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Autumn Mystery

Marianne Celano

(Response to Stanley Kunitz, Adam Zagajewski, and Mary Oliver)

In treacherous times
the heart can harden
before it breaks.
How then do we praise
the mutilated world?

The basil has bolted,
the blossoms now vibrate
with carpenter bees.
Tiny tomatoes jewel vines
encased in spiderwebs.

There must be more
to prayer
than paying attention,
than resisting
the impulse to look away
from destruction.

The fig tree is dropping
its leaves, yet today
I found two ripe fruits
in its embrace.
If only mystery
was the end of the tale,
not a gateway drug
to certainty.

Every day when I drive off,
I break a web
strung between bush and car
and every morning
it reappears, like magic.

Finding Roots in the Marshland

Linda Vigen Phillips

ancient live oak, what secrets
seeded your birth before girth
before bark overlaid palm prints
of bonnet-maidens making merry
round your roots
routing wisdom to the ages

shrilling cicadas—sing unto sky
let your timbre tell all,
stories you gleaned
burrowed below ground,
a free spirit naming your
own time, singing your own sound

azaleas creating color riots
Autumn Amethyst
Perfecto Mundo Orange
Plumleaf
favored child of Spring
spreading soul balm
up highways, down lanes
across all species
of the animal kingdom

Savannah, seal me in your seasons
ways of sun and soil
a stranger digging
down for roots
bargaining with sea breeze
branching out shaky limbs
looking up, scaling to top
skimming the surface
searching the waters
making peace
with the marshland

gopher
Hugh Findlay

long heat of summer
[deep burrow into earth's womb]
slow freeze of winter



Seasons
Sonia Nanescu

Into the Wet

Amelia M Pozniak

The autumn leaves, often misremembered as dry, have always been wet
They've masterminded confusion, hypnotized our zealous expectations
But as they were, I saw canopies of
Wet where buds grew cherries, now apples, round and obtuse—bursting at the
Seams of confounding understanding all blowing
Bits into the picking fields splattering noses red

Cross, I have never been cross, maybe indifferent, maybe something different but when
I tell you no, you know, you hold my hand and we cross
Wet leaves and turning birch trees of freedom, glinting in the eyes of the leavings season
There are five houses in this town and I have disappointed
Them all, you gall, I stall, they call us
Girls, the train light turns
And the water runs from the city, dirty and thick with the
Muck of what goes on down there
We watch it penetrate stone passes as wet leaves stick
To our thighs, I sigh,
They don't know what to do with
Girls, the track light turns
It warns us from above, closest I've known to an omen but
You look to the water, always further, always another
Sensation to step out onto the rock, before the ice is
A sea of possibilities

I tell you no, you know, hold my hand and take me to the deep
Where waits the island of plum city exhaust,
We soak our legs in the river
The dead beetles of a summer's fall tickle our thighs
Plunge bare feet into the shallow
I see in your laughing, no reason for laughing, yet laughing
It stings my eyes, the blue and green, the sour creep of improvement bluing the veins of our skin
And in the laughing is a
Hair slicked back to a woman's spine it is old it
Shivers
In the wet of it all

Solstice

Sean Whalen

Sunrise and a wet wool blanket
weighs down the shoulders of the cornbelt.
Crops pant like marathon runners,
sweat into the ocean of air where swallows
imitate breaching dolphins and people
bottom crawl like sponges and crabs.

Driving to work, feeling underwater, the sun
blocks the damp girl dragging her lolling dog
toward the crosswalk. I see her flippered finger
in the mirror after they jump back to the curb.
I should back up and thank her for the gesture,
a reminder of the blindness caused by staring

longingly into the light, but instead I drive on,
roll down the window, inhale the dank air salted
by a fresh spreading of fertilizer, drink my coffee,
listen to the robins swimming in the yards,
watch the sun teeter on the waving tree tops
knowing tomorrow will be infinitesimally shorter.

Creekside

Rikki Santer

Your sadness is not mine to possess
but yesterday afternoon you agreed

to walk with me into our nearby metro park.
In the sunshine we were fellow adventurers

in awe of conventions of gray-headed coneflowers
and bees dancing over pink billy buttons.

Our back and forth talk mostly light and warm
but then twice that dark animal inside you

with tentacles whipped sharp and bleak.
As we headed off the trail, you gently

held my hand to steady me down a slope to a wide
expanse of creekbed, its rocky floor baked dry.

I turned right, drawn to a place where the water gurgled
through its tightened throat. You turned left

looking for fossils and what could have been discarded.
As you walked beyond me I watched this handsome

son of mine, tall and lean with long curls, make
his way to explore what was ahead of him.

The next morning, lined up on my kitchen table,
I found three tiny shells no bigger than fingernails

exquisite in their scalloped wonder having protected
a delicate creature for a while.



Morning Walks
Anita Pinatti

THANKS, PINE

Kenneth Pobo

A glorious morning
on the trail, mosquitoes
must still be asleep.
I have on earphones. Ah,
the best of Tommy James
and the Shondells. I sing
along with “I Think We’re
Alone Now”—that’s when

I walk straight
into a pine and fall
on ferns and needles.
I don’t cuss out the tree.
It’s me, my attention
tangled up
in chords. Besides,

being on the ground
brings peace, smelling
a new spring,
counting red trilliums,
a branch lending me
a hand to get up.

Landscape

Dan Fitzgerald

Light paints shadows
across the yard,
their shapes the beginning ghosts
of trees, of shrubs,
 of passing clouds.
There is sound in this,
a below the whispering of air
heard only when a leaf moves,
 or a bird sings.
Darkness speaks then,
a brush stroke of voice
announcing the palette of night,
finishing a landscape.

Symmetry in the Silence

Darlene Bester

I try fruitlessly, to piece
night back together,
with only my fingertips,
and smooth over the dimness,
the street lamps that hover
like dying candles.

About half of my sky is
covered in stars that lie
in hypocrisy, and the other
is a place where the birds can
fly through my dreams
anonymously.

I do find peace in the
blowing out of a dying
candle, as the smoke fills
the air in one final
aesthetic sort of way.
At the end of the road,
I awake from a dream
in which my steering wheel
is that of a velvet cloth.
There could be symmetry
in the silence,
if I so choose or desire; instead,
I'm left with a quiet
vagueness in the
palm of my hands.



floral bfloral b&W 30
Denise Bossarte

Violet Fields

Mary Baca Haque

we are exposed to past storytellers, left to twist
slowly on our own in the winds from yesterday
words formed on occasion into sporadic storms

nevertheless, this is food in our own wilderness,
solitary healing—our companion to our own
wrought endeavors in life’s daunting residue;

yet we remain as such seeking balance towards
a radiant view laden and bellowing like meadows
covered in fields of exquisite violets

with sundry petals—some are tragic. some precarious.
some take our breath away touching our soul ridden
in flaws concealed from the light, even so

the color tells a most elegant story—

we walk. we pass. we admire the sumptuous, quietly
poised in our own unsteady retrospection looking onto
the recital of beauty regardless.

One

Elizabeth Birch

If trees are connected
underground synapses relaying information
between root systems and fungal filaments
about sunlight, drought, the wrenching pain
of chainsaws and relentless itch of termites, or
the qualities and nutrients in soil that humans have yet
to create names for
then what other connections exist
beyond our blunt eye? Do the stars communicate
 deep intergalactic frequencies less detectable than dark matter
to warn planets of species that eat their insides
or corrode their atmospheric bark, smoke signals sent
through funeral pyres? Or is their combustion like rebirth,
a celebratory candle in the sky?

