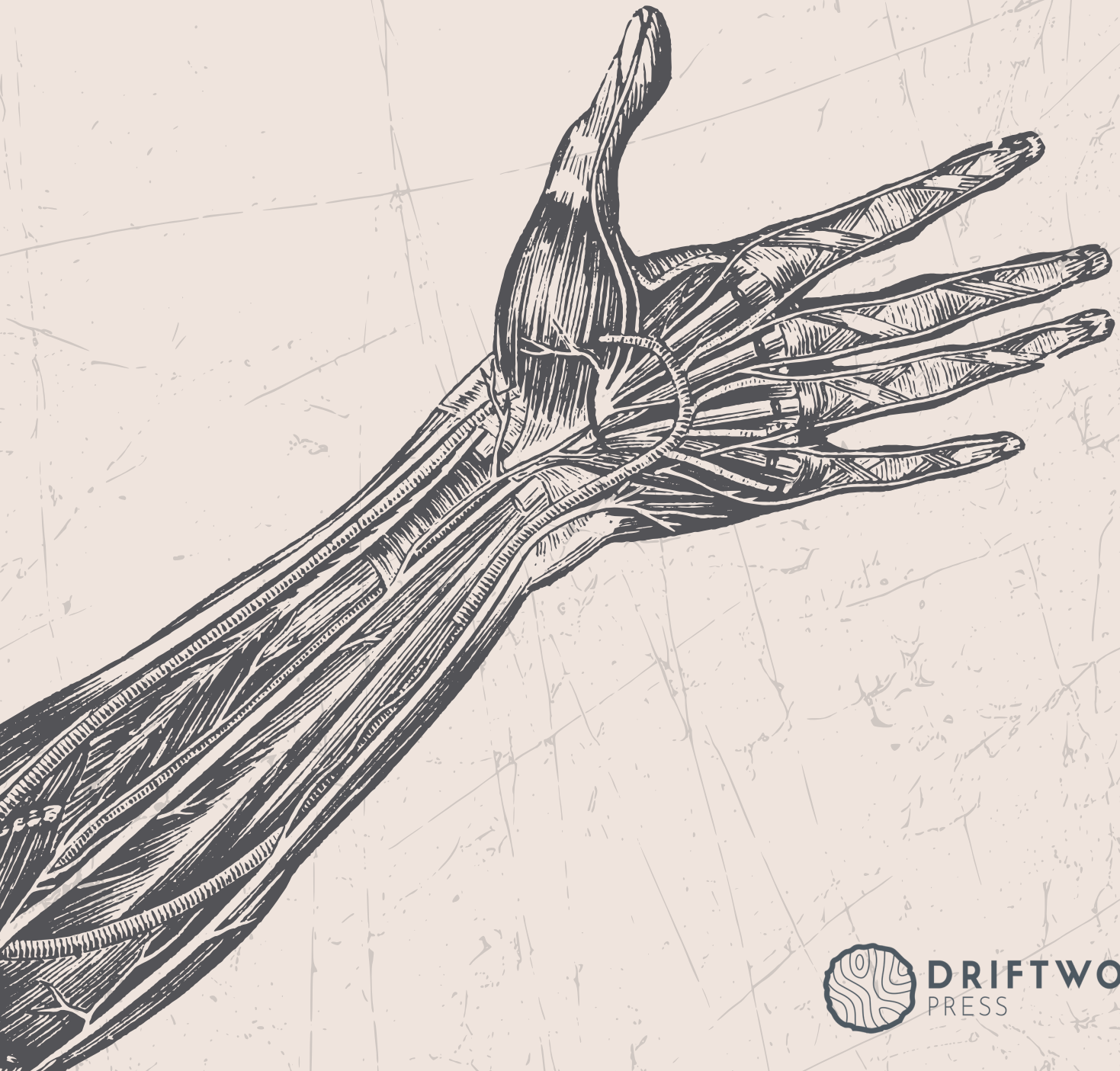


EACH KNUCKLE WITH SUGAR

SARAH LEVINE

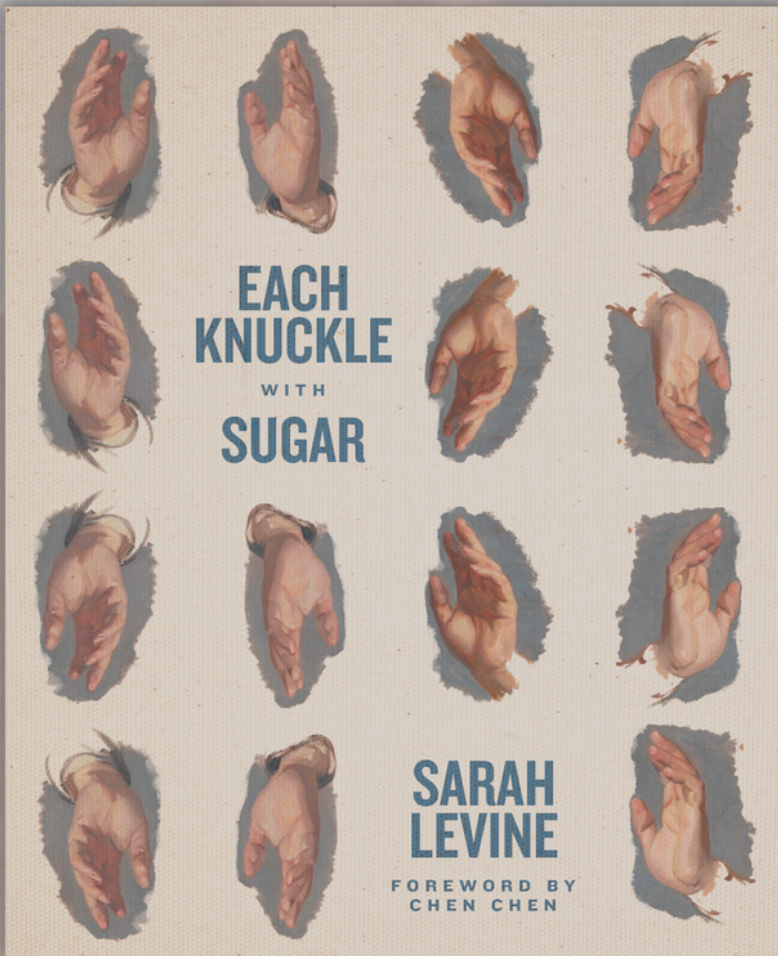
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SARAH LEVINE'S EACH KNUCKLE WITH SUGAR

is a soft yet powerful deep-dive into love and grief told through multiple fascinating perspectives.

"I love this book. [...] Look, some of its tanginess may leap off the page and startle your fingers. Some of its honey may stick to your knuckles. Let it."

**—CHEN CHEN, AUTHOR OF
YOUR EMERGENCY CONTACT
HAS EXPERIENCED AN
EMERGENCY**

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PAGE ONE

ADVANCED PRAISE

"I have been reading Sarah Levine's poems for the past decade and in this luminous first collection she fulfills the promise of her earlier work. *Each Knuckle with Sugar* explores the romantic relationship between Herman and Begonia who meet at his mother's funeral. Each poem in which they inhabit is vivid, lyrical, poignant, often passionate and always intimate. As their relationship matures the metaphoric language is never