

LAST LEAVES



Issue 10 | Spring 2025



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Last Leaves: Issue 10

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Edited and compiled by Cailey Thiessen and Kiera Baron

Cover design and end pages by Kiera Baron

Note from the Editors

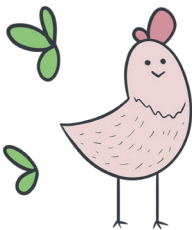
It's beyond thrilling for us to be at Issue 10. When we started this magazine back in 2020, it was a means to stay connected, a way for us to find comfort in the distance and bring together as many voices as we could in one supportive, communal space.

Now, five years later, it feels like a part of us. We've watched so many around us fall to the wayside—and it's easy to understand why: life happens. But that's when we need poetry and art the most.

The journey into Issue 10 brings us to a new season of covers, a new style of doing what we've already loved doing. Because let's face it: none of us are who we were five years ago. And that's the beauty of it all.

We want *Last Leaves* to represent to the best of our abilities what we all carry with us. We paid homage to our first issue by doing an open call—and if you've been around long enough, you'll notice the cover art for this issue is a similar concept to that in our very first leaf. Only different.

The one thing we all have in common is change, and it's a constant. We're so excited to embrace it alongside you in this issue of poetry, art, and the things we write about when the box is broken.



~*Last Leaves* Editors
Kiera S. Baron & Cailey Johanna Thiessen



Content Warning

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

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



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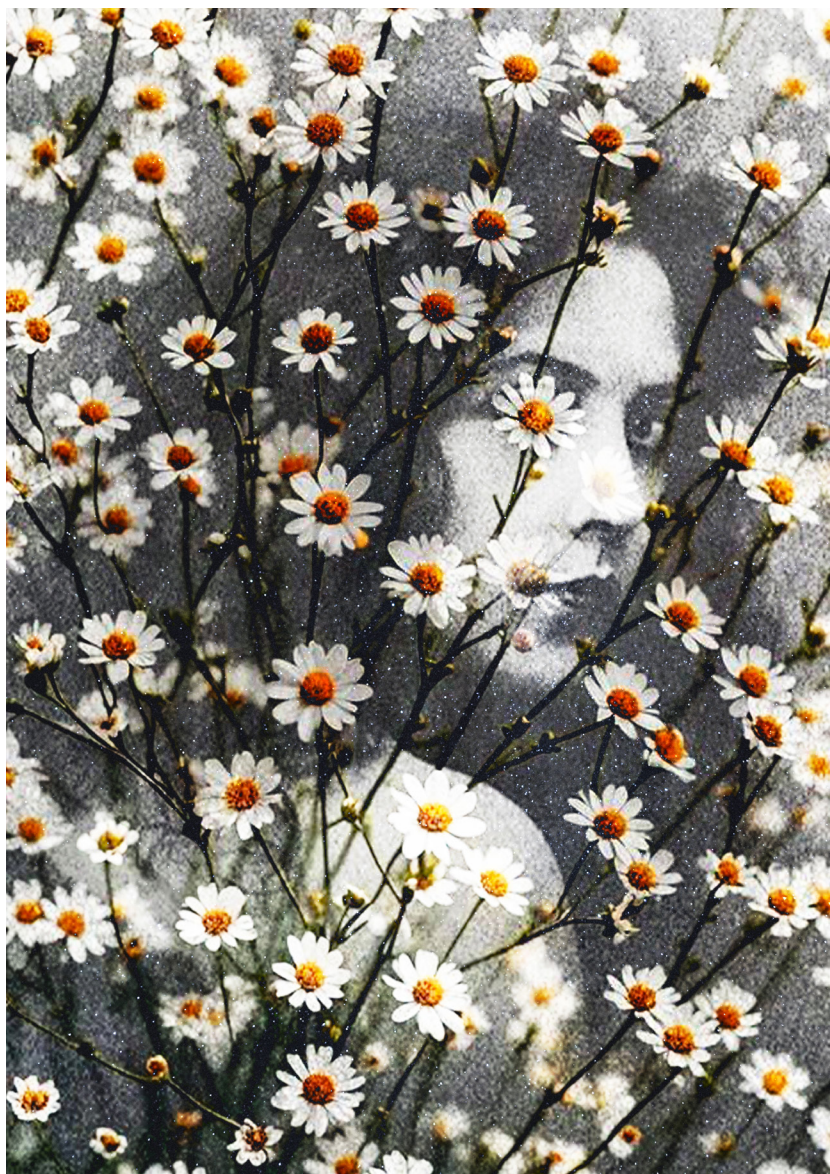
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MEADOW GHOST

Mirjana M.

The Grey

Vana Kingsley

Here in the woods, where the wolf likes waiting,
wailing winds winnow through willows awakening
to fix the stars, to cast the bones, fating.

I'll reap aconite in the late winter's waning,
and run, while my blood and my courage are hastening—
run to the woods, where the wolf likes waiting.

There's a boundary of boughs in the brume, mediating
the crow and the vulture like wraiths who've come, ravening,
to gouge the stars, to pick the bones, fating.

There's a moon-dappled bridge in the shadows abating;
gold eye on the river, a carnivore slaving
here in the woods, where the wolf likes waiting.

But these aren't the jaws that I'm anticipating,
and these aren't the cues to my wary mind, wavering
to read the stars, to see the bones' fating.

There's a knight on the stair in their chainmail and plating,
who's wondering at the nuance in my flavoring
here at the door, where the wolf lies waiting
to fix the stars, to cast the bones, fating.

THE MONK

George Freek

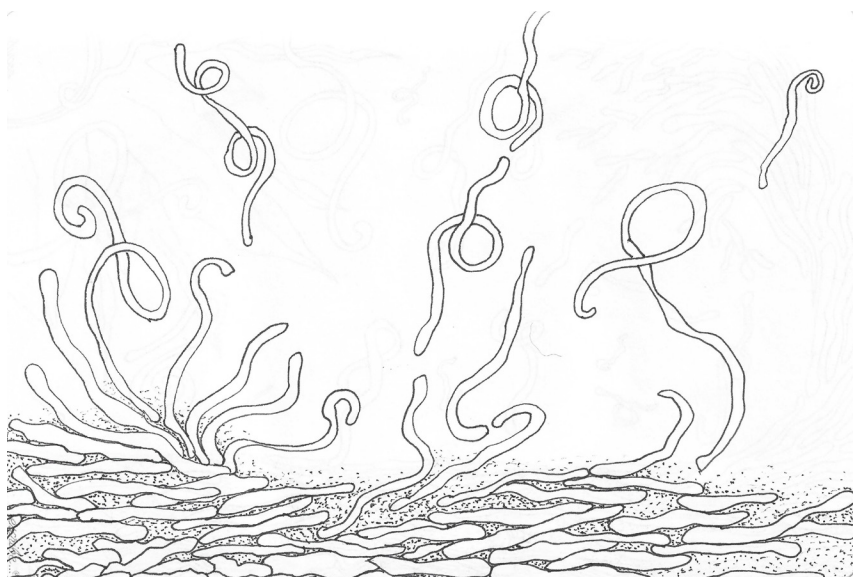
—*On the painting 'Peach Blossom Spring'*
by an unknown artist, inspired by a fable
written by Tao Qian (365–427)

The mountains rise up
in grim shapes,
looming far above
the workers and the monk,
meditating in his cell.
They ignore the towering rocks
at their peril.
The mountains
turn away. You are merely
transient, they seem to say.
And where are the peach trees,
and peach blossoms,
and where is the spring?
They're not even there.
They're unimportant.
The mountains know nothing,
but the mountains are everything.

Black Mountain Jazz Ensemble

Amy Nemecek

Rhododendron leaves are piano keys
beneath rain's liquid fingertips.
Towhee brushes green circles
among forest debris, swings
a steady six-eight to dogwoods'
descending chromatic greens.
Whippoorwill calls for an encore.



E/MERGING
Lorraine Caputo

SNAKE NIGHT

John Grey

I awake at midnight
and my bed writhes with snakes.

The smell of my fear
guides me through
this dangerous
slithery terrain
where not even
the familiar sheets
or the photographs
on the dresser
can save me.

My wife sleeps through it all.
She has faith
in the ordinariness of life.
And her logic is simple:
reptiles have no place in beds
therefore there are no reptiles
in our bed.

But I believe in art and poetry,
in sensitivity and imagination.
If not, there'd be no snakes.
If not, something banal,
philistine, would bite me.

You Are Enough

Bobby Jones

You turn page after page
but the words just pass by your eyes,
and it's like collecting water with a fish net.
And what's the point of knowledge when you're dead?

You want to stretch your benevolent arms
around the world to give it a hug,
but the dishes in the sink keep piling up,
and the laundry must be folded.

And where are the lesson plans
you should be writing,
And the watercolors you should be painting,
And the friends you should be calling?

You feel like you are
walking up the down escalator,
and then you must nap.
Who will help the homeless then?

French Toast Friday

Michael J. LaFrancis

Sometimes we do not want
to take any chances;
that is why
we keep coming home

for something dependable,
as two old friends,
something still as special,
as a three-day weekend.

A teaspoon of olive oil crackling,
responding to a wakeup call
from a black steel skillet
on medium high heat.

Maple syrup blowing bitsy
bubbles on the back burner behind
a bowl of frozen wild Maine blueberries,
the low bush kind, thawing.

The aroma of pumpkin and cinnamon
dancing with nutmeg midair,
as their substance blankets three slices
of fresh ciabatta bread, tucking them in.

Each bite is a feast
worthy to savor; enough to fill
a wonderful moment
with a taste of enlightenment.

Home Movies

Max J Westler

Dressed for stardom, we hog the shade in some balding uncle's suburban backyard, where even the sun-browned grass can't seem to catch its breath. Rumor has it we're to play a decisive role in

the times ahead, but now we loiter uselessly, behaving ourselves, bored as never before, our freshly laundered bodies sweating like the meat inside a boiling lobster claw. Meanwhile our moms and dads

can't resist mugging for the camera, stuffing the lens with their great, big lives. Here they are, blowing kisses, swaying hips, hands reaching higher than all the heavens. And that's our cue to get in step, come

marching down the path they've cleared for us at what personal cost and sacrifice, they'll never tire of reminding us. All at once we're the sons and daughters they dreamt of having, arms and legs swinging flawlessly,

like the blades of a scissors, as if we'd just had a shot of iron, and ready at last to assume our vast cosmic responsibilities, bear these good names into a future that's already been written, already waiting for us to arrive.



BURN A BRIDGE

Rik Mazolli

The Poet Defines Atheism

Emma Johnson-Rivard

The law within, that doctrine
where the soul lives
compels you like
magnetism. No matter what,
all things return. All things happen
like that even if it doesn't seem
that way. You are within your rights to chase it,
that logic, to give it a name. When living,
we create a way to name, a taxonomy of us
and all that bleeds. We want and so we walk
upon the field, speaking names that speak
through us. The wheel turns. We must be generous.
We know very little, and we know
too much. We are doing our best. We
would like to be kind. This must be defined
on individual terms.

DOLLS IN A MUSEUM

Mark J Mitchell

Gods did not make us.
Mothers sewed time.
Fathers shaped out faces.

Formed to tease smiles
and dry tears, children
warmed us while they slept.

Now you walk past us
reading printed guesses
at how we helped an oracle.

We never did that.
We were dolls, resting
on the borders of sleep.

If you think our eyes are dead
just remember how long
we've been alone

and oh so cold.



PLUME

Oormila Vijayakrishnan Prahlad

Sourdough

Zoe Freihofner

He leaves the starter on the bench. In the sun
So that it gets too hot. Feeds it expired flour till
It rises over the edge of the jar. Bubbles placing
Touches of vinegar in the air. Room smelling of
Something brewing. Thin fibres of green blue
Mold spreading over the surface. He kneads it
Into the next loaf. Waits for it to rise until it fills
The bowl. Presses unwashed fingers deep into
Its tissues. Leaves nail imprints on the surface.
Little half-moons. He mixes paints of titanium
and lead. Splashes colours in florals that wrap
as a vine. Scores the surface with a rusted knife.
Deep enough to pierce the heart. Pre-heats the
Oven for only five minutes. Places it on a cracked
Stone slab. Bakes it until the hands on his watch
Stop turning. Keeps it on the bench till he grabs
Out his butter. Softer now that his fridge stopped
Working. Acidic and bitter all at once. Slices it
Thick but lathers it thicker. Dishes it up on plates
Once fine. Now they are chipped. He leaves the
Crumbs that remain for an ant family. Home built
In rotting window frames. And scrapes it all back
Into that jar of starter.

Frangipani

Andrew Robson

The frangipani blooms,
its scent thick, syrupy like overripe mangoes
left too long in the sun.

The courtyard holds it all, holds the breath
of a slow afternoon, holds the sighing,
which is different from complaining.

Her grandchildren see fairies here,
their wings small as spoons.
They stir the air, stir up laughter
such loud, sticky laughter!
Even the petals pause to listen.

She sits with the other residents,
our chairs lined like books
no one has checked out in years.
Someone says, *do you remember?*

Her husband loved this tree,
loved how the petals fell so
casually, without a plan.

She thinks of him as the roots,
bury beneath, deeper, deeper,
twisting into the old, knowing earth.

He's there, she tells herself,
falling with the blossoms,
his hand just out of reach.

But sometimes, she feel him,
in the syrupy light,
as the sweet air presses against her skin,
as if to say, *Look, I am still here.*

The Melon

Paul Rabinowitz

like inhaling a part of memory
I slice into the net-like rind of a perfect melon

two halves separate and fall away
under the glistening canopy of the magnolia tree

pruning shears near chilled chablis glasses
we celebrate another summer harvest

in the closing moments of the waning light
a million crickets rub leathery wings

you cross your legs over mine

when suddenly our dog swoops in like a hungry kestrel
burrowing deep sniffing your sweat

her eyebrows twitch as if detecting an organic compound
growing and dividing

the blade brushes my finger

but so absorbed in my task and the melon's geometry
I ignore the truth

scrape pits from its flesh and place the perfect cubes on a tray
a sea of red floods the cutting board

veins pulsate as tears swell cleansing my vision
a swarm of wasps land on the serving tray

the yield of our long hot summer
overripe and decaying

Getting Clean

Sam D. Brammell

I came back home again
eyes glossed with dew drops.
Lips cracked open. A red pastel
punctuates the unarticulated. You,
offer coffee. I ask if I can bum a smoke
You can't bum one. You can have one.
You ask if I've had enough. I have.
The words mean little. I've said them before.
That's why when you ask me
What's different this time, I just look hard
Into your iris. I shed my skin,
vomit up english ivy and my teeth turn to tree bark.
I know, you say, I know.

Outside, a thousand dead bodies
with needles perched from their veins
like lighting rods, cry out for a song.
I have no music, only a desperation
opaque enough to touch
to draw closer. Powerless
Is a word that means capable of cleansing.
When a liar lies down in the mud
they grow roots. Truth is a thing with leaves
And little pollen buds. You tell me
the dead don't long for company
they are content to be compost.

When I rip the dream open
it offers snapdragon petals,
Honeycombs, a floral transmutation
of hemlock
but no promise
of eternity
only today

Self-Portrait at Thirty-Three

Shannon Swearingen Gabriel

I remember when the future was the sun in a clear winter sky. Warmth out of reach, but there. I remember when the future was the radio turned down low, the bass or harmony barely audible until you recognize the song and turn up the volume. I'm thirty-three years old now and I have exactly two gray hairs. My chest is a sky of sunspots that weren't there just a few years ago. Fine lines crease the corners of my eyes when I smile and twin vertical lines split the space between my eyebrows, just like my mom and aunt. I'm thirty-three years old and gravity has caught up with me already. I'm being bleached, diluted, embrittled from the inside out. We buried my aunt last week. Dried mud from the cemetery cakes my high heels. When will the sun frost me in gold, like cornfields in autumn? When will I receive my spray of roses, my crown of stars?

The Cat

Pierre Minar

The first time I saw my mother cry
She was sitting on the floor of the garage,
The cat was dying in her lap.

I felt lonesome.
It wasn't because she was attending
To the cat's last moments.

It was because, even as a kid
I could tell this grief
Wasn't grown-up grief.

It was the grief of a kid,
Maybe younger than I.
Things started to unravel that day.

She Wore Grief

Arvilla Fee

like mustard,
 tangy
bitter
 dull yellow;
she hurled prayers
at heaven's gates,
 questions
shaped like why?
she waited—
the answer came
 in thunder
in lightening
 in spatters
of raindrops
the answer come
 with a voice
if you hadn't loved
 you would not feel
the loss.

I want to be the patient sky.

Cameron Rife

Patience,
patience not in
the whistling wind,
not before the air decides
to cease its chaotic
play.

I find
the wind and I
—sisters to the dawn light,
sprinting through existence
without a mind of disruption.
Or sometimes I am blooming
through finite air,
breezeless,
never wanting to even cause so
much as a pinch.

Yet,
yet I want to be
the slight hum
ringing off a wind chime
that pleases and breathes eyesight,
yearning
amongst
a starless,
aching
night sky.



SMOKING THE STARS

Morgan R Jenson

Snuggling

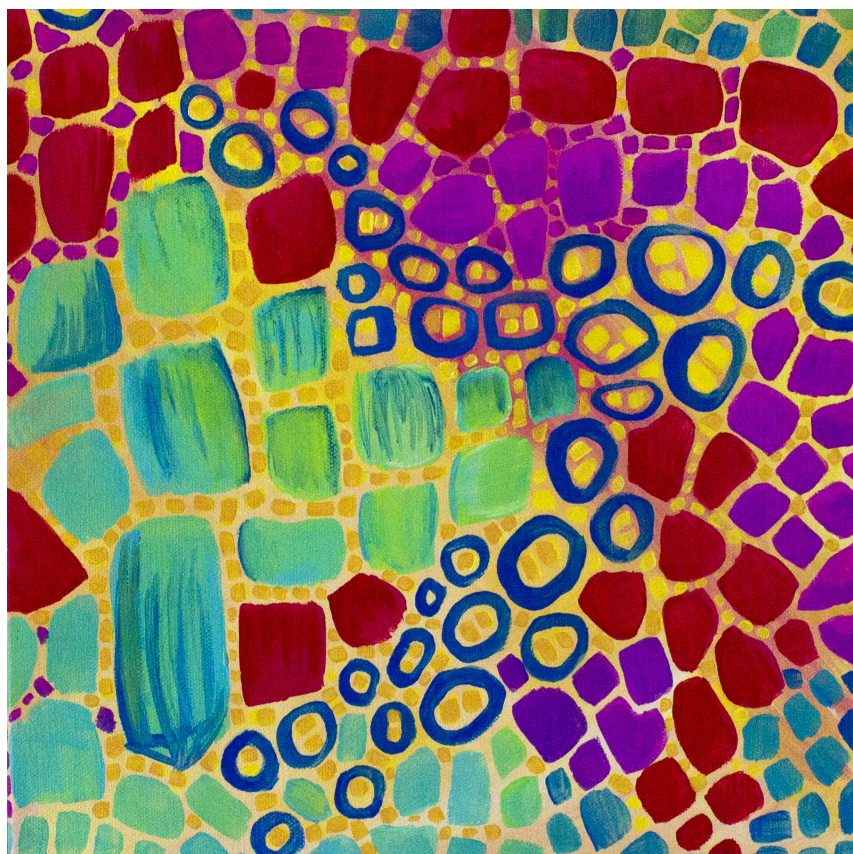
Glenis Moore

He is old now.
The years wear hard
on his joints: stiff, unyielding,
his muscles wasted,
bones stick up,
like ship wrecks,
and his mind wanders
places from the distant past,
too lost in reverie
to pay attention to now.
But there is little pain
and today the sun is shining.
Perhaps he will laze in the grass
and tell stories to the bees
as the breeze snuffles his fur
and Mungo snuggles close
as he used to
when they were kittens.

