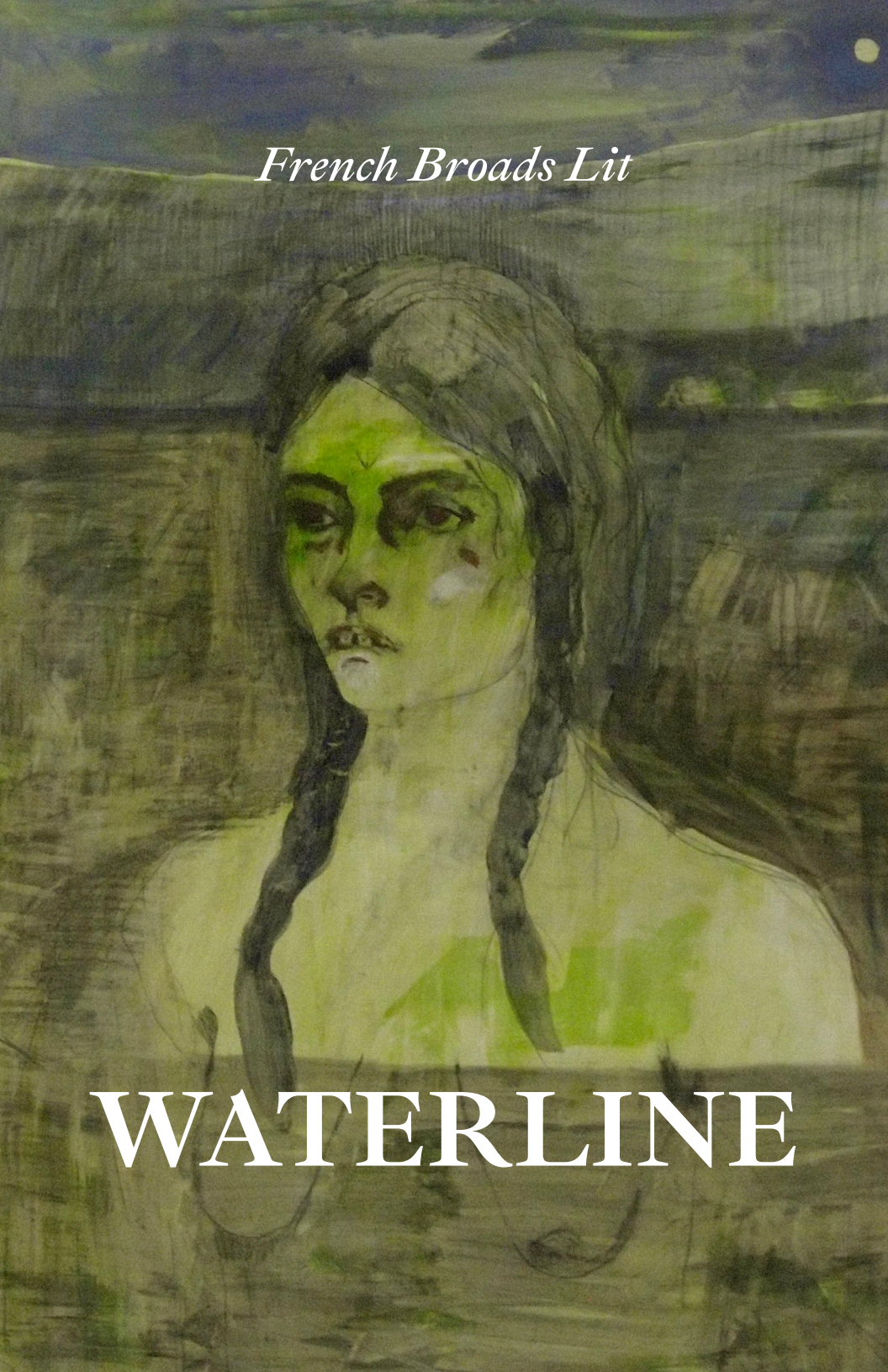
French Broads Lit



WATERLINE

WATERLINE

French Broads Lit Issue 1

Managing Editors: Sarah Oechsle, James Giovanni Novello
Contributing Editors: Barry Fields, Morgan T. Jackson, Marco Visciolaccio, Rebecca Buchanan, Jeremy Giles, Gina Malone
Typography: Sarah Oechsle

French Broads Lit is a not-for-profit literary magazine based in Asheville, North Carolina. Any proceeds from each issue's publication benefit a different organization working to improve life in Western North Carolina. All contributors to this issue are writers and artists with roots in Southern Appalachia.

Contact:
editors@frenchbroadslit.com
www.frenchbroadslit.com

GLASSMINE
PUBLISHING

ISBN: 979-8-9959392-0-7

Table of Contents

"...and when daylight came the worst scene of desolation ever viewed in the mountain became visible. The river began to recede, at times, and then, strange to say, would suddenly rise again, walls of water coming down the river like an ocean tide, with the thunderous noise of waves beating on a rocky coast."

- Lucious Morse, Chimney Rock, 1916

It fills me with joy to present the inaugural issue of ***French Broad Lit: Waterline.***

Waterline was initially conceived in April 2025, when, like tulips and daffodils, friends who lost their homes in Hurricane Helene began to return to Asheville. After the gray ruin of that winter, the shades of green that gushed forth in spring to cover the wreckage became my favorite colors. From that new growth, ***French Broads Lit*** and ***Waterline*** were born.

The months following September 26th, 2024, transformed my belief in community. Having been born just before the new millennium, I've known a cynical, dissociated world, both over-exposed and under-connected. But in the clear air after those days of rain, the truth of human nature came into focus. I saw people and communities come together in a way I had been naive to. I saw compassion. I saw love with deep, deep roots, and a generational strength born from a culture of taking care of each other. Despite the years I'd already called Asheville home, I took root in that upturned earth, and this place became my home.

Waterline is not about Hurricane Helene, but what comes after. It's about days sitting in the dark, and it's about stepping into the light. Two springs later, we look up from the downed oaks,

flooded banks, and the wreckage left behind to another bloom. Our hearts have surveyed what was lost, and now we ask, "what wants to be born?"

Thank you to our editors for all of your help and patience in allowing this issue to grow from seed. Above all, we want to thank the talented writers, poets, and artists who contributed to *Waterline*.

We hope that this collection of works will live up to its intention: a gift to a community and a place that we love. Appalachian roots grow deep, and even when the topsoil gives, come spring we will still have flowers.

-Sarah Oechsle, Managing Editor

the watering

it is two hundred years from now and I am
down by the creek, on the embankment

no one can see me and so much disappeared
everyone and buildings and the gentleman

sitting behind the counter at the cluttered
country store and refrigerators with the soda

pop and vanished the names of the towns.
What is known for the fewer here still

walking, breathing are the forest trees
and their qualities, the smell of the soil

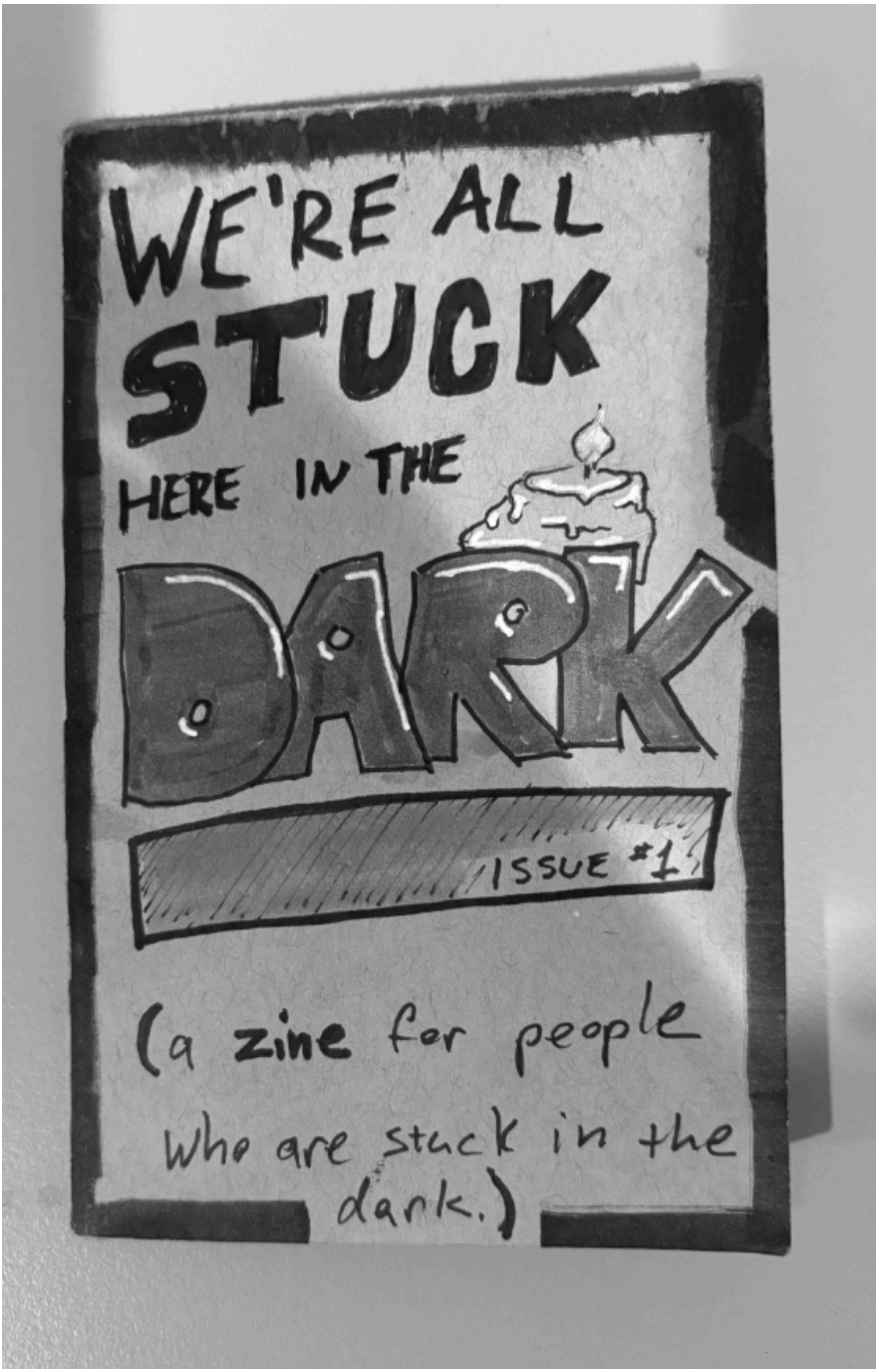
that we bleached before the blood. I cannot
remember all that much as meet upon it

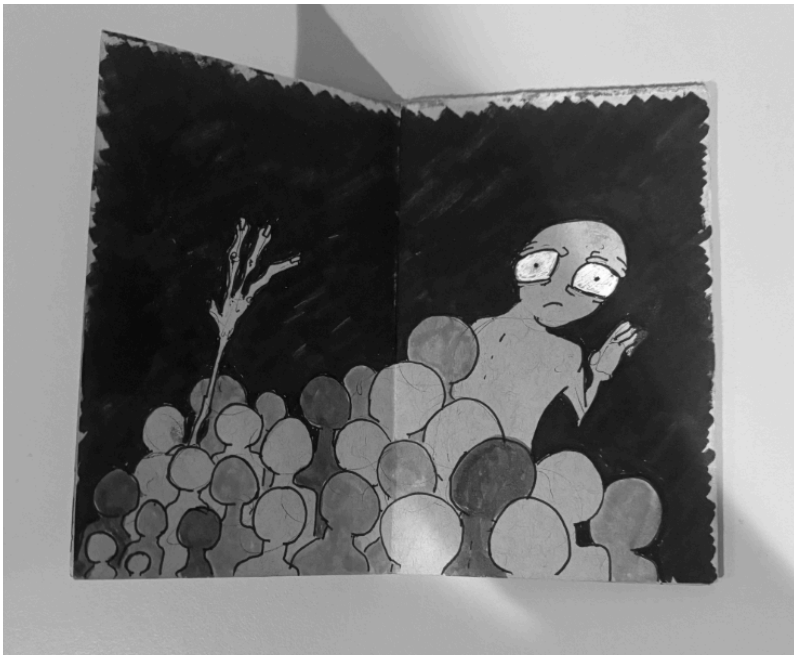
right now in new day. I am out of history trying
to learn a survival and where to sit among all