predictable, a touch eccentric and always blissfully original. Read these poems and I guarantee you will bask in their humanity and, ultimately, be transformed in the mystery of their elegance."

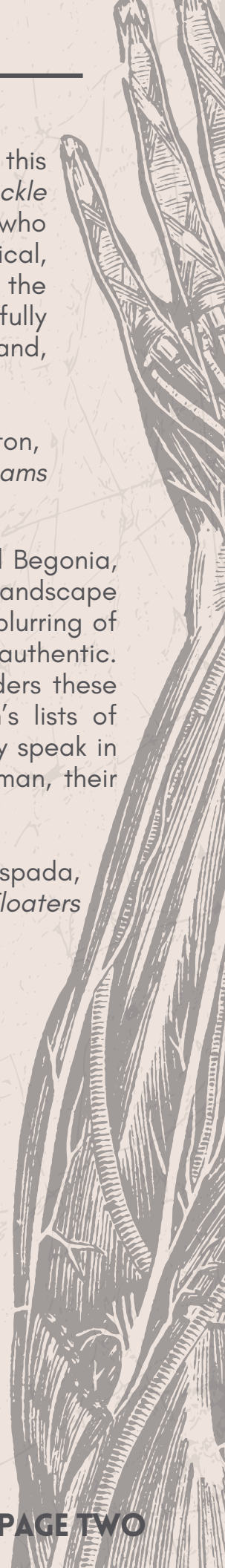
— Kevin Pilkington,
author of *Playing Poker with Tennessee Williams*

"Sarah Levine's award-winning debut collection introduces us to Herman and Begonia, two people who embark on a love affair as they try to find a way out of a landscape stripped bare by loneliness and grief. There is a strangeness, an intensity, a blurring of the real and the surreal that makes this tale of love and loss intimate and authentic. Levine has a strong command of the image, metaphor and simile, that renders these poems vivid and dreamlike. If there is grief, there is also humor: Herman's lists of questions to ask Begonia on their dates are original, to say the least. As they speak in turn, in their fragmented voices, Herman and Begonia become achingly human, their need for love and their thwarted attempts at salvation all too familiar."