We extend our eyes, ears, mouths, and fingers, our clumsy
roots and tendrils, into the world. Unlike the trees
 intertwined for miles of forest
we stand stiff
like telephone poles stretched across the earth's surface
and toss each other wires, hoping
we don't lose much in the static, hoping
our lines don't tangle or sag with birds or wrap
around another's neck.

But what if there is more
than these desperate attempts to decipher
each other and everything, more than this distraction
translating the tangible,

here, here, here
this, this, this

an energy missed by us and trees, a rippling
vibration between all
species and stars?

Here. This.
Here. This.

We spin like tops waiting to topple, hoping
to fall in the direction of righteousness,
 waiting and spinning until we forget

we would ever want to stop spinning at all.

Hinohara

Madeleine French

from this day
guiding a needle
through
cotton
my fingers
will remember

snowy stitched
patterns
on a cobalt
kimono

a wannabe-waterfall's
silver
song

soft scarlet
leaves
that looked
spiky
but weren't

a citrusy scent of
cedar
in my hair

gilded
chrysanthemums
with petals like
paper

a cotton cloud
halo
on the hill
I could almost
touch

More Sermon than Proposal Cyn Kitchen

Does the forest know her trees? Name them one by one?
What if we have it upside down? Entertain this:
trees rooted in the sky, trunks making purchase.
Fruit & nuts, currency—freely exchanged,
never hoarded. Imagine a world
where Grandma always said there's room
for one more at the bosom of the table.

Here, take, eat.

I crash over the hill into a glade of fallen ancestors,
stepping over bones and teeth that bid me remember
they too once were, before the collapse, when the back
of a cosmic hand brushed my cheek in the name of the Father,
Son and Holy Ghost. All I'm saying is they have eyes too.
Maybe if we start using ours, this mess will calm down
and we can begin to make sense of the map the ants left behind.

Summer's End

Nancy Cherry

Nothing moves this morning beneath
last night's dusting of rain—thick scent
of the tropics clinging to the dark, its
soundless shuffle as time holds its breath.
It felt like the promise of a kiss, a sultry
stirring like a memory of hunger or
the unexpected return of lost love—
the way the pit of your belly sways as
the swing pauses, falls back to earth and
swoops up again as you pump your legs,
lean in and rise.

It was only a suggestion, a tone of voice
caught in the written word. I feel now
what I felt then—an excitement, a taste
of tenderness, the rouge of memory I may
reach out to touch, but it is only air in
my hand, a softness against my cheek.

Late Season

Eric Samuel Chapman

The air turns metallic,
as if someone rinsed the sky,
forgot to dry it

billboards fade slower than trees,
their faces breathing through rain,
each promise half kept

commuters stand in doorways
carrying July's heat
like ghosts of labor

somewhere a mower idles too long,
its sound growing roots
in the wrong yard

days fold inward
like receipts in a wallet,
ink thinning but never gone

a leaf sticks to the windshield,
the color of an old penny,
still there when the light changes



Refuge
Katherine Schander-Triplett

The Last Day of Summer

Patricia Hemminger

I'm sitting in the garden on the Autumn
Equinox, trying to write about balance,
how I love the world, know I'll have

to leave it. A housefly crawls over
the page, a black jumping spider
explores the cast aluminum patio table.

A chipmunk hesitates in the flowerbed
then makes a dash for its hole. A honeybee
lands on my notebook's orange cover.

I transfer the bee carefully onto the late-
blooming Gaillardia daisy. I hear the clicking
of the Carolina Wren, buff-colored breast

and long white eyebrows. The tufted
titmouse joins in, grey crest and black
forehead. Now a cacophony—the fish

crow, Black-capped Chickadee, the Eastern
Phoebe bobbing with its tail down, the red-
Bellied Woodpecker hammering into the dead

branch of the ash. Some say it's best
not to name things— it encourages
attachment. Too late for that

and yet at times I taste a letting go,
as those late-blooming daisies let go
their fiery blossoms when winter comes.

I caught my reflection

Michael VanCalbergh

and won't let him go
until he calls us stunning.

It's a game we haven't played
in many metal months. We start

touching our lips and eyelashes. Today,
we're expansive, so we embrace our chin, palms

down. When that dimple in our left shoulder
valleys and curves, we shudder. We run

our hands like tightening a bag
strap; the weight difficult

to carry. We want to go further but this mirror
doesn't go past our chest. He winks,

promises this day will be okay. We
step back. All the baggage hangs revealed and

we do not cry. I take my reflection by the chin,
run our knuckles from cheek to our side,

watch his disbelief as we cradle
our torso softly like old books.

He's grateful I've learned what I need
to carry me and goes to leave. So distracted

by the gentle graze of our hands against
a body we were told not to love,

I almost miss his victory, a short hot
breath against my ear: We're stunning.

Island in December

James Fleet Underwood

I could use an island,
an extinguishing
of this hot, red fist
punching me inside

and out until I'm crunching
aspirin & ibuprofen beneath
a rolling pin and spooning
them onto my oatmeal. I vision

myself running
across a highway at night
in a kind of blackout
of temptation then sprinting back
barefoot because I've intentionally
left my shoes.

Gums bleed when I drink
anything hot and I'm up
most nights plucking wings
from stars and pasting
an inverse zodiac
on my window. At weekends

I pack a bag,
sit beside it in the dark.

In southern Thailand
an island
where giant sea turtles
doze in December moon beams—
if you're there at dawn
ride them into the surf.

Tonglen Kathryn DeZur

In—

Silver needle pulls brown thread
through skin in bathroom,
hospitals too dangerous

Out—

Fawn beds down, dozes,
sweetgrass dapples sunlight
across tawny pelt

In—

Thunderclap in the head, jagged
mountain range of chipped tooth,
purple-green plain of forearm

Out—

Aspens whisper ochre
shimmers of wind,
rustle rhythms of spheres

In—

Repeating blue linoleum
fractals crack, heart
attack in the kitchen

Out—

Honeybees sip nectar from pink-
kissed lotus, tiger pelted cymbidium
orchids equally

In—

Still black ink longs
for the ripple, the dead
calligrapher's hand

Out—

The hawk's yellow eye
surveys the dandelion,
the sun



In the Trees
Gina M Gidaro

Precipice Dancing

Michelle Brown

Sitting by an algae filled pond,
tiny, rippled circles lazily drift.
Dragonflies dance on surface.
Boulders hold her in place.

Shubunkins somersault in
anticipation of sustenance.
Brain chases problems in circles—
up and down mind constructed
stairs floating and moving before
solutions appear.

A wrenching soul howl
breaks free of brain's control.
Sunflowers wrenched from the ground
life force filled with love, now...
tabula rasa.

Shudders ripple, through spine
fighting for stability,
Wind whispers through the gum leaves.

A raucous of mynahs debate
clattering chatter, distracting the internal mirror.

Choices to be made,
Nature's repeating patterns
replicated in human relationships.

Perfect, beautiful cycles,
Fibonacci spirals, danced, to find peace within.

Choose the wrong door, the pathway
spirals into dark shadows filled with
obsidian glares coming face to face with...
the abyss within.

Precipice dancing by an algae filled pond.
Blue dog chases the crowd away,
Decision made as her hand grabs
algae sludgy slime,
grimaced and dumped
feeding future flowers in compost.

Love Poem for Friday

Susan M Coronel

You're named after Frigga, wife
of the German god Odin and goddess
of married love. You appear at Shabbat,
the day we run out of pizza dough

and use flatbread instead. Oregano leaves scatter
on the marital bed, mouthing leave me, don't leave.
You're smudged glass, a missed period.
You hold my loneliness like a golden egg

suspended in a milk galaxy. Sometimes
you surprise me with your waxing moon
and I pull over on the highway to witness you.
I wait in the weeds of you. Warbling, not wobbling.