Moth-catching

Xingyu Zhao

Kerosene lamps set ablaze and a frenzy
Of moths, gliding on a sliver of red smoke
Into our home, their shadows swimming
On Chinese calligraphy like ducks kissing.
At eight, I listened to the rasping cicadas,
The chorus of toads under pupa-shaped clouds,
The crazed thumping of moths against molten
Glass, turning each brown vein on a forewing
Orange against the oscuro of its thorax.
The small ones died fast, dropping onto the oak
Panels, like black seeds flung from a tree of flame.
The wind, pregnant with periwinkle, speedwell
And camellia, swept them out the door,
The upside-down 福, returned them to the soil,
The ponds filled with duckweed. The larger ones
I caught in glass jars, caged them in autumn's
Half-light. Proboscis on chrysalis, antennae folded
In prayer, a thousand eyes swivelled up and down.
Once, I tore off the wings of a tea looper,
Light as tenjugo paper, inkblots against white sky,
And felt each trembling valley and tributary.
I watched it crawl out onto the grass, away
From its clipped wings, towards the moon.
Crickets and grasshoppers looked on
As it hid itself amongst stalks of sage.
Its legs reached out, touched a cigarette
Butt, still smouldering, ash powdering
Its abdomen. Then, it disappeared into Jingxian,
The approaching squall, the dusk-steeped trees.



JUBILEE
Maudie Bryant

Artemesia Extract

Abigail Micheline

Inside the Artemesia house, a ficus tree
made for the glass ceiling as if it could leave
us. Between branches, the accidental spill
of light bleached bright shapes like spotty smiles
across the beige carpet and tiles.

The story we would tell as *that one time*
we broke the bed on your birthday
became the story of our son's conception.

Almost on entering the fire smoked us out
of that upstairs corner room. Then it was our baby,
unfit for the edges of iron staircase that spun
around the tree, unfit for the sounds of surfers
surprising us for dinner at 9pm, unfit for all that white.

We carried the bedframe down the spiral stairs,
shoved its awkward weight across the wrought iron,
scratching splinters into our hands all the way to the curb.

Slowly, the ficus succumbed to beetles,
and had to be extracted, like a tooth, wet and gleaming
at the roots, the light suddenly puddling in every unsuspecting
corner, leaving the stairs to trace all that empty space
as if it could hold together

everything that pushed us out.

Taming Wildness into Verses, a Bookshop Poem

Stacie Eirich

We spend a Saturday at a local bookshop
in a nook of coziness, curled in a soft armchair
reading and writing. A piano plays soft pop &
broadway standards through overhead speakers
above the waterfall hum of a white noise machine.
A flow of mist rises from an oil diffuser, scents
of peppermint and lavender. A relaxed, unhurried calm
falls over us, slow shoppers browsing shelves of Tolkien
and Hemingway, Shakespeare and Dickens. A mural
of Hogwarts library on the wall, a stack of Narnia books
a Jane Austen puzzle, a copy of *Sense & Sensibility*
on the wooden table beside us. This space a sanctuary
a downtown haven for artists, creators, thinkers, dreamers.
For that thing that touches us, that brings our emotions
to the surface. Allows us respite, a space to open
and let in tenderness: to dream, to nurture our wildness
and our artistic, human sensibilities. This is the poem
that can come from this space. A nurturing, creative one
of light and time, time for seeking and dreaming
for knowledge and indulgence. For stories and murals
paintings of blossoms and wings, floor to ceiling shelves
of writing, old and new. For finding a world of possibilities
settling into a soft armchair to tame our wildness
into verses, into lines and paragraphs, drafts of light
to stave off the darkness: works-in-progress to feed
the lions of our imaginations, the tigers of our dreams.

The Ideal Marriage

Pierre Minar

Sudden change is hard

Parenting is overwhelming

I liked looking at your calves
as you reached up for the cinnamon

You said watching me
peel grapefruit made you wet

Can we please take care of each other?

Just the Bare Bones

Arvilla Fee

Give me naked trees,
branches scraping
against winter's
steel-wool sky.

Give me a meadow
fat with clover,
bursting with pollen-
laden bees.

Give me the tears
shed by a new widow,
her solitary cup
at odds with the table.

Give me a child,
mouth wide open
to receive the gift
of fresh snowflakes.

I'll hold the bones
of each tableau,
a rib here, a fibula there
until the whole skeleton

stands like a poem,
and walks away,
skull grinning

THE SEVENTH DAY

River Snowdrop

forgive me father the sharpened
razor nicks one's face on the clock's
twelve phases knocking like a hymn
at the catholic churches threading
through time so that your trauma purses
tight lips forward into my eleven body
breathing sorry down hollow landline
ten strikes this shrine attacked by the
breeze //

a sure thing, boar-bated, animal sob

releasing silence into the cracked spine of
your parenthood / weight understood,
undertaken; hope you choke on that

shackled knees to iron vine the
nine-life cursed to always bend
what holy friend shakes out nothing
rage-hated figure eight string of ire
damned i love this god and fire! spittle
spews across millennium space on the
seventh day i come to wrath speak
six six six and call it off control the
five four three two vials //
poison chalice, poison child

Tie that quiet star to me

Sabrina Tolve

Tie that quiet star to me
with the red leaf you lost;
it shines like salt sewn
to the yew planted under the bridge.

The fox met in the shadow
crowns me queen of mice
among puddles and dew
racing towards the hill.
It bears humps of rock
nailed to the sky with a crucifix.

The world reflects itself upside down
in bogs and overturned sod fields;
the voices of columns curse me
abandoned to glow in my mouth
as *Cailleach Bhéara* lashes my eyes.



FLAMING FAREWELL

Sean Ewing

The Hilltop

Damien Gentry

The fog has settled in. It obscures the ground.
If I trip on something and crack my skull, at least I'm already home.
The pale, yellow light emanating from the lantern flickers.
Even it is trembling in this sea of dread.
I pass by the familiar names and whisper to them
The wind whispers back, beckoning me to stay awhile
The large moon grows more consuming with every step.
If it crashes into the earth, at least I'm already home,
I trek up the hill, the recent rain making it hard to hold on.
There you are, high above the rest.
I lay the lantern down beside you.
Reading your name brings you back.
I pour my canteen into the ground.
You need to stay hydrated.
I brought a special treat for you today.
Homemade cookies.
I shove one into the ground, it cracks.
That's okay, they crack in your mouth anyway.
Just don't let the birds eat them this time, or I won't come back.
You think I'm bluffing, well you're absolutely right.
I could never go on living without you.

Sparks / Chispas

Angela Acosta

A bird call nestles
itself at the back of my neck,
a nest of crackling synaptic contentment
each morning.

The mockingbird sentinels
assert their presence in the foggy air.

The highway south
gave me little to go on, yet
my gray daydream
morphed into kaleidoscopic
astigmatism
and in the sparks of color, I saw
lo que vivía dentro de mí
what lived within me,
awaking the kindling
of Spanish, even here,
of a Brazilian neighbor's
Bom dia wishing me good morning.

For once I am alight
in a halo of dawn
I'd always slept through,
of the irises of my own eyes
shining forth a new town to call home.

Goldfinches

Danielle Hanson

The goldfinches are blown
from branch to branch
as the wind turns its collar
up against the sun. A rock curls
into itself, sleepy predator.
The grass, unafraid, lifts its head.



Three Years

Randi Schalet

Since his last breath
He's not worrying about where he'll live next
About having enough cigarettes

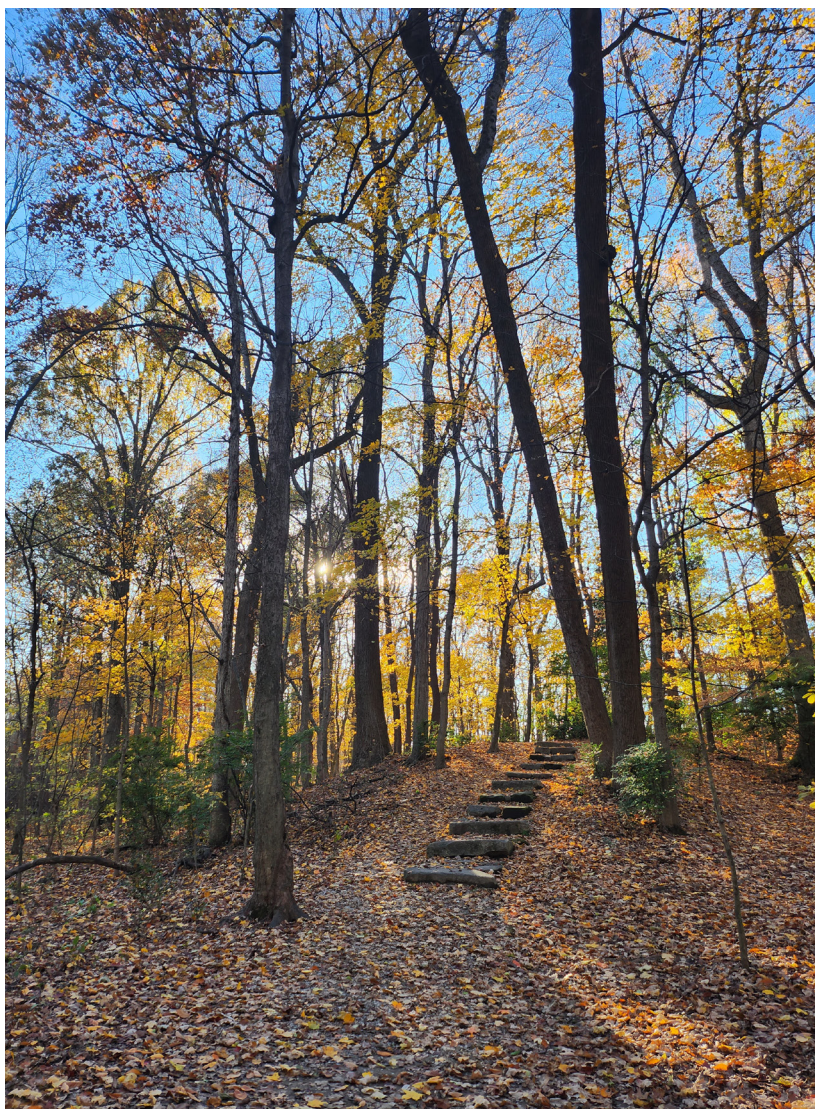
He's not calling his godfather begging for cash
Stealing his fuck buddies' check
Squatting in an old Motel Six

Was he thinking of his mama
With her arms crossed
My phone turned off

Or did he picture himself
A boy asleep in my lap,
Head lodged against my neck

Or remember when we sat on hard stools,
Visiting through scratched plexiglass
If he hadn't died that day

It might have been a month later
That's what everyone told me
Time to quit feeling guilty



STAIRWAY TO DREAMS

Kaitlin A Figg

How I Drive My Sky

Jonathan Ukah

I have decorated my body to drive my sky home
to where my crown will lie in wait;
I have made my body the colour of my sky,
unfrozen, no longer decaying,
but blossoming into a flower of the moon.
There, where my pain leads me away
and I could not gain the victory I deserved;
there, where the tremors of the mountains
have pushed my glory further into the valley;
there, where my hope drowns in a sea,
as the river of my song dries up in my mouth,
there, I will drive my sky to resurrect
my dead bodies and mend my broken bones.
I will raise a blue bottle filled with my sky,
empty its vial of oil on my cracked head;
that whatever must die for my honour
will die now for me to live in time,
when my living is not too late.
How else would I outlive my burden,
if my sky has become too heavy for me
And my head is too small for its weight?
Now, my body is ready, the road is smooth,
mountains are low; valleys glitter with rocks;
if I must drive my sky along, it must be now.



the cicadas cry

Matthan Slith

my thoracic cavity vibrates
you surprise me

i cannot draw breath, it's all caught
up just above my diaphragm and
solidifying, solidifying
like cement, not ice
because it is the middle of summer—your
favorite, isn't it?

but like Dad, i am cold.

weeping willow sways creaking
you sit hunched under influence
of self-medication, your haze—
you cannot see me when you say,
You are why
I want to die.

i feel the asphalt of our driveway,
too-hot singeing soles, my feet
yet don't feel solid, but my
vibrating chest does. the cicadas
are better at crying than i.

in elementary i learned to value
my ghosting solidity, or
my own two feet
short stature, high marks
though my grades in empathy
were questionable

yes,
i prided my superior vocabulary—
in my word-bank plethora of
playground esotericism,
i had, already, the word *suicide*,
but it wasn't my word.

i feel the weight of my labors,
hollow. i stand—
the air's too thick out here,
i cannot speak

rushed, i leave you sitting bitter
cicadas, wailing—
i think maybe they cry dry, too
vibrating, weeping with their bodies
while my chest starts to burn.

Scatter the seeds on the willow

Sabrina Tolve

Scatter the seeds on the willow,
its bones groan at dawn,
each finger is a flame
that fades in the tide.

It's the algae rising from the port,
the cherry tree that chews the hours.

You bend like a bitter bramble
searching for amulets,
you have two golden gems in your throat
framing your vocal cords.

Like in *Lárág* you will teach me,
opening a new whirlwind in my chest
of drawers and north winds.



NEW LIFE
Claudia Tong



On Making the Call to Unhook the Ventilator

Stephanie McCarley Dugger

Let's say the call was something less
than death, something more

along the lines of *your father*
grabbed another nurse. Let's say

it was someone else who made the call
to end things. Let's say

there was nothing more
than relief after, the calm

of knowing he wouldn't hurt
anyone again. Let's say he lived

and never touched another
person. Let's say he grew

to remember me again—
the catfish pond, *Indiana Jones*

on TV at dinner, my birthday. Let's say
this year's birthday, Father's Day,

Christmas burst with his song,
his bass voice announcing

he is here, here, here. Let's say
his presence is a gift, not a sign

to step away. Let's say we step in front
of the plow one more time,

and this time, we call his name,
beg for him to slow down,

not because we are worn, but
because we want to see earth

sifting below our feet, the blue
of his eyes catching the cattle

grazing in the field beyond, their heads bowed
in reverence to what my father grew.

pluck

Anatalia Vallez

An esthetician once told me it is normal for eyebrows to look more like
cousins than twins

I wonderered how it must feel for them to be compared in such a way

one does not speak English
an eldest daughter forced to raise her siblings
she satiates her freedom on the outskirts of town
on her fifteenth birthday she hid a growing belly under her dress
this eyebrow doesn't like to be plucked
will grow in whichever direction makes her feel most wild

the other is a middle-child latchkey kid
a good student who never crosses the street alone
this eyebrow likes to be kept in order
enjoys some praise when I raise her in response
she knows more than what she lets on
she's the one you have to look out for

they were raised in different countries, families, religions but when they are
threaded together,
they are unstoppable

Sonnet that thinks itself too grand

William J. Joel

You walk into a room and words stand still,
suspended in the air like logos drawn
by airplanes. Smiling, you control by will
the focus of a dozen minds, each torn
away from mundane plans, their eyes now fixed
on how and where you move, on what you need
or what they think you need, a simple trick
for one who cares for nothing but to feed
on pure attention, sucked away from souls
too weak to fight a mesmerizing charm,
like atoms slowly swirling towards a hole
so black no love can hope escape its harm.
But then you err, you reach a bit too wide,
as dread of imperfection swells inside.

The Irises of Failure

Laurel Benjamin

Van Gogh's dreams about failure began after the ministry,
when he decided his future would fill his mouth

with stipple and shading, secrets of grey in those streets.
Before the colors. I painted my dream after him,

knowing I'd have failures, yet hoped to make it to the Alps,
poster taped to the bedroom wall—not familial

but the railroad calling, lakes, mountains, and irises. On our coast,
I'd seen another iris, bordered by fault lines, tectonic plates

imprisoning their yellow beards, white poet's shirts. A trail
followed the estuary, where seaweed heads masqueraded as seals.

In a new film, Van Gogh is marketed with the catch phrase
“poets and lovers” as museum experts describe the passion

of storytelling and how he altered the settings. For the little park
across from the Yellow House, he added a row of trees,

left in the crowd woman with long skirts, removed the weeds.
Surely the spurts of irises belonged. My own efforts with art

amounted to cross-hatching a future city. In one dream,
someone handed a map of purples to construct an identity.

In art class, they skipped the part about turning to page
thirty four in the textbook and painting grandparents

you never met, or your mother's eyes, filled
with too much light. What they didn't say, blue mixed

with a dot of red could be your own personal palette.
For Van Gogh, once allowed to leave the sanitarium,

he filled in the wheat fields with an unnatural
shine, hands separating the sticky hairs into bunches.

As if he was the wind. I have no argument
for failures—why an artist claims a landscape

for themselves. Even in the film they can't help mentioning
the ear, his thin neck barely supporting the bandage.

I'm not criticizing what lived deep inside him. I've held
my ear in the middle of the night, as if a knife

stabbed. One specialist after another, imaging, nerve block,
nothing resolved. Only the irises soothe, stiff multiplicity

in dark jackets, out on the Point among grass stubble
bearing a silver edge. Walk through a triangular wood,

over a bridge, up a hill and further, a narrow trail,
to find their skirts, almost taped shut.



WHO MADE ME
Morgan R Jenson



SPRING DANCE

Mirjana M.

Poetry Rejection Transposed

Robert Estes

Thank you so much for inviting
me to spend the night with you.
I am honored by your offer.
I know it takes courage to ask
a woman that. I seriously
considered it. Unfortunately,
I won't be able to accept
your offer at this time. I get
so many opportunities
that I must say no to many
attractive men. My rejection
of your offer should not be taken
as a judgment on your appeal.
Sexual attraction is such
a highly subjective matter.
I'm sure you will find the perfect
match. Don't be discouraged. Keep those
lines rolling. Please feel free to come
back in six months' time to buy me
a drink and try me once again.

Engagement

Emily Johnson

If I said your world will shrink to a pinprick,
when you thought it needed your supervision -
Then would you still know the cotton-framed folds of rest,
under a quilt of muted mourning hourI am moored by Overton's window,
and my childhood bedroom,
and an eternal half-mast flag
But the order and rule of instinct
returns me to blood and spit,
and a dying woman's thoughts on war-
'they don't know what real troubles are'
We will always have crying in the shower
and 'Dancing in the Dark,'
the pink calamine of poison ivy
and crashing your car into a snowbank,
but I will never know the scratch-off, fingers-crossed
wish of cruelty for others and kindness for myself
When they are handing out papers, mine will say of not from,
inconvenient for everyone, and yet,
the truth.

All In a Day

Carol Seitchik

It could fool you, the clapboard houses
in their peaceful arrangement after snow.
How typically New England with the sky
grayed as though a fine scrim washes
the scene in drama. Though today
my daily walk is haloed with sadness
as just yesterday my dog leaned his body
against mine and today, it was different.

That end of life on his breath, so labored.
His body stiffened. The difficulty of moving,
so he stood on unsteady legs
and I could sense the confusion
and I knew that he knew he was closing
as the mist in the air outside
was surely casting a layer, obscuring detail,
nothing clearly discernable as though
a holding pattern when you know life
can no longer be rescued.