— Martín Espada,
author of *Floaters*

"Open Sarah Levine's *Each Knuckle with Sugar* and join the journey of Herman and Begonia's love, born beside a funeral's 'goodbye box,' nurtured in old cars, fed by passionate 'kissing with mouthfuls of jam,' tested through fire, betrayal, and regret, as it rolls down 'bony roads scattered with elms and white churches.' Prepare to fall enthralled to the music of Levine's language, her magical surprises, the way she places realist images beside wild metaphors to make both burst alive, 'pulling red / birds out of each-other. / All heart and dirt.' Then when you've reached the end of the road, dancing 'like a bucket / rolling down a mountain,' whisper a thank you to Levine for bringing us along, slurp a little 'peach juice and rain,' and turn back to page one to take the ride again."

— Christopher Citro,
author of *If We Had a Lemon We'd Throw It* and *Call That the Sun*



ADVANCED PRAISE (CONTINUED)

"*Each Knuckle with Sugar* unravels and opens the reader. Through a multi-registered duet of ache, joy, longing, failings, and the search for meaningful human connection, Sarah Levine delivers an age-old story anew. A precise ear reveals image and language that startles and revives, a throat transforms into 'a hallway of snow,' giggling is reimagined into 'birds inside your body flap before hitting water,' and 'ears gust back like candles blown out by a child's untaught breath.' Levine fashions an ebb and flow between two personas within the liminality of arriving. Balancing the brutal, tender, playful, and spiraling, *Each Knuckle with Sugar* compels us toward an attunement of the spirit, to illuminate the unspoken, sought after wavelengths of connectedness we desire from a life lived."

— Anthony Cody,
author of *Borderland Apocrypha* and *The Rendering*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sarah Levine is a Pushcart Prize nominee and author of two chapbooks, *Take Me Home*, a finalist for the New Women's Voices Chapbook Competition (*Finishing Line Press*, 2020) and *Her Man* (*New Megaphone Press*, 2014). Her work has appeared in *Passages North*, *Best New Poets anthology*, *Green Mountains Review*, and *The Paris American* among other publications. She earned her MFA from Sarah Lawrence College, MAT from Smith College, and BA from UMASS Amherst Honors College. Levine is a 2023-2024 Teachers for Global Classrooms Fulbright fellow and teaches 7th Grade ELA and 12th Grade AP Literature at Williston Northampton School where she currently holds the Richard C. Gregory Endowed Chair. *Each Knuckle with Sugar* won the *Driftwood Press* Open Reading Contest and is her debut collection.



LETTER TO THE READER

DEAR READER,

Herman was born in 2009. In college during a midnight rainstorm, a friend and I left a party, ran through other peoples' backyards to return home. I remember stopping beneath a giant elm tree, my sweatshirt stuck to my ribs, everything damp with wetness and for the first time in a long time I saw the moon. I stood beneath sheets of rain and couldn't stop thinking about how badly I wanted to grow arms long enough to cuddle the moon. How lonely the moon looked. I sprinted back to my dorm and wrote a poem until the sun came up. This new voice suddenly flooded out of me: observant, eccentric, honest. My world's monotony appeared brighter. Stranger. I couldn't stop writing. Days flew by. I skipped classes. Missed meals. I knew I was knee deep in good trouble.

Herman's voice has been with me ever since. Over the course of fifteen years, this persona has guided me through heartbreak, grief, and resilience of finding myself despite change and doubt. Eventually, Herman's voice grew into its own developed world, this book, *Each Knuckle with Sugar*. *Each Knuckle with Sugar* is a series of persona poems told from two voices: Herman and Begonia. Herman is a misunderstood young man who unexpectedly loses his mother and meets Begonia at his mother's funeral. They begin a relationship and both characters share their side of the story through intersecting voices (Herman is on the left side of the page; Begonia is on the right side of the page) navigating grief, love, loneliness, and sometimes sheer awe of what it means to exist in this unpredictable world. Thank you for sharing this journey with me.

**SINCERELY,
SARAH LEVINE**

I LOVE THE WAY YOU TASTE AFTER DRINKING WATER

I was taught to kneel in a night gown
gathering stars spilled from my brother's hands.

Brother built from geometry and Tuesday afternoon rain.
Sometimes, I lie in bed clutching my own hair, dark river

hung by two clothespins and I want to kiss someone, our mouths
collapsing under the weight of honey

to smell of pussy willow and love for no reason.

I met you on a road in a town

where men knock their knuckles
against a hound dog's head and trees wave

when I walk because I am wearing the reddest dress
I own. The trees think I am a giant flame and they

are so afraid, summoning wind to toss me down the road and a road's job
is to carry someone away. What do you think about when you see the moon

during the day? Do you think about your childhood and how much of it ended
when you learned what was really up there.