me
God, save me
God, renew me
God, punish me
God, awaken me
God, why am I not listening?

I find myself at life's four way stop
One way leads to Heaven
But the path is blocked by trees
One way leads to hell
And the other two ways lead to purgatory
Which is a hell of its own

I am sliding down a hill
On a sled of uncontrollable speed
No walls to protect me
No one to help me

- *caesura* -

I jumped down this hill alone
And I will suffer alone

Each crime I commit
Each sin I commit
Every time I fail to commit
Leads me to the same place
Leads me further away
Leads me opposite from grace

I have wronged you
I have wronged God
I have wronged myself
I have wronged everyone
I am wrong
And it is wrong to think that

I hide from you
So I can hide from me
So I can hide from God
So I can never be free

- sonder -

So I can burn for what I've done
Because I believe I need it

What a complex I have
How complex I am
Nothing going on
And nothing going in
A bundle of sin
And a mask with a grin

Everything I do feels fake
Every joke I make is a lie
I'm sick to my stomach
Everyone I love sees it
They don't like my jokes
I'm sick to my stomach

Mom, help me
Dad, help me
Friends, help me
God, help me

Please help me

Help me find what to do

Fight, flight, or freeze?

I saw a spider once

The size of a silver dollar

I stood still for thirty minutes

I couldn't think for hours

I freeze

My tires are bald

From spinning in place

Not moving forward or back

Not moving time nor space

I am burning rubber

And I'm wasting gas

Will you ever want to talk again

Will you ever think of me highly again

Will I ever be worthy again

I don't feel worthy ever

- sonder -

I don't believe what I pray you believe
I live the lie that I tell

Why must I play tennis
As the ball
Hit between Heaven
Hit between Hell
God owns me
Why must I suffer so

I know God loves me
So why don't I love Him
I know He created me
So why don't I love Him
I know God speaks to me
So why don't I listen?

The Kite

Noah Hayden

He took down the kite from the sky
A noble flash of fire
And let it drag on the asphalt.
Cliche: How far the mighty have fallen!
Truth: The phoenix is powerful only when
She is stretched prostrate across the abundant sky.
He coaxed the kite along
As it made vague attempts at flight
Why do we yearn for a fathomless freedom?
For there is nothing the kite despises more
Than a tangle in the string.
Inversely,
There is nothing the kite loves more
Than a young child's cry — "Be free!"
And a pair of scissors.
Icarus realized his folly all too soon
Or else, he always knew it was futile
As the kite rises blissfully

- *sonder* -

Separated finally from its ball and chain
We all want to kiss the Sun,
To cradle the world in our arms.
The phoenix resurrects,
the kite catches a new air current,
And the world becomes ever more distant
From the aspirations it contains.

The Rhythm of Change

Mitchell Eltzeroth

I stand
on the sea's shore.
Worries wash away
with the rhythm of the tides.
In and out.
In and out.
The beat of my breath
joins them.

But the sea's
calm countenance conceals
the war beneath the waves.
Grains of sand separate
with each swell.
Torn apart
by the turbulent tides,
never to meet again.
Former friends and family
fated to become fond memories.

Waters recede
the sand lands
among strangers.
Perplexing pebbles and
shells surround him.
Hoping for a home,
he settles.
Then air.
A moment to breathe.
Suddenly the swell snatches
him away again.
Confined in the cycle
while others are doomed
to the depths.

I sit in silence.
Listening
to the truth in the tides.
The rhythm of change.

Icarus

Ella McDivitt

The rubbery soles of my tennis shoes cling to the sandy red rock underneath me, as if begging me to not go a step further. But I do. I walk myself right up to the edge of the cliff and stare down at the pebbled shore beneath, foamy gray-blue waves smashing against the rocks. I am one step and a light gust of wind away from tumbling over the edge, my body smashing onto the shore like a flesh-and-bone wave.

My father's voice beckons me away from the edge. "That's far enough." But is it? I feel myself drawn to the two hundred feet that lie between me and the water, as if I could fly down like the shrieking gull that spirals overhead. He speaks to me in harsh, fearful tones. He plays out a scenario of falling, waiting, unsure if my broken body is still alive. I am too close to the sun.

I can picture this scene, though my father thinks I can't. I can imagine handfuls of hikers staring in horror as I somersault through the air, my hot wax wings dripping into nothingness, landing on the beach with a sickening crunch. But this is not the scene I crave. My father thinks I have a death wish; I do not.

What would I see, as I wait for helicopters to arrive? Lying on the beach, the frigid waves of the Gulf of Maine washing over me—I do not imagine I could be in pain down there. The beach is pebbled with millions upon millions of rocks that press into my damp skin. The sharp, unforgiving points of shells, slick driftwood, cold, salty wind surrounding my brokenness. The chilly air stinging my nose, my eyes, streaming with salty tears mingling with the seafoam. The pale and gentle warmth of the Northeastern sun resting on my body, not oppressive, only a ghost of a touch.

