



Last Leaves

Issue 6 | Spring 2023

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Cover design by Kiera Baron

Note from the Editor

To the wondrously talented submitters and fans of *Last Leaves Magazine*, this wasn't easy to start or to write: My hunger is leading me elsewhere.

In this issue of HUNGER, I wanted to see us when we're at our most primal, driven, and desperate—and I enjoyed seeing what that meant for many of you.

Through the collection of works we received for consideration, I realized it was time for me to step back as an editor. And it wasn't easy. I feared that I would be cutting off my connection to the literary writing world and my link to Kiera and Cailey. I was afraid of being thought of as a disappointment for pulling back from this passion project of ours.

But through a very kind conversation with them, I realized that I've grown a lot since the magazine started—we all have. And the funny thing about growth is that it can lead to a hunger for something new.

This doesn't mean I'll be so far removed from the mag that I'll disappear entirely. I'll pop back in occasionally to mull over some poignant reads, and Kiera and Cailey have assured that I'm always welcome as a guest editor for any issue I want.

You're in good hands with the ever-dependable duo with how they constantly give their all to ensure each issue is shipped out on time and that everyone and their work has ample consideration.

I've said this before in our first issue, but without the two of them, there would be no lit mag. I'm endlessly grateful to be included in this journey, and I will undoubtedly love to see how it continues to evolve.

~Maina Chen, Former Last Leaves Editor



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.

Contents

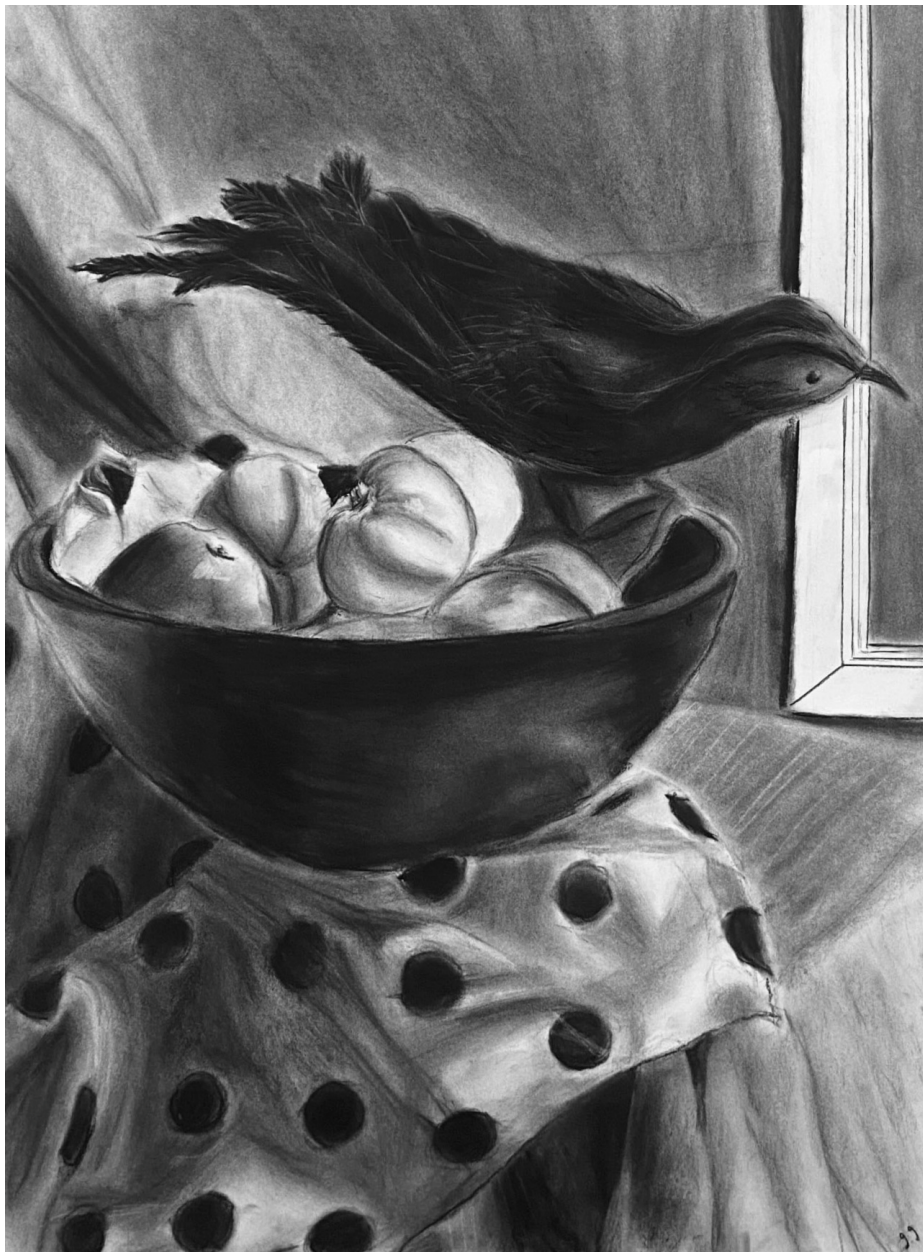
Calm Night.....	xii
I have Failed the Deer	1
Finding the Tribe.....	2
Away From Her.....	3
When the twenty-first person asks me if they should become a social worker	4
Waking with a child's heart	6
Melting shores	7
fed up - a poem in three courses	8
Pep Lasagna	9
Primavera.....	10
Summoning the Ferryman.....	12
In watermelon sugar	13
Kairos.....	14
Patron Saint.....	15
Between-Time: The Hunger of the Dark	16
COSMIC HUNGER.....	17
Where do you think you're going?.....	18
Un-Coloured.....	19
You are the eggs	20
Inspiration	21
A Sandwich for Justino	22
Digesting a Grandfather Clock.....	24
Self-Order Kiosk.....	25
Kitchen Bin Hymn.....	26
A Callous Baptism	28
BURRITO.....	29
AMERICAN PASTIME.....	30
CUR.....	31
A Snapshot of What is Mine.....	32
Desert Ride	34

Katydid stakes.....	35
It Never Snows on Tuesday.....	36
SPINNERS OF WEBS.....	37
ALMOST 100.....	38
last meal	39
On the Coming Cold.....	40
Bridge Between Water and Sky	41
Nightmares, I	42
Quiet at the Library	43
crashing the banquet.....	44
pastoral lights	45
You, Will Be a Wolf	46
Clean Plates.....	47
esu-ri-ence	48
Gaunt	49
Bowl O' Teeth	50
The Empty	51
Dinner Time	52
off the leash.....	54
Draught.....	55
leftovers	56
Appetite	57
i can remember what it is to love.....	58
A Mother's Hunger.....	59
THE BURDEN OF MEMORY (After Mei Yao Chen)	60
Buffet	61
13	64
Oh, to End	65
Crumbs	66
Hunger.....	67
Cathedral	68
pearl-white necklace of teeth and souls	70
February.....	71

“I felt that silence was sweet”	72
I see the crow.....	73
Bangers and Mash.....	74
Seduce Me	75
After I Said Goodbye	76
Friendship and Onions.....	77
Aftermath.....	78
Yeats Narrates.....	79
Foxes come in pairs	80
Into Silence We Move.....	82
A Greek Wedding for Gulls	83
The New Bride	84
A few morsels of truth	85
Bounce.....	86
Into Silence We Move.....	87
walk into a bank with empty pockets.....	88
The Poet	89
The glass Grandma wanted in Grandpa’s glass.....	90
Transitioning.....	91
Baked Goods	92
Good Kids Eat Up	93
Forbidden Fruit	94
deadflash.....	95
beware	96
Stone Proof	97
One Lunch in Eastern Oregon, circa 1982.....	98
The Poet’s Mother Waits on Earth.....	99
glut.....	100
Diet.....	101
soil	102
Spring Palindrome.....	103
Momentum.....	104
Alphabet Soup.....	105

A Eulogy for the Dead and Dying.....	106
50	107
Whose Hungry?.....	108
Divorced Eggs.....	110
Ground	111
Cheesy Meatball.....	112
Calling	113
Field notes from Ridley Creek	114
Hunger.....	115
Rural Ride.....	116
A Gentle Wound	117
The pit.....	118
Making Poutine Rappee With My Husband	119
London Scene.....	120
Road to Freedom	121
Acceptance	122
Irony. Paradox. [English Media for Thought Pattern].....	123
Hidden Manifesto of <i>Stability vs 稳/wen/</i>	124
The Crow.....	125
A Poem to My Father.....	126
breakfast	127
The Black Hawthorn	128
For the Italian Stonecarvers of Barre, Vermont.....	130
sampson and delilah.....	131
I Dreamt of You Again Last Night.....	132
The Death of Nihilism	133
waxing poetic with my best friend.....	134
Final Mouth	136
Porn.....	137
Cinnamon Toast	138
at the end of the day.....	139
groundskeeper starving.....	140
Feasted	141

All I want to do is	142
Last Day Salad	144
Ripe	145
Becoming.....	146
Anchorage	147
More Than You Can Chew	148
Studying in the Library.....	149
Green Onions.....	150
Digging in My Poems in the Morning.....	151
They Call Me Desert.....	152
STARVING	153
PART ONE	154
I Hibernate Within Myself	155
Roast Beef	156
Sandwich.....	157
Ears of Corn	158
The Last Time I Went Home.....	159
Lying in the Grass Behind a Grocery Store on Fox Grape Plaza in Springfield, Missouri	160
Idilica.....	161
Gissel Gomez	161
Greens.....	162
Gardening For Dummies.....	163
We Met at a Farmer's Market	164
Portait of the Author as a Single Mother.....	165
Partition 1947	166
The Sweeper's Daydream.....	167
A Question of Lost Lust	168
Contributor Bios	169



Calm Night

Gissel Gomez

I have Failed the Deer

Chris Dungey

I may have failed the deer—
the six-point buck I shot at age
fifty-eight, my first. We blundered
into each other a half-mile
from the hunting lodge near Luzerne.
I joined the Club for the pickled bologna,
sharp Pinconning cheese, well-oiled friends
gathered around the fire pit with flurries
spilling. All I'd seen before
were cautious doe, coyotes
sniffing past my blind.

*

The promise I made
as remorse swept in, still worrying
if he'd stay lashed to the luggage carrier,
was to waste nothing. In fact, the brain
went to the DNR. Marrow-
bones and hide were processed
and we've eaten the last package
of venison burger, butterfly steaks.
Only those antlers remain neglected,
collecting dust in the garage.

*

Club tradition is to mount the rack
or head above the cut-stone fire-
places. Other members have done this,
some long deceased but now remembered
for their prowess. It is not too late to have
my antlers glued onto a polished plaque.
Dad even wanted his ashes spread
near his blind. One day a grandson
may read the engraving beneath my horns
then on Opening Day sit out
in Dad's mouse-chewed bucket seat,
waiting for browsing ghosts.

Finding the Tribe

Laurie Kuntz

On days when the air is rife
with scent and breeze
and there is no anger
toward any living thing,
on those days help the bone thin
lift packages from step to door frame,
and hold open that same heavy glass door,
so the mother of three can balance
carriage and carry.
There comes a day,
when a neighbor needs to know
how to use something other than the landline
in order to see a grandchild in a state
with different borders.
Summer days, bring a box of donuts
to someone stuck at a desk,
and pick a bouquet of wild asters,
so affordable, pick bunches
for tables where all are invited to sit,
for it is in the invites that we find a tribe,
and relearn how to help, to praise,
to share our hunger,
and how to come home.

Away From Her

Laurie Kuntz

I want to remember my mother when she was still herself,
not in a grip of sorrows and congestions.
As death sits at her table, I am away from her
now, the last questions can never be answered,
no going back to mother and daughter
only on to the dealings with death.

Cummings said, *Dying is fine*

but my mother is hooked up to a life gone stagnant,
there is only the waiting, but once gone
and out of the aching descent,
I will easily remember a woman
holding in her palms the lines
of all her children's futures.

As death eats at her table, I am away from her
picking huckleberries from trees rooted in my daily paths—
like a child I engage in pulling down the heavy berried limbs
carrying such sweetness, the way a mother carries
the wishes and woes of her children.

When I should be near, I am far
picking huckleberries, their juices run
over my crescent fingertips and stain my skin—

stains that remain for days
like the memory of my mother
when she was still herself.

When the twenty-first person asks me if they should become a social worker¹

Callie S. Blackstone

Legal advocacy

She takes the watch out of her pocket.
The lines and numbers once signified something.
She used to run on military time—she showed up early
with her hair trimmed and her boots shined.

She has abandoned her hair—once high and tight,
it's too unkempt for Navy standards now. It's still soft brown,
it hasn't grayed after all these years. It is dirty, though—
it isn't clear when she last washed it. It isn't clear
if she buys shampoo or conditioner these days,
or if she takes a shower at all.

She stares at the watch. She stares out the window.
The watch reads two and the window reads dark.
But her stomach growls, so she figures Burger
King should be open. She has the secret knowledge
that clocks don't guide the world, her biology does.

Hungry? Restaurants will magically open,
populated by eager employees who know
her name. Angry? Her psychiatrist will retract
the misdiagnosis, stop the injections and pills,
and her blood (count *and* sugars) will go back
down. (She knows what the pills *really* do.)
Sad? Her son will finally return his calls
and admit that he was wrong all along.

The world is hers, it's in her hands. She walks the few blocks, sees the poster featuring a plethora of sandwiches. Why yes, she thinks, I will get the BOGO. I will feast tonight.

The darkened interior of the restaurant doesn't register. Nor does the *redblueredblueredblue* that bounces across the windows. When the cops appear in the reflection she decides to buy them sandwiches—*her treat*—despite her low income. She has, after all, always respected authority. She can't hear them over the *thudthudthud* of her fists against the glass. Beef? Chicken? Fish? French fries or onion rings? Diet or regular? She is yelling, demanding service. This is bigger than her now. Burger King doesn't back the blue and she won't tolerate it. *This chick again*, one of them says. *She's unhinged, she needs to take her meds and to chill the fuck out.* The other nods. *What she really needs is a trip to the looney bin.*

Their laughter joins the cacophony of flesh against glass, of shoes on the sidewalk—other late night explorers pause to take in what it's like when someone else gets arrested

Waking with a child's heart

Linda K. Miller

new day
awake with the dawn
eager to get on my way
a wide smile and a yawn

honeybun
butter and strawberries
cocoa coating my tongue
no counting calories

reality
an adult day
work, accountability
no child today

but before all that
I'll get my honey scone
and drink hot chocolate
with strawberries at home

all the while
dreaming of waking
with a smile
as a child again

Melting shores

Linda K. Miller

With shaking hands
ice drops off Earth's highest brow
water ices my fingers
sends shivers down my spine
warm winds blow across deserts
used to heat the days
lizards laze under the blaze
of skies burnt centuries on end
but fires flare now as temps rise
somethin's gone awry now
Aussie life is dying now
Amazon forests felling to the
ground taking our air with them
fear is hiking its way up through
my guts, creating craters of pain
as I eat meat that gobbles up
acres of land better used to
produce vegetables to feed
multitudes rather than the few
what's that old saying...
crocodile tears...
if I was truly sorry or guilty or
caring, I'd give up meat
instead I just give up on
humanity as we
rush toward extinction

fed up - a poem in three courses

Gloria Heffernan

appetizer: how Bullwinkle got that way

fed—
the contentment of a nourishing meal.
the satisfaction nestled in the mashed potatoes
on the Thanksgiving dinner table.

fed up—
the bloated blinding rage
in the wake of insults and irritations
better spat discreetly into the dinner napkin
instead of swallowed and stuffed—
inflated like the Bullwinkle balloon
in the Macys Thanksgiving Day Parade.

entree: what Bullwinkle swallowed

devouring each stifled word,
each swallowed objection,
promises never important enough
for you to remember
but too important
for me to forget
thank yous
you never bothered to say
because the giving had become
too commonplace to notice.

dessert: the icing on bullwinkle's cake

apple pie or pumpkin?
ice cream or whipped?
thoughtless oversights?
insults or neglect?
choices relegated to reflex
ingested out of habit and desperation

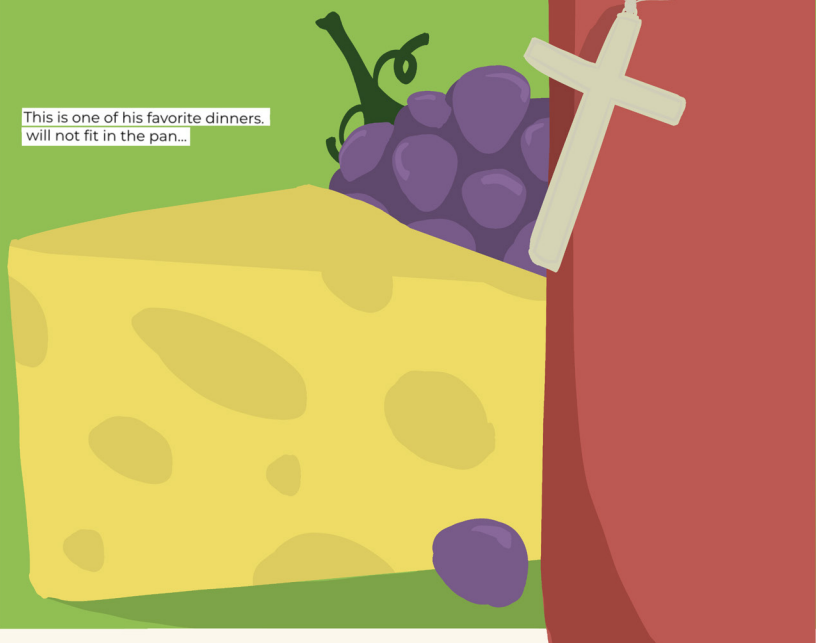
seen now in the fullness of ancient hungers
i finally step away
from the table and say
enough.

Pepperoni Lasagna

★★★★☆ 8 reviews

My husband comes from a large Italian family,
when he married me--having grown up with a dad
who had lots of delicious Italian recipes he'd gotten
from friends whose parents had
a dinner honoring a priest-relative
who'll be celebrating his 30th

This is one of his favorite dinners.
will not fit in the pan...



Pep Lasagna

Daphne Fauber

Primavera

Gloria Heffernan

When the hem of winter
begins to unravel
in that muddy space between the seasons,
my hunger for green
drives me to the farmer's market
where the promise of spring
waits in bins of root vegetables
and hothouse tomatoes.

