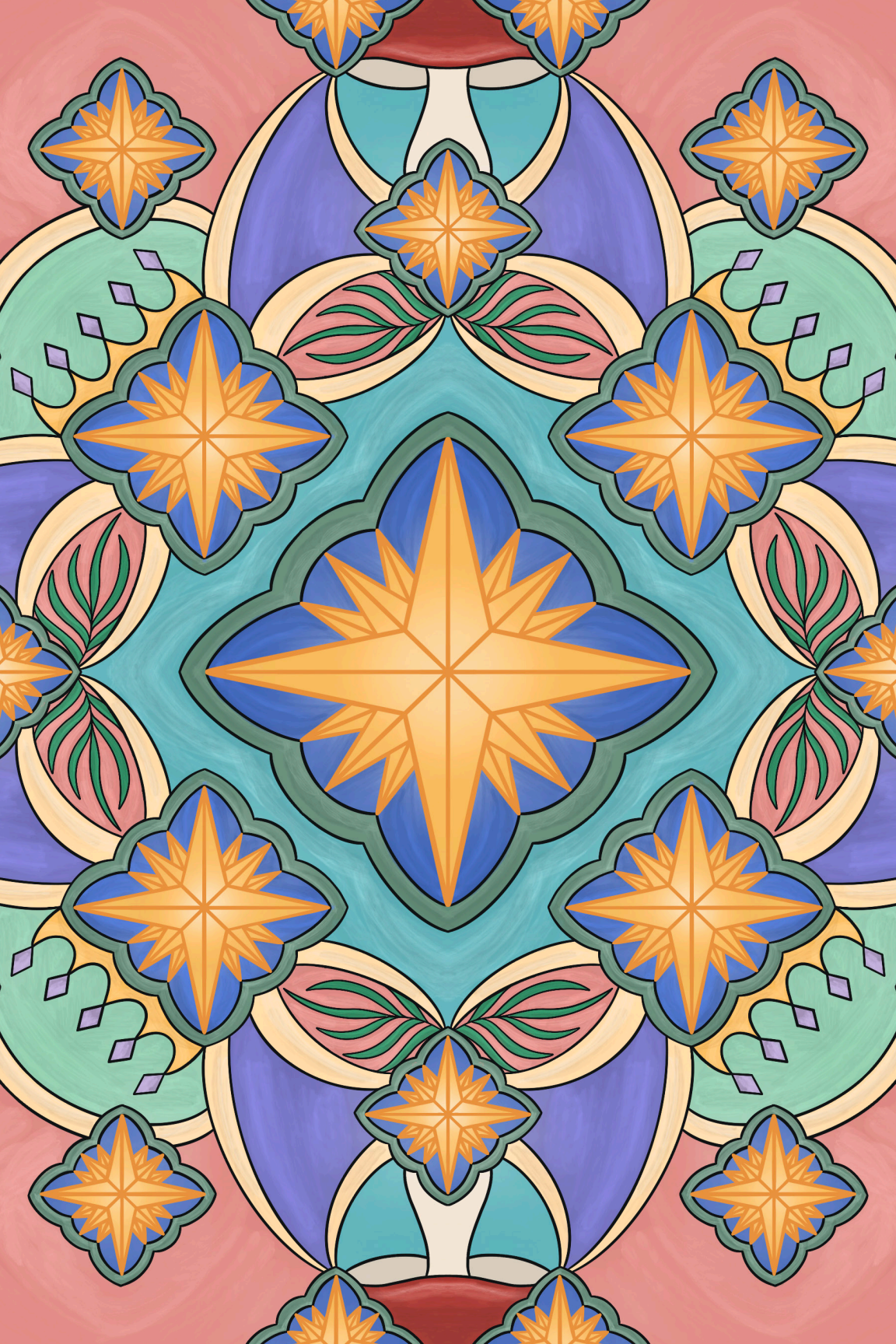




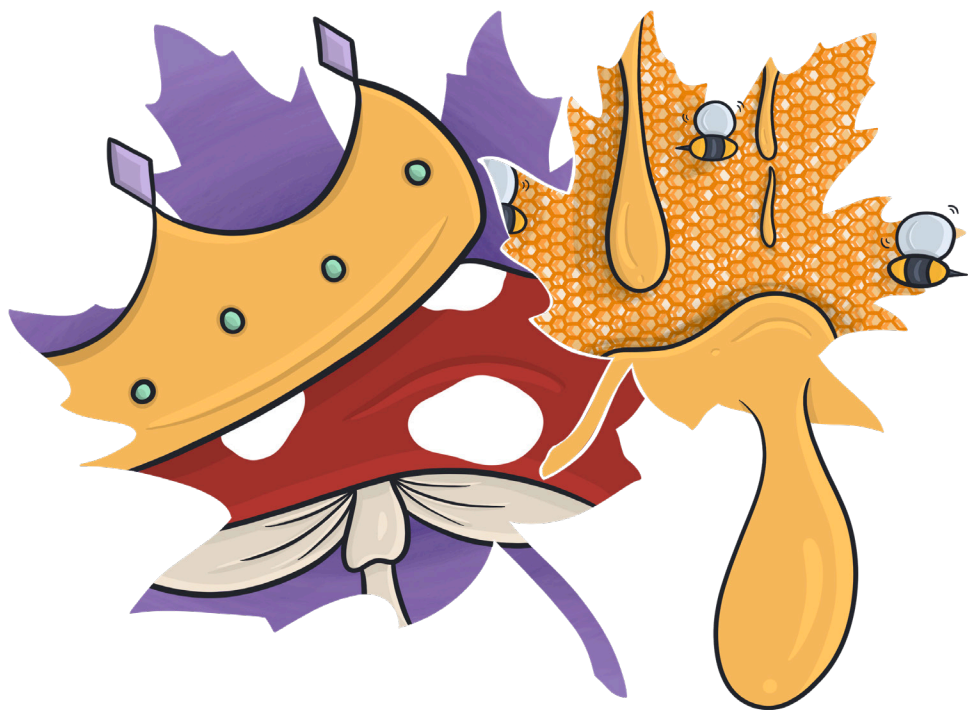
Last Leaves

Issue 8 | Spring 2024



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Last Leaves: Issue 8

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Edited and compiled by Cailey Thiessen, Kiera Baron, and Lilo “Rik” Mason-Zollfrank

Cover design and end pages by Kiera Baron

Note from the Editors

This issue turned out to be an especially fun one for us. Aside from the amazing story-based poems we received (ranging from re-tellings all the way to personal experiences), we also ended up with the most art and photography submissions to date. Not only that, but for the first time, we broke one thousand pieces received!

It was incredibly special to read and review everything that was sent our way. And even though we can only accept a fraction of what we get, we love every minute of it. We're one step closer to our tenth issue, and we've got some ideas up our sleeves.

Thank you to everyone for your continued support, and a very special thank you to our guest editor for this issue: Lilo "Rik" Mason-Zollfrank.

We loved working with them, and bringing someone new in for this issue gave us yet another display of how different poetry and art interpretations can be from one person to the next. They were an invaluable asset in making this issue what it is, and we couldn't have done it without them.

We hope you enjoy all the stories that lie in the pages ahead as much as we did, and maybe we'll see you in our submissions next time around.

~Last Leaves Editors

Kiera S. Baron & Cailey Johanna Thiessen



Content Warning

Some poems in this book contain content that may be sensitive to some readers. Each of these poems will be marked with the above symbol so you'll be able to tell which ones have potentially triggering content. Please read at your own discretion.

At *Last Leaves*, we understand how reading sensitive content can not only affect our daily lives but our mentality and overall state-of-being. Please take care of yourselves, and take breaks reading the content if you need.

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PERSPECTIVES 1

Avery Timmons

Sitting Shiva for the Last Cypress Tree

Elisa Subin

I comfort the cypress
as it stumbled and fell and
cried ash at my feet

gather tears in cupped hands
as desperate gift to hungry fires
the dead feed the ravenous dying

I catch the pale shadows left
as sun light dims
and the water wheel stops
and nothing begins

strike a pose
as stockinged feet give chase
and earth's lonely reflection wept
inside the covered mirror's face

endless nights last
seven long days
you are but a pinwheel's spin
on the way to your grave

witness witness
watch and rend
don't turn your back
not even in the end

The Long Hill of Strangers

L. Ward Abel

In front of me
the long hill rises.
Behind me there's the great river
with lights on the other side
framing a night.

I have loved such places like people,
learned their moods, heard
muses in fields and on old streets,
mistook clouds for mountains
or at least for silhouettes
of hope

but this wideness
rejects geography and
embraces a new lonesome,
like a mirror
unable to capture reflection
except in the form
of a stranger.

Black Rock Channel

Eugene Stevenson

The river is a born collector, makes deposits in
Black Rock Channel. Barges & lakers head for
steel & paper mills downstream in Tonawanda,
tankers steam for the orange-haloed refinery
below the arches of the Grand Island Bridge.

In the muck beneath the channel's face,
automobiles & slot machines, shopping carts
& broken furniture, torn mattresses & box
springs, Saturday night & weekend specials:
layers of a whole town's quiet sufferings.

You lived there once, short blocks from
the concrete break wall, eight-man shells,
old men fishing their lives out, living on
the channel. You married again, a stranger
to us & to you, remaining so, lesson learned.

In Buffalo winter, Thompson Street inside
the body, dormant fever that manifests in
sweat & nightmares, in decaying old wood
in rain & snow, in the air of church bells &
a freight train pulling long & slow to Canada.

In times swept past & places left behind,
since then, the Niagara has swept us up &
deposited us deep in the Black Rock Channel,
our dreams unacknowledged, unrecognized
& dead in a way, though we lived them once.

One Form of Home

Robert Harlow

Sometimes my hands
 don't want to have anything
 to do with me,
 so I have to tell them lies
 to comfort them, encourage them
to want to go on.

One is tied to a chair,
 the other to the Bering Sea
 (wherever that is)
 or so it seems, fingers reinventing
 the undulations of the ocean bed.
One hand wants to be

the flukes of a whale.
 The other wants to play "Hambone"
 all the time but doesn't
 know how to begin.
 One wants to live forever,
so it writes a poem.

The other far too innocent
 to commit such a heinous crime.
 It's so dark in here
 I can't tell the right from the left.
 Left to their own devices,
I'll let them decide

how and when and if
 they'll make their way home.
 Sleeves of my shirt,
 though not of their choosing,
 one form of comfort.
One form of home.

STOIC

Mukut Borpujari

It's already summer, and we're getting rid
of clothes, getting ready to greet
the scorching days ahead;
making the place airy and less cluttered.
We're living on the edge, restructuring the house,
getting rid of the old furnitures,
obsolete machineries and funny gadgets.
A small table in the kitchen for two. Our world is
changing, our wardrobes mostly empty;
gone are the skinny jeans and the fancy moccasins—
the windchime and the trinkets.
When someone comes to visit and admires
our complete works of Yeats,
the peacock feather in the open thesaurus,
the mantle vase on a shelf, we say
take them. This is the most important
time of all, the age of dissipation,
knowing full well what we're divesting is
like the fragrance of a burning incense stick
that lingers hours after it has been doused.
An ordinary Friday afternoon
when one of us stared
and the other one just laughed.

MESSAGE TO A FRIEND

George Freek

What good are poems?
They give small comfort
when I'm alone.
They can't drink with me.
They can't remove
my fear of death.
They only add to my unrest.
But still, at times
I get ideas, and I must
write them down.
My wife is dead.
So I sit here alone
like an abandoned groom.
I invite you to join me.
I have plenty of room.



FELINE FAIRYTALES

Janet Teas

Cumulative Effect

Thomas Piekarski

Zeus snoozes in the stratosphere
unaware of Aphrodite frolicking naked
to raucous applause through Elysian Fields,
and a debonair Barbie flirts, puts on airs
while vast quantities of methane gas
bubble up from a hidden lake
way out in northern Siberia.

As we flinch and turn the other cheek
sharp sirens outside elongate night,
freight trains grumble, screech and grind,
pompous politicians impaling us with lies.
Stress that outright tyranny causes
is more than evident to anyone with eyes,
the oppressive heat, insane murderers.

Despair saves the weak from infamy's pit.
Death surely puts a lid on pain.
Existing half-paralyzed by mortal fear
is a common panacea for quitters.
One can always resort to poetry
but the poets' exceptional metaphors
are irrelevant to an apathetic public.

While bandit oligarchs roll up the score
robins have fewer worms to peck,
this to the wily most circumspect.
Now watch Alice plunge through a plastic
looking glass, thousands of species
lost to time, and a sickly planetary grid
without which no one can live.

May we be itemized, atomized, optimized,
with all oars pulling toward glad events
like jolly Poseidon gunning his jet ski
or plane less a turbine that lands safely
as fireworks explode in a 4 th of July sky,
for spanning realms of pure purpose we
progress together a collective breed.

The Anteroom

L. Ward Abel

There's no one else in this house.
And maybe I'm
just the ghost of me, an afterword,
decades-gone, just a broken misty
black and white projection with verticles
running through my image.
No pianos, no brushstrokes make notes
colors down the hall in my anteroom
as I try to describe the life of this
late-day lonely
empty space.

From a second-floor window I see
no map-lines across the world. But
the wideness is full of silent places.
Only blurbs like me fill the rooms
and not just confined to nights either.
An oil stain on old floors—I, we
hover over
remembrance.
A time-stopped echo plays
who-knows-what earworm
over and over and over.

A world disguised as waning
but more cover than book
the rows and rows of lonesome
are spread across form-fitting
long, low hills all the way out
to the coasts where there's nothing
but water and air.

And no ghost ever swims there
behind, beyond
the tide.

Like the first moving pictures we leave
only a rough draft, a sketch, we're car lights
on an evening wall—together but alone
our households dissolve like subject matter
like generations like mountains
like motion like mass
like light under
miles of
zero.



UNTITLED I
Alex Bastianini



UNTITLED II

Alex Bastianin

A Drowning Man

Robert Harlow

I don't know why, but I'm feeling
somewhat Nubian tonight,
lapsing along the date-palm trail,
and desperately in need
of an oasis or a ribbon of trees
that point the way out of town
because, once again, I've worn out
my welcome, and the mats
at our front and back doors
have been rolled up and removed from sight
by someone other than myself.
Cats yowling, dogs yodeling,
the all-night diner closed
just when I need it most,
everything seeming like
another vacation that ends badly—
rental car out of gas
in the relentless, slashing rain,
the tires blown all at once,
car off the road in a deep ditch,
so far down it can't be seen
by passersby, but there won't be any
because of the mudslides behind
and ahead of us, and triple-A
is not answering the phone.

O.K., I get the picture,
cropped to remove me,
grinning as if the Cheshire Cat
had rented most of my face,
but still holding your hand
after you told me what I didn't need
to be told in that sun-shattering
make-or-break moment.
And I forget, are those wasps
and hornets or just icicles
falling behind your eyes
in that photograph of us
in that thickest part of summer
when we were standing knee-deep
in the ocean that used to like me,
or so I thought, because of
how it washed up and down
my legs, bone-white then
but on their way to a painful
fire-engine red, just like the rest of me
later in the day. But looking back now,
I'm wondering how it was that I missed
the glint in the eye of that no-longer
user-friendly ocean telling me I was next
on its list to be swallowed whole.

COLLAGE

Mukut Borpujari

1

An unexpected thundershower puts out the smoldering city, ending the heat wave abruptly
Water seeps through minute spaces between glass and window frames.
Sky's tears replace dust, leaving streaks down the walls
I have little time to stand and stare. The hills turn a vibrant green
Weekends are for my newfound love. Twice I trailed the periphery of the city to lunch beside the stream for the afternoon
Once I followed a mud track to a solitary shrine. I used the branches of the dense undergrowth to pull myself to the square opening
I hardly gawked at two magpies sitting above on electric beams. I only saw their salient backs as they took flight—my unwelcome presence forcing them into the midday sky

2

A neighbor through the wall plays classical music faint and faint over the weeks. Another learns drum-sets through a merciless repetition of top fifty alternative hits
I can pretend I'm unwell. I wouldn't say a week mundane, shifting from invisible to see it all.
The yellow marigold bloom thro' cracks, searching for the sun
I turn from the sense that I know myself to the sense that I had some friends who knew me well, though I didn't know myself to them
My partner in grief haven't slept for days. When he finally does, he wakes up eager to tell me about his dream. A furry cat leads him to his garage where a mother shrieks owl and her baby's nest

accept my ocean or stay on the sand

Linda M. Crate

i was so scared
when i was telling my best
friend who i truly was,

i didn't know what to expect;

the trauma and anxiety had
me convinced that she would be
just another person who would
abandon me—

but she accepted me as who
i was and told me that it didn't
come as a surprise,

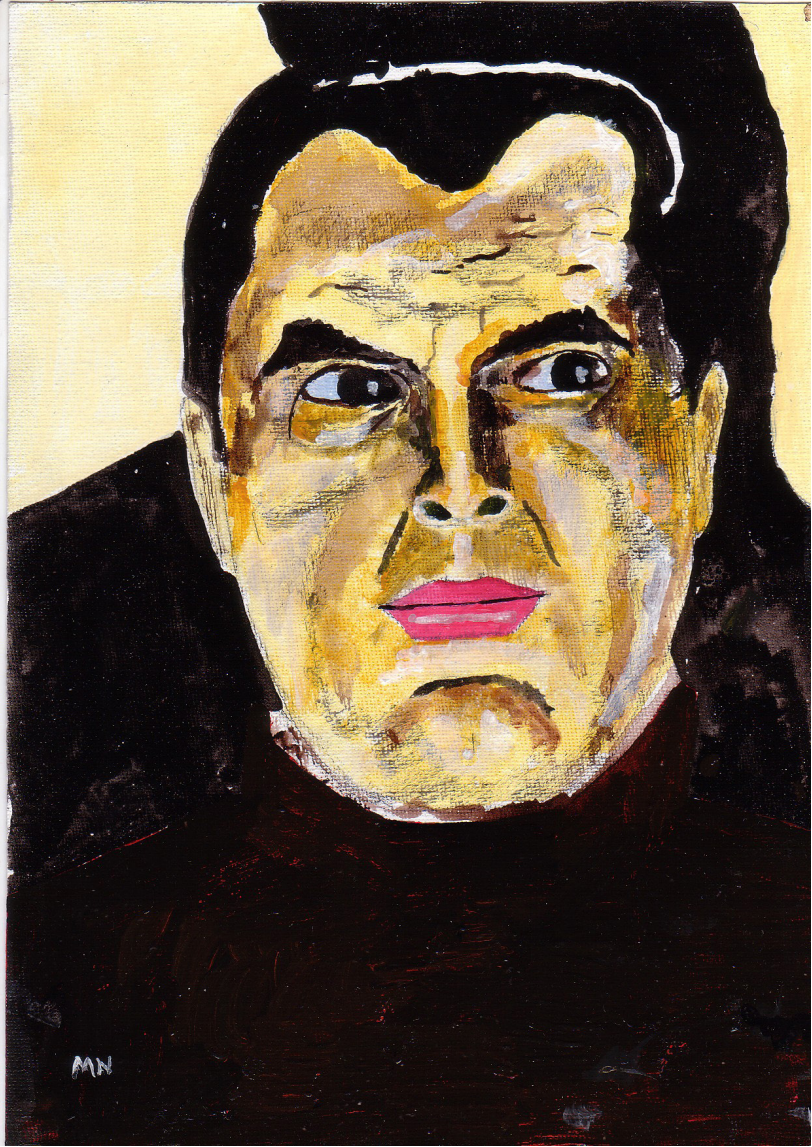
maybe my rainbow heart has been
louder than i thought it was;

perhaps that's why my mother told
me twice that i better not be a lesbian
and i'm not—but i am also not straight,

and sometimes i get exhausted
with one foot in and one foot out of the closet;

so love me for everything i am
instead of hating me for everything i
am not—

because i am done swallowing myself
down for the comfort of others,
accept me for the ocean i am or stay
on the sand and avoid my waters.



VAMPIRE
Michael Noonan

FEBRUARY

Mukut Borpujari

I'm crawling out of this season of hard cold winter,
That stayed long enough.
The bottom of my feet kicked up dirt on the hard asphalt.
When I planted a mango tree it smelled of green earth —
Pulsing sun, dirt, and water.
I do remember this. I pinned summer light upon my back
And made no apologies for the space I took up —
Barely clothed and sun-burned.

Now, a ball of cotton in the grey sky.
The sun rolls low on the horizon, hangs,
Then dips behind a city block.
Wind howling us into the night.
Inside in the erratic rhythm of this flickering
Shadows and light,
I conjure up the potent sky of the longest day;
Seeds, with a whole galaxy inside them.
Cicadas vibrating outside
On the branches of a giant neem tree.

I never expected to find myself in such a cold place,
My hands dry out against the cold.
I let the memory out, let it linger on the horizon,
Some kind of flying like a kite — again and again.
I loosen the buckles of my mind to fly back in time,
To the days of dried out paddy fields, and herds of cattle —
I let it stay there.

Replaying the Same Song Hoping For a Different Melody

Martin Willitts Jr.

My son's birth had gravity — it stopped my heart,
kick-started a collection of surprises:
a perception with helplessness; creation itself;

the recognition I played a small part in his existence.
Without love, he would not be cradled in my arms.
I know many parents feel this way. I know some don't.