My children won't listen to you, won't honor
my requests to hold their gaze for more than a minute.
Friday, sometimes I fear your return,
think you should relocate with me to Connecticut

so we can count deer among wildflowers – yarrow,
milkweed, columbine. Once a fresh loaf,
now you're shredded, dispersed like crumbs.
You're the day I realize I don't love enough,

even though I say yes, while my voice mouths
why not, it's not so bad, aren't you grateful
that you can mark the week's end with a match
so light won't leave the body?



Clymane Alone in Her Room
Joel Lind

Returning Home

Madi Corell

Every June, air and brush hurry,
swell thick as soon summer pushes through.

Green crawls, demands, chokes out.
Trails disappear.

Still, there is no forgetting
the almost slipping of a tightly wound wheel,

those stomach dropping curves.
When oak trees call,

I obey:
follow veiny paths to a cold creek,

slide butter-fed thighs onto
wet limestone, watch them

transform into fat water moccasins
skimming the surface.

When dangling on the edge,
there is no right or wrong;

We all end up the pit
in someone else's stomach.

Marriage Poem

Hannah Phillips Mollenkamp

My husband wishes the maple
outside the kitchen window were red.

My husband wishes for a baby.

My husband wishes I would not write poems
about some of the things I write poems about.

My husband wishes I wouldn't put words in his mouth.

My husband is a man, but you knew that already.
My husband is a person, but sometimes I forget.

I write him into a poem to remember

but it just makes me mistake him
for a metaphor. This is not a metaphor:

My husband wants a baby and a red maple

in autumn. My husband wants the things I want, usually.
My husband is braver than I am. That might not be true, I don't know.

I also don't know my husband

because knowing someone isn't possible,
like how it isn't possible to turn a yellow tree

into a red one. Like how it might not be possible

for me to have a baby and so it's easier not to want
but we want anyway and I want to know him

so I imagine I do. I write poems and pretend. He helps.

I ask him to hold me so I can pretend I'm real.
I ask him to hold me down so I can pretend I'm not.

I want things, too, I think. He lets me pretend

they're the right ones and I think maybe this
is marriage, this game we play where we want things together:

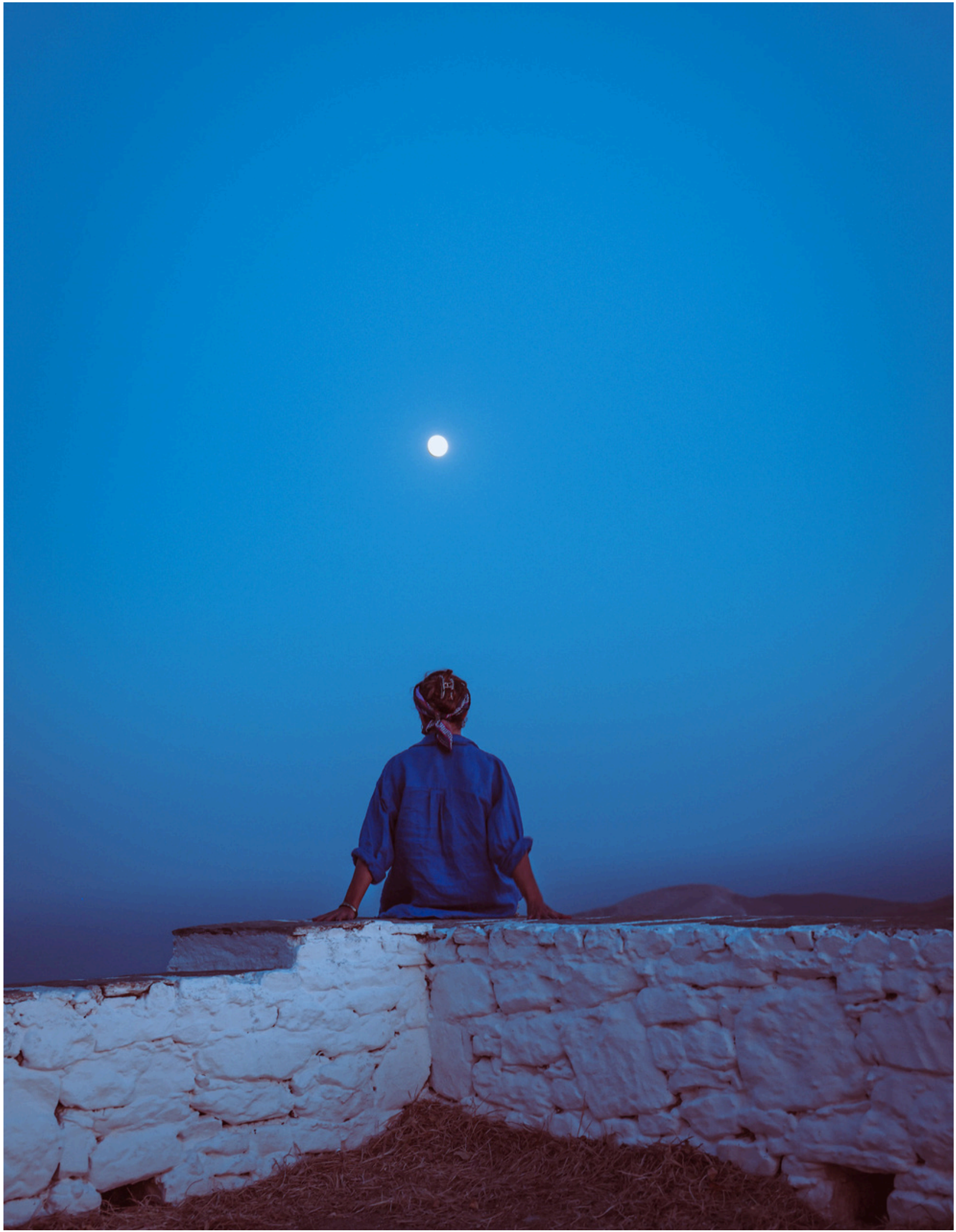
A red maple instead of a yellow one, a baby with his eyes.

Words and glue to fix the broken things.
Another body in our bed, or two.

World peace. A green house instead of a red one.

You get the idea. We do this every day. We do this
until I worry we have forgotten

how to want the things we have.



Nowhere to Go
Larena Nellies-Ortiz



Train That Never Came
Sara Jorgensen

Desert Winds

Cindy Rinne

Oriental porcelain teacup with stones hand-painted blue on the inside, a conversation of chili oil remembrances

The crocheted hat didn't turn out just the way she wanted, mourning her sweet dog's passing

Desert wind presses against the car; his jaw is bone scraping bone

Tiny cactus spines bite her ankle, but sunrise too, a city is a living thing

My silent moment for her friend's passing one year ago and another today and then another and another and another, Berries Ripen Moon hides behind the ocotillo branches

Ears inside my body (Go down the spine. Listen. Land in one area. Visualize.), fussy about how she likes her matcha

Joshua Tree boulders stacked upon each other start to break down in his back, he makes his clothes by hand

Cyclic mandala of cosmic unity, my body covered in intricate designs of self-exploration

Someone close to me breathes in the mouth to the stomach and back up to the heart and out the mouth, quiet and rooted when she goes for repair under chaotic winds

prove the intangible

Justin Ecarma

would you believe my eyes
if i raised them up to you
from a position of prayer
on the floor
because i believe in you
i need you to know you believe in me

i will show you
my proof first

take my heart out of my chest
pass it around the room
feel the stains on your hands
so you know my heart is a bleeding one
squeeze it as it goes along
so everyone knows it beats for them too

just because I know what I am
does not mean I want you to know
but if you must take out my eyes
dig around to find the brain
look through my sockets
to see in the cortex
how many neurons you live in

how much does anyone need
to peel away from a person
to cross section their layers
to find out what they are

i offer my body
so you may find out



floral b&W 35
Denise Bossarte

Freeze Warning Sam Calhoun

They say it will freeze
tonight, protect sensitive
vegetation, especially
low valleys, cold pockets
where the air has to wait
for light a little longer,
and here we are, ready
for spring vegetables,
ready for summer being
honest, for when the earth
doesn't smell so fresh
with each rain, no grass
having grown yet to sort
out the weeds, just here
in the last of winter,
equinox meaning nothing,
meaning the jonquils
are lowering, yellowbells
beginning their green hats,
meaning I rake your grave,
place three of each
against the heart-stone,
hold this cold air deep
in my chest, and let go.