No matter that they are the last
Vestiges of harvest time.
They will serve my purpose
better than the waxed beauties
piled geometrically under fluorescent lights
in a supermarket where the blemished
are discarded after the thousand-mile
drive from the Sunshine State.

Just a taste of Spring propels me
to the early morning parking lot
where trucks line up side-by-side
proffering crates of unvarnished fare.

Calloused hands drop potatoes
and beans into brown paper bags
along with a few hints for how best to
coax out their flavors.

Carrots, zucchini, bell pepper,
a fist of garlic, basil, and parsley,
fresh farfalle made just yesterday.
Be careful not to overcook it
warns Rose as she hands me the bundle
wrapped in butcher paper.

At home the kitchen blossoms
with the fragrance of pasta primavera
piled into white bowls
to let the colors bloom like the tulips
eager to erupt into a new season.
For now, the mere promise will have to suffice—
a bowl of Springtime
in the waning days of winter.

Summoning the Ferryman

Gloria Heffernan

She flags him down
as if simply hailing a cab
on Fifth Avenue in the rain.

But unlike the careless cabbies
speeding through oil-slicked puddles,
ignoring her as they splash her dress,

Charon obliges,
steering his ferry expertly
to the riverbank where she waits.

She steps gingerly into the boat.
No need to announce her destination.
He knows where she wants to go.

In watermelon sugar

Rachel R. Baum

The monarch butterfly casts
a batlike shadow
worried, it paces
the corridor of sky
come soon text messages
and grim phone calls
are sweet nectar sipped
by aging children
they hover too long,
whisper conspiratorially,
about hospital protocols
and overdue apologies
they are butterflies, sensing
watermelon sugar is near
confused, hungry,
greedy for anticipated news.



Kairos
Corey J. Boren

Patron Saint

Bart Edelman

Leonard begs for a patron saint
To protect him from harm.
Sister Oona suggests Saint Sven—
One of the newer breeds—
A man who came to the Lord,
After his own personal struggles
Brought him to his knees,
Before he cut them off—
A supreme offering, if you will.
Leonard wonders, day after day,
Could he commit such a sacrifice?
Sever the appropriate body part?
Would an ear, finger, or toe suffice?
Or need he go bolder?
He knows the stakes are high.
A false, foolish move, now,
And he'll slide deeper and deeper
Into the color of despair—
For which no name exists.
Leonard contacts the Almighty,
Asks him to deliver a sign—
Some gentle declaration, at least—
One last beacon of hope?
But only silence follows.
Leonard raises the knife higher,
Lets it drop, wherever God pleases.

Between-Time: The Hunger of the Dark

Jennifer M. Phillips

Another day dangles on the clothesline

between God and Magog.

A salting of small hail on the summer grass
as bully thunderheads

bruise noon's sallow skin.

Most days we are blithe
and self-preoccupied
and then

July icefall crashes in

trees split, wires down.

We find ourselves like that Medieval mob
of grotesques, naked, nervous

glancing over our shoulders

at what is too large to see or to define
shivering as its shadow

passes over us like ether

limbs frozen in a dream
no sound

from our moving mouths.

the hunger of the dark

stalking our toothsome moments

all the lithe green landscapes we inhabit,
funneling us in.

COSMIC HUNGER

David Dephy

The hills darken. Standing across from yourself
you can feel the dark— your own existence, hunger.
No one is around. It was noisy place. Noisy dark place,
but even now it is assembling, as all your fears sleep
in their emptiness now. Hunger is the end of loneliness.

All your nightmares having been picked clean.
Now you see how your favorite moon rises,
above all your expectations— the bridges of paradise.
The ghost of a saint is leaning out the window,
calling the night by its real name,

saying the words in different languages,
yet, the self implies other, as the spirit of the moon
creeps out of the sky, and you can steel feel yourself
in that empty place on the night sky when the lilac
shadow of the whole constellation has drifted away.

Where do you think you're going?

Ketia Valme

To the moon
Where we're viewed
As gentle as a caterpillar in its cocoon
Somewhere real; somewhere pure
A place that doesn't fuck around with our insecurities
It don't invalidate our vulnerability
And inaugurate us into a swarm of negativity
All cause our blood carries the history of inequity
Our backs read the story of our ancestry
Our ankles shackled in this system's penitentiary
But they expect us to shut up and claim freedom
While we watch our kingdom
Corrupted by white wisdom
Filled with nothing but mediocre visions
Illustrated with demolition
And their mission to invalidate the conditions
That we undergo—
I mean it's sickening—
How they try to paint over the imprisonment
That follows us like a silhouette.
But on the moon
That's a guaranteed reset.

Un-Coloured

Lynn White

Sadness leaches the colours from life.
Even the bloodied black hole of death
is bleached white
with hunger.

You are the eggs

Nolcha Fox

that run from toast,
a fugitive from frappe mornings,
the empty chair at my table,
a gnawing need that eats my guts,
a craving I can't fill.

Inspiration

Ripley Crow

a muse
must be
kept
out of reach
because
nothing
inspires
like wanting
some-
-thing
unhave-
-able.

A Sandwich for Justino

Evie Groch

He grabs my attention as he enters tentatively.
I sip my mocha at my local Starbucks,
evacuated my house for the cleaning ladies.
A sandy-haired tall, rail-thin Adonis who
walks up to the pick-up counter and orders water.
He's dressed in homelessness, speaks softly,
strives to be invisible, but fails.

He glides outside, takes a few sips of his water,
curls up on the pavement, leaning against
Starbucks' floor-to-ceiling window to catch a nap.
He never leaves the corner of my eye.
I read, write, send emails, but always return
my eye to check up on him.

I wonder what I've trained myself not to wonder:
What's his backstory? Who misses him?
Where will he sleep tonight?
My heart aches. I think about buying him
a bag of chips but feel shame at my pitiful offer.
We've been trained not to give money.

As I get ready to leave, he awakens and reenters.
He now orders a cup of coffee, and I dare approach.
May I buy you a bag of chips? I offer.
Could I have a sandwich instead? he counters.
Of course, I say. He has removed my shame.
I pay for his sandwich for which he whispers Thank you.

I turn to walk out, but instead turn back and ask,
What is your name?
Justino.
Hi, Justino, I say as I give him my name.
Hello, he says with a slight nod and not quite
a smile on his lips.
I knew I would come home and write
about him and ponder the significance later.

Digesting a Grandfather Clock

Evie Groch

The question is not why
but how you should do it.
Start with clean hands;
assume it will be time consuming.
Chime in for grace,
emulate the gears' teeth.
Do it by the numbers,
time piece by time piece.
Take minutes; they count.
Go back for seconds if time permits.
Credit it for original tic-tocs.
Take it at face value, winding it up
at the end of the meal.
You will not be left with time
on your hands, but rather
hands on your time.



Self-Order Kiosk

Michael Moreth

Kitchen Bin Hymn

Daphne Fauber

O Thee of infinites,
I lay at Thy altar
an ordinary offering of
celestial citruses
golden like a dawn
tender as a breast
sickeningly sweet
that I vowed to eat
yet abandoned.

Praise Thee!

Praise Thee!

O Thee of infinites,
I lay at Thy altar
ye heel of bread
crippled crumbs
coarse and crusty
humbly begging
for deliverance
from the depths
of the drawer.

Holy!
Holy!

O Thee of infinities,
I lay at Thy altar
ancient lasagna
a relic of time past
that was agreeable
but worse revisited
in a clouded Tupperware tomb
so as to suppress the sin
of the —Cheese? Meat?

O Friend Unseen!
O Friend Unseen!

O Thee of infinities,
I lay at Thy altar
and I praise Thee,
for your omnipotence
and conviction ensure
I take the trash out.

Amen!

A Callous Baptism

Daphne Fauber

I hold my keys between my fingers
while I baptize myself in the holy waters
of the public bathroom someone was
too stupid or too saintly to keep locked.

Trash can wedged against the door to
keep other potential venerators away
as soap forms clouds and fluorescent
lights make hazy halos in my vision.

A knock at the door—confession time—
both real and imagined sins despite
my resemblance of Mary not Judas
no divine absolution will be granted.

With my makeshift rosary I pray
the Roman soldier will withdraw,
letting me rest in my manger
and nurse my original sin.

BURRITO

Norman Minnick

To the devil I sold my soul for a half-frozen burrito.
At four in the morning, I sold my soul!

I had for years a handful of change in my left pocket—
the one without the hole—but it was never enough.

AMERICAN PASTIME

Norman Minnick

The muck and grill-gunk
of scorched pork and scrapings
of stainless-steel spatula burn
into a finer and finer decay.

The seared lines on the long pig
indicate an open-air ritual
and the gathering of carnivores with a lust
for bland camaraderie and burnt flesh.



CUR

Norman Minnick

I am all stomach and appetite. I devour
shit, peat moss, a litter of rabbits,
all varieties of weeds and grass, a cast-out bone.

I vomit and I eat that, too.
Every day a cute redhead skips by
and I forget my sudden attachment to the leash.

I keep waiting and waiting, waiting for the day
the backdoor opens and a voice calls out.
They never gave me a name.

A Snapshot of What is Mine

A. Benét

For my people. Old, new, and becoming.

So, we all gather round to take a picture.
Me and my people. And when I say *my people*,
know that I am also talking about the ancestors.
Dressed down in their grace and guidance,
They stand regal in the back waiting for us to ready.

But we are too busy cackling to notice a flash.
We can't resist the urge to run when laughter bubbles
over. Our lips, dyed cherry or orange or grape, peel back frozen,
suspended in moment, while Ant prepares a roast of Lanti
and his shoes or braids or socks or fit or ash-stained knees.
We linger in this show of care taken from the old ways of dozens as

we are told to face the light. And I think of our skin.
How it darkens in chlorine and sun, and the blue hue
makes us something ethereal and beautiful and of God.
And how after every poolside baptism
I learn to like the taste of water on my tongue.

Like I learned to ask aunties for a plate home,
and they taught me the joys of leftovers in the morning,
greasing my scalp, dripping my wrist in gold, and
finding peace in chaos and stillness and amen.

This is where I find myself in memory.
Longing for the sound of laughter and nagging and silence,
for the times I get my way because we secretly want the same thing,
and fighting about wanting to fight is an unvoiced

I love you

I see you.

I see my people and fall to my knees.
Ask God to never let us worry again.
To bless our pockets with enough flow to make dreams reality,
to support ourselves with more than sticks. I pray

that we are always surrounded by enough love
to give us space to grow, to move, to learn new things.
I weep to see them all reflected in crystal ball. See:

Sappy's whole head turn white,
Pookie's name on the side of buildings,
Re walking down the aisle,

Mo accepting degree after degree after degree,
Phe dancing around a room, beckoning me over,
and when I shake my head, tell me to *be so fucking foreal*.

I will know God is real when I witness them grow old.
Our oiled skin will remain holy.
We won't die of accidents or purpose or "self-defense."
Our hearts will stop beating on the same day, at the same time,
and it will be peaceful and warm and the opposite of mourning
because we will still be together.

When I say, *my people*, know that my heart
is speaking to you and you and you.
When my eyes well up, it is with all the gratitude in the world
and I exist to know you the way we know vulnerability and rivers and
green

and dancing on bare feet and singing until our voice is hoarse
and inking our skin and ube and keeping each other alive
and learning to see in the dark, after flash, underwater, where we abide
and abide and abide and abide and abide and abide together *again*.



Desert Ride

Dave Boyle

Katydid stakes

Betsy Bolton

An involuntary audience, we eavesdrop
on insect passions, their thrilling tremolos,
their desperate buzzings, stutterings, sputterings,
all swelling into deafening force. Lost in the buzz:

the risk entailed by song. Singing to summon
a mate, male katydids reveal themselves
to tachinid flies who tune in to the katydid's call,
home in on their prey, deposit larvae to swarm

the katydid, burrowing in, consuming him
from the inside out, noshing the least important
tissues first, holding vital organs for the final course.
Reproduction or death, the lady or the fly—

katydid males face both options with every
stroking stridulation on the forewing's
washboard edge. What human song can compete
with that pitch, that timbre of intensity?

It Never Snows on Tuesday¹

Jonathan Yungkans

And here it is Sunday, weather's thermostat
set to hell and the switch broken off. Haggard,
two ravens smudge the oily dawn sky, together
on a power pole's cross-tree. Crucifying us
and these corvids together, seemingly damned—

like that song about the stone, "How does it feel?"
The corvids stay nudged closer than I'd seen them,
come freeze or storm, regular as my first coffee.
One raven with its head leaned toward the other,
sometimes on the other's wing, sometimes using

its beak to groom the other. Watching concern
unfold like an outstretched wing the color of all
anxiety and hope poured and fledged.
We alight on the branches of muggy heat.
The whole tree oscillates day and night right

beneath our consciousness like an undertow,
snapping the chance of rest from underneath in
the ironic timing of this supposed day
of rest. The birds look worn, a bad-hair day
in pinions and down. Barely dawn and the day

pricks deep under brain and skin, percolating
like an old black-and-white TV coffee ad,
good till last drop. Apparition like these birds
in their ratted attire. They and we still watch,
hungering for a break in hell or weather.

*¹Title taken from the poem "Plain as Day" by John Ash-
bery, in the collection Can you Hear, Bird.*

SPINNERS OF WEBS

C. W. Bigelow

Frothy translucent
labyrinth

spun into
additional avenues of silk

to attract the arriving hordes
cheering the rebellious

who venture
boldly,

naively courageous,
impervious as they

dive in with little choice
but to

charge the
dominant spider.

Enticed by
success in the vicinity,

mimicking the creator
of the last web -

building on
a few remaining strands

balefully drifting in the wind,
hopefully duplicating

the remnants, memories and
nutrients of webs long past.

ALMOST 100

C. W. Bigelow

Is it good that I
depend upon them
like I did my parents?
They are my children,
after all, and they
answer my questions,
like I answered theirs
when they were kids.
And guess what?
I remember
none of the questions
or answers,
because I'm inching
toward a century
with a memory
like a dust storm
clouding the sky.
Lucky to remember
their names,
recognize their faces
and more fortunate
they care about me
enough to keep asking
questions and providing
answers I don't remember,
but I do remember them
and appreciate that
they remember to visit me
and ask me questions
I struggle to answer
and remember.

last meal

Julie A. Dickson

hawk perched high above open field
adjacent to weathered farmhouse

hunger gnawed at her insides
constant burning pain in an empty belly

focused on the ground, her eyes darted
right and left, watching for movement

suddenly, she thrust forward, swooping
down with sharp beak open, shriek piercing

the air, talons picked up the rodent quickly
she landed on a branch to devour her kill

poor poisoned field mouse was in death-throes
at time of capture; hawk knew nothing of poison

just ravenous hunger, oblivious of the deadly meal
that would take her life as well

On the Coming Cold

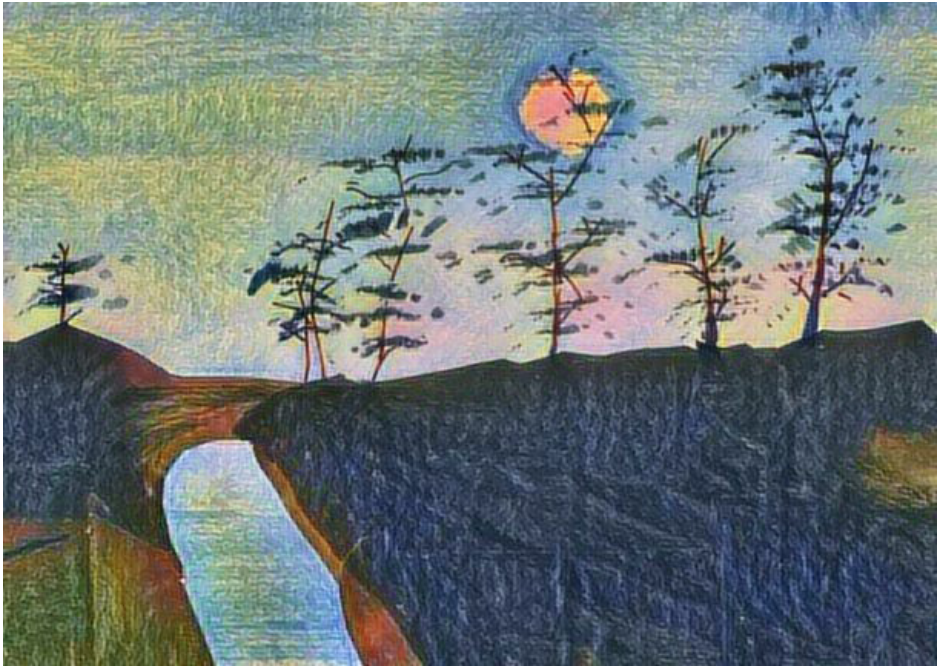
Cameron Morse

The bees are nosy in late September
they look to me for a sip
of nectar as the flower shops close.

Autumn stems
the sugar that runs in the sewer
all summer long.

Leaving them high
and dry, the high on life. Stone
cold sober, the jittery bees.

I drink my coffee black I am so
strong and bitter the bees should know better
than to bother me.



Bridge Between Water and Sky

Cheryl Caesar

Nightmares, I

Cameron Morse

1

In the orchard of
nightmares, I pluck my brain
tumor from a tree.

My mouth waters
the roots with its teeth.

Tarantula branching above me
may I be permitted
a smidgeon of

moonlight
through outstretched legs
open to me?

2

A tangle of teeth tell the true story:
I backed away from
the woman

who loved me unworthy
was to love myself.

I bit through her skin with my teeth.
I bit through my skin
with her teeth.

Quiet at the Library

Pasquale Trozzolo

Soft sounds abound
with rhythm unchanged
excepting the encroachment of
keys clicking a small distraction of reality.
Among this quiet racket, she reads—slow—absorbing the
shape of each word—careful turning pages as if separating the
ink to claim her story. Casually she pushes hair, tucking messy strands
on perfect ears—and glasses are pushed gently against a glorious slide killing me
from a distance. Like Shakespeare, I wish to be a glove—that I might. She closes her
eyes—seeing—what she reads. And me, knowing she's here only for the books, I write her,
wondering what journey she's on and how I might, in this quiet, find her again tomorrow.

crashing the banquet

Andy VanDoren

bloated summers and egos swell in the heat, the gas flames
licking all that's rare. bloodred
tablecloths and clattering forks on plates sticky with the stems
of verbs. you bite your tongue,
savor the metallic taste. dab your mouth, choke back the words
you stole. pick my adjectives
from between molars. what does my voice taste like in your
mouth? your table and belly are full
in the aftermath of the raze. I could salt the earth with what
you left behind. when the guests pay
compliments to the chef, do you realize how tightly your vocal
cords entwine with mine? does
the banquet hall echo without me? the open mouth that calls
for you isn't asking to be fed. I am
begging you to miss me.

pastoral lights

Andy VanDoren

I wish for a long, wooden table
one to feed my family, or
whoever happens to pass,
to share gifts of the garden
and sate our bellies with laughs

and for bites of taste crisp air
alongside morning tea:
jasmine leaves, freshly green
sweetened by the neighborly
hums of the honeybees.

but every little luxury –
fireflies in glass jars,
kaleidoscopes of rainbows,
the golden sun at daybreak –
my heart already knows.



