

VIRIDINE LITERARY



REFUGE

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Editors
Romy Morreo & Roger Niven

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“Torrent” by Romy Morreo

NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

Welcome to the ‘Refuge’ issue!

We begin with Ruth A Rouff’s “Druids”, a gentle examination of natural refuge that leaves a subtle impression of the ephemeral. This contrasts with the approach taken in Kendra Whitfield’s “Imperative II”, where nature’s resilience and longevity are highlighted. The co-existence of opposing ideas lends itself to the deeply personal nature of refuge.

Next comes Sienna Alpert’s snapshot of Sappho in “Unpublished and Burned”. This piece demonstrates the devastation that comes with refuge lost, and how external influences can impact our personal senses of self. Ian Brownlie’s “nostalgia” provides a guided return to safety, combining humour and a sense of belonging through shared experiences (“flowery twats”; if you know, you know, and we certainly know).

Sandra Beth Levy takes us on a touching journey through the fluctuating interpretations of a home in the poem “My Homeland”, evoking warmth through imagery, before “Please Don’t Kill Shadow” by Gunilla T. Kester snatches away that impression of refuge and replaces it with a fast-paced and anxious depiction of authentic struggle. Our final poem—“Refuge” by Sambhu Ramachandran—meditates on the idea of sanctuary in the form of love, with humanity and emotion taking centre stage.

The only piece of fiction in this issue is “Not a Bedtime Story About A Superhero, A Rabbit, and A Wolf” by Stephanie Ross. This compact narrative takes the reader into the psyche of a child and examines the concept of refuge from a place of innocence, despite the presence of a looming threat, and maintains a tone of rising dread surrounding the youthful perspective. Finally, we lighten the mood with Alaina Hammond’s script “Fancy Meeting You Here”, a meet-cute scene demonstrating the joy of human connection.

We’re proud to be able to present these incredible pieces, particularly at a time when safety feels threatened and uncertainty governs so many of our lives.

Long live the literary,

Romy Morreo & Roger Niven

CONTENTS

Poetry

Druids	Ruth A. Rouff	5
Imperative II	Kendra Whitfield	6
Unpublished and Burned	Sienna Alpert	7
nostalgia	Ian Brownlie	8
My Homeland	Sandra Beth Levy	9
Please Don't Kill Shadow	Gunilla T. Kester	10
Refuge	Sambhu Ramachandran	12

Fiction

Not a Bedtime Story About A Superhero, A Rabbit, and A Wolf	Stephanie Ross	13
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Script

Fancy Meeting You Here	Alaina Hammond	15
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Contributor Bios

22-23

Druids

Ruth A. Rouff

I have a favorite tree. It's a Catalpa
in Knight Park. Leafy, shady, it
has a knothole in its trunk that
looks like a mouth. As I walk
by, I imagine it's greeting me,
a rather low, mellow hello. Maybe
there's a nest of screech
owls in it that fly out at night,
I don't know. Hecate's gate.

With any luck, it'll be there
after I'm dead. For younger
folks to notice. Or not.

Imperative II



Kendra Whitfield

Wade in the surf that ruffles the shore, uncurling your toes in the damp sand
Scan the cloud-scuddled sky for seabirds, letting them watch you with avian
indifference.

Reach toward the inscrutable horizon, knowing this stretch is the closest you'll get to infinity

Scatter popcorn for the ravens nesting in your spruce tree, measuring the year by their arrival

Wander the woods behind your house, steeping in their green until you photosynthesize

Lounge in a deckchair above melting snow, soaking sunlight into your winter-withered soul.

Get lost in the museum of your heart, taking refuge among its artifacts.
Wander its hushed chambers with reverence, marvelling at its resilient existence.

Dance to the songs of its breaking, knowing you are always home.