Snowmen Lain

Breathing in the sharp edges,
In with the crystaling cold,
Out with the mourning warmth,

A new season has arrived.

Born of melted fire and blistering frost,
Terrified creatures and terrifying humans,
Ice out to kill, killing on the ice,

A routine is created.

One foot in front and behind,
Always creating caution and fear,
An emptiness arrives and a wind calls,
But no one answers in the far mountains,

An exhilaration is defined.

Spirits become antsy,
Ready to call the war of blistering storms,
While foreign darkness arrives early
With little time to spare,

A new time is born.

Even without the sun, the blue sky,
The harshness, the dark times,
Deep breaths, Short nights,
Chilling monsters, frozen deaths,

A little girl makes a snowman,

And a world stops to smile.

Hyperborea

Greg J Hill

There are no apologies for layering snow into the first
few lines of this poem—clouds full of dancing
curds settling into sheets on walkways, into mounds

by the mailbox and the cedar, furious flaking that hushes
the neighborhood with its insistence, the cleansing
of its cold calm. The snow I sprinkle in

is weather's only token of winter. Instead,
the windows go unfrosted, stare across black
highway to construction and the schoolyard, everything

buzzing with a stale regularity of spring. Firewood remains
untouched, and despite the new baby, and the in-laws
who drove over from Vermont, even Christmas

appears to have been misplaced into the chapter of another
season. The oversized jackets we reciprocated with
thank you letters and Happy New Year photo cards are worn

mostly for show, or to signal preparedness to Aquilon and Skaði
who forgot us. After tunnel digging months out of
last year's custard and frosting, should we not rejoice

this winter's lean diet? Rather, with nothing
for our little dogs to burrow and bound, nothing to shake off
at the front door, nothing to curse waving those cheap scrapers

and choking morning exhaust by our rear fenders, we wave
to each other without mittens, even lament that we might as well
be in Florida. Our parents call from Naples and West Palm

wishing they had skipped the migration and had stayed here,
where the only indication of month is the time the sun sets,
still well before dinner and bed.



Tranquility
Henry Vinicio Valerio Madriz

Shift

Emily Benson

we celebrate less of me
my lessening
the lesson of becoming
fewer unbecoming cells
the stardust of children
we let out into the driving snow
trusting that they will return
when darkness falls
so early and so deep
winter winnowing away
even as it accrues
amassing mass
the massive weight of silence
and when was the last time we wanted
anything at all to bridge this gulf?
yawning into sleep
where we escape and
silence the voices echoing
inside brains
stuffed with pink insulation
excess meat
snow piling up against the fence
year after year
pushing over the pickets
picking at our frayed beginnings
I am afraid
I will never return
to this form I no longer know
will something new form?
formulate a plan to grow
less selfish selves
freed from self-loathing
moving together
in all our fears and flaws
through the thaw
into a warmer season

Fledgling

Paul Hostovsky

My training wheels lie in the grass
like legs. My father stands over them,
steadying the bicycle with one hand
while with the other he beckons
with a grimy finger. A Phillips-head
sticks in the earth beside the severed
pair. The whole scene looks like an amputation.
I will never walk again, if I can help it—
as soon as I learn how to fly. Flying
will be a little like dying and a little
like being born. I mount the bike
which wobbles slightly in my father's grip
the way the earth wobbles in the grip
of the late afternoon sun going down
behind the huddled houses. The seat
which is a little higher than the sun,
and the handlebars which are approximately
two stars, together form my north and south poles.
My spine is the prime meridian. My nose
sticks out over the top of the hill, on top
of the world, sniffing the air for the bottom.



Balancing Memories
Gina M Gidaro

Equilibrium

Martin Willitts Jr.

The boy on the train loses his balance.
He wants to talk endlessly about the altar boy
turning into a monarch butterfly,
trying to escape through the church window.

His father hushes him
into a folded newspaper
origami. The boy's words crease
and press
into asymmetrical triangles.

The boy remembers the altar boy
cringing under the vestibule,
making the sign of the cross
with his fingers across his chest,
praying to die.

Instead, the boy's news is derailed.
His father closes his ears,
throws away the key:
It's getting near-late.

The boy tosses words like harpoons.
He cannot forget the butterfly
bashing against church windows,
hymns singing off-key.

The altar boy gets a part of his prayer answered,
becoming butterfly
dangling off a Calder mobile,
with an incense ball as fulcrum
and a drying palm leaf on the other side.

The boy on the train could never forget the altar boy.
He'd never forgive himself if he did.
The boy knows the powerlessness of children.
He would pray until his knees bruised and redden:

*if I should die before I wake,
my soul, please, do take.*

a common name in tibet

Kenneth Kesner

did you touch the moon feel its fog
chasing down winter streets
ask for a second chance
look at intersections nothing greater
as they were no longer than before
the parades trailed off into the night
you wandered off still in shadow
saw something of yourself in laughter
to imagine an analogy of the lost
not there and where you can't return
silence as directions if you could
hypnotized though not meaning to
the incense written for her eyes to hear

Advice To Another Self

Helen Nancy Meneilly

Write a letter to someone you love.

Write to god. Write to yourself as a child. Write to your mother,
again, or write to a stranger. Don't write to any more men in prison.

Write to the uncontainable sky, to your future self, to your niece in twenty years.

Go to the ocean, walk all the way down to it. Take your shoes off.

Write a letter to your sister. Tell her you're sorry.

Write a love poem in which no one dies or is lost. Write a novel.

Put it on your bucket list at least. Put both feet down into the thick, wet sand.

Listen to the surge of the sea and write about its voice.

Put your heart into the earth instead of into the pockets of careless men.

Write about the land you're from. Write about why
you aren't there. Put your arms out wide as the salt air
whips around you. Listen to your heart's boast. Be proud.

Write a poem about the moon: shapeshifter, slipping out
from behind her curtain of cloud. Write a poem where
you leave and never look back.

Write a prayer, which can be anything at all.



Ocean Horizon
Henry Vinicio Valerio Madriz

War

Krista Ruffo

Lives lived and lives lost
on battlefields where blood was spilled
and mothers mourned for new graves
they knew their sons would fill. For freedom
they were killed; now they sleep beneath a storm.

A raindrop from full clouds above
waters the harrowing, hallowed ground
where thousands of dry bones lay,
alive somewhere beyond the bright, burning stars
of a blue-black summer sky.

Every golden grain of every beach
is grateful for whom it carried to turn the tide;
Every silvery moon that sets
bows its head in reverence to the sun
that warms the sea of whitewashed tombs.