You, Will Be a Wolf

Eric Christopher Uphoff

When I die, I will be a bird,
feel the muscles of my wings.
Perhaps an elk, laden with pride
I never had. A boar,
that would teach me the pain
of my stubbornness.

But you, will be a wolf.
Find me, wrap your jaw around
my throat. Snap.
Shatter vertebrae below my skull.
Taste my flowing wine.

From your stomach, I will
burrow your womb. Bear me,
covered in your blessing I will be
human again.

Clean Plates

Akua Lezli Hope

We were never told
think of the children in Africa
who looked like us, but thinner
warm, with fewer clothes
always an unswatted fly in baby's eye
who couldn't barter by tutoring
the less smart for money
to spend at Mr. Lee's for a sub
who couldn't shovel snow, clean
or rake leaves to get chips or Twinkies
to substitute for meals, to take the edge off
No one needed to evoke faces of others
starving, black like us, yearning for ease, access
privilege we saw up close, so close, next door
driving by during rush hours,
on television telling us to eat eat eat
what we could not grow or afford
We needed no incentive to clean our plates.

esu-ri-ence

Gina Gidaro

/ i-sur-e-ints /

noun

1. when the surgeon opens you up, they'll find an unforgiving winter. a loud and tragic blizzard pushing at the walls of your ribcage. no singing tanagers or white-tailed deer. no flourishing green vines climbing up the whites of your bones or canopy trees guarding your heart. it's a landscape of starving **avidity** and famished ambitions. your fingertips are cold to the touch, your stomach full of heavy rocks and frost. nothing grows because there is a craving that is insatiable. devouring. ravening. hungry.

2. when you sleep you dream of empty towns with rolling fog. you're on a four-way intersection with a strong desire to go back the way you came. tall but crumbling buildings surround you, with shattered windows and busted doors. shadows pass your peripheral. you run down every forsaken street in search of something unblurred, until you feel drawn and malnourished. your feet bleed for years as you run and turn, run and turn. you are a thief who **is** always reaching for more.

3. when you sit at the table for dinner you are asked to say grace. you close your eyes and picture an ancient, burning chaos. a star's ability to just become. nebulous clouds, a vast nothingness, and a simple yearning to exist. you feel stardust tickle your eyelids and hope to someday understand your hunger as clearly as the galaxy understood its own. you squeeze the hands of your loved ones, pray a prayer that means something to them, knowing well that the food in front of you will do **nothing** for the everlasting esurience inside of you.



Gaunt

Arvilla Fee

Look how thin we've become,
the ribs of our relationship,
the clavicle of our complacency,
on display for the world to see.
When did we stop eating?
Was it the year we decided
to abandon our éclairs in France
and eat salads in Pittsburg instead?
Was it those protein breakfast shakes,
each of us trying to out-health the other?
Was it that year our plates never touched
the table at the same time, hurried, half-
eaten sandwiches as we burnt our calories
faster than we burnt money and the time
spent making it? Your sea-foam-colored eyes
barely glance at me, studiously avoiding
the gauntness of my cheeks, the way I pick
sesame seeds from a bun. Why not sit down,
love? Shall we share a slice of chocolate cake
for old time's sake?



Bowl O' Teeth
Milly Aburrow



The Empty

Mona Mehas

To fill up the empty, I eat
Living alone might have its perks
Round every corner, sadness lurks
A sugar high, my day complete

Phone calls and texts don't satisfy
To fill up the empty, I eat
My weight loss goals fall at my feet
My body does not gratify

I shy from photos, camera
Shows my truth, I run for retreat
To fill up the empty, I eat
Overweight, lacking stamina

Reach for candy, cookies, more treats
Still lonely, I have no control
No matter what, I won't be whole
To fill up the empty, I eat.



Dinner Time

Mia Amore Del Bando

You stripped me
From my golden skin
To the milk white of my bones
To entertain you all summer

You knifed out my spine
Salmon on a plastic cutting board
Gutted out, deboned
My flesh soft tangerine
Ate up my skin without chewing
My skeleton recycled for later
Useful toothpicks, clean your cramped teeth

Hearty bite into my intestines
Hanging in your hands like overcooked spaghetti
My blood dripping off your chin
You wipe with a sweater sleeve

Next is the lungs
The left one blackened by tar
It's dry and tastes like mold
I chain smoked on the weekends

After you tolerated the mildew flavor
The best is for last

My brain
My lovely brain
That gave permission for every disaster
Allowed pain to register
Welcomed depression as an honored guest
Anxiety a close family friend
Flirted with the line of men
Who have killed me
Including you

Best, world-class dinner you prepared
My brain
Trusted *you*
You take another bite
Sip on red wine and laugh
Dinner time is ready

off the leash

Clay Waters

I emerged
tangled
to a snarling at the base;

roots quickly licked raw
a beast's throat hoarse
from forewarning

a trunk of nerves
paralyzed in place

images obsess:
cars and glass
towers and sidewalks
laughter and blood

if I untether
what will happen
between now
and the void?

Draught

Michael Neal Morris

I picture my father,
drinking at the airport
before coming to see us,
to steel himself before talking
to my mother, whom he half
still wanted. Now that we
have buried her, I get it.

Wandering the morning,
I, caffeine-addicted, put off
the sun and the book.
God, again, waits for me
to gather enough courage
to step away from swine.

I'm not drunk, but probably
should be, probably
shouldn't drive in this state:
want, loss, suppressed terror.
This weaponized world
trafficking in woe, melts joy
to make sneakers, grinds
children to make coffee.

leftovers

Andrea Gerada

your food is inedible. overcooked string bean caught
like toy shovel in charred pan, you
really shouldn't cook. no one wants you to.
but you mutter for days about using too much salt
and oil for deep-fried midnight cravings that we let you,
anything to stop the taste of okra
pouring bitter. rolling down pots that simmer.
down the gossiping tongue.

you hide the best of them. waxy noodles behind splattered
heinz jars where my brother can't
reach (that's what you think) chocolate commiserating
with carrots and *pechay*. what a sight.
what a friendly refrigerator. we worry about your father,
your evolutionary call to gather.
hoard. our calendar says the world hasn't ended
so tell me about this kitchen-bunker ruin?

you plan to starve him. i am fed, too much. your staggering
footsteps signal bounty—yellow
chips overflowing, spanish bread, star bread, pandan juice to
boot. i am happy. mother's
displeased, brother is scratching his head. but i am hit with
regret sometimes so i wonder
about your favorite food, your life, your lack.
whether you ever went hungry.

Appetite

Annette Gagliardi

you hunger
for something

that nibbles—small
bites at a time;

that eats away, slowly,
steadily;

that chews
ravidly, hunger blazing—

each specific craving like a
hankering down under,

a yearning that smarts
as it wets your eyes,

craves that certain
something—

that certainty, unknown—
until it is found.

i can remember what it is to love

Megan Diedericks

watered down, spilled drainage –
i hunger for the memories
that are disguised and distorted;
memories that fog windows up from the outside,
where muffled silhouettes dance and extinguish.

in plastic containers, held together in haunted spaces:
the way true honey remembers all the places
it came from, and retains its form
shapes my stomach into a howling wolf
pleading for the tried and true reflections of the past,
but all i am left with is the counterfeit flavor
because time and emotional chemicals
corrode my storms into flashes of lightning.

i remember everything, yet nothing
because sometimes roses grow
and sometimes thorns are all that remains –
i hunger for the sensation of knowing
that my memories are printed words
on laminated pages,
and not initials written in the sand
washed away by the ocean.

but the certainty seems bleak:
i fear all i do not remember
and perhaps being hungry
is good sometimes,
because it means i can still
feel, yearn, and
love.

A Mother's Hunger

Jonathan Ukah

Like a promise awaiting fulfilment
My mother twirls in the tiny thread of anger,
each time she watches the river swallow me,
or the sun sink into my fingernails,
or the moon collides with my forehead;
she is the daughter of thunder
and fire swims in her blood,
on a landscape of burning pain,
Excoriating her heart to a million slivers.
when hunger feeds like a parasite,
she is a lonely echo,
floating over a setting sun,
as time slowly falls away.

THE BURDEN OF MEMORY (After Mei Yao Chen)

George Freek

My alarm awakens me
like a blow, The sun drops
through a miasmal mist,
like a rock falling
into a cavernous pit.
Yet spring is the same
as when I was a groom.
An abundance of lilies
and daffodils
will still bloom.
On this May morning,
My wife's hollyhocks
reach toward the sky,
but my heart
is like lead.
I walk in circles
and tell myself lies
to try to forget the newly dead.

Buffet

Sean Whalen

The offal pile in the pasture
serves skunks, possums, hawks, and owls
squirrels, blue jays, fox, and coyote:
the trails are hard packed

from padded feet and raked with claws.
There's been tails up and squabbles,
fur and feathers flying. I'm afraid
of what they will do

if I run out of bones.
Will they hungrily disperse
into the fields and streams?
Or gather at my door

eyes little moons in the moonlight
whetting tooth and fang on the threshold
scrabbling and scabbling at the knob
chirring and whirring, howling and yowling

until I get no sleep and out of madness
offer up my own?



Content warning: Some readers may find the nature photography on page 65 disturbing. If desired, please skip to page 66.

biting
 my [redacted] down [redacted]
 [redacted] fingers [redacted]
 [redacted] in [redacted]
 My mind [redacted] the memory of [redacted] him [redacted]
 [redacted] wax [redacted]
 [redacted] [redacted]
 arm [redacted] wrist [redacted] armpit [redacted]
 [redacted] I sock [redacted]
 me [redacted] and [redacted]
 I [redacted] eat [redacted]
 [redacted] myself [redacted]



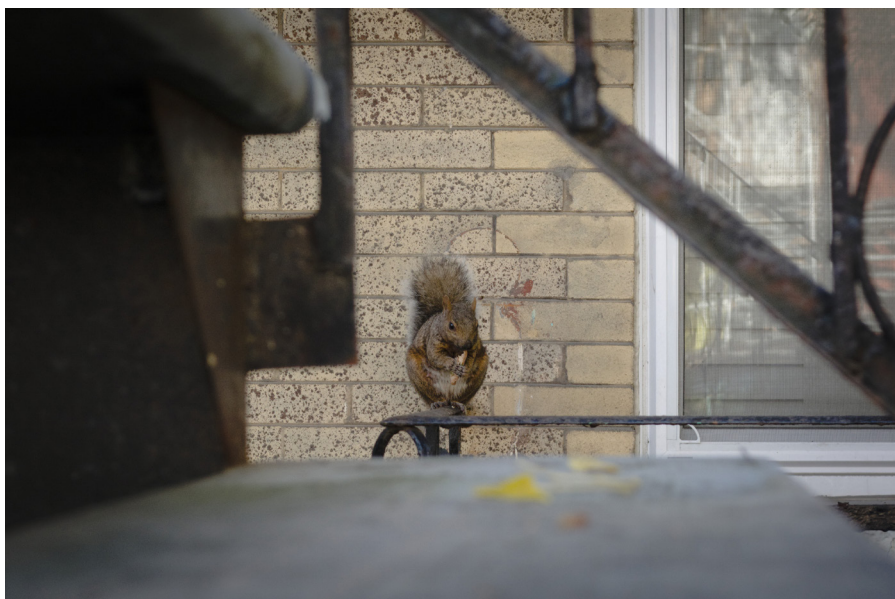
Oh, to End
Hazel J. Hall

Crumbs

Sean Whalen

For thirty years he saved
every toaster crumb
in a bread sack
until one day
it was a child

When they walk together
to the store for ice cream
it is difficult
to protect him
from the birds



Hunger

Allie Keats

Cathedral

Sean Whalen

Coyote wears his paws
tracing a path from grove
to grove. A rabbit. A mouse.
a bite of garbage, tangy,
dangerous, chickens,

a worn trail.

*Once under a darker sky
he stalked campsites.
Restless children
asleep under stars.
Small and lethal.*

*Sticks tipped with stone.
Stick tipped with steel.*

Curled in the lee
wind at his back
sunrise colored eyes
watch the silent house
for the woman

to come with a bowl
in her arms. Scraps
of gingham arms.
“Here chick chick chick.
Get up pig pig pig.”

Steal a bite, a breath,
from an altar of wood.

*Under a clearer sky
he followed the cathedrals
of hide, meat, bone.
Immense, tendons,
dangerous, tusks,*

an unworn trail.

Under the unsame moon
coyote wears his paws
on the familiar trace.
A gingham scrap. A vole.
An empty bowl.

pearl-white necklace of teeth and souls

Bailey Sims

skeletons hang from my neck,
an albatross of bones—clinking
behind me, femurs and vertebrae

ribs where beating hearts once hid.
these are my dead—my body
my graveyard, a migraine

of mourning and longing
and fear. echoes like wooden toys,
wind chimes to remember

what once stood in their place.
an albatross, guilt following
for those who couldn't be saved,

those who i did not kill,
but didn't keep alive, either—
could even the bones blame me?

February

Britta Adams

love tucked away
in envelopes, deep sad hymns
about the sea, frost-bitten earth
sprinkled over graves. what is february
but a catalog of ghosts
and the panging hunger for spring?

“I felt that silence was sweet”

*Emily Dow Partridge Young after the death of her husband,
Brigham Young, August 29, 1877*

Britta Adams

he died
and the silence was a sweet,
juicy plum. forbidden
fruit found me lip-quivering.
I couldn't help but bite
deep. the skin snapped sour;
it was delicious to the taste.

I see the crow

Sarah-Marissa Marquez

through the window
drift down somewhere

in the Cassia tree's deep green
leaves, overtaken by clusters

of yellow blooms. I want to ask
where it came from to escape

the wild crash of thunder. Morning
rain spilling into afternoon. January

is washing away and I've only just begun
to form my resolutions for this year. To

brainstorm in the paper planner I bought,
called Garden Arches. The cool blue

softcover inspires feelings of peace.
Much like discovering the woman

in the mirror, loving me more. She is me too,
born with an empty womb meant to be full.

Words in her mouth. When she speaks,
I listen. I can't control time, but I wonder

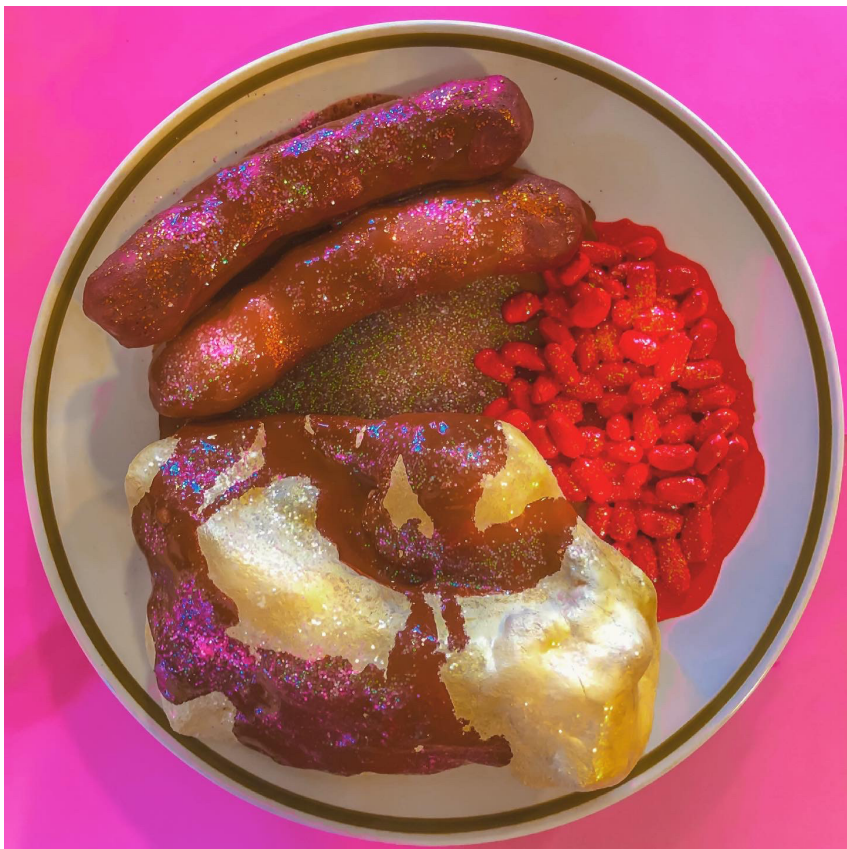
what if I stop celebrating this season
of *soon* and act on instincts I rely on

to tell me *move now*. Reject no affection
from you. Resist a craving for "just sex"

to have a conversation about how I feel
last-minute gifts of flowers aren't special

anymore. And two years and counting is
the long way out. There is a door ahead

we must walk through, together or apart.



Bangers and Mash

Milly Aburrow



Seduce Me
Milly Aburrow

After I Said Goodbye

Cecil Morris

I decided to make myself a suit
of blackberry brambles, the thorns and leaves,
the green heat, so much better than hair shirt,
than the many twisting tongues of the scourge
that reinforce failure at dawn or dusk.
I wanted to occupy suffering,
to embody pain outside as inside.

I decided to make myself a bed
of rose canes and pyracantha, of thorn
and spike, stripped of blossoms, berries, and leaves
so I could sleep in agony ongoing.
The numberless cuts, uncounted piercings
not mere discomfort or evening ritual
of flagellation, but true and constant

as the loss of our daughter, our nurse.
I will not forget. I will not forget.
I will not forget the doctor saying
this is very bad or our daughter shrunk
in silent fear, her knowledge visible
in her eyes, her look through those final days.
I could not save her, but I will save this.

Friendship and Onions

Joan Leotta

My friend Roula lives
so far away. We write,
we call, but distance
still keeps us separate.
Tomorrow, Thursday,
I'll buy onions
slice them thinly, then
sauté and scatter the caramelized
slivers on top of lentils and rice
in my friend's *mujadara* recipe
and come evening
I will eat her meal, bringing
at least the flavor of
our friendship close again.