There, where no one can reach me. Hours and hours alone. The steady rhythm of the waves my only clock, to rest among the rocks my only task, scuttling hermit crabs my only companions.

I do not imagine I can feel pain.

Again

Anna Blower

Nature comes to its end.
Sounds of the grass embracing my feet.
The trees begin a brittle sleep as the leaves reveal their character.
Calming kisses from the breeze.
Singing crickets praise the soft air.
Spiders rebuild their webs from the day.
Noir creeps into clouds, and the moon highlights their framing.
She stares back, breathing relief into our lungs.
Restoring peace to the shredded heart.
Nature comes to its end,
To experience,
The beginning,
Again.

- sonder -

View from the hotel window in Assisi

Annie Lingren



I still pick at my scabs

Maya Hawkins

I still pick at my scabs

Because yes it's ugly when it dries up

But when it heals

There's a pink hue of infancy

A part of your skin has been refashioned

To make you new

And exposed

Why must the air touch the webs that adorn the outside of me

Why have i been stretched so far

Where if i pull on the thread I'm a loose pile on the floor of my flesh

Where if I flinch at the touch of your calloused hand

I pull

Away

I yank myself out of your embrace

You said it doesn't burn when you touch the stove anymore

Because your fingers have been so worn from the world

Paper for hands

Folded and written in red

Dragging long lines of weakness and
worry
Either way i love you in the mess of my heart

I still think about my salvation
Your son still reminds me of how close
I've come to forgetting
the final squeeze of your hand
Where your fingertips spread apart each strand of my hair
On a loom of your story that you still write
when you're gone
I've sat here
Unfinished

Picking at my crusted blood
Letting it become red craters
On the surface of the planet that still encircles you
Calming, lazy circles that threaten to lead me astray
because I've done the same thing over and over and over and
over again

- *caesura* -

It's hard to watch the sun rise
it's so pink when i close my eyes
and feel it wash over my face
with every sun rise
I know that it's not the end
And every day will still begin

fear

Natalie Shiels

You have this little voice in your head, the one that replays every awkward moment or tragic end as you close your eyes at night. It governs your life. You think of everything in terms of being perceived — how do you avoid being the center of attention, the butt of the joke? You triple check your hair in your phone camera on the train; you wear simple, plain clothes; you avoid construction sites at midday.

And none of this is bad. You just want to put your best foot forward, make sure that people see you as you are. Or as you want to be: careful, respectful, understanding.

And it's not just about the way you look. You let Brett talk over you in work meetings and smile politely on silent Zoom meetings because — what if you don't have anything substantial to say? What if they hate it? You can't lose your job. You always wait a little too long before turning right on red because you don't want to inconvenience other drivers. You don't leave the house after dark, triple locking the door and turning every light on.

But at some point, after years of carefully placed bobby pins and sharp winged eyeliner, something else seeps in.

You step out of the house without looking in the mirror. You wear loud patterns and aren't worried about if your outfit matches perfectly. You take the shortest route, past the construction site at midday, and put up a middle finger without a second glance.

You hesitate to call it courage.

This new thing, unnamed and unknown, is a little exciting. And maybe it is brave — stepping out to try new things and be someone you've never gotten to be before.

But then you realize why everything has been so quiet.

You have always been careful, respectful, understanding. That voice has taught you how to be safe. Protected.

But now that the constant warnings have been silenced... there's a ringing in your ear. You take a step, then another, then another, and before you know it, you're halfway around the world, London, Lagos, Lisbon. You've found yourself in a new place, surrounded by strangers.

You start doing whatever you want. You stop thinking about the consequences or the people you've left behind. You leave the house after dark to get a late snack and don't even consider what the shadows might be hiding. You wear a full face of makeup and curl your hair just to go to the grocery store; then show up to work in sweats and a messy bun. You roll your eyes when it's warranted and snap back when it's justified.

You try not to be ashamed of the places you've been and the things you've done in the name of this newfound confidence. Because this is better than the caution, right? This is easier.

If you have always lived by that voice, how are you supposed to survive when it's gone?

It doesn't even register to you that you've stepped into the street until the car passes less than a foot behind your back, the wind whipping your fraying braid over your shoulder.

The danger has started to become fun.

How close can you get to the flame before you pull back?

How far can you lean over the edge before you fear the fall?

- *caesura* -

There is no limit, you decide. On the roof of your apartment building, you wonder what it would be like to touch the stars.

Rebuild

Ella Wortley

I lay in the middle of the rubble,

Watching the ash pour down—

Adorning my hair, clothes, face,

Remains of what I thought was home.

You can't fight an earthquake built of tragedy.

You're lost and afraid, and nothing is safe anymore—

Torn from the weak hands of a child.

Now, you must be your own home.

Discover the bricks that you held close to your heart,

And uncover the mortar of things that are constant,

Lay them slowly, carefully, patiently.

Your back will ache with sadness—

Grief over the life you wished to have,

Fight it.

You are building a home.