Unpublished and Burned

Sienna Alpert

I picture Sappho watching herself leap,
grieving the representation of the isle, alike herself
Oh, lovesick whore, turning to madness
madness that is inherent to female anatomy
Instability compelled by a false heart, a death not holy as
her words; imaginary love, twisted snakes and chains
wrapped around wrists before swallowing salt. If she knew
what we tried to make her, I think she may have jumped
I picture Sappho of Lesbos sat in the heavens, next to
Aphrodite, unpublished and burned, lost to time

nostalgia

—————♦—————
Ian Brownlie

‘flowery twats’
says the sign
outside the hotel

i didn’t see it on first broadcast
i’m not that old
i had the dvd box set
i’m exactly *that* old

couldn’t get away with that kind of thing nowadays
they say

but i prefer
that we now live in a world
where so many more people
are familiar with the word ‘twat’

My Homeland

◆◆◆
Sandra Beth Levy

Sacred home within my body
within my love for my mother, husband, sons
ancestors I did not have the privilege to know
gassed to ashes, driven from their homeland
an old world full of rituals and dry dirt
too many violent boots –
carrying their homes in their hearts to my heart

home to my fevered regeneration through procreation
poetry, lilting and dancing at midnight moonlight
harvest moons, my two-year-old son saying
the moon is coming with us as he looked out our car window –
a moon is a home as we travel, not frivolous
filled with shine and mystery
a silver skin to graze our eyes upon

There was my home in Manhattan where I binged on soot
and loneliness, poverty and abandonment
lush store-front windows filled with elegant clothing
I could not afford, my home in college
where I entered myself connected with mentors
a lover, lucid dreams
tree lined walks around mansions
I lusted not for money but for comfort
stately architecture, security

my home now resides with my love of forty-three years
we live in a Victorian house one-hundred-twenty-years old
I am growing old, first finding many homes
I carry, stretch into, slumber deep within
I am a home for all those I love
discovering a giving homeland inside my own silken womb
for me to curl in
like an unborn kitten

Please Don't Kill Shadow



Gunilla T. Kester

Kneeling on grass
she stares
at my raised hammer

I remind you, she says,
you're still young
key on hook in woodshed

I no intruder
why always
they accuse me

every time I go border
men with dogs
call me out of line

touch edges
of my body
to them silk piece

cheap Steak
&Frites place
by train station

across fancy hotel
I scrub toilets
tables feed myself

when money
begin to vanish
into black hole

some \$50 at a time
they point me
but find never a coin

am I thief?

sweet airport dog
he follow me, even cuter
handler smiles 'This dog
never wrong'

go through every pocket
my bag my jacket my bra
panties tampons and I let him

what to do?
police hit&chase me
I hide behind wood pile

in junkyard between N Road
and C Street when dark
I come here not to squat

under clothes line in blue
shift while you lift hammer
like your mother

what can I do?

see shadow
line
cross my face.

Refuge



Sambhu Ramachandran

My eyes shepherd the blushes
grazing on the hillside of your cheeks

as evening webs the quiet between us
with filaments of russet and gold.

Your forehead rises like the dome
of a very ancient Jain temple

rendered in chiaroscuro by the moon.
The wind flutters the downy moth wings

of your hair split down the middle,
and puffs out the pleats of your saree

swaying like the mythical five-headed snake.
When I seek you, my hands become paddles

that row my body's kayak towards your heart.
If I am stranded here, look out

for a cork-stoppered bottle
bobbing towards the whelk-strewn shore

of your love. In it you'll find the message—
Do not attempt to save.

Not a Bedtime Story About A Superhero, A Rabbit, and A Wolf

Stephanie Ross

A child stood in his suit. Full-length legs, plush covered arms, body all white fur. His ears peaked on either side of his head, hearing across the globe. A superhero with a bunny tail that twitched when he wiggled just so. He knew because he'd practiced and learned the angles needed to see his behind in his bedroom mirror.

He wasn't a timid rabbit like the grey one he often saw near the backyard hedge. The one that froze faster than the others when he disturbed their evening meal of freshly cut summer grass with a side of dandelion and clover.

He sometimes joined the yard rabbits. Being still on all fours, slowing his breath, willing his heart to stop beating so loudly. He wasn't a timid rabbit, but it was good to be real, to know the feeling of camouflage. Just in case. Just in case the wolf crashed into the yard.

Most days, once he felt he could be a real backyard rabbit, he stood up again to become the superhero kind. He'd leap across the yard and measure the distance, each time hoping it was further than the last. Each time hoping to be a better superhero.

Once he tired of leaping, he'd reach into his right pocket for a granola bar. His favorite kind with chocolate chips. The one his mom bought on Tuesdays, when she didn't work in the evenings, and she came home to take him on their grocery store adventure together.