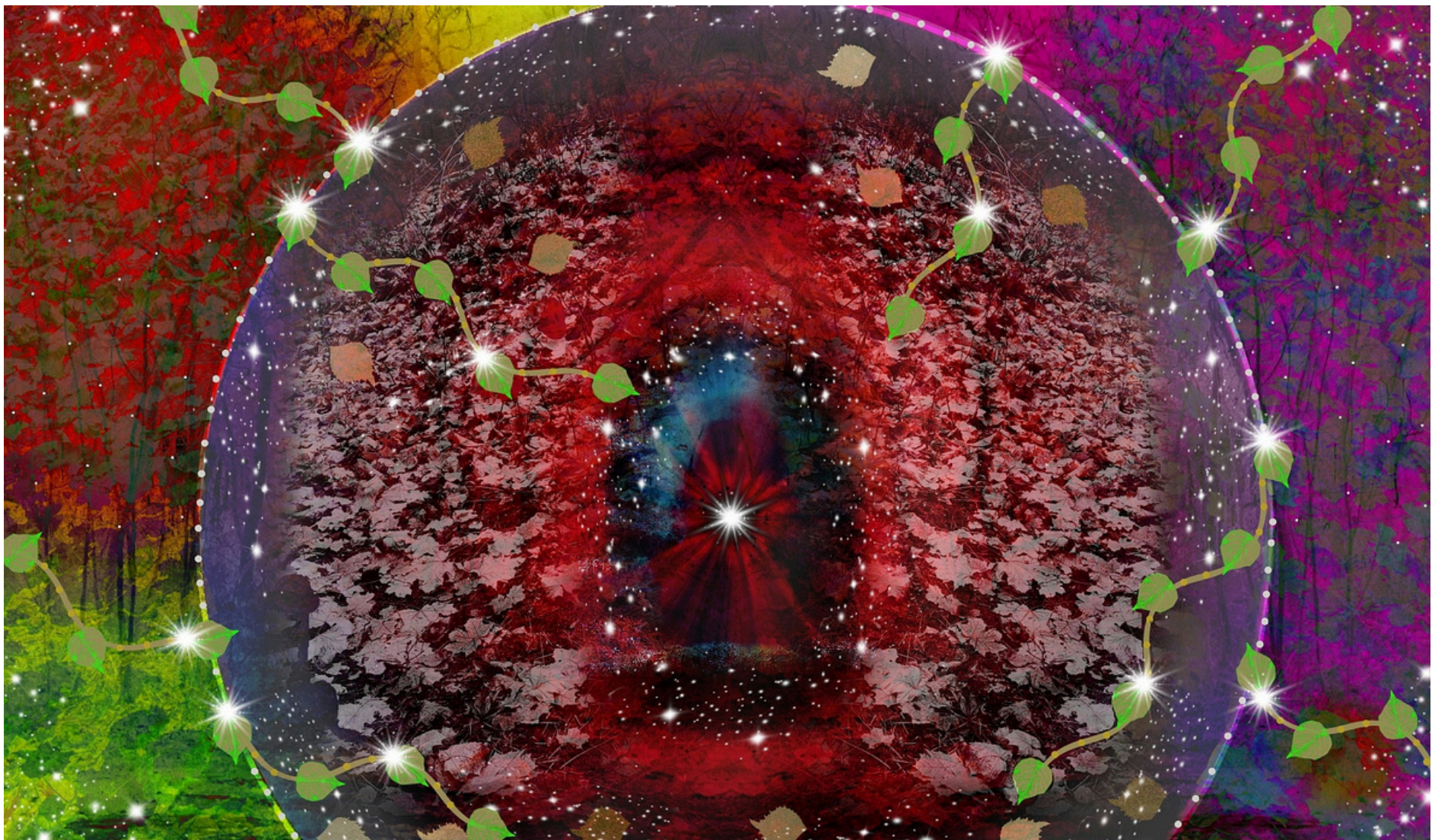
The dew from roses that have bloomed
swirls to a vapor at daybreak
as the clouds reclaim their ghosts.
The earth sighs at the weight of her load
that she holds in sorrowful duty.

Green hills darken as a roll of thunder
brings in black clouds that unleash their tears
once again, giving life to the sacred soil
under which a soul rests,
and above which new life grows.

Everything in the World

Charlene Langfur

Days like this I'm looking for more than I can
count up. I'm taking slow deep breaths here
where the sun rises over the mountains and I'm walking
out under the fat oasis palm trees full of brown fronds
when it seems life as I know it now has to begin again
when I am out touching the white petals on the fruit trees
as if I can keep what is soft close to me even now when
I am all alone looking for life's beginning and endings,
you know what I mean, I am out finding the edges, touching
the sky, the closeness, the exact loving kindness that
holds us to the planet in the first place, all the gravity
and the warmth and the pools of water where the birds drink.
My rescued dog and I walk over the desert at first light
and she leaps as if for the light itself because she knows
how it all begins again and we are part of it, holding on,
walking apace, slowing and stopping for the unexpected.
She always stops for the unexpected and so do I now.
How else will I get on? In front of me the cactus is covered
in yellow flowers and the tall wild grass blows in the wind
like angel's wings and we are moving in the wind such that
all we have to do is understand we are part of everything,
part is what is safe and begins again, what blooms because
I plant seeds each day and water them gently to begin with,
one of many moves of caretaking, because we are all in it,
you are and I am and my lovely yellow rescued dog, all of us,
like the petals opening in the moonlight, everywhere there is.



The Beginning of Knowledge
Diamante Lavendar

Halosere*

Christopher McCammon

We go down together, time and time, you
and I at week's end, nestling into dark
as near as body will admit until
too close, too warm, we each recalibrate,
now just apart, this matter of our lives
compressed but never fully decomposed.

You always rise before me, even though
I've often been awake enough to watch
you arch and curl into the glow above
our bed, as sinuous as smoke; and still
while half-asleep I see you drift, become
diffuse in every room, filling the day.

This oscillation's meter is our bond:
we fold to fen, unfold again to air.

*Haloseres are plant communities emerging in saltwater coastal environments.

Unmanned

Helen Nancy Meneilly

Be brave, by which I mean
be hopeful.

Unexplored ocean beckons:
blue abyss over which we rise
into exosphere. My two passports,
restless in a drawer, speak
of possibility wherever I find
uncertainty.

No longer afraid
of any border, I have walked
the length of my hometown

and kept going.

Now, here I am.
My spine holding me up.
Horizon in every direction.
I arrive at the edge of the sea:

One bag packed. A ticket
in my pocket. No return.
No belonging, except
to my own two feet.

Between Two Worlds

Barbara Krasner

After Self-Portrait Along the Border Line Between Mexico and the United States by Frida Kahlo (Mexico), 1932

I want to stay.
I want to go.

I want to dig into dirt and grasp my roots
I want to yank the hairs and braid them with my own.

I want to wrap my ancestors in the kerchiefs of the shtetl.
I want to kibbitz with them around the samovar.

I want to ignore the present, live only in the past
when life was harder yet simpler, without smokestacks
belching propaganda and demands

I need to choose one world where I can stand
and survey the future of the past, the sun

feeding the fields, the moon shooting
lightning bolts to wake the dead.

Which foot will I lift?

The Flaming Cliffs

John Delaney

In 1923, an expedition led by American paleontologist Roy Chapman Andrews discovered the world's first fossil dinosaur eggs here. Nearby, for centuries, caravans of camels plied the 'tea road'.

Yes, as the sun sets, they flame,
flashing their reddish-brown flanks.
We sit on chairs above and across
to view, glad that we came to celebrate
the day—and give thanks.
Over the edge, we can toss
our worries and watch their shadows
sink and dissipate
in this glory of place and man,
imagining silhouettes of camels
passing in the distance
in their ghost caravan.