Returning home, after he is no more,
I stare into the stillness outside
surprised by a huge flock of robins
arriving on the corner maple.
It is February. The snow is deep,
the food source slim. I read that flying
in nomadic flocks protects from predators,
that life and death precipice.

But there is a beauty here, in their numbers,
their orange breasts a brushstroke of color
lighting up the hazy sky. And I am looking out
for something. How the unknown turns me toward
an omen, to feel safe passage in the leaving.
Right now, like the robins, he is still everywhere.

The Honey King

David Milley

Spinning honey that hot October day, you returned
the first of the empty frames into their boxes,
set them on a hive for the bees to clean. You sat
a while, and drank a beer, your reward –

then another, and then, I suppose a few more.
I'd promised to document your harvest of honey.
Camera in hand, I wandered out back. I found you,
frame full of honeycomb held in both hands.

You peered at me from the dark of the barn.
You wore nothing but cut-off shorts, boots,
and a crown of cloth strips – red, white, and blue –
torn from a shirt I wore in my hippie days.

You'd looped all the short strips on the longest one
and knotted it around your head. You pointed:
"Tomato ties!" Sweat ran through all the hairs
on your chest. Your earring glinted like your eyes.

You held your trophy frame aloft. The smell of honey
drenched us. Tanned arms gleamed, sticky with honey
from the comb. You grinned madly. Stray bees drifted,
curious, hungry, through the door. I snapped the shot.

I still have that photo. This morning, while you wait
downstairs, nursing your porridge and watching the news,
I sit with a small wooden box on our new-made bed.
I open the lid, riff through, and pull up your picture.

In my hand, you still glisten, under your crown of rags.
You beam at me once more: sweaty, drunk, delighted.

You Can See Forever

Russell Willis

Swept clean
by incessant wind,
Sky drew farther away
with each upward glance

Sun, no longer a sterile sphere of light,
no longer a spawn of physics,
pierced Sky as a mortal wound,
enflamed, gorging on all remnants
of life as it swooned to the West.

Desert swam in its optical mist.
flinging shadows where nothing
blocked Sun's glare,
decapitating far-off peaks,
robbing Horizon of any purpose,
levitating birds of prey apparently
against their will to pierce
the mist in search of supper.

Then to realize
it was I who had
been chosen as
witness for the prosecution;
subpoenaed to take the stand.

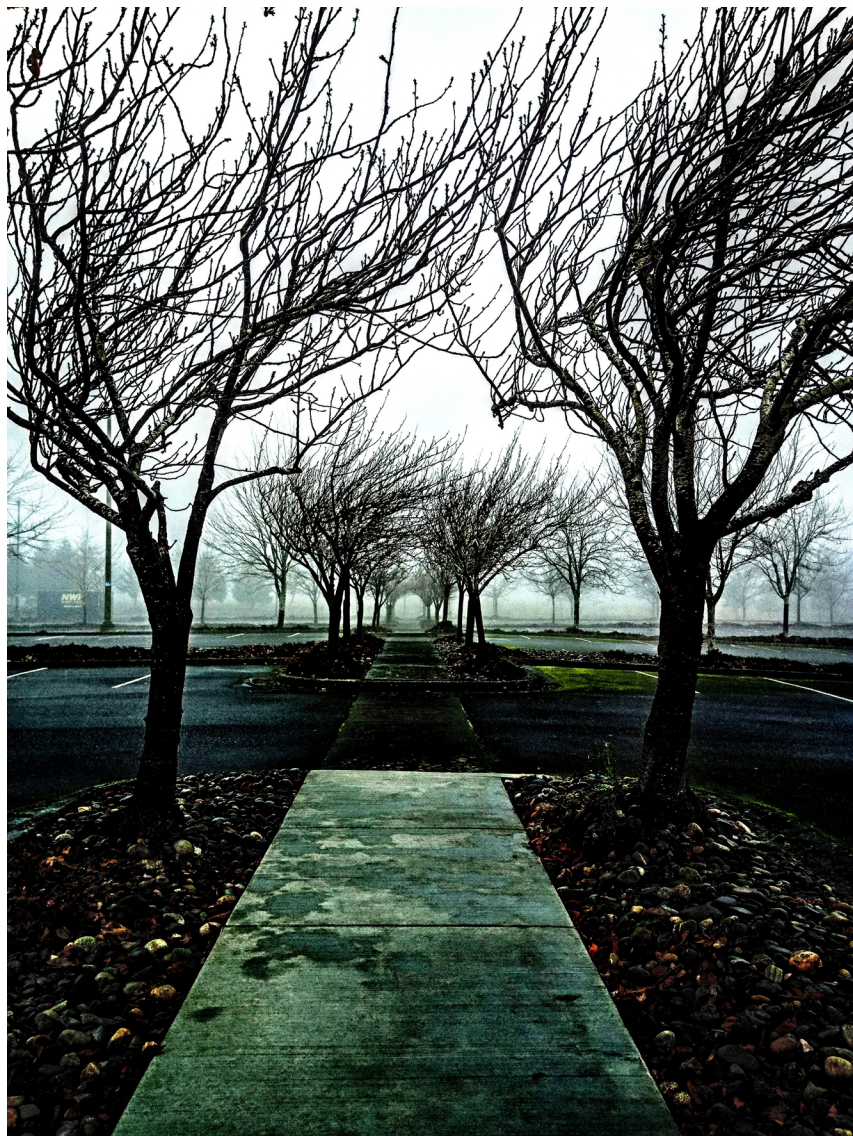
I clambered onto the dock,
with some sort of conviction
to find myself at
the top of the world;
a witness, yes,
but also convicted,
convicted wholly and fully of
the immense wonder of it all:

A thin canopy of air
separating the vacuum of space
from a teeming bio-sphere.

That star that marks each
day, even if clouds possess
the audacity to strive
to hide its gaze.

Earth, here an immense expanse of
life and beauty even in its
parched desolation, spinning
out its own web of life;

From that perch, fit for an eagle,
I found myself gazing at Forever;
never to look at any aspect of
life as I might have before
I reached the crest of the world.



GOTHIC TUNNEL

Rik Mazolli

Special Report

S.D. Dillon

—*Lines from weather.com*

The weatherman pulls a coat hanger
From his jacket. Alert. Watch storm
In 14 seconds. You need to see this
Before it's gone. Incredible caves. My house:
Satellite view.
Our favorite things.

We're on the brink of finding alien life.
Take us with you.



out — gone fishing

A.J. Parker

let the men
choke you

they're bored
& have
nothing better
to do

than to pretend
you're a trout
caught on their
line,

wriggling
for fun &
splashing
for more,

why gut
something
so fine &
glistening
as that

you don't
bleed
out but
you don't
breathe in

the best part
is they can
throw you
back to the
current &
do it
all over
again,

puncturing holes
in your gummy mouth
until you don't
know

if you can survive
in water either

In Golden Chains

Lionel A. Newman

The flowers that overgrow
your sown eyes
are too many colors,
blossoms burst crisp whispers
of *You...*

We dance into the red wine music
where objects in space meet skin.
We land where
each
breath
takes us,
the last thing we see as our eyes slowly close
and the very first thing when we open.

Night after night
we dance for the first time
knowing better than to give each other away.
Music plays from the other room
and here is the ringing of little ankle bells
hung loose in golden chains,
here it is stepping lightly over your eyes.

Here are the seeds left on your tongue
after we drank from the sweetest fruit.

Τα πουλιά

Ελλη Παιονίδου (Elli Paionidou)

Θ' ακολουθήσω τα βήματα μου πρὸς τη μεθυσμένη πόλη
και θ' ανεβώπροσεκτικιάτις σιαλωσιές
εκτελώντας ένα τάμα και ένα εσταυρωμένο.
Θ' ανεβώμιά–μιάτις σιαλωσιές που τρίζουν
– παλιάτσος ακροβάτης του Πιασό–
και το γύψινο πρόσωπο μου θα γεμίσει ρωγμές.
Ύστερα θα ελευθερώσω μιάαγκαλιάπουλιά
που δεν γνωρίζουν πιάούτε τ' όνομα τους
μα που γνωρίζουνε καλάτην μοίρα αυτούτου τόπου
με τα τζαμιάκαι με τις εκκλησιές που κλαίνε.
Γνωρίζουνε καλάτη μοίρα αυτούτούτόπου
και την τραγουδούν περίλυπα πίσω απόμπετόνινα κλουβιά.
Ύστερα να κλείσω σφικτάτη ψυχήμου
σαν κουτίτης Πανδώρας που μόλις άδειασε
και να πάρω πάλι μοιραία το κατήφορο.

The Birds

Peter J. King

I'll retrace my steps to the drunken city,
climb the scaffolding with care
to make an offering, a crucifixion.
Step by step I'll climb the creaking scaffolding
– one of the acrobat clowns of Picasso –
my plaster face all webbed with cracks.
Then I'll let birds free, an armful,
who've forgotten what they're called
although they know the fate of this place well,
its mosques and weeping churches.
They know the fate of this place well,
and sing it sadly from the backs of concrete cages.
Later, let me slam my soul shut,
a Pandora's box whose contents have just flown,
and let me make again the fated descent.

Lulu (*in the San Francisco Botanical Gardens*)

Lisa Delan

—*For Luna Pearl Woolf*

i see you in the arboretum
seducing first spring
beneath a crown of bees
your dimpled lips
petals parting—
the nectar of a low laugh
a spread of unwitnessed joy
pulses by the beardtongues
in the conspiratorial sun—
later you will hand me
your loss and invocations
palms briny with our
empties and yet—
i see this moment now
variegated
a leaf between pages
waiting to be turned
long before we learn we are
already everything

together

William W Arnold

and i forgot what the days looked like,
with the socks on the floor,
and the eggs on the stove,
and the gray of the morning.

and i forgot what the days looked like,
when the sun was dying,
my heart was failing,
and it was all slipping away.

like the run on sentences,
and the hours spent at work,
and the bells ringing through the school hall,
and how everything is quiet now,
too damned quiet,
the tick of my watch,
and the pulse in my neck,
it is as if i could hear it,
all slipping away.

and i forgot what the days looked like,
how your eyes look when you smile,
and how the grass smells afters its cut,
and how my mother is allergic to gluten,
and my dad wears socks with his slippers,
and how my brother has a scar on his chin.

and i never know what to tell them,
when they ask where i am from,
like we don't all wake up,
to the same sun,
and fall asleep,
to the same stars.

Moonless Night

Stephen Mead

Find, when will you find?

Pass a sea-side cemetery & gulls rise from the stones.
I am riding a bike & the gulls, snow-white, make the graves
appear to ascend. Gray gulls, pearl-pallor, & the road winding
through black towards more black as these wheels
sizzle with wetness, the dawn's ocean-spit.

How will you ever find, conceive the notion
to bring a compass & start the chart?

Heart by heart, dark tree past trees even darker,
I part from the fantasy and hope parts also.

To be lost & yet continue is an independent thing.
To move through the moonless as a bat would
shelters this hungry journey,
a Catherine-wheel-alert
to only my own spokes.



ALONE
Sean Ewing

Slug

Collin Garrity

in gingham boxers i kneel
scrubbing layers from a painting.
gentle circles on the dust, flip the rag to circle
clean side, then into the grocery bag i'm using
as trash. coughing gently as i unobscure circles of
vibrant red, a room. in it, seven figures and an animal.
 a man in a suit, shooting an apple off his own head
 with a handgun, kneeling. his eyes closed tight.
 a man opening a mint door, entering the painting.
 a man melting and loosing shape, surrounded
 by a gray aura, added to separate his skinless muscle
 from the burn red of the room's background floor
 a man in a cheerleader's outfit, pointing out of frame
 and looking up, following his own suggestion.
 a man, cross-legged in jeans, head in his hands.
 a man with a sweater, brimmed hat, suitcase
 and baseball bat. it may be on fire, or maybe
 the paint has chipped away to reveal red below.
 the last man is naked on the floor, drowning
 himself with a beer can the size of his own body
i have cleaned this painting, i will fix the broken stretcher
i will put on my pants, socks, shoes and go for a walk.
the animal, behind the green door, is a six foot slug,
looking into the empty corner of the room
this is the figure that will haunt me, faceless
and living trapped in a world it did not ask for.
humans made this world, the seven men, the room
with its darker walls. the door handle and door
and the absence of door in the wall where it rests

untitled

Ivy Vega

there is a holiness
to resilience

so i force a joining
of my hands
palms
like magnets
pursing
different norths
and i bare my knees
to the earth
knowing that this
is the closest
i'll ever get
to prayer

Everything is ~~as it was~~ left as it ~~was~~ on bed, striped ~~blankets~~. But in the blue ~~light~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~light~~, ~~and~~ ~~the~~ ~~knobs~~ ~~with~~ ~~the~~ ~~light~~ ~~fringe~~. The double table with a stack of books. The half-drunk glass of water. ~~Standing glass~~

I know my [redacted] future. [redacted] my [redacted] [redacted]
[redacted] the table, I searched by the water glass [redacted] some thing
[redacted] my [redacted] past, and by [redacted] [redacted] my safe passage
[redacted]

I wonder if we'll know each other after this.

I sit on the edge of ~~the bed and think of you. What if I forget you~~
~~and my memory. Old enough to feel the soft hem of my own~~
~~shirt, feeling the gentle touch of your hair. I know how much it's like~~
 this. ~~What if I forget you and my memory. Old enough to feel the soft hem of my own~~
~~shirt, feeling the gentle touch of your hair. I know how much it's like~~

I'm
scooting
waiting
propping
pulling—
the wet of
Tender Point. There's a pleasant
syrup
I freeze.

pump the brakes
 , hold my hand
 to my mouth and hate the taste

BEFORE THE LEAP

Rory Oliveri

Thaw

Alessio Zanelli

That's how it should be.
Around mid-spring the sun starts
meaning business,
the mountain resumes
its journey to the sea.
When it thaws,
the subtle mirage of rebirth
glistens all over again.
Enraptured and checked
by the upside-down abyss above me,
I stand on a glacial boulder,
scanning the alluvial fan
spreading below the head of the valley.
I don't know what to look for,
I look at what I don't know.
One day my body will turn to stone,
my memories to melting snow,
my spirit to running water.
Nothing lasts forever.
All is in continuous transformation.
That's how it is.

following my older friends across the high meadow

Lionel A. Newman

before we reach the wooden gate toothed in tall grass
I look up from the steep path underfoot
and stop to watch distant green hills dotted with horses

inside the shrine hall my friend gently insists
bleaching the grass stains from my white robe
is simpler than I think—don't soak it for so long that it yellows

after the evening candles have gone out
she kneels facing me with her back to the altar
and turns polished marble eyes on me

whispering an invitation
to take her auspicious place
at a dinner to be held

in the home of a prosperous elder gentleman
one or two guests will sit at each long table
set with silverware and dishes on white cloth

I must not eat until the host sits down
not knowing what he looks like or where he will sit
keeping alert for someone to arrive

at what might be a seat of power

Red Butte Canyon

Val Margolius

My mountain has shells in her hair,
delicate white screws, witnesses
from the pleistocene epoch ice ages
when this valley was full
of water rather than mormons.

She chews my worries
while I strain my knee to hike her bumps,
her skin so coarse it drags underfoot,
and she spits out the equivalent
of a fortune cookie slip.

You may want this life, but do you enjoy it?

I will never know the valley
as a bowl of trees,
instead as a concrete plate
that knows my desires:
to breathe, to ache, to believe.

Reverence lived here alongside
Utes and Goshutes, in shells
sinking to rest on a lakebed
like memory foam, in the sunsets
over the hill we carved for copper.

My mountain gives me injuries
as the oldest form of penance
for the faithless, my bones fraying
into swirls of shell in gravel deposits
as new relics of old devotion.

I may not want this life, but I enjoy it.

Remnants

Sarah Frost

My stomach is tumbling onto the subway tracks hours after I read an article about how love shouldn't make you feel like the bottom has dropped from it, thanks to a text my ex sent about the origin of chicken bones in tree pits—discarded landmines littering city streets,

which every city dog can inexplicably uncover with ease. I spent the day at the junk store reflecting on what we leave behind; sifting through leftover legacies from estate sales and poring over family dynamics, escaping with a handful of photos fossilized in black and white.

I walked away wondering if this granddaughter inherited a love of fishing from her expert grandfather or if that trio formed a friendship spanning decades; I'm certain those four brothers were up to no good. The train doors are closing, and I'm stuck

in the idea of what it is to be missed. Several of these people are longed for by someone, and a man thought of my dog lovingly while listening to a specific story about street trash. Memory is funny in that way; his sweatshirts are tucked under my bed,

but the other day I scrolled past a shared note of a grocery list and the check mark next to the onions might as well have been a love letter from the 15th century. Gone was my presence in the present day, and there I was, back inside

what it means to build something together—a life, or a meal. I'm convinced this is what's left of us when we go: mischievous, ordinary moments cast in the cling film of recollection, and how we took care of one another, on dog walks and at dinner.

Reclamation

Craig Byers

When the mushrooms claim my flesh
and usher me back into the soft soil
let them make flowers from my lungs
the abandoned pale husk rationed away
by the toadstools who can put me back
into the ground and I can be intertwined
with the dirt that brings forth all things



Right in the Middle of It All

Stephanie McCarley Dugger

—For Jill

There was the baby
finally
twenty years' longing

And there was the baby
gone
pieces
in an afternoon

And there I was
standing
in your office
the first place I thought of

And there was your arm
pulled
around my shoulders

And there was the scent
of lavender

Let me start again

There is the baby
gone
and you now gone
and I have learned
we age into loss
the way blood
slips from the body
the way the growth
in the chest
in the womb
will mean death
and love and
death
and

There was the baby in me
and there was the cancer
in you
and neither of us
knew until it was too
late
too late

Paper Houses

Don L. Brandis

Other people live in paper houses. Visiting them is like opening a novel, reading a few pages here and there not knowing what's before or after. What they say when we're not here. Whose faces they wear. How to tell if we too live in paper houses: are the walls blank as printer paper when we awake, then covered with scribbles in a tiny, illegible script when we go back to sleep? A hand we don't recognize. Perhaps a visitor we barely recall who mumbled pleasantries and cliches. We don't think we invited them, or they showed up too early or too late when we weren't at our best. It's like they visited when we weren't home, left us notes we can't read. We would have remembered them writing on the walls.



END OF THE LANE

Claudia Tong

Did she grow out of it?

Leighton Schreyer

That's all he wants to know,
this child. If people grow

out of hate

the way they do shoes, which,
I suppose, is his way of asking if

there is reason for hope.

Oh, how I want to say yes. To speak only
of the way wine sweetens with age, the way

it betters in time.

How I want to say that the tannins turn,
that they dissipate, decay. How I want to say that

the sourness sweetens,

that the bitterness blossoms into a rich bouquet
of elderflower or apricot or molasses,

maybe. I want

to not explain the stain. The way it, too, deepens,
darkens, becomes richer in time. The way it

takes a little more

out of you with each bloody wash. Until.
Threadbare now. Battered. Bruised. *Out,*

damned spot; out

I say! Wouldn't that be something?
If we just grew out of our bite?

All that spite?

Just woke up wiser one day. Just.
How to say *it's not that simple*. To explain

that love ages well,

but so does hate—hardens with time.
How to say *No, she didn't grow out of it*.

And still.

How to say *Sometimes, often. If only*. To explain
that sometimes, the bigger we get, the smaller

the world becomes.