He'd pull out his granola bar, gently unwrapping the whole thing before biting small morsels just like the yard rabbits. Holding the bar in two hands, he'd nibble until it was too small to be held by all his fingers, and then he'd chew the last corner in one go. Even superheroes needed fuel.

On those days, he'd tuck the wrapper into his left pocket and hop around on two feet looking for stranded insects to rescue, a plant to prop up, or anything else a superhero bunny might need to do, just in case the world wasn't spinning correctly. Just in case a little help was needed.

But on this day, as he stood in his bunny superhero suit, his superhero ears perked up higher, and his nose twitched. His superhero senses warned of the wolf. It smelled like nicotine and stale beer. He knew he hadn't

practiced enough to be a real superhero bunny and vanquish this wolf. He had to be a real rabbit, move to the hedge, slow his breath, and quiet his heartbeat. He knew, because he'd practiced.

He wasn't a timid rabbit. He was a brave rabbit, and today was not Tuesday. He knew that on days like this he could brave the evening shadows. Brave nightfall in the yard long after the yard rabbits had gone to sleep. Be a real rabbit. Until it was safe to be a superhero again.

Fancy Meeting You Here

Alaina Hammond

DEVON climbs up the New York Times Building. He rests for a moment. KIMBERLY climbs up to his level. They see each other, surprised.

KIMBERLY: Well, this is a little awkward.

DEVON: I'll say, and that's just the wind conditions.

KIMBERLY: So... What brings you here?

DEVON: Disease. I mean they're all bad, but I'm focusing on dysentery.

KIMBERLY: Dysentery? Isn't that a little civil-war era?

DEVON: Not in Africa, unfortunately. It's like a constant civil-war enactment there.

KIMBERLY: Oh, right. So, what can be done?

DEVON: Well most of the problems derive from lack of clean water. If you could fix the infrastructure...

KIMBERLY: Infrastructure! Yes, I see. That's a good metaphor.

DEVON: Thank you! You know, it's subtle.

KIMBERLY: No, no, I get it. New York Times building...

DEVON: Infrastructure! Infrastructure....

KIMBERLY: New York Times building. And if you could get them to write an article about it...

DEVON: The gray lady loves to look into her own mirror. Free press.

KIMBERLY: Africa wins, the New York Times wins. Everyone's a winner! You're a genius!

DEVON: Thanks, you too. What's your motivation for climbing, then?

KIMBERLY: The environment.

DEVON: What's your angle? Solar power, as in the windows? Oil, as in your sweat?

KIMBERLY: No. Ew. No. I'm doing it for the rainforest. There's no direct connection to the building.

DEVON: Lame.

KIMBERLY: Hey, shut up! I didn't criticize dysentery! I offered no dysentery-dissent!

DEVON: Sorry.

KIMBERLY: Besides, I have sponsorship. It's like a vertical breast-cancer walk, but I don't have to bump elbows with celebrities or housewives. And for every floor I climb, an eccentric billionaire will save an acre of the Amazon.

DEVON: Speaking of missing breasts. I'm sorry, that's terrible.

KIMBERLY: That's OK, nobody heard it but me and the pigeons. And nothing is sacred to pigeons.

DEVON: So, if you don't mind me asking, which one?

KIMBERLY: Silly, there's only one Amazon. And that integer shrinks every day. Wait, I forgot, can integers shrink?

DEVON: I meant which eccentric billionaire.

KIMBERLY: Oh, I can't disclose my sponsor. Let's just say I can never use a Macintosh in public.

DEVON: Curse you, Bill Gates, and your unrelenting sense of whimsy! Seriously, I think what you're doing is great. I'm

creating awareness, but you're actually generating revenue.

KIMBERLY: Thanks!

DEVON: I worry that if I accepted money for my cause, I'd be too tempted to blow it on legal fees.

KIMBERLY: Oh yes we're definitely getting arrested.

DEVON: And with good cause!
(realizing how lame his joke was, embarrassed)
Sorry. I'm Devon.

KIMBERLY: Kimberly.

They shake hands.

DEVON: Can I ask you a personal question?

KIMBERLY: We're a half mile off the ground, I think we can throw formality out the window. Splat.