I still feel his imprint between my hand and elbow,
the weight of responsibility. My logic unmoored.
It had the momentum of first spring.

Love begins its curious work, a certain grimness
associated with worry I would fail. I feel I failed anyway.
All lack dropped into my heart.

The heart strangles. And why? Where did I fail?
What bends the heart, twists it, carves it?
Simple truths smell like soiled diapers I had washed,

hung on a line, folded, powdered him many times.
I accepted this, its fragility, the inconsistencies of sleep.
It wasn't academic. He could barely lift his head.

I criss-crossed his blanket. Fierce responsible staggered me.
I poured every once into him. All my wondering
what would he be like when he grew up,

only to learn the bitterness of rejection. All the bottle testing.
All the disbelief how time works against us.
One minute a baby, the next asking for the keys to the car.

Driving away, saying he refuses to come back.
All the nights rocking him to sleep, to be rocked off my feet,
Time reduces into a time bomb.

Invention

Susan Shea

Fifty one years ago, my suited-boss
wearing the wool of a sheep, told me

I would be stupefied when he showed
me his new \$18,000 fax machine that
could send documents in six minutes

after which he proceeded to show me
how fast he could deliver inappropriate
behavior wrongly attributed to wolves

letting me leave with only a quick fuss

I was relieved to walk back to my office
through the glassed-in roof tunnel that
led to lower level management offices

I stopped to feel sunshine on my face
to stand tall again, to take a moment
to be lured by a tiny creation of green
growing through a crack in concrete

letting me remember the origin
of my luxuries, the might of will

Food Co-op, College

Jeff Burt

I took with jars,
gave with tablespoons,
lips opened but wallet wired shut.

By the end of a month
I had nothing to eat.
Poverty consumed me.

Waiting for a grant to arrive,
I searched on cold cracked linoleum
wild for crumbs.

I lived in a studio: read
in one room, ate in the same,
slept where I sat.

Like a gravy bordered by
ambitious plots of bread
I didn't belong alone with a plate.

I learned to pare, to lean
toward the minimum, to devour
aroma, the sweetness of air.



WISTFUL PIGEON

Alex Bastianini

Between Gulfport and Gone

JC Alfier

From the shore,
 I turned landward

under the chance chorus
 of gulls — a diary of the sea.

A departed train
 left me to the shaded

silence of autumn
 that gains on the year.

A shoreward wind
 comes on suddenly,

like a woman
 running from a stranger.

The dust on my tongue
 tastes of home.

Expedition

Susan Shea

You didn't hear me say
I am not a barnacle

when you expected me to stop
what I was doing to do what
you were doing in your
ride through your moment

or maybe you did hear me
but, we were both so stunned
by that thumping bubble that came
out of my mouth without warning

that we adjusted ourselves to the
cold current, trusting we were
still on course together

knowing we had to keep
watch for our sharp-toothed
predators who mine the
words from our lowest territories



ZION CANYON ASCENDING

Michael Shoemaker

Because One Cannot Have Too Many Coyote and Bear Stories

Martin Willitts Jr.

Credibility, chortled Coyote,
that's for serious ones like Bear.

Bear wanted to sleep on that idea.
When he woke up, he was powerful hungry.
Bear had better things to do
than contemplate what the word *Credibility* meant.
After feasting on twenty-seven salmon
and a whole blueberry bush,
Bear decided it was time to waddle over
to ask the smartest one he knew: Deer Woman.

She said, "It means *reliable*;
not at all like my husband
chasing after every young doe
flipping their white tail at him."

Bear as usual misunderstood. He thought
Coyote was cheating with Bear's nice, comfortable wife.

He went over to Coyote, and whoomphed him,
knocking Coyote's tiny brain out of his skull,
spilling trickery everywhere,
and they became cockleburs.

What's that for? Coyote finally said
as he reattached his pea-sized brain.

Bear held a grudge the way he might hold a bee hive.

"Don't ever call me credible again."

Bear stormed off so angry,
he walked right through a mountain.

Grandmother Spider Closes Her Web of Stories

Martin Willitts Jr.

Coyote begged for another story about himself.
He loved hearing about the good old days
when he created every new rock, tree, river, bird.

It was too late.
Grandmother Spider ascended her rope,
but she told Coyote,
you have the power to write your own stories.

That's exactly what Coyote did —

He ran out, dusting the air with his bouncy skip, tail
wagging, painting the sky colors no one had ever seen,
making clouds of honey for Bear,
shiny blackberry stars for Crow,
a purple moon for Turtle Clan Mother,
new feathers of darkness for Raven,

As for me, well,
he gave me a promise
to never trick me, and I laughed so hard,
I spewed out an ocean, knowing
he had no intention of keeping that promise.

In Denial

Donna Pucciani

Dear crickets, tonight
your persistent chirping breaks
the darkness into shards of light.

Hasn't anyone told you
it's time to sleep?
To cease your useless chatter?

The heat that held your songs
of summer drifts away daily,
have you not noticed?

Soon the trees will turn
from green to gold, to brown,
then emptiness, and yet

you, who will also vanish
with leaves and flowers and
all the signs of summer's juicy life,

refuse to acknowledge
that everything changes,
that soon the encroaching cold

will banish you and the joy
of your incessant humming.
Face the reality of your

imminent stillness, your
gradual quiet. For god's sake,
stop singing.

Surviving London

Clay Waters

Before these antique overhangs of stone
compact your forehead like a witchfinder's brand
you must flatten the years down,
those dense packages of history
you're unequipped to carry,
to leather these interlaced streets down to the sole,
aerating the compressed centuries looming on either side
before one of those double-deckers
blaring the color of postal certitude
catches you looking the wrong way
and makes you one of the blurry bits
in a painting of lollipop rain
you're too exhausted to appreciate.

you must descend
be buffeted in the rush
of the city's blank underground breeze
blasting about you
directionless and encompassing
the fast train
shooting into your veins
a dose of everything, a city encoded virally
statues squeezed into symbols
marble gods powdered into takeout curry—

*ascending to the hazy surface
the last Dalek
rises like St. Paul's
across the Thames*



SEATTLE SKYSCRAPERS

Michael Shoemaker



Haunted

Beth Brody

Under a rock, on the left side of my well-worn path
just around the turn where the hoary oak tree
bearing carved names of lost loves rests, weary and gnarled--
there! See phosphorescence glowing sharply
blood-rosy sparked with anger. Out from the light seeps
memories of damp wool tweed and after shave. It oozes
past the mound of grasses, weeping into emptiness—there's no one
here who'll listen. Light leaves shadows, and in those shadows

I feel your fist upon my cheek, my chin, my soft
reclusive inner child. I taste the blood, hear
the snarl of my name, one of many not my own you spit
into my face. Backing up, my spine a rigid mast against the oak
I feel for the initials carved by one who loved me
way back when, who wiped my wounds with flannel, whose
unkept promises were not her fault. Now I feel her strength
embolden mine. There is nothing here to fear--

I take a sturdy breath and slowly move my heavy feet to leave
weighed down by your incriminations and a single stone
laid there to keep you in your place.

Half-sisters

Douglas K. Currier

Of the two, death is kinder, more forgiving,
more understanding. Life, on the other hand,
is a heartless cunt – old photos show us that,
photos from before she had her way with us,
fucked us over and over. That allure, that
seduction, consensual myth of the new day,
nodding fiction of the fresh start – ah, those
sunrises, how we gloated over time as if the bastard
were ours to enjoy. Have to admit: most times
she looked great, sometimes better after a few drinks,
full belly, but she was always there, always available.
We never read the fine print, putting it off for later
– the price of age, the cost in appearance, pride,
dignity. It's not until the end that we learn that death
is the nicer of the two, virginal, embraced but once.

Sheath

Nerissa Nields

Before I knew its name, I knew the laurel bush
By its gnarled branches, as bent as my grandmother's hands,
The space it made for a three-year-old's fort.

I knew its flowers were hexagonal and sweet.
But not for eating. A complicated flower
Blooms in my chest. A memory so hidden
It manifests only as a gentle redirect:

You can eat the roots of the grass
Pulling, slow and careful, the blade from its sheath
To draw the sweet white nectar between your teeth
Look—I can still show you how.

dissolving

Eva Eliav

this is the place
where roads
bleed into rivers

remnants
of our journey
drift like leaves

briefly dance
with thread-legged
water spiders

bone and flower
mingle
freed of burdens

all that the river craves
seeps from our skins



Native Born

M.F. Drummy

As a child this is
what you told me:
If you're not careful,

they will be careful
for you. To look out
for me, I guess, is what

you meant. To have my
back, to be there for me,
to be *full of care* for me.

They would be all these things,
for me. Omnipresent you said.
But the distant voices I hear

now are not yours. Can
they be trusted? Can I just
stroll into any Safeway

on my way home
to pick up a few things,
assured I won't be

perforated by
an AR-15? Here, where
you gave birth to me?

Prairie Garden

Donna Pucciani

This small patch of earth
we call “home” opens its arms
to all who pass, often
through the back door.

Wisps of communal coneflower,
senna and nodding onion, newly planted,
may or may not survive summer’s drought
or the onslaught of winter’s deadly woe.

All elbows and knees, the ragged sprouts
somehow live on, shouldering each other,
higgledy-piggledy, their ancient origins
full of new beginnings.

All seasons agree that there’s no tragedy
in a bit of clover working its way in,
green lace amid the dignity of dock-weed,
all reaching skyward, grasping possibility,
to meet the honking geese overhead,
cloud-riven, held together
in the improbable vee.

The first frost arrives in the garden,
this echo of Eden, a reminder that death
precedes resurrection, sure that spring
will return, golden under a blue sky,
its lavenders and yellows embracing
bounty after hunger, faith after despair,
leaning on each other to stay upright,
facing the sun.

What are old men made of?

Douglas K. Currier

Snips, snails

And puppy-dogs' tails

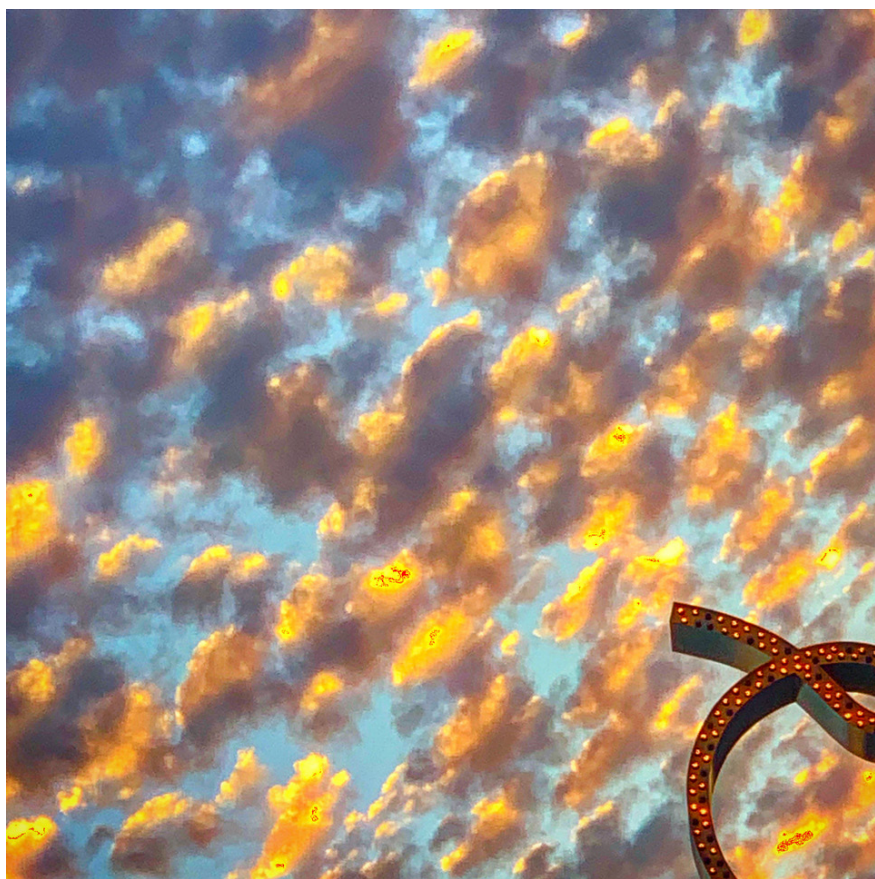
—“Natural History,” Robert Southey

Bones and blemishes, a surfeit of skin, and scars
that stitch mistakes, risks taken, caution ignored.

They are fashioned of wine and waiting and regret.
It's a certain whine that they themselves can't hear,
and a constant hunger for more time, although they don't
know what to do with it, and they already have all there is.

Constructed of stale wishes, the boards of boredom,
planks of pathetic, used nails long and thick, abandoned hope,
and rudimentary need, they limp from the evening news
to bedtime, breakfast to lunch, dinner to evening news
— a path worn into the rug of days. Sometimes they bathe.

Their dreams are mere memory, desires ridiculously
out of reach, requiring a new body and a better attitude, or perhaps
a turning back – the impossible redo, new beginning, flipping leaf,
mulligan, requiring a number of new parts and skill greater than God's.



CALIFORNIA SUNSET
Lawrence Bridges

In Magic: Nature

Beth Brody

Snow balances on a tightrope
of bare branches. A dozen clawed and taloned
feet mark the snow below. There's a tail trail
and a scattering of black-oil sunflower shells:
a winter's story made for melting.

The sun rises from a reddish quilted sky,
it sets in a flash of green light
at the night edge of the horizon. In between
it counts the hours of its workday—
just like the rest of us.

A fibrous nest
tightly woven
swings high in treetops
catching the wind
swinging
back and forth
keeping
the tiny, marbled
blue-grey
Oriole's eggs
from falling.

In daylight I'm delighted by everything: the nubby
texture of cement or the smell of wet dogs. I crave
French Toast or chocolate and always
my next cup of coffee. In the dark—
swastika nightmares scrape away at my still conscious mind.
My insomniac anxieties refuse to hide
in my bunker, or simply leave until...
I think of forests, not to conceal myself, but the damp mulch
smell, the sounds of insects boring wood, and birdsong. I think
of a flowing river, its banks green and the rocks slippery smooth.
I hear sounds of the ocean, smell its scents of salt, hot-sun sand,
and crimson beach roses, and feel it soothing me, finally,
to sleep. Like magic.

i used to dream

Gina Gidaro

i used to dream that you would talk to me.

sprawled out on
green carpets with
colored specks,
the smell of
heavy books and
brewed coffee—

certain things are only meant to ruin you, my dear.

i would fall asleep
on the curving slope
of syllables,
spiral into a warm
meadow of promises
and plans.

like a veiled chameleon, your words were dipped in turquoise.

we'd talk about our
icy fingertips, my
bruised resentment,
and your fallen name
in a deliriously epic
rhapsody.

in those wobbly lines of somnolence, you tell me everything.

fleeting freckles,
and sandy sheets,
i can't count how
many times
those dreams
led me to the creek.

with my knuckles against my chest, i will myself a proper rest.

i am gulping oxygen
through a graveyard of
unrelenting illusions;
i used to dream
that you
would talk to me.

until i tore the tapestry blocking that candy-colored sunrise, and what it means to be free.

stripmap

Eva Eliav

we hurried
then

devouring the journey
like exotic fruit

tossing the towns
away

wide-eyed children
in a fairy tale
catching our first glimpse
of gingerbread

motels with slot machines
and swimming pools

waffles for breakfast
twenty eight flavours
of ice cream

innocent and greedy
we shouted demands

left sweets barely tasted
half eaten wonders

forward racing
forward

in the end

we crave it all
want every flavour back

This hook was supposed to bite you

C.C. Joyce

This hook was supposed to bite you. It failed, clearly — sitting passively, waiting to be leashed & drug along through chunky prose. You were *supposed* to be enticed. I've said this line so many times, it's like muscle memory, etched & hand-stitched into the sinews of skin and soul:

“Hi!” I'd say, “My name is [BLANK].
I just moved here from [BLANK CITY,
BLANK STATE]. It's been six months,
though it feels like I never left home.”

Could you see anxiety *bleed* through paper-thin smiles & hands clammy, still aching from grips too tight, or the façade pulled taut around the edges my persona spilling from the seams? Could you see that I've backspaced & over-thought, that I've practiced these lines too many times? It's muscle memory for the glass to overflow.

“Yeah, I enjoy it here so far,” I'd reply. “No, my siblings and I are estranged, practically. Do I miss them? Of course, but — No! *You* don't understand. No one tells you who to bring.”

No one shows you how to write the perfect chapter, just that adverbs should be used sparingly, if not rarely; that the hook should *bite* you. It should *entice* you — pull your readers through, grip constricting. No one shows you who to bring (and how to help them leave) & no one tells you that it will one day be muscle memory to not look back. A chapter's purpose is to keep moving forward.



CATCHING LIGHT

Ellen Harrold



RUINS OF YESTERYEAR GERMANY

Arvilla Fee

Adduction

Yuna Kang

I'm sorry I couldn't be what you needed me to be, he says, he
broke my heart. That old cliché, but it's true, I felt those crystal
beats slow, turn to sugar sludge in varicose
veins.

And I am not a jealous god, or fickle, or even
alive, but the defection stung me like a stage
hit, the whistling of air, that smug execution. I
would have preferred if you smacked me until
my breath stung with jealous gold, carotid blooms
bursting, but it is the absence, that
purposeful miss, that made you so proud.

It was all for the show. The

exaggerated promises, the breathless whining, I
love you so much, No one could treat me like

you do. You are a daughter to me, Proserpine with her hair
on fire, gilded curls dancing in fields of hot wheat. I knew
you were to go down to Hades, enveloping warmth, and still I
thought: so unorthodox. What a wonderful

girl.

Giving Up Identities, However Briefly

Grace Martin

After the snowmelt in the valley only a few days
before the first array of leaves

I collected cottonwood branches in the grass,
blown down by weather, the bark smooth and folded as skin,

buds full of sticky resin staining the husks ebony like clusters
of cloven hooves. Into the river, I discarded the twigs

looking downstream saw a glossy nose dividing the current
without reflex to identify I said to myself *it looks*

like somebody is coming

In the following days, I pondered the absence to reflexively name
with a surprising fullness in my throat. I didn't know

that I was tired of my own mind, that I was only
guarding smallness

Gathering twigs had been my method of picking the lock,
while the guards were distracted. That day on the river

as I rested on the grass it was an otter who swam
in the shallows like a ribbon, surfacing for breath

our eyes met without fear until the breeze turned,
carrying with it my scent

sitting with dreams at café

Alex Bastianini

a clock with cartoon eyes
its hands wobble with laughter
inferno, flames quivering
trepid eyes, frightful
an apocalyptic play book
round dot spider, bats
a drawing of a tundra
and roaming the landscape
the face of satin glaring, spite
crumbled ruins, stretching to infinity
mustard fog, dredging alone
in darkness, nothingness...
heaven, seeing the cards of original sins

the cobwebs of memory clear
the vignette falling to 0
sitting here
trying to determine if she's the one
the one love is directed to
sending the email
she gets up and leaves
like the dreams, she never will return
grabbing suitcase and leaving
to walk the portrait of a life vibrant
where beauty is everywhere
while wistful poetry remains in the heart
for now
while on earth



FENCED IN
Shei Sanchez

Bigfoot Blues

Renee Williams

He's out there, you know,
waiting, watching and wondering
when we're gonna have the good sense God gave a goose
to leave him the hell alone.

Our town dedicated a festival in his honor
as if he wanted one
or even contemplated showing up for the Big Foot Holler.

Would you come to see a crowd of screaming hillbillies
munching on fried Oreos and funnel cakes,
leveling lemon shakes like they would a Yuengling on a Friday
night at the Tavern,
all the while screaming your name, demanding that you come
out of hiding?

I thought not.
Those around here go Squatchin'
'bout as much as searching for morels and 'manders.
(For the uninitiated,
on rainy, spring nights as temperatures near 60,
off folks go in search of the spotted salamanders, helping the
wily beasts cross busy roadways
so they can find their vernal pools, procreate,
and go into hiding again.
Kind of like Big Foot, I guess.)

He has my sympathy, you know.
Though he lives in the woods and tries to be an introvert,
his days are numbered.
No skinny dipping for him.
Doubt that you'll see him picking wild raspberries, either,
and you sure as heck won't see him doing a voluntary highway clean-up
when the do-gooders
come around...or the convicts.

For some, it's imperative that
we find evidence of his lurking by identifying his footprints in the mud,
taking plaster prints as documentation.
Though photos are never provided, data is written down, logged, and
categorized,
like electric bills, insurance rates, and Covid numbers.

Here you'll find white-tails, muskrats, mink, and moles.
Less likely you'll see a bobcat, or a forest puppy, also known as a black
bear.
Rumors abound of ghosts, haunted trail tunnels, and sometimes aliens.

Local lore tells us that that even the mammoth icebergs were worn down
by the time they reached rebel Appalachia, forming these the foothills
where I call home.
From my vantage point in the hot tub, I can drink some cheap sweet
wine,
gaze at the shooting stars on a canvas of black sky as they burn wildly to
the ground, and
behold the mysteries of the world.
The Big Dipper is all I ever cared to know.

What Lies In Wait for Salmon After a Long Migration

Grace Martin

In every tavern, there is a map spattered
with islands and estuaries. Here,

the sea is on everyone's mind.

It is the gray table where
evergreen loaves of forest lie.