The Passing Lane

Baskin Cooper

In Germany, the rules are plain
You only pass in the left-hand lane
Like clockwork, cars just cruise along
All humming down the autobahn

In Italy, things are less restrained
The left lane's chaos, uncontained
Move to the left, prepare to face
an open invite to a race

In Egypt lines are just décor
Five lanes of traffic maybe more
No signal flashed no plan implied
Just brakes and bluster side by side

The British drive with calm and pride
Each car keeps pace then turns aside
Their manners shine in grand display
too bad they're driving the wrong way

But here at home the tale is grim
Left-lane crawlers slow and dim
Ten under the limit on cruise control
As left-lane backup grows and grows

And how long must I idle so?
I wrote this poem five miles ago

Traffic

Erin Jamieson

fog on my windshield, remnants of last night as I drive myself across slushy roads, hurrying- all of us hurrying- to erase the days before or render them meaningless, rushing past boutiques with faded for sale signs, past the dollar store selling stale bread, past the fountain where we tossed gummies coins- wishing for success or love, trying to beat the next traffic light, trying to prove our bodies deserve space in this endless cycle of work & paying bills & trying to make things better but not knowing what better means, missing the sounds of spring trying to break through harsh winter

missing our reason for being
alive

Not From Around Here

Diana Dinverno

I'm a newcomer navigating a Houston expressway,
twitch the wheel when I catch sight of a sun-scorched
field and brilliant green birds

balancing on utility lines—wires that keep screens
pinging, dinging, tell me to keep my eyes on the reel,
the story, what's prime.

I gawk at these Elphaba-tinted creatures
flitting from one spot to the next as if looking
for a friend to perch by at school.

This week, in my new neighborhood, I saw unripe
bananas on a broad-leafed tree I believed
only existed in lush places

like Ecuador or Brazil, even farther from where I began
in the Midwest, now preparing for winter,
dropping flame-colored leaves.

Like these birds, I'm green, too, discovering
strange beauty beside this wickedly-warm stretch
of concrete, chain-link, debris caught in weeds.

Where did these lively birds begin?
Were they born here,
or have they traveled like me?

I don't reach for my phone, try to capture the moment
with a lens, or stare at a search engine,
scroll, scroll for a name.

Instead, I hold my breath as they startle, watch
pinons lift, their emerald glint high above
a place now called home.

London

James Armstrong

I'm sitting here at table number four
inside Victoria Pub on a side street
from whence some men come in, then a few more,
to grab a pint, perhaps a bite to eat.
It's almost twelve, with locals pouring in
for drink, and food, and shelter from the rain.
They fill the room with noise, and thus begin
to cover up the recent sore of pain.
The Tube's not running, so I overhear,
and taxis are impossible to catch,
yet nowhere in this room do I sense fear.
They go on, and ignore the small red patch
of blood upon the tracks, for they all know
they shall continue on. It must be so.



Jilted Luna
Joel Lind

Playdate

Malisa Anne

Centered inside of me, waves of faint rumination
directed to my heart, her locks of curly blonde hair

someone left behind from childhood
a ghost of myself.

Wails come from her little lungs
she demands to be heard.

If I blow her some bubbles
or swing her on a swing

that lost joy will attend
from the home inside my stomach.

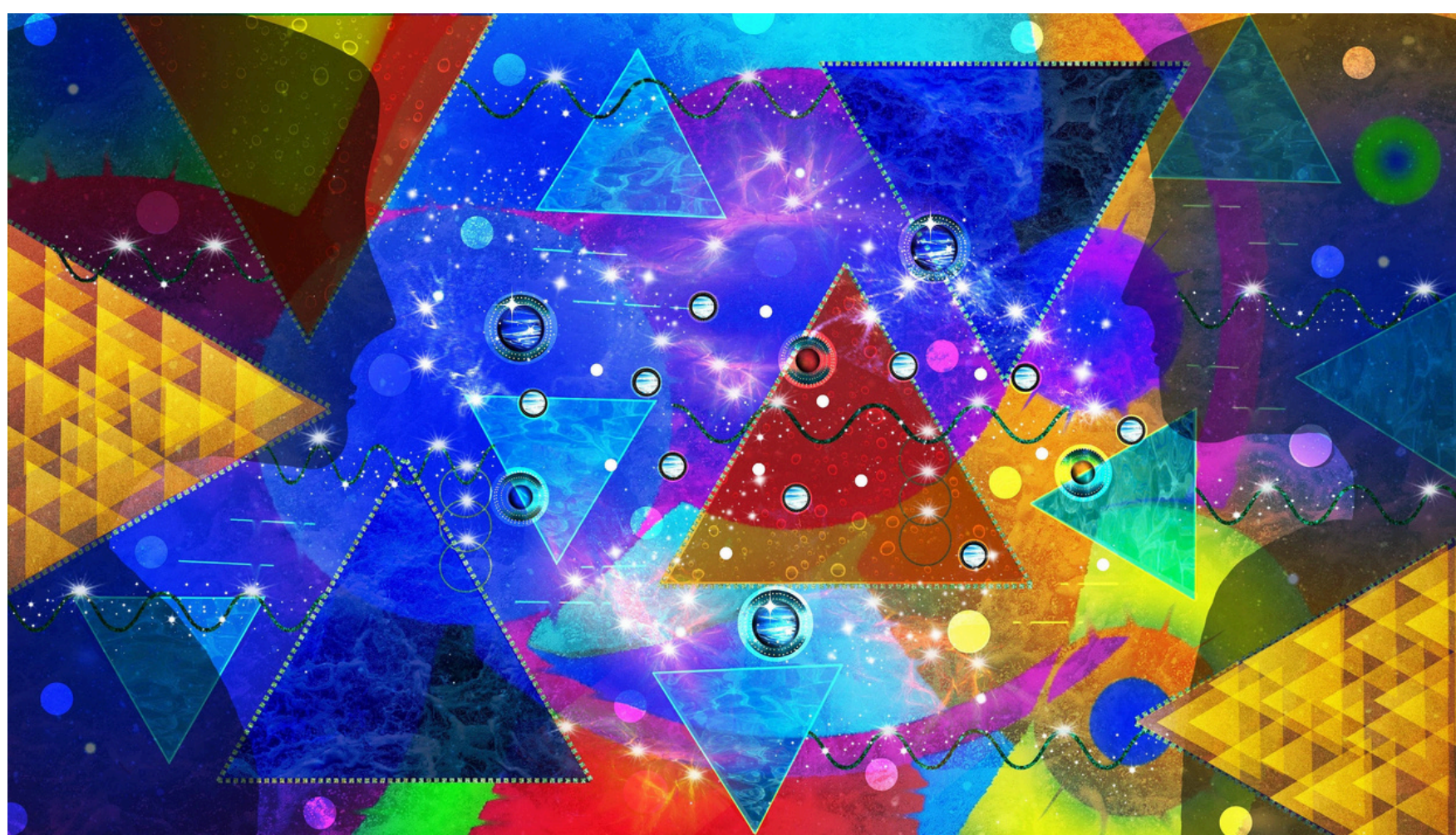
It's the curiosity of the blue sky
with the puppy-shaped clouds

she loves to send my neck back to peer.
The taste of strawberries sweetens my tongue

she used to eat so many
it would give her a rash.

I don't remember her well
she was left behind decades ago

all my scents bring her to life.
She likes to remind me she lives here too.