Note: The italicized text reading “Out, damned spot; out I say!” is a line
spoken by Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare’s play, *Macbeth* (5.1.35).

AND I GO ON SAYING

Renee Kalagayan

I do not want to repeat my life,
the into and out of me, my dying breath,
what Elizabeth Bishop calls *the terrible oxygen*.

It's night and I'm in Maine and over
the black, wet slate of a pond,
a loon chucks his song across the surface,
sobs for morning. I wish I didn't
stutter in conversation

the way a woodpecker
bashes his bleeding head
into keys of bark,

drumming off-key. I don't care
to repeat myself or my brown hair
mistaken for black, the way it flies out
from my skull and reaches for whatever isn't
my scalp. All the parts of me want
to get away, my peacoat hacked into strips by the wind
and falling five paces behind me, my chapped lips
peeling outward, my collarbones protruding
from the skin that traps them. Over the black,
wet slate of a pond in Maine, my reflection
in the dark pool reaches up and pulls me
into the murk of myself. Night is
a poem which repeats, and I find myself
over and over staring into its awful eye. And
in the morning that always comes,
I am here. I am still living.

Autumn

Loralee Clark

A cloak of stormy birds
the color of thunder
heavy in their whispering,
songs telling stories that
spine shiver into my feet
carrying me backwards,
nonlinear, unpredictable
underneath bitten nails
through twisted cordage,
hidden, wooded paths
of compost and leaves,
damp must and funk--
mold like a homecoming.



SOMMELIER
John Swofford

Star Walk

Jason Boitnott

It's only a few seconds of a day,
but among the most timeless
of the many given, that moment
when I click off my chore lamp
and predawn darkness engulfs all,
even gleaming cat eyes, the tin-shiny
barns, silhouetted elms, this farm
stubbornly dug six generations deep.

Above, pinprick points of light
twinkle through the celestial fabric
and heighten my dust's desire to see
what lies further behind the curtain,
both beyond a body and within it,
where carbon, oxygen, hydrogen,
nitrogen, and tiny traces of iron,
pulse in the sky, throb under our skin.

But how to compare us to such
majesty -- cold as I am this winter,
spilling my cracked bucket of grain,
fumbling to reignite my faint light?
Diminutive, frail and brief, we are
so much less than a single star.
And yet, we are so much more, too,
even as we stumble in darkness.

The Serenade

Anika Gomez

Carbonated water swishes in my mouth
Bubbles chirp
I swallow
They crash into the circumference of my throat
Rattling my nerves
Eyes wet

Eyes wet
I lay on the paper cover
On top of the medical bed
Close my eyes
And listen to the hum
Of the air conditioner
As it serenades me to sleep

As it serenades me to sleep
Flowers are watered in the evening
It's summer
Babicka's garden is lit by the late setting sun
Crickets begin to gossip
Mosquitoes rise above the thick grass
Slugs leave slimy paths on the concrete
And Maminka calls me for dinner

And Maminka calls me for dinner
But I'm entranced by the patterns on Lola's skirt
It's worn as a strapless dress
And it swirls around my body
Following its movements with every spin
Forming an umbrella-like shape around my ankles

Forming an umbrella-like shape around my ankles
My baby blue dress sits perfectly on my thin frame
A confirmation wafer melts on the roof of my mouth
I walk towards my family's assigned pew
And kneel

*In the name of the father
the son
the holy spirit*

Amen

A Simple Equation

Raven Magill

I've tried to tell you
who I am,
how we add up.

It's not so easy.
The equation
isn't simple.

I tell you

my stomach is a tangle of blue Christmas lights
burning cold.

My heartbeat is a stream of leaf-clogged water
(something that an antlered-thing
once drank from).

My eyes are halogen glowing
in office buildings at 11pm,

and my longing for you is
a cat sprinting out of the dark
across an empty street.

Maybe
you can do the math.

There is No Clean Glass in a Laundromat

Rebecca Surmont

And there is often no glass either, mostly plexi, graffitied, etched.
The last of the automats, like a distant great uncle with big eyes
churning, spinning, a good rinse.

And you never see anyone wiping machines there
even though everyone sits and waits their cycles, resigned.

Collisions of smells and stains.
These are not easy places --
scuffed, unpolished, washers' eyes downward
abandoned newspapers or maybe *People*
just enough to make one feel like a tiny load.

Celebrities don't use laundromats.

An hour spins to dull slumber
warm drier drumming, fragrant fabric softeners, toxic but promising.
How clean leads to smart? I'm sure someone has done a study
because here we all come in one way, leave thinking we're slightly better.

Outside the cars, quarters, stiff baskets on legs come rolling in,
rolling like no conversation. I stare at these tanks – think tanks -
because I find myself thinking, meditating
on suds, their tasky friction,
on their dependable automatic outcomes.



FISH

Alaina Hammond

Aurora Borealis

Laurel Benjamin

I'm making a small sacrifice in ordering less dim sum.
Then the cart comes around and a basket of pea shoot dumplings
is set on the table next to the clear pot of chrysanthemum tea.
My friend of decades lets me do the ordering. She's removed
a chambray button-down shirt, and underneath, two black
tank tops layered. On this winter day, she still suffers
hot flashes. And if the Northern Lights could enter her system,
the sky show we both saw last night, like a hand sending
morse code, maybe the message would cool her. The Cyrillic
alphabet design fluttered a moment, a lighter blue to the jeweled
star background. And beyond the curtain, gold clouds—
She says, *like eggnog sipped straight out of the jug.*
I'm somewhere in the pork bao by that point, may not hear her
right, but down on earth with a naked eye, we do our best.

The shrimp shumai shouldn't have bigger pieces tucked
inside the dough, but the flavor, delicate, barely garlic

and ginger, hint of chive. We've changed topics to my cat's
lung mass and medication, then to the San Francisco

mayoral race. Then my manuscript. Does she remember
before I moved back home, the letter folded into her purse?

I don't ask if friendship can be written into the sky. She's admitted
throwing out the sweater I gave her. Worn out. As the restaurant

busies, we agree the astronomer who linked the green-purple
disturbances with the sun must have tranquility

to realize the geomagnetic connection. We're no experts.
I say, *Maybe there's a message to advise in a time of war.*

She replies, *You mean a kind of understanding to reach the truth.*

February First

Brandy Bell Carter

The daffodils beside my porch
Insist on blooming.
The winter has been mild for weeks.
I've hovered over them,
Covering them with mulch.

So anxious.

Anticipating the bitter frost
Might burn them any morning.
They pushed right through,
Reaching for the sun,
Even on rainy days like this one.

Now, the yellow fringe of a blossom
Peaks out – ready to burst forth.

I hear some geese in the distance
Just past the trees
Out of sight
The sound of change –
Spring or fall –
A little lonesome.

If only I could be so bold
To bloom or fly
Unafraid of the winter.

Signs

Estill Pollock

Ash of burned bodies, raked
Into the rose beds, the gardener pausing
To wipe rain from his face, the morning
Mist thinning now
To blade-work silhouettes

The woman walking by, close enough
He could smell the incense
From morning Mass on her clothes, sinuous
Through faded greys, a construct
Of ennui and sickly light

The park otherwise
Sunk to wet weather's lacquered look
And sluggish swathes of shadow, patient for
Speaking parts and encounters
As yet unwritten

At the gate a rusty sign, the limits of resolve
Coded into place names
Of other lives, mute witness
To journeys beyond the clutch
Of countdown rosaries

She disappears where the path divides
At the topiary animals, and he again to his routine
Of yesterdays, raked beneath
The blooms, liturgies of lost weather
And streets in rain



OWL
Alaina Hammond

Moon Song

Xingyu Zhao

Some nights the humid air presses
Against my chest like the paws
Of a feral cat, darkness congealing
On the tip of my tongue. I cannot sleep,
My mind drifting back to the blue room
Of my childhood, the plastic stars glowing
On the ceiling, the posters of the solar system
Rustling like my grandmother's breathing,
Sleeping beside me in the creaky
Wooden bed to stave off my nightmares,
Air sweet with leftover Yakult bottles
On the mouldy banister. Once, I taught her
The English word for 月亮, told her
That when I grew up, I would buy the moon
From Chang'e for her. She laughed
And checked the back of my ears for cuts.
Leaning into the throat of night,
I remember somebody telling me
That time passes slower in the equator.
The sedated cars zigzag between the lanes
Of Marymount Road, and the sparrows,
Unseen within the Banyan trees, ruffle
The brown boughs, sing in A major.
Soon, the speckled light on the horizon
Will be snuffed out by the wind, whistling
Through concrete walls, smelling of durian.
The clocktower of Raffles Institution begins
Folding its hands in prayer. Just below,
The outline of a man undresses
Before the pool, arches his back
To look at the sky, and plunges
Into the depths, echoes breaking
The reflection of the yellow moon.

A Self-Reflection of Despair

Carson Calkins

You're naked

slumping on the toilet

Work looms

Twelve hour of sleep
failed to temper tornado
thoughts and wane
life's weight

Seeking escape, your thumb
scrolls on a fractured
screen, mirroring you

The poop refuses to pass
and so will the day

Homesick

Pooja Muthuraj

I wonder how long eyeballs can
Survive out of water,
I want to roll yours around my tongue
Until they leave cuts
All over my mouth,

Spit them into my palm
When I can no longer stand the scalpelling
And hold them there for awhile
To admire at my mercy,
Saliva-soaked and shivering
And perfectly endearing

I will then rinse them with soap and water,
Deposit them back into their bowls,
Glazing them over so they may swim free,

I think I will understand you sufficiently
In the weeks I spend swallowing
The blood they leave

MOUNTAIN BOYS

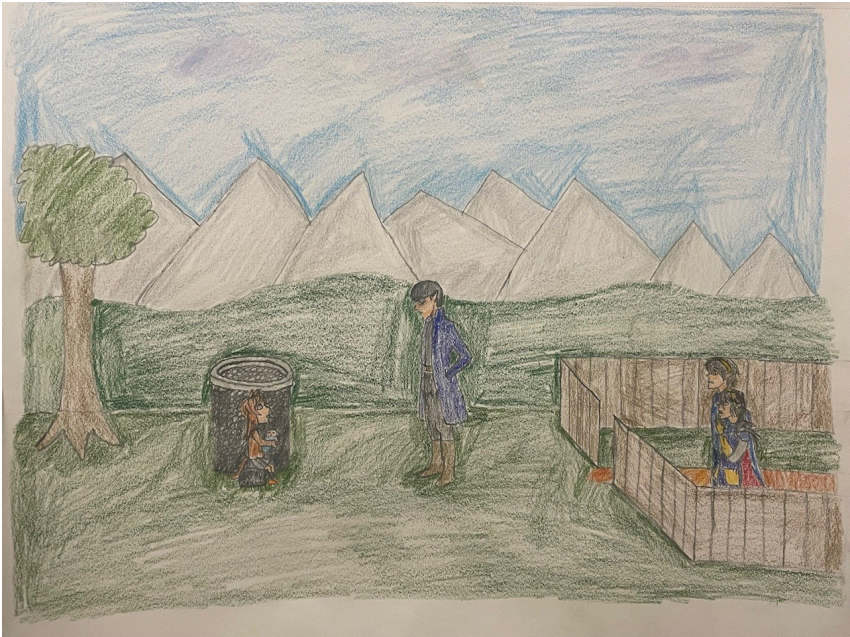
James Long

Arthur in third grade was a frightened squirrel,
and the boys called us queer when I squeezed him
around the waist, because playing made us nice.
All weekend on Millsite Mountain we biked and climbed

trees, gnarly ones boys like us could squeeze
and feel safe in mid-air. No one judged his fluffy voice
those weekends we hitched ourselves up maples
cheek to bark and saw each other's faces exfoliated.

We were safer in mid-air than in school
being judged for pencil marks and androgynous flannel
arms which wanted to wing each other. Once
exfoliated, your face is pre-suicidal, briefly fresh

as the pencil marks and androgynous flannel arms
which fail. I remember Arthur being frightened
clinging to me, his face hopeful and raw
as it was on Millsite Mountain, in the trees.



THE PRINCE AND THE KID

Caleb Knisley

Kikunae Ikeda

Will Diggs

My halmoni was born
in the Seoul of a country
that is surrounded by water
on three sides
hostile relatives
on the one remaining

She never said a string
of kind things
much preferred to
bookend compliments
by calling you a name
that the devil whispered
into her right ear

At her funeral
all people could talk about
was the food she made
how good of a cook she was

the hours she spent
toiling away in her three
or four gardens depending
on what was in season

Umami is a word
coined in 1908
that has no English equal
describing what Americans call
savory meatiness

the flavor of Kikkoman
that can be sensed without
the presence of sodium

When grandmother died
I tipped a bottle of soy sauce
over in the backyard

watched the deep brown
nearly black liquid separate
grass stems as it inched ever
closer to her cabbages

I read somewhere that
plants can taste certain flavors
in the soil
with their roots

all I have to offer them is this
umami from my mean ass
dead grandma



LAVENDER SMILES
Oormila Vijayakrishnan Prahlad



BOUGH OF JOY

Oormila Vijayakrishnan Prahlad

death of a possibility

Matthew Lee

a foreign word
in the comfort
of a lover's tongue.

her eyebrows arch
as if to reassure me, but
it hurts to know my muteness,
my ignorance

of unknown romances,
rhythms of dance
and lovemaking, inflections
of vowels that change

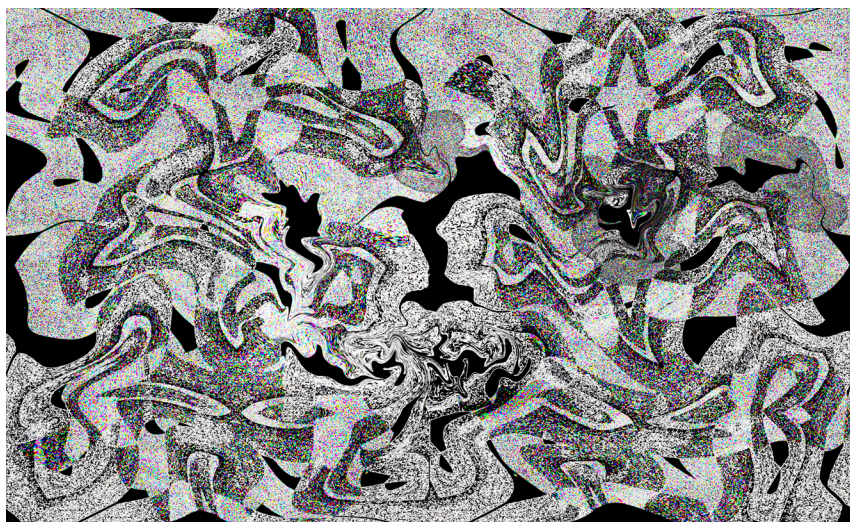
the contour of
conversations,
other lovers,
other loves,

other lands, just now
revealed
her sunlight —
her world.

Undisclosed Recipient

Alina Kalontarov

I look for you in places
you can't possibly be.
Behind the bark of trees,
the shadows pinned by stone.
In the magenta of an anxious sky
or the hopeful smile of a stranger.
Always by the shore, inside the wet sand;
I look for you there the most.
I grab it by the handful, and it's like
catching a chunk of time while it sleeps.
Salt-laden and heavy from the sea,
it sits there like a heap inside my chest,
forgetting to sift through the fingers.
Still, I nudge it along.
Time and again I learn
that the simplest way to find you
is to stroke the absence in my hand.



LOVERS BRING THEIR PAST WITH THEM

Edward Michael Supranowicz

Outside Community

Diana Becket

Voices are sheets of noise shaken by alien
rhythms, tongues press behind teeth
ground into palates

word boundaries merge in jangled clamor
meaning blurred on the edges
of rattled streams

my eyes try to make sense of the smiles
reaching people's eyes, softened
faces rippled by laughter

I search for common experience bridges
strain to link stressed guttural sounds
with frowns and raised brows

irritation demands response to issues
hidden in patterns of sense webs
alive to insiders

lost to outsiders locked behind acceptance
barriers, passed over by faces
sweeping the room

I try to catch gesture clues, interpret
hand movements linked
to ideas I recognize

tensed muscles search for syllables
hidden in my stock of words:
wings to find entry

in strange company, catch wind
currents, fly with the flock.

Mother's Screaming Siren

Donna Dallas



It was the Samurai sword that sliced me
from her womb
I was marked with an X
and the bittersweet takeaways
mapped out
before I knew what they truly were
before I could say boo
I was wrapped in
her botched suicide attempt
her long absence
while on her road to recovery
aunts and uncles
foster fondlers
casseroles
cigarette smoke and whispers

I tried to set
the blanket on fire
while we were under it
so high
from her prescription pills

We shared the body
blood
and bottle
and in the end
the grave
because I'm coming
one day soon Mother

My brittle bones
will be neatly packed
and placed
over hers

False Spring

Andrew Alexander Mobbs

After the ice storm, daggers dripping
from the craftsmen eaves,

I admit I felt hopeful as I strolled past
the soft pink rhododendron

blooms, ready and craving the nectar
of some unpromised new start

(aren't we all) as sporadic sunbeams
flashed like strings of tinsel

in the cedar. I guess I was the ground-
hog spotting its shadow too

early, a seed sprouting from thawed
earth moments before looming

frost. I guess I decided I was done
enduring all the loss quilted

over us these last few years, stitching
us up in headlines of death,

leaden debt, one doomsday prophecy
after the next. Don't worry—

I have learned not to wake until tragedy
disintegrates. I have learned

not to trust a quiet wind.

Absecon Bay Marsh, New Jersey

Elizabeth Fletcher

Two slate-blue herons rise
conjured
from the rippling gray inlet
floating silently on foggy air

Necks stretched skyward
white feather crests blowing
like spume
sailing above the marsh

Wheeling
wings fluttering
Embracing
ephemeral as smoke

Across the bay
Atlantic City's glass skyscrapers rise
Cold and shining
mirroring the herons' dance



AT THE POND

Kaitlin A Figg

Undressing Me

Tony Brinkley

[T]he icy fang / And churlish chiding of the winter's wind / . . .
are counselors / That feelingly persuade me what I am.
—Shakespeare, *As You Like It*

Summer breeze undresses me - summer wind like winter
cold can tell me who I am. *Feelingly*. As ever, ready - I
am here - as always ripening for clean-up - then cleansed

to skeletal. Searching for you - murmuring like the weather
through my skin - I look elsewhere - into the dark pauses
where you are but no one I can speak to - so much of you

if felt for, but not much of me to see you through. If I *could*
search through you tonight, I'd wonder if it's worth it. Am I
worth it? . . . Blood-streams from the heart to brain shape

the blood waves beautifully. What do I think of that?
An after-man (not every-man and not above- nor over-
man) I've also wanted to be finished, done with every-

one I've fought for. I want now to be helpless - to feel
the ground I lie down on and listen for your footsteps -
I take the horn out of my mouth to hear the silent ending.