Far off, the sugar frosted outlines
of mountains provide a border
for the mind, a hedge against

the unacceptably vast

Every September, droves of salmon
leave the seaweed and brine
for freshwater streams, probing

by memory the familiar lanes

In the shallows, their python bellies
drag in the silted gravel
as they crash against the current

Sometimes they gather-

darkly pulsating in the deep
slow places

In a crack of passion, one beats
a thick tail, snaps at a golden eye

The cold wash of autumn
bring unshaven men in riverboats
to wait

In the cool gray dawn,
they pull from the water
long silver bodies that-

arcing and snapping like bows
beat aluminum hulls
as if punishing themselves for failing
to make meaning of their lives

If they had lungs, their screams
would be unbearable



THE AMERICAN TOURIST

Arvilla Fee



REMNANT
Ellen Harrold



An Apology to Our Son

Camille Lebel

Every evening of that last August found you
waiting on the dock for the purple-pink dying of day.
Crickets scraped soft melodies with sharp-edged wings as
you offered red wigglers to sleepy bass and
smack talk to little brothers.

You joined our family at age 17: a dozen foster homes
too late. We didn't know then how a body holds memory;
scent and shadows hiding in cells, tense and trembling.
We couldn't see the searing affront in
a bowl of black bean soup, a lace tablecloth,
a whispered good-morning.

When you left that night, it took us a week to find you
again, another unclaimed someone interred in the city morgue.
They had you by the wrong name. A dead name
for your frozen body.

We're sorry. We know you're afraid of the dark. We know you hate the cold.

We won't bury you in a graveyard, surrounded by
the thou-shalts who hurt you. Instead, we'll sprinkle
ashes on the warm sand and visit on summer evenings.
We'll carve your life into a tree on the water's edge.

We'll call you by your name.

Rhubarb

Diane Funston

The rhubarb in great-grandma's backyard
inner-city hometown
was born way before me
Dinner plate size toxic leaves
waved greetings every summer
Glad hands of green
with crimson stalks
made sweet with cane sugar
stirred in to her granite ware pot
simmering on the Magic Chef stove
Rhubarb sauce for breakfast
or ice cold on dog days
baked into pies with custard
Hard to kill the plant
in those God-less winters
just a white fluffy blanket
It raises its infant head
a sign of spring
All the relations gone
old house rented out
then sold for 5 grand
rented out again and again
So hard to kill that rhubarb
but it's dead-cold gone
The empty lots burn red
without street maple trees in autumn
once a blaze of comfort
All the family flowers now bloom
in the old city cemetery
Rhubarb a victim of crime
no more waving it's hands
too many guns there now
on the stalks of young men's arms

wild hope

Gina Gidaro

summer

you picture her in the trees, a greenhouse of hope and intentions and fireflies. the air tastes like sweet tea and mint chocolate chip ice cream. within your ribcage is a cavern of lavishing ivy, hidden and wastrel. **and yet**, she breaks apart your upholstered soul and you watch movies outside, the dew making promises out of green and gold. embers reach for the sky like longing fingers. the two of you fly through the canopies, getting tangled in wild reed. you teach her to swim where her feet can't touch, bare toes sweeping past silhouettes of the unknown. dragonflies dance around you in the candy-colored skies. you tell her to run so she *does*.

autumn

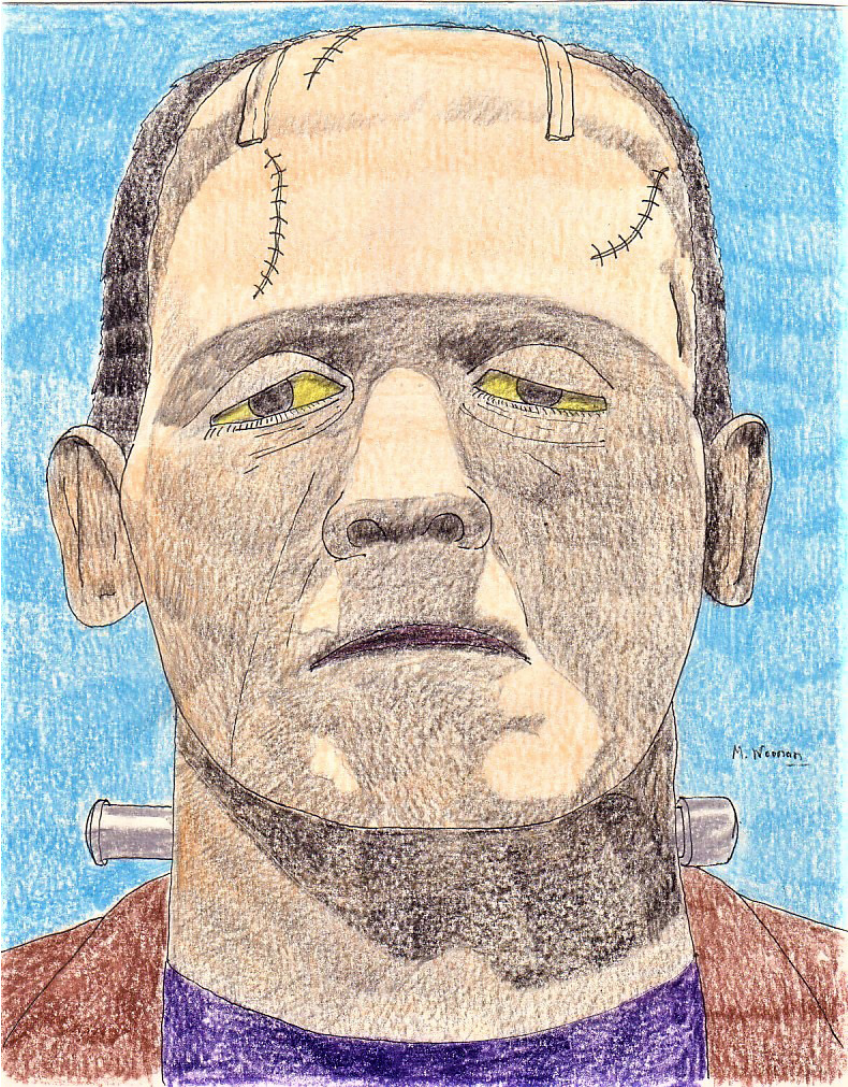
change withers green to brown and **there is** a soft breeze that blows leaves across the driveway. tree limbs block paths like ebbing bones that do not fit anymore. *she* abandons those currents of sentiments for syllables in the dark, and you lose your mind over the desires of a silly girl. she tosses wood into the fire and watches it burn and smother and crumble. she plays games of hide and seek in barren cornfields while hands reach through her honey-dipped words only to grasp tides of emptiness. she begins to look away. cicadas sing hymns of wreckage and quiet deaths but a flowerbed grew in your cavern and begs you to cling tight. hope never lingers, it suffocates.

winter

with **so much** convenience in ignorance, your greenhouse is buried under layers of snow. winterberries glow crimson against the silver meadows of things lost. you walk around aimlessly in a fathomless home *even* after that brisk air breaks the world open. you *think* of running away, of chasing the pearl moon but everywhere is a graveyard of dreams, forgotten in shades of blue. starry midnights leave a bitter taste of guilt on parched lips and there is an echoing stillness in your abandoned cavern. something has been left for dead and dragged away into the night and when the ghosts come out of their graves she directs their path your way.

spring

time is to blame for the embroidery of wounds. invisible scars on pale, thawing skin are like raindrops gliding down windowpanes after a long drought. cardinals and white trilliums mark an evergreen persistence. souvenirs from the Great War. but what could be left *of you?* your feet are sore from running over dreadfully inconvenient things. the two of you wait for that morning glory but the sunrise only brings a peculiar kind of loss. something has been left behind. she sips lavender coffee while sunbeams travel up your spine. you recall that lost **hope** buried under puddles of pain and decide, once and for all, that this is how wildflowers are made.



FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER

Michael Noonan

AT THE MALL (ON BLACK FRIDAY)

Thomas Rions-Maehren

there is a crowded shopping mall
where competitive discount seekers
bump shoulders & sometimes shove. it is bleeding
drakkar noir & cinnamon-scented
grease. the lines have never been longer;
the desires have never felt so urgent. luggage,
jeans, smoothies, sun-
glasses. they are toasting to the peak
of human experience, i scoff

with sarcasm. no.
they are not zombies. they are not
drones. they are not selfish. i know
this, or at least, i try to drill it
through my stubborn skull. it's just
that i have a mouse trap in my kitchen
loaded with a glistening glob
of peanut butter, but the mice
only pick at the crumbs on my
countertop without greed
capturing them in its sticky clutch. no. stop that!
they're the clichés? what's more cliché

than the angsty poet writing
an angsty poem on a bench off to the side
of the parade of happy people? your wife
is trying on a sleek, black dress
that will drive you wild. your sister
& her friends are making memories
over a styrofoam plate of orange chicken.
others are picking out remote-control cars
for their nieces & nephews, buying
lavender candles for their stressed out

mothers. there is a crowded shopping mall
with hoards of people, & i wish that i paid
as little mind to the voice of my inner
curmudgeon as they did.

Toothsome

Grace Martin

One of those tender June
early afternoons, I found
the litter and maul of branches
abandoned by a toothy critter

There were switches fresh,
raw alabaster peels
and a high strong willow
now bent perpendicular

Our handyman, who did not
budget his imagination,
spent wildly on theories
of underwater muskrat lairs

Whatever it was, I envied
the animal who could gnaw
and slice with its powerful
mouth. How it must satiate

his most grievous moods.
As a child, I bit my headboard
in the dark. The way my teeth
sank into the soft wood, cracking

delicate paint, it was an odd
yet reliable palliation.

Glass Exhibition

Diane Funston

—*For Dale Chihuly*

Last night in a crystal-clear dream

stalactites and stalagmites
man-made sparkling icicles
stream with druzy
Displays encase reflection,
refraction, mirrored abundance

Featured artist

a man blowing glass
through flute-like tubes
A manic Pan twisting
molten hot rope
into serpentine spirals
they slither or snap
from breath of his lips
ex nihilo

The forms dance with his kiss

This Prometheus sparks
skill from deft hands
while I watch intently
as hard-packed ice
cold outside window panes
while I feel
hot singe below skin
from his unbridled flame

Asterisk

Patricia Walsh

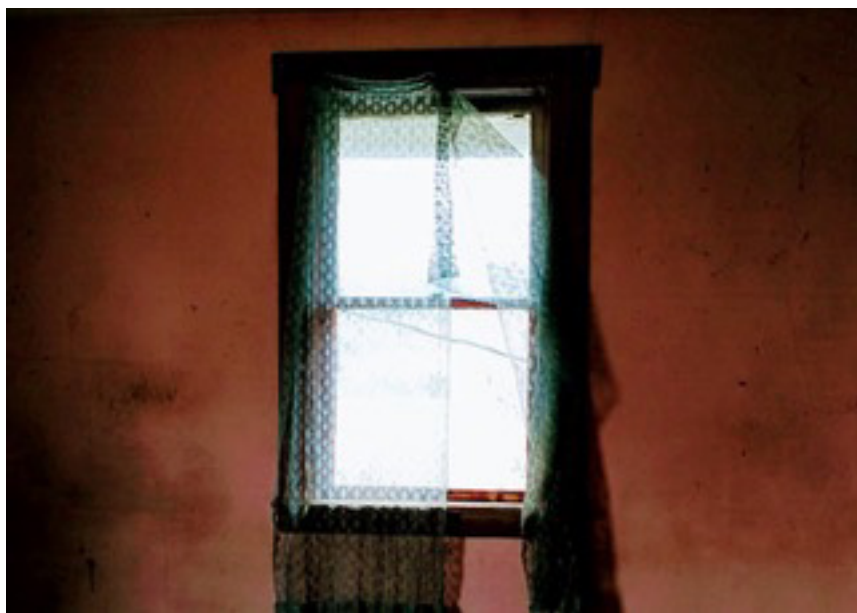
Hanging itself under cover of midday
this iron constitution fools no one now.
Interruption in its intermissions sweetly recalling
blurring the plot-lines on dint of disturbance
spraying the smoke into a diligent air.

Taken aside for the crime of remaining
occupying tables best suited for multiples
defunct fireplaces remain there, as will
piping music in speculation a glorious fire
stuck together, fighting, like the famous cats.

Teasing for want of a better life, a food source
more inceptions than the body can fathom,
living beside candle-grease, spat on momentarily
children more complex than really necessary
watched over celebrations on a wasted colour.

The gentle drunk turns shyly away
stories unwanted, enough to contend with
radiators painted a silent grey,
autobiographies sold to assailants, done nicely
tossed aside once home, rubbished in due course.

Not paying for the privilege, simply downloaded
the one step towards addiction ever alighted,
fixing others an occupation worth slighting
mirroring the prominence of another beauty
lights sounding what is otherwise ignored.



IT'S BEEN AWHILE

Gina Gidaro

The Monster Alarm

Ed Brickell

The church bells rang on the hill above my house
While the children played below.

The youngest from another neighborhood
Asked me what it was.

“That’s the monster alarm,” I said.
“It’s how we know when the monsters come.”

And I must admit
To my pride in the look that passed among them,

And I must confess
To a power in the silence of their trusting,

Having led them to the frontier of
My tremendous lie,

Rearing on its haunches,
Darkening our sky.

STORIES RUSH IN

Janet Teas

School sent me to London
 an eventful mile.
Westminster Abbey,
peach from a stand,
numerous memoirs
 of friends and wee flats,
a zebra crossing—
 that search was slow on foot.
Deck chairs in the park—
 a sense of déjà vu.
Popcorn and a piercing,
Piccadilly Circus.

I revisit all my treasures
 tightly packed in a box,
and stories rush in
 of forty years ago.

The rain-soaked streets
 under my well-worn shoes,
the people close around me
 in snapshots and in memories.

Happiness, Perhaps

Paul O. Jenkins

She parked the car—
Not the hybrid she thought she'd be driving by now—
And saw the decorations on the wall
Of their house, newly free of mortgage,
Hippy flowers splashed crazily
Across the somber umber they'd chosen
Just the summer before as stain.
Six petals, all yellow, served as spokes for orange rings
That looked to her too far
From perfect to warrant the name of circles.
She engaged the parking brake,
Noted that she should vacuum floormats this weekend,
Gently slammed the door
And found her husband on the grass,
Beatific as he had so often longed to be.
The brushes, destitute of turpentine,
Would be ruined, she thought.
The rag he held, unused,
Had been her favorite tee shirt once.
This, she thought, might just be
Happiness.

First Love

Donald Sellitti

My first love was a bump in the road
on the Sunday drive to Grandma's.
A dip of the pavement atop a tiny creek
that sent the car a little airborne,
setting something in me jostling.
'Here it comes!' I'd think,
and if the speed was right
I felt a kind of thrill that
always left me wanting more.
If that is love,
then I was smitten.



CITY

Alex Bastianini

To My Children Regarding the Ride Home From School

Camille Lebel



The books failed to cover our first shot-dead body bleeding on the roadside. If I find this information, I will place it on the shelf beside the playful-gentle-attachment manuals. I will dog-ear pages and highlight lists, an arsenal against the senseless.

You stayed in the van, at least. No complaints or indignant protests. You told me later that you could see his body. His muddy boots. His gray hoody and jeans. You did not report if you could see the blood, pooled purple under his chest, bright red filling his mouth.

What did he look like? Someone's dad. Soft bellied, too-thick mustache gray-ing above the drowning mouth. Someone's son. Unblinking eyes frozen wide, sea green.

Why did you stop? Because the women who witnessed this, his body dumped from a moving vehicle, could not. stop. sobbing. Because a calm hand can press two fingers into the side of a still-warm neck and find no pulse there, feel for breath recently departed. Because a voice not shaking can lead police to the back, barely-named road. Because you were watching.

Was he a bad man? Is not the question you are asking. What you want to know, why. Justice still a black and white construct, you crave balanced scales. If he is a villain, the world again has order. Good men are not expelled onto asphalt's edge, among unkempt weeds and crushed Sonic cups, a roadblock on our way home.

Will the police catch the killers? I will tell you about license plate numbers, fingerprints, traffic cameras. But first, I will wrap you in heavy quilts on the couch. I will give you mugs of hot cocoa and bowls of buttered popcorn, and we will watch television before homework or chores. I will remind you of all the ways we are safe.

I will wash his blood from my fingers. I will clamp a hand over my mouth.

I will not scream.

Spring Spawn

Amy Nemecek

"I am living a creek, writing a river."

—Luci Shaw

I am a zaftig torpedo determined
to deliver this live payload of stories
upstream to the weir of rocks, leaves,
and deadfall where my journey began.
I anchor pectoral fins in shifting silt,
and the creek inscribes a cursive vee
as it slicks past my dorsal fin. I'm a
silver arrow defying the April current
that taunts me to surrender downstream.
Belly grazing gravel, I take thrashing glee
in urgency, leave no trace of my efforts
except a silent clutch of pearlescent ink.

Pepper Plant

Ed Brickell

Something that could give me gifts, plentiful, naughty, delicious.
Peppers, I decided. Rows of them just off the truck, labeled,
Huddled in planters, surging from stems stiff as springs,
Fragile birthers fated to begin. I confined one on my patio,

Pregnant in scruffy leaves, green pods burst into red hearts,
That flirty curve at the tip – wanton wink of artistry,
Growth with sexy grace that made cutting it seem almost wrong,
Pain's pleasure finally bought and paid for. I bit,

Tongue's buds aroused in expectation, caressing
The old seasons. My searching mouth, thrilling with the sting
Of peppers from the past, but tasting only tepid whispers
From what seemed to have gone wrong in the growing.

Cloistered in my quickened calendar,
Did it lag behind each sun, mistake the moon's light?
Root tips, feeling along the hard, unsolvable curve –
Was there confusion, some strange sadness? Or impossible to thrive

In my starved imagination, shaky scaffolding
Of what had happened long before? What pepper could conform

To my blueprint for all good things to be?
Only white scabs where I broke their grip on home,

Bold colors bleached away,
Water choked in shrinking stalks,
A slow, unscripted exit,
The last ones too small
For my plotted summer romance,

Tiny skulls
In my tight fist.



EXPANSE
Afra Adil Ahmad



GROWTH TAKES TIME

Afra Adil Ahmad

October Garden

Paul O. Jenkins

The wind is kind to this October garden,
Arranging desiccated blossoms
With solicitude,
Coaxing fallen petals into submission,
Cajoling them into supporting roles
Now that their diva turn is past.
Some catch on twigs, shy to leave the stage,
But most scatter, loath to linger now deposed.
The breeze escorts them into acquiescence.
Eternal, it recognizes their decay will
Spawn resumption come the Spring
When legatees' auditions
Will flit in currents fresh,
Delighted to be granted motion
By obliging and accordant wind.

A Story about Dad

Adam R. Levine

In another version, he wants to hold my son.
He's not afraid to cradle the baby
boy looking up at him on his lap, red-haired and bulbous-cheeked
like he was. He's not afraid of his own body, fragile, frail,
only soup and yogurt, white knuckles and bone,
blotchy skin, clothes flapping around joints.
His cheek muscles don't resist when he smiles.
He enunciates a joke and we laugh. Then he stands
without my help and clasps his grandson
to his chest, tells him not to procrastinate like his father,
balances him on his shoulders, not yet slouched,
tickles him until the tears trickle
down his glowing face, traces
the contours of his nose and mouth,
familiarizes himself with fingers freckled and wide.

I remember those hands
playing piano duets, wrapping around mine on golf clubs,
soy-stained from homemade marinades,
tossing me into the pool on Sundays:
high-pitched laughter, suntan lotion, Cat Stevens.
He dove in after us, the former swim team captain—
bronze, elegant, graceful. I felt weightless in his arms.

My son falls asleep and time stretches like a cat.
Sunspecks fall in shafts of afternoon light.
A breeze ripples the screen door.
Dad's sitting in his armchair, newspaper folded.
He takes my hand, gripping it as hard as he can. He wants me to
hold it there. There's still time
(*hold it there, there's still time*)
to teach me how to be a father.

Future Aubade

Sean Eaton



When my father died at last, I did not attend the funeral, having no broom to get there. In another state I ate my lunch and pretended the newborn white foals in my stomach were pillars of bluest granite for his sake. His wife and her children, all loving and stupid, spoke their lame honors over his coffin before it was lowered into the lampblackened teeth of slumber. To honor my reputation, I dressed in scarlet satin. Days passed. The foals became stallions that galloped and sweated, running their races to make money for others. Awake or asleep, the filaments of my life haunted my slumber. Ablaze with faerie fire, I could not concentrate and all I touched blackened like silver in greenest seawater. I used my thirty pieces to buy a smorgasbord of hot wings, and gorged myself till I was sick with blue memory. Buffalo gravy dripped down my chin and stained all my shirts with the blood of the delicious reptiles all culled to grace my dinner plate. Abating to bed then, I rested fitfully and dreamed I was forgiven my sins by the rector of the neighboring parish. My father, his loose skin a gasping pale blue, vanished into the kiss of night, a flock of moths spilling from his exit wound. The stallions were culled and turned into glue. I woke in a sweat and a fever of epiphany, seeing the course I would take in the morning. I dressed in darkest blue. Heavy with cold stones, I tried to drown myself, but the creek was mere inches and I was just muddied. A farmer passed by then, and gave me a scolding for trying to throw my life away, as he helped me up and drove me home. I said nothing to my mother about all this, one scolding enough for me. I washed my clothes, the day fled into dusk, and I fell into sleep. The fever then passed, as most fevers do.