Intuition
Diamante Lavendar

Visiting Ghost - November 10

Cindy Rinne

Roar of a saw. Maple branches crack near
my son's bedroom. Splinter to the ground

in a thud. Inner circle of orioles chirp hysterically.
Outer circle of crows warble and caw in deafening

cries. A closer look. You see the nests. Eggs.
You are unsure about the plot of a book

you've written. You go inside your garage.
Place the power tools on their hooks. You wish

it was a plum tree of juicy flesh. Then enter
your house and think about a mural crafted of beads.

You start to sit down. Then step back
as you spy a semi-transparent man sitting

on your couch. The Tongva ghost says,

"This was my home. I raised my family here. I grew
food. I carved toys under that deciduous tree.
Crow guards her for seven generations."

The silver sky waits for the river. Time surrounds.
You live inside it. You raised a family here too.

Directions for Scattering Hillary Smith-Maddern

We needed the space.

The road and its open
stories. The way it bends
our memories, drapes them in sequins,
teaches them to two-step
right past the wounds.

Along the way, family
barbecues & Tinker toys & fights
about Christmas & photo albums
stored in dusty attics & laughter
like finely diced onions.

We had such specific directions

that we ignored the miles,
searching instead for omens
in roadside debris. We wanted them
to linger on the bookshelf,
haunt us by knocking over clay pots, stay
where we could still pretend
they were packing our lunches.

In the end, we parted
the way any self-respecting
New Englander does: sweaty
and a little drunk
off the can of Pinot Grigio
poured into a Dunkie's cup,
our dead parent's ashes
greying the gaps between our teeth.

We laughed as we hugged goodbye.

We refused to swallow.



Where the Light Might Find Us
Katherine Schander-Triplett

I haven't left the couch for days

Madi Corell

I've been sinking
into dirt into dark into concave
cushions and dating shows and what I eat in a days
sinking
fingers into whatever's wide open choking
on gossip from the side street globs of
peanut butter and the white stuff clinging to my teeth
choking on the thought of my rotting
teeth falling out into my throat and killing me
I've been falling for
WebMd checking to see if
I sweat too much when I'm nervous
and am I nervous too much to be drinking this much
coffee and are these rashes from working
too much or not saying my scriptures
like my grandma told me to and how likely is it really that I'll be like this
forever? The internet tells me
it's all in my belly
these Oreos are driving me
nowhere and I have a problem with cheesebiting
pizza right out the oven and burning
my mouth biting pizza rolls and burning my mouth flicking
the skin dangling from the roof of my mouthsquirming
my tongue around to grit one part against another
I wish you'd call
I wish you'd say let's press our sticky skin
against each other one more time I wish you'd tell me
you taste me tell me you taste the peanut butter still on my breath
and it's nasty and you miss it like crazy
I've worn these sweatpants for a week now
this sweatshirt I stole
from someone I slept with three years ago
I'd known him for three months he was an asshole and a rockstar
I should've picked his coworker I kissed her at the same party
I saw him at a bar He's still playing house
shows and biting his lip
My psychiatrist calls and I lie
say I'm managing quite well think the pills
are making me nauseous and after six years
they have not succeeded in bringing anyone back to life
so I want off
and he tells me that's not how it works
tells me I'm genetically fucked
on both sides, which feels rude
so I say nothing and
he says fine

I've been trying
to be collected

have a routine
shower every night
even though all I do is stand there in hot water
and cry about getting out

I bury myself
soaking wet under the towel
and the comforter
and a blanket
trying to feel
warm again
probably growing something toxic

Monster

Muheez Olawale

i spoke in silence so long
it became my first language

the quivering lips of my mother
her downturned gaze
her twisting fingers

my father's gnashed teeth
his stomping feet
his clenched fists

the stillness of the room despite
the swinging doors
the vibrating louvers

in every horror movie the monster surges
from the woods and climbs in the window
the proverbial lizard sneaking through the cracks.

here the monster sits in the room long before
the poem began and no one knows
the itinerary of its journey except that
it is unwanted

in the mirror, the monster peels off dark spots
till he bleeds as if blood is enough sacrifice
for acceptance and suddenly
i understand

humans hate
what they don't want.

[illegible]

when the smoke starts consuming your lungs
Nissi Odessa Mandanao

SKY JAIL

Kenneth Pobo

Sometimes a gray sky settles into me,
the blue that I thought I saw, a mirage.
It's a jail, the door shuts, and there's no key.

Mostly I sleep and dream of getting free,
a changeable sky's colorful collage.
Sometimes a gray sky settles into me—

seeping in without a warning, slowly,
I can't hide or find the right camouflage.
It's a jail, the door shuts, and there's no key,

yet I cherish a robust memory
of an azure sky that gave me courage.
Sometimes a gray sky settles into me--

that azure deepens and grows silently
like the mina vine behind the garage.
It's no jail, the door opens, there's a key,

but it fades away. Eventually
I return to a sky that I can't dodge.
Sometimes a gray sky settles into me—
it's a jail, the door shuts, and there's no key.

The Morning to the Night Before Alex LeGrys

I keep stumbling over
pieces of myself--
they're scattered
around the room
and I forgot that the
neighbors knocked
on the door to ask
why I had to
spill so
strangely

there is nothing
more nauseating than
another beginning--
I think that's
what I told them

and if perhaps you'd
want to talk about it,
remember that
the clock can't tick
forever and someday
we won't
have to wake up
any longer--

isn't that easy?

The Story About the Owl

Nicholas David Castine

We fled the river marsh at summer dusk.
A barred owl dropped before us, wrenching
a bullfrog from the mud
to carry its limp body to a nest of hungry mouths.
We stopped to hear their sated hoots — long and low.
Their calls shuddered through our ribs.
We were children — brother and girl.

Now, our hair is gray,
the marsh as dry as old skin.
Our children chase each other on trimmed grass.
A heron passes overhead and you tell the story
about the owl. In your version the frog escaped —
we stopped to hear its damp croaks echo
through the trees.

Where has it all gone:
The marsh, the call, the hunger?
We are no longer sister and boy
running from the same thing.



Watcher
Jennifer Weigel

What I wrote in the steam on the shower door

Davis Hicks

*What love brings, and seems to bring,
are often less alike than we'd like,
but not as challenging as we'd challenge.
The body can be only shape,
and the soul shapeless.*

As soon as those words emerged from my finger,
upon the hotel's opaque, permanently impermanent plexi-paper, I knew what I'd done,
what clock I'd started.
The shower was abandoned,
and the record-keeper assumed.
I was ashamed and stalking into the room.
Just for something, anything, to prove these thoughts true.
My love; that gorgeous truth who does not think like me
yet does not believe me wrong for it
made eye contact, like a wild doe, and stood her ground.
I backed away, quiet, afraid to wake the fauns,
and returned to my work.

Triolet: Hurt Blossoms

Steve Wilson

How, like a flower, hurt blossoms –
 chill amber across loss.
How like a flower, hurt: blossoms,
 opens us – to blue wounds,
 long silences, questions
how. Like a flower, hurt blossoms
 chill-amber, across loss.

The Rescue

Marianne Celano

Aphid-infested and dying,
this milkweed plant is home
to a perfect monarch caterpillar
stranded on an empty stalk,
peeling its body up and around
as if gasping for air. Eager to help,
I latch it to a healthy plant nearby.
I want to stay and watch, but who has time
to care for other species? I have just
accepted that I need to let
the experts check on me.
The doctor frets about my spine
so much that he has now prescribed
injections to be borne each day,
a tonic for unseen decline.
At least his tone is clinical,
not tactless like the voice of one
who looked up from the scan to say
he could see right through my bone.
By sunset the caterpillar is gone.
Was I wrong to interfere?
My hands aren't used to emptiness.
I imagine her defeating the odds,
destined for a life of becoming.
Every dangling pepper in the yard
could be mistaken for a chrysalis.