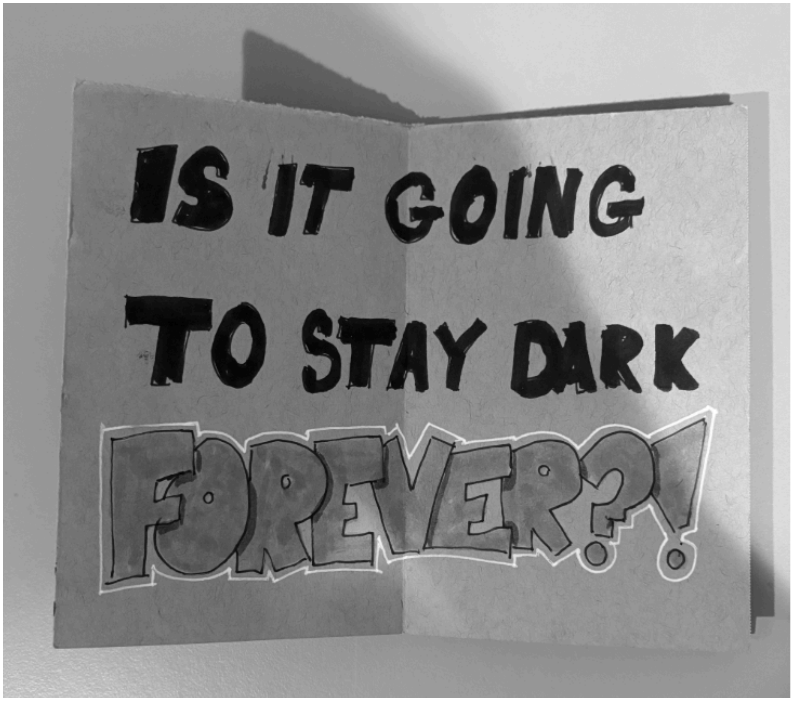
the creatures. The rocks and river are named
doctor. And whomever said to you it is two

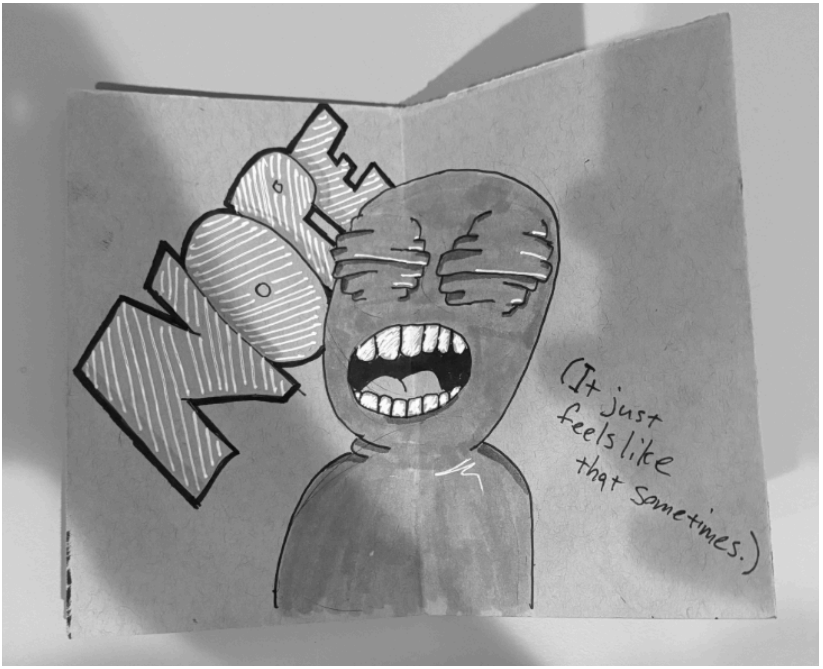
hundred years from now, let it be a lesson not
to trust, for already the measuring's begun.

Timothy Dodd


WE'RE ALL
STUCK
HERE IN THE
DARK
ISSUE #1
(a zine for people
who are stuck in the
dark.)




IS IT GOING
TO STAY DARK
FOREVER?!


(It just
feels like
that sometimes.)

We're All Stuck Here in the Dark

Nick Valente's series, 'We're All Stuck Here in the Dark', was created in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Helene. In the first days of what would become months without power and water, he created visual interpretations of what it felt like in the form of zines, with four issues in total, all created by candlelight.

8

What Wants to be Born: Floods, Fungi and Showing Up for Each Other

by Genevieve Barber

Asheville, North Carolina—my home—has always teased us into thinking we can heal. In the 1800s, it was tuberculosis patients. Today, it's the junkies and drunks, climate migrants, and all those whom Western medicine has failed. In these mountains, we find healing hands, springs, and vistas. The acupuncturist, the shaman, and the counselor offer their answers. Healers and the wounded come together in this valley ringed by mountains. The Blue Ridge Parkway goes nowhere fast, a slow love affair along the Appalachian body.

Here, nature is robust. Warm, wet air from the Gulf hits the escarpment of our mountain chains, rises, and makes rain. Some of our counties get 90 inches a year. Glaciers never crawled across this land, and the sea receded long ago, so our ecology is ancient and varied. Our topography lends itself neither to the combine harvester nor to post-WWII horizontal development. Try a small tractor for the family farm or a field hoe for a personal vegetable patch. Here, we find fewer cul-de-sacs and fast-food arterials. True, development swallows a new section of mountainside daily, but the wild tangle of prehistoric plants returns quickly. Clear a patch of earth and watch the wild blackberries and pokeweed grow before our eyes. Mother Nature is modest. She hates being naked, especially in Western North Carolina.

Into this fecundity spins Hurricane Helene. News organizations are slow to grasp the threat, but the National Weather Service does at last sound the alarm on September 24th: historic rains on the way. Still, a day before Helene's arrival, few have seen fit to evacuate. My wife grew up along the bayous of southern Louisiana. Her people are accustomed to the calculus of wind and water, knowing when to get to a friend's place on higher ground or drive north to Baton Rouge.

But in Western North Carolina, people tend to stay put. And, if we do leave, who will take care of the garden, the beehives, the old dog who needs eyedrops? A daughter had twins in Hickory; a son is out of detention and wants to get clean. Here, we need people to host a weekly Sangha; who have the keys to the church that holds a recovery meeting. If we go, we'll miss game night, the Plants for Everyone sale, the neighbor singing in the Wild Asheville Community Chorus, the LEAF festival. And what sunset over the Smokies, redecorating our skies daily, ever looks the same? This place is sticky, in the best way. Before Helene, we all look at the forecast, but not a single person I know leaves.

The rains begin on Wednesday, a stalled front over Southern Appalachia, while Helene gathers strength over the Gulf. Like all self-respecting gardeners, we have a rain gauge, a clever glass contraption mimicking a science beaker. By Wednesday evening, the gauge approaches 10 inches. Our crawlspace begins to flood. We grab shovels, a pickax, and our wet vac. It takes two hours to fashion a crude gully—dubbed our "French

Whore Drain"—to redirect the water, but it works. Everyone around us with a basement sees it flood that day. The rains continue Thursday. We help a friend dry out her lower-level apartment. It's the same all over the neighborhood—doors open, dehumidifiers running. The early storm has saturated the ground, and the rivers are already running high. The hurricane has not yet arrived.

We let our dog sleep with us Thursday night. A runty Redbone Coonhound, she is a poor bedfellow, stretching into our space, ears flapping. Around dawn, the first great gusts of Helene shake our windows. We hear the wind coming from the East long before it arrives. Trees bend sideways. Rain whips against the side of our home. Several transformers blow around 6 am. We lose power, internet, and cell service. Our faucets run sluggishly, then stop altogether.

By 11 am, the gusts come further apart. People emerge from their homes and begin comparing notes. Our French Whore Drain has held, and we've stayed dry. My wife and I live in a neighborhood off of Haywood Avenue. The ridgeline bisecting much of West Asheville split the rainfall in half. Water found other places to go, so our neighbors have fared well, though downed trees block most of our streets. Corners of homes are clipped off, and one family had to huddle downstairs while a tree came through the roof. But they made it out. As patches of blue sky appear overhead, we cluster on a neighbor's porch, drink coffee, and—I'm stunned to recall—even laugh. Helene has crawled West. Surely the Smokies will pacify her for good.

We'll clean things up, help each other, and endure the inconvenience of lost power and water for a little while. But the crisis has passed. Our neighbor's porch is maybe 300 yards from the French Broad River, but high on a bluff with no sight lines to below. People begin walking by, towards Riverview Drive, where a break in the trees allows us to view the River Arts District below. A hushed crowd gathers, and we join them.

There is a moment in disasters when our concept of what's happened, built from planks of assumption and experience, collapses. On 9/11, I stepped from a classroom of ninth graders to see hundreds crossing the Brooklyn Bridge out of Manhattan. An office worker in the crowd caught my eye. He walked as if sedated, a computer bag slung across his chest. Although it was a cool morning, patches of sweat spread on either side of the strap. It was only then that I understood: this was a catastrophe.

And so too at that moment, we join the crowd on Riverview Drive and first see the River Arts District. Or what was left of it, now drowned by angry water. RAD, as it's known, lies just below the confluence of the Swannanoa and French Broad rivers. Both have reached historic levels and utterly devastated everything in their path. Shocked into silence, we follow others down to the Haywood Bridge. Hundreds of people line the railing, trying to make sense of the scene. The River Arts District has disappeared. Two-story buildings are almost fully submerged, great trees uprooted, a river crowded on summer

weekends with lazy flotillas of tubers has been transformed into deadly rapids. A school bus floats by, then a mobile home. Lawn chairs, a swing set, pieces of roof and foundation. A cat balanced on a pallet is miraculously rescued before colliding with the Craven Street bridge.

My wife and I quickly discover that our bikes are the best way to get around, and we visit other vantage points. The wide cornfields of the Biltmore Estate have become a lake. The Citgo on Amboy Road is underwater, a tanker mostly submerged. The air reeks of gasoline. Cell service is out to the entire region, and the only way to get news is by word-of-mouth or to see it with our own eyes. We ease our bikes around downed trees, but no matter how much we try to absorb, we can see so little of what has happened to our city.

II

The stories trickle in over the next few days. A downtown hotel has Starlink internet, and coverage from the outside world slowly reaches us. Information still passes mainly from person to person, a tapestry of loss. Our city is accustomed to tropical and ice storms, and to big wind. Trees come down, we lose power, but we always recover quickly. We've had our legendary flooding in eras past, but this rainfall is not something anyone alive has seen before. Spruce Pine records 24 inches. Our own lot gets 22. Twenty-five hundred square miles have witnessed a thousand-year flood.

Little-known streams and creeks, ones we could leap across or easily wade, become destructive torrents or conduits of the deadliest mudslides. Garren, Flat, and Little Crabtree Creeks. The Cane, Toe, and Catawba Rivers. In Fairview, a mudslide deposits a debris pile two stories high in Eileen's yard. It spares her home, but a couple miles away, another slide kills eleven members of the same family. In Barnardsville, Morna watches Ivy Creek sweep away the school her family had built, called The Children's Garden. In Green Mountain, Knox, a beekeeper, is taken by the Toe River, along with his fiancée and her two children. His body is not found. In East Asheville, Jill tries to escape her house but is turned back by the rising Swannanoa. Her neighbors keep driving and are lost. Her other neighbor climbs to the roof but drowns anyway. Yet another hangs onto a tree for eighteen hours before being rescued. Jill has lived richly, has studied with Thich Nhat Hahn, and jumped from a moving car driven by—she discovered years later—Ted Bundy. She changes into her swimsuit and watches the water rise to her foundation. She makes her peace. But the water recedes, and she survives.