Aftermath

Sunayana Dash

Flesh throbbing, pounding pulse,
the hunger gnaws her, tears her from inside out,
hunger for what you ask,
for warm skin against her palms, gouged from her own dirty nails,
to remind them about kindness,
that seeking love with open heart and spread legs
doesn't mean being ready to be splayed open,
to be drenched in pain worse than bruises,
and in the years she has lived,
the hunger has been cruel, taunting her
with dangled frames of hope on the blurry horizon,
always in sight, always out of reach.

Yeats Narrates

Rachel Johnson

Things fall apart before they fall into place.
At least that's the hope I cling to.
I find myself creating beauty as a
way to escape the unfinished project
of remnants and chaos that is life.
I don't want to read or watch, I don't
want to run to fantasy, knowing
it will change nothing.

I want to build, make the mundane
gorgeous, as it is the only transformation
I seem to have any control over right now.
I sew tiny buttons onto a shirt, each
representing a happy little pill that I am
not swallowing. I stitch up tears in pants
because my core has been slashed wide
open and I can not mend it alone.

I embellish little bits of nothing and
drench them in sentimental value while
I drown in a downpour of anguish
that aches and threatens to crush me.

Happiness is a hobby. It must be nurtured
and practiced to get really good at it.
I am dust covered and forgotten,
a brush crusted over with glue, unwashed
after the last time it was used.
I watch things fall apart and try to
build them into something new.

Foxes come in pairs

Kristiana Reed

— as lovers do,
awoken by strangled calls,
cries of carnal pleasure,
savagery with which they love,
raise their young:

I covet a mother
who will clasp the scruff
of my neck, teach me
how to kill, how to whine
in ecstasy

— as lovers do,
skulking along the embankment
human nature caught,
as splintered glass,
a vixen and her mate,
in their eyes:

grey with wisdom,
mine bright blue,
all the innocence I will lose,
the innocence I will claw back,
desperate, ignorant
of how desire lingers

— as lovers do,
slinking between the bins,
garden fences, bottle strewn patios
their forests,
the urban sprawl,
their legacy and lineage:

I wonder if anyone will carry
my name, if there will be
a cub, I did not want,
and I'll call them Hope, or Dreams,
or something else I've never had,
I wonder if the growl beneath
my tongue will ever escape

— as lovers do,
mounting one another
and climbing streetlights
disguised as stars.



Into Silence We Move

Edward Lee

A Greek Wedding for Gulls

Kristiana Reed

Oysters and mussels
smashed / broken china:
a celebration
of the feast

the coming together
feather bone and sky
yellow beaks:
sunlight heavy

in their songs —
but we never visited them,
this was the only place
I did not share with you

the lighthouse
sea pools of sky
graffitied shelters
and sand:

thank goodness we never married,
smashed / broken china,
thank goodness you chose to starve me,
feather bone,
thank goodness for clarity,
sunlight heavy

in my songs.

The New Bride

Moonmoon Chowdhury

Patience and silence sat
at the apex
of her trousseau, marked
fragile in bold red.

“Eat after them”, her mother
had reiterated, along with
other mandates, seemingly
conducive to the health
and longevity of marriage.

She silenced her hunger
pangs, patiently
serving her marital
family of twelve,
an elaborate meal
of dal, bhaajis, and curries,
ladling generously,

Carrying forward the legacy
of a semi-empty plate for self,
taming the hypothalamus,
meal after meal after meal,
to earn the epithet
of a worthy woman.

A few morsels of truth

Moonmoon Chowdhury

The bellies of waste bins by the roadside,
Bulge with morsels of discarded food
While the street children with tear-stained
Faces and sun-dappled torsos, stare at
The rice and potatoes simmering
In the aluminium pot on the broken stove,
Their bellies, a cavernous pit, since dawn.

Oblivious to the concept of
A breakfast, they can break their fasts
Only after earning enough,
(often by begging), to procure
The meager ration for the day,
The dust, the honks, and the stares,
The regular condiments to their meal.
They devour each stray grain,
Washing it down with rice water,
Knowing not when their hungry bowls
Will receive the manna again.

When I see rotting vegetables
Peeping from the refrigerator,
Or my fussy child wasting platefuls
Of pilaf, fruits, and cheese,
Or lavish parties where fish fingers,
Chicken nuggets, and meatballs, linger
Orphaned, next to overstuffed humans,

I think about the famished children,
And pledge to alleviate their suffering,
Only to end up with the lament,
“Can one person be the antidote?”
Like a bloody escapist.



Bounce

Grant Burkhardt

In school we learned drunk drivers survive in droves
because they overcome human instinct, which is to say

they're not alive enough to know:
when impact is imminent, *brace*.

At the collision point, their boozy body bends
like fresh rubber, and they stumble from the scene.

On the other side, a stiffening
so natural, and everything shatters.

That tensing, that hardening, that preparing,
our tragic condition, it's how we tend to be.

But what would happen if we forgot it –
if we relaxed, would we bounce?



Into Silence We Move

KJ Hannah Greenberg



walk into a bank with empty pockets

Corey J. Boren

The Poet

Charles Kell

I was turned
into a ceramic figurine
surrounded by glass
& others who were also

motionless. I admit
I was frightened.
My limbs completely frozen.
After a length of time—

maybe twenty minutes, maybe
a month—I grew calm.
I felt warm & cool,
like a vegetable. I wrote

fifty poems in my mind,
scrawling images with
an indistinct stare. This
is immortality. This is death.

The glass Grandma wanted in Grandpa's glass

Sylvea Wong

Us three, we were living in Hong Kong then
Grandma in the shared kitchen, washing our 3 bowls

Us two, in our rented room with the two round chairs, unfolded
their vinyl faux-wood shining so un-wood-like

my seat, the bed, orbiting the dining table
or craft desk, or bookshelf, or whatever shape it had taken in that moment

To pour his glass of Rémy Martin was a responsibility
that both thrilled and bored me
Grandpa teased my splashes of amber, equating it
to Grandma's lightest pours.

But a glass half-empty will succumb when it hears pressure,
So at six years old, I would grant to him the reluctant extra ounce of
nettled drops

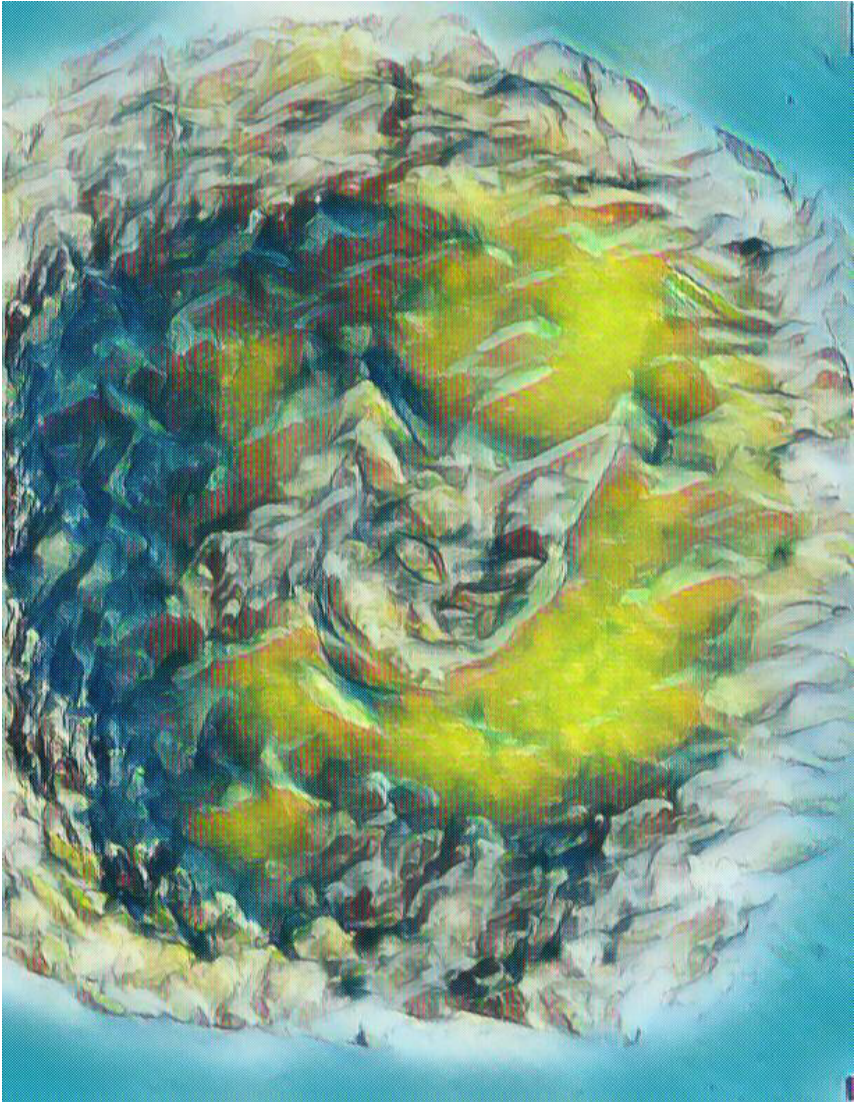
I did not imbibe on the displeasures of wanting to please
Still, before even a single sip had sunk, he'd trade with me,
a twisted, twinkled wink.

A wink I had yet to understand, but nonetheless, held the glow
of a not-yet-buzzed, not-yet-passed, accumulated loved

Not ever would I find the warmth of that wink again,
Not in shape, nor smell, nor heat,

or even tucked within the liminal curve at the bottom
of an endless glass of cognac.
Instead, decades of searching memories would teach me

All the guilt I cannot pay, still can't exchange the gilded words I wish I knew,
or at least a chance to see that when we, us three, were in Hong Kong,
it was us too.



Transitioning
Cheryl Caesar

Baked Goods

Alina Zollfrank

We weave a thread across the continent, our
footprints: etched in cherry juice in the snow.
When we march our sorrow our selves our soul
back to the fatherland we leave a little
in the wake for nosy rodents to find.
It is astounding how we can live on
crumbs of kindness but remember the hardness.
We are reduced to basic white sauce: just
water and flour. Milk is celestial. Butter a fool's errand.
Salt in the trenches.
And we walk
across cratered fields and crumbled streets
until we find a hay mound to burrow into.
Then we go some more.
We rocket along the trails the roosters
have left for us eggs, such
brittle shells drunken, raw licked from chapped lips
in the shadows of no one's barn. Is it kindness if.
We steal from fellow humans who.
Don't speak our language or do. I don't know if
the shrapnel in my Opa's thigh made the journey
faster or slower. Shrapnel can fly, before.
It pierces its target. The butter knife cuts the potato in.
Six pieces for eight people. Enjoy, Oma coaxes. Her
voice a resonant well
when we gather around the round table and stab at
pink glass plates with dainty forks:
cheese cake and Dresdner Stollen and cherry-apple strudel.
In the pillowy corner, Opa's parchment hands wrap
around a mug. He smiles into the tea and tells pungent
jokes that have nothing to do with yesterday.

Good Kids Eat Up

Alina Zollfrank

We close our eyes mid-flight drunk.
We raise our grassy green bottles of Becherovka behind
our backs sing good health to
us to us! who overcame to be amidst the living
with hardened bread heels and lonely radishes
stuffed in holy coat pockets. We dream
of broiled chicken wings hoisting their glossy selves
through the howling sky straight into
our mouths the end-all be-all where
- with eyes cast below the ground - family
sways lift-right-left-right in oceans of
marigolds and lilies of the dead.
Eat up, speak my grandparents and ladle
another puddle of tripe onto my gagged plate.
My guilty palate proclaims:
I am the imperfect offspring to those
who starved before me
too skinny, too pale faced with daily
embarrassments of head cheese and blood sausage
swaddled in sauerkraut. Slathered and
slaughtered choking caraway:
harsh half moons an epidemic of legions
who marched hands out to the benevolent state
into the gaping mouths of stale Ersatzkaffee
and gathered yellow and purple pansies
while they panted their life away.
Leathery toes on the ground, yeasty digits
stuffed through gaps in the mesh. Leavened. Our
lost eyelids hover.

Forbidden Fruit

Allyson Turner

on my tongue,
sweet juice
suckled from the bite mark
teeth peel dew-kissed skin
from ripened flesh
reveling in each sensation;
next bite
juice on my chin
and I couldn't care less;
lick my fingers,
dripping with goodness
and damn the consequences.

deadflash

Lucas Enne

once running all brightlike halfsmiling in halfdark
at the nothing of the far unpaved phantom roads
all the while the rain steady falling all gorgeous
to shroud that scene with deephappy distillation

you see you see in a thousand billion eyes
risen lightyears above the old scene in this
tall demonsent wilddark reminiscing on
days you flew about the ending wildlight

just some wingflash deadflash longslaughtered
world and light and worlds and lights
you wish weren't gone and you wish to here
you wish to god to send steady falling rain

beware



the

human

beware

Alan Bern

Stone Proof

Beth Gallovic

The items I cross off
my to-do lists
are an effort, fifty years later,
to win my father's love.

He spoke the language of hard work,
financial stability—
well, I'm not the only girl from the 70's
who never got hugs from her dad.

Sifting one day through inky blue sadness,
a bright white discovery—
childish lucky stone I gave him
before he took the bar exam.

Small stone proof—
something I did
mattered to him.

One Lunch in Eastern Oregon, circa 1982.

Alison Hurwitz

The Vanagon parks, and they pile out in European sandals, pale thighs helixed with the ride; road pressed into skin and peeled off slowly, patterned by their pleather seats. They just paused their BBC mystery narration, but still, it accents them, modulated sentences incongruous as teacakes in this grassland.

Father surveys the scene before he peels the diner door for his family to walk inside. Wide shot of tiny wife, then Daughter, Daughter, Daughter. Their foot falls tap too loud against the tile. Instinctively, all alter stride, roll heel to toe: they library their feet.

Close up on the guy who doubletakes in Wranglers, boots, day-old stubble (jaw foreshadowing?) hostile gaze a burn before any match could catch, then, return to freeze-frame on the father: his bearded face, his Jewish nose, eyeglasses slid just a bit askew from heat. He adjusts them carefully. Watch

him take the temperature, weigh his options. His family's empty bellies. Youngest daughter watches every eye that watches her while they all sit still inside the booth, spines unnaturally straight, eat as quick as sparrows. Everyone goes with someone else to use the bathroom. The father doesn't go at all.

Easier to stall, use the next rest area. Easier to hold it than to rise and watch the Wrangler man rise just a minute after, unhurried, electric as the air before a storm. Easier to pay the bill. Easier to cut out now before another scene has gathered in the wings, twisting darkness in its buzzard beak.

Easier to drive until that diner hides
its thickened grimace in the hills.
Easier to keep on going
till they're gone.

The Poet's Mother Waits on Earth

Alison Hurwitz

You're out starwalking
and I am too far from where
you are to tether you,
track syllables across the void
between, or call you back, since
love is soundless out in space.

Understand, it's as if
you've joined a skin-optional collective:
every organ played and opened wide,
charted as if you were a planetarium,
while I wait to resonate the swollen ache of you
inside my chest: iambic dust of

comet tails and meteors,
the craters of collision and elision
concaved into your bones. I cannot be
your shield, no landing pad for you to burn
a vision into. But walking out by night
into the field, I look for you far off,

to trace your constellation: shape
outlined across the stretch of empty dark,
your word-net cast and spangled with
the ghosts of luminary bodies, your
metaphors strange tesseracts of longing,
astrography revisioned into music,

chords bent by time and mass and light.



glut
Alan Bern



Dieta
Gissel Gomez

soil

Claire Beaver

dead end avenue
return to the past and converse about dirt
stuck to the top of our shoes
then scratch and scratch it off
and lick it from beneath our fingernails

yellow caution tape wraps the house
that raised us, you tear it apart
with your teeth and enter
I follow behind dragging my shoes
by their tied laces

barefoot on the dirty floor
we haven't been inside for years
preferring the grass and the stars
to the yellow chicken painting
that hangs where we ate

Spring Palindrome

Daniel Brennan

1.

Spring has no sovereignty here.
Life recedes beneath a concrete skin.
We collide,
we dare it to watch, to taste our pooling sweat.
We, the honeyed jewels
only friction and the dark can yield.
Diamonds made by the crush of brick and steel,
our bodies writhing against the crosstown wind.
Cool afternoon, and my hand is guiding
the thrust of your wants into oblivion.
Daylight does its best to slip in through the
tight spaces, to tell us
how alive we are
despite our litany of little deaths.

2.

We have no sovereignty here.
Life comes up, roaring through cracks within
the concrete.
Dares us to look away.
Dares us to miss the earth yielding below.
On branches outside your window;
diamonds, carried across infinite miles, made
from the crush of ancestry. Of purpose.
They return on the breeze and
bury themselves over and over.
They shut out
the prised darkness, pulling want from our oblivion.
Spring collides into both of us, makes us the same. Have we
always been this way?
It calls forth the daylight hidden
between our little deaths.

Momentum

Daniel Brennan

Is it because of my vices that I know virtue?

I eat too much, drink too
much, and when night comes,
I dream too much.

I have a tendency for leniency;
no, I never learn from these bar-room
boys and their easy-lipped ploys.

I can't say no when one door
opens, and I can't remember
how many I've moved through tonight;
all I do, you should know,
is court thresholds.

I fill my skull with party favors
and savor the moment I crave another.

I take cabs home at four, five, six in the morning,
and, lord, how the sun is punishing.

I rinse and repeat. I swallow my pride.
I become justified. I become momentum. Less
and less me, still clinging to the memory
of boyhood.

But I do these things because without
them, how can I know what it
means to be good?

Alphabet Soup

Jane-Rebecca Cannarella

You told me that the heartbreak resulted in writing good poems.
The falcon flight hooked loops
of a fake history set in stormy serif font. My life snipped
into individual consonants and vowels,
single letters processed in a blender and clumped together.
The pride in your poems was lorem
ipsum excitement, placeholders on a page. Nothing nourishing.
The only result was lines of text,
every word the same. Boiled and mixed:

spoonfuls of alphabet soup have made more sense.

A Eulogy for the Dead and Dying

Chris Atkin

The silence at my grandpa's funeral spoke
more about the man he was than any of his sons.
A quiet so callous we felt it shred our skin.
The December air made the ground every bit
as cold and hard as the man we were about to bury in it.
Because of Covid, we kept the service casual,
and the congregation small. So eight sons
circled their father's casket while their sons
circled around them.

When my uncle Grant finally found his voice,
he just said "Dad really loved Mom,"
it was the only good thing left to say.
And when his brothers finally took their turn to speak,
sour memories puckered their lips,
before they could shape them into grief.
the man in the casket had died twenty years ago,
on the night his wife had passed away, and now
that his ghost was finally gone, the only things
he left behind were hurtful words, and battered sons,
and the smell of stale piss soaked into his bedroom carpet.

On the drive home my father said,
"I wish he would've died sooner"
and I know he really meant
"I wish his good years had not been eaten by the bad."
Now, I can't help but wish my father would die too,
before the memory of the man who taught me
to bake bread, and ride a motorcycle,
is swallowed by the man who lost his soul
to Joseph Smith, and Tucker Carlson,
those prophets of a hateful God, Who'd see
all the love flushed from my fathers veins
and replaced with "faith," and "pride,"
and bile.

I have a bone-deep fear of

New Year's Eve.

I

have

milk and honey.

I have twenty minutes before my shift.

I have

all this shit and

So many

knots.

I love

such things

I'd never be able to

want

A

home,

a kid

to



Whose Hungry?

Chris Atkin

I was nine years old when she told me, *You are shaped like a jellybean!*
She was shaped like a string bean, wispy and long,

and she mocked me through a mouthful of greens.
I called her a *butthead* and tried to pretend the truth didn't sting.

When I got home, I ate a whole bucket of jellybeans.
Look, I know I'm not literally the meal I had for lunch today

but my love handles still define me.
Both a collection of lipids and a collection of stories.

Every pound on the scale,
is another day I'd rather not remember.

Five pounds here // every time
they thought I was stupid because of my size.

Ten pounds there // each stroll through the dairy aisle
where a child pointed and snickered as I walked by.

Twenty pounds // that day in the Walmart parking lot she told me
if I was just fifty pounds lighter, she might actually be able to love me.

Forty pounds // the day we found out my mother had cancer,
an inoperable tumor latched to her colon, hugging her spine.

One hundred pounds. Ten years later,
when we found out she suffered for nothing.

The tumor was a benign cyst
and the doctor milked us for money,

I swelled with rage when I realized
the nights she spent bent over a toilet

and days she spent caged in a coffin of blankets
and flop sweat, fighting off that chemical cure did nothing.

She took pills for pain, while I threw back the leftovers
to fight off sadness and fear, while the threat of loss
ticked up the needle on the scale until it broke.
Hunger swallowed me whole.

I'm buried // beneath the weight of days I'm dying to forget,
mountains of me, standing between the man I am and the man I want to be.

Just once, I'd like to feel light. Just once,
I'd like to shed this chainmail I've woven out of red vines and self-loathing.

Just once, I'd like to renounce the darkness I've swallowed
fistful by fistful and feel the warmth of the sunlight I lost

when I turned my back on the east.
Hey, uh // is anyone else here, hungry?

Divorced Eggs

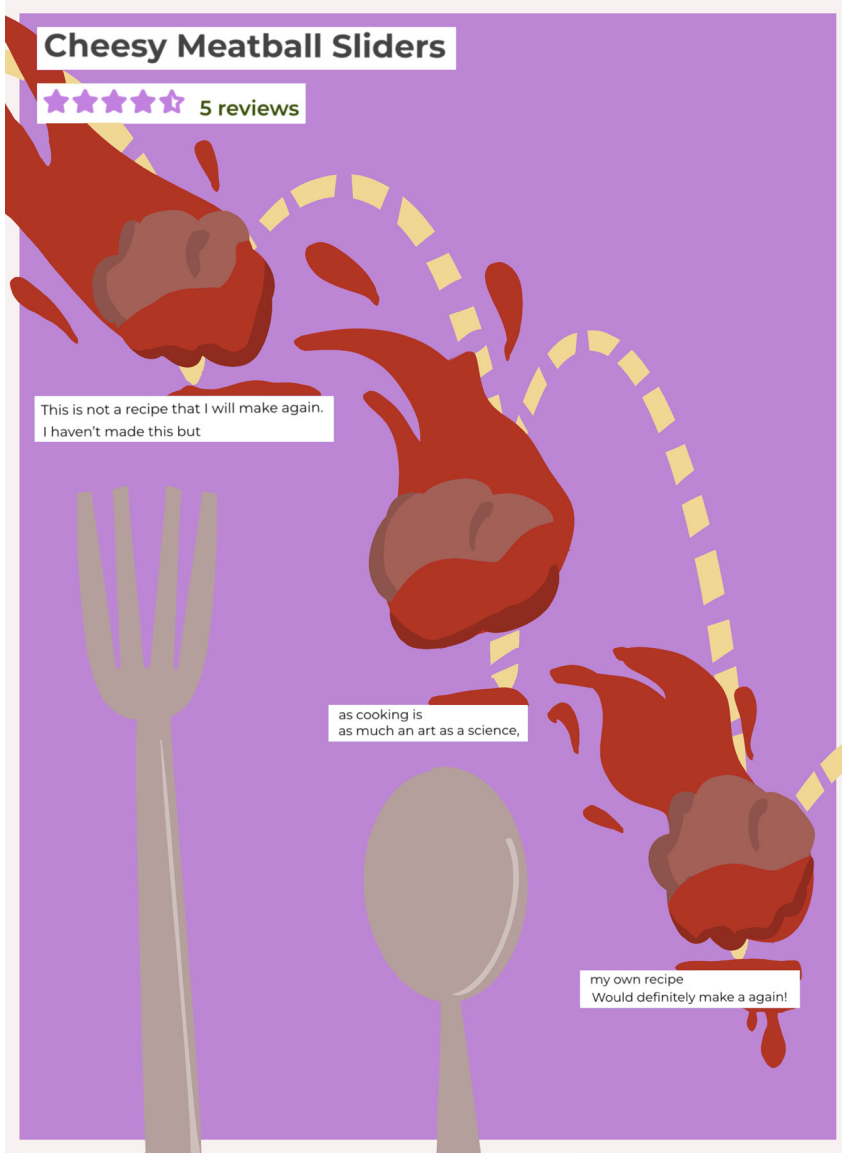
Lorette C. Luzajic

The first snow always made us homesick. I loved the gorgeous glow of autumn, with everything green battling the red world, like huevos divorciados. But when the frost fell, we all wanted to be back in Aguascalientes, where November mornings were mild but the heat at noon was enough to suffocate you. Mother heaped salsa verde on her plate and salsa rojo on Father's, and she knew I liked lots of both, with pools of tomatillo, chiles, and egg yolks over potatoes. Father ignored his plate and stared for a long time into his coffee. His sadness was different from ours. It was something that rode him until he was weary, something you couldn't see but you felt the heaviness of. Mother said it could happen to us if we learned to think too much. She warned us never to ask him what was on his mind, because he would tell you. Father was the silent type, unless given an invitation. What are you thinking, Luis? she asked, sawing a small slice of chorizo with a butter knife, forgetting for a moment her own caution. What am I thinking? Father repeated, raising dark river eyes from his mug. I'm thinking, what could drive a man to put a plastic bag over his head to stop his breathing? What could make someone do something they could never come back from? And he rose laboriously to his feet, pushing away his eggs, and shuffled through the kitchen doorway into the hall.

Ground

Ken Farrell

The longing: to be a gasping muscle
milled beneath another gasping muscle,
both fighters' sweats and bloods blended, eyes stung,
mouths dripped into and dripping. Yet one doubts,
wonders why she's chosen to chew on this
anxious attrition instead of red mud.
Why eat longing and not weed-split asphalt?
Like loaved clay, the answers can't be swallowed.
Like ground, they sometimes fault, consume, but won't
be consumed. Over time the answers lie
like silt, layering all. Their weight enfolds
her until she's ground, a tattered mountain
buried under seas so blue so boundless
empires of fish get lost in the rocking



Cheesy Meatball

Daphne Fauber

Calling

Ken Farrell

You can measure calamity simply
by counting: floats in leaky bullboats;
brambles, arrows, bears that draw blood;
people – some dead – left behind;
the days hunger shrivels you
to tattered, skin-spindled sticks;
the day hunger bests you
and you eat your horse; or count
the days you sleep in salt-flat
graves of your own digging so
you can trudge thirty miles
by night. Then balance all scars
against your foregone conclusion:
If I live, I'll be back next season

Field notes from Ridley Creek

Mellisa Pascale

The sluggish flow of creek water in June—
somehow, it always makes me think of you,
just buying time, with clear blue eyes, for I
did not yet know of her. Did I let you
slip through my fingers? Or were you checking
that nothing slipped through yours? From tree to tree,
red cardinals peruse the mulberries.
“I’m sorry, but I have to trust my gut,”
you said, in text, which seemed to be the wrong
internal organ, for this sort of thing.
Sweat trickles down bare legs and stings the spots
where brambles took a bite—those thorny fucks,
like you turned out to be, when you said let’s
“stay” friends, and never spoke to me again.

Hunger

Jenne Micale

There is a holiness that you can't speak.
Words touch the lips, after all, and this is
too pure a thing for a mouth. The bones branch
into winter trees—holy and empty,

birdless and stark, your heart fluttering wings
against the cage of your ribs. Your thin hands
are working the lock. You will free it and
yourself from the dirt of this earth. Holy

the air against your skin! You bend yourself
around emptiness, a crescent moon,
a tide drawn out, an empty shell whistling
in the sand. You're measuring your food again,

giving it to the compost or the dog.
When the fog wreathed your head and spun the room
you greeted the hunger as a ghost bride
lying with her in bed, sick and holy.

What is love compared to this purity?
You were filthy with love, feasted and full
as a moon. You turn from that orbit,
laugh as they try to press clay to your shape

with desperate hands, trying to shore up
the ebbing earth. You offer a glass smile,
shining and fragile. You're a spirit now
and need only the wind and emptiness,
and damn the love that seeks to make you whole



Rural Ride

Dave Boyle



A Gentle Wound

Edward Lee

The pit

Jenne Micale

That's me always, isn't it? Greedily
tasting the scene, running my tongue over
every part, salt on skin, the softness of
a palm against a mouth, cat fur, sugar

straight from the jar. Give me every berry
even the poisonous ones bitter-crushed
and I wonder why I puke my guts out
so often, head bowed to the tile, my hair

swinging over the toilet rim. Why not
the grass, I ask? The crystal slivers of
broken glass along with the peach preserves
why not stones and every person I see

tumbling into that aching pit ink-black
at the center of me, the one where you
can drop a rock and never hear it hit
the one without a bottom, this hunger

to pull everything in and make it part
of me. They say gravity warps the well
of space; there's no bottom to that, either.
Drop it, listen: It doesn't make a sound.

Making Poutine Rappee With My Husband

Rhonda Melanson

Let us skin those spuds naked
till they look like heavy moons:
whole
halved
quartered. Let us dream
about being grated to barest bits,
how we can get raw,
ballsy even
with those slippery shavings,
sliding in
the wiggly salted pork,
tasty on the tongue!
We can light fires
under tin pot oceans,
our little worlds
boiling foam around their curves.
We are a plateful of universes,
our rounded bellies
swollen enough to touch

again, again
skin on skin.



London Scene

Dave Boyle



Road to Freedom

Dave Boyle

Acceptance

Yuan Changming

The moonrise later. The sea becoming muted
Among foamy noises. All clouds scared away as
Myriad shapes of thought sagged in blue dreams. &
Inspirations glisten beyond the mirage like the moment
That hangs in midair. A dawn with brilliant hopes is to
Break for us as it once did for the last generation of earthlings
With the first rays penetrating the bloated bodies of robots
Or godlings. Whoever survives must have adapted to
Or embraced the changes that are constantly evolving from
Their own innermost beings, evaporating like the seawater

Irony. Paradox. [English Media for Thought Pattern]

Yuan Changming

There's neither egg in an eggplant
Nor ham in a hamburger
Much less any pine or apple in a pineapple

Just as English muffins were not invented
In England, so French fries did not originate in France

Likewise, a guineapig is neither
From Guinea nor is it really a pig

While boxing rings are actually square
Quicksand always takes you down slowly

All writers do write, but fingers never fing
A teacher must have taught, while a preacher could never
Have prought; a vegetarian eats vegetables only
And a humanitarian eats nothing but humans?

Hidden Manifesto of *Stability* vs 稳/*wen*/

Yuan Changming

These two nouns are mutually translatable

Between English and Chinese, there's

No doubt about that, but no translator

Knows the most fundamental difference deeply

Rooted between two civilizations:

In English: only when you're *able* to join the *table*

Can you make sure something remains stable

Whereas

In Chinese: to achieve 稳/*wen*/ or *stability* means to

Produce *grain in a hurry*, or the other way around

The Crow

Steve Denehan

It hit the grill of the car
I did not feel it, barely heard it
but it was big, meaty
for a crow

it flew as though catapulted
from the roadside ditch
a ribbon of night sky
on a breezy sunny day

inert in the rear-view mirror
one wing, obviously broken
pointed up, straight up
at what had been left behind
what had been stolen

I drove on, tried to put it aside
tried not to think
about hatchlings waiting
starving

hours later, on the way home
I looked across
a thousand tyres
had rendered it an oily black paste

four or five crows stood around it
as if in discussion
picking at what was left

as I drove past
they flew away

A Poem to My Father

Steve Denehan

When you sit at the dinner table
your plate half empty
your mouth half open
your fork suspended
halfway

when you stand in the garden
motionless
just yards from the apple trees
the bucket in your hand
swaying

when you sit on the passenger seat
silently unsure
of where you are
just minutes
from home

when you walk into a room
to stand there
on the verge of a question
a pronouncement
on the verge of who you used to be

when you put your palm against her cheek
as though she were a sacred thing
for seconds
for minutes
forever

when we sit
across from one another
talking, like we used to
when your voice trails off
when your eyes glaze over

where is it, that you go?

breakfast

Jonathan Chan

exhaust thickens as the film
on the skin, fingers atop
the crisp crust, browned by
charcoal, pressed, sealing the
viscous green, pale yellow.

two shells shatter, whisked
in a spiral of deft powder
and a dark ooze. the treacle
over the rim and around
the throat, puddle lapped
from a saucer.

nearby, he sits leaning,
fingers curled around
a frothing glass. further
aside, she pulls off her
mask, famished
by the sun. golden
springs. gelatinous pucks.
grains packed as a cup.
sated after the rims
whirring down the bend
and around an icy truck.

thin paper crushed, like
foil. devices shudder as a
morning abyss. the red folds
of an umbrella begin to wilt.
the lines furrow into beads
of sweat. chatter suffuses
in the concrete heat. they
call it good here, they call
it good there. they reflect
on a time to meet.

The Black Hawthorn

Danielle Guthrie

I stand atop the golden hill:
the wiry heads of scotch broom fills the clearing,
their tendrils reaching out to the sky,
fingers twisting under the sun,
their tips scorched and brown and begging to be set ablaze.

The lone tree stands out – a defiant ink blot.

The Black Hawthorn.

With its tall canopy of dark leaves,
the branches are low with pale flowers,
disguising inch-long thorns.

Even from across the clearing,
the blossoms' reek corrupts the air:
spoiled spices and molding meat.

Humans lay around its base,
their naked backs leaning upon the trunk,
asleep underneath its starry canopy.
Though some chests breathe in the foul air without grimace,
some stopped rising long ago.

The fetid smells settles on my skin, an oily coat,
before I collapse onto my knees at the first body.
Laying my hands on its stomach,
the skin tears and deflates under my fingernails,
a huff of breath,
imploring.
I oblige.

The first fistful, meat oozes between my fingers;
wriggling worms after a downpour.
I force it inside my mouth, maggots and all,
swallowing its sour tang,
feeling the lump move down my throat before
plopping into my stomach.
I reach back inside the body,
pulling out another clenched fist,
then another,
devouring,
slowly,
until only femurs, vertebrae, and teeth are left;
scattered blossoms in the shadow of the tree.

For the Italian Stonecarvers of Barre, Vermont

Tad Tuleja

Hunger brought you here
from the foothills of your native Lombardia
to granite Vermont you came
seeking work, *pane sicuro*,
to keep food on the table
and landlords from the door.

In Viggiù you worked outdoors,
your *scalpello* catching the Milanese sun.
In Barre the weather ruled,
power drills vaporizing stone in airless rooms
surrendering you at fifty
to the *mal d'America*.

Trapped in that silica storm,
did you dream of chestnut tagliatelle, Grana Padano?
Did you read *Il Proletario*, sing “Bandiera Rossa,”
ask Clemente patron of carvers to carry you home
before the fog had swallowed
your last breath?

Labor choked you silent
but the song of the *scalpellini* echoes still
across your adopted country
from angels in churchyards, Madonnas in grottoes,
olive branches encircling cenotaphs,
fish and Cupids gracing bistro fountains.

Pane sicuro you sought
and in seeking brought beauty
to places where they do not know your name,
do not understand that stone was bread,
have not heard the chanting of labor’s children
or the sound of granite dust taking a life.



sampson and delilah
Edward Michael Supranowicz

I Dreamt of You Again Last Night

Phil Eggers

Orange, orange peel, burnt orange, blood orange,
Lemon, lemon pith, lemon rind, lemon peel, lemon-lime spritz,
Pepper, clove, oak, smoke,
Horse blanket, hay,
Honeysuckle, honey, honey dew, cantaloupe,
Caramel, coffee, toffee, chocolate,
Mocha, mango, marzipan,
Lemon grass, wet grass, green grape, red apple,
Baked apple, apple blossom,
Blackberry, blueberry, raspberry, strawberry, cherry, black cherry,
Prune, raisin, plum,
Peach, pear, apricot,
Kiwi, kumquat, tangerine,
Green apple, red grape, ruby red grapefruit,
Banana, butter, butterscotch, bubble gum, brown sugar, band-aid, barbeque
Pomegranate, pumpernickel, pretzel, tequila, rye
Bread, bread crust, toast, burnt toast,
Cranberry, cracker, flour, flower,
Damp, dank, moss, maple syrup, milkshake, musk,
Beechwood, butternut squash,
Pine tree, pine sap, San Francisco sourdough,
Cinamon, sage, sesame seed,
Clementine, cardboard, chamomile,
Parsely, paper, rosemary, thyme,
Chai tea, candied yams, chardonnay,
Basil, biscuit, jasmine, juniper,
Marmalade, marshmallow, mushroom, mint,
Fig, fir, goat fur,
Date, donut, dragon fruit, graham cracker, granola
Walnut, chestnut, peanut, pecan, pancake, pistachio,
Almond sliver, acetone,
Licorice, leather, hibiscus, hazelnut,
Pineapple, papaya, passion fruit, plantain,
Toasted coconut, tobacco, coconut shavings,
Broccoli, green onion, star fruit, star anise,
Cornflake, sweet corn, cream corn, tomato soup,
Bourbon barrel, brandy barrel, rum barrel,
Cedarwood, Cheerio.

I dreamt of you again last night.

The Death of Nihilism

Phil Eggers

Have you stood between cars on the N train as it lumbers across the Manhattan Bridge at midnight in late July after leaving her party early for fear that you might be overstaying your welcome only to take up smoking again? Have you quit your job at the French bistro on Atlantic Avenue, rated most child-friendly brunch spot in Brooklyn, and emptied your savings and bought a one way ticket to Denver and gotten in stranger's cars with stranger's dogs just to come crawling home three weeks later in order to sell comedy tickets in Times Square? Have you eaten magic mushrooms and sat alone at Shore Park gazing at the water towards Staten Island listening to Phillip Glass on a pair of Bluetooth headphones you stole out of the lost and found only to be sucker punched in the face by a teenager who demanded nothing more than your confusion? Has an open mic broken your heart? Has karaoke mended it? Have you closed work an hour early to flee to The Owl Farm on 9th Street and work on a poem heavy with repetition to dull down the anxiety and anticipation of being dumped by your girlfriend of two months who insists on meeting up for lunch tomorrow only to renounce Nihilism?

waxing poetic with my best friend

Brigid Cooley

i've been low recently
when i say low, i really mean lonely
attempting to curb sad feelings by learning new things,
like how to change the brake pads on my car
and ways to say i love you in different languages

*sometimes being single feels like sitting outside on a cold curb
under a dark sky in a residential neighborhood
i can hear laughter coming from parties
hosted inside houses with picket fences
lined up orderly along the street*

*i can just barely feel the warmth radiating off fires blazing beneath mantels
adorned with engagement photos and wedding invitations
still, i stay outside, despite knowledge of unlocked doors
and welcome mats. not exactly exiled
but not yet reveling over an invitation to join either*

my best friend listens quietly through the phone
i can imagine her furrowed brow and patient eyes
the way she must be tilting her head to the side
while assessing my melancholy monologue with precision and care
she is well familiar with the fears stashed inside my busybody brain

after affirming my feelings, she takes creative liberty
changes the analogy so that i am taking a long walk instead
tells me i have never been one to sit around and wait
and also that most people don't heat their houses with fireplaces anymore
even if they have one

she hypothesizes the sky must be beautiful outside
all wintry and full of stars
reminds me how much i enjoy watching breath turn to smoke
whenever temperatures dip down toward single digits
says i look good with flushed cheeks and warm clothes

*sometimes, you've just got to feel the feelings,
even when they suck. especially when they suck.
it doesn't mean you're empty — you're far from it.
besides, you've always been so resourceful. if this scenario were real,
you outside and alone, i bet you'd pick up useful things along the way.*

while she talks, i glance at myself in the mirror
notice how green my eyes look after crying
watch my sadness start to subside as she
makes a joke about our middle school dances
and childhood crushes

once we hang up, i lay across my
unmade full-sized bed and crack a wry smile
because i can sleep on whichever side i want.
later on, i'll make myself a cup of tea and read until 2 a.m.
tomorrow, the sun is sure to shine.

Final Mouth

Elizabeth Porter

For a moment, your grave was an open mouth, and I considered entering the gasp ahead of you.

Don't I always get home before you - to pre-heat the oven or start the roomba or pull tight sheets

over our sagging mattress? Only a hundredthousand heartbeats ago it was Sunday and you were procrastinating some report or work assignment and I was too busy stirring my own trouble to notice that the hair around your ears had grown too long and your favorite shirt was thinning. But now, a dozen lacquered shoes slow-march to the terrible pit and now we are all closing it and now it is a soft mattress of locked darkdeep soil. And now that moments are unstrung between us, the parallel divide between our bodies is a haunted hunger.

Porn

Paul Hostovsky

My cat Howard
looking
out the window
at the sparrows
in the hedge,

his nose pressed
to the screen,
his mouth opening,
twitching
with desire,

his claws extending,
retracting,
the whole of his
attention
taut, poised,

pointing
at all the winged
bodies coming
and going.

Cinnamon Toast

★★★★☆ 4.5

Didn't knock my socks off,
I could tell something was off
and not right.



Thanks anyway though.

Cinnamon Toast

Daphne Fauber

at the end of the day

Brianna Cunliffe

I can't unname our children.
stones we left as gifts in the hollow of that river pine- it will never
spit them out.
my old wishes may unmake me
but still, they clatter, ever
down to the bottom of that cracked fountain

my gutter of a heart swells with clogged rain
paying for its refusal to let autumn
slip away. now the sweet leaves are rotted tyrants
they will not let me
flow on

still get zillow alerts from the slice of the mountains we chose
foreclosures, mostly, tilting towards inevitable ruin.
but I would have knelt to tear at rotted plywood, hacked
kudzu from choked chimneys, from that blood moon until the turn of the
century
salvaged anything. everything. off those good bones we grew together.

now, geography, momentum, slant the light. the windows still shine
tenderness, abiding, in that timber frame. you, as ever, multiplying, within
down in the valley, now, I look in, starving from the
unfolding road
at the richness of every love we ever made
that is now beyond my reach

groundskeeper starving

Brianna Cunliffe

There are no tomorrows to be found
 in that satin soil, that
 crystal fountain
nothing in that perfumed
 dirt that could
 see you through the night
 sate any sort of hunger, even the
 ones of the mind

It's an anemic kind of beauty that
 snarls its comparison
 like a sneer around the
neighboring weeds,
 there is
 nothing to eat, here

That is your museum, your
 performed mutilation, a culling, a
 hoarding, a desert of tenderness

I will not call it
a garden



Feasted

Alan Bern

All I want to do is

Caroline Reigel



Walk through a gust
Of deep-fried air. Tear at
An onion ring. Peel the skin, suck
The translucent bone, animalistic and
Alive with salivation. Take you to a grassy knoll.
There there, I think, as I gently brush my fingers against your
Forehead, your head in my lap. Your body to the moon. I wait
For her buttery goodness to laminate you. Do you feel
The cosmos pulsing through you? Do you feel the pull of
Gravity inflating your bones? *When you laugh*,
Can it be real? I will drag you across the lawn, down the hill,
Your body leaving a snail trail through the tall tendrils.
I drag you through the gravel of parking lot
Where bright headlights blind me as I squint and pull.
Kids run around, cars move with hesitation, doors slam
Behind and in front. I make my way through the bodies,
Past the carnival. Your shirt riding up, rocks scratching your skin.
I hold your feet firmly against my armpit. Your body scooping gravel.
Your brilliance a steady bumpity bumpbumpbump bumpity bump bump
As it rolls unsteadily back and forth, back and forth again. I breathe heavily
As I drag you. I am hung up on the idea of breathing pleasure into you.
I am hung up on the idea of hanging you on a clothesline so that you can feel
The summer night's warm breeze. Clipping a clothes hanger to the fat of
Each shoulder so your feet could swing. I'd hang you out in January
If that is what your brilliance would need. The dead of winter. The frost of the first
Freeze. Your eyelashes glistening. Come spring, I would hang you out
Next to my tanks and jeans, and let the scent of fresh clothing
Arouse you from your daily stupor. I am hung up on the idea
Of hanging onto *Nothing can last forever*.
I am hung up on the idea of shrinking my body, of making
A slice to your toe, stretching the skin and climbing in. Of making room
For my body in yours. Rolling my shoulders against the tendons,
Burrowing my way further in, sniffing and smelling and taking it all in so that
I could know what it is to be in your labyrinthine machination.
I would make my way around. I would explore. I would take a break
On a cell, pull the backpack from my back, have a snack — trail mix
And a cheese stick. I would take my time in you. Let you know
What it is to have more life in you. Let you feel the pricking annoyance
Of my determination in you. And when I make it to your brilliance,
You would be sound asleep. You would drool me out of your

Cavernous mouth, let me ride the waterslide of your slackened jaw, and
 I would pray that you would awaken with the zest of knowing what it is
 To feel alive in yourself.
 Large again, I would watch you wake. Feel your matter all over me.
 I am hung up on making this work. I am hung up on ridding you of
 Your scorned indifference, of your hauntings. How deep into you
 Must I go? How far must I drag you? How long must I lay you
 Beneath the glory of the moon? I tie you to a hand truck.
 Let your arms dangle free so that I can hold one of your meaty hands. So that
 I can show you the exhilaration of waving at a stranger, of
 Moving your arms back and forth to slice through the wind, to
 Move your body swiftly, to get your heart racing. I
 Cut the rope and fling you forward. Watch your body stumbling,
 Falling, crashing, crumpling. To learn again the embarrassment and tears
 Of a knee scraping. Of worrying that someone saw you. Of getting up
 Cautiously. Of having someone clean you. A tweezer to your knee,
 A pebble removed. Hydrogen peroxide bubbling. A Band-Aid. A kiss.
When it stings, when it soothes, can that be a tender moment that you cling to?
 I am hung up on the years. I drag you to the eighties.
 I smooch your foot into a roller skate. Smooch the other. Push my weight
 Down on your shoulders, down on your hips, down
 Until I feel your feet slide in. I tie the laces, catch my breath. I
 Throw you over my shoulder and glide over the popcorn carpet,
 Past the slushy machine, onto the roller rink. Your skates clatter
 To the floor as I set you down. I stand behind you, grab you by your hips —
Your beautiful hips — and we jolt around the rink under the
 Glimmer of the disco ball. We stumble into line. When it is our turn
 I kick you square in your tailbone, your strapped-in feet
 Rocket across the concrete, your back bent backwards ninety degrees
 Uncomfortably, your eyes — *your beautiful eyes* — boring into me.
 I push you hard one more time and you clamber beneath the limbo pole,
 Your body contorted. *Do you remember what it is to feel this childhood thrill?*
 Your back — snaps. You lie — motionless. Take my turn. Take
 You by the hips, take you by the torso, throw
 The pieces of you over my shoulders. Unlace
 Your skates, let them clatter. Pad away in my
 Socks, try again tonight and tonight and
 Tomorrow and tomorrow, searching,
 Ravenously/pleadingly/relentlessly/
 Always searching, for the next
 Marrow to suck
 And swallow



Last Day Salad

Sue Fagalde Lick

You can't take it with you,
you can't let it rot, you
bought too much and you're leaving,
so you dump it all on a paper plate—
you don't want to do dishes again--
and you shovel it in from left to right.
Nothing left in the refrigerator now
but a biscuit for breakfast, a single egg.

It's Sunday night, when your mom
used to serve well-roasted beef,
mashed potatoes, canned peas
and chocolate cake frosted with Cool Whip,
or—if your father was in the mood—
you ate barbecued steak in the patio
with potato salad, beans, lemonade,
and ice cream sundaes for dessert.

But Mom's not cooking anymore.
Your dad is broken and alone,
living in a nursing home. You're going
to sit beside his wheelchair while
he eats chicken on rice, carrot sticks,
maybe a tiny bite of cake,
water, juice and milk lined up
like shots of whiskey on a bar,
aides checking off every bite or sip.

When he asks what you ate,
you'll say, "A salad," not mentioning
it was three inches high, a foot across:
lettuce, apples, spinach, tomatoes,
cauliflower, cucumbers, carrots,
and chunks of ham with fat attached,
soaked in low-fat zesty Italian dressing
with garlic-flavored croutons,
washed down with a glass of wine.
No, you don't want to tell him that.

Ripe

Sue Fagalde Lick

My father's refrigerator's empty,
the cupboards bare, shopping
too hard with his failing heart,
his legs that won't obey his mind.
He lets supplies run low rather
than asking someone else for help.
He says he has enough.

I wander the backyard orchard
past rusty buckets, hanks of hose,
weeds brushing against my knees.
His berries have turned to stone, but
the lemon, orange and cherry plums
hang heavy with fruit, a feast ignored,
rotting on the hard clay ground.

At the sink, I peel a plump orange,
bite into its bursting lobes,
let the juice run down my chin,
thank God for this blessed fruit
of a tree I bought one Father's Day,
a small gift in a cardboard box.
It grew and bore fruit, never picked,
until today when I needed to eat.

Becoming

Amy Devine

as you split the muscles at the core of me I can
feel myself falling into rounded, ripe halves. I can
sense you gathering the pieces with the least seeds,
with the whole flesh, but I think I can
swallow what you leave behind.
using the seeds in my stomach to grow half of me back and
feed you from my core again - yes
I can.
I can.

Anchorage

Amy Devine

There are people who march solo across the deserts of Antarctica.
People - human beings of flesh and clumsy nervous systems - who choose
to isolate and expose
and
step from tents into landscapes where there isn't even life enough to die.
I hear this and I think that we are a foolish creature.
I think 'at least birds migrate for a better view of the sun'.

But. I suppose -

I have felt a fear greater than death, greater than no-life, grip the heart of me.
I have heard the storms and the howls threatening just beyond my horizon
and forgot what a sunrise was.
It is a foolish, foolish thing; to be this afraid and make breakfast,
answer phone calls,
scuff shoes on linoleum, bite into just-ripe pears.

When asked the secret to her solo journey across Antarctica, one woman said:
"Just get out of the tent.
Every day. Just get out of the tent."

More Than You Can Chew

Toby Devens

Bite off more than you can chew,
my heart's permission, my mouth's temptation.
Taste at least the headlong dash into
defiance of the limits
life's savory enrichment.

It could be caviar, how cannibalistic, or
medical school or mushrooms that tantalize with flaring gills alarming poison,
but still delicious going down and maybe you were meant for earth.
You can swallow, you can spit that novel you were doomed to write
the paged exposure of your luscious grand desires,
the hungry urges, the gourmet fears. If you choke you choke,
but you might not. To never know what you can bear or breed,
to never try or test or feed on possibilities, for me too sour a choice, impossible.
For you, Open Wide.



Studying in the Library

Zhihua Wang

A boiled egg,
a banana,
and a steamed bun

tucked in my backpack
weigh as much
as my books and laptop.

After reading a chapter,
finishing a critique,
or drafting a paper,

I feed myself one,
like a master
training a dog.



Green Onions
KJ Hannah Greenberg

Digging in My Poems in the Morning
Zhihua Wang

Urged by the thought to please my heart
and placate my blood, I open old lines
and jot down new sprouts, like Narcissus
viewing himself in the mirror, like a hearty

breakfast waiting on my table: honey,
bread, soy milk – a feast after fast, nectar
nourished by instinct and introspection.
Ideas weighted, voices chewed, words

combed smooth with sheen. Hands knock
them into keepsakes of black and white,
like fresh produce on display, like what
I care for is tended. Like applying lotion

on my face, my neck, I've touched
my every nook and cranny, inside and out.

They Call Me Desert

Linea Jantz

I curl my curves along the mountains' jagged back
Press my open mouth against the flicker of their pulse
Volcanic

The shattered sun floods an endless sky
The deer staggering, stumbles
Does not rise
Hopping crow, I eat its eyes
Obsidian beak a scarlet lullaby
To Death cuddled newborn in my lap

Sagebrush breathed into woman walking
My leather palms seldom greet the rain
My roots stretch deep
Follow the water



STARVING

Susan Alkaitis

Shera started it.
It spread
like fire,
a pyroclastic
gossip flow.
My sister and
the other girls
admired the way
her legs hung
under jeans,
bracelets jangled
on wrist bones.
She taught the art
of gorging.
Her newfound
prominence led
to a course correct
and she began
lecturing on
the elegance
of depravation.
It spread
like wintercreeper,
decaying the mortar
like the smoking
epidemic among
juniors last winter.
Bad seeds
in wind,
Shera extolled
the infinite
control it afforded.
She said
you could taste it.
My sister followed
her flame
and she and Shera
starved together.

PART ONE

Susan Alkaitis

You press your fingers
into the side of the tree.

We press our backs
against the bark.

Your calves are tracked
with dirt. I wonder if

I will return home with dirt
under my nails.

Knots of root roll out
making the ground uneven.

I cannot fix an object
against the horizon and

I cannot imagine finding
this tree again. So this is

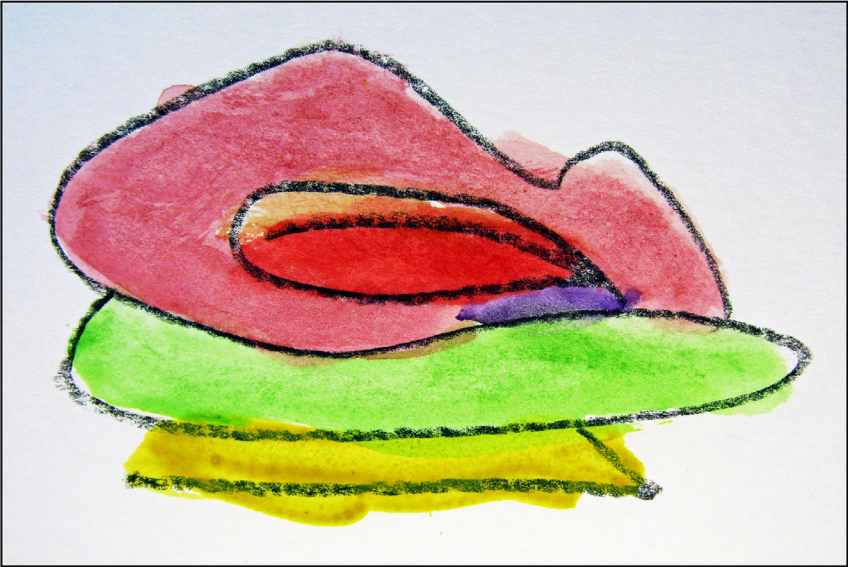
wanting in parts. And so
this is the first part.



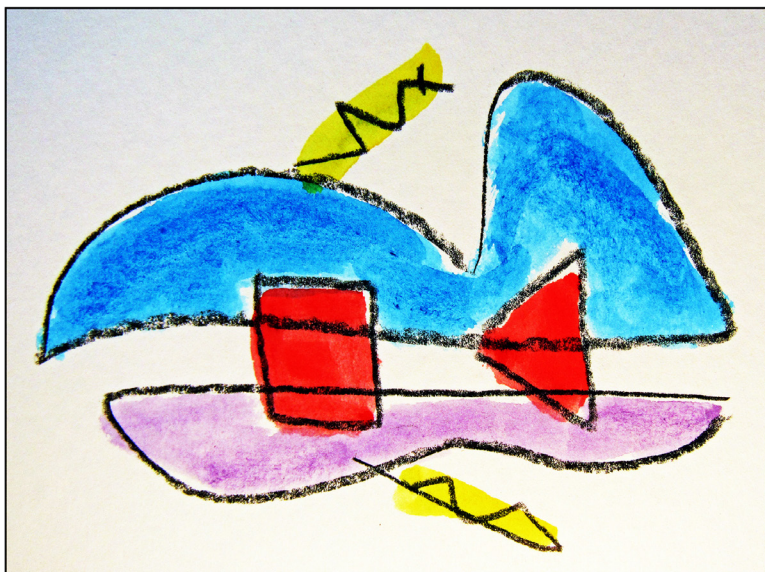
I Hibernate Within Myself

Bethany Jarmul

I eat blubber by the fist-full, washing it down with melted butter, building brick upon brick underneath my skin. I curl up inside my esophagus, hair hanging into my stomach acid. While I sleep, my cubs are born. They suckle me dry, then when hunger gnaws their insides, they take bites of my brain, chewing on my hippocampus and cerebellum. When I awake, breasts deflated, mind half-gone, I attempt to untangle myself from within, but I can't find my way out. My teeth keep getting in the way.



Roast Beef
Michael Moreth



Sandwich
Michael Moreth

Ears of Corn

Bethany Jarmul

Two small growths appear, one in each of my ears—green hair-like things. Growing thicker, longer by the hour. Leaves sprout. Maturing cornstalks grow overnight, each three feet long and laden with much fruit. I'm out of breath from turning my head and looking in the mirror.

You look like a reindeer, my dear.

Jeez, thanks a lot.

I go to the barber. He trims them down to nubbins. Alas, they regrow.

The dentist performs an extraction, a root canal. Alas, they regrow.

The doctor prescribes a shot, a cream, a pill. Alas, they regrow.

I decide, right then in the doctor's office, these cornstalks are a part of me. They are my ears.

The Last Time I Went Home

Eli Slover

Driving back, I remind myself
pink is a kind of
red shaded light.
The sun tucks itself
in nighttime's sockets.

Misery sits on my arm,
swollen as a tick, and
I thumb the steering wheel
nervous as a seraphim. I
imagine if things were different.

The fading cars, headlights
their only proof, reside in
memory's long moan.

Home is not just one place
but many, and the heart that
beats for them is interminably
broken.

Lying in the Grass Behind a Grocery
Store on Fox Grape Plaza in Springfield,
Missouri

Eli Slover

—*After James Wright*

On the knoll of mostly dead grass,
propped up by my elbows, a knee up,
eyes half closed under the sun,
I can almost imagine the passing
cars are white waves on a beach.
Golden sand crumbles between my toes,
flecks of amber grass peeking through.
Songbirds become seagulls
crying, and the movie theater
across the street is a slow, gray tanker
chugging darkly across the water,
carrying cancer over a half empty
parking lot in the afternoon heat.
The wind ruffles my hair gently.
I will love you until the oceans dry.



Idilica
Gissel Gomez



Greens
KJ Hannah Greenberg

Gardening For Dummies

Ed Brickell

Pot by pot across the patio,
I'm failing at this god thing:
The shriveled orange fists
Of marigolds, raised in protest.
I gave them all a home, however cramped,
I water them when I'm not too busy.

Clearly it is not enough,
Not even for the stoic rosemary.
The brown stems, the shriveled leaves,
All drooped in prayerful mockery.
They are not impressed with me.
How to be the druid of my dreams
In a temple of blooming perfection?

Over my slumping shoulders,
The oak tree's mistakes on proud display:
Look at me, it implores endlessly,
See how my branches never make sense.
Some of me giving birth, some of me dying,
All of me right now. What other way to be?

We Met at a Farmer's Market

Forrest Timmons

“I want to be with you,”

is what I said when we were drinking that sweet homemade wine,
but now I'm sober and I'll reiterate,

I want to be with you.

like a plum's flesh, fallen, rotting on the ground, wants to be with its pit.

I've tried to grow facial hair, and it's also blond, but not blond like yours.

Mine is blond like hair and yours is blond like a great rolling wheat field,
or peach skin.

When I worked in an apple orchard, lopping limbs off trees, bottling cider
and baking donuts and pies, watching families arrive and find amusement

in the work I lost sleep for, sliced fingers and wrenched muscles for,

I would come home smelling like cinnamon and sap.

But now I come home and smell your musty, earthy, almost pungent scent,

when I wear your shirts or sleep in your bed or nestle in your armpit,

my appetite is greater for this than

for any fruit I've harvested.



Portait of the Author as a Single Mother

Cheryl Caesar

Partition 1947

Tara Menon

I look at every face,
long, round, oval and square
to see if any belong to my parents.

No one looks like them.
My father and my mother must be staring at faces
to find me, their ten-year-old daughter.
Holding my breath, my stomach tightening,
I look at the dead men and women,
and glance away with relief.
My parents must be gazing at dead children,
to make sure none of them is me.

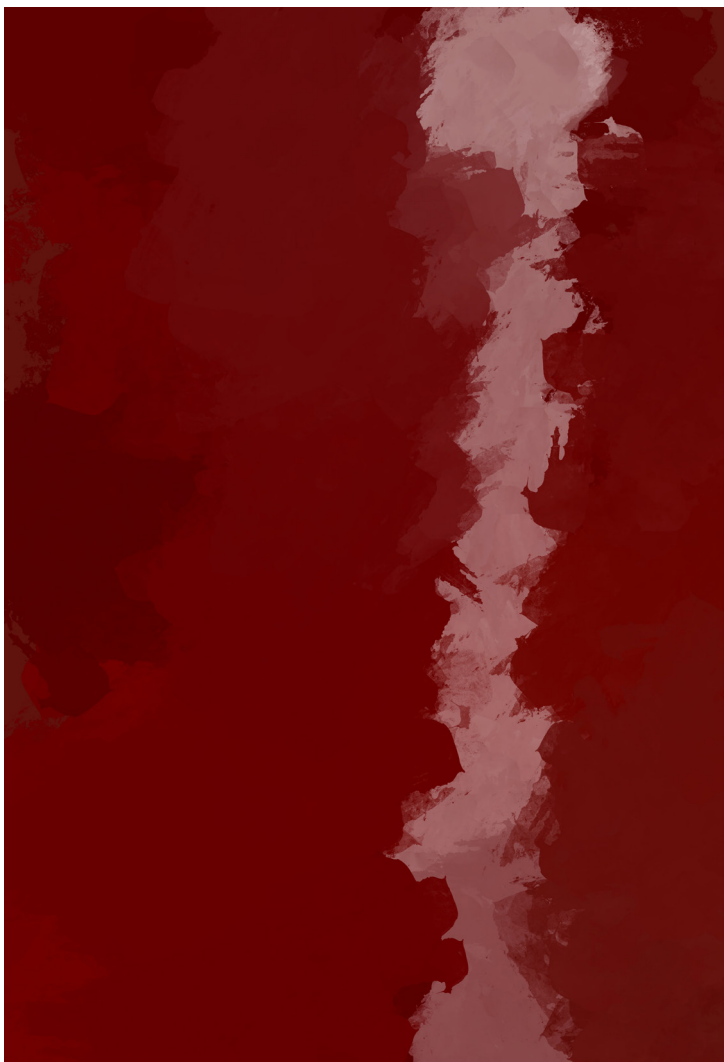
The border that will soon divide
seems to keep moving further away
because no matter how far I go
people always tell me I have many more miles to travel.
Hindus desperate to cross over into India,
Muslims rushing to make it to what will become Pakistan,
but right now I don't care about my faith.

Sometimes it's hard to believe a border will exist
when it wasn't there the day before,
I know my parents want to be on the other side,
so they must be waiting for me over there.
I just want my parents and my baby brother
and my home that burned too brightly,
the windows framing greedy flames
the night we fled wearing pajamas,
grateful just to be alive.

The Sweeper's Daydream

Tara Menon

She sweeps the floor with her twig broom.
The end of her sari flows dangerously close to curios
until she tucks it into her petticoat.
The fake gold studs glitter on her nose.
Her cheap red glass bangles tinkle as she sweeps.
Her shiny ebony plait sways as she moves from side to side.
She daydreams she's a dancer as she chases dust and dirt
in a house where a family of six resides.
She imagines the curtains, the spotlight, the applause.
Give her anklets that will herald her steps,
jasmine to decorate her hair and perfume the air,
a pink costume with generous pleats to replace her faded red sari,
a stage for her feet to thud, thud, before an audience.
Help her fantasy come alive, if only for a day.



A Question of Lost Lust

Edward Lee

Contributor Bios

Laurie Kuntz is a three time Pushcart nominee and a Best of Net nominee. Her fifth poetry collection: *Talking Me off the Roof* is available from Kelsay Books. Visit her at: <https://lauriekuntz.myportfolio.com/>

Callie S. Blackstone's poem "When the twenty-first" is a part of a series of poems that consider what it is like to be a social worker through fictionalized events and how her own internal landscape has been impacted by her career. Her debut chapbook *sing eternal* is available through Bottle-cap Press. Her online home is calliesblackstone.com. ACAB.

Linda K. Miller's *Poems to Amuse, Bemuse, and Entertain* is on Amazon. She's been published in various books and magazines. But really, she's just a retired person stressing over words and playing with cats. Waiting for the end of the world in a climactic rush of ice.

Gloria Heffernan is the author of *Exploring Poetry of Presence* (Back Porch Productions), the poetry collection; *What the Gratitude List Said to the Bucket List* (New York Quarterly Books); and the chapbooks *Some of Our Parts* (Finishing Line Press) and *Hail to the Symptom* (Moonstone Press).

Rachel R. Baum is the editor of *Funeral and Memorial Service Readings Poems and Tributes* (McFarland, 1999) and the author of the long-running blog *Bark: Confessions of a Dog Trainer*. Her poems have appeared in *Poetica Review*, *Raven's Perch*, *One.Art*, *Crosswinds*, and others. She chairs the committee that will select the first Poet Laureate of Saratoga Springs. For more information, visit: <https://rachelrbaum.wixsite.com>

Bart Edelman's poetry collections include *Crossing the Hackensack* (Prometheus Press), *Under Damaris' Dress* (Lightning Publications), *The Alphabet of Love* (Red Hen Press), *The Gentle Man* (Red Hen Press), *The Last Mojito* (Red Hen Press), *The Geographer's Wife* (Red Hen Press), and *Whistling to Trick the Wind* (Meadowlark Press).

Jennifer M. Phillips is a much-published immigrant, gardener, grower of Bonsai, and painter. Phillips grew up in upstate New York and has lived in New England, London, New Mexico, St. Louis, Rhode Island, & Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Her chapbooks include *Sitting Safe In the Theatre of Electricity* and *A Song of Ascents*.

David Dephy is a Georgian/American award-winning poet and novelist. The founder of Poetry Orchestra and an author of full-length poetry work *Eastern Star* (Adelaide Books, NYC, 2020) and *A Double Meaning*, also full-length poetry work with co-author Joshua Corwin. (Adelaide Books, NYC, 2022) He lives and works in New York City.

Lynn White lives in north Wales. Her work is influenced by issues of social justice and events, places and people she has known or imagined. She is especially interested in exploring the boundaries of dream, fantasy and reality. <https://lynnwhitepoetry.blogspot.com> and <https://www.facebook.com/Lynn-White-Poetry-1603675983213077/>

Nolcha Fox's poems have been published in *Lothlorien Poetry Journal*, *Alien Buddha Zine*, *Medusa's Kitchen*, and others. Her three chapbooks are available on Amazon. Nominee for 2023 Best of The Net. Editor for Kiss My Poetry and for Open Arts Forum. Accidental interviewer/reviewer. Faker of fake news.

Jonathan Yungkans is a Los Angeles-based writer and photographer whose work has appeared in *MacQueen's Quinterly*, *Panophy*, *Synkroniciti* and other publications. His second poetry chapbook, *Beneath a Glazed Shimmer*, was published by Tebot Bach in 2021.

C.W. Bigelow lives around Charlotte, North Carolina. His recent fiction and poetry have appeared in *Blood & Bourbon*, *Good Works Review*, *Back-channels*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *Remington Review*, *Hare's Paw*, *The Write Launch*, *Hole in the Head Review*, *Last Leaves Magazine*, and *Tiny Seed*.

Evie Groch supervises in Graduate Schools of Education. Her opinion pieces, humor, poems, short stories, & recipes have been published in the *New York Times*, *The SF Chronicle*, *The Contra Costa Times*, *The Journal*, *Games Magazine*, various anthologies, and online. Her themes are travel, languages, immigration and justice.

Daphne Fauber (she/her) is a writer, artist, and microbiologist based out of Indiana. Her work is upcoming in the *Garfield Lake Review*, *The Last*

Girls Club Magazine, *Permafrost Magazine*, and *Diet Milk Magazine*. She can be found on Instagram at @daphne.writes.

Norman Minnick is the author of three collections of poetry. He is the editor of *The Lost Etheridge: Uncollected Poems of Etheridge Knight* (with a foreword by Yusef Komunyakaa). He is also editing a collection of interviews and essays on Etheridge Knight that will be published in early 2023. His work has been published in *The Georgia Review*, *The Sun*, and *New World Writing*, among others. Visit www.buzzminnick.com for more information.

Betsy Bolton's work has appeared or is forthcoming in reviews like *The Hopper*, *New Croton*, *Split Rock*, and *Gyroscope*. Her chapbook *Mouth Art of the Bald-faced Hornet* was longlisted for the Kingdoms in the Wild Annual Poetry Prize; the title poem was nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Jane-Rebecca Cannarella (she/her) is a writer and editor living in Philadelphia. She is the editor of *HOOT Review* and *Meow Meow Pow Pow Lit*, and a former genre editor at *Lunch Ticket*. Jane-Rebecca is the author of *Better Bones* and *Marrow*, both published by Thirty West Publishing House; *The Guessing Game* published by BA Press; *Thirst and Frost* from Vegetarian Alcoholic Press; and others.

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

Chris Atkin is a Pushcart Prize nominated poet and high school English teacher from Orem, UT. He has a B.A. in Education from Utah Valley University. His work has been published in the *Lascaux Review*.

Lorette C. Luzajic is a widely published writer, editor, artist, and educator living in Toronto, Canada. She is the founding editor of *The Ekphrastic Review*.

Julie A. Dickson has been a guest editor, is a past poetry board member, writer of YA fiction addressing critical teen issues, and primarily a poet. Her work appears in 50 journals including *Misfit*, *Girl God*, *Blue Heron Review*, and *Last Leaves*. Dickson advocates for captive elephants and feral cats.

Ken Farrell's work appears in various anthologies and in journals such as *Pilgrimage*, *Sport Literate*, *Watershed Review*, *Coffin Bell*, and *Iris Literary Journal*. He holds an MFA from Texas State University, an MA from Salisbury University, and has earned as an adjunct, cage-fighter, pizzaio-lo, and warehouseman.

Mellisa Pascale's essays and poetry have appeared in *Elswhere Journal*, *City Creatures Blog*, *Moss Puppy Magazine*, and other publications. She holds an M.A. in Writing from Johns Hopkins University and is studying for her M.Phil. in Medieval Studies at Trinity College Dublin. Find her at mellisa-pascale.com or on Instagram @mellisapascale

Allie Keats is part-time photographer and full-time pretentious bore living and working in Tiohtià:ke/Montreal, the unceded territory of Kanien'kehà:ka. Their work frequently explores the quiet conflict between nature and human creation in the context of urban spaces.

Lucas Enne is an author and poet from the midwest United States. His works are published or forthcoming in *The Dread Machine* and *Illustrated Worlds*. See ennewritings.com

Jenne Micale lives in the woods in Upstate New York with her husband and cat. When she's not scribbling, she is making music as the ethereal/wyrd folk project Kwannon, learning Gaeilge, and practicing aikido badly.

Rhonda Melanson is a poet and teacher living in Sarnia, Ontario, Canada. She is the author of two chapbooks *gravenotes* (Beret Days Press) and *My Name is Mary* (Alien Buddha Press).

Cameron Morse holds an MFA from the University of Kansas City-Missouri and lives in Independence, Missouri, with his wife and three children. He is the author of ten collections of poetry and serves as Senior Reviews

editor at *Harbor Review* and a reader at Small Harbor Publishing. His first collection, *Fall Risk*, won Glass Lyre Press's 2018 Best Book Award. Visit his website here: <https://cameronmorsepoems.wordpress.com/>

Pasquale Trozzolo is a retired madman from Kansas. His work appears in numerous journals and anthologies including *Sunspot Literary Journal*, *The Pangolin Review*, *What Rough Beast*, *34th Parallel*, *From Whispers to Roars*, and *Last Leaves Magazine*. He is the author of two chapbooks. Still no tattoos, or MFA, he continues to complicate his life by living out as many retirement clichés as possible. <https://pasqualetrozzolo.com/>

Andy VanDoren is a queer, synesthetic poet inspired by natural phenomena. Themes of their work include abstracting reality and unreliable narrators. Through poetry, they paint pictures of how the world looks from inside their mind. They are published in *Celestite Poetry*, *Lavender Lime*, *Ink Drinkers*, and more. You can find them on Twitter @raggedypoe

Eric Christopher Uphoff is a wanderer who has called Texas, Japan, and Taiwan home. He currently finds himself an early childhood educator at a bilingual school in Taipei. He holds an MFA in writing and a BA in music. His poetry can also be found in *Book of Matches* and *MockingHeart Review*.

Akua Lezli Hope is a creator and wisdom seeker who uses sound, words, fiber, glass, metal, and wire to create poems, patterns, stories, music, sculpture, adornments, and peace. Published in numerous literary magazines and national anthologies, her collections include *Embouchure*, *Poems on Jazz*, and *other Musics*, *Them Gone*, & *Otherwheres*. <http://www.akualezlihope.com>

Gina Gidaro is a creative writing graduate and photographer from rural Ohio. She enjoys watching Asian dramas and anything spooky. Her work has appeared in a few magazines and online zines. If she's not writing her own stories, she is probably obsessing over someone else's. More information can be found at <https://ginagidaro.wordpress.com>.

Arvilla Fee teaches at Clark State and is the poetry editor for the *San Antonio Review*. She has been published in numerous presses, and her poetry book, *The Human Side*, was just released. It is available on Amazon and the Wifp & Stock website.

Chris Dungey is a retired auto worker in Michigan. Over one hundred of his poems have been published in lit-mags and online. This is probably his first published poem in three years due to preoccupation with a novel and short fiction. His most recent collection from ADP/Kindle is *We Won't Be Kissing*.

Mona Mehas (she/her) writes about growing up poor, accumulating grief, and climate change. A retired, disabled teacher in Indiana, USA, she spends most days at her laptop with two old cats as chaperones. Previously, Mona used the pseudonym Patience Young. She's published multiple essays, stories, and poetry in journals, anthologies, and two museums. In 2020, Mona watched every Star Trek show and movie in chronological order. Follow on Twitter @Patience77732097 and linktr.ee/monaiv.

Mia Amore Del Bando was born and raised in Long Beach, California. She is a Los Angeles-based flight attendant. Her profession allowed her to travel to several countries and practices her independence wherever she goes. She has been featured in *The Art of Everyone, You Might Need To Hear This, Flora Fiction*, and others. She is a faithful friend, difficult daughter, and selfish lover.

Yuan Changming hails with Allen Yuan from poetrypacific.blogspot.ca. Credits include 12 Pushcart nominations & 15 chapbooks, most recently *Sinosaur* (Redhawk Publications). Besides appearances in Best of the Best Canadian Poetry (2008-17), BestNewPoemsOnline, Poetry Daily, and nearly 2,000 others across 49 countries, Yuan served on the jury, and was nominated, for Canada's National Magazine Awards (poetry category).

Steve Denehan lives in Kildare, Ireland, with his wife Eimear and daughter Robin. He is the author of two chapbooks and four poetry collections. Winner of the Anthony Cronin Poetry Award and twice winner of Irish 'Times' New Irish Writing, his numerous publication credits include *Poetry Ireland Review* and *Westerly*.

Clay Waters has had poems published in *Green Hills Literary Lantern*, *The Santa Clara Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Roanoke Review*, and *Last Leaves Magazine*. He lived in Florida until the age of four and recently returned to find it hasn't

changed a bit. His website is claywaters.org, featuring his self-published cozy mystery novel *Death in the Eye*.

Jonathan Chan is a writer and editor of poems and essays. Born in New York to a Malaysian father and South Korean mother, he was raised in Singapore and educated at Cambridge and Yale Universities. He is the author of the poetry collection *going home* (Landmark, 2022). He has recently been moved by the work of Noah Arm Choi, Spencer Reece, and Roger Robinson. He has an abiding interest in faith, identity, and creative expression. More of his writing can be found at jonbcy.wordpress.com.

Danielle Guthrie writes both poetry and prose, exploring the dark fantastical. Originally from Vancouver Island, she now resides in Edmonton, Alberta. She is currently working on her first novel.

Tad Tuleja, a folklorist with a Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Texas, has written widely on folk and popular culture and received a Puffin Foundation grant for his song cycle *Skein of Arms*. His poems have appeared in *Blue Unicorn*, *The Road Not Taken*, and *Adirondack Review*.

Rachel Matthews is a queer writer and librarian based in Vermont, with a Massachusetts core. Her short fiction has appeared in *Puddlefar*. You can read more of her blackout poetry on Twitter @raymattswriting.

Phil Eggers is a poet and painter living in Brooklyn, NY. A finalist for Brooklyn Poets Yawp Poem of the Year 2020, his work has appeared or is forthcoming in places such as *Thimble Lit Mag*, *Vita Brevis*, *Red Wheelbarrow*, and *Cobra Milk Lit Mag*.

Corey J. Boren is a recent UVU graduate and Oreo aficionado. Corey served as Editor-in-Chief of *Touchstones*: Utah Valley University's Journal of Literature and Art in Fall 2021, and has been previously published in *Last Leaves Magazine*, *The Allegheny Review*, and *Better Than Starbucks*. To see more of his work, visit coreyjboren.com

Michael Neal Morris' most recent books are *Based on Imaginary Events* (Faerie Treehouse Press) and *The Way of Weakness*. He posts regularly to

the blog *This Blue Monk* and makes music as Device Flesh, sacramental, and Clique Bait. He lives with his family just outside the Dallas area, and teaches Composition and Creative Writing at Dallas College's Eastfield campus.

Andrea Gerada is a writer from the Philippines. She loves candles, cats, and children's stories.

Annette Gagliardi is a teacher, author and poet. She has two children's books, a full-length poetry book (*A Short Supply of Viability*) and a new novel (*Ponderosa Pines: Days of the Deadwood Forest Fire*) published, along with work in various anthologies and magazines. Her website is: <https://annette-gagliardi.com>

Megan Diedericks's debut poetry collection, *the darkest of times, the darkest of thoughts*, is available on Amazon. She's situated in South Africa, and when she's not writing, she's living in worlds of fiction with background music to match—or playing with the dogs. Other projects, and social media, available here: megwrites.carrd.co

Jonathan Ukah is a graduate of English and Law living in the UK. Jonathan's poems have appeared in several poetry magazines and anthologies, including the *Poet Magazine*, *State of Matter*, *Wildfire Words Poetry*, *New Note Poetry*, *New Reader magazine*, *whiskyblot Literary*, and others.

Alan Bern is a retired children's librarian and the award-winning author of three books of poetry. He is an exhibited/published photographer and performs with dancer Lucinda Weaver as PACES and with musicians from Composing Together. Lines & Faces, his press with artist/printer Robert Woods, linesandfaces.com.

George Freek's poem "Enigmatic Variations" was recently nominated for Best of the Net. His poem "Night Thoughts" has also recently been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. His collection *Melancholia* is published by Red Wolf Editions.

Michael Noonan lives in Halifax (famous for its Piece Hall), West Yorkshire. Has had stories published in anthologies. A volume of his short sto-

ries, *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.

Brigid Cooley (she/her) is a poet, journalist and storyteller based in Georgetown, Texas. She is dedicated to highlighting the stories of others while also carving out a space to share her own experiences. Her work has been published internationally, in publications including the “skin” edition of the *Formidable Woman Sanctuary* and the upcoming “horror” edition of the *Wells Street Journal*.

Hazel J. Hall is a nineteen-year-old disabled-queer writer based in rural New Hampshire. Right now, she is pursuing an English degree while working on her first novel. More of Hazel’s work can be found in *Dream Noir*, *Overly Lit*, and *Sage Cigarettes*, with other pieces forthcoming or visible at their site, hazeljhall.com.

Edward Lee is an artist and writer from Ireland. His paintings and photography have been exhibited widely while his poetry, short stories, and non-fiction have been published internationally. He is currently working on two photography collections: “Lying Down With The Dead” and “There Is A Beauty In Broken Things.” His blog/website can be found at <https://edwardmlee.wordpress.com>

Zhihua Wang is a graduate from the Arkansas Writers’ MFA Program at the University of Central Arkansas. She worked as the Managing Editor of *Arkana* from 2019-2020. Her recent work has appeared in *Aji*, *Last Leaves*, *Across the Margin*, *San Pedro River Review*, *Nurture*, and elsewhere.

Gissel Gomez is an eighteen-year-old Mexican American artist. She is a first-year student at Williams College interested in English and Studio Art. Her artwork has been recognized by several publications, and she hopes to make people stop and stare at her work.

Linea Jantz, M.Ed., has worked in a wide range of roles over the years including waste management, paralegal, medical records staff, and teacher. Her articles can be found in magazines including *The Dyrft*, *Trail Sisters*, and *Singletracks*. She has poetry forthcoming in *Thimble Literary Magazine*.

Susan Alkaitis is a writer living in Colorado. Her poems are forthcoming in *Illuminations*, and she recently won a Causeway Lit award for her poetry. Her work has also been published in *Rattle*, *The Punch-Drunk Anthology*, *Slow Trains*, *2River View*, and *Glass*, among others.

Bethany Jarmul is a writer, editor, and poet. Her work has appeared in numerous literary magazines and been nominated for Best of the Net and Best Spiritual Literature. She lives near Pittsburgh with her family. Connect with her at bethanyjarmul.com or on Twitter: @BethanyJarmul.

Eli Slover serves as an assistant poetry editor for *Moon City Review*. Their poetry appears in *Remington Review*, *MAYDAY*, *Freshwater Literary Journal*, *Frost Meadow Review*, and elsewhere.

KJ Hannah Greenberg's art has appeared on covers in many places, including *Angime*, *Black Petals*, *Impspired [sic]*, *Pithead Chapel*, *Red Flag Poetry*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Smoky Blue Literary and Arts Magazine*, *The Broken City*, *Torah Tidbits*, and *Yellow Mama*. Additionally, her digital paintings are featured in *One-Handed Pianist* (Hekate Publishing, 2021).

Ed Brickell lives in Dallas, Texas. His poems have appeared in *Modern Haiku*, *Hedgerow*, *Last Leaves Magazine*, *Copperfield Review*, *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*, *Loch Raven Review*, and other publications.

Cheryl Caesar is an ex-expatriate, having lived in Paris, Tuscany, and Sligo (Republic of Ireland) for 25 years. She earned her doctorate in comparative literature at the Sorbonne, and now teaches writing at Michigan State University. Her chapbook *Flatman: Poems of Protest in the Trump Era* is available from Amazon, although she hopes it will soon be of historical interest only. You can find her poems and artwork in *Words Across the Water*, published by Fractal Edge Press.

Forrest Timmons was raised in Princeton, New Jersey, and now studies English and creative writing at Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington. He draws inspiration for his poetry from the relationships with people, animals, and food he built during his time farming in upstate New York.

Tara Menon is an Indian-American writer based in Lexington, Massachusetts. Her most recent poems have been published or are forthcoming in *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *Arlington Literary Journal*, *Global South*, *San Pedro River*

Review, and *The Loch Raven Review*. Her latest fiction has appeared in *The Hong Kong Review* and *Litro*.

Toby Devens' first book of poetry was released by Doubleday. Later, three of her novels were published. Now she's back creating poetry that has appeared in journals such as *Verse-Virtual*, *Glimpse*, *Snakeskin*, and *Home Planet News*. Writing fiction, adjusting plots and characters, she holds her breath; writing poetry, she exhales.

Amy Devine (she/her) is an artist from a lineage of artists whose poetry has been in several publications including *Beyond The Veil Press*, *Soft*, and *Gems*. She is based in Sydney, Australia and is currently working on her first book. She can be found at devineinspirational on Instagram.

Sue Fagalde Lick is a writer/musician/dog mom living on the Oregon coast. She has published two chapbooks, *Gravel Road Ahead* and *The Widow at the Piano*. Her poems have also appeared in *Rattle*, *The MacGuffin*, *Sage Soup*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *New Letters*, *Cirque*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Diode Poetry Journal*, and other publications.

Caroline Reigel's recent poetry can be found in the *Papeachu Review Five* (Winter 2023). Her creative nonfiction last appeared in *Proof The Zine*, 004. Caroline's writing captures quiet moments and the visceral experience of being human. She writes from Minnesota, where she lives with her partner and two perfect pugs.

N. Jones is in love with everything at once. On Twitter for the hot takes, weird genders, and cats, @ablazeinhim

Michael Moreth is a recovering Chicagoan living in the rural, micropolitan City of Sterling, the Paris of Northwest Illinois.

Daniel Brennan (he/him) is a queer writer from NYC, who spent his childhood in the rural Blue Ridge Mountains of Pennsylvania. Brennan hopes to juxtapose the vastness we experience within our changing natural world with the often daunting intimacies the queer body presents. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in various journals.

Brianna Cunliffe is an environmental justice activist and storyteller. As a queer woman who grew up on a disintegrating Carolina coastline, her work explores fiercely loving the fragile places we call home. Her work appears in *Reckoning Magazine*, *Vagabond City*, *Lucent Dreaming*, *Storm Cellar*, *Claw and Blossom*, and more.

Milly Aburrow's uncanny sculptures and installations of the everyday mundane encapsulates the correlation between today's connotations of food and the slang and theories connected. Exploring foods social commentary. Scrutinising whether food needs to identify with superfluous associations and the person who eats it. She fabricates artworks engrossed in the sphere of consumerism, both materialistic and nutritious, relatable and ironic.

Beth Gallovic has been seen on the hiking trails around Boulder, Colorado, pulling out creased squares of paper from her backpack to scribble down lines of poetry. She marvels, often, and especially outdoors, at what an expansive force poetry has become in her life. Her poems have been published or are forthcoming in *Pine Ron*, *Quibble*, and *Twenty Bellows*.

Paul Hostovsky's latest book of poems is *Mostly* (FutureCycle Press, 2021). He has won a Pushcart Prize, two Best of the Net Awards, and has been featured on Poetry Daily, Verse Daily, and The Writer's Almanac. Website: paulhostovsky.com

Elizabeth Porter lives, writes, and teaches middle school in south-central Pennsylvania. She has been an educator since 2020 and a ravenous consumer of poetry since her own middle school days. Her work is forthcoming in *Eunoia Review*.

Sylvea Wong is an artist living in New York City in search of something meaningful. While she's not certain what exactly it is she's looking for, the pull to articulate her pursuit remains.

Sean Whalen is a health and safety professional in Iowa. He's been on a bit of a hiatus from writing, but is trying to get back in the groove. Back in the day he had works in *Mid-American Review*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, and *The Sow's Ear*, among others.

Bailey Sims is a writer and editor from Pittsburgh, PA. She is the Head Copy Editor of *The Fourth River*, and she edits novels for self-published authors through her business, Lena Creative Solutions. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her friends and her cat, Stella Luna.

Britta Adams is a writer, intersectional feminist, and frequent mid-shower vocalist from Orem, Utah. She writes poetry as a means of understanding and inhabiting complex feelings. In her newly acquired spare time since finishing graduate school, she enjoys bingeing documentaries, curling up with a good book, and belting out a good song while baking delicious treats.

Cecil Morris retired after 37 years teaching high school English and now tries writing himself what he spent so many years teaching others to understand and (maybe) enjoy. He has poems appearing in *Cobalt Review*, *Evening Street Review*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Poem*, *Talking River Review*, and other literary magazines

Joan Leotta plays with words on page and stage. She performs tales featuring food, family, and strong women. Internationally published, she's a 2021, 2022 Pushcart nominee, Best of the Net 2022 nominee, and a 2022 runner-up, Robert Frost Competition. Her chapbook, *Feathers on Stone*, is out from Main Street Rag.

Sunayana Dash is an IT consultant who lives in Bangalore, India. Her poems explore emotions and the inner workings of relationships among humans. She loves taking pictures of the sky and believes art exists in every form in nature. Her works have appeared in *The Great Indian Anthology Vol.3* and *The First Line Poets Anthology*.

Rachel Johnson earned a BA in English Education with an emphasis in literature from CSU Fresno in 2012. She has not been published yet. She regularly competes in her community's local poetry slams and is often asked to read for special events put on by the former Fresno Poet Laureate.

Kristiana Reed is the Editor in Chief for *Free Verse Revolution* and has self-published two poetry collections. Reed often explores the self and memory through the natural world and written portraiture. Her work has

been recently published by *Nightingale & Sparrow* and is forthcoming in *Vocivia Magazine*. Instagram: @kristiana.reed.

Moonmoon Chowdhury is an Indian poet, currently based in the Netherlands. Her work has been previously published or is forthcoming in *Borderless*, *Tell Me Your Story*, *A second cup of tea* by The Hive Publishers, *The Pine Cone Review*, *Sylvia magazine*, *Sonic Boom Journal*, *Amethyst Review*, *Sixpence Society Literary Journal*, and more.

Grant Burkhardt is a writer of poetry and short stories. He was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Charles Kell is the author of *Ismael Mask*, forthcoming from Autumn House Press in 2023. His first collection, *Cage of Lit Glass*, was chosen by Kimiko Hahn for the 2018 Autumn House Press Poetry Prize.

Dave Boyle's themes are very escapist /surreal - much action, boys and girls adventure pics -women on large motorbikes and sidecars, British Bobbies, jungle action, animals and famous characters. He also bolts terrible books shut and make lampshades with x-rays. Website is Boyleswellington and lives in New Zealand.

Alina Zollfrank from (former) East Germany now nags her teens and cranky beagles in Bellingham, WA. She loathes wildfire smoke and people who don't leash their dogs, and loves to write to get out of her whirling mind. Published in *Bella Grave*, she's caught the poetry bug. More at: <https://zollizen.medium.com/>

Allyson Turner is a poet, a dreamer, a crafter, a lifelong student of the earth, and a librarian. They have been writing poetry for over a decade now in the pursuit of living what someone once called "a poetic life." Allyson draws from their religious background—using Biblical imagery to a fault—their queerness, a mystical view of the universe, and the desert landscapes they grew up surrounded by.

Ketia Valme is a resilient writer from Cambridge, MA, who aspires to inspire others through her authenticated writing voice. The Westfield State

University student started her own radio show and a spoken word club, forming a safe space for writers to express their creativity. Writing's her passion, as she proves!

Sarah-Marissa Marquez (she/her) is an MLIS student at San Jose State University. She is based in Los Angeles and has work published and forthcoming in various magazines and journals, including *Capsule Stories*, *Human/Kind Press*, *Kissing Dynamite*, *Mud Season Review*, and more. When not writing, she can be found tweeting @Sarahmarissa338.

Alison Hurwitz writes gratefully in North Carolina and was previously published in *Tiferet Journal*, *Writing in a Woman's Voice*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *Book of Matches*, *The Shore*, *Amethyst Review*, *Rust and Moth*, *Thimble Magazine*, *Academy of the Heart & Mind*, *River Heron Review*, *The Jewish Writing Project*, *Speckled Trout Review*, and *Gyroscope Review*. Alisonhurwitz.com

Claire Beaver is a multi-genre writer from Long Island, New York, who is currently working towards her M. Phil in Creative Writing at Trinity College Dublin. She has previously won the Danielle Alyse Basford Writing Prize from Johns Hopkins University.

Ripley Crow began writing as a child. Ripley graduated from Southwest Minnesota State University with a bachelor's degree in ELA Education. Published in *Train River Anthologies*, *365 Days of COVID*, and *Last Leaves Magazine*, Ripley grew up in rural Minnesota and now continues to live in Minnesota with a spouse and two children. @poetwhispers28

A. Benét is an emerging poet from California. She has a weakness for coffee and the color of burnt clay. Her work is featured in *The Origami Review* and *Onwords Press*, and is forthcoming in *Feed* and *Acorn Review*. You can find her on Twitter @benettthewriter or email benettthewriter@gmail.com.