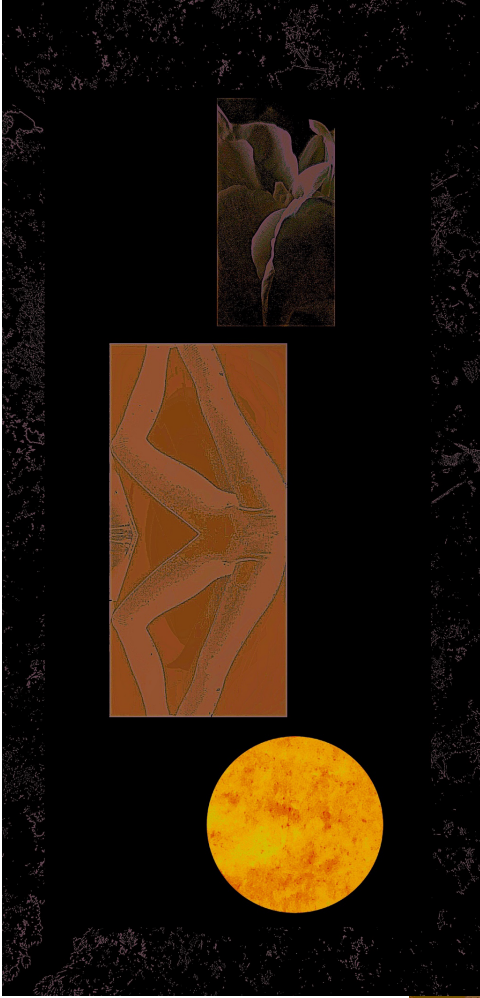
Who can show me what 's unknown when what I want's
not knowing. Humility wants courage, but never the way
I'd want it. I've never lacked compassion - my courage

has been sufficient - but was I ever humble - enough
to feel your splendor? . . . Things I could not find words
for I've feared had no existence. Here on the margins

of non-entity - where words show what their words
can't say - can failures become luminous? Your
mind's in every cell of mine - everywhere it quiets -

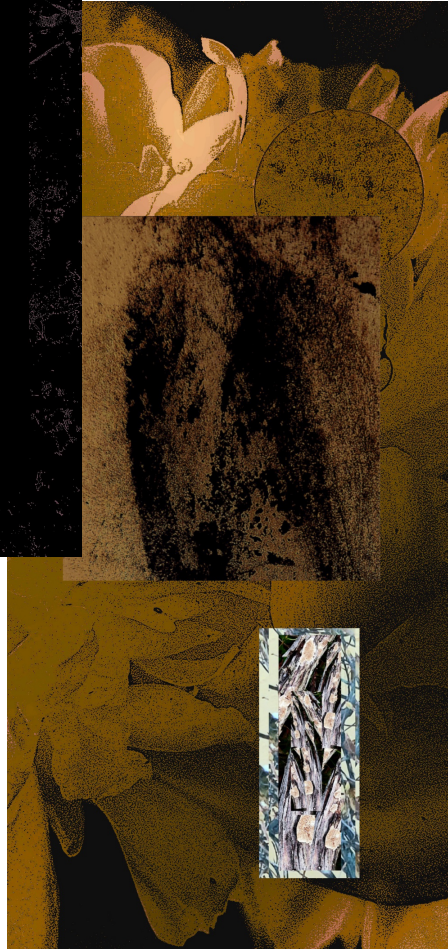
playing nothing overnight and listening to you play
it. At night my thoughts undress me to answer what
you're asking. If I could still go back again, I think

I'd wish I couldn't. I think that you'll be with me
here but wonder if I'll notice. What I've thought
is still unripe and out of sight of seeing. . . .



UNDRESSING ME (ART)

Tony Brinkley





PAINTED COSMOS

Sean Ewing

HAMMERFEST, NORWAY, DEC 6.

Stephen Joffe

an iv drip of spare joys

maudlin sips, blue
light through a straw
to keep from drowning

asthmatic eyesight, the sky-drenched cave.

i must douse the halogens to see
the crest of his
hair, as though at any moment he
will come back
to rest, rose cheeked with

stories-

i have been anywhere but here,

and it was beautiful
and everyone missed

you,

and i would kiss him
with the toothpick still in his
wet mouth;

sunshine
if you love me, leave gently.

Perhaps I love Marigolds the best

Sara Collie

It takes years to recall it – the art of deadheading.
Each tired bud snapped clean from stem,
the gaudy petals wrestled free, thumbnails seeking
a weak spot to carve their rounded bellies
clean apart as two-toned seeds spill out in a rush
of brashly scented sap.

Its scent, my scent.
Its scent, the greenhouse.
The greenhouse, Grandpa.

In my memories of the greenhouse
I am small.

Cobbled together, those old panes
weathered the decades refusing to budge.
Inside, a gentle forest of marigolds rose
from the mud, somewhere to hide.

In my memories of the greenhouse
something slips between the cracks
of the clay-red earth.
Splits apart.

Grandpa was brittle edges tightly bound,
thunderous moods, hail stone fists.
The kind of man to take a hammer
to the things he couldn't fix.

In my memories of the greenhouse
unspoken secrets
stain
our fingertips.

Each seedling pricked out, planted on.
False leaves first, then the true.
The blooming stage, a signal
we were halfway home.

In the present tense I tower
over marigolds with
no greenhouse
to my name.

Only the ache
of that old structure in my bones,
the seed that needs saving,
the light that needs letting in.

A Last Leaf Wind-Dancing on a Frozen Pond.

James Bellanca

Gone, gone. Where have my pond's warm days all gone?
Frost-mirrored like a windowpane, a snow dusted book cover, a winter dinner dish,
my frozen pond's last multi-tone red maple leaf wind-dances whirl-borne.

A steel-eyed eagle crag-flies above the frozen pond, wing-born
above its pylon dotted fishing hole. No koi, no carp, no catfish.
Gone, gone. Where have my pond's warm days all gone?

My frozen pond's last multi-toned red maple leaf wind-dances whirl-borne.
A lone chipmunk digs no snail, no seed, no favored mealtime wish.
He fails to find new season meals, wishful dreams all gone.

A meal-forsaken horned owl blink-eyes a squirrel nest shorn
of nuts and grubs, a once snarfed luncheon dish.
Gone, gone. Where have my pond's warm days all gone?

A tiny finch with broken wing sits alone, hope gone.
He shallow chirps his meatless wish.
My frozen pond's last multi-toned red maple leaf wind dances whirl-borne.

Forlorn, I sit and stare through freezing tears, my pond,
a mirror of my weeping heart; my soul, a wind-whirled dervish.
My frozen pond's last multi-toned red maple leaf wind-dances whirl-borne.
Gone, gone. Where have my pond's warm days all gone?



UNLOCKED
Claudia Tong

Round Lake, Burnt Hills

Jayce Elliott

You were crouched down before a frozen puddle,
hugging your knees and saying “that’s my favorite ice,”
when I knew. Or as my poetry professor would say,
I intuited it.

You picked up a piece and made sure
I watched you throw it against a tree.
“You didn’t appreciate that, watch me again. Come feel it.”
So I did. It was the greatest lesson I’ve learned yet.
Until you moved along to a new spot and said,
“this might be my new favorite ice.”

I needed to kiss you then, and several minutes passing
seemed to cleave between a moment’s edge.
I love kissing the way we do
when I don’t feel like I’m trying to do a thing at all,
I’m just doing it, warm and tucked inside of it with you.

You told me everything looks like a bob ross painting
And I agreed. I haven’t even seen a bob ross painting
that I can recall.
I thought to look at some after that,
and I thought about the brambles I picked
from last summer in these very spots I share with you,
and how much you love blackberries, kind of the way
you love landscapes.
How your mom told me that your dad pretended to like them
when you were little and you made him eat them with you.

I thought about it all night until it was two in the morning and
thirteen degrees outside, my lips brittle and cherry red.
But when I held my listless hand against your cherried cheek
and felt your tongue touch my lip
it was suddenly the only warmth I could ever fathom
and the only climate I cared to consider.

You slid my sleeve up my arm to trace the skin
all the way home and told me not to get chilly.
I told you I wouldn't as if it were a choice.
When you'd finally finished I let you tell me
how the home you drew sat between two mountains,
when through the valley, I only saw my own disheveled hair.
I told you it was beautiful.

We saw a green sign:

Round Lake
Burnt Hills

You asked me if the lake was round
and I asked if the hills were burnt,
and when we got back to your house
I acted as if I needed a break from the driving
so I could spend a few more precious moments with you.

It's a miracle I harbor not a stint of sadness
in the you-shaped space I keep beside me,
you always come where the longing goes.

AFTER RAIN

Sammy T. Anderson

We watch each other's hair
drip dry on the floor.
There is a lonely fire
easy to die beside.
We curl close,
and count
the seconds
slowly
while we listen to the storm.
We hear it like a memory,
aware that one day
rain will fall,
and then
never again.

To: The First Day of Spring

From: The Last Day of Winter

Date: M/D/Y

Carolyn Martin

I'm impressed with the elegance of your awakening.
Although I've pleaded with crocuses, hyacinths,
and daffodils to wait until my raging storms cease,
they couldn't resist showing off. And your camelias?
More formidable than my sleety winds carving
crevices into flower beds and mudding asphalt streets.

In less than a month, every lawn will need a cut
and "Moss Out" will attack green mounds older than grass.
Why humans treasure blades more than feisty spreads
still confuses me. Anyway, a few robins flew in yesterday
and I watched them stethoscope a yard for naïve worms.
They advised you don't need to be early to catch anything.
Just arrive. We're all Mother Nature's kids, so why ask why?

In spite of climate change, you've arrived almost-on-time.
Here's to a splendid romp through roguish weeds,
cherry trees, thunderheads, and early picnics in a park.
I'm off to another continent. I'll let you know where and when.



VERNAL BALLET

Maudie Bryant

Trouble the Dandelions

Susan Mason Scott

A garden of graves, though to some inconvenient weeds, in John Paul Park
dandelions I trouble: grandparents, pioneers, and children phantom

reprimand—their dark eyes never close. Cavities of no
memory in stone of soft lime, taproots can't carry marrow,

the mossy sentiment from epitaphs plucked like pesky relics,
the gravestones sigh in a cellar nearby.

In this place of bodies buried underfoot, where no worms rise
I root for stems, seeds, sepals, and feathers for the nameless

an account, for their bones and dandelion ghosts I float
epithets, exhale parachutes.

All the while cornered inside my home
a bronze jar, remains, a dilemma.

My ghost—my child—wears a wool hat to keep warm.
Funny, I know, but how to let go, tell the story without stone

of my weed cut from stem before full flush.
For his skin and tissue like soft moments,

his bone memory, a splinter in my hand,
for his garden of ash, I wish for a squall—

a dandelion to trouble.

Back From Mexico at Last: Goldfinches!

Elizabeth Fletcher

Tiny sunbursts
darting diving
flashing
through spring green trees

Zippering zooming
soaring
Bouncing up then down
on warm spring waves

Whirling on my feeder
trilling cheeping
Tiny sunbursts
Cracking hard shelled seed

Cracking open the black ice
encasing my heart

planting seeds in the sky

Anatalia Vallez

a few days ago I dreamt my grandma was showing me how to garden
the sky was the soil and the light coming in beamed like stars
put those seeds here, let them grow roots—she told me

so I opened my agitated fists
yanked the last bits of microaggressions stuck to my knees
and woke up

when I talked to her today she was in her garden
preparing the soil, doing her part
it's time I do mine

I won't pretend to know everything, but I know enough
to plan my days in cycles of energy, rest, nourishment
because everything that exists in the future is being imagined right now

and the brightest light blooms in the dark

Hole and Unwhole

Laurinda Lind

We were kids together
but we grew up as in
away, though you
stopped in one day.

Your foot slipped down
a woodchuck hole at
the edge of my darkgreen
lawn and you said,

I need another drink.
It was a joke, but
so self-conscious
that I realized still

we couldn't see
one another, still you
would rather step into
a hundred thousand

empty spaces than try
the truth of us. And I
too have never found
the heart to start.



LASTLY DELIRIUM, AND ON THE NEXT OCCASION
Jordan Veres

Body Bag

Julia Ludewig

Pages upon pages lie
floor, zero-and-one
that gesture, this word—

they had felt
his shoelaces
staircase-struck—
just out-urged
to hit

Zippered shut

I think now, 2 months
I wonder: should I unzip
bury them, pull out

my tongue between the serrated opening?
Would it harrow or heal?
Zip them

And what would be more
The bag empty,
Or one that looks
just a shoelace

on my computer's memory
versions of
how urgent
after he had tied
and I my tongue, both
a need
by the reflex
Ctrl+W.

like a body bag,
into staircase time,
these moments or go
a shoelace and stick
my tongue between the serrated opening?
Zip them shut.
open

horrifying: to find
or filled, my body
familiar,
or a tongue?

Corvus Brachyrhynchos

Yuna Kang

The grace of the trickster bird appalls me:
She circles slowly, the slight of the wing brushing my hair, (such
a girl's girl, she always loves my hair). She never allows herself consent,
she just reaches out and touches it, with what I presume is maggoty, ringworm

claw, but I am wrong. Turkey vultures, they say, urinate on their legs
and allow the UV light to bake the bacteria dry, flaking it off their twig-like
bones. Crows cannot be so different, in fact, they must be much better:

clever creatures, malicious birds. She loves to dive at me, cackling, cocking
her pretty head at me, bead eyes closed. The bird will never harm me. She simply
likes to play, to cry *I am here!* at my limited head. Because we share no common
tongue, only action, and inaction.

She has a name for me, a specific high bark of five or six syllables: I do
not know. When she sees me, she swoops, touching my shoulders, my head, my
sight. The gust around her wings is so strong, the feathers too soft. We

thought ourselves so bright, with our metal tools and post-wood
fires. One day, I place a peanut within the iron grates of apartment rail. She

arrives with some rusted dental implement,
pushes her meal out and through,

cawing gloriously at my spite.

perennial

Jamie Lim

Grief should fall, then clear
but sorrow clings to me like
water in branches.

Winter Light

Sarah Das Gupta

—*A sonnet*

A day of sunshine, in a winter of fog.
The morning light plays on grey, slate roofs.
Blackbirds emerge from days of grimy mist.
In this new light, shades of blue edge their wings.
The linen-like layers of frost are soon burnt off,
As the winter sun paints the tips of grass
with tiny, diamond shards and shiny garnets.
At last, trees in the park believe in Spring.

Behind the church, the day is dying,
Bold crimson streaks are brushed across the sky.
Pale pink clouds merge into the grey of twilight.
Through a jigsaw of bare, wintry branches,
the last light fades from the western sky.
A half-moon rises, shrouded in mist and haze.

Hostile Takeover

Alina Zollfrank

You rake with derision. Orange
fades to yellow folds to black
lumps on young pear tree's leaves.
Hard cankers turn mountainous, mar
the innocent underside. Stalactite
life where it shouldn't be. Such
ugly growths you want to scratch. Them
off with. Your hard nails. Turn
pear rust into. Something forgettable.
Something. Inconsequential.

//

Grandma drinks honeyed peppermint
tea with dainty raisin cakes, margarined
toast. Chews food well, shirks coffee,
avoids pig lard on rye bread. Shrugs that
they took it out when it gave more
and more trouble. Tells you
they even showed it to her with all
the stubborn stones. Dang gall pain,
gone, she smirks. Rubs her stomach.
Clockwise. Thoughtfully. Recites
lacking symptoms.

//

You miss your dad's smell of cologne
and wood chips and wool socks. Hint of
spearmint chewing gum. When. He
tells you this bump appeared on
his gums over a broken tooth.

He squeezed. Putrid stuff poured out.
You think. Wow. I haven't hugged.
You in four years. Last time we both.
Had all our teeth.

//

The stalagmite burrows where
it shouldn't in your pelvis. Robots
clad in sterile greens drill.
Yank the stranger into fluffy
pieces. Show you photos
when you come to. A love letter
the invader sent to the home
it once inhabited. You throw

up bile. Evacuate drugs from
your system along
with the memories you have
the gall to remember, to miss
how things should be, oh, how
this life can etch such lines

of vinegar into a face wholly
lived, into something
of consequence.

In Our Home of the Lost and Found

Carolyn Martin

Two pink pairs of Jockey underwear,
three blue socks, five black gloves,
a backup drive for a MacBook Air.
Not to mention, four boxes of cracked
pepper snacks, a wheel of camembert,
a Costco receipt, one pair of pruning shears.
We could hear them guffawing at 3 a.m.
after a day of wearing us down
as we scrambled through cabinets,
drawers, and the foggy corners of memory.
Until, that is, we conjured up a new strategy:
squint our eyes, count to ten, and return
to the first place we looked and look again
while shouting Robert Frost:
...when you're lost enough to find yourself.
Each hide-away is bound to concede
that enough is enough and will agree
to repopulate the homescape of the found—
like a tulip bulb waking in early spring
or the Hunter's Moon ripping through
unruly herds of autumned clouds.

Smelly Feat

Christina E. Petrides

Inspiration wagged its eager tail
and ran off into the trees,
whence it soon emerged,
dragging mortal fragments
of some unidentifiable creature
stinking and buzzing with flies.
It rolled gleefully in the mess
and then ran up to me,
proud of its accomplishment.

Jiggling

Jack Granath

This poetry, I open it
with difficulty, heart and head
two drawers I go up against,
jiggling, ill-treating, cursing,
until one gives, it doesn't matter
which—this one one day, that the next—
they both were jammed, the head with pennies
and the heart, of course, with salad.

PERCHANCE

Louis Faber

—*After William Shakespeare*

I don't suppose you were trying
to be whimsical, that would have been
wholly out of character for you.
But you did get an answer
to your question, didn't you, if
not the one you wanted or expected.
Maybe it wasn't meant to be a question,
merely you reciting words, words,
words, but we all took it that way.
It hardly matters now, everyone else
left for dead, did you imagine you
would somehow come out unscathed?
So you had your memorable scene,
friendless at the finale, leaving
it all to another strong arm
to clean up the mess you created.
And now I am left to stand
on the parapet on a cold night
in the glimmer of a gibbous moon
and shout to the celestial gods, "alas
poor Hamlet, I knew him Yorick."

Ghosts in My Camera

Maureen Clark

Some torn places cannot be patched
~Rumi

I took photographs of ghosts on the way to class
fallen leaves printed on pavement
by last night's rain autumn sun leeching the tannins

by the time the news reached me
he'd been driving for hours he didn't know where
only that he needed to get someplace

didn't know which way was home
forgot to leave breadcrumbs
or pebbles not sure it is November

evening is coming on cold
and it will get colder he has been driving
since early morning while we listen for the phone

he drives and so do we in shifts
to all the places he knows but he doesn't know them
any more we can't help driving in circles anyway

we find a recent picture for the *Silver Alert*
pray he will pull over and hold still
long enough to be found and finally he does

parks in front of a house long enough
that the man who lives there comes out
to see what is wrong then calls an ambulance

and at the hospital dad waits for something familiar
but doesn't know what or who he is
the police call just before the nightly news

and we let out the breath we have been holding all day
the ghosts in my camera captured in my other life
we take dad home in blue hospital scrubs wearing a diaper

this man who wore a silver star on his chest
and carried a gun and at home we hold each other
like the family we are supposed to be

mom takes the keys from him by the time we drive back
to pick up the car the kind man
has cleaned the driver's side upholstery

Wintering Dream

Laura Denny

I want to begin again
the way the rising sun
turns the slow clouds
that first delicious pink
and birds announce
the new day with wild song
just before the sun streams
its silky light down the trees.
I want to humbly begin again,
bowing in reverence to the beautiful,
surrendering myself into solitude,
and giving up what hurts.
I need a wide covering of quiet
deep snow to sleep under
to remember the seed
of myself back into song,
the way the wild foraging night
repairs my mind
with forgotten dreams
making me clean again.