Place the boards of things you love down in a majestic pattern,

Cover the walls with items that bring you joy, peace, and comfort.

Your home will be beautiful.

- caesura -

Sleep on the things that bring a smile to your face,
Dress yourself with happy memories and blessings.
Warm yourself with the sun beaming from proud smiles,
And eat and drink with the ones,
who help you fall in love with being yourself.
It will take time.
It is worth it.
Rebuild. Rebuild. Rebuild.

Contributors

Elise Adams is a contributor to this year's issue of *Caesura*.

Abigail (Abbie) Beliles is an undergraduate in English and was born and raised in rural Indiana. Her work has previously been accepted in *Caesura* and *Lit Mags*. She loves writing stories of all kinds, whether it be novels or short stories.

Anna Blower is a Theater Major. She delights in nature, particularly the moon, which her poems are about. She started dabbling in Freeform poetry as a form of stress relief. It allowed her to process her emotions and focus on the good. She hopes her pieces help readers, as well.

Brittany Brown is a contributor to this year's issue of *Caesura*.

Zoe Cook is in her first year as another of *Caesura's* majestic editors. She is a sophomore double major in English Education and Honors Humanities. She enjoys reading biographies and realistic fiction. Her future plans include world domination via the invention of mind control shoelaces and becoming an English teacher.

Mitchell Eltzeroth is a lifelong Hoosier, writer and artist. Starting with skits for drama club, he enjoys writing of all kinds including short stories, screenplays, and poetry. He hopes to incorporate his love of storytelling into his art as an Illustration major.

Isabella Gusmano is a sophomore English major with a minor in Writing, and hopes to pursue a career in editing. She loves to read and write poetry and has a fascination with the Romantics.

Maya Hawkins is an English Education major with a minor in Writing. She has always loved writing poetry and typically enjoys sharing it with her close friends. She always wanted to be a writer but settled for the role of an English teacher to share her love of writing and literature with her future students.

Noah Hayden is a sophomore majoring in English, Writing, and Honors Humanities. He hails from Vincennes, IN, and attends classes here at Indiana Wesleyan University. In his free time, he enjoys reading and writing, and he is excited and grateful to share his pieces in the 2026 edition of *Caesura*!

Lleyton Kane is in the 12th grade at Mount de Sales Academy

in Macon, Georgia. He is an autistic writer with a keen sense of restraint and aesthetic empathy. His short story, “Staring Beyond Kings and Gods,” won second place in the 2024 *GISA State Creative Writing* competition, and his poem “Right to Possible” was awarded 1st Prize in the 2025 *Renee Duke Youth Poetry Award* competition. He has been published in multiple literary magazines.

Emmylou (Emma) Kunze is a sophomore at Indiana Wesleyan University and is majoring in Nursing and Honors Humanities. She has been writing poetry since middle school and finds her inspiration in relationships, life experiences, and Creation. This is her first poetic publication.

Matthew Lacy is a four-year contributor to and editor of *Caesura Magazine*. In the process, he has made friends to last him a lifetime after he graduates and enters the world of public education, where he hopes to inspire a new generation of writers and poets.

Annie Lingren is a junior Studio Arts and Creative Writing double major. This is her third year on *Caesura*’s editorial team. Crafter of prose, poetry, and artwork, Annie enjoys indulging her whimsy in all possible ways and hopes that her work may be source of

refreshment for others.

Ella McDivitt is *Caesura Magazine's* Head Editor, and this is her third year working on the editorial team. She is a junior English and Writing double major with a minor in History. She enjoys juvenile fiction, romcoms, and adventure novels. She writes children's fiction, creative nonfiction, and poetry, and her future plans include writing and publishing children's novels and attending law school.

Natalie Shiels is a senior Creative Writing and History major. She's been writing across all genres for almost a decade and has been published in national publications and several undergraduate programs. She hopes to publish a collection of all of her works, displaying creative non-fiction and poetry side by side.

Katie Todd is a contributor to this year's issue of *Caesura*.

Abbey Toner is a sophomore at Indiana Wesleyan University and is majoring in Ministerial Leadership and Honors Humanities with a minor in Creative Writing. Her work has previously been published in *The Academy of the Heart and Mind*. After college Abbey plans to be a church planter.

Gibson Wing is an attempted writer and musician from Dayton, Ohio. His works include two (home) studio albums, as well as many essays and poems of varying quality. His primary goal in life is to be remembered but not perceived.

Adalynn Wollan is a Creative Writing Major. Poetry has always been Adalynn's most effective outlet. She believes it is an art form meant to be shared. Her poems speak for themselves, and she hopes they touch *Caesura* readers. She thanks Dr. Allison, Dr. Fayard, and her peers for helping her re-open these creative channels during her time at IWU.

Ella Wortley is a contributor to this year's issue of *Caesura*.

Ariel Zhang is a poet from California. She believes in poetry as a possibility. Ariel has been recognized by *YoungArts*, the *ruth weiss Foundation*, and *Chapter510*. She is fond of words, sunsets, and bagels.