The winds have barely stopped blowing before Western North Carolina enters the "Heroic Phase" of the disaster. The collective mobilization is astonishing to witness, and even better to join. In Barnardsville, the old firehouse becomes command central, transforming into a large, free grocery store. Civilian crews clear roads and begin the long work of restoring the electric grid. So many people come to donate that volunteers must direct traffic. Outside of the firehouse,

whiteboards list the needs of community members: "Dillingham / Tree on house, need excavator." "Sugarcreek Road / Install culvert." In Marshall, locals set up operations at Nanostead, a tiny home building company. There's a kitchen, a place to change clothes, and a shuttle to get volunteers downtown, where the French Broad crested at 27 feet and overtook Main Street. Hundreds join the effort, and when the US army finally arrives, they are amazed at the scale and professionalism of what we've already accomplished.

In the following days, helicopters crisscross the sky. The Harley-Davidson dealership in Black Mountain becomes a landing pad for operations into remote regions. Many roads are still impassable to cars, so people take horses instead, plentiful in these rural hills. They pick their way alongside the washouts like hero cowboys. Help arrives from all corners: the Cajun Navy from the South, the National Guard, electrical crews from everywhere. In my neighborhood, Ben and Mandy host a dry toilet workshop. Five-gallon buckets, pool noodles for seats, and sawdust. At our house, we use an iron pole meant for a bird feeder to hang a "solar shower," a glorified IV bag. Someone has a generator or solar panels and shares power. Someone has a cistern or well and shares water. Someone has a freezer full of food to distribute. Everyone has something to offer. No one wants to stop and let the shock of it all catch up.

In between lugging water, checking on neighbors, and worrying about my own emotional numbness, I can't resist knocking into the dark speakeasies of the internet once service

slowly returns. Madness comes from all parts of the political spectrum. The New York Times runs solemn pieces, but the comment section is filled with messages that could be summed up as, "Maybe now those Trumpers will believe in global warming." Or the breathless citizen-investigators of Telegram claiming lasers strengthened Helene, FEMA seized supplies, or that the disaster is a land grab for companies wanting to mine lithium.

Just as a flood will pick up everything in its path, so too will a flood of information, grabbing clips and posts indiscriminately. This debris piles up and we are left to sort what's true from the dis- and mis-. Is the river mud so toxic that boots are melting in Marshall? Neighbors talk about raccoons behaving strangely and dogs taken to the emergency vet. But when actual accounts emerge from Marshall, there are no melting boots. Is the lithium land grab legitimate? Esther Cunningham—local beautician turned eco-hero—would urge watchfulness. When the Forest Service wanted to drill for oil and gas in the '80s, she helped fight them off. That same decade saw the Department of Energy eyeing our area for nuclear waste. There is a legitimate history of mistrust between the people of these mountains and the large bureaucracies of the flatlands.

Physical recovery will take long, careful excavation. And so too do genuine accounts of the disaster need time to surface. Gardeners try not to rush to conclusions. We prefer more seasonal evaluations. And regardless, we've got water to haul and a trip to Barnardsville to deliver supplies.

We start hearing the word "war zone" used to describe parts of Asheville. It's a careless phrase for an American, considering we've exported our wars for over 150 years, and have not collectively sacrificed for one since, arguably, World War II. Hollywood, not warfare, has better prepared us for something like Helene. We love our movies about twisters, volcanoes, and asteroids. And ever since a character named Superman appeared in the 1930s, we've loved our heroes too. The Helene heroes come in helicopters, on horses, and by foot. The Tyvek coverall is the costume; shovels and crowbars their implements. The days after the storm are desperate and exhilarating. People "rush to the scene," "come to the rescue," "get to work." But after that? What happens then?

III

At House of Mercy, pastor Chad quotes Romans 8:22 in his first sermon after the hurricane: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning together as it suffers together the pains of labor." The groan is good, he tells the congregation, a flotsam of retirees, ex-drunks, and recent inmates from the Swannanoa Correctional Center for Women. House of Mercy meets for worship in the tasting room of The Devil's Foot Beverage Company. Sweeten Creek flooded the building, but did not rise high enough to damage the modest sound system. The room is clean and bright that morning. "It can be tempting," Chad says, "for the insulated to ignore the everyday suffering of creation. Something like Helene can startle us awake. Pay attention. Listen to the groan and ask—what wants to be born?"

At 12 Baskets Cafe in West Asheville, patrons place their lunch orders. Today's menu is overflow from restaurants around town: pulled turkey, rice and kale, green salad, and fruit. Connie tells me we've been feeding fewer people since Helene. Pop-up kitchens have appeared around town. It's easier to find food, at least for now. The cafe fills to a comfortable level. There's a friendly bustle and familiarity, volunteers and customers sitting together, catching up. The tables are round, by design. The 12 Baskets community includes the poor, the unhoused, those suffering from addiction and mental illness, but everyone is seated and served equally. There is no head of the table. The Fall 'Zine, a compilation of writing from the cafe's Friday workshops, is dedicated to Hurricane Helene, but the poems rarely mention the storm. Instead, they explore the groans of uninsulated lives. Lives for which Helene was just another grim milestone.

"I've been waiting for the manual to magically appear. The manual for a life well lived... When do the answers come instead of the questions?" - Mae

"How to be a human being?
First, learn how to fall.
Second, learn to live in pain.
Third, learn to get lost and find your way again."
- Shunyu Huang [From *the intersection: A 12 Baskets Zine]*

Jacob plays guitar outside in the garden, a late-season tangle of red amaranth, cosmos, and purple coneflower. Gourds hang

from a crooked trellis near the takeout window. People come for their bag of groceries, picking from a box of avocados softening in the sun. On the sidewalk outside the cafe, residents of Pisgah View, a gritty section 8 complex, mix with parents pushing $500 strollers. Helene took remorselessly from many, but she also cut the breastbone of the city and spread apart her ribs. The heart lies exposed, at least for now.

IV

October passes. The silver maples and oaks that kept their leaves through Helene's savaging now drop them, exhausted. The Halloween costumes are low concept: elves, ninjas, and dinosaurs. Farmer Greg picks me up on a Saturday morning. We are headed to a gathering to inoculate oak logs with shiitake spores.

"Do you want to ride along the river?"

"Sure," I say, even though I don't. It's been a month since the storm, and I've been hiding on my ridgeline for too long. So, we drop down to the French Broad. Here, still, is the drowned gas station, the wrecked coffee shop that had Bluegrass on Saturday afternoons. Helene damaged or downed 40 percent of Asheville's trees; heirloom oaks were some of the hardest hit, their broad canopies catching the hurricane winds like sails once their ancient root systems could no longer hold the over-saturated ground. The riverfront is strip-mined, a dusty, brown expanse. I'm too ashamed to admit how much I miss the dog

park. How trivial. Greg and his wife moved from Phoenix, where they farmed trees. They came as climate migrants. It wasn't so much the heat as the incessant, dry wind that had become commonplace in their last several years. Their trees would dessicate and fall over, and their business took the hit. Too little rain for them, and now far too much. The middle ground is no longer anywhere to be found.

We reach our destination in Shiloh, a well-loved ranch with a front lawn covered in raised beds. Twenty of us—permaculturists, foodies, and the post-Helene lonely—say quiet hellos. We place our drills and potluck contributions on a folding table and circle up. Shiitakes will grow in a variety of hardwoods, but if they had their way, they would choose oak. Our host Beatrice has salvaged maybe 100 pieces for us to inoculate.

"Mushrooms are a commitment to the future," she says. Our work today will bear fruit—and the cap of the shiitake is indeed a fruit—in one to two years. Birch and alder decompose more quickly. They would produce sooner, but for not as many years. Cedar would resist the mycelium altogether, allowing for no fruit. Oak is the poignant middle way, a wood that surrenders slowly. We may get five years of harvests from these downed trees. It's an idea we're barely ready to entertain: that something good could come of Helene. "Silver lining" is a discouraging phrase, overused, often by people who haven't lived under the cloud itself. As we select our first logs to drill, no one says, "silver lining." But these pieces of tree are literal

windfalls. Taken down by the storm and now available for all to use.

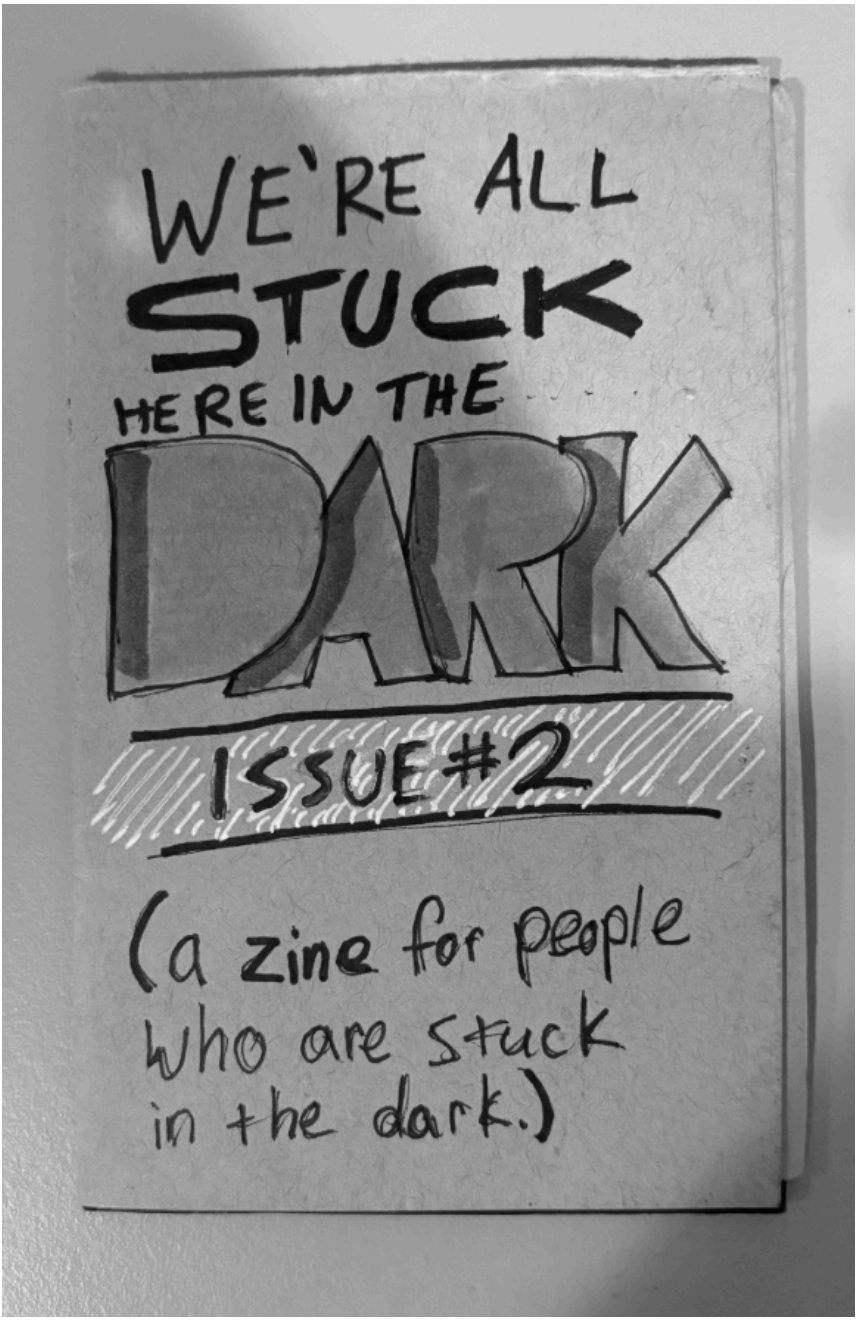
We get to work, drilling holes four inches apart in staggered rows, then tapping in the shiitake plugs. In the Spring, when the mycelium wake up, we may pound them to encourage fungal spread. "We are wounding this log," Beatrice reminds us. Mushrooms struggle to grow in healthy wood. They come as colonizers, parasites. Helene brings the tree down, and we continue the work with our drills. If we're lucky, the mushrooms will join in the destruction and give us fruit.