Rain on the River

J. Adam Collins

Where once bare bodies basked in summer sun,
a rip-current river spills with winter rains. Would
that I could follow that flow. If not for white-
caps churned from frigid winds, I'd float. To where

I don't know or care except out to sea's end.
Before now, I'd never watched the river
in the storm. How silvery gusts lift then lash her
surface, sheets in such multitudes her skin

sings with innumerable tinsel choruses. Normally
I suffer this season for all its dead and quiet gray,
but here I am listening at her banks, hands cupped
to catch all I can to drown the wrongs I've said,

not just today. You've said I have a flair for dramatics.
So what if it's true? I grin and send my tears to meet
the rain. I'm sopping wet and cry a river just for you.

when you laugh / when i pray

Beth Gilson

a joke you've told 20 times
is the altar

where i let the words
move me to absolution

without fail
warmth rises to my temples

my lips twist up
eyes widen with awe

breath hitches
the final hail mary before

the first carbonated cackle
climbs through my tooth gap

tongue pushing in the crevice
of my chipped molar

the last gulp of seltzer
comes out of my nose

pushing at my nasal cavity
communion worth any irritation

we're guffawing with abandon
holy water hurtling down our cheeks

flushing out our pores and
engraving smile lines

scrunched noses etching
worn scriptures by our eyes

our skin remembers to
keep the hymns we sang for later

and

i don't know if i believe in god but
i look at you

Between my guts and stars

Isabel Szurlej

Between my guts and stars, somewhere
In the middle lays my mortal imperfection,
Flat and uniform.

Earth rotates.
Grandfather clock spins, indicating the hours.
Pendulum swings, measures time.
I pivot back and forth in unison and tied
With gravity cord, I have my moment of inertia.

In the center of my present
Melting patience roams like a worn coat;
Threadbare and filled with doubts in patched holes.
I look at a hazy band of Milky Way, with its billions
Lights and I long to discover something
That could be eternal.

World tree breaks through the event horizon
Rooting in our hell.
When its phytochromes heave, tasting heaven,
Two opposite otherworlds arise as
The immanent twofold of reality.

LV 2349

Clay Waters

Even within these elaborate citadels
without clocks or windows
still I cannot escape
my inner countdown,
that heavy tick weighing, warping
my pocket of space-time
with the numbers to come:
40,000 accidents I must avoid
200,000 incidents I must swerve
a million rolls of the dice
before sleep

A billion moons beyond,
an evolved lung gulps desiccated air
in the vast citadel
built to confuse invaders
rows of rusted metal machines
still girded for war

on the south end
of the asphalt battle-zone
his bone-crammed Black Pyramid
battles the invading Green Cross

his clock stopped, his breath short,
his life a passing chance—

What is it like
for life to leap out at you
like a surprise?

I take my short spin
And await its tiny pleasure
Did I lose? Will I live?

A billion moons from now, who could tell?

Nocturne

V.C. Myers

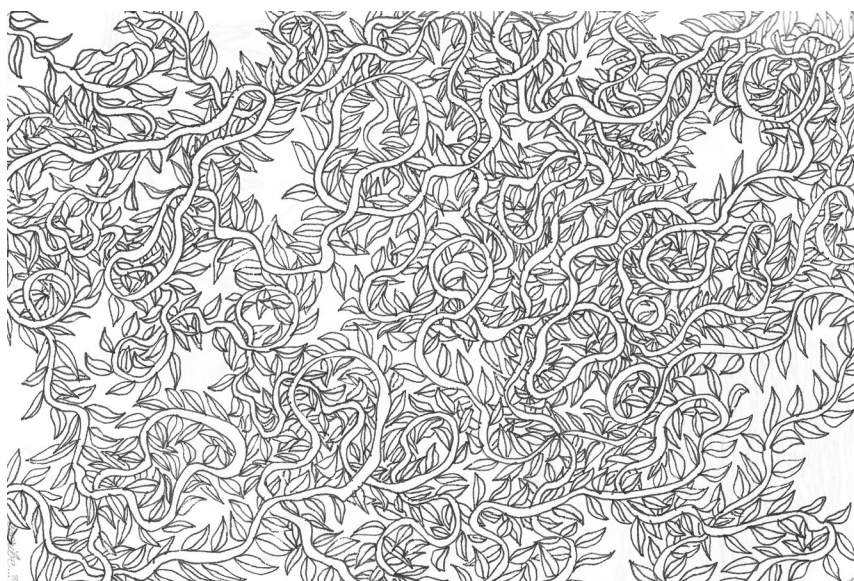
This is gathering mud, not basking
in the afterglow, in the aftermath.
So show some respect. A cutting,
cunning and susurrus. This
is not how a wound heals, properly,
tender. My hands in the soil, in
your hair, in agony. No longer waiting
for the first bloom, this is the final thaw,
the final straw in a field of what if,
why not, remember when. This
pouring out of old wineskins
won't hold, won't quench. It is
enough, what we had, what we were
given, to waste, years slipping
between our restless fingers, between
us, between what was and what is not.
Loving isn't living, isn't being.
This minutiae, this finite yawn,
letting go of what brings joy,
what breathes in the dusk. Go
now, before the dawn breaks
us, before we have time to change
our minds. One last touch of a hand,
brushing hair away from averted eyes.



DISMAS

Sammy T. Anderson

Blood soaked lines like bread crumbs
lead from the kitchen.
I hear laughter, alarm bells,
a strangle of my name.
I see your heart along the knife,
I feel chaos in the air.
You lay
crucified upon your cotton cross.
But,
I am not a savior.
You are dying
and I do not listen.
You whisper
“Do not tell the Angels.”
I stitch my dry lips shut
and look for God on dirty walls.
The walls, they remain silent
and there floats Dismas in the air.



ENTWINING
Lorraine Caputo

Nameless

Pooja Muthuraj

If you teach me your name,

I will open my mouth.

Until then, I refuse to eat.

I will hold my breath until

My neck turns black,

I will peel my eyes from sleep.

I will wail and stomp my feet

And slam my head to the ground

Again, again,

Shatter my knees,

Slit my wrist

And bleed a puddle

And make a prayer carpet of it.

I love you,

Please.

Please.

I dreamed myself last night.

Mira Lightner

I dreamed myself last night
she was lying on our old couch,
 (the one I couldn't convince my parents to keep)
and scribbling over a memory of summer.
in my dream, she smiles at me and asks why I am there.
 (she does not ask who I am)
I can't think of the answer, but she doesn't seem surprised.
she takes a piece of coal from the fireplace
 (did we have a fireplace?)
and goes back to her drawing as if nothing is amiss,
as if the fire wasn't lit.

I dig my nails into my palms and trace along the ridges
of life and love and fate.
 (I can never remember which is which)
she could tell me, I know, if I asked.
the crumpled fortune teller on the floor is proof enough of that
 (even if two of the answers are empty)
the girl on the couch understands her world and how to blur the edges
I envy her that ease, that simplicity
 (rituals were simply a part of recess)
magic is a fact of life, as indisputable
as the marker in her hand.

I fold myself in two, until my eyes meet hers and
I want so desperately to warn her,
 (though she would never listen)
to tell her she cannot smile at everyone she meets in dreams.
one day someone will try to twist your smile into something else,
 (one day you'll let him)
but she is still smiling, so instead I tell her
"don't lose yourself in him."
 (you might never find who you were before)
she tries to imitate my expression, but it's unfamiliar to her,
and she can't quite figure out how to furrow her brow.

When her face remains her own, she sighs in defeat
and starts to pick at the sequins on her shirt.

(the purple one, with the butterflies)
she tells me that there's no one who could make her afraid
and in the soft light of the dream, it's almost too easy to believe her.
(but even then, the butterflies had begun to fade)
her gaze is unbearably, painfully trusting,
and I cannot bring myself to be the one who shuts it
(not when it won't last much longer)
but I can read myself well, and she is learning too,
and she isn't smiling anymore.

her face is too small for the solemnness that comes over it
and for a moment, there's an ancient sort of sadness in her eyes.
(like the figurehead of a sunken ship)
but it passes— too quickly, and she's a child again when she tells me
that see, even the scrape on her knee has healed
(the one from last week's game of capture the flag)
and that bruises are a part of summer.
this almost makes me smile, but she's never been more serious
(and her conviction is her strength)
I swallow another warning, but this time she must have seen it,
because she tells me again that she isn't afraid.

I want to tell her that this too will change.
someday, when all you know is fear,
(how easy it is to forget there is anything else)
when you crumble under the weight of your own dread,
you will bend your knees
(and they will break.)
and when you see him, your stomach will twist itself
into carefully crafted knots, intricate and incomprehensible
(like the ones your cousin tried to teach you last summer)
but when he sees you, and he smiles— you'll smile back.
and you won't know that you're afraid of him.

I want to tell her that this is a nightmare.

I want to tell her to wake up.

Cloister in Barcelona

Jan Wieszorek

Tonight, behind an iron gate,
let us tend a little cloister
of fountains and almond trees.
You can play a spirit who lives
here rearranging the bricks.
We do take a chance, though,
when someone new surprises
us, climbing down the tree.
Others speak of us not so well.
It's our rosacea and silhouettes
imprisoned inside like a sigh
of almonds underfoot. Cracking
and sighing when I loosen shells,
speak the meat. Touch every
piece—but not after the cloister
bells ring—the crone coming,
wearing all black, showing us
out, fumbling her keys. We
are loved for who we are. It
clicks in us like a nut hitting
the ground, as when someone
new climbs down.

Creeping in

Danuta E. Kosk-Kosicka

For days, the weeds creep in, pretending they are good plants. They spread and spread. Honeysuckle lures with a chocolate scent while suffocating the yellow flowered broom. Tentacles that reach, surround, entangle. Gloves and a three pronged tool—fingers grasp the stems. Feet press the ground; muscles tense along the spine. The trident thrusts deep under the crabgrass's claws & clover's web. I straighten up, wipe away the splatter of dirt. Whiff of chocolates from the box brought by fake friends coils at my feet.

The Fly in My Beer Was Dead

Laura DeHart Young

It drowned. Floating on its back.
I flipped the pint glass over
and watered the grass with alcohol.
Watched as the fly's spinning body
sank into the dirt.

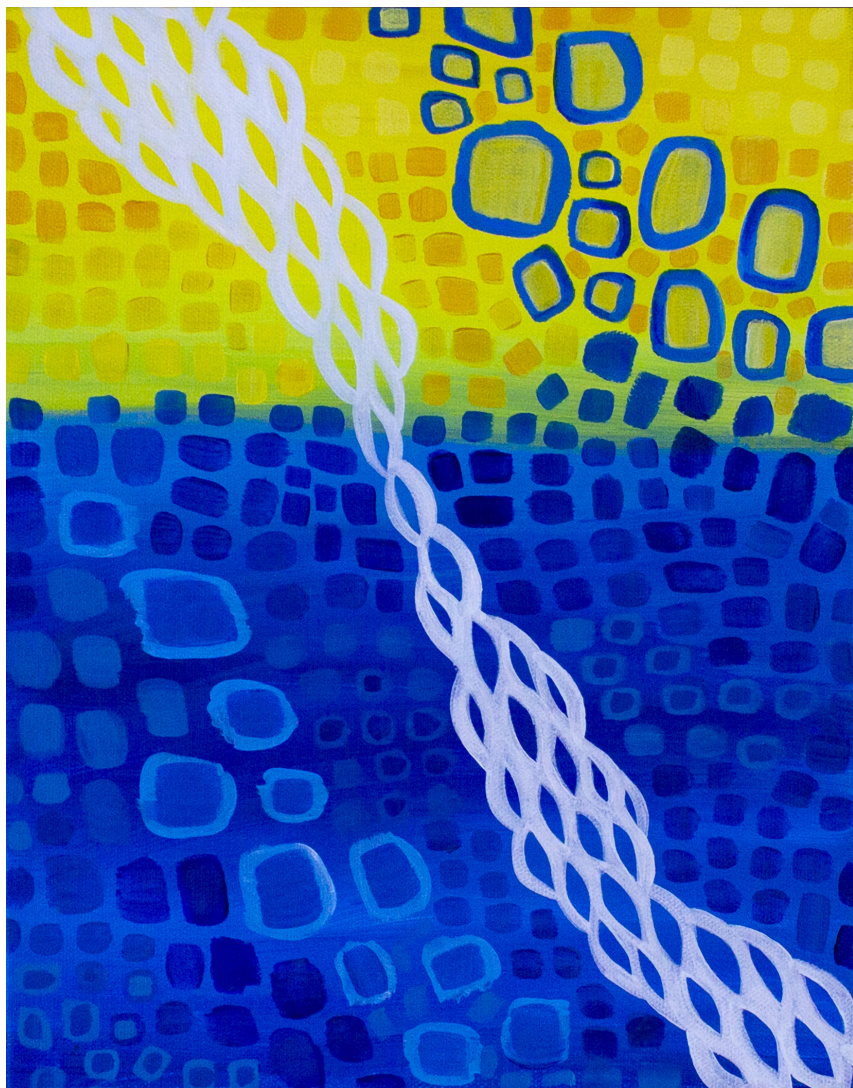
You were stuck in my thoughts -
an earworm, a cognitive itch
causing the brain to automatically
itch back - like a song
that played in my head for days.
A tune we danced to in the living room
as a summer storm passed through.

Bachman Road rain gulleys channeled
the runoff
as we watched from the porch.
Your arteries channeled the drugs
that made you feel both better and sicker -
the intolerable excess swirling in a bucket
you held in your lap on the way home.

“My mouth tastes like old pennies,”
you said.

I was afraid of horses when we first met.
Now I was in a barn snipping baling wire -
a curiosity for this city dweller.
Released from their tension,
the wires slapped my arms and sliced my skin -
oozing blood mixing with sweat,
wiped on an old T-shirt.

You were in the house resting
when a pitchfork was thrust
into the compressed fibers,
the hay separated and spread
covering the horse stalls in a fresh bed of straw.
I snipped and bled some more,
hardly aware,
the T-shirt tie-dyed in brown platelets -
wounds that continued to bleed
long afterward
in places the steel wire missed.



HORIZON
Maudie Bryant



RAINSPEAK

Mirjana M.

One Last Cup of Coffee

Amanda Hawk

I tell JD it has been almost ten years,
and we hug, closing the gap
from my big city to his small town.

The waitress comes over to hand us menus
and pours coffee into an empty cup,
while sugar cube excitement

sprinkles from my mouth
as I chatter to her about the origin story of JD and I.
Tell her between her snapping gum enthusiasm

and yawning gaze interest about our Friendsgiving meeting
and our fight during Nicholas Cage's sixty second dialogue.
I showed up the next day to settle the argument,

then JD promised coffee and dry humor
and I demanded him to be my best friend.
His smile beams in the tabletop

and I wish the brightness would follow me home.
JD tells me I need to visit more and explains the drag show crowd
has become cowboy hats and sorority lipstick graveyards.

The waitress returns to refill my cup
and asks me if I am okay, and I sip on my coffee.
JD places his hand on my mourning fingers

as the waitress walks away.
He promises more days of comic book hideaways
and nights of disco ball dancing.

Assures me we will meet at this table each year
until we are old with dentures, gray hair, and jaded life views.
I believe him.

The waitress brings me another napkin
and he passes me a pencil.
Tells me to write out my ten year emotions,

and I scribble down his wild and unkempt hair
and his lopsided eyeglasses.
I ask for one more selfie before I head home

and JD swears I must have folders of him on my phone.
I set up a new folder for this trip,
and I snap a few pictures of us.

The waitress watches from behind the counter.
He asks when am I moving back,
because wants to discuss his Mormon mother's phone calls

and his latest blind date rendezvous.
I flip through the menu like a funeral program
and ask JD if we can talk about his MS next year

and the beginnings of his lesions.
I offer an apology for my lowered gaze and absent arms
when he lost his dancing shoes to an electric wheelchair.

He relates with stories on frailty and bullied nerves
that leaves him curled up in his bed for weekends.
I ask for forgiveness for the lapses

between my goodbyes and hellos
and he tells me he misses me too.
I hold my coffee mug as a tribute to him

and I watch the waitress pull off her name tag.
His family threw away his photos, our selfies
of us traveling through our diner and bookstore adventures.

I miss his voice, his handwriting, and our history,
and I wish his family had given me one of his journals.
JD tells me he will be here next year

and I want to believe him
that when I leave
he will follow me out.

The waitress sits across from me
in front of JD's empty coffee cup
and reaches across the table to hold my hand.

Worship

Elizabeth Diamond

As I sit on the polished pew
I think of the trees from which they came
Wise, ancient sentinels guarding secrets
 of the hearts who kneel upon them
These echoed halls beckon me to whisper to them
I feel a tug, but not the pull of the divine
 which I've been told to feel
Bring me back to the origins of this creation
Let me kneel on peeted hills, and I'll tell you everything
Dig my heels into the sand that will become
 your windows of stained glass
Salt spinning my hair as I open my palms to greet
 the harrowing winds of the sea
Carved granite crosses covered in lichen and dew
Echo the towering mountains, bringing me closer to you
I feel the father of the day warm my skin
His prick and zeal a reminder of the flesh
I feel the mother of the night cool my brow
Her quiet grace instilling inner peace
Fireflies light my way in the chapelled forest
Crickets and owls harmonizing in my wake
Cold dirt paints my calluses as
My roots travel further underground
Life dances all around, encircling
 as it fills me with belonging
Each breath reassuring me that
I am never alone

Thanks, Dandelion

Rory Oliveri

As a kid
I'd defend that great transformer
when anyone called it a weed
or a pest—
only a fool would poison
that which would dance on his breath
and bring her wishes true

A couple years back
I thought I'd get one
on my calf—
not the petals on the wind;
on the stems, both heads
and the leaves and the roots
and then all who would look
might see me full

When we met
I was high and covered in sweat
from pushing my way up
through pavement cracks—
no clasp under my everycolored shirt
I used all my new words;
they showed me the violet
on the soft side
of their arm

A couple months in
they said I had the energy
of a sunflower—
and isn't it a wonder
that I think that
they're right;
that you can have more
than one soul

As a kid
I could only have wished
for a life that would let me stand
this tall, with my face
to the sun

Yellow is my favorite color

Pragadish Kalaivanan

Spotting the sweetest mango
golden nectar oozing
from the squirrel-bitten flesh
insatiable carnage
till the seed, now a furball
brushed in a pale amber reminiscence
of the fruit it once was.

Unripe, green yet unsafe
from the ocher-tipped fingers
painted by turmeric
over the years, meticulously
perfecting the pickle
that smelt like carefree summers
alongside two staples;
dal, unassuming
often overlooked for its simplicity
and fried potatoes
dusted with spices
glistening like polished champagne topaz
reflecting the mustard streaks
on my grandmother's saree
as she cooks for me
in the mango orchard.

Everpresent

Hy

Even if
the world
rips out
a past
you did
not want,
I will
be here
to live
in your
ever-
present.

Solstice

Joel Lind

Red in black (in red)
Like a Memorial Day poppy.
I never forget a face.

Sure enough it was you? In late July?
Between full night and sunrise
Drawing and quartering,

An Imperial moth (*Eacles Imperialis*)
More feathered than filiform,
Only recently eclosed into thingness.

Your mate took the thorax to feed the hatchlings,
And you devoured the rest,
While a quartet of brightly blotched and speckled wings fell,

With the speed of a feather,

I gathered them from the tulip tree leaves,
And put them in a cigar box,
Along with a blackened monarch chrysalid.

I vowed never again to show you kindness.