DEVON: Uh, do you have a boyfriend?

KIMBERLY: I'm pretty busy. It's hard to meet men who share my interests.

DEVON: Oh I know! I was dating this acrobat chick for awhile, but all we ended up talking about was work, work, work.

KIMBERLY: So... Do you wanna give those people down there a show?

DEVON: No, I'm here because I DON'T crave attention.

They kiss with passion.

KIMBERLY: Now that's good publicity!

DEVON: Yeah, thanks for letting me cop a feel.

KIMBERLY: But you didn't...

DEVON: Gotta save some for next time. I have plenty of causes up my sleeve.

KIMBERLY: Score! Second date!

DEVON'S phone rings.

DEVON: Hold on.
(looks at it)
Oh it's my lawyer.
(Answers)
Hey Celestial.

KIMBERLY: Your lawyer's name is Celestial? That's an uncommon name for a lawyer. Or a person.

DEVON: Oh. Uh, sure. Here she is.
(hands her the phone)

KIMBERLY: Celestial, what's going on?... Huh. Really?... Wow. OK. Thanks. I'll call you later.
(Hands him back the phone)
She's already at the courthouse. She got the judge to drop the charges against us if we agree to sign a few autographs and do a photo op with him. It's an election year.

DEVON: Cool. I can't believe we share a lawyer. Small world. Very few buildings.

KIMBERLY: Don't be naive. Did Celestial suggest this particular date for you to climb?

DEVON: Yeah, she told me it was a historical event. Why?

KIMBERLY: It's the day she lost her virginity. I think she thought it would be romantic way for us to bump into each other.

DEVON: Oh my god, this is a blind date! Bitch set us up!

KIMBERLY: I know, I feel so manipulated. Like a puppet blindly flapping its arms.

DEVON: (pause)
Couldn't she have just invited us over for drinks?

KIMBERLY: That does seem somewhat easier.

DEVON: This is not an efficient way to meet! What if you'd chosen the other side of the building? Or what if I'd accidentally fallen to my gruesome death? Enough things can go wrong on the ground!

KIMBERLY: If you'd fallen to your death, that would have been awful for my love life. We never would have met. Celestial would have had to introduce me to someone else. One fewer eligible bachelor in New York. Now that's tragedy!

DEVON: She's a gambler, our Celestial. But at least she's looking out for us.

KIMBERLY: Right. Things seem to be working out.

DEVON: Yeah. This might sound a little crazy, but—

KIMBERLY: That's OK, so are we.

DEVON: Do you want to be my girlfriend?

KIMBERLY: There aren't any other men around. Not just here on The New York Times Building, all of Manhattan is such a desert island. So yeah, that would be great, thanks.

DEVON: Wow, what a productive day!

They high-five.

KIMBERLY: Do you want to keep climbing?

DEVON: To be honest, I'm getting a little bored.

KIMBERLY: Oh god, of me? Already? This always happens! Why, Celestial, why?

DEVON: No, Kimberly, I'm very happy with our relationship.

KIMBERLY: Ah good. Me too. I'm not at all insecure, can't you tell?

DEVON: But I was thinking, climbing's so repetitive. Let's go hang-gliding off the Brooklyn Bridge, see where we end up.

KIMBERLY: For what cause?

DEVON: Can't we do anything that's just for us?

KIMBERLY: You're right, we've been socially conscious enough for one day. Let the Amazon take care of itself for once.

DEVON: Great, let's get down there. Then we can go up again. When we have kids, we should get them tested for bipolar disorder.

KIMBERLY: When we're in the air, do you wanna get married?

DEVON: Nah, I always saw myself getting married on a snowboard. How's winter sound?

KIMBERLY: But I know this extreme minister who practices "Extreme Marriage! Woo!" and will go hang gliding with us today, no preparation or blood tests required.

DEVON: How do you know?

KIMBERLY: It's on his website, "Extreme Marriage! Woo!" dot org.
(pause)
What, I'm a romantic, a girl can dream.

DEVON: I'm a sucker for love, and websites that promote extremism. You've got yourself a fiancé. We'll just have to conceive our first kid on a snowboard.

KIMBERLY: Oh, I'm so excited about our extreme wedding!
(hugs him)

DEVON: Woo!
(embraces her)

KIMBERLY: Listen to the crowd, they're going wild! They're wooing!

DEVON: What can I say, baby, you're a pleasure to woo.

Playwright's note: "Fancy Meeting You Here" was originally performed at Manhattan Theatre Source, in 2009. It starred Eliza Lay and Michael Nathanson.

CONTRIBUTORS

Alaina Hammond is a poet, playwright, fiction writer, and visual artist. Her poems, plays, short stories, nonfiction, paintings, drawings and photographs have been published both online and in print. Four of her flash fiction stories have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. Additionally, her pieces "Muffin Or Something" and "Wigless" are both Best Microfiction 2026 nominees. Instagram: @alainaheidelberger Playwright's note: "Fancy Meeting You Here" was originally performed at Manhattan Theatre Source, in 2009. It starred Eliza Lay and Michael Nathanson.

Gunilla T. Kester, Ph.D., author and editor of six books in three genres including a full-length poetry book *If I Were More Like Myself*. Lately, she has published over 65 poems in various literary magazines including *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Citron Review*, *Pirene's Fountain*, *Pangyrus*, and *The Potomac Review*. She writes a monthly essay for *Consequence Forum Substack*. Her new full-length poetry manuscript *Hold Me Still* has been accepted for publication by *The Main Street Rag Publishing Company*. See more at Gunillakester.com.

Ian Brownlie is a writer and poet from the UK. He has been published in *SHINE Quarterly*, *Audi Locus* and *streetcake* magazine, *Cosmic Daffodil*, and was recently nominated for the Pushcart Prize. He has children's poetry in *The Dirigible Balloon*, *The Toy*, *Tyger Tyger* and *Little Thoughts Press*. He can be found on Bluesky: [@ianbrownlie.bsky.social](https://ianbrownlie.bsky.social) (He/him)

Kendra Whitfield lives and writes on the southern edge of the Canadian northern boreal forest. When not writing, she can be found basking in sunbeams on the deck or swimming laps at the local pool. Her poetry has been anthologized by *Beyond the Veil Press* and *Community Building Art Works*.

Ruth Rouff lives in southern New Jersey, just outside of Philadelphia. Her literary work has appeared in various journals, including *Philadelphia Stories*, *Persephone Literary*, *Twin Bill*, *the Mensa Bulletin*, and *New World Writing*. It's upcoming in *The Louisville Review*. Her books *Pagan Heaven* (a poetry and prose collection) and *Lone Star* (a novel) were published by *Bedazzled Ink*.

Sambhu Ramachandran is a bilingual poet, translator, short story writer, and academic from Kerala, India. He is currently working as Assistant Professor of English at N.S.S. College, Pandalam. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in Palette Poetry, Neon & Smoke, The Alexander Review, The Bombay Literary Magazine, Wild Court, Madras Courier, The Alipore Post, Muse India, Lothlorien Poetry Journal, Setu, The Chakkar, Ethos Literary Journal, Every Body Magazine, and Sextet, among others. You can reach out to him on Instagram: @sambhuramachandran

Sandra Beth Levy is a retired psychologist who passionately practiced healing through psychotherapy for over forty years and is now pursuing her dream of immersion in creative writing. Her social and personal histories are woven through her writing as she explores intricacies of love, loss, aging, and awe of nature. She has published poems with Anomaly Poetry, Small Gems Press, Arcana Poetry, A Curious Moon, The Vagabond's Verse, SHINE poetry series, and has poems upcoming with The Poetry Lighthouse.

Sienna Alpert (they/she) is a butch lesbian poet who strives for their writing to connect people to one another. They're attending the University of Alabama at Birmingham to receive their B.A. in English and Literature, and more of their work can be found in Sabiduria Academic Journal and Poetry Festival.

Stephanie Ross writes at the confluence of inner inquiry and the living world. Guided by her practice as a Ren Xue Yuan Qigong teacher, she crafts work that invites readers to relax and develop connection to heart and True Self. Her work is published or forthcoming in the League of Canadian Poets (Fresh Voices), White Wall Review, RXA Qiblog, and Braided Way Magazine, and among others. You can often find her walking with her 67-pound lap dog, Pepper. Connect with her: <https://www.stephanierrossauthor.com>

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