UNICORN

Irina Tall (Novikova)

Another Cape Story

Ed Brickell

1

Eyes opening, uncertain time in a different zone,
Walked still trailing sleep to the window by your deck
Where you watched the day writing itself
In lengthening lines of light, each of us awakening
In different ways, my squandered dreams

From last night's tossing burned away
In the sun's slow firing,
Still sighted through their shadows
But little left of the story they had sewn,
Vague and, in pleasant ways I never remember,

Inconsequential, slow dissolving leaving me
Neither calm nor worry, slate wiped as clean
As the soft emoting sky above your head,
Clouds exiting stage left. You sat alone
In your copyright of past, present, future,

But perhaps our separate lives could shelve
Both our libraries of experience,
Interleaving on the folio of the forming hour,
Some new play of our perceptions
From true copies of what had gone before.

2

And I entered, eager to hear what you were seeing
Without thinking of your private right
To the day you were creating there alone,
And you looked surprised to see me freed of
The grip of my own sleeping story,
But we waded into the stream of each other's speech
As easily as summer bathers, and quickly we began
To describe the same things we saw in different ways,
Cape Cod undraped in dark pastels under squinting sun,
Rising light waxing the pines and oaks below us,

Revealing your tales of other times
When ice sheathed the same branches in another shine,
Other nights when, just to lie closer to the stars,
You pitched a tent on the wooden planking
Where my feet now rest, breathing the same piney air
Sharpening now in me, listening to your past
In a day still unsure of itself, still feeling its way
Out of the sea on the edges of our sight,
As they did long ago, starved and sneaking,
Stealing corn the Wampanoag had offered to their dead,
Mistaken mariners surprised in the drowning,
Desperation, shipwreck, disease, massacre and revenge,
Stories long sown and plowed to silence in the ground below
While our innocent remembering drifts among the salted trees,
Past plaited into present, histories rising from the dark.

I Was Born in May

Angela Hoffman

She dares to share her imperfections alongside her divinity,
so I'm drawn to her.
There is an aura of holiness when she puts her finger to her lips,
in her birdsong, in her gentle tears that fall.
She can be messy, miserable, raw.
She is indecisive, deceptive in that sunny way.
She warms up to you slowly, breaks out of her tight bud
but then retreats, goes back into hiding.
Sometimes she can be downright cold towards you,
stinging you with her outbursts, so gusty.
There are days she seems to offer only the bare bones of gray,
but then she goes all out with her generosity, hospitality,
setting out bouquets of daffodils, hyacinth,
dressing in her finest greens, all sparkly, radiant.
She is patient, yet makes others wait for her.
She offers hope, even resurrection from the dead.
I know her well, as I was born right next to April.

Words that do not mean what you think they mean

Elliot batTzedek

cut grass but not your cut grass
cut grass and creosote rising from deep
within fence post after fence post after
acre after country mile after fence post
after rain

moonlight after snow

how come or when or why not
existing for two days only after each
calendar date circled red

gas

neighbor
gun
neighbor with his gun
his gun without neighbor

squirrel dove rabbit snapper
dirt gravel oiled blacktop
single double over & under

trucks as horses trucks as cars trucks
as wagons trucks as livelihood trucks
as projects trucks as legend trucks as
myth trucks never missing from
any picture

that scene with the hat on the antennae

corn



A6118

Richard Hanus

The Mercury Lounge (Saturday Night)

Thomas Skahill

Tonight,

I'm

going to drink whiskey

and get my life together. Counter intuitive,

I know. Chisel Tip,

Oxymoronic. A thousand

dead thoughts rot

across countless lead rooms. Embryonic.

Sharing troubles. Something

like a light waltz plays as Man

is poured from frothy mugs.

It's a hollow sorrow; all to its own. Mundane,

overdone. Something like a well-done steak,

covered in ketchup. Horribly wrong to some.

Perfect

to others. Buzzwords become straw men as

conversations step over each other. Blunderbuss shots.

Words spout when I hide from others, intentionally.

“Whiskey Neat”

Hollow Sorrow.

Empty Words

&

Obvert Observations.

The truth of the matter is there is no obvious target
for irrational anger.

It just happens to be whoever you hold close.

Best

not to hold anyone

at all.

Hermitage. Everlasting.

The ingredients of the second fall.

The Fall of Troy

William Doreski

A false dawn awakens us.
The right time, when the cloud-facts
explain us to each other
while absorbing the spilled light.

An era of rhetorical skies
precedes another great war
with all its pomp and circumstance.
Where will we pitch a tent when

ghost armies occupy our basement
and feint and struggle all night?
You want the sentiments to pile
like rugs from the Middle East.

You want the bass clef to dominate.
I'd rather lie on the sofa
and act as a cat trampoline
while the political class sheds

the last ethical gesture and stands
naked and shameless in the snow.
Christmas may or may not
arrive soon enough to save us

from bellowing little villages
armed with their naïve ambitions.
We'll drive through these places the way
Einstein drove through time and space.

Can we simper ourselves to sleep
for another hour while the clouds
argue among themselves? The fact
of the fall of Troy still lingers

with its legends fizzing and sparking.
But only archaeology changes
like someone pulling clean socks
over feet rancid with decay.



THE MUMMY'S REVENGE
Edward Michael Supranowicz

Sunday Night in a Funeral Home

Felix Elliot

The sun has set hours ago and lamp posts look
over a glossy street, their necks bowed
in genuflection: a flaming reflection. Heavy
blue-gray sky, same hue as the flush of his veins.

Here I am, cradled as a lamb. Here I am
open to his influence. The hand
on my throat shows more mercy than I desire.
A tenderness unwarranted but endured.

Outside cars hum by while he and I
moan like the dead. If ghosts exist they are made
in hollow hallways and young men.
In O-shaped mouths and the songs they make.

We steal our little deaths where we can,
preparing for the final curtain.

The Keeping Room

Arvilla Fee

a bone china teapot
with tiny blue roses,
a lace doily
which covers a scratch
on the oak side table,
three paperbacks,
(all mystery thrillers)
one still has a bookmark
on page 119,
house slippers
formed over time
to the exact shape
of her size 6 feet,
a threadbare quilt,
its ocean blues faded
to a muted gray,
the cuckoo clock
that always kept time
ten minutes ahead,
the garden statue
of a bunny
that never quite made it
to the garden;
the room had kept
everything
but her.



GODDESS BONE

Ellen Mary Hayes

Reclamation

Shelly Reed Thieman

An art therapist has instructed
me to write things down.
Like a good girl, I submit.
The dawn is calescent, pine
cones sweat sap in sun.

Locusts master a dialect
I can't depict. Hummingbirds
speak the language of flowers.
I stroke the velour of my cat's
chest, he lunges from reach.
I don't speak his jargon either.

I've just read a poem, surrender
tears like an icicle in spring,
wish I were Persian or French
with an ancestry broad
as a young mother's hips.

The plush poet persuades—
Even midday brims with stars.
Close your eyes, you'll see them.
Today they'll speak Punjabi,
a melodious language
with a vast vocabulary.

I put down the pen, imagine
a world with without lyrics.
There must be a ballad
about that somewhere.

A train whistles at moonset.
Sudden as the rapture
of nightingale, my throat
opens to wild song.



Kumbaya

Sean Eaton

One day the towers were standing, the next day they weren't. I have no memory of the pillars of smoke, the dust-clouds of salt-sweat as thousands wound their way down endless stairwells. A helicopter parent, my

mother was determined to shield her children from what had transpired. I didn't learn about the terrorist attack until many years later, unfashionably late to the party of red-eyes and jingoism and dingleberries hang-

ing from bayonets and powdered wigs, of the tanks and camo prints and trillions poured into the gopher burrows to poison the pests we'd bred ourselves back in the eighties to fight them Red Commies. I was busy

watching Disney movies and Winx Club, and dressing up like a princess when my fraught schedule of school and social workers allowed it. My third social worker gave me a bird puppet named Peebird the Second,

after the original Peebird who was canary-colored. Peebird 2 was blue, and I thought he was named after the vegetable for years, the wordplay lost on me. But my mind was on the *Titanic*, reading voraciously about

that glittering woebegone liner. The world could go on tearing itself apart without me, and it would. And it does still. We started a war that lasted over twenty years. We make our beds then refuse to lie in them.

And how is Afghanistan looking, now that American
Freedom has left its mark on the faces of their cities?
*Come by here, Lord, someone is crying. Come by here,
Lord, someone is praying in mighty need, O Lord.*

□□□□□□□□□ * * *

On the one-year anniversary, my elementary school's
faculty planted a tree on its grounds, and had every
student stand in a giant circle around it. Dutifully we
held hands and danced a hora, singing *Kumbaya*,

My Lord and Shalom Haverim, songs we had recently
been taught in music class. I, who was nine-and-a-half
then and had only a vague understanding of what we
were honoring, thought the whole idea was stupid.

Sure, it was sad that some people had died, but how
would planting a tree and singing songs bring them
back? I muttered as much to my best friend, whom I'd
made sure to stand beside in the circle. Our teachers

stood solemnly, all tearing up at the sight of us young-
sters singing and dancing and saving the Earth with
our youthful optimism. *O Lord, come by here, some-
one is singing your song. O lord, come by here. Christ.*

THE PHOTO

Lawrence Bridges

That photo looks just like me
on the cusp of a breakthrough.
How many times have I fallen in,
head, arm, and legs up like an electric plug
with five poles reaching through the lightning
and rain to ignite a story?
But not today. The theater is dark
and I doff my Jimmy Stewart hat
and stroll a lanky block
adding up the prices of all the cars.
Jeepers, it costs a lot to be an American.
The cars are all plugged in and charging.
I'll mosey back to my farmhouse
with its screened-in porch and rocking chair,
rent paid up for a year. I'll gather eggs
and chop some wood for winter
here where summer hasn't even started.

Morning Devotional

Sharon Hope Fabriz

Mother is on the toilet, praying.
Her wheelchair waits at her crippled feet.

Held to her heart like a rosary
is the towel that dried her the night before
when I pulled on blue gloves,
Lathered a warm cloth,
cleansed her hidden folds and creases,
applied ointments and shields, geriatric chattel.

Mother is on the toilet, praying,
overhead fluorescents unforgiving.
Drenched diapers baptize the wastecan,
permeate her pleas. Holy water gone sour.

Her Father has a promise to keep
that cleaves to her like a lamb to her shepherd,
My grace is sufficient for thee.

Witness the woman on the toilet, praying,
meeting the End Times in Her Way.

Not a Handmade Sweater

Anam Tariq

It will soon be sweater weather Insha Allah,
the nights stretch to the length
that my dadi's giant, handmade,
black and white striped cardigan did, covering me
from twelve to twenty-two.

I've learned the yarn is infinitely re-shapeable
if broken can be re-tied, loose ends re-purposed.

Mine is firmly wrought, cast into an ornament
to stay like that, unchanging.
One interlock leading to another
with no way to go back.
Turns, bends, knots
and I have myself a sweater
of questionable decisions.

Flamboyant, with two squares—
baby pink and sky blue in the first row and
lavender and yellow in the second
spread across the front
like a part of a coloured chessboard
and rolled down in the same way at the back,
was the sweater *expected* to be.

It quite fits my dusty, woody cabinet
where the dirt glimmers like a layer of sand on the top,
kept from its intended, unintendedly made elusive dream
of embellishing the beam of the wearer.
Accompanying it, the pouring books clutter the shelves
and the pouring winter winds bring in more dust.

Note: 'Insha Allah' is an Arabic word meaning 'if God wills.' 'Dadi' is a Hindi word meaning 'paternal grandmother.'

I Bleed Language

Gavin Kayner



*"When I was nine years old, I discovered I was a writer.
That same year I attempted suicide for the first time."
—C Lincoln.*

Sundered by the saw-toothed edge of childhood
I bleed language
Stitch up my wounds with words.

What with
My manic mother shredding her clothes
With a butcher's knife-
Punishing her children
Willy-nilly
For the sin of their existence-
Haunting the house
A shroud of melancholy
Trailing behind her
As she wandered night
In a vigil
Looking for something she lost.

Herself.

What with
My father
Rehearsing his death
Laid out on the sprung sofa
A discordant symphony of crushed
Cigarette stubs in a kitsch ashtray
His sarcophagus companions
Exhausted with accommodations
Flattened by a job Job would bewail

He lies inert while his nest of children

Squealing for their portion of
Pablum
Riot at his bier.

What with my grandparents
Stoic as stones
Flinty and unforgiving
Even of themselves
Starving us with their mute
Detachment.

What with the gunshot Christmas Eve
Shattering that silent night into a thousand
Jagged pieces
Eviscerating fantasy.

What with the familial dread
The dying
The dead.

The accumulation of dismay.

No wonder
I sought refuge in the alchemy of a
Thesaurus
No wonder
At age nine I was already fraught with a voice for keening
Consigned to hurling word-stones at the universe
At the gods
At my own mirror
Striving to break through to reconciliation.

Can I tell you I wept to hear the train whistle's lament
Inexplicable hot tears

Oh, how I mined vocabulary to encapsulate them
Give the inexpressible a name
And failed over and over and over again.

And here.

Oh, how in my despair
I sprinted through stark mornings
This running through unmown grass
Shoes and socks dew-soaked
Running
Cold air cutting in my lungs
Running
Melancholy crows perched
On fence posts
Punctuating my desolation
Running
Up from shorts pants and home
Striving to break free
Running
Head back, arms pumping
Running
Bristling with language
Afire with an angst
Wanting its articulation.

Running
Running
Running.

Not even realizing
Suicide was an option.

Billie Holiday's



Velvet Mood

VELVET MOOD

Alan Bern

through a glass



THROUGH A GLASS

Alan Bern

Holding On

Angela Arnold

The darkness of dark not really touched by this
impromptu coven of any old scraps of candle (no stand-ins at all

for light proper). Undeterred, you open yesterday's book, grip, tip open,
bookmark fingering its every-day-same way on to the table,

regardless, neatly, sweetly,
beside a now indisputably dud lamp. Can you stop?

Stop staring beyond the decipherable? Quit clutching that
whatever-it-is, at somewhere like amputation depth:

down amid the swell of great unspokens
that your novels bottle, apparently sincerely, as text –

why? And who knew you'd find pages, mere bloody pages, so
absurdly comforting, at this time of very, very minor loss.

All the words I can dig out of the dark are glass
and wine, more or less (torch-found) as per normal. But once

my back's turned, will your nose be in there like a hound,
sniff, snuffle the life from that total stranger's stories

the way you do – adding rapt to ordinary disregard – only
much more so, now I'm certified formless?

Hard to tell who's no longer here. When there's a blank
on the other's map. Stuffing ripped out.

The Autopsy

Louhi Pohjola

The thing about pathologists
is that they can get really gross
about food. Not eating it.
Describing *with* it.
They say it helps with memory.
I have to admit, how can I forget
anchovy sauce pus, maple syrup
urine, or pancake brain?
Some organs and tissues look
like cottage cheese, or cornflakes,
or shish kebabs. How about
spaghetti and meatballs,
sugar icing, or tender coconut?
Red currant jelly clots and pea soup
diarrhea made me sick.

On the morning of the autopsy,
I joined a crowded room to watch
Jim's pyrotechnics
on an overweight man
who had choked while
eating a hot dog
in Candlestick Park.
He'd had a heart attack
and died immediately.
When Jim held up
the flaccid piece
of aorta to show
us the *chicken fat* lining
its surface, I fainted,
sailed towards the concrete
floor, and was caught
by a handsome man
who looked into my eyes
and whispered,
You'll never forget the chicken fat.

Dark, Darker, Darkest

William Doreski

Every night, dark brims me over.
Yes, it's full of cities exploding
in pinpricks; yes, the people I miss
prowl for scraps and flotsam; yes,
the military kindly prevents
us all from toppling over
the edge of the badly flat Earth.
But I can't digest every ort
of dark, and residue piles up.

You want me to see a doctor,
but they're invisible now,
clustered behind plastic curtains
that ripple without a breeze.
You claim the night isn't night
anymore, too thin to ingest.
When I was a child the streetlamp
in front of my house sang me
to sleep with a winsome chorus

of photons that still puzzle science.
I learned that I was an alternate
phenomenon: a particle caught
in the corner of a god's eye,
a wave cresting the far horizon.
Can you explain my existence
in simpler yet compelling terms?
You subscribe to laws of physics
I've never understood. Your slick

education tops mine. I still
hear that antique streetlamp singing
as it scatters trillions of photons,
but the light doesn't reach me.
It's no antidote for moonless
landscapes growing inside me—
webs of lit cities grinning
with those lovable old spirits
with whom I used to intertwine.



ITALIANS DO IT BETTER

Mario Loprete Catanzaro



EPIPHANY

Katharine Weinmann

Canyon River's Descent

Michael Shoemaker

the late winter afternoon's advanced
slanted sun arrives
a half-spirited brother
to August's glowing orb
of molten heat
liquefying snow and ice sheets
dormant above the tree line
in mighty elysian fields
where grey granite boulders
azured skies, pristine glacial lakes
and outstretched osprey talons reign

as congealed snow takes catalyst
from new spring's longer rays
aided by friction and gravity
water moves starting as a single
ring of a triangle to the powerful
tempestuous timpani and kettle drums
ending in a smashing crash of cymbals
in continuing creation's repeating
seasonal delight

weeks later
after heated hurried climb
feet immersed
between slippery silver stones
relieving swelling with numbing
cold water's cure
I sit astonished and in awe
heart swelling full with holy gratitude
that I too can be at home
in the canyon river's eternal abode

Refrain

Hoyt Rogers

No continent is a life:
a continent distorts
the scale of time, as if
it might never end.

On islands, the limits
are clearly set. Soon
there's a cliff, a beach,
a river's silting mouth.

On maps of archipelagoes,
the shorelines predominate.
Oceans chorus their refrain:
here you stop, begin.
Leave yourself behind.
Flow like water or air.
Change into a sailfish,
a frigate bird. Breathe
on the waves like mist.

Gift

Diane Averill

Torn yellow leaves
like butterflies broken by rain
swept sideways
on All Hallows' Eve.

As darkness deepens, I can see
by the Harvest Moon
that old ritual,
ancient mother turning her broom
into a mandolin
the strings a gift to her finely-tuned daughter

who opens November dawn
playing the gentle silver
threads of water, her notes singing
in the new season.

I can't hug you anymore

Giulio Maffii

I can't hug you anymore
- oh how I wish I could -
the unbridgeable gap
between the pillows made of years and ruins
The sheets dance in the fire
I'm afraid of extinguishing
Stay on my body melt into me
we're nothing but a seed covered by bones
We're posthumous dead
in self-defence inside another body
We're made of water that washes away all these deaths

Sonder?

Kashish Kumar

I woke up this morning,
Light up my smoke,
As I look down the street from my window,
I notice a subtle synchro.

From where I stand, I watch people wandering with ease,
While here I stand, I could seize,
Effortlessly the move,
To this contemporary groove.

Staring into the distance,
I feel caught in this predicament.
Am I but a bystander in this grand design,
Or perhaps immerse me in this splendid wine?

Staring into the space,
I feel lost in the puzzle's embrace.
Plagued with sentiments,
A spirit exposing indents.
Yet still so dense

Is it just me? I often wonder,
Or if the word I am missing is sonder.
To cognise each passer by holds a world within,
Weaving of serenity, sorrow under the veiled elated grin.

**ALL THOSE TIMES WE TOLD YOUR PARENTS
WE WERE “JUST GOING DRIVING”**

Kelly White Arnold

The gravel shards in your driveway
are their own kind of rural glitter,
doppelgangers for jewels,
their prismatic sparkle amid
the intense orange
red of Piedmont clay,
a study in contrast,
glorious and ordinary,
a serendipitous coupling—
Maybe a lot like
you and me at seventeen
headed out on a steamy July
night, convertible top down, infinite
star-sky spread above,
destination decidedly uncertain.
Red Mustang wheels kick up
dust beneath us,
churning rocky brilliance
with every revolution.



THE FLAVORS OF THE SOUTH

Barbara Anna Gaiardoni & Andrea Vanacore

Asking Directions

Ben Macnair

I took the Road less travelled by,
and I got completely lost.
Not even Google Maps could help me,
thanks a lot, Robert Frost.

Too Peopley Out There

Arvilla Fee

I know I'm not the only one
who sits in the dark
on my bathroom floor
and has a good cry
because the bumps and bruises
of too many bodies
got the better of me
because honking horns
and flipped middle birds
sent me into flight mode,
away from the talons
 of traffic—
back to my burrow
with its cool tile floors,
where I collect breaths,
rewire the circuit board,
and prep to rejoin
the mass population.

not much to report



from the past

NOT MUCH TO REPORT

Alan Bern

Something Borrowed Becomes a Gift

Joe Oswald

Something borrowed becomes a gift
when a friend lends you a Doors' album
and you can't return it before you leave this earth

and your brother finds it after you're gone
and when he moves away to college he takes it
with him and plays it over and over on a turntable

while writing, or daydreaming, or entertaining guests
in his room, until he learns not to pick up the needle to skip
over "The Lizard King" because he remembers

wanting you to, every time he heard it
playing from your room.

To Drink the Arno River

Isabelle Bizalio

Oh Asya,
brown puffs
of curls, dark
& bold
brows of a woman

the little girl
still inside you
screamed
in your scribbles
with my primary
color oil pastels

always walked
around our room
in just your underwear

we danced
as we dressed,
danced as we waited

your tea
from leaves you grew
on our terrace
cleaned me

skin scraped
from dragging
our limbs over
the stone wall
just to sit
along the Arno

we imagined
the stars
we couldn't see
& wondered how
many people
saw us

*How long would it take
to drink the whole river?*
while you wrote
Turkish words that flowed
from your beautiful
mind
about love
& hating yourself

*& if we could
even drink
the whole river?*

*I'm more interested
in the process of
drinking it*

*rather than if I'll ever
end up drinking it all*



SINCE BEFORE I CAN REMEMBER

Erica Galera



MORNING DELIGHT

Erica Galera

Ariadne Mentors The Minotaur

Kendra Cardin

One day, you dream, this labyrinth
will unravel,

eggshells stomped to dust
beneath hoof and heel,

a fresh clay to mold, a city
of your own making,

this time.

Broad shoulders learn calculations
innumerable, tight corners taken

right, left,
paws balled into fists,

set to endure every turn.
Starry one,

soul full of breakables,
bovine in a china shop—

I whisper this to you in the dark:
sometimes a string is just a string,

a snip away from free.
Little bull, hold true.

Take a cue from the Fates—

cut loose.

For Orestes and All the Others

Louhi Pohjola

San Francisco, 1984. Your halo of black curls writhing
to the Stones' Satisfaction in a body-thicket. You shouted
that I reminded you of the Swedish lover you fucked
on an Australian beach that summer. A year later you were
on a sidewalk near Union Square, snake-bitten and fading.

And Conrad, an Adonis evaporating like water from
a heated flask, yet still somehow two-stepping
in his crisp white lab coat down that wretched hallway
where nearby, under my microscope, cells vomited out virus
like blossoms spewing pollen at eight miles an hour into still air.

On a sunny day at a stoplight, a man, body turned, crossing
Market Street at Castro. Blue shorts over pink flamingo
legs with purple splotches shimmying up his shins, a shipwreck
among thousands laid to waste on those T-cell-depleted shores.
The light changed. I drove on. In my rearview mirror,
Death waltzed behind, flipping us all the finger.

Slideshow of a Mother Drowned

Shelly Reed Thieman



Summer knocks
A mother answers the door
in silver swimwear

Backwater bay
In white clam diggers she swigs
tequila sunrise

Liquid brunch
Her champagne bottle's floral motif
shatters poolside

Evening cocktail dress
gold chiffon with pleats
Cigarette burns tattle

Mailbox, ashtrays
liquor bottles full, Count Basie
crackles on timeworn vinyl

Coherence drowns
Friends and possums stop visiting
Her house murmurs neglect

Strong drink snows
her in, the finch feeders
now fluent in abandon.

Spring estate sale
Her possessions molested
bickered down by strangers

Today her coveted
trillium and hyacinth
stumble toward sun

Elliott batTzedek

Softly, I pray for you,
gently—
 Mississippi River silt, foal muzzle, mole fur

Mine wraps me tight,
bindings' creak my lullaby:

there is no place for you in this world

*Sleep my little one, sleep and dream
to the song the black bird sings in the night—*

that binds
in a world so tightly
no place
there must be for you

A Quiet Embrace

Michael Theroux

Touching you now
Slowly, thoroughly
Remembering breezes
Tousling grasses
In rippling waves
Following contours.

The thin skin of spring
A scatter of flowers
Your shoulder, your hip
My hand on your hand
A tracery of bones
Of earth, of life.

Ours is the dance
Of wind on the prairie
Tree tops in April
Ours are the steps
Of quail on dry leaves
Careful, silent

Knowing the heat
Of tomorrow's sun
Will shift our Grace
From slow to quick
Skittering sparrows
The Hawk's dive

For now, for now
We embrace a quiet
Sublime and profound
Deep, still water
The hush of dawn
Touching you now.



SPRING BROOK
Michael Shoemaker

LAMPS AT DUSK

Peter Gregg Slater

Arm-in-arm on Christmas Eve, full of
good — tidings and booze — junior faculty
went caroling in the little New England
town bottoming College Hill.

Light snow at dusk nicely synced
with the final verse of “Winter
Wonderland,” confetti whitening
our amble to the next block.

The corner house a gonzo scene.
Crossing roof, Santa and reindeer
lit movie-shoot bright. Idling in the
yard, supporting cast, Jack Frost
and three puffy snowmen.

Through the flurries, gawked at the
dumbshow with my colleagues,
though only a moment, eyes drawn
midway down the street to a house
hardly bigger than a cottage.

Plain wreath on door, lamp shining
in downstairs room, shade raised.
The sight filled me with a warmth
keener than the finest whiskey.

I was Proust with the madeleine.

Cozy comforts of Home & Family
the light’s spell. Some of it anyway.
For the desk lamp piercing the dusk
in a realtor’s second-floor office window
similarly summons a primal response.

Eyes unswerved from the little house,
mind-stored images surfaced, snatched
from film and dioramas. A spectacle of
determined ancestors besieging the night—
cavemen, Spartans, Incas, Victorians.

Their fire pits, torches, candles,
lanterns and lamps of every sort
valiantly slashing the dark.

I became the traveler of old
making a twilight journey on foot,
pleased to spy the flickering lights
of a city of the plain, half a league off.

'Tis merely a waypoint and I cannot tarry,
but I yearn for respite from the deploying dark,
a coming out from behind enemy lines.

The window shade suddenly lowered, my
reverie ended. The carolers have moved on,
singing away amid the flurries, vanishing
into the entrenching night.

Content that in a room in the little house
lamplight had won a skirmish,
I hurried to catch up.



SCULPTED BEAUTY

Katharine Weinmann

Summer Drive

Jacob Butlett

Thickets of white pine sway beyond train tracks
 sprinting side-by-side with the interstate to Galena.
Mom listens to pop music on the Chevy's radio
 from the passenger seat, & as I drive around a bend

surrounded by cornstalks haunched below cliffs
 of barreling cloud, I refuse to let the humidity
get to me, so I crank up the air with a spin of a dial,
 not cold enough to freeze Mom in her Fourth

of July tee, which she bought along the riverwalk
 last week, before we watched from the river
the fireworks display, those sparks strumming
 skies with calloused fingers of smoke & sulfur.

Our restaurant reservation is for half-past-eleven a.m.,
 & fearing we might arrive late, I press the gas pedal
harder, the wheels kissing graveled shoulders when
 I turn up rural roads, precipitous, tree-shadowed

yet cool, like leaf-streaked caves of half-light filled
 with Mom's humming. She, yes, *tries* to match
the rhythm of the latest summer smash blasting through
 the radio. I focus on the road, but when I catch

her smile in a sidelong glance, I can't help but slow
 the car down at the top of the roads, neither of us
that hungry anyway, & I hum with her during those five
 extra minutes to Galena, our voices, repetitive

yet spellbinding as birdsong (at least to us), shepherding
 flocks of sunlight down paved lanes to Main Street.

While the storm

Sasha Goodwin

rumbles over town
the hot night air leaves the house
in the shape of objects inside.
Lungs sail beside
the outline of the dog.
This constellation with no stars
passes Ward's Meats
and sees a sale on chicken parts.

Night animals roam
below the street lights. The shy skunk
digs a new den. Abandons it.
We'll patch things up
next time around. I'll be
the gull and you be the cold
green sea against the rocks.
The sky's beginning to clear
as we pull the nets back up.



WOUND
Shei Sanchez

Sometimes

KH Holladay

—Published posthumously

On a winter's night
sometimes the stars are so
crisp, clear
so near
and you're driving home
from a friendly house
where Cointreau and secret
revelations have been sipped
and savored
delicately
and through the dark
solitary windshield
a blue star flashes
downward, singeing your eyes
and sometimes
that star will fall so near
almost dropping into your mouth
like a hot blue gumball
that you can taste it
Getting out of the car
you look up and see
how close heaven and earth really are.

The Goodbye Hallway Dance

A.S. Hallam

Wide blunt teeth keep coming up
through my gums: brute growth
that holds me against you. Arms-

length from the night, I tremble,
pinned like a spaceman. You
wrap your arm around my waist
and don't let go when I step back
sooner than I wanted to because
I'm trying to perpetuate the lie
that we are still just friends.

This is the goodnight hallway dance
and the ugly truth is, there are no
more steps than this minuet shuffling.

Lost,
I fall in love the wrong way
all over again.

MAROONED

John L. Stanizzi

Among my finest skills
is the one that
allows me to forget.

For example, I can
simply erase from my mind
the fight in the kitchen,
the one where you held the knife.
You.
Not me.

I can allow the malicious remarks
to remain embedded under my skin,
their pain becoming part
of whom I've become,
though I'm not at all
certain who advanced the first challenge,
where or why...
...and what difference anyway.

The air we breathed so unconsciously
has become a crazed windstorm
that continues to
to grind around us so closely
it gashes our skin,
forcing us to
conceal our bodies as well as we can,
and stay inside.

Eventually it will own many of us-
it is selfish and deadly
and lacks a conscience,
although whatever scraps
of torn up metal you discover
are, therefore, yours.

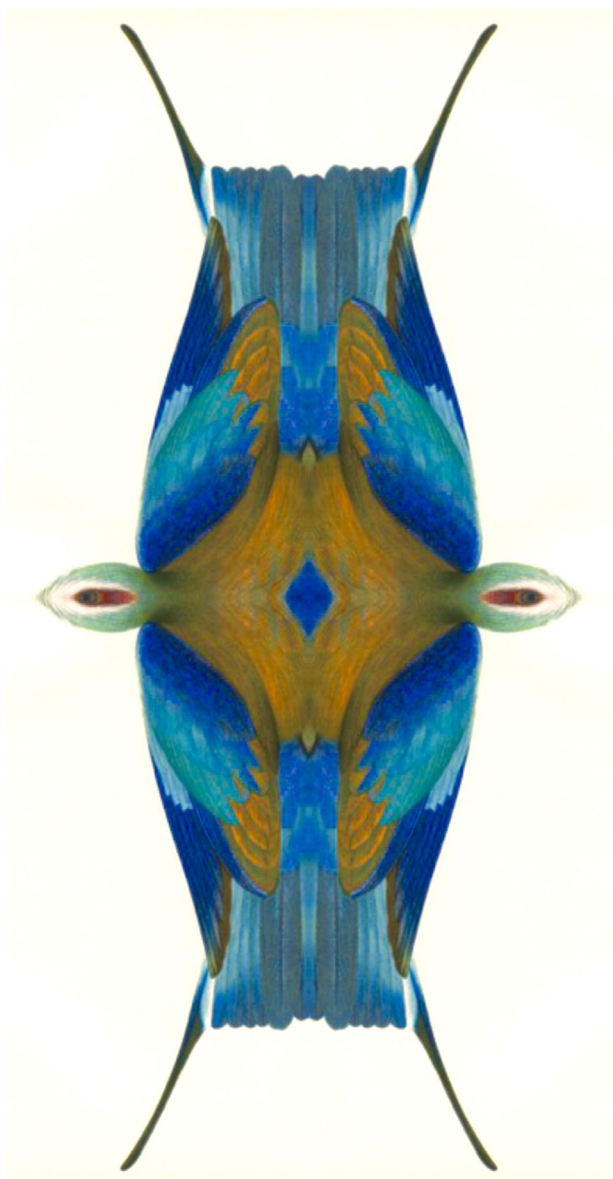
Feel free to use them as weapons.

Oh, my children,
the time has long past
for you to take
my quivering hand
and guide me
across this decoyed landscape
of brightly colored treachery-
a bad dream, a dazzling dale
colliding with the sky,
and with every day that dashes by us
its colors become more washed out,
replaced by an affliction we cannot see.

What is there to look at now anyway
on this battleground
of parental perpetuity?

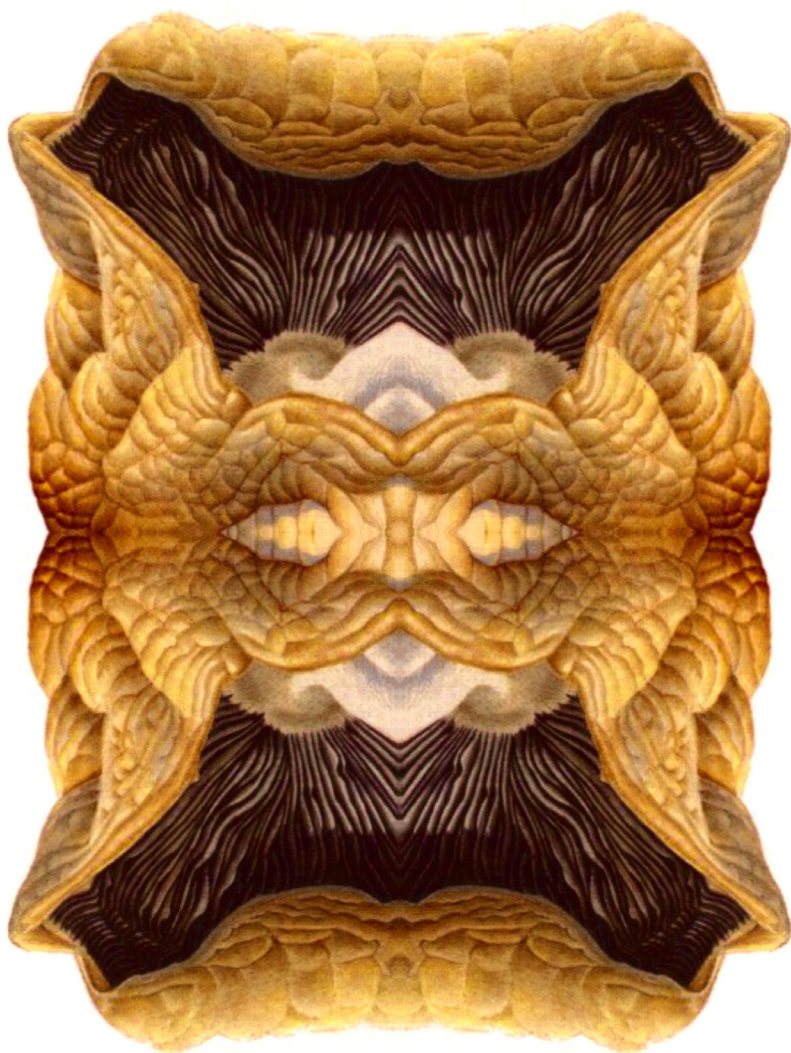
I shall engage the gears of amnesia
which will move the children to safety,
and replace them with a
replica of a golden ship
laboring boldly across the turbulent sea,
and I'll call out, *"It's too late to fix it!*
I'm sailing back to the beginning,
the very beginning,
and I'll take it from there."

From the beach
a very long way off,
you tried to hear
the sound of my voice above the sea,
which gradually became
a part of the sound of the sea *roiling*
as I screamed out to you irreconcilably
This is the darkness at the very end of the walk,
the tide bubbling up around my knees.



UNBEARABLE AS THE WEATHERVANE'S RESTLESSNESS

Bill Wolak



UNALTERABLE AS PANIC

Bill Wolak

Philomena

Salvatore D'Alco

The jingling sleigh presses on despite
its familiar and regrettable weaknesses.
We stood at the edge of the white woods
Wondering what it would take to be fine inside
the dark hollows. But only a freezing racoon
would raise its head and speak in tongues.

Who can make it say that
there is something inside
our minds when we collide—
nothing will do it today.
I play with the sound of
your name on my breath
it never ends there, it
makes its way inside
inside again when we
touch eyes and the same
thing happens that
happened when we
were more beside ourselves.

Volubilis

John Delaney

You pass through the gate as through a time warp
of centuries into a Roman world
of streets and homes and businesses.
There is much that remains in this rubble
still overlooking a fine fertile valley.

You imagine the lives of the people,
taking their families to the public baths
fed by an aqueduct from the mountains.
Squeezing olives at the coop, inviting
friends over to marvel at the new mosaic floor.

They imagined things, too. Elephants and tigers,
gods and goddesses are depicted there.
The towering columns support stork nests now.
A colonnaded street reminds you of processions
with banners flying, honoring each passing year.

Anyway, you could have been happy here.

One of Morocco's best-preserved Roman ruins located near
Meknes above a fertile plain surrounded by wheat fields.
Founded in the 3rd century B.C, Volubilis, at its peak in the
2nd century A.D., is thought to have had 20,000 residents. It is a
UNESCO World Heritage Site.



VOLUBILIS

John Delaney



VOLUBILIS
John Delaney

Under the shade of the Amaltas tree

Aiman Tahir Khan

Why can't you say you love me and mean it?
You have to open an umbrella for me instead.
Meanwhile, yellow flowers dangle from the branches,
blowing in the wind, like colorful jellyfish,
and light falls in your eyes the way a body falls,
fragile and small.
Wikipedia says July is the best time of the year
to plant a golden shower tree.
In our part of the world, they call it Amaltas,
a name I much prefer, for the way it slips
out of my tongue. I wonder who planted this one,
did they know one day we would desperately need its shade?
A garland falls from its majestic arms, when I learn that you're going away.
You say, "there is something poetic about this,"
this moment, where we both know things are going to end soon,
and we allow ourselves to be gentle in the face of what is inevitable,
but forgive me for not being able to appreciate its literary value just yet.
I have to get home soon and you have a dream you have to chase.
Under the shade of the Amaltas tree, although we try not to say it,
we both know we'll never be one whole again.

Lip seam splits against October

Ellen Harrold

Earth curdles and churns under the pressure of our boots,
letting loose oxygen pustules.
Held so long past metal blades
reaping root systems from beneath the frostbite.
Now that spun cell matter lies
sprawling across some silver dust,
frayed for the dissolution of some more perennial life.

A Promethean sycamore rests against some crumbled granite
bowed by winds, unchecked.
Splitting bark and raising anchors
for a dove corpse replica at one-hundredth the scale.

Whistling a new atmospheric pressure that harmonises
with a soft tear. You rip that damp carcass shard
from the host body. Flicked to the Earth.
Before we turn around and that memory is whisked away.



GIRL IN HEADSCARF (BARCELONA, SPAIN)

Angela Thoma

Heaven

KH Holladay

—Published posthumously

At dusk
the night birds dip and swoop
from the eaves
like bat butterflies
swinging your eyes
to the clouds, which are
almost always
feathered in a fan of white
over turquoise
so beautiful
you could not ask for more
even if you have not ever
been satisfied
with anything *ever*.
And you want to fly
into God's great lap
with the bird butterflies
to the clouds and sun and haze
and heaven above
and finally be ready
to live or die with joy.

In Asturias

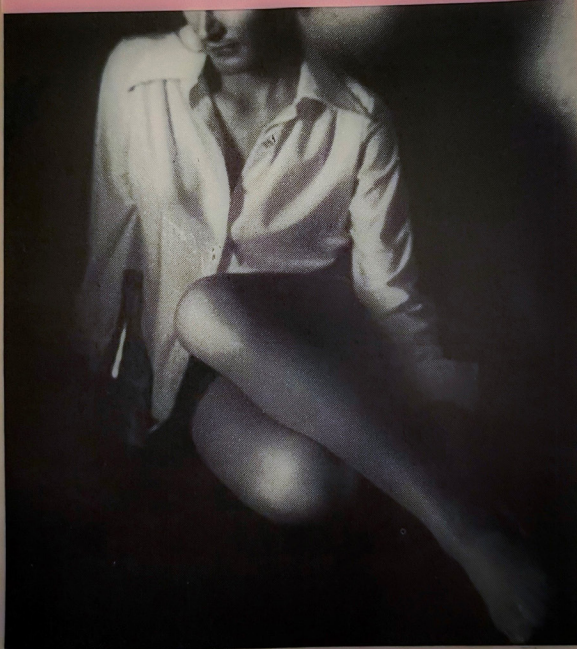
William Heath

At the local bar a man cuts
my hair for free as a woman pours
a sparkling cider from a bottle
she holds above her head
into a wide-mouthed glass
positioned below her waist
to *escanciar* the drink —

this is called friendship,
these are neighbors, they like
each other and welcome
strangers. Here we find
a small pocket of people,
call them human beings,
who care about such things.

"At least ten times
better than it was at the
Blue Angel." — *Newsday*

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SA DANSE S'ÉVEILLERA DANS EN ROSE

(HER DANCE WILL AWAKEN IN PINK)

JC Alfier

Dandelions

Charisse Stephens

God has died, so
I bury him right
here,

in this earth,
at my feet. It takes
time—

for us to remember
this

is where we came
from, he and I:
this is our

first and only world,
and in the time before remembering,
nothing
grows.

Then—now—when I finish
wearing down the dirt
over his body

with my pacing,
and asking,
and breaking—

dandelions
cut through from seeds
the wind planted without me—

small
sunbursts of everyday nectar
for the bees and me to drink—finally,

finally—
because this simplest story
somehow, always, has to be taught

again:
things die, and we mourn,
and from the same dark earth,
bright old things
grow again.



IN CEMENTO VARITAS

Mario Loprete Catanzaro

It Happened Some Years Ago

Angela Thoma

It was a wet spring morning in
April—there was melted snow—
when I boarded a train in
Rochester, I remember

the carriages were empty. I sat
by the window. “Last call,” boomed
the conductor. The PA system crackled.
“All aboard the train to Boston.”

Wheels screeched beneath
me, bells rang sharp. We rolled
forward, the countryside shrouded
by glass.

We passed yellow hills dotted
with tan calves, ponds, and
maple trees— with spires that held
white buckets—budding wildflowers,

abandoned plows. I saw
wind whirl through milkweeds and
push a vacant swing. Then came
the smog,

a wisp at first, which
turned to clouds, which turned
to muddy haze that
dirtied the terrain.

We passed trees with
discolored leaves, and piss-colored
grass. Soot-stained concrete and
buildings abandoned en masse.

Planes rumbled overhead, and I
wished for untamed rains to wash
the landscape’s stains. I wished for
a time gone past.

Sleeping Places

Fritz Eifrig

The cemetery next door to work looks inviting,
in summer's flush not bare or ruined, a copse
of well-tended ash and willow where sweet birds sing,
dappled sun across all manner of markers, plots
for father-mother-child, where limestone angels grieve
at graveside— and I think: this would be okay;
a place where one would know I lived then took my leave
and died, now at rest with all this human clay.
Better though to burn to dust, and wash away in rain,
maybe flung among wild Columbine or perhaps
a berry patch: slowly seep down deep into roots
to mix with the nitrogen and potash, drawn back
up a cane to blossom and finally to fruit—
one small offering of sweetness at the end.

After Hugging Elizabeth Arnold Poe's Memorial Marker

Ryan Mayer

Her bronze profile. A raven, curved like a karambit,
emerging from the urn she holds against her cheek.
With wings pulled back, it almost peers over her head.
Her eye closed, her chin tucked—she pities the hatchling

she adores! Well-practiced as an actress at dying,
elevated as an invalid to a doyenne of death itself,
she knew only bones (her zygomatic arch, her collar bone)
would project from gravestones. So against her portrait,

chilled from resting, I slide my forehead from Eliza's.
My left arm drops to my side; my right hand washes over
her epitaph, then the patina bleeding from the bronze.

Once my fingers have their fill, I depart down the brick path,
which, with its varied red shades, takes me back
to my childhood home.

APOSTROPHE

John L. Stanizzi

`-Wandering...

*is a chance destination of the heart's rugged topography
whose season is all too brief.*

—Pathways, David K. Leff

April 9, 1955 – May 29, 2022

An elegy for my dear friend and gifted writer, David Leff. I miss you so much.

Flocks of the grief-addled tied up the phones;
email inboxes congested with grief.

One cannot ease the mourning of these souls;
a scrim of tears cannot deter this thief.

Keats might remind us of life's contraries,
tell us, *Speak to the dead as if they're here.*

David would speak of the light – it varies.

We navigate moiling darkness this year.

I wondered as I wrote, what good prayer is.

I blessed myself, bowed my head to inquire.

Time disperses, the echoes from Walden

travel deep, the depth of field more precise.

I've only known one man who'd feel walled in
with one gazetteer. Only three suffice –

alphabetical, encyclopedic,

and dictionary; this is where regions

like campanile sound out, aesthetic,

countries calling mirrored selves in legions,

David in the midst, at times hermetic,

in the breach that surges between seasons.

At other times he'd just appear, like love,
like the time I did a reading, never
imagining that, for his friend, he'd come
so far – but David's mates were forever.
I looked up from the podium and there
he was. We smiled, the heart's submission
stowing away that brief glance like a prayer,
brothers born in a bright supplication,
stitching together water, earth and air -
David lived with this as his foundation.

Rain on my pre-dawn window like stuck stars,
the only light this fall morning. I swear
they emit tiny, imagined fires,
'til the real heat rises and clears the air.
Just one terra nexus amid them all,
wonders of nature right before our eyes-
Gorgeous - places used hard - beyond the pall-
flotsam, jetsam - rust tractor, profound prize,
swaddled in bittersweet's copious sprawl.
The forest-claimed-Dodge - in deep woods it lies.

Winter encroaches, and David would speak
of skeletal limbs that arc in darkness,
against the backdrop of the sky they creak
in freezing wind. He smiles at the sharpness.
Let's join together and embrace our gifts.
Instead of *Good-bye*, Whitman loved, *So-long!*
So let's say *So-long!* into autumn's mist,
and seek paths hidden in plain view like songs.
Two red-tails above the canopy drift,
flying a trail for you to follow along.



UNEXPECTED

Erica Galera



Go-To
Erica Galera

Bouquet of Rituals

A.S. Hallam

you are dancing with a life-sized spoon
in a field of poppies. I am the tongue-tied
audience, feeding you applesauce.

I've been walking for what feels like forever
and I need a break, because I'm going to break
but I don't know how to get one, because

I can't stop walking and you can't stop dancing
stop and smell the flowers? that doesn't pay.
and what if when I stop I start crying?

I can't feed you applesauce while I cry.
so I clutch the fork tines and walk on,
using it as a cane, following you, dancing

and the man with the knife follows us and
he keeps yelling "one, two! one, two! one, two!"
like we're soldiers, and maybe we are.

but I'm just trying to feed you applesauce faster than
you can dance it off and I don't really care about
the poppies I trample along the way



Summer Litany

Fritz Eifrig

“poetry only changes the poet”

—*Mahoud Darwish*

Things are falling apart and all I seem to do
is write poems about the moon

or the sweat heat of a glorious Chicago August evening
the *tk-tk-tk* time-keeping of sprinkler heads
and the Doppler growl of a motorcycle bombing along Cicero Avenue

or the tinny salsa beat from an old radio two doors down
the beer bottle condensation between my fingers
and the last of the daylight through my neighbors' flags

and how barely a mile from me, across from Chopin Park
over by St. Ladislaus Parish, an angry man takes
his registered Canik TP9 from a gun safe,

crosses the street and fires a nine millimeter bullet
through the head of a nine-year-old girl
standing in her doorway with her scooter and a *paleta*

and there's blood and ice cream on the floor of the vestibule
and my poems will never clean it up

and things are falling apart
and I'm ashamed to look at the moon.



Pit Bulls

Jacob Butlett

yelp all evening in the apartment down the hall, their wails
reaching my bedroom, where I'm trying to sleep,
& Mom, visiting me, is lying in the guest bedroom.

My neighbor, a bull of a man with skull tattoos flexing
down his biceps, shouts at his dogs, *Just shut up!*
When I fall asleep at last, I dream of those dogs dashing

across the park down the street, their master making out
with his latest girlfriend, who I passed in the parking lot
last night, punching the man on the shoulder between

their parked sedans, accusing him of being a lowlife,
a manwhore. I feel a hand on my arm,
& I awake in a pool of moon from the window, Mom

standing over me in her pajamas, tears in her eyes.
He's going to kill those dogs, she whispers. Listen...
The dogs keep barking, but among their cries, deep

as starveling groans, I can make out the man screaming
at them—*shut up, or else...shut up, or else...or else...*
Mom touches my wrist. *Don't let him hear you*, she begs

as we walk to the bathroom, the ceiling fan muffling
my words to 911—*he won't stop shouting, the dogs*
won't stop whimpering. In no time, the police bang

on his door. *She broke up with me!* he yelled, his words
shuddering, blood-boiled & bone-breaking, through
every wall in my apartment. *I didn't touch the bitch.*

She broke up with me! But the police command, *Open
the door. We're here about your dogs. Open the door!*
The dogs bark even louder, & I imagine them bleeding out

in their living room, or cramped in cold cages, scratching
& thrashing at the locks, as if they're strong enough
to break themselves free. *You're not going to take my dogs—*

they're all I have! he shouts back, his voice now low,
strained like a prayer lost in the dogs' uproar,
& no matter how many times the police bang on his door,

Mom and I overhear him repeating *they're all I have,*
they're all I have, as if he's trying to convince his dogs
or anyone else who might be listening. I squat on the edge

of the porcelain tub, Mom standing over me, her lips
twitching with fright, & I reach out to placate her,
but she stands stock-still, petrified, snared in the man's

supplicating screams, in the dogs' wall-crushing snarls.



UNTILTED I
Irina Tall (Novikova)



UNTITLED II
Irina Tall (Novikova)

Mikor először megtagadlak

Károly Lencsés

(Ezra Pound címére)

vesd magod elé földbe. taposott értelmet nyerjen
a világ elfogadó része.
virág legyen a sziklaormon zuhanás dísze. az ugró utolsó
emléke ne legyen hamis.
ők, akik köréd álltak vizet meg kenyeret adtak rakták alád
a gerendát, hogy égj!
hazudtál volna igazságot. tűzhegyére hányt szórügy pattan.
ki még utánad?
ki-be mászkálok a házból, mint veszett farkas. meleg föld
koszos talpam összes rútságom
ázott bűzt okádó vermem. füledt vihar előtt csend.
várt harag. a megsemmisülés ígérete.
hitvány dalokat kottáz az elmém bárcsak
lemezteleníthetném a múltat
mikor először megtagadlak...

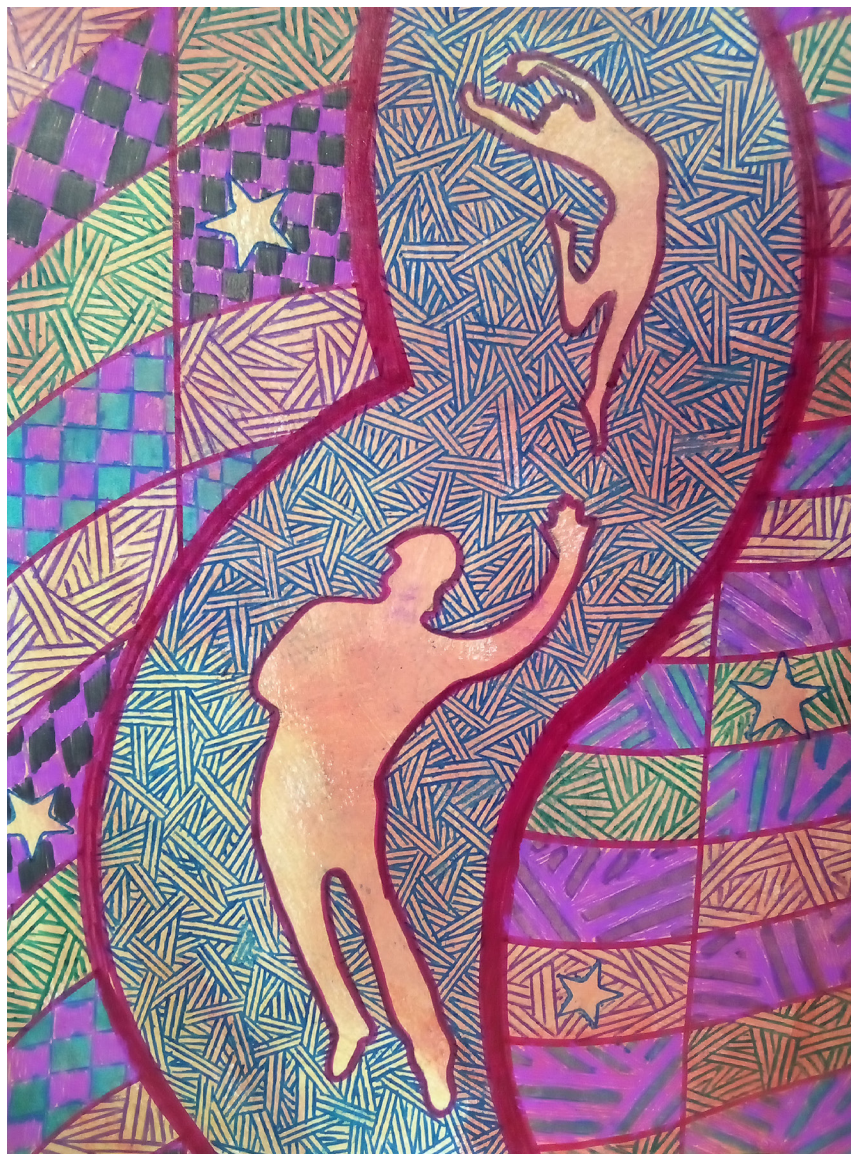
When I first deny you

Károly Lencsés

(to the address of Ezra Pound)

sow your seeds before me in the soil. let the tolerant
part of the world get treaded meaning.
let there be flowers on the crag ornament of the fall. the last
memory of the one who jumps shall not be false.
those who stood around you gave you water and bread put timber
beneath you for you to burn!
you should have lied the truth. word-spouts spring thrown at its firepoint.
who else follows you?
I walk in and out of the house like a rabid wolf. warm earth
my dirty feet all of my ugliness
my pitfall vomiting drenched stench. silence before a muggy storm.
anticipated wrath. promise of annihilation.
wretched songs noted by my mind if only
I could bare the past
when I first deny you...

—“*Mikor először megtagadlak,*” translated by Ágnes Megyeri



GRANDE JETE

Chad M. Horn



Black Crow

Nancy Patchen

He storms in, wings smothering
my forlorn bird bath.
His feet get purchase, his black
feathers fold to armor,
his beak hammers the murky water.

I run across the lawn, crying Shoo,
Shoo, Get Away!
The black blur keeps pounding until I'm upon him.
My breath stops.

He loosens his wings, launches upward
and lazily caws off.
Your last letter: Move on, that's life.

In the crow's wake, I stare hard into
the bird bath, grey mush of dead
leaves, twigs, algae.
His prey still cleaved to the bottom of the basin.

A baby rabbit's haunch, a furry brown clump,
tendons weeping...
my battered heart.

Did the Romans call birds harbingers?

Alan Bern

Later sun gathers to light — song birds

small dust a bird
bird huddling
tiny birds birds
bird blow around
birdsong footsteps
Bird x 3 + 1 or more
loud birdsong between storms
stone birds can fly off
alarms: birdsinging ringing
the same birds?
cawing not keeping up
with the chainsaw

"I feel bad for that bird, missin' a foot."

Meditation at the Water's Edge

Maggie He

Here, I watch lily pads and moss-covered rocks
see lotus blooms under speckled sunlight.

In the shallows, water slips
through my fingers like a memory

my hands still remember holding yours
that summer we jumped into the lake together.

Here, I throw a pebble that ripples the surface
and startles the fish below. They scatter

like paint streaks on a canvas before
disappearing. Perhaps

koi fish also reminisce about
moonlight from the night before,

and try to hold onto the cicada's song
from lost afternoons.

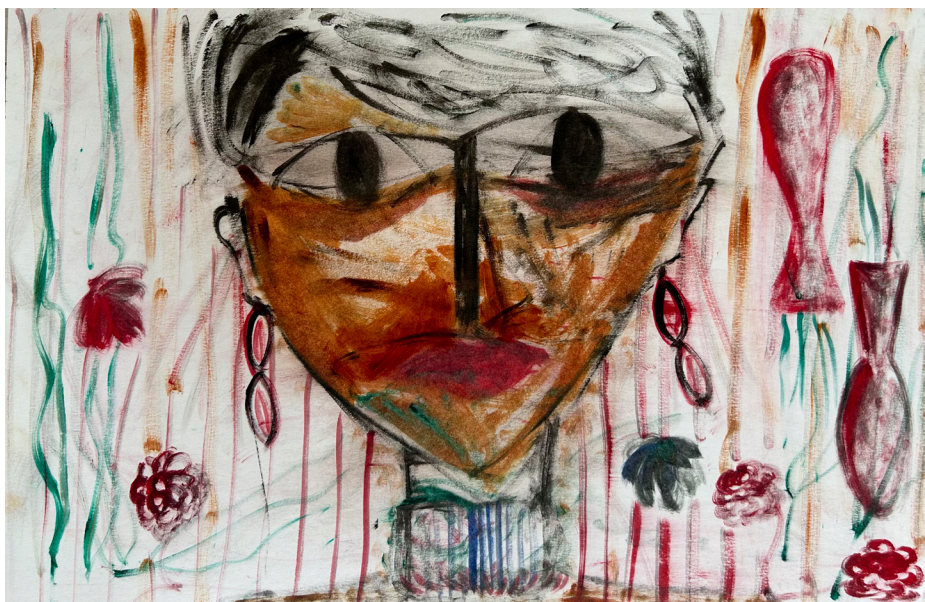
Shooting star

Rory Oliveri

I said, pointing to a passing plane.
Their breaths became the
bubbled beginnings
of laughter.

One even skipped a sliver
of a contradicting um...
across the night-
stilled lake.

But where my still-raised finger
drew their watch, just then
a streak of light, a fallen
lash of sky, as if to say
yes, right you are
down there.



SELF PORTRAIT II

Sai Pradhan

Uh

Kate Polak

I might have loved you ever
since you forgot my name. Made
the slight sweet, made it who

I am rather than me a blank space
in which some story might be
scored. You're always turning

from me, coiling blown strings
and hush. What I want most is
the talks we'd have at half-dark: your

gleam, your circumflex lip arcing over
snow piling on panes as this lone
man sets his hand naturally

to the lissome frame and scroll, wings lush
in color, the way some errant spoonbill
lofted, the vervet loose down the coast,

clean, dark sheets webbed over
our naked thighs, fingers stained with
paint. The ache of imagining the fall

of your hair... That day where bones
were picked clean, you asked to put
your arms around me, and I tried

to breathe, *bélas*, petrified to startle, my
body rendered jump scare. I didn't
know how to let myself relax on you,

take from your hand, always waiting for when
you'd step back, leave, ginning up some grin,
some foxing line, the silence that collapses

while tuning, something felt for all
that, but just this side of performing,
trying so hard to be recall of what I didn't

see, where I stretch my long neck
in dance and play the remainder
of memory, make some sense

of whatever I've laid aside, and let
it be. I'll never tell you this secret:
that rampant touch was the longest

anyone ever held me. Tiny violin.
I tell myself I have to shut
my mouth, stop rehearsing how

to tell you about the corner of the lip
of the moon, how I saw it twitch
in the rearview. Tragedy is fine

fingers braced to sustain little touch, it's
the better part of most luck, spurning
what spell's been spun because of

what? Whatever stays your hand: call
it pride or honor, or whatever pressed
into a seeming, a cufflink. It can be

such as it is: I swallow the whole damn
thing, make you another part of me
might be, but for now's been put away wet.

No direct flights

Lisa Sultani

Inspired by the afterlife,
I've returned to Anjuna Beach
The tall palms sway in symmetry
Since I have studied under Guru ■■■
I carve rainbows with the belief that
Symmetry is overrated
Though confusingly,
Guru ■■■ frequently compliments the
Symmetrical parts of my body

Cows walk next the water
In rows more orderly than the traffic
I am not supposed to think like this or
They may label me as only a gora
I wish to be known as an old soul

My calluses sear under hot wax needles
Achingly smooth, but not yet holy
These ugly feet still must work
I would like to practice with shoes on
Or even socks, but I know the rules
I helped translate them from Hindi to Dutch.

SHORT BREATHS

Stephen Reilly

My breath short as tercets,
not hard to believe
with marathons whittled into

block walks without her.
Phrase-twisting fails
to salve or mend yesterday.

Grief heals, but absence
a scar itching with its memories.
No new light in these sunrises.



AGED TIME
Gina Gidaro

Ode to the Upstairs Toilet

Maureen Clark

thank you for hinting of your imminent demise
before falling porcelain stump first
into the downstairs closet

thank you for all the times you were there
solid beneath my bare bottom
or waiting for me as I pray

to my esophageal spasm kneeling before you
until this weekend I never thought
about your connection to pipes and fittings

in the walls of my house never thought about
what kept you in place rather than
sliding about unmoored and on nights when I'm about

to unburden my knotted bowel
you never complained
that I stayed too long or used too much toilet paper

your trusty bulk something I never thought about at all
now I picture you plunging through the floor
ruining carpet shoes clothes the dresser itself

the seven little bowls of earrings on top of the dresser
so much possible destruction
you saved me from having to clean up

now I only need to contemplate
the restoration crew who will come tomorrow
to repair the walls and replace the slate tiles

and I will be so grateful when you are once again in service
at which point I will forget your loyal machinations
and clean you once a week like I used to

taking the pumice stone to the hard water rings
with vigor and cursing forgetting how serviceable you are
what silent constancy you never tire of giving



syntax error

Grace Hu

at 12 a grey-eyed boy listened to my
confession, a priest who heard me
pray, and ordained that there was
a shaky red line under my sneakers

with his laughter at my half-swallowed
words and i wondered if i was related to
the common whitescreen typo. i realised
that i'm not the kind to impress with

dress, and as i dabbled a wet
paper towel on my face to get rid of
smudged mascara before a debate
tournament i learned that my reflection

had a personality as great as mine.
it didn't take too long before i started
cutting myself on the sharp silver line
between wit and being full of shit

because my tongue was not smooth
enough to slide over the skin of men
and make them sigh, but serrated,
pointed, the type to prick skin and twist

and draw blood. she might feel the
warmth of their arms around her, but
i could only wrap the glow of arson
around me and call it my hearth, to

wear a martyr's cloak, to beg for
crucifixion so that maybe one day i, too,
could be glossed over in shining colours
and a coat of smothering white. maybe

someday i also could be adored, even if
i was only loved for all the ways i could
bend and not break. for all the ways i
could slice soldiers into constellatory

flecks. drain rivers. rain droughts on
oceans. bottle tornadoes. capture
droplets of a solar flare. pluck out stars
and rearrange them to another's liking.

shoulder the world. it didn't take long
until i learned all the different ways i
could mangle myself into something
briefly beautiful enough to be loved.

There are occasions like road rashes

Giulio Maffii

There are occasions like road rashes
wide openings of the sky right here
where there are no traffic lights
and people live in bars in nicknames
in visiting the dead at home
Winter diagonals come out of the lungs
and sometimes you feel dead too

A Sparrow

Ryan Mayer

Valentine's Day 2022

Strolling through our favorite park,
I saw your favorite feathered friend
below a café's window:

a sparrow still as the one
tattooed below your collarbone.
You loved sparrows for how they flutter

from bell towers to eaves, utility poles
to birdbaths, toward crumbs, then away
from feet. And how they see

cracks in crypts or cavities in oaks
as indistinguishable from an open
hotel window. Once, you proposed,

"A sparrow needs a full chest to accommodate
its heart, which would expand until ribs broke,
without the extra space."

Ants crawled through this bird
as through feathered crumbs;
its lissome tongue lolled from its beak

onto leaves auburn as your hair, and over
the one eye I saw—like the tattoo
below your collarbone—a *tache noire*.

“We have heard with our ears”

Fritz Eifrig

i.

There should be no border
in our hearts,
and yet

and yet

ii.

O God of Isaac, God of Ishmael:
will you not remind your eyeless children?
Will you now only hide behind your beard?

O God of the stranger, of the handmaid:
will you not succor the torn flesh of these
your children, will you not bind up their wounds?

Will you pass silent among the broken
swords and jawbones, past the horse and rider
you have thrown down into the dark waters,

dark waters where the temple broke and fell,
black bloody waters that now rush to mark
forever the boundary of the river.

iii.

Shall we gather at the river
and gaze upon that other shore?

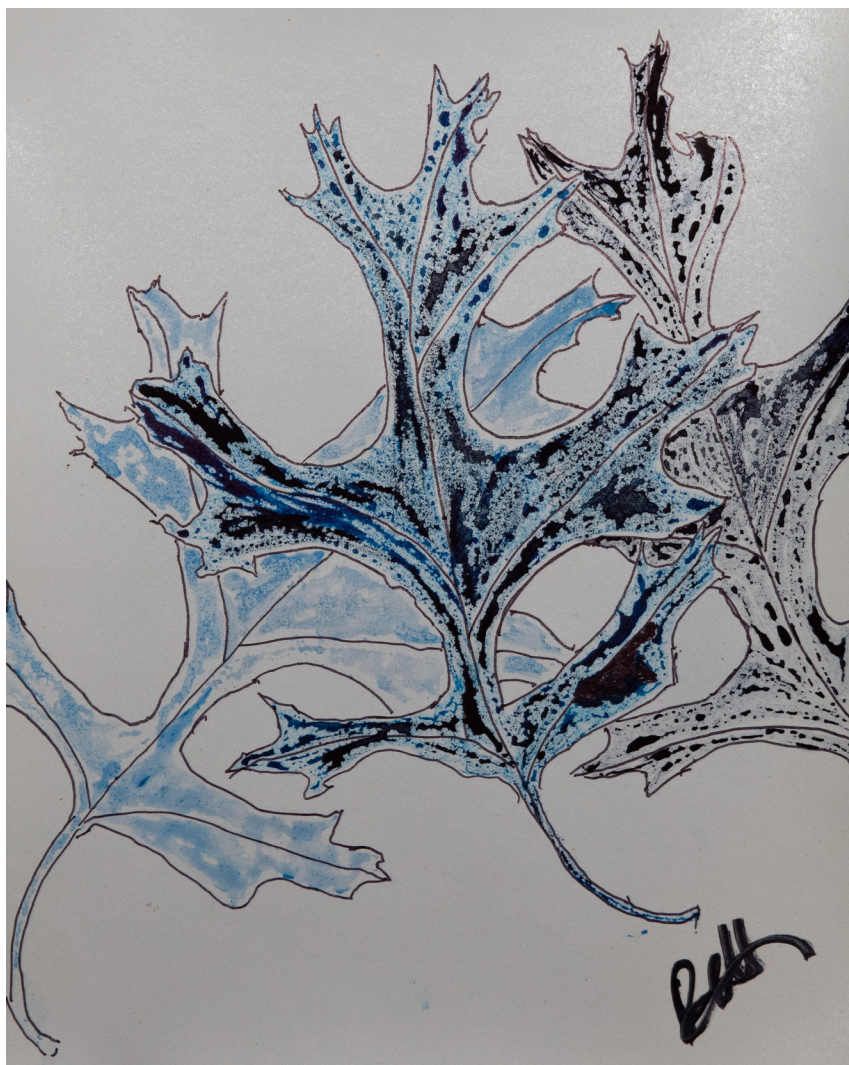
Rest our angel feet in its crystal flow
and taste the ashes on the air.

iv.

Consider the sweetness of figs
in their season: soft yielding flesh,
wasp tombs holding pulp that blooms
like honey from the lion's skull.



MANSPLAINING
Lawrence Bridges



Apricot Tart

Morgan Neering

A walk through sodden streets
cobblestone like crooked teeth
morning shadows follow
alongside my shopping bag.
Say hello to the women I see each day
wander the aisles, stay
a little longer than needed
crossing each item off the list
as it's thrown in the basket;
apricots, flour, sugar, salt
the rest we have at home.
Back at our place,
shed the wet shoes by the door
wipe the counters,
form a ball of the flour, warm water
roll with my hands
leave the yeast to rise
keep it warm
'round and 'round
place the apricots in the dish
turn of the keys in the door
oven dings
a sound to love
apricot tart
served with ice cream
for two.

BEFORE STARLIGHT

Judi Mae "JM" Huck

The day before winter
break, a minute before
the cars leave the station
a breathless man
rushes to the last available seat
on the train.

Immediately
she notices he is handsome,
a linger of aftershave,
respectable leather shoes,
strapping legs stretching all the way
to the row in front of them.

Noncommittally, he paces
between café car and
the seat beside her
until finally, stocked with
2 beers in arm, offers 1
as a pivotal icebreaker.

The lager opens doors.
He reveals his most treasured memories:
a solitary jog on an ice-
slicked Golden Gate,
a production of Shakespeare
on the downtown waterfront...

She has two precious moments
of her own, but only shares the one
of an outdoor amphitheater Einaudi concert
at Griffith Observatory where
she witnessed strangers crying,
listening with eyes closed.

Towards the end of the line
on a crumpled café napkin she writes,
Can we be friends? / *Yes* *No*

Their romance, like a violent blizzard,
thaws into the radio silence of spring.
Finally he texts her,

I live in NY now.

Writing the Memoir: First Draft

Helen Patrice

Blobby, as bubbles of memory plop
up from the quagmire depths.
Halfway through trawling a nervous breakdown,
I find myself musing on a beloved back yard,
and the Freak Bird who visited.

Some days, I am blithe,
others serious, tediously so,
sometimes so earnest it hurts.
Today, I sharpened my hatchet,
got to work on a lover -
my memoir, I can twist it any way I like,
and what is truth anyway?
I long to make him small-dicked,
more ridiculous than he is,
with a tattoo that says 'pea brain'.

Some days, I walk around and around
the page, trying to punch my way in.
No solution, but to go through,
and through.



UNTITLED
Stuti

Cities in War

Maryam Majid

The ghostly moon's light
wilted upon this desolate hamlet.
A city of tenements black with smog,
stark lines, angled roofs –
built to be miserable
in the ever-pouring rain.
Its orange light pollution veiled
the first heaven's stars.

Far away, the sunrise
is charred orange and smells of burned things.
Streaks of blood-fire and
smoky wisps of clouds.
It tells things of destruction.

I think of what a sunrise
is. I remember times
when it meant the same.
I wonder about worlds
where it still does.

I think of hallowed ground swallowed
by rubble and fire,
and dust. Like salt to the sea from the tears
of a nation
of souls.

Cocooned in this world of lack
lustre and light,
my heart breaks.
The smoky blood of flame.

Hospital Ice Milk

Jason Melvin

To this day, so many years later, whenever I walk into a hospital, I say hi to my dad and my ten-year-old self. The kid who ate milk with a spoon. A smell of old and old bleach. A response of unease, the same as bare feet in a waterpark locker room. An urge to leave.

A silver stool waiting for me, the kind that spins. Beige Formica countertop with an elder lady and a freezer full of ice milk behind it. Dad is in treatment again. Or following up after treatment. Or recovering from surgery. Or receiving more grave news after more grave news.

A year of childhood, spent heading to the hospital, sitting in the lobby. The elderly lady in the gift shop/lunch room knowing my name. This was the 80's and ten-year-olds could take care of themselves.

Ice milk isn't ice cream. It sparkles like glass as the spoon enters, peeling off in slivers and disappearing on your tongue. Vanilla is its only flavor or maybe is just tastes like milk. I honestly don't remember.

Dad melting faster than ice milk.

As the glass doors slide open and I step in, just for a moment, I'm ten and scared and anxious and maybe excited to eat ice milk and spin on the stool and sit in the lobby reading Highlights. And then I'm missing the man I never had a chance to share a beer with.

Mother's Day

Anna Molenaar

Momma possum carries her babies through a puddle.
They cling with the ferocity of worn velcro,
slipping off and climbing back on,
creating a writhing mass of button eyes,
silk scrap ears
mature dandelion fluff
and corncob tails.

She knows it won't be long now.
They're too big, too curious
about anthills and rotten logs
to cling starfish hands to
her much longer.

She knew their heartbeats back when
they were jellybeans.
She birthed them, kept them enveloped in her pouch and
birthed them again,
when they climbed out.

Any day now they'll
fall off and stay off,
wandering with wide eyes
and eager, sniffing triangle noses.

But right now they fall off
and hustle back.
Because the world is very large
and momma is just big enough
to hold them all.

Ode to Opossum

Felix Elliot

Your pallid fingertips dragged
through earth with delicate
attention. You found yourself
lost. Late at night and alone.
How long did you wander
past honking cars and drunken
hollers? How long would I have
had to follow that strangled line
of blood before I would find
that missing piece of you? Gaped
jaw and pale heart-shaped face.
You made yourself comfortable
in my bed, in the hood of my coat.
You fed on over ripe bananas
and kitten food until your tail
scarred and thickened and grew
strong enough to hold my hand.

Hard Fact

Shei Sanchez

A hard plastic cart is wheeled to the back seat.
The vet and her student lay your sick body on top

and I watch the beginning of an end unfold --
the irregularity of stiff neck lying against stiff spine,

like a sapling stretched supine by wind. I watch the grip
of transience mirrored in your onyx black eyes searching

for ways to say Don't leave me. Leave me. Don't. Leave.
All that we could have done courses inside you –

Thiamine, penicillin, muscle relaxer, sugar-water.
One injection after another, a regimen learned

like verses from a toughened heart. While we wait
for a reason in the car redolent of hay dust

and futility, I step out and look up at the evening's
ocean blue hue. There, wading on its surface,

the waxing crescent moon, watchful and unafraid.
I imagine you bathing under fluorescent light, trying

to live. My mud brown eyes widen to inhale this moment,
let the deepest color of fear pour slowly on the parking lot

where the twilight had descended and the faint sounds
of Columbus stilled itself. Like a gift, a lone firefly made

himself known to us. Is this the end of a beginning?
I smell lemon in black walnut leaves; you loved to eat them.

Your mother browses in the meadow; I rub the side
of her belly where she carried you. Summer's halfway

through and this sky cannot carry us all. Days later, a hard
plastic box and a handwritten grief card come in the mail.

We stare at your hoofprint, at the flecks of shit and mud
from your home standing out against an empty white.



THE WEIGHT SHE CARRIES (CASCAIS, PORTUGAL)

Angela Thoma



PEOPLE WATCHING (CASCAIS, PORTUGAL)

Angela Thoma

Sunday, Years Ago

Ryan Mayer

The New Orleans sun that day had scorched
me red, so each balcony I passed under
I praised—thanking each for its shade:

pressing my palms against Romeo spikes,
I allowed myself to drip; I inhaled
the uneven sidewalk's tinted spray—

smelling of death and rotten oysters; I gathered
fronds that spiraled down from wrought-iron
curlicues to save them from the asphalt—

as though wafers blessed by some penitent
demon. Despite my bloody hands, raw
soles, and the garden in my pockets—

the balconies remained unmoved! My bones
forced me onward, deep into black smoke, swirling
laughter—where cognac and rose petals

coated obsidian graves. I prayed
for a parasol, for portable shade—

yet even my bones swelter inside me.

Painting flowers yellow like hope

Rina Malagayo Alluri

As I began the sojourn of motherhood
you were already battling disease

witnessing how grace filled sorrow
writing our names in the snow with our footprints

slipping on ice, I held your arm so you wouldn't fall
a frightening reminder of how brittle our bones get

fragility of tree branches heavy with the weight
of alternative therapy, painting flowers yellow like hope

you always did love to draw roses in the margins
of ancient maps of the Ottoman empire

edges burnt on an open stovetop
parathas coated in butter flipped onto iron by hand

walking up mountains for new viewpoints
exposure to the canine teeth of friendship

warm winter fur, holding out a trustful hand
searching for a version of self in the unknown

tragedy forcing us to confront the piercing bolt
of regret, choices that would gnaw at our hearts forever.

Machinery

L.N. Quinn

The rain brings what you don't forget –
floods, yes, and flowers. Remember frogs
in the low-lying areas, the wandering turtle,
a young god's excited pulse on the tin roof,
the shuffled smell of minerals rising
from the mud. The growth of rust
on the hollow cars buried
in the shelter belt. The plum tree exploding its blooms
when the wind sang, and the shine of the amber
reminding everyone that the maple tree is dying
and needs to become fire. Remember
holding that small, gold, crystal ball,
looking at the tractor through its fish-eye,
dreaming that you could carry machines so easily
you could forget you were carrying them at all.



PERSPECTIVES 2
Avery Timmons

Contributor Bios

Michael Noonan lives in Halifax (famous for its Piece Hall), West Yorkshire. Has had stories published in anthologies. A volume of his short stories, entitled, *SEVEN TALL TALES*, is available at Amazon, as a book or kindle, and he has had one act plays staged, and published in book anthologies.

Thomas Piekarski is a former editor of the *California State Poetry Quarterly*. His poetry has appeared in such publications as *The Journal*, *Poetry Salzburg*, *Modern Literature*, *The Museum of Americana*, *South African Literary Journal*, and *Home Planet News*. His books of poetry are *Ballad of Billy the Kid*, *Monterey Bay Adventures*, *Mercurial World*, and *Aurora California*.

L. Ward Abel's work has appeared in hundreds of journals (*Rattle*, *Versal*, *The Reader*, *Worcester Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *Honest Ulsterman*, others), and he is the author of four full collections and ten chapbooks of poetry, including his latest collection, *Green Shoulders: New and Selected Poems 2003–2023* (Silver Bow, 2023). Abel resides in rural Georgia.

Robert Harlow resides in upstate NY. His most recent book of poems—*Places Near and Far*—was published in 2018 by Louisiana Literature. His poems appear in *Poetry Northwest*, *Rhino*, *Cottonwood*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, and in many other journals.

Eugene Stevenson, son of immigrants, father of expatriates, is author of *Heart's Code* (Kelsay Books, 2024), and *The Population of Dreams* (Finishing Line Press, 2022). His poems appear in *Atlanta Review*, *Delta Poetry Review*, *San Antonio Review*, *San Pedro River Review*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, among others. More at eugenestevenson.com

George Freek's poem "Enigmatic Variations" was recently nominated for Best of the Net. His poem "Night Thoughts" was also nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Mukut Borpujari is a graduate in English Literature and a Masters in Computer Application (MCA) degree holder. Based in Guwahati, Assam,

INDIA, his poems appeared in various international literary journals and magazines, including *Mount Hope Magazine* of the prestigious Roger Williams University (RWU) and *New Feathers Anthology*. He was also long listed in this year's Erbacce-prize for poetry 2023.

Linda M. Crate (she/her) is a Pennsylvanian writer whose poetry, short stories, articles, and reviews have been published in a myriad of magazines both online and in print. She has twelve published chapbooks the latest being: *Searching Stained Glass Windows For An Answer* (Alien Buddha Publishing, December 2022).

Susan Shea, a retired school psychologist, who was born in New York City, and now lives in a forest in Pennsylvania. This year, her poems have been accepted in a few dozen publications, including *Across the Margin*, *Avalon Literary Review*, *Ekstasis*, *Feminine Collective*, and *Military Experience and the Arts*.

Jeff Burt grew up in Wisconsin and the Midwest still populates his vision decades later. He has a digital chapbook available, *Little Popple River*, from Red Wolf Editions and a print chapbook, *A Filament Drawn so Thin*, from Red Bird Chapbooks.

Martin Willitts Jr is an editor of *Comstock Review*. He won numerous poetry awards. His 21 full-length collections include the Blue Light Award 2019, "The Temporary World". His recent books are "Not Only the Extraordinary are Exiting the Dream World" (Flowstone Press, 2022) and "Ethereal Flowers" (Shanti Press, 2023).

Clay Waters has had poems published in *Trampoline Review*, *Green Hills Literary Lantern*, *The Santa Clara Review*, and *Roanoke Review*, as well as *Last Leaves*. His website is claywaters.org, featuring his self-published American gothic mystery novel *O Dry Bones!*

Sai Pradhan is an Indian American writer and artist who lives in Hong Kong. Find her work at www.saipradhanart.com.

JC Alfier's (they/them) most recent book of poetry, *The Shadow Field*, was published by Louisiana Literature Press (2020). Journal credits include *The*

Emerson Review, *Faultline*, *New York Quarterly*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Penn Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and *Vassar Review*. They are also an artist doing collage and double-exposure work.

Donna Pucciani, a Chicago-based writer, has published poetry worldwide in *Shi Chao Poetry*, *Poetry Salzburg*, *Gradiva*, *Acumen*, *Meniscus*, *Last Leaves*, and other journals. Her seventh and latest book of poetry is *EDGES*.

Nerissa Nields is a writer and musician/songwriter living in Western MA. She's a founding member of indie-rock band The Nields. Her short fiction, non-fiction, and criticism has appeared in *Brevity*, *J Journal: New Writing on Justice*, *The Maine Review*, and *American Songwriter*. She is currently working on a novel about a family folk-rock band.

Beth Brody was awarded an MFA in Writing from Vermont College of Fine Arts, where she recently completed post-graduate work in Poetry. She won the 2018 Writer's Digest Poetry Award and has a dozen poems published in journals and anthologies. When not baking or traveling, Beth and her husband spend their time between Connecticut and Vermont.

Gina Gidaro has a bachelor's degree in creative writing and a minor in studio art from Ohio University. She is passionate about stories and anything spooky. More of her information can be found at <https://ginagidaro.wordpress.com>.

Erica Galera is an art editor for an online journal and part of the social media team for an online youth organization. Her works have appeared in *XinSai Magazine*, *Girl to Girl Stories*, *Reverie Magazine*, and others. You can find her collaborative art page on Instagram at @lynnandann.art.

Yuna Kang is a queer, Korean-American writer based in Northern California. She has been published in journals such as *Strange Horizons*, *Sinister Wisdom*, and more. They were also nominated for the 2022 Dwarf Stars Award. Their website link is: <https://kangyunak.wixsite.com/website>

C.C. Joyce is a Black poet and writer based in Tampa, Florida. Usually plagued with writer's block, you can often find them knitting outside or

on strolls around town, taking pictures of architecture and flowers. Their Instagram is @viscount.venom; don't be afraid to say hi. They'll most likely say hi back.

Grace Martin is an emerging writer who lives in Seattle. Her work is forthcoming or has been published in *Lingua* and *The Orchards Poetry Journal*. She was nominated for the Pushcart Prize by *The Orchards Poetry Journal* (summer 2023) for "Tracking the Source, Losing the Trail."

Eva Eliav received her BA in English Language and Literature from the University of Toronto. Her poetry and short fiction have appeared in numerous literary journals, both online and in print. She is the author of two poetry chapbooks: *Eve* (Red Bird Chapbooks, 2019) and *One Summer Day* (Kelsay Books, 2021).

Douglas K Currier has published poetry in various journals in North and South America. A graduate of the University of Pittsburgh MFA program, his poetry collections *Señorita Death* (Main Street Rag Publishing Company) and *Regreso* (Moglia Ediciones) were published last year. He divides his time between Vermont and Argentina.

Alex Bastianini is a poet and artist from Pittsburgh, PA. As a kid, Alex developed a rare neurological disease and went into a coma. Today Alex hopes to promote education by encouraging others to write their truth. Instagram: @xandrwrenn.

Janet Teas is an Ohio-based poet and crossword puzzle constructor. She is passionate about collecting dictionaries and reading poetry rich in vocabulary.

Patricia Walsh was born and raised in the parish of Mourneabbey, Co Cork, Ireland. She has previously published a range of poetry in publications across Ireland, the UK, and the US, and one collection of poetry, (*Continuity Errors*) and two novels (*The Quest For Lost Éire* and *In The Days of Ford Cortina*). She lives in Cork City.

Donald Sellitti honed his writing skills as a scientist/educator at a Federal medical school in Bethesda, MD, before turning to poetry following his

retirement. He has publications in *The Alchemy Spoon*, *Better than Starbucks*, and *Rat's Ass Review*, which nominated him for a Pushcart Prize in 2022, among others.

Camille Lebel, mother to seven, lives on a hobby farm outside of Memphis. She's published in *Rogue Agent Journal*, *Literary Mama*, *Sledgehammer Lit*, *Black Fox Literary Magazine*, *Inkwell*, *Hidden Peak Review*, *Writers Resist*, and more. She enjoys traveling, horse-whispering, and making people uncomfortable. You can find her on Insta @clebelwords

Diane Funston has been published in journals including *California Quarterly*, *Lake Affect*, *F(r)iction*, *Tule Review*, *San Diego Poetry Annual*, among others. She served two years as Poet-in-Residence for Yuba-Sutter Arts and Culture Her chapbook, "Over the Falls," was published by Foothills Publishing in 2022.

Amy Nemecek was awarded the Paraclete Poetry Prize for her collection *The Language of the Birds*, and her poems have appeared in journals such as *Presence*, *Relief*, *The Windhover*, *St. Katherine Review*, and *Whale Road Review*. She enjoys solitary nature walks by her favorite stream and exploring new places with her family.

Ed Brickell is a Soto Zen practitioner and member of the Maria Kannon Zen Center in Dallas, Texas. Along with previous appearances in *Last Leaves*, his poems have been shared in *Hiram Poetry Review*, *Bowery Gothic*, *Loch Raven Review*, *Susurrus*, and others. He shares his previously published poetry at shortsurpriselife.com.

Sean Eaton is a queer disabled poet hailing from the hills of New England. His favorite writers are Amy Clampitt and Ruth Stone. He is an emerging poet with work forthcoming in *Arboreal Magazine* and *Eunoia Review*.

Paul O. Jenkins lives in New Hampshire and increasingly in the past. His poems and short stories have appeared in numerous journals including *The Avalon Literary Review*, *The Northern New England Review*, *Straylight*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Nebo*, *BarBar*, *The Chamber*, and *The Field Guide*.

Thomas Rions-Maehren is a bilingual poet and novelist. His new, Spanish-language novel is called *En las Manos de Satanás* (Ápeiron Ediciones, 2022). More of his poetry in both languages can be found in a number of journals and at his website (thomasrionsmaehren.com). He is on Twitter and Instagram @MaehrenTom.

M F Drummy's work has appeared, or will appear, in *Allium*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *Emerge*, *the engine(idling)*, *FERAL*, *Main Street Rag*, *The Rumen*, and many others. He and his way cool life partner of over 20 years enjoy splitting their time between the Colorado Rockies and the rest of the planet.

Afra Adil Ahmad is a writer, poet, artist and calligrapher. Based in Taiwan, she holds a Bachelor's degree in English Literature. She writes about everything under the sun: from dark issues of the society to problems faced by teenagers. Her works have appeared in various magazines including *Iman collective*, *MYM*, *Rather Quiet*, and more.

Lawrence Bridges' poetry has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, and *The Tampa Review*. He has published three volumes of poetry: *Horses on Drums* (Red Hen Press, 2006), *Flip Days* (Red Hen Press, 2009), and *Brownwood* (Tupelo Press, 2016). He lives in Los Angeles. You can find him on IG: @larrybridges

Angela Hoffman lives in Wisconsin. With her retirement from teaching and the pandemic coinciding, she took to writing poetry. Her poetry has been widely published. Angela's collections include *Resurrection Lily* 2022, *Olly Olly Oxen Free* 2023, and *Hold the Contraries*, forthcoming 2024 (Kelsay Books).

William Doreski lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire. He has taught at several colleges and universities. His most recent book of poetry is *Venus, Jupiter* (2023). His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in various journals.

Michael Shoemaker is a poet, writer, and photographer. His writing has appeared in *Blue Lake Review*, *Front Porch Review*, and in anthologies at Poet-

ry Pacific and Pure Slush. He lives in Magna, Utah, with his wife and son. He is the author of *Rocky Mountain Reflections* (Poets' Choice, 2023).

Hoyt Rogers is a widely published poet, translator, and novelist. His latest collection of poems is *Thresholds* (MadHat 2023), his latest translation is *Yves Bonnefoy's The Wandering Life* (Seagull 2023), and his latest novel is *Sailing to Noon* (Spuyten Duyvil 2023). Please see his website, hoytrogers.com

Elisa Subin is a writer whose work has appeared in *The Account: A Journal of Poetry, Prose, and Thought*; *The Inflectionist Review*; *Not One of Us*; *34 Orchard Literary Journal*; and many others. She won an Honorable Mention in the Reuben Rose Poetry Competition and was nominated for a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net.

Peter Gregg Slater, a historian, has taught at several institutions, including Dartmouth College and the University of California, Berkeley. In retirement, he has devoted himself to creative writing. His poetry, fiction, satire, and creative non-fiction have appeared in *DASH*, *Workers Write!*, *The Satirist*, *Masque & Spectacle*, and *Defenestration*.

Arvilla Fee teaches for Clark State College and is the poetry editor for the *San Antonio Review*. She has published poetry, photography, and short stories, and her poetry books are available on Amazon. For Arvilla, writing produces the greatest joy when it connects us to each other. See her website <https://soulpoetry7.com>

Stuti is a 13-year-old who enjoys art and writing. She generally spends her free time with her friends and published a book of poetry. She is in 8th grade and honored to be a part of *Last Leaves*.

Aiman Tahir Khan was born in Lahore, Pakistan. From a young age, she has been fond of reading poetry and she has cultivated a vibrant community of poetry enthusiasts on her Twitter/X (@dumbsoftheart).

Elliott batTzedek is a Pushcart Prize-nominated poet/translator. Her work appears in: *American Poetry Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Lilith*, *Sakura Review*, *Caboodaloodaling*, *Naugatuck River Review*, and *Poemeleon*. Her chap-

book *the enkindled coal of my tongue* was published by Wicked Banshee Press. A chapbook of translations from the Israeli poet Shez, *A Necklace of White Pearls*, is forthcoming.

Irina Tall (Novikova) is an artist, graphic artist, illustrator. She graduated from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures with a degree in art. The first personal exhibition “My soul is like a wild hawk” was held in the museum of Maxim Bagdanovich. She draws various fantastic creatures: unicorns, animals with human faces.

Bill Wolak has just published his eighteenth book of poetry entitled *All the Wind's Unfinished Kisses* with Ekstasis Editions. His collages and photographs have appeared as cover art for such magazines as *Phoebe*, *Harbinger Asylum*, *Baldhip Magazine*, and *Barfly Poetry Magazine*.

Shelly Reed Thieman writes to connect with the wounded. She is a messenger of imagery, a mistress of montage. Her work is heavily influenced by the discipline of haiku. Her poems have appeared in wide array of fine literary journals. Shelly is a two-time Pushcart nominee.

Charisse Stephens is a poet and teacher with a deep fascination for science, history, and language. She grew up in the flatlands of northwest Ohio but always considered the mountains home, and she now lives in Salt Lake City with her partner, two kids, and dog Polly.

Jacob Butlett is a Pushcart Prize-nominated author with an MFA in Poetry. He has been published in many journals, including the *Colorado Review*, *The Hollins Critic*, and *Into the Void*. In 2023 he received an Honorable Mention for the Academy of American Poets Prize (Graduate Prize).

Sasha Goodwin completed her MFA in poetry at Pacific University in Oregon in 2017. She was awarded a fellowship to a Monson Arts residency. There she completed the manuscript *Centipede*, which won the 2022 Maine Chapbook Series judged by Joshua Bennett. She lives in Auburn, Maine.

Mario Loprete Catanzaro (Italy) 1968. Throughout some artistic process, he transforms clothes into artworks to hang. His memories remain

concreted inside, transforming the person that looks at the artworks as a type of post-modern archeologist that studies his work as if they were urban artifacts.

Chad M. Horn is a touring beat poet and mixed media artist. When he is not writing or painting, he is advocating for at-risk and homeless youth in the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

Salvatore Difalco is a poet and author who lives in Toronto, Canada. Recent work appears in *Third Wednesday*, *Cafe Irreal*, and *RHINO Poetry*.

Michael Theroux writes from Northern California. His career has spanned field botanist, environmental health specialist, green energy developer, and resource recovery website editor. Michael is shifting from the scientific and technical environmental field to placing his cache of creative writing, a challenge indeed at 73 but much more satisfying.

Isabelle Bizalion is from western Massachusetts. She studies art and writing in Bozeman, Montana and has studied in Florence, Italy. During summers, she works in Montauk, NY. When she is not outside or on the move, she writes about people, their daily lives, and how they hurt and love.

Diane Averill holds an M.F.A. degree from the University of Oregon. She is twice a finalist for the Oregon Book Award, for “Branches Doubled Over With Fruit,” published by the University of Florida Press, and for “Beautiful Obstacles,” published by Blue Light Press. She was a teacher until retirement.

John Delaney’s publications include *Waypoints* (2017), *Twenty Questions* (2019), *Delicate Arch* (2022), and *Galápagos* (2023), a collaborative chapbook of his son Andrew’s photographs and his poems. *Nile*, a chapbook of poems and photographs about Egypt, will appear in May. He lives in Port Townsend, WA.

Ellen Harrold is an artist, writer, and editor of *Metachrosis Literary*. She is currently exploring the connections between science, art, and storytelling. She has recently published poetry with *Die Leere Mitte*, *New Note*

Poetry, and *Skylight* 47. She also published her first book *The Aesthetics and Conventions of Medical Art*.

KH Holladay was born in 1950 and grew up in Nashville, Tennessee. She graduated cum laude in English from the University of Wisconsin and spent much of her life in North Carolina before her death in 2016. A fierce devotee of poetry, old movies, and the North Carolina coast, she was previously published in *Last Leaves* in Spring 2022.

Nancy Patchen is a poet and fiction writer newly inspired by a move to Los Angeles. She's taken turns as a journalist, editor and novelist. Her work has appeared in *Earth's Daughters* and several anthologies.

Renee Williams is a retired English instructor who has written for *Guitar Digest*, *Alien Buddha Press*, and *Fevers of the Mind*.

Thomas Skahill is an educator, poet, and artist from Playa Del Rey, California. He currently teaches in Oakhurst, California, and is involved with the Fresno Art Scene.

Karoly Lencses is a Hungarian poet and visual artist, born in Nyiregyhaza, Hungary, in 1976. He has been writing from a very early age. He has numerous publications in most Hungarian literary magazines. He has had two books of poems published, and his poems are included in many anthologies.

Anam Tariq writes from India and holds an MA in English and a poetry collection, *A Leaf upon a Book* (Leadstart, 2022). She runs The Wordsridge Newsletter on Substack and writes for The Incognito Press, and others. In her free time, Anam loves immersing herself in books and learning Arabic. Visit her at www.anamtariq.in or [@anam.tariq_](https://www.instagram.com/anam.tariq_) (IG).

Alan Bern is a retired children's librarian and a published/exhibited photographer. He has won awards for his poems and stories, has published three books of poetry, and has a hybrid memoir, *IN THE PACE OF THE PATH*, published by UnCollected Press. Lines & Faces, his press with artist/printer Robert Woods: linesandfaces.com.

Kate Polak is an artist, writer, and teacher. Her work has recently appeared in *Plainsongs*, *McSweeney's*, *So to Speak*, *Coffin Bell*, *The Closed Eye Open*, *Inverted Syntax*, and elsewhere. She lives in south Florida with her familiars and aspires to a swamp hermitage.

Maureen Clark is retired from the University of Utah where she taught writing. She was the president of Writers @ Work 1999-2001. Her poems have appeared in *Colorado Review*, *Alaska Review*, *The Southeast Review*, and *Gettysburg Review*. Her first book *This Insatiable August* will be out February 2024 from Signature Books.

A.S. Hallam (she/her) is a junior at Smith College pursuing a B.A. in English Language and Literature, with a Poetry Concentration. She's been published in *Zeniada Magazine*.

William Heath has published three poetry books: *The Walking Man*, *Steel Valley Elegy*, and *Going Places*; two chapbooks, *Leaving Seville* and *Night Moves in Ohio*; three novels: *The Children Bob Moses Led*, *Devil Dancer*, and *Blacksnake's Path*; a work of history, *William Wells and the Struggle for the Old Northwest*; and a collection of interviews, *Conversations with Robert Stone*. He lives in Annapolis. www.williamheathbooks.com

Ben Macnair is an award-winning poet and playwright from Staffordshire in the United Kingdom. Follow him on Twitter @benmacnair

Ellen Mary Hayes explores the transcendent qualities of creativity. Her work is born through reflections on creating sacred homes, contemplations on the spirit, and meditations on the natural world. Ellen's work has been featured in *Anchor House of Artists*, *Equinox*, *Sonic Boom*, and elsewhere. Contact Ellen at ellenmaryhayes@gmail.com and Instagram @ellenmaryhayes1.

Giulio Maffi was born in Florence (Italy). His studies are dedicated to poetry (linear-experimental-visual) and its diffusion. Recently he has published in New York's magazine "Arteidolia", "Expanded field journal" (Amsterdam) and *Urtica* (France). He collaborates with "Bubamara Teatro" Theater Company. He teaches at the University of Florence.

Adam R. Levine earned his master's degree from the Bread Loaf School of English. His work has appeared in *Apricity Magazine* and the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. He won third prize in the 2018 Robert Haiduke Poetry Contest. A former English teacher and a current high-school dean, he lives with his family in Los Angeles.

Gavin Kayner's plays, prose, and poetry have won numerous awards and appeared in a variety of publications. He thanks the folks at *Last Leaves* for this opportunity.

Stephen Reilly's poems appeared in *Charon, Wraparound South, Albatross, Main Street Rag, Broad River Review, Cape Rock, Poetry South*, and other publications. Reilly retired in 2023 after working 30 years as a staff writer for the *Englewood Sun*, a daily Florida newspaper with circulation in south Sarasota County and Charlotte and DeSoto counties.

Edward Michael Supranowicz is the grandson of Irish and Russian/Ukrainian immigrants. He grew up on a small farm in Appalachia. Some of his artwork has recently or will soon appear in *Fish Food, Streetlight, Another Chicago Magazine*, and more. Edward is also a published poet who has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize multiple times.

Fritz Eifrig lives, works, and gardens in Chicago, Illinois, where he's made his home for the past 35 years. His poems have appeared in *After Hours, Cerasus Magazine, The Loch Raven Review, Olney Magazine*, and *Blue River*.

Judi Mae "JM" Huck is an Asian American poet and teaching artist in Las Vegas, Nevada. JM is passionate about community engagement. In 2023 she co-founded wewritelv.com to offer generous support for emerging writers to develop their craft. Huck's poetry synthesizes her understanding of culture, history, nature, and science.

Kelly White Arnold is a mom, writer, teacher, and lover of yoga. Her work recently appeared in *Walter and Ink & Marrow*. When she's not scribbling in notebooks or wrangling teenagers, she's planning her next tattoo and daydreaming about traveling the world. Find her on social media @KArnoldTeaches.

Kendra Cardin creates a safe harbor for herself with poetry and storytelling. She loves speculative tales and enjoys imagining new and familiar characters to befriend. Her writings have been featured in various publications including *Little Thoughts Press*, *Blink-Ink*, and Sídhe Press's *Glisk and Glimmer* anthology.

Angela Arnold lives in North Wales, UK, and is also an artist, a creative gardener, and an environmental campaigner. Her poetry has been published in print magazines, anthologies, and online, in the UK and elsewhere. First collection: *In Between* (Stairwell Books, 2023). Twitter: @AngelaArnold777

Joe Oswald lives in Madison, Wisconsin. A retired justice worker and children's mental health advocate, his prose has appeared in print and online journals, including *Hippocampus*, *Compose Journal*, and *Soliloquies Anthology*. After a forty-year pause, he recently returned to writing poetry. This is his first published poem.

Helen Patrice is an Australian writer living in Naarm, with a view of the Dandenong Ranges, which often inspire her work. Helen works in poetry, short fiction, memoir, creative non fiction, and very occasionally mixed media art. Her new collection of fairytale poetry *INTO DARK WOODS* will be published in 2024.

Maryam Majid is an emerging young writer who loves words that feel like the lavender haze in her veins. Her work has been published in *Teen Ink Magazine*, *Cathartic Youth Literary Magazine*, *Malu Zine*, *Expressionist Youth Literary Magazine*, and the *Encephalon Journal*. You can find her on Medium.

Anna Molenaar is a writer of poetry and prose concerned with nature, humanity, and the messes that occur when the two mix. Her work appears or will appear in the *After Happy Hour Review*, *Common Ground Review*, and more. She lives in St. Paul, Minnesota, where she received her MFA from Hamline University.

L.N. Quinn (they/them) is a partner, parent, and poet. They draw inspiration from the diverse landscapes and experiences of time lived in

the Midwest and Southwest United States. When not writing, they enjoy collecting vinyl records, film photography, composing music, and playing RPGs. Find them on Instagram @l.n.quinn

Jason Melvin is a father, husband, grandfather, and metals processing center supervisor who lives just north of Pittsburgh. He is a later-in-life storyteller, having first published in 2020. He can be found on Twitter @Jason5Melvin, Instagram @JasonMelvin5 and on his website at www.jasonmelvinwords.weebly.com.

Avery Timmons is an Illinois-based writer and photographer holding a BA in creative writing from Columbia College Chicago. Her short fiction can be found or is forthcoming in *Querencia Press*, *Mulberry Literary*, and other publications. She is on Twitter as @averyt_214.

Shei Sanchez's work can be found in many places, including *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, *Women of Appalachia Project's Women Speak*, *Still: The Journal*, and *One Art*. A Best of the Net nominee, Shei can be found herding goats and writing in the woods at her farm in Appalachian Ohio.

Grace Hu is nationally recognized by the League of Canadian Poets. She writes fantasy novels, angsty songs, and experimental poetry that adds a touch of stardust to the mundane. She grew up in Vancouver, and now studies international relations and classics at the University of Toronto. More writing content @grace_should_write on Instagram.

Katharine Weinmann is a seeker whose reading of poets and mystics shapes the container from which her words and images emerge, revealing beauty in her imperfect, sometimes broken, mostly well-lived, and much loved life. An intrepid traveler and internationally published poet and photographer, she blogs at A Wabi Sabi Life.

Maggie He (she/her) is a recent English Literature graduate from the University of Glasgow. Born in China, she moved to Canada with her family at a very young age. Her work was previously published in *orangepeel* magazine and has also been recognized by the Scholastic Art & Writing Award.

Ryan Mayer is a poet and writer native to New Orleans, Louisiana. Ryan graduated Loyola University New Orleans with a BA in English (creative writing) and received his MFA from The University of New Orleans.

Felix Elliot is a queer poet in Richmond, Virginia. He was a reader for *Blackbird* and has a degree in English with a minor in creative writing. His poetry has been featured in *Pwntem*.

Rory Oliveri writes to get to know himself. She cannot be found anywhere (yet).

Rina Malagayo Alluri (she/her) is of Indian and Filipina heritage, raised in Ibadan, Nigeria, and migrated to Vancouver, BC, Canada (Turtle Island). She is a peace scholar, yoga practitioner and mother to two headstrong children. Her poetry weaves experiences of (de)coloniality, diasporic identities, and relationships that form/unform.

Louhi Pohjola was born in Canada to Finnish parents. She was a biologist before teaching sciences and humanities in a small high school in southern Oregon. Louhi lives in Portland, Oregon, with her husband and her temperamental terrier. The latter thinks that he is a cat.

Sharon Hope Fabriz publishes poetry and prose weekly on Medium at sharonhopefabriz.medium.com. Her spiritual memoir *Circling Toward Home* (2021) is her first book. She is part of the Sisters of the Pen writing group based in Sacramento and also participates in Ann Randolph's Unmute online writing community.

Barbara Anna Gaiardoni & Andrea Vanacore alias gaia & vana are finalists of the Edinburgh "Writings Leith" contest. Barbara's Japanese-style poems have been published in 142 international journals. Andrea's video and photographic works encompass his performative approach toward reality that he puts in dialogue through his investigation. They are life partners in Verona City (Italy).

Richard Hanus. Had four kids but now just three. Zen and Love.

Morgan Neering was born and raised in small-town USA and is an American writer and poet living in France. Her work explores themes of nostalgia and self-discovery, and can be found in various literary journals such as *Yellow Arrow Journal*, *Carolina Muse*, and *Ink in Thirds*.

Ms. Sultani earned her MA in Library and Information Studies from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She now lives deep in America's Bible Belt, which is as surprising to her as it is to anyone else. Her poems are included or forthcoming in *Delta Poetry Review*, *J Journal*, *MOIRA*, and *The Racket*, among others.

Angela Thoma is a writer and photographer from the greater Boston area. She holds a Master's in creative writing from Trinity College Dublin. Her most recent creative work has appeared in *New Square*, the official publication of the Sancho Panza Literary Society. Angela's journalistic contributions have also appeared in numerous Massachusetts newspapers.

Kashish Kumar intertwines philosophical and psychological themes with musical influences, crafting sonnets and free verse that ignite introspection. Through vivid imagery, Kashish's writing invites readers on a journey of contemplation, exploring the intricacies of human existence and the depths of emotion. Immerse yourself in the webs of thinking.

John L. Stanizzi has authored *Ecstasy Among Ghosts*, *Sleepwalking*, *Dance Against the Wall*, *After The Bell*, *Hallelujah Time*, and more. John's work has been in *American Life in Poetry*, *Prairie Schooner*, *New York Quarterly*, and others. John was a Literature Professor at Manchester Community College in Manchester, Connecticut.