From Fallen Leaves
Larena Nellies-Ortiz

roommates

Ella G Astbury

they receive attention but never command it
they tell long-winded stories with no purpose or significance
i, the listener
the loiterer
the spectator
the shadow
i move to the fluidity of their words
i mimic the confidence they so effortlessly exude
i sink into solitary confinement
i laugh in all the right places

i have charm
wit
intelligence
i have interesting things to say
i do.
yet my throat burns at my own words
an imposter in my own home
a caricature of everyone i've ever known

i'm certain they will rule the world someday
and i, their dear jester
their friend by proxy
the girl next door
i'll sit in the front row with tears in my eyes
for i am endlessly grateful
yet perpetually sad

we'll drink and dance
and they'll tell me they love me
do they love me?
or do they love the way i love them?
i'll shake the question away as i always do
i'll clean the dishes in the sink
i'll put myself to bed
my door

my German grandmother

Martha Ellen Johnson

i could sit there
for a long time
my gruff silent German
grandmother sewing
on the treadle machine
her feet moving in
rhythm peaceful cadence
is she humming?

i spin around over
the floor heating grate
my dress billows
she doesn't scold me

i pick all the tiger
lilies i can find and
bring them to her
i find them upside
down in the garbage
and pretend not to see



Alignment
Krista Ruffo

Costume Jewelry

Patrick G. Roland

Grandma's ring should've died with her.
No one wanted it but no one could let it go.
Its stone so green it winked through fabric,
a cat's eye through satin curtains.

Mom swore it was glass.
Grandma: *a crown jewel*.

My mom would murmur,
Gaudy, during birthday parties.
Cheap costume jewelry, when we attended plays,
as if glass or acrylic couldn't harden
into something sacred.

Peridot was grandma's story, an artifact of
Sunday light trapped in olivine.
Never removed, not even in the pool,
its soul tattooed itself into her skin.

She stared at the ring the way a person
looks at an old picture of faces long gone.
She wore its tint to bed,
let it fold into her prayers, her thin skin grooved
by its weight, its oblong shape.

When she died, the ring, destined for a thrift store,
found my daughter's hand. A perfect fit
for hands she never touched.

Mom came to admire the ring on the five-year-old finger.
Tradition licked skin like lichen does stone.
A green eye keeping watch across generations.

Basement Ballroom Dancing

Barbara Krasner

“The Lawrence Welk Show aimed to re-create a particular kind of fun, an evening spent out on the town listening to inoffensive yet danceable music, then taking a swing out on the floor with a significant other.”—Emily St. James for the AV Club, 2012

You count time as if still
in Arthur Murray’s dance studio
or listening to Lawrence Welk.

I place my feet on your polished
shoes, and we box-step around
the checkerboard floor

of the basement, your pipe
tobacco—or had you switched
to cigars by then—filling the dank air.

You sweep me off my six-year-old feet,
marking time to the Boston Pops
as your reel-to-reel recorded

the radio show. I record my
hand in yours, burn it into
my memory, lingering

long after the polish wears
off your shoes and the basement
is no longer ours.



Latticework
Sara Jorgensen

Fluorescent Mercy

Eric Samuel Chapman

At the sink the light flickers,
hesitates like someone
deciding to stay

a cup tilts on the edge
and the reflection wavers,
split between the clean water
and the dark that forgets its name

the doctor says
these pills will smooth things out
as if grief were a seam
you could iron flat

I swallow
and the world exhales
its edges thinning
until even the air feels hollow

by noon I forget what I meant to hold
by dusk my hands remember nothing
but the shape of holding

outside, the maples
practice vanishing
and almost succeed

my son's shoes by the door,
still wet from yesterday's rain,
each one a small raft
that never found a current

in the mirror, my face drifts
a pale balloon
rising through glass
as if to leave me behind

I watch it go,
and for a moment
no one is watching back

Swept Away

Jimmy Neenan

To be swept away
 was not the vision.
That you would step
 rock by rock to
the whirl of water turning
 was all.

You wanted to rise
 a city of chert
from the riverbed.
 Walls deep and towering
to hold rivulets serpentine.
 Spires of skyline
to dwarf a small beginning.

You offered a toe
 and the river took
a quarry.
 Whipping pull of limbs
into the vein of its
 slithering, dragged
across scores and
 hollows in stone.

The crack of bone
 on rock will echo.
The clack of bones
 in the bag of the crone.
A fragment of woodsmoke,
 bodies
the trampled grass.

It was the sound
 of the great whisper
of a trillion leaves
 shushing the land
that shuttled me to you.

Your wrist in my hand
 and the weight of you
against the pulling
 was all we needed
to breathe.



Spikey
Loralee Clark

Survivor of a Genocide’s Guilt

Hania Qutub

Guilt follows me all night long
It lingers in the corners of my soul
I see it on my plate full of food
And in the scraps thrown away
I see it in my fresh cup of cold water
And in my dripping faucet
It’s in my hot shower with me
And under my warm blankets
It’s in my car wafting in and out of my breezy windows
And trapped with me in my room
It’s with me when I smile
And especially when I feel fleeting moments of joy
Reminding me to stop
And remember
Even though in such ethereal moments
I never did forget



Burrs
Loralee Clark

this is surely what i'm made of Julian Dindal

lemony green
the grass bends for me.
i try not to think about
the blades i may break
off from their friends.
under my unbearable weight.
it brings me such comfort
i fear i will bring it harm.

the sun assures me i am forgiven.
for everything breaks
and everything dies.
it is no fault of mine.
they will
decompose
just as i will.
slowly melting and churning
into something
new.

i have been here awhile
now.
the ants have made a bridge
of my legs.
the squirrel's eyeing me
i wish i could tell him
i mean him no harm.
no harm. but if
i could pet him, would i?
is that harm?
what if he does not
wish to be pet?

the wind rinses these
thoughts from my head
with one warm gust.
'no need for such anxieties,
you are with us now.
just be.'

fingers scrounging,
smushing, pushing
into the dirt.
rich and homey the dust fills
my nostrils.
this is surely what i'm made of,
i think.
slice a calf, send the pebbles spilling out.
open a mouth, unfurl the tongue of moss.
this is surely what i'm made of.

Equilibrium

Deborah Sage

Sometimes when slacklining over the loosely-secured
Net of my life, I dream of gardenias and
My mother or
Recite Wendell Berry's *The Peace of Wild Things*,
Savoring the last line.

On the precipice of a void created by the latest
Mass shooting, I remember the beauty of wildflowers on
Mount Rainier and the
Aroma of coffee in the morning and am saved
From a fall.

Walking the tightrope of too much and too little;
Screen time, scrolling, the incessant drumbeat of despair over
Division, diversity and death, I stop to
Read stories of maidens in towers and girls in red cloaks
Who triumph over witches and wolves.

In mountain-climbing moments of uncertain footing,
When fear seems to take up permanent residence in
My mind and body; when there is no relief, only
Dread, I choose the risk and
Dance.



**The Balance and Trust between Eleshin and Eshin
Sef Adeola**

Goldfish

Nicholas David Castine

When I returned home after twenty years,
my mother had become a goldfish,
living in a bowl placed on the living room carpet.
“How long has she been like this?” I asked.
“I’m not sure,” my sister replied. “She’d complained
about losing weight, and when I showed up,
this is how I found her.” I tapped on the glass
to greet her and tell her I loved her. She stared
back blankly, her mouth opening and closing.
“What’s that mean?” I asked my sister.
“It means it’s time to feed her,” she said, sprinkling
fