

UNPUBLISHABLE

UNSTEADY LINES

Issue #3

SHARED
DRAFTS
PROJECT

SPRING 2026

CONTRIBUTORS

Click on the title to view the contributor's work

Owen Townend - A Perfect Rhyme Could Not Be Found

Christina Payne - I Fell

Jim Murdoch - Mots Étranges

CA Scarborough - Backed My Car Into Another Parent's Car at School Pickup

Blaire Goff - Not Quite Her

Sophia Venables - Spineless

Allan Lake - At Cafe Called Superrandom

May Garner - How Can I Survive?

Jordan Micah Wyberneit - rainbow bones

Carly Heider - New Year's

Samuel Fishman - Another Poem About Renee Good

Billy Tuggle - Abridged Creation Story

CONTRIBUTORS

Click on the title to view the contributor's work

Isabelle Palmera - A Car Crash (A Crooked Star)

Aidan Bernales - Objects of Affliction

Adam Porkolab - Inner Spring at Low Brightness

Charlotte Poitras - Unfortunate Cookies

Rebecca Corcoran - are caught or confusing my only options here?

Arijit Lahiri - Selfish Writing

Greg Lehman - Application

Tessa Lee-Thomas - To All The Men Who Hurt Me

David Lawton - Left Coast

Darlene Reilley - The Nightmare Poem

Bruno Talerico - Life Poem...

Suzanne S. Austin-Hill - Of Use, Regardless

Sarah Royer-Stoll - When the Math Works Out in Our Favor

Inner Spring at Low Brightness

Adam Porkolab

i don't know where happiness is,
but i'm sure it doesn't ask for sugar.

once i saw them searching for it,
pressing buttons behind a counter,
scrubbing through blurry security footage,
until they found three seconds of it—
someone returning a lost set of keys,
and no one in the city died from it.

another time i walked into a café
with the momentum of
writing a poem since my date wasn't showing.
but i ate a cinnamon roll instead
and watched a pigeon
negotiate with an entire table.
it was a heist, a proper summit:
nodding, pecking,
stealing the napkin. bragging.

once a sixth-grader
told me off in a store:
“smile, it’s not illegal.”
then vanished
as if swallowed by a cartoon,
and ever since, behind my forehead,
a yellow warning light blinks back:
“smile malfunction. rebooting.”

sometimes enlightenment appears
in cell B2 of an Excel sheet.
someone types: “nap 10:43”
and suddenly the whole day makes sense,
time i’d gladly waste with you, laughing.

sometimes there’s only coffee,
reheated for the third time.
by the fourth, half-unconscious,
it’s just me being clever:
a little bitter, but surprisingly lukewarm.

and then i don’t want to be anywhere else.
maybe that’s happiness too—when i stop asking
if i’m happy. a split-second
of muting. silence. i sit
under Hunyadi’s horse or in a park in Pécs,
and i feel:
under my coat, in the storm of my own mind,
the air is a little warmer
than outside, more wondrous—
as if someone
were heating me from within,
or at least their moments
paint for my switched-on brain
an inner spring
at low brightness, holding me together.

Inner Spring at Low Brightness

Adam Porkolab

Which line in the poem feels most unsteady to you?

The line "smile malfunction. rebooting." feels the most unsteady to me — partly because it's almost too playful, and partly because it isn't playful at all. It's the line where the poem's coping mechanism (humor, deflection, self-diagnosis through tech metaphors) briefly stops working and you can hear the actual malfunction underneath it. I was never sure whether it belonged in the poem, or whether it should have been softer, sadder, more earned. It stays because I kept failing to replace it with anything more honest.