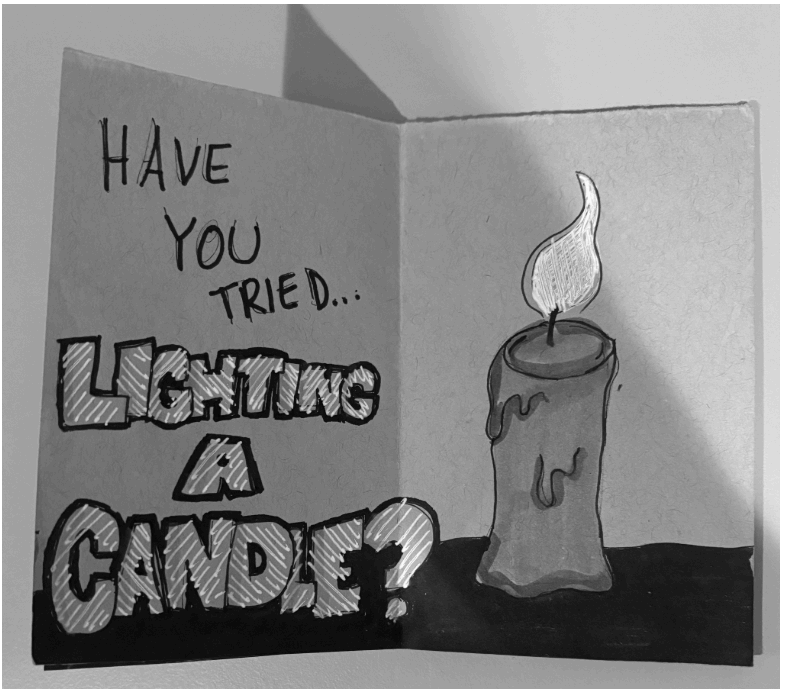
Greg and I load up the truck with a dozen inoculated logs and head home. We reach a crossroads. "Turn left here," I suggest, but he continues straight. "This is how I discover new paths." So, we take the longer way through the heart of Biltmore Village. Here is historic All Souls Church. The flood tossed around its pews like kindling. The Grand Bohemian Hotel, my mother's favorite and the last hotel I stayed in with her before she got cancer, remains closed. Andaaz, an upscale Indian restaurant, is smashed up as badly as the Wendy's. A tanker is tipped on its end in the Swannanoa River. There's so much dust in the air that we keep the windows closed. It's hard to look, but impossible not to.

And yet the wounds of Western North Carolina have called forth a web of response. They've always been here, these fragile filaments of mutual sustenance—indeed, they are found on any day, in any good place. Storms or clear skies, so many would be lost without them. There is a web above and within: the grief

and wisdom of Ancestors, the suffering of Jesus, and the balm of the Holy Spirit, dukkha and liberation, hitting bottom and getting sober. There is the web on the ground: pop-up supply stations, "free stores," water trucks, shower stations, the US Army, and an army of volunteers. What do you need? What can I offer? And now, invisible but insistent, there is a web below: the mycelium awakened by the trauma, transforming the damaged places, reminding us that this is not the end of the story.

We cross the French Broad into West Asheville. To resist change speaks of spiritual immaturity. All things change; they are, in fact, constantly changing. And yet, passing the flattened riverbanks, we can't help but want the grand old oaks back, the everything and everyone back. The list of losses is too long. But in a couple of years, or maybe only one, there will be mushrooms.


WE'RE ALL
STUCK
HERE IN THE
DARK
ISSUE #2
(a zine for people
who are stuck
in the dark.)


HAVE
YOU
TRIED...
LIGHTING
A
CANDLE?


IT
MAKES
THINGS
ALMOST
NOT
DARK


BUT
ALSO
NOT QUITE
LIGHT.

This is a Cold House

The furnace is ailing again, and the cutting wind off the Elizabeth River
has located and infiltrated every entry point in this 100-year-old house.

Two-space heaters are humming, and the warmed oven door is cracked
open just enough for Thanksgiving 2016 to escape. Daddy, gone four years

now, at the table working a puzzle, Momma questioning the quality and capacity
of my kitchen chairs, and the young folks playing Heads Up in the living room.

Pierce is still alive, all 18 pounds of fluff, and smacking the kitchen door for attention.
Kelly cooked enough food to feed ten families, and yet we managed to eat it all.

So much has changed since then — people and pets no longer with us. By God's
will, my choice, or their choice. I need to fiddle with the furnace later.

It's unseasonably chilly on this October morning. This is a cold house.

Carol Parris Krauss

Cover art:
Character Study for 'Undine' Crankie by Primrose Coke
Pencil, oil and gesso, on paper, 2024
Used by Permission

"She slept beneath the bridge in shallow waters
turning in fitful currents dreaming of dusty toes on hot asphalt"

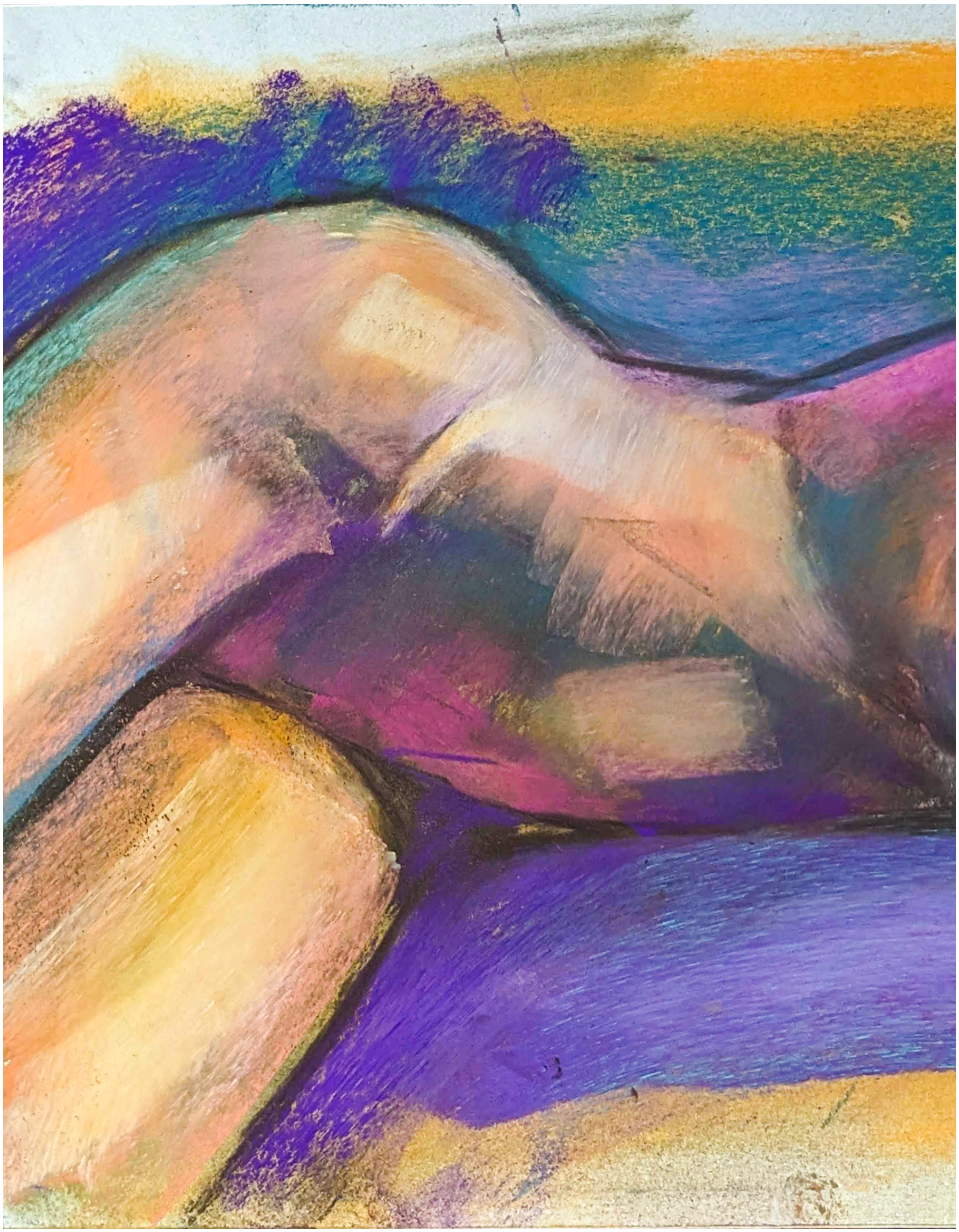
When Helene dragged her water-clogged and muddied skirts through the town of Marshall late September 2024, Primrose Coke had yet to move into her studio on the island. Carrying this feeling of good fortune one feels after a near miss, she set up a canvas tent she had painted with stripes and scallops in her yard. That same day, an invitation for Tea and Solace was nailed to the garden fence.

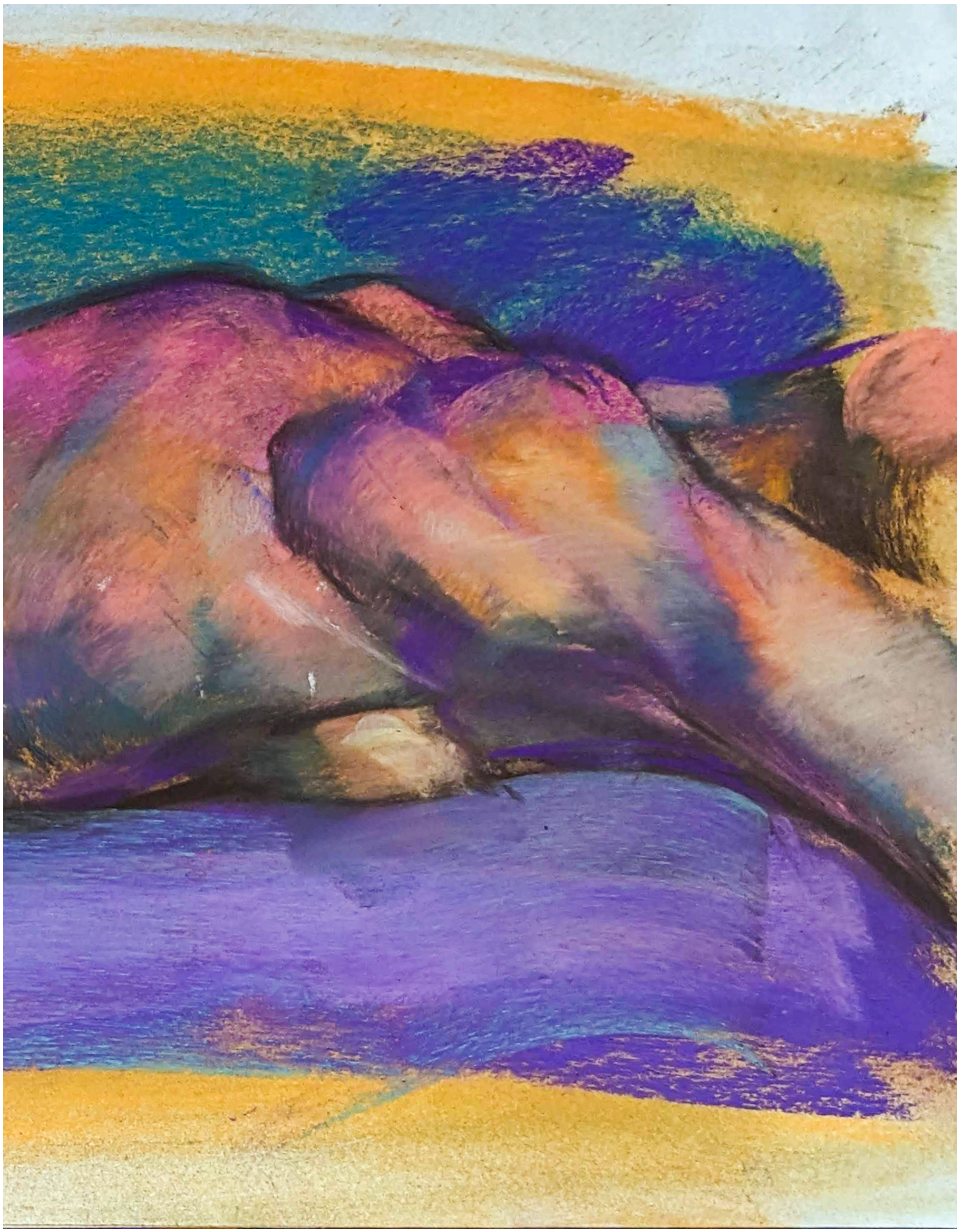
Many came to The Tea Tent with sodden stories from the flood, others with optimism for a 'new world' where community was strong, and work mattered.

The Crankie story 'Undine' was born under this canvas. A small town love story, between a lively green water creature and a 'wistful' boy, a fatherly Heron, an unheeded warning, a flood, a loss, and a grieving.

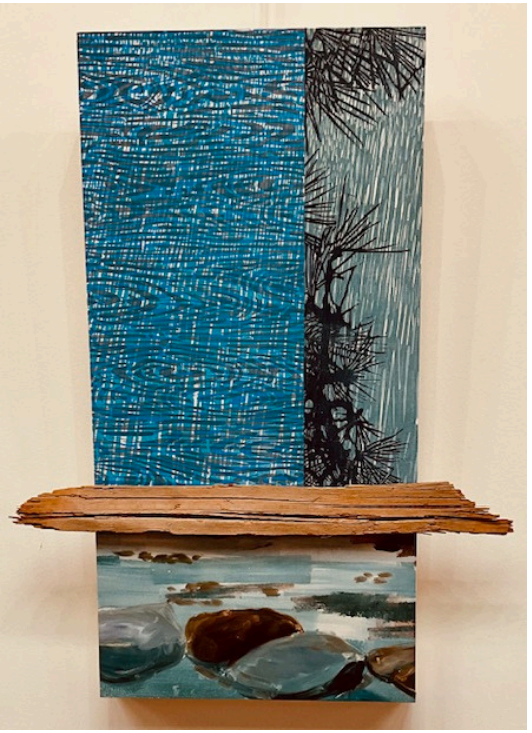
Primrose has performed her Crankies in and all over the Asheville area in hollers, and on hills, in theatres and in barns. The storytelling box is lit, the paintings are scrolled and the tale unfolds.

Excerpts from 'Undine' Crankie (*right*):
'Undine' Crankie by Primrose Coke
Pencil, oil and gesso, on paper, 2025
Used by Permission





August Hayashi by Alex Alford
12"x18", pastel on paper, 2025
Used by permission



"In the aftermath of the flood, I found myself captivated by the profound and surreal beauty of the destruction, the worn and broken surfaces that emerged after the waters receded from the building that once housed my studio, and the astounding amount of refuse piled high all over town. The studio contents are under those piles. Loss and heartache are under those piles. The flood with its chaotic surge and shear force unearthed and rearranged the landscape all around me, our workspace and our lives. It washed away the familiar and exposed the raw and unchartered ground. It created chaos where there was none. It took lives and livelihoods and homes and brought deep grief. It also gave us great opportunities for change and for our community to come together. Now that spring has arrived and the rebuilding has started, renewal is all around including the unstoppable force of the rebirth of nature. I'm inspired by the tenacity of seedlings, pushing through the mud and silt, the way communities are rebuilding from the remnants and the collective spirit rising from devastation."

-Denise Markbreit, Artist

The Mighty French Broad I/II
by Denise Markbreit
12" x 24" overall, Multiple woodblocks, mono prints, masa paper. Akua ink, cold wax, found objects from the flood zone

Duck by Spencer Beals
Pen and acrylic on panel
Used by Permission

Eyes of Appalachia by Spencer Beals
Watercolor and mixed media
Used by Permission

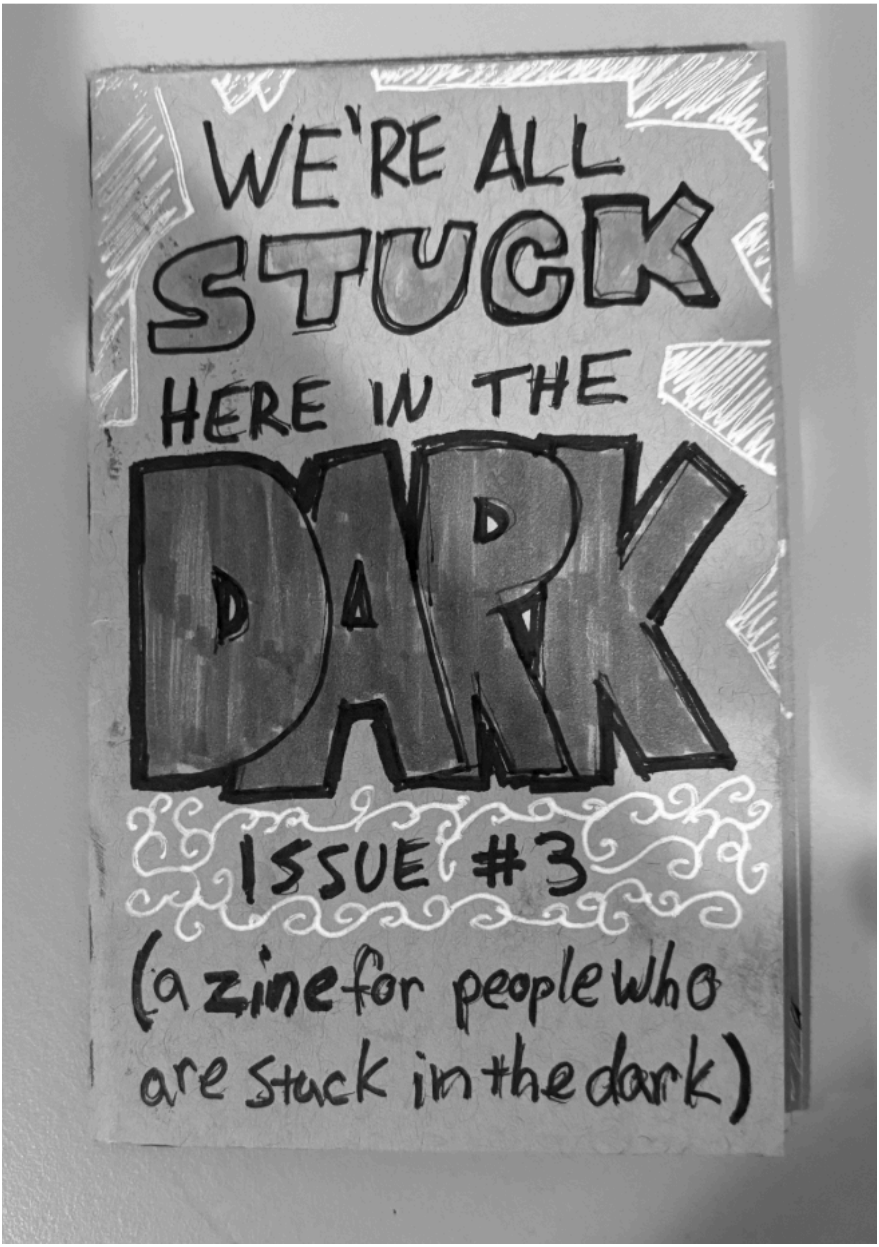
Spencer Beals was one of many artists whose studio was flooded in the River Arts District during Hurricane Helene. While Foundation Studios was still under six feet of water, Beals and his friends canoed in to start recovery. Among the rubble, he recovered this piece, Eyes of Appalachia, and was able to largely restore it.

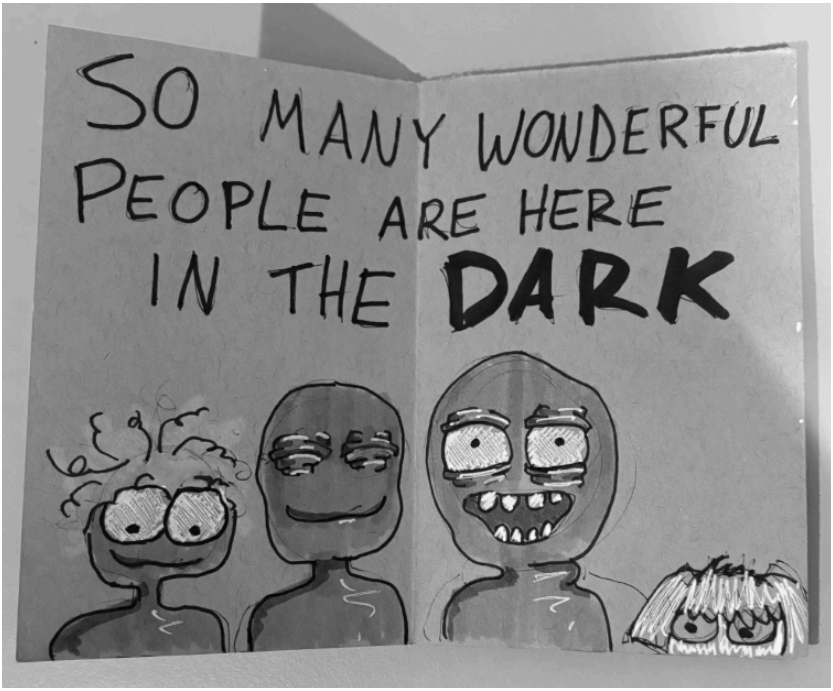
Original condition of the recovered artwork:

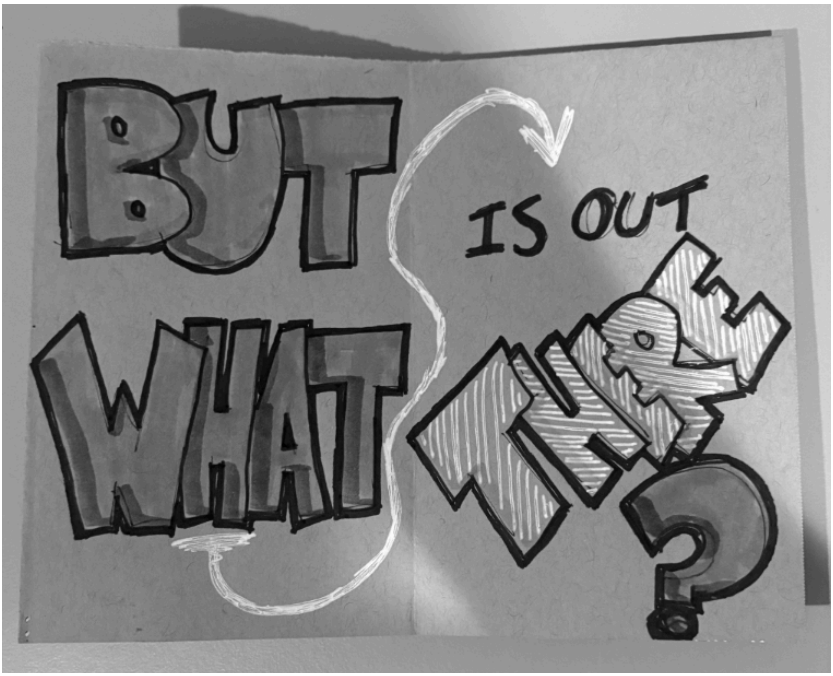
Good Boy

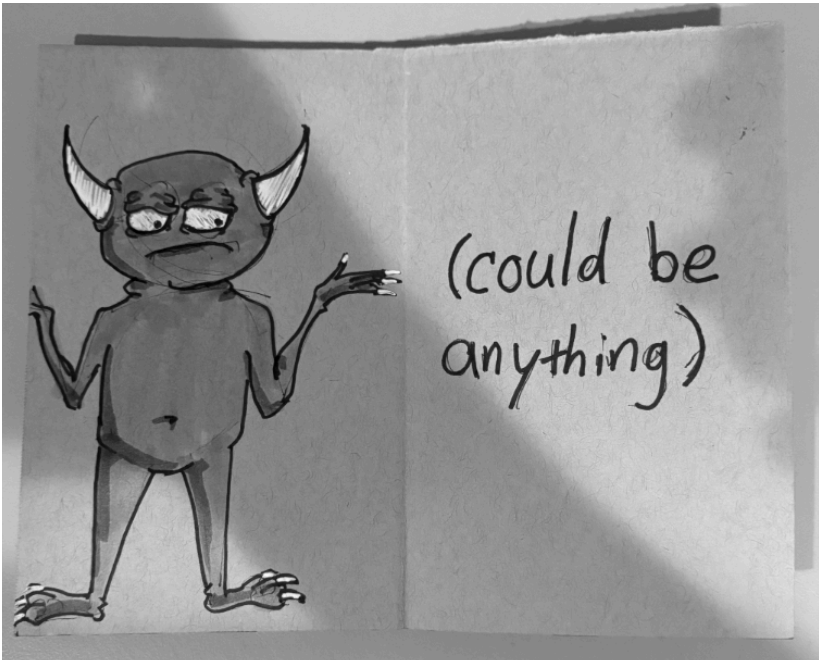
Becks' feet, far from fitting her brother's battered boots,
gathered at the outer edge like him.
At 11, she already knew she'd have
to compensate for family patterns,
those worn ways that want for repetition.
"Mom, can I take something from the barn?"
The flood crushed, hushed every wild thing.
"Yeah, I guess so. Like what?"
The angry mud-water pushed and pulled,
piled night and river through three walls, collapsing loft,
taking things it didn't need the way boys do.
Shovels, rakes, trimmers.
Bridles, bits, brushes.
Spirographic spider webs, swifts' and swallows' nests.
That thick scent of horse and hay,
Becks' second best to biscuits,
now mold.
And the heart of it all, Becks' bay Morgan, Judge.
Her step-father, far from fitting as father,
told her Judge was gone,
not gone like dad and brother who chose gone.
Gone like Grandma and Rocky and Racer.
But Becks couldn't see Judge as gone like them.
In her mind, which was far too big for her heartly head,
Judge was galloping, whinnying,
racing hawks on hilltops.
"I just want this lead," its snap hook still holding the twisted tie ring.
"That's fine," Mom said as she flipped debris with her foot.
Becks rubbed the metal clasp with her fingers like a rosary,
mouthing "good boy,"
feeling for the freedom it was leading,
a freedom far from ever fitting him in this barn.

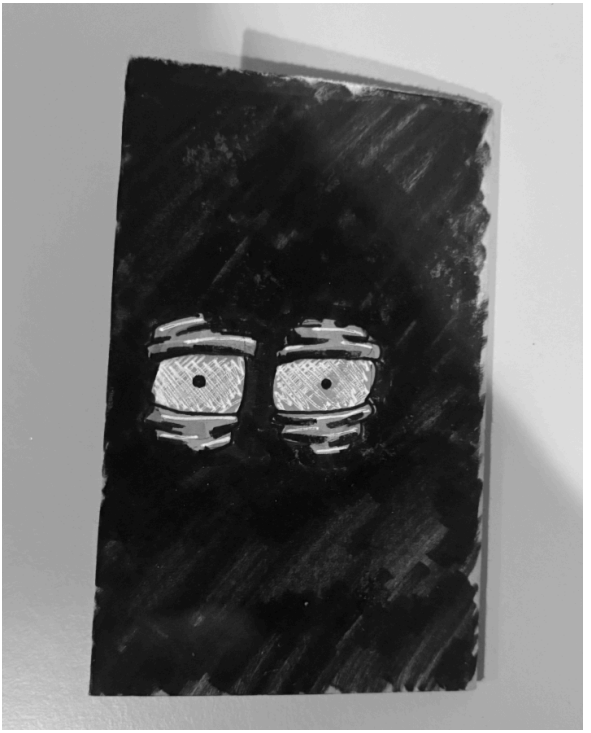
Brian Longacre


WE'RE ALL
STUCK
HERE IN THE
DARK
ISSUE #3
(a zine for people who
are stuck in the dark)


SO MANY WONDERFUL
PEOPLE ARE HERE
IN THE DARK


BUT
IS OUT
WHAT
THERE
?





Nick Valente

38

Body Painter

by Joseph R. Goodall

I avoided the mirror as I entered the empty art studio, but I could picture the reflective surface plastered with handwritten affirmations, palm reading ads, apartment listings for climate refugees, and calls for show submissions. What I didn't want to see among them was my own reflection.

I pulled off the mask covering my nose and mouth and shook the ash from my unwashed hair, then shuffled to the kitchenette and brewed a cup of tea. The evening sun carved a red circle through the smog out the third-story window as I settled on a stool at the back of the room. I shook paint tubes from my bag across a desk and set a fresh canvas on a rickety easel. The model wasn't there yet—as was my plan—but no matter the subject, I always started with color. Skin colors are as varied as hues of soil, my laidback roommate would say. She was the one who had talked me into this.

Today I was feeling orange. I would imagine my favorite sunset vistas, rendered fantastical by the ever-present fires and worsening pollution, and begin to channel my years of landscape painting onto the canvas. This was practice, psychological gymnastics, easing myself through comfortable territory before diving into the nerve-wracking waters of the human form, surrounded by potential critics.

I started with smears of stark white on the textured surface, then deep red, mixing shades while I worked. As I extended a

loaded brush toward the canvas, a glob of red dripped on my bare knee, splattering across the hem of my cutoff jeans and spilling onto the toes of my well-worn Chucks. The smeared paint resembled blood, like the skin over my kneecap had been turned inside out. I trembled at the image of leaking bodily fluids, of my dermis jumpsuit filled with organs and intestines and brittle bones, stuffed with bundles of nerves and blood vessels, held in tension by cords of muscle and tendons.

Your body is a landscape, my roommate told me the previous week, when I had vented to her about my dilemma. Swiping at the glob of paint with a handkerchief, I grimaced. It was like a hot wind rushing past me, carrying everyone else in some swift, turbulent direction, but I could not let go to follow its path. It was a mystery to me how Michelangelo could have stomached so many human dissections. It is said he carved a crucifix for an Augustinian friar in exchange for a room to study cadavers. I had half a mind to scrawl an obscene image and send it to the wealthy snob who had been funding my landscape paintings for nearly a decade. At first, it was exhilarating to make a living with my talent, to capture scenes of beauty even in the aftermath of a flood or a drought. Now the old man had invested in an underground home, while all along he'd likely been profiting off the polluting practices that contaminated the air and water and ravaged the energy grid. How much blame was on me for ignoring it?

I straightened my torso and replaced the paintbrush on the desk. The back of my legs and glutes stung, so I gave them a

break from being forced against the sharp edges of the stool. On the far wall was a poster of David in all his nude, marble-white glory. No one looks like that, I thought, but everyone wants to. There were dozens of my painted natural scenes hanging on patrons' walls, showing a world that no longer existed. There were hundreds more stuffed in my closet or rotting in a landfill that no longer felt true, were nothing but flimsy nostalgia.

The door to the studio flew open. A stream of boisterous young voices entered, followed by our instructor, an imperturbable woman with a golden mullet and hazy blue eyes. She moved to the stage at the front of the room, removed a bowl of fake fruit, and replaced it with a plain, rectangular wooden bench with a faded blue cushion.

The long, narrow room pulsed with chatter as the other artists removed their masks and set up their easels and tools. They were all probably making the switch from being internet influencers, following the trend back to physical media, flocking to the lavish underground homes of the wealthy to hawk their wares.

I took a sip of tea and glanced at the round, analog clock above the stage. My brow tensed as I noticed the base of the normally-round clock sagging, as if being melted by a blazing fire. The plastic frame stretched down the textured brick wall, threatening to subdivide. The three hands spun around its center like spokes on a bicycle wheel.

I blinked twice to adjust my contact lenses. Now the clock read half past six, perfectly round again and portraying only minuscule, second-by-second movement. I rubbed my eyes and took a deep breath, then swirled my paintbrushes in a cup of grayish-brown water in hopes the motion would clear my thoughts.

The obscured sun cast a muted auburn glow across the room, as if my workbench had tipped over and spilled old paint on the wooden floorboards. Four other artists flanked me, two on each side in a "V" formation. The air in the room smelled like burnt wood, aged cheese, and decaying flowers. With fitful growls, my stomach reminded me I hadn't eaten since breakfast.

The instructor's cat, Skittish, leapt onto the windowsill, inspecting me as I adjusted the canvas on my easel. His whiskers twitched like the wagging finger of a strict headmaster. Feeling a smile play at my lips, I stroked the raised fur on the back of his neck, eliciting a gentle purr. As the door opened again, the cat scampered away.

The art instructor led an elegant, dark-skinned woman to the platform at the front of the studio. My eyes went to her face first, full lips and sharp cheekbones, her skin a warm blend of vermillion and ebony. She disrobed, facing the door, her body in profile to her audience. She turned her head and chose a starting pose, one leg over the other, her bare back bending at the waist and forming a curved bow. Her arms were the boughs

of a graceful willow tree, comfortable, natural, relaxed. I wished I could ask how she felt about our gaze, considering her entire body was vulnerable to our interpretation.

Easing onto the stool again, I rubbed my lower back and winced, trying to calm my breathing. A few decades ago, in art school, I skipped figure drawing and told my advisor I needed a religious exemption. My deep-seated aversion to human subjects was like a harsh internal voice, one that didn't quiet except in the presence of a distant horizon.

When I was a child, my grandmother took me south to the beach. Surrounded by exposed bodies and salty surf, I learned to swim in that chaotic, green gulf, squeezed into a hand-me-down bathing suit a size too small. There was a rainbow sheen on the choppy water, and I watched, mesmerized, as the sun revealed cascading hues stretching in every direction. I wanted to learn how to paint every color I saw. That is, until a slew of dead fish washed ashore, caked in tar, and everyone got out. I couldn't stop thinking about all those nearly-naked human bodies emerging from the ocean, stained with midnight-black oil.

My stomach rumbled again as I took a sip of tea, careful not to confuse the mug with my brush-cleaning cup. I considered the enviable cast of characters in the studio with me. Their eye for movement, musculature, expression, and detail. My cheeks flushed with jealousy as I held out my thumb, squinting and measuring the distance from the top of the model's head to her

collarbone, from her shoulder to her waist, her hips to the base of her backside, her thighs to her toes. I tried to sketch an outline of her body, around the patches of orange on the canvas. Rough pencil lines for the head and shoulders and curves for the waist, though on second glance, the shapes looked like two angular birds pecking at each other.

Incrementally, the woman's head rotated until her face was turned away from us. As her neck swiveled, rivulets of hair fell across her shoulders. Her skin wrinkled and scrunched like a washcloth wrung out over a sink. I blinked several times and rubbed my forehead, but I kept my pencil tracing across the canvas as the model continued to turn her head. Meanwhile, the sandy-haired instructor milled around the studio to inspect our progress. I coughed and leaned into my canvas as she passed.

When I poked my face around my easel again, I nearly choked. With a sharp noise like a champagne cork, the model's spiraling head popped off and rolled to one side of the platform. Her eyeballs squirted out, one after another, and bounced against the wooden floor. Perturbed, I sat frozen in place as the rest of the model's headless body remained erect on the wooden bench like the Winged Victory of Samothrace. Nearby, the instructor stared lazily over the painters, none the wiser to the body parts spilling over the stage platform.

A moment later, one of the model's arms, slender and brown, toppled from the cushioned bench. It moved like an inchworm

across the blue rug on the stage, bending at the elbow. The appendage pulled itself up the brick wall, fingers clutching the plastered grooves. With wriggling leaps, the arm ascended toward the clock face at the top of the wall.

The model's head rolled from the platform and traveled down the aisle between the easels. On each rotation, the lips began to speak, alternating from yell to whisper, while the eye sockets remained dark and the loosened hair collected dust and crumbs from the tiled floor. Skittish bounded from the instructor's lap to chase after it.

My neighbor on the left coughed. I glanced over to see her canvas contained a fully embodied female form, all limbs attached. The artist next to her had added intricate shading to the arms on his painting. However, as my fingers began to move again, my canvas bore new penciled satellites orbiting the original scribbled figure, an attempt to portray the scattered body parts spreading around the room. I figured the other artists had ignored this development, or that time had continued moving for me while grinding to a halt for the rest of the onlookers.

On the platform, the decapitated torso remained seated, its posture unbalanced yet stationary like a headless Venus de Milo. The breasts drooped and eventually fell to the floor like sandbags.

"I always thought our chest was too small," the lips said at my

feet. The head had come to rest against the legs of my stool. "Barely see a difference now, if I do say so myself."

"You mean I barely see a difference," came another voice near the studio door. The eyeballs had rolled into a corner behind me, coated in red dust tracked in from the street, but the pupils continued to scan the room like a pair of security cameras.

"Let's not start an argument. We all know I'm our most attractive feature," said the arm hanging from the wall. "And I can do a lot more than most of our other parts."

There was a chuckle from the model's legs, still oiled and shiny on the subject's bench. "But we're more powerful, hands down. And the pun is absolutely intended."

The lips buzzed dismissively on the floor below me. "Brain cannot speak," they said in a droll tone. "But they would like us to know it's their mental acuity that holds us together."

Mocking laughter echoed through the room. "As if. Brain is just a lump of wrinkled tissue without us to boss around," said the breasts from their spot on the carpeted platform.

Unnerved by the model's head below my stool, I switched to a paintbrush and smothered the penciled outlines on the canvas with thick swabs of oil paint.

"What's this?" the model's eyeballs asked. I could tell they

spoke about me, their gaze hot on my neck. “We’ve got an amateur Picasso over here, totally butchering our likeness.”

“I think they’re painting a self-portrait,” the eyes said. “Hey, you—Arm. Get us back together. We gotta show ‘em what a real body looks like.”

“Are we on speaking terms again?” The arm paused its ascent up the far wall.

“Nothing like uniting against a common enemy.”
Skittish meowed and leapt onto my lap. The instructor sighed heavily and walked down the aisle to my easel. She clasped her hands behind her back and frowned at my canvas.

"You need to keep your eyes on the model,” she said, seemingly unmoved by my colorless face. “Let what you see talk to you, let it guide you." She grabbed me by the shoulders and leaned my body around the side of the wooden easel. "Look," she said, drawing out the word and making me feel prudish and stupid.

The studio darkened as the sun’s glow out the window was replaced by the ominous silhouettes of abandoned skyscrapers. In the lower light, I saw the parts of the woman sitting there, rearranged beyond recognition. Her bickering limbs were gathered around the bench like an altar. The face was turned toward me with its shadowy eye sockets, and the model’s arms held the two eyeballs up so that they stared unblinkingly in my

direction.

I leapt up and gasped, the sharp intake of breath filling my lungs with stale air. It felt like I was teetering on an unstable foundation, that my own body might mutiny against me and disassemble itself, my limbs seceding from their union.

Lurching forward to flee the studio, my shoulder collided with the instructor, sending her backpedaling into an easel. Some of the other artists stood, turning their attention toward my staggering escape. I could hear the ruffling of their papers and smell their mixed paints as I barreled through the door, careful even in my dazed state to avoid the mirror.

In the harsh glow of the buzzing light bulb, I finally made eye contact with my reflection in the smudged mirror. My lips pressed into a disgusted frown, but I willed myself to keep looking. Despite my paranoia, every piece stayed firmly in place. Fabric and buttons hid much of my body, a shield from my demeaning gaze. I turned away and sat on the stained toilet seat. Closing my eyes, I tried to picture the street I grew up on, to remember each detail of the tree branches against the sky, the contour of the land, the reflection of a bird in flight across the pond in the park. I gravitated toward these subjects because I could count on their simple beauty. For too long, I'd ignored their fragility.

After the disastrous childhood beach trip, I drew picture after picture on scrap paper at my grandmother's house, using every

crayon in the pack to capture the grotesque aftermath of the oil spill. My grandmother took issue with my depictions, saying I was exaggerating—the fish had died in a storm, or perhaps a fisherman's gas tank had been leaking. There was no use dwelling on it, so she threw my sketches away. When I told my roommate this memory, she said it was no wonder I freaked out over criticism and questioned my intuition.

With a deep breath through my nose, I opened my eyes and returned to the bathroom mirror. First, I pulled the sweater over my head, feeling the static zaps along the back of my neck. I swallowed, inspecting the wrinkled cotton shirt. It was tighter than it used to be. One button at a time, I opened it, progressively revealing the pasty skin of my chest and abdomen, branching stretch marks, my protruding belly button, the fat on my hips shaped like a gourd. Another button and zip, and my pants were at my ankles. I flexed my arms and twisted my lips to one side. I pushed my chin to my chest and pulled at the thinning hair on the top of my head. When I yanked my underwear down, the imprint of the elastic was visible on my waist.

I kicked off my pants and shoes and lifted one foot onto the ledge of the sink, my wiggling toes visible in the mirror. I turned in profile to view the bulge of my gut hanging over my pubic region, my knobby knees in two different sizes, the vague definition of my leg muscles. Tan lines created a patchwork of pale shapes across my body like continental land masses. There

was a scar around my left forearm, and a brown birthmark bearing tufts of hair on my shoulder.

I retrieved a small pad from my pants pocket and began to sketch my reflection. All in one, a full-frontal self-portrait as I faced the mirror, drinking in the shape of my body, including every part. I was a sunset, a nature scene, a cityscape, a still life, both the artist and the subject, neither trying to manipulate the other, just being and responding. For a moment I worried my body parts would begin to whine or cry out in protest like the model's in the studio. But they remained quiet, willing participants in this playful exercise.

I paused and glanced at the paper. Elementary shapes formed the foundation of my drawing—ovals of various sizes for my head, hands, fingers, and other extremities. A large curve for my abdomen, smaller ones for my chest, careful lines for the outline of my legs, unruly waves for my hair. As I stared between my naked body and the flat, paper-bound representation of it, a warmth of satisfaction fluttered in my chest. The pencil lines were not photorealistic, but they were true.

The room seemed more spacious as I scooped up my empty clothes and pinned the sketch pad and pencil under one arm. The tile was cold on my bare feet as I marched up the hallway to the studio. My nose stayed upward, relishing in the scent of microwaved food and leaking pipes as I felt my thighs chafe together and heard my knees continue to pop.

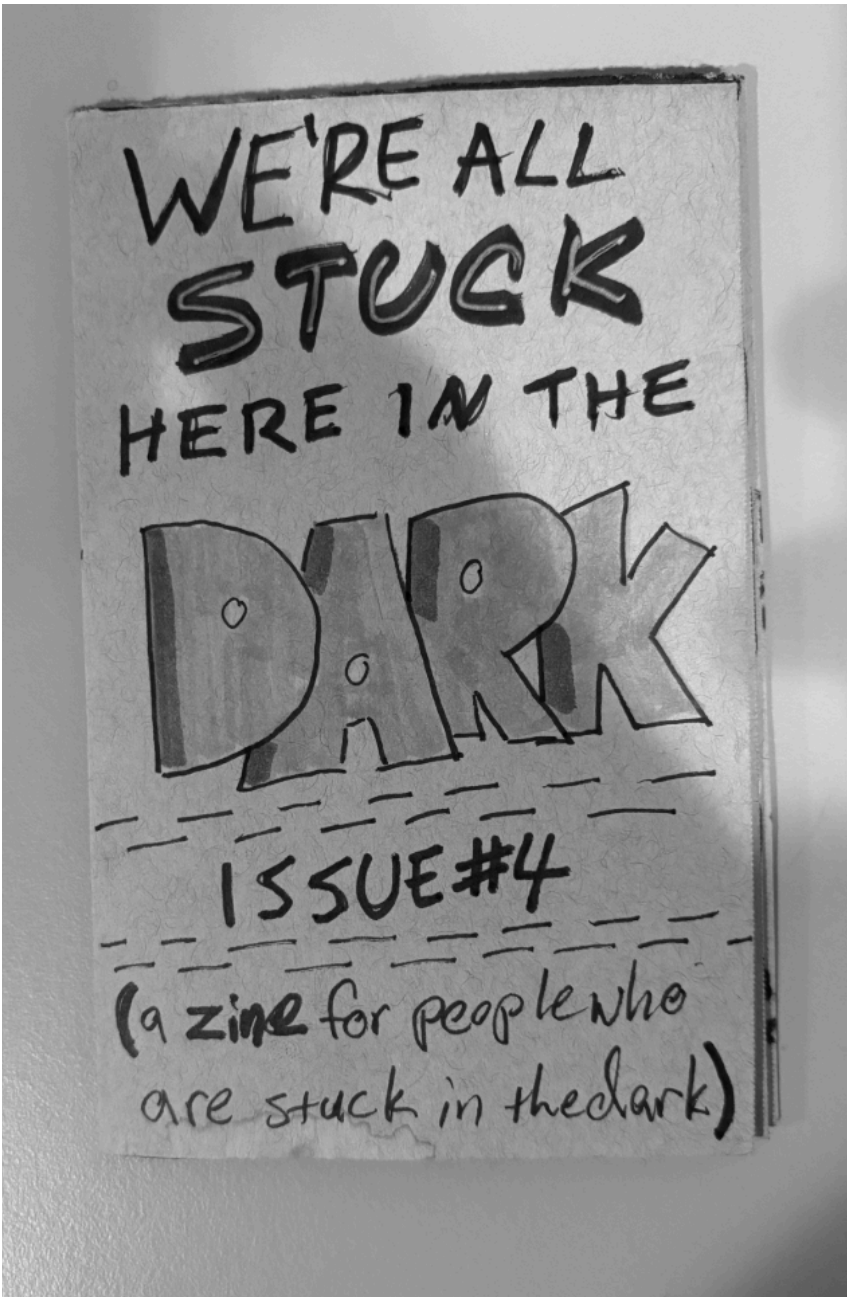
As I walked into the studio, I side-eyed the mirror and saw the swath of flesh as I passed, feeling the gaze of my peers. I eased my naked backside on the metal stool and placed the pile of clothing on my lap, content with maintaining a small level of privacy. When I looked up to the stage, I was relieved to find the model was in one piece again. I raised the brush to the canvas almost without thinking, and could hear the forceful prompting of the instructor in my ear to "look." It was a human body, more like mine than I would have acknowledged just an hour ago. A vast expanse of color and texture and beauty. A tiny, complex form made of dust.

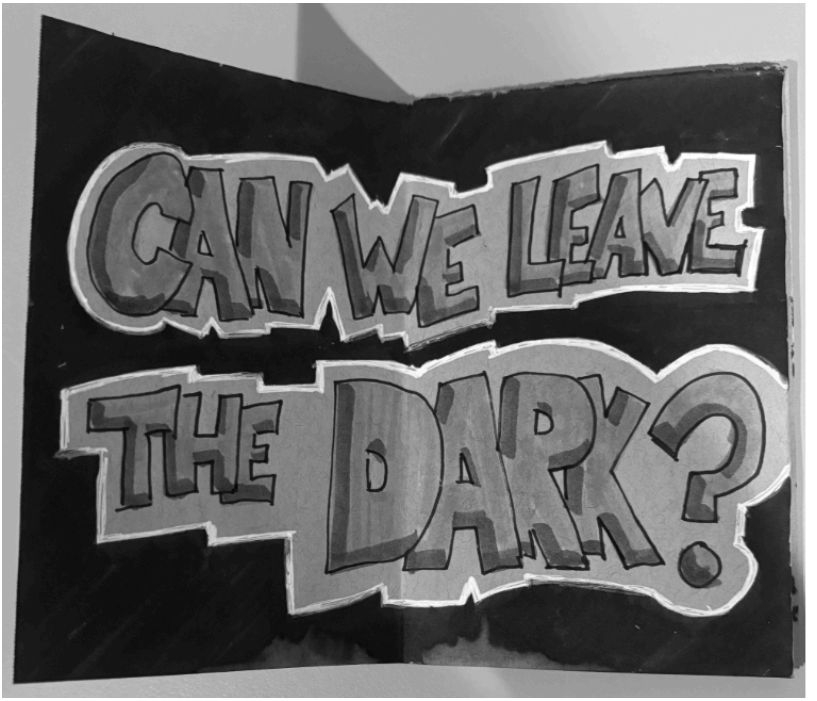
I started to add to my painting, but there was still something out of alignment. I could hear murmurs and restless movements among the artists, and I noticed the model break her eye contact with the back wall to deliver me a curious glance. The instructor tried unsubtly to get my attention.

After another moment of studying my subject, I dropped my clothes to the floor and again retrieved my sketch pad. Skittish circled my legs as I stepped over to the window and forced it open. The raspy evening air swirled into the room, eliciting yells and gasps from the other artists. I climbed out to the rickety fire escape, coughing against the dust, feeling nervous about the height but determined to expand my vision. Gripping the metal grooves with my toes, I crouched in a squat and set pencil to paper. In the polluted twilight, I could decipher the outline of a cell tower and a downed wind turbine in the distance. Below my feet, the skeletons of trees lined the

road. I wondered if anyone had ever called them beautiful, if somewhere within their roots and limbs they could still be considered alive. Next to my self-portrait, I tried to draw their solemn shapes on the page, the wood fibers and metal beams bearing witness to tragic neglect.

Behind me, the instructor and model called through the open window, their concerned voices stifled by masks. I'm not sure if they were startled by my lunacy or the red-tinged dust coursing across my bare skin. Maybe it was the entire scene: my vulnerable, contorted figure suspended above an overtaxed ecosystem, both body and city painted mauve by the sickened haze.


WE'RE ALL
STUCK
HERE IN THE
DARK
ISSUE #4
(a zine for people who
are stuck in the dark)


CAN WE LEAVE
THE DARK?


WILL
WE
MISS
IT?

Nick Valente

Piedmont Girl

What makes the Blue Ridge Mountains blue?
blue grass blue mountains

Winding up into Blowing Rock
A store that sells faerie dust and porcelain dolls
We're broke so we're making a business trip into a vacation

At Jesus camp a kid eats a mushroom and gets lost in the woods
In the dark the flashlights cut across the trees and people scream his name
He ate the mushroom because he thought it was the magic kind
It wasn't any sort of magic, but he got sent home.

Jesus camp was fun
It felt good to be a believer, or to pretend
To tell a lie to everyone else and myself
Waking up at sunrise to sing worship songs at the top of the hill
Put on skits about the messages of Jesus and get attention

We rode through the forest of the Smokies on horseback
my horse stumbles over a rock
It would be easy to tumble over the shoulder blades and fall face first
Taste all the dirt of home

Winston Salem has something to do with cigarettes
Julian with the grey streaks in his hair went there for school
And I never saw him again.

Now I have grey streaks and I haven't seen the blue mountains in years
I got off the plane in Cleveland and the mist of humidity reminded me of
North Carolina

In the summer the days lasted forever because it doesn't get cold at night
It just gets dark
And it was easy to sit in the Rose Garden and listen to cicadas
Stone tables and shadows of trees
Summer days in the art park doing nothing
not even drugs like my mom thought
And the memory amazes me
because how did we spend all summer doing nothing

The summer when we were thirteen my BFF painted my face like a clown
And we went to Harris Teeter to walk around and act crazy
And that was probably the last few months of my life
Before I knew about hatred and rage

At REI the guy who used to bully me in math class
Followed me around the store
I told him I moved to California
And I could tell he thought I was pretty now

Girls from chorus class
Are married to the Belgian twins who transferred junior year
They seem happy in the pictures

I'd swish the words around in my mouth
Before speaking
To make sure I didn't get an accent
Now when I get angry I feel the drawl sneaking out

As the plane flies overhead it's all green and trees
before I left for good I stood on top of a parking structure downtown,
looked out and took a picture of how it disappears into nothing,
thought about how I was going somewhere where I wouldn't see that again
But now I miss the disappearing edges
The fade out into nothing

I'm coming back for you Carolina
Piedmont girl bless your heart

Anna Tregurtha

during this rainy season I collect branches

sodden, fallen limbs I pile into what will blaze
in the candlewick days
of autumn

others I lay on kitchen towels meant to absorb summer's
harsh dampening – and soften
early descent

I arrange them in pitchers and jars, rusty-rimmed tins
knobby, twisted bouquets without color
or scent

without bloom or blush – just the barrenness of a film noir
clip, a stretch of shadow, a bony
beckoning

they are brush and ink, a calligraphy script meant
for sky, now cloud-scrubbed and windblown
to this place

this vase, where I compose a Kabuki dance
of branch and sculpt thorns
into crowns

Lucinda Trew

Poetry

Timothy Dodd is from Mink Shoals, WV. He has published four books of Appalachian short stories as well as four collections of poetry. ***Small Town Mastodons*** (Cowboy Jamboree Press) and ***Orbits 52*** (Broadstone Books) are the latest. His humble website is timothybdodd.wordpress.com.

Ms. Carol Parris Krauss is honored to have published in *Louisiana Lit*, the *Arkansas Review*, *Salvation South*, *Eclectica*, *One Art*, *Story South, The South Carolina Review*, and the *Mid/South Sonnet Anthology*, among others. *The Poetry Box* released her chapbook, *The Old Folks Call It God's Country*, in 2024, and *Fernwood* will publish her full-length book (Mountain.Memory.Marsh.) in November of 2025. Carol was born in Greenville, S.C., to mystical mountain people, raised in NC, and attended Clemson University. She currently lives with her St. Bernard, Martha June, in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia.

Brian Longacre has been an English teacher, writer, coach, truck driver, chef, house painter, and 911 dispatcher, and those are just the jobs he's not trying to forget. More importantly, his wife, Karen, and he have raised three daughters over three decades, and all four still ask him his opinion about important things like Taylor Swift lyrics and local coffee shops.

Anna Tregurtha is a writer and video artist. Tregurtha's pieces search for harmony in routine moments. There are constellations of meaning everywhere, and capturing them allows the patterns to be inspected closely. Her works have been published in *The Forgotten Writer*, *Same Faces, JAKE, super / natural* (Perennial Press), *Backslash Lit*, and *POOL magazine*. She grew up in the backseat of state-owned cars, driving around rural North Carolina with her mom who worked in tobacco prevention. The cars always smelled like artificial oranges. Tregurtha graduated from VCUArts in Richmond, Virginia. She lives in Los Angeles.

Lucinda Trew, author of *What Falls to Ground* (Charlotte Lit Press, 2025), is a poet rooted in the pine forests and red clay of North Carolina's Piedmont – and has deep family ties to the western part of the state. Her work has been honored with three Pushcart Prize nominations, a Best of the Net nomination, and Boulevard's 2023 Poetry Contest Award for Emerging Poets. Her poems appear in *Cagibi Literary Journal*, *The North Carolina Literary Review*, *Burningword Literary Journal*, *storySouth*, *Susurrus*, *Trace Fossils Review*, and other journals and anthologies. Lucinda lives, writes, and walks among trees with her jazz musician husband, two dogs, two cats, and far more books than she can count. https://www.lucindatrewpoetry.com/

Prose

Genevieve Barber is a writer living in West Asheville.

Joseph R. Goodall is a writer and civil engineer whose fiction, essays, and poetry explore the intersection of human communities and natural landscapes. His debut short story collection, ***What the Bird Sees in Flight***, examines the unraveling and reunion of a strong-willed farming family. Born in New Zealand and now based in Atlanta, he draws inspiration from watersheds, local history and a diverse range of storytellers. His work has appeared in publications such as ***Flora Fiction***, ***Litro USA***, ***The Masters Review***, and ***Appalachian Places***.

Visual Art

Alex Alford has been drawing the figure from life for nearly 50 years. Each week, from his Asheville studio, Colourfield, he hosts life drawing sessions - except when he's drawing in other parts of the world. His work, and his travels, may be followed on social media at @AlexDrawsLife.

Spencer Beals (he/him) is an artist best known for his detailed, imaginative worlds that people get lost in. He currently lives full time in his van and makes work in his art studio in the River Arts district of Asheville North Carolina. He blends colored pencils, markers, watercolor, and pen together to make intricate worlds exploring the natural world. Spencer graduated from MICA in 2022 with a major in General Fine Arts and a minor in Sustainability. Spencer is actively involved in creating community by hosting a bi-monthly sketchbook club and outdoor nature journaling classes. His interests lie at the intersection between outdoor education and making art.

Primrose Coke works out of her studio on an island in the French Broad river in Marshall NC. Her work delves into the aesthetic of the 'Old World', faded circus colors, Crankies, and giant shadow puppets adorn the walls, but the folktales she adapts for her crankie stories show signs of a sickening near future.

Nick Valente is based in Asheville, North Carolina and originally hails from Washington, DC. He has worked as an artist for 25+ years, previously as a music producer and, in more recent years, as a visual artist. Art is the portal through which he explores his internal self and attempts to make sense of a world that often doesn't.

Denise Markbreit is a well-known printmaker and mixed-media artist in Asheville, NC. In 2019, she established Asheville Print Studio & Gallery in 2019. Located in the River Arts District, APS+G quickly grew and became a thriving printmaking studio and exhibition space - the only one of its kind in Western North Carolina. After APS+G was destroyed, along with all of the artwork, archived, library, tools and supplies, Denise and her partner, Anna Bryant, opened a reimagined Print House in downtown Asheville with the help of the community. Her non-art interests include practicing Transcendental Meditation, playing Mahjong, gardening, combing antiques malls for treasures and knitting. She holds a BFA from the School of Visual Arts and an MST from Rochester Institute of Technology, and is a founding member of NYC Urban Sketchers and a former member of the National Art League. Her artwork is featured in collections around the globe.

Her work featured in *Waterline* was created post flood, in her new studio space. It explores the balance between destruction and creation, capturing the essence of resilience that emerged when the waters receded. Through layered textures, using many an earthy palette, the symbology of wind, wave, roots, wood, and foliage patterns, she conveys the tension between loss and hope. Her intention is to honor the scars left by the flood while celebrating the resilience that emerges—a testament to our ability to find beauty in renewal and strength in rebirth.

IN THIS ISSUE

Literature

Visual Art

French Broads Lit **is a not-for-profit literary magazine based in Asheville, North Carolina. Any proceeds from each issue's publication benefit a different organization working to improve life in Western North Carolina. All contributors to this issue are writers and artists with roots in Southern Appalachia.**