Now, I see you.
A barely beating heart,
Crouched and cold in the low evening sun.

“Where’s your wife now killer? Your progeny?” I ask.

From the top of the tree I mark your approach,
One branch at a time until you stop,
At the tip of the lowest limb,
A frozen flower on a cold and blackened spit.

Birds are indifferent,
Its men that run hot and cold.

I step forward and fill the feeder,
With last dregs of birdseed from a galvanized pail,
I keep in the garage.

Soon the days will be longer.

I am not sure if I will refill the pail this year,
I want to keep the mice from coming inside during the winter.

AN URBAN SPRING

Sarah Das Gupta

Pale February sun brushes bulbs on city balconies.
Sap surges in grey urban spaces;
in gutters close to drains, weeds cling fast to perilous places.
In lost gardens of old mattresses, broken chairs and urban trash,
an early snowdrop battles through.
On muddy building plots stray daffodils sound yellow trumpets,
Last Post for a floral army lost in trenches dug for luxury flats.
Under sweaty railway arches, moss clings obstinately, out of view.
Through steamy subway windows, passengers can just distinguish
clumps of grass, green hair, hanging from secret crevices,
blown by every subterranean wind that whistles past.
Old cherry trees, tentacles reaching down through cracks
in pavements, yards and squares of broken tarmac,
leaning arthritic limbs at crazy angles, still feel a touch of sun,
enough for one last Spring.
In city No Man's Lands, where muddy paths cross empty lots,
clumps of gilded celandine claim untrodden, sheltered spots.
Along an old parade of shops, in fissures of broken sills,
a lonely dandelion, an eastern potentate, a golden king,
looks proudly down on grimy streets and endless queues.
In suburbs hawthorn hedges break out in a rash of white confetti,
a scent, a passing whiff of nicotine, promises drug-like bliss.
Commuter trains pull in and out of stations, almost crushing
fluttering ferns, vintage emeralds, set in crumbling brickwork,
stoically facing daily death.
On green embankments, lakes of bluebells nod and bow,
in homage to the brash Express imperiously rushing past.
Hedge Parsley's dainty fretwork pokes through rusty mesh
guarding park playgrounds, neglected basketball courts.
On flat roofs the eco gardens: grass, trees, plants of many sorts,
with budding curiosity bend over, as if to berate
the faceless, morning crowds from New York state!

Visualise to Realise Something to Actualise Nothing

Ashlynn Zhang

Outlined in margins, shaded in the creases of sleep,
I imagine moulding my teeth to sets of skin that'll be mine
forever, indenture and meek.

I gorge myself to the bone to visualise
something to deny, and realise
growing pains actualise to nothing —

Tinted roses stained to strained,
soon you'll cave again, to the depths, claw
into your guts; eat out your heart, ripped through your

throat — can you visualise something as bloodcurdling,
as realising you're drinking yourself to deaths
actually, for nothing's pain. Thirsty little cannibal —

How much more more will you devour, this void of Pestilence,
for a light, for a slight; devout pioneer of a never-coming
age, faithful to a fault, too late, to

Visualise to realise — in actuality —

A broken heart craves in a thousand shattered lives
a taste of a heartbeat. Hold it to the back of your throat,
how heavy it weighs, indentured meed.

Twig

Carole Greenfield

I'm constantly catching myself on you,
snagging a sleeve, buttonholed by your sass
and I catch my breath at the sound of your laugh,
wash of your words and I'm undone, slipping off
my togs from beneath my top to prove how caught
up I am with the thought of you, can you catch at
my meaning, catch my drift as we take on swift
swirling eddies, heady twirlings, my hair curling
round your heart, darkness is a part of our desire
as we play with fire, strike a match, try to catch each
other up on all the years, reach past fears of smothering
with over much, catch me if you can, lovely man who knows
his way around, toss me to the ceiling, catch me on the drop
back down.

Line my Casket with Bubble Wrap

Jamie Schneider

I wake in a gutter
tarred and feathered in high fructose corn syrup
and credit card statements –
head light as my wallet,
eyes crusted in pyrite,
tongue fuzzier than my judgement.

I shamble down the neon-draped street
grasping at ad-plastered utility poles
as if they were crutches.
Tumbleweeds of used packing tape
wobble down the pixel-burnt asphalt
gorging on crumpled receipts and packing peanuts.

Cardboard tombstones slouch in the strangled grass
beneath the cold glow of a backlit billboard.
There are no names,
only discount codes and expiration dates;
eulogies reduced to order histories and
shipping cost savings.

I tell those poor bastards I won't be joining them,
but I know I'll continue to toe the line
through the holes in my socks,
teetering on the edge of
box cutter blades and bankruptcy
until my own epitaph reads 'BLACKFRIDAY50'.

The side of the road

Alex Ruggiero

10/10/2024

The trees were burnt orange
and on the side of the road
were surnames
backed
with
red or
blue
all begging for a new position,
in many ways I understood
their desperation, clawing up
the dirt.

When Monday had come
I longed for Thursday,
rattled in pain and aches.
I wanted out,
yet the signs came
back to my mind
over and over.
The air was changing,
the wind restless
the world on edge
and it wasn't even Tuesday.

But, after tireless nights
we wandered about
 passing overpriced vendors
 and animals begging to be freed.
A side of the world I tried to ignore,
yet the alarm bells rang
and away we went.
 The autumnal paints
 back in stock
 as wood supplies
 grew low

and when the morning came
I saw all those cars, one after
 another
on the side of the road
before I sat awaiting what was the next
in that sterile, lifeless, office
with mundane conversation buzzing
like worker bees.
 I was everywhere
 and
 nowhere all at once

The Morning I Cooked Myself Lunch for the First Time

Nico Santana

Over video call, you spent two hours
of your only free night that week
tending my fingers — wilted as they were
beneath the weight of my unblemished
kitchen knife — until they grew just
barely steady enough to peel and cut
a carrot. “Pretend you’re sharpening
a pencil before putting it in your mouth,”
you didn’t say; “pretend you’re etching
the outline of the Zambales Mountains
into the early July sky,” you didn’t say;
you didn’t say much of anything,
really — just that you would’ve liked
to settle the onions into perfect cubes
while I struggled with my task, all
so you could suffer their stinging
in my place — and suddenly the vegetables
were waiting ready in my pot with the
pork, the roux, the water, how easy it was
to let everything soak in the blossoming
warmth — I may be new to this life,
but I think I could cut anything now —
and if you only asked, I would fashion
for you a happy little rabbit out of an
apple slice — or better yet, I would
carve this chunk of Manhattan into a
coconut crescent and sail it straight
into Manila Bay — and there you’d be,
waiting at a table, ready to greet me
with two ice-cold bottles of coke
and fresh white rice to spare.



The Gold

Juliana Weiss

My mom bought me a bracelet
Small purple beads
Adorned a portion of string
Silver beads covered the rest,
To match hers
Gold instead of silver
Gray instead of purple
Made to be wrapped around the wrist
Three times
Unraveled they resemble a long necklace

Every night at the dinner table
Looking down at her wrist
My eyes always catch on the familiar gold
Peeking out from under her sleeve
Standing out against her tanned skin
Looking down at my wrist
It's bare
The look on her face bubbling guilt in my gut
Disappointed
The beads aren't there

It's not like I don't want to wear it
Every morning I stare at the delicate silver hanging on my shelf

Like every other morning
I take it down
Put it on
Moving to look in the mirror
Observing how the silver stands out against the gold decorating
My wrists
Neck
Ears
Like every other morning I'm
Disappointed
Like every other morning
it doesn't match the outfit and jewelry I already picked out
Like every other morning
I take it off
Thinking if I change my outfit,
Or replace my gold for silver
It would work better
We would work better
And like every other morning
I gently hang the bracelet back on its shelf
And hope

Hope that tomorrow will be different

The Art of Acceptance

V.C. Myers

Sing stars in the dark &
collect them, one by one, in
trembling hands, gathering
them, a flock of fireflies, to
swirl light in your mason jar.
Call to the crow sitting solitary
on a gravestone. Praise the
serpent as it bites you, the
venom burning in your veins.
What is sorrow but a shadow of
fear? Make a blessing of
a curse. Be joyful. Be brutal.
Be your own muse. Follow the
evergreens, keep your colors
in winter. I'll celebrate you from
afar. I'll celebrate you for what
you are. All that is wild &
defiant. A brilliant fire. A star.

Contributor Bios

Bobby Jones, after completing a PhD in psychology at The Catholic University of America, enjoyed a 38-year career in medical education. He is now working to reinvent himself as a writer of poetry and creative non-fiction. His poem, "Alleluia, Alleluia," was awarded honorable mention in Passager's 2024 poetry contest.

Edward Michael Supranowicz is the grandson of Irish and Russian/Ukrainian immigrants. He grew up in Appalachia. Some of his artwork has recently or will soon appear in Fish Food, Streetlight, Another Chicago Magazine, The Door Is a Jar, The Phoenix, and other journals. Edward is also a published poet.

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in New World Writing, New English Review and Tenth Muse. Latest books, "Subject Matters", "Between Two Fires" and "Covert" are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in Haight-Ashbury Literary Journal, Amazing Stories and River and South.

Pierre Minar was born in Lebanon and grew up in New Jersey. His work appears in Hobart, Giant Robot Poems, and Transmissions From My Yearning Chair, a chapbook. When not writing he investigates Medicare fraud by big companies for the government. He lives in Dallas with his son.

Glenis Moore is a relatively new writer working in the flat lands of the Fens near Cambridge, UK. When she is not writing she makes beaded jewellery, knits, reads and runs 10K races slowly. She has been previously published by Dust Poetry, The Galway Review, Infinity Wanderers and Cosmic Daffodil.

Emma Johnson-Rivard is a midwestern writer of poetry and weird fiction. Her work has appeared in Strange Horizons, Coffin Bell, Moon City Review, and others. She can be found at Bluesky at @blackcattales and at emmajohnson-rivard.com

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

Max Westler supervised the Creative Writing Program at Saint Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana. His poems have appeared in The Minnesota Review, Poetry East, The Sycamore Review, Artful Dodge, The Greensboro Review, Religion and Literature, among others. He now lives in Lawrence, Kansas with his wife Robyn and several cats.

Sam Brammell is an undergraduate student at the university of Texas at San Antonio, he placed first in the Universities COLFA creative writing competition

for undergrad students, is currently at work on his first poetry collection and is among the founders of the University's Inkwell Writers Co-Op.

Abigail Micheline teaches writing at Northampton Community College. Her debut chapbook, *Brace*, will be released by Thirty West Publishing House in May 2025. When she's not writing, she can be found playing with her kids and running Pennsylvania roads. Find her at www.abigailmicheline.com.

Zoe Freihofer is based in Melbourne, Australia, and her writing has been published in *The Amphibian*, *Last Stanza*, *Letters to Lovers Zine* and the *Daydreamer Anthology* by Bowen Street Press. When not writing, she works in Supply Chain and spends as much time as possible in her vegetable garden @zoe.freihofer.writer

Mark J. Mitchell has been a working poet for forty years. His latest full length collection is *Something to Be* published by Pski's Porch. He lives with his wife, the activist, Joan Juster. A small online presence exists.

Shannon Swearingen Gabriel is a copyeditor by day, mom around the clock, and scribbler of poems whenever possible. Originally from Nashville, she now lives near Chicago, where she enjoys visiting the area's many great restaurants and coffee shops. Find her at shannongabriel.com and on Instagram @thatmompoe.

Kaitlin A Figg is a photographer and visual artist. She finds the most beautiful moments of life to be captured within nature. She believes that at the right angle, anything you see can be a dream. You can find more of her dreamy photography on Instagram at @daydreammedia_

Stephanie McCarley Dugger's poetry collection, *Either Way You're Done* (2017), was published by Sundress Publications. Her chapbook, *Sterling* (*Paper Nautilus*, 2015), was winner of the Vella Chapbook contest. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Mid-American Review*, *Poet Lore*, *The Southeast Review*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, and other journals.

River Snowdrop (they/them) is a queer trans poet from Manchester, UK. Their work has been previously published in *Free Verse Revolution*, *Querencia Press*, *fifth wheel press*, *ouch! collective* and more. They are a 2023 winner of the *Mulberry Literary Fresh Voices Award*. You can find River on Instagram/X/Bluesky @riversnowdrop.

Vana Kingsley (she/they) is a fiction writer, poet, and folklore enthusiast living in Fitchburg, MA with her aussie, Quill. She is a whimsical lifelong creative and sincerely hopes you enjoyed reading her poem.

Michael J. LaFrancis is a trusted advisor and advocate for individuals, groups and organizations aligning purpose, capabilities and ideals. Writing poetry is a contemplative practice providing him with insight and inspiration for living a life imagined. He and his partner Sharon are co-authors of their autobiography.

Paul Rabinowitz is an author, photographer, and founder of ARTS By The People. His work appears in The Sun Magazine, New World Writing, Arcturus-Chicago Review Of Books and elsewhere. Rabinowitz's poems and fiction are the inspiration for 8 award-winning experimental films. www.paulrabinowitz.com

Amy Nemecek was awarded the 2021 Paraclete Poetry Prize for her collection *The Language of the Birds*, and her poems have appeared in journals such as *Presence*, *Last Leaves*, *Relief*, *Windhover*, and *St. Katherine Review*. She finds joy spending time in nature, where she walks slowly and bows often.

Emily Johnson is a high school special education teacher from Massachusetts. She has been published in *BarBar*, *Loud Coffee Press* and *Monkeybicycle*.

All things are connected. That's the premise of what **William J. Joel** does. His works have recently appeared in *Common Ground Review*, *DASH Literary Journal*, *The Blend International*, *Liminality*, and *North Dakota Quarterly*.

Peter J. King, from Boston, Lincolnshire, was active on the London poetry scene in the 1970s, returning to poetry in 2013, and has since been widely published in magazines and anthologies. He also translates poetry, mainly from Greek and German. His latest collection is *Ghost Webs (The Calliope Script)*.

Ελλην Παιονιδου (Elli Paionidou), born in the village of Vasa Koilaviou, Cyprus, is a widely-published poet, novelist, journalist, editor, and translator. She has published around thirty books, and her works for children have been broadcast in Cyprus and Bulgaria. Her books have been translated and published in France, Hungary, Germany, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Portugal, Romania, China, and FYROM.

Arvilla Fee has been published in numerous presses, and her poetry books, *The Human Side* and *This is Life*, are available on Amazon. Arvilla travels with snacks, and her favorite quote is: "It's not what you look at that matters, it's what you see." ~ Henry David Thoreau. Website: <https://soulpoetry7.com/>

William Arnold is an author from the Eastern Shore of Maryland. When not reading or writing, he can be found playing blues guitar or spending time with friends and family. His short fiction has appeared in the *Raven Review*, *I-70 Review*, *County Lines*, and *Locust Shells Journal*.

Leighton Schreyer (they/them) is a writer, poet, and critically Mad queer activist from Kitchener, Ontario whose work often explores themes of gender, sexuality, mental health and the human condition. More information about their writing and previous publications can be found at www.leightonschreyer.com.

Resident artist/curator for The Chroma Museum, artistic renderings of LGBTQI historical figures, organizations and allies predominantly before Stonewall, <https://thestephenmeadchromamuseum.weebly.com/>, **Stephen Mead** is a retiree whom, throughout all his pretty non-glamorous jobs still found time for writing poetry/essays and creating art. Occasionally he even got paid of this.

Sarah Frost is a poet and wanderer who is constantly searching the world for bits of everyday magic. Her poems are often time capsules containing what she's discovered; previous work has been published by Corporeal and Lenticular literary magazines, and she can be found on Instagram at [@fromthenotesapp](https://www.instagram.com/fromthenotesapp).

Loralee Clark resides in Virginia. She has a book forthcoming, "Solemnity Rites", and has been published most recently in *Nature of Our Times*, *Unearthed*, *Choeofpleirn Press*, and *Thimble Literary Magazine*.

Carol Seitchik is the author of the poetry collection, *The Distance From Odessa* (Atmosphere Press). Her poems have been published in the anthologies; *A Feast of Cape Ann Poets* (Folly Cove Press), *The Practicing Poet* (Terrapin Books), and most recently *Tide Lines* an anthology of Cape Ann Poets (Rockport Press).

Sean Ewing, a visual artist inspired by nature, captures the quiet beauty of fleeting moments through light and shadow. His work evokes serenity and introspection, inviting viewers to pause, reflect, and find a peaceful retreat from life's chaos.

Damien Gentry is a senior at Tennessee Technological University. His work has been published previously in *The Iris Review*.

Randi Schalet's work has recently been published in *Peuxdunque Review*, *Prime Time Magazine*, *Words Faire*, *The Write Launch* and other publications. She previously wrote two novels which were published by small presses.

Alessio Zanelli, Italian, writes in English. His work has appeared in numerous journals worldwide, whereas his sixth collection, "The Invisible", was published in 2024 by *Greenwich Exchange* (London).

Alaina Hammond is a poet, playwright, fiction writer, and visual artist. [@alaina-heidelberg](https://www.instagram.com/alaina-heidelberg) on Instagram.

Lionel A. Newman is a Thai-American former Buddhist monk and holds a PhD in neuroscience from the University of Groningen. His poetry has appeared in Hot Pot Magazine and The Marbled Sigh, and he is a member of the Strange Birds writers' collective and the Groningen Poetry Stanza.

Craig Byers graduated from the University of Central Arkansas in 2018 with a degree in Creative Writing. His poetry has previously appeared in 30 North Literary Magazine. He lives in Central Arkansas with his wife.

Don L. Brandis is a retired healthcare worker, has published poems in Leaping Clear, Amethyst Review, Blue Unicorn and elsewhere. Latest book is Paper Birds, from Unsolicited Press.

For **Carson Calkins**, writing was once the bane of his existence. Reading was not far behind it. Not until a recommendation from his psychiatrist (and journaling inside a storage closet following it) did he begin to journey the writer's path.

John Swofford graduated from Georgia State University with a bachelor's degree in English literature. He is forty-six years old. His self-published books include a book of sonnets: *The Infidel* (2024) and two book length rhyming poems: *The Absent Lover* (2023) and *The People of Eden* (2024).

Laurel Benjamin is a San Francisco Bay Area poet, active with the Women's Poetry Salon. She curates Ekphrastic Writers and is a reader for Common Ground Review. Publications: *Pirene's Fountain*, *Lily Poetry Review*, *Cider Press Review*, *Taos Journal of Poetry*. Laurel holds an MFA from Mills College. Find her: <https://www.laurelbenjamin.com>

Estill Pollock's publications include *Constructing the Human* (Poetry Salzburg) and the book cycle *Relic Environments Trilogy* (Cinnamon Press). His poetry collections in the Human Resources series —*Entropy*, *Time Signatures*, *Ark* and *Heathen Anthems*—are published in the United States by Broadstone Books.

Xingyu Zhao is studying literature on the sunny island of Singapore. He has been published in *Portside Review*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, *ONE ART*, *Pictura Journal* and elsewhere.

Cameron Rife is a poet living in Denver, Colorado. Cameron finds expression from a deeper part of herself through writing and draws inspiration from nature and human experiences less openly discussed.

Matthew Lee lives in Melbourne, Australia. He is a regular contributor to the *Farrago Magazine* of the University of Melbourne. His work can also be found in publications such as *Literally Stories* and *Five on the Fifth*.

Andrew Alexander Mobbs is the author of the chapbooks, *A Walk in the Garden* (Bottlecap Press, 2024) and *Strangers and Pilgrims* (Six Gallery Press, 2013). A Pushcart Prize nominee, his poems have appeared / are forthcoming in *Frontier Poetry*, *Terrain.org*, *storySouth*, and elsewhere. He's the co-founder of *Nude Bruce Review*.

Jayce Elliott is an English student who grew up on the Northeast Coast. He spends more time outside than in, and his poetry appears in *New Feathers Anthology* and *The Bridge Journal*, where he is now an Editor.

Morgan R Jensen is a 20 year old non binary, disabled artist living in Utah. They specialize in collage, both physical and digital and mixed media work. Morgan has been previously published in *New Words Press* issue 5.

Jim Bellanca began authoring poems 66 years after his start as a secondary English teacher, stints as a publisher, husband, father, grandfather, and gardener. He favors damning war, celebrating the green world and the travails of old age. He lives in Lake Forest, Illinois with his wife.

Donna Dallas has appeared most recently in *Beatnik Cowboy*, *Tribes and Horror Sleaze Trash*. She is the author of *Death Sisters*, her legacy novel, published by *Alien Buddha Press*. She has two chapbooks out, *Smoke and Mirrors* with *New York Quarterly* and *Megalodon* with *The Opiate*.

Laurinda Lind lives in New York's North Country, close to Canada. Some of her poems are in *Blue Earth Review*, *New American Writing*, and *Spillway*. Her first chapbook, *Trials by Water*, was published in summer 2024 (*Orchard Street Press*).

Lorraine Caputo's artwork and photography are in private collections, and has been exhibited in the US, Peru and Ecuador and published internationally. Her poems and travel narratives also appear internationally. She is a Best of the Net and Pushcart Prize nominee. Caputo continues journeying south of the equator.

Alina Zollfrank from (former) East Germany dreams trilingually in the Pacific Northwest and has received the 2024 Washington Artist Trust Grant. Her work has been nominated for Best of the Net and The Pushcart Prize and recently appeared in *Psaltery & Lyre*, *Orchards Poetry Journal*, *Tipton Poetry*, and others.

Amanda Hawk is Best of the Net-nominated and Pushcart Prize-nominated Poet. She lives in Seattle between the roaring planes and the city's neon lights. Amanda has been featured in multiple journals including *Rogue Agent* and *Imposter Journal*. Recently, she placed second in the Seattle Crypticon Horror Short Story contest.

Susan Mason Scott lives in Madison, Indiana. She is a recently retired mathematics instructor in adult education. She is twice nominated for a Pushcart, received first prize in the Nebraska Poetry Society Open Contest, and won a Northwind Writing Award. Find her published work at susanmasonscott.com

Clay Waters lived in Florida until the age of four and recently returned to find it hasn't changed a bit. Three of his six memories from that first stop involve the alphabet, which in retrospect was a bit of a tell.

Joel Lind holds a B.A. in English from George Mason University. He has been a sailor, a construction worker, and electrician. He currently builds light traps and photographs moths. Sometimes he writes poems about them. He lives in an old house in Virginia. He doesn't think it is haunted.

Alex Ruggiero studied English at Salem State University with a double minor in Environmental Sustainability and Journalism. He often spends his time writing, and playing video games or Dungeons and Dragons with friends!

Hy is a new poet who finds inspiration in the time spent with loved ones. If one of these poems are accepted, then the selected poems will be Hy's first magazine publication.

Mirjana M. is a digital artist and writer from Belgrade, Serbia. Their work explores juxtapositions of elements through mixed media of photography, textures, light and concepts of duality. Their work appeared in *Vocivia*, *Broken Antler*, *Spellbinder*, *The Fantastic Other*, *Soft Star* magazines and other places. They authored 3 poetry collections.

American Southerner **Christina E. Petrides** lived in South Korea for 6.5 years. She has published four children's books, one massive Russian to English nonfiction translation, and a poetry collection. Her website is: www.christinaepetrides.com. Substack: christinaepetrides.substack.com

Louis Faber's work has previously appeared in *Alchemy Spoon*, *Arena Magazine* (Australia), *Dreich*, *Atlanta Review*, *The Poet*, *Glimpse*, *Defenestration*, *Tomorrow* and *Tomorrow*, *Rattle*, *Cold Mountain Review*, and *Worcester Review*, among many others, and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Pooja Muthuraj is an undergraduate at the College of William & Mary studying the farthest subjects from poetry. This whole writing thing is an attempt to redeem herself. She published her first chapbook, "18... Whatever That Means," (Bookleaf Publishing) in 2022, and—oh—she occasionally forays into spoken word.

Will Diggs is a Black pothos father residing in North Carolina where he studies communication arts and history at NC Central University. His work also appears in *The Rumen*, *IMPOSTOR Lit* and *Furrow Mag*. You can reach him at [digable.creatives@gmail.com](mailto:creatives@gmail.com).

Rebecca Surmont lives in Minnesota. She has a love of corn fields, funk, and tiny things. Her written work has been featured in publications such as *Nature of Our Times*, *MacQueen's Quinterly*, *Stone Poetry Quarterly*, *Eunoia Review*, *Common Ground Review*, *Crowstep Poetry Journal*, *Ekphrastic Review*, and *Tiny Seed Literary Journal*.

Raven Magill makes her living writing technical documentation, but lives for crafting whimsical poetry and speculative fiction. She lives in a rural corner of New York with her family where the cats and dogs outnumber the people. You can read more of her work at ravenmagill.substack.com.

Laura Summerfield is a researcher and a fan of black licorice.

Ivy Vega is a poet and occupational therapist whose dual passion for healing and the arts informs her creative voice. Her work explores liminal spaces where love, loss, and quiet resilience reside. Like any true New Yorker, she is passionate about indulging in pizza, bagels, and donuts.

Lisa Delan's poetry has been featured in a broad range of literary publications, and she has received two Pushcart Prize nominations. When she is not writing, you can find the soprano, an international performer who records for the Pentatone label, singing songs on texts by some of her favorite poets.

Robert Estes, who lives in Somerville, Massachusetts, got his Physics PhD from the University of California, Berkeley, and had interesting experiences using physics, notably on two US-Italian Space Shuttle missions. His poems have appeared in *Gargoyle*, *Cola Literary Review*, *The Moth*, and elsewhere.

Russell Willis emerged as a poet in 2019 and has since appeared in over thirty journals and twenty anthologies. Russell grew up in and around Texas, was vocationally scattered throughout the Southwest and the Western Great Plains for two decades, and finally settled in Vermont with his wife, Dawn.

Collin Garrity studied poetry at Warren Wilson College. He is currently editing a collection of poems he wrote while working on a commercial fishing boat in Alaska. His poems have appeared in *The Madison Review*, *The Allegheny Review*, *Quiddity*, *Puerto Del Sol*, *Gravel*, *Tar River Review*, and elsewhere.

Maureen Clark's book "This Insatiable August" was released in 2024 by Signature Books. She has received two nominations this year for a Pushcart Prize. Her memoir "Falling into Bountiful: Confessions of a Once Upon a Time Mormon" won Honorable Mention in the 2024 Utah Original Writing Competition.

V.C. Myers is the author of *Ophelia* (Femme Salvé Books, 2023) and *Give the Bard a Tetanus Shot* (Vegetarian Alcoholic Press, 2019). She has edited and read for Sarabande Books, Barren, Ice Floe Press, and Frontier Poetry. Her work appears in journals such as EPOCH, Poet Lore, and Prairie Schooner.

Ashlynn Zhang is a Malaysian writer who began writing interactive fiction, and has since decided to pursue her debut novel. She is the voice behind her books-and-writing newsletter Ashlynn's Gone Off Script. She is also a fiction editor at Spellbinder Literary Magazine and Echo Review.

Laura DeHart Young has written seven novels, as well as short stories, published by Naiad Press and Bella Books Inc. Her poetry has been published in *The Bluebird Word*, *The Raven's Perch*, and *The Manuscript*. Laura has enjoyed a career in the communications field and lives north of Atlanta, Georgia.

Jordan Veres is a Jewish musician/songwriter/composer/lyricist/producer, shutterbug, poet, sculptor, artist, and welder currently residing in the Upstate of South Carolina. Jordan execrates where he currently hangs his hat because he is surrounded by a bunch of bigoted mossbacks. Meanwhile, Jordan is an avid supporter of Bernie Sanders and a member of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Sammy T. Anderson (He/Him) is a writer and filmmaker from Indiana. His work has been featured in *Dream Noir*, *Armstrong Literary* and elsewhere. He lives with his wife and three dogs. To see more of his work, visit his website sammytanderson.com, or follow him on instagram @sammytanderson sammytandersonwrites@gmail.com

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Alina Kalontarov is a teacher of English literature and Humanities in New York City. Poetry and photography have always been a way for her to rummage through the unspoken and unseen spaces. She relishes the opportunity to share her work with you.

David Milley's recent work appears in *Third Wednesday*, *RFD Magazine*, *Friends Journal*, and *Feral*. David lives in New Jersey with his husband, Warren Davy, who's made his living as a farmer, woodcutter, nurseryman, auctioneer, beekeeper, and cook. These days, Warren tends his garden and keeps honeybees. David walks and writes.

S.D. Dillon has an MFA from Notre Dame and lives in Michigan. His poetry has appeared recently in *Tampa Review*, *Door = Jar*, *Panorama*, *Dulcet Literary Magazine*, *BarBar*, and *ephemeras*, and is forthcoming in *Canary*, *The Periwinkle Pelican*, and *Tiny Seed Journal*. He can be found on Instagram at @sddillon50.

A.J. Parker grew up in Phoenix, Arizona, then spent some time on the East Coast trying to make up for all that water she lost. Her work has been published in over ten literary journals, including *Feminist Food Journal* and *Watershed Review*.

Renee Kalagayan is a poet from South Carolina, where she writes poems about death and fruit. An MFA student at Converse University, she is on staff at *South 85 Journal*. Her work is featured or forthcoming in *Inkwell Literary Magazine*, *Listening Journal*, *Persephone Literary Magazine*, *Carolina Muse*, and three anthologies.

Matthan Slith (he/they) is a writer and poet with a passion for bringing characters and moments to life. Their work has appeared in *#EnbyLife*, *Fruitslice*, *Juste Literary*, and *Forevermore*. They love reading, listening to the rain, and disappearing in the woods.

Angela Acosta (she/her) teaches Spanish at the University of South Carolina. Her Rhysling and Utopia Award nominated writing has appeared in *Somos en Escrito*, *Apparition Lit*, *Radon Journal*, and *Space & Time*. She is author of *A Belief in Cosmic Dailiness* (Red Ogre Review 2023).

Danielle Hanson is author of *The Night Is What It Eats* (Elixir Press Prize), *Fraying Edge of Sky* (Codhill Press Poetry Prize) and *Ambushing Water* (Finalist, Georgia Author of the Year). She is Marketing Director for Sundress Publications and Poet Laureate of Costa Mesa, and teaches poetry at UC Irvine.

Sabrina Tolve is a poet from Italy, currently living in Ireland. Her work explores themes of identity, nature, and memory, bridging the landscapes of her homeland, Italy, and her adopted country, Ireland. Her poetry has appeared in *Ragaire Magazine*, *Water the Sun*, and other publications in both English and Italian.

Maudie Bryant is a mother, educator, and multidisciplinary artist based in Shreveport, Louisiana. Her work explores memory and identity, transforming

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Isabel Szurlej comes from Poland and the art of creation has always demanded a material form in their existence.

Rory Oliveri writes from the intersection of coming-of-age and queer discovery. She believes a large body of water can heal any ailment. His poetry can also be found in *Last Leaves* issues 8 and 9.

Nico Santana is a Filipino poet from Quezon City. He graduated from Ateneo de Manila University and is currently pursuing an MFA in poetry at New York University. Aside from poetry, he also writes about video games and comics he never plans on actually trying to make.

Carole Greenfield grew up in Colombia and lives in New England, where she teaches ELL at a public elementary school. Her work has appeared in such places as *The Plentitudes*, *Crowstep Journal* and *Amethyst Review*.

Jason Boitnott is a lifelong rural Nebraskan, family man, twenty-eight-year educator (high school counselor), and livestock farmer. His poems can be found in recent issues of *The Midwest Review*, *The Closed Eye Open*, *Wingless Dreamer*, and *Nebraska Poetry Society's Poetry Rabble*.

James Long's poems have appeared in *Presence: A Journal of Catholic Poetry*, *Appalachian Review*, *Still: The Journal*, *Kestrel*, and are forthcoming in *Pirene's Fountain*, *Good River Review* and *I-70 Review*. He recently completed an MFA in poetry at Spalding University. Long lives, works and writes in Charleston, West Virginia.

Diana Becket was born in Manchester, England, lived in the Netherlands, then moved to Cincinnati, Ohio. She began to write poetry when she retired from teaching composition courses. Her poems were published in *Muddy River Poetry Review*, *The Cape Rock*, and the anthology, *I Thought I Heard a Cardinal Sing*.

Tony Brinkley's poetry, translations and art have appeared in *Mississippi Review*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Cerise Press*, *Drunken Boat*, *Four Centuries*, *Hinchas de Poesie*, *Hungarian Review*, *MayDay*, *New Review of Literature*, *Puckerbrush Press*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Otoliths*, *Shofar*, *Metamorphosis*, *OPEN*, *Collateral*, *Nashville Review*, and *World Literature Today*.

Elizabeth Fletcher's published poems appear in *Spaceports & Spidersilk*, *Ariel Chart*, *Tiny Seed Literary Journal*, *Star*Line*, *Cape Cod Times*, *San Antonio Review*, *Schuykill Valley Journal*, *Book of Matches*, among others. Nominations :

2023 Rhysling Award and 2021 Pushcart prize. Philadelphia Inquirer publications include essays on sea turtles and Snowy owls.

Brandy Bell Carter is a high school English teacher in Wake Forest, NC and lives nearby with her husband. She is inspired by the beauty of nature, bluegrass, Mary Oliver's poems, and the Psalms. Her work has been published in The Wake Forest Review and Y2K Quarterly.

Stacie Eirich is a mother of two & author living in Texas. Her latest book publication, *Hope Like Sunlight* (2024) is a memoir of her family's journey to their child's cure from brain cancer. She writes for healing and hope; her verses are inspired by nature, the arts and humanity.

Claudia Tong is an artist and quantitative researcher based in London, dedicated to storytelling and humanity. Her practice spans from painting and illustrations to mixed media, visual computing and music. With a background in computer science and psychology, she has lived, worked and exhibited internationally. <https://linktr.ee/claudiuxt>

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Blissfully retired in Clackamas, Oregon, **Carolyn Martin** is a lover of gardening and snorkeling, feral cats and backyard birds, writing and photography. Her poems have appeared in more than 200 journals throughout North America, Europe, and Australia. Find out more at www.carolynmartinpoet.com.

Andrew Robson is a writer from Western Australia and a member of the Peter Cowan Writer's Centre.

Jonathan Ukah's poems have appeared in NDQ, The Pierian, Boomer Literary Magazine, Strange Horizons, Kingsman Quarterly and elsewhere. He won the Alexander Pope Poetry Award 2023 of The Pierian Literary Magazine. He was a finalist at the African Diaspora Award 2023 and has been twice nominated for the Pushcart Prize.

Anatalia Vallez is a writer, actor and creative alchemist from Orange County, California with roots in Guerrero Mexico. She is the author of a poetry collection:

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Jamie Lim is currently an undergraduate student at Johns Hopkins University studying chemical and biomolecular engineering. She aspires to be a physician-scientist and bring hope to patients with chronic diseases. In her free time, she writes poetry, designs houses on *The Sims 4*, and watches African wildlife documentaries.

Laura Denny lives in the Santa Cruz Mountains. She got her BA degree in dance from UCSC long ago. She has retired from thirty years of teaching kindergarten. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Sunlight Press*, *Remington Review* and *Academy of the Heart And Mind*.

Caleb Knisley is a student writer and artist. Caleb has never published anything in his life but occasionally would do a bit of writing and sketching based on stuff he likes. Caleb is currently a student at Shawnee State University as a Gaming Arts Major.

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Elizabeth Diamond is an avid crafter, reader and baker, always looking for new projects and inspiration in her world. She has written poetry for years and has been published in *Zig Zag Lit Mag*, *Highland Park Poetry* and *Portrait of New England*.

Sarah Das Gupta is an ex- teacher, aged 82, who worked in UK, India, Africa. She is learning to walk again, after an accident. Her work has been published in over 20 different countries. She is a nominee for Best of the Net and Dwarf star.

Julia Ludewig is a learner, teacher, and traveler with hearts on two continents. She teaches German and Environmental Humanities at a small liberal-arts college in Pennsylvania. Her work appears in *Midsummer Dream House*, *Meat for Tea*, *Scribeworthy*, and *Front Strike Press*.

Beth Gilson (they/them) is a writer living in Brooklyn, NY. When they are not writing, they love to look at the clouds in the park.

Mira Lightner is an undergraduate student studying Classics and Ancient Religions. She enjoys writing about ancient myths, lesser deities, childhood memories, and grief. Her poetry has previously been published in the *Moonstone New Voices Anthology* and her undergraduate thesis is due to be published in the spring.

Danuta E. Kosk-Kosicka is a poet, translator, and photographer. She is the author of two award-winning poetry collections and co-editor of *Loch Raven Review*.

Published in Notre Dame Review, Spillway, Tar River Poetry, and elsewhere. Her art appeared in Last Leaves Magazine issue 9. Website: danutakk.wordpress.com

Jamie Schneider is a poet based in Florida, drawing inspiration from human interactions and current events. He is working on his first poetry collection and looks forward to sharing his voice with a broader audience.

Sara Collie (she/her) is a Norwich-based poet with a PhD in French Literature and a lifelong fascination with the way that words and stories shape and define us. Her writing explores the wild, uncertain spaces of nature, the complexities of mental health, and the mysteries of the creative process.

Anika Gomez is a junior in NYC Lab High School. Outside of school, she swims, hikes, bakes, cooks, and snowboards. She enjoys writing poetry because it gives her the opportunity to write about her experiences in an unconventional way.

J. Adam Collins is a creative director in Portland, Oregon. He holds an MA in Book Publishing from Portland State and is a founding member of the Writers.com Community. His poetry has been featured in Assaracus, Pair Shaped, The Tishman Review, and others. Find out more at jadamcollins.com.

Jan Wiezorek writes from Michigan. His poetry chapbook, *Forests of Woundedness*, is forthcoming from Seven Kitchens Press. Wiezorek's poetry appears in *The London Magazine*, *The Westchester Review*, and *Lucky Jefferson*. He taught writing at St. Augustine College, Chicago, and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize.

Pragadish Kalaivanan is a queer poet born in India and living in Boston. His work explores everyday emotions and childhood nostalgia that are often accompanied by feelings of longing and acceptance. His poem has recently appeared in the third issue of *Body Talk*. TikTok: [pragadishkalaivan](https://www.tiktok.com/@pragadishkalaivan)

Juliana Weiss is an aspiring writer who can't wait to share her work with others. Juliana has been writing and reading for as long as she can remember. When she's not reading she enjoys playing guitar, hanging out with friends, and going to her favorite summer camp.

Rik Mazolli (they/he) is a trans-nonbinary writer, drummer, poet, percussionist, composer, and editor. They are the author of the novels "Nautila" (2020) and "Boyish" (2024), the poetry collection "Killed the Clock" (2023), and the photography collection "Oneirik Desolation" (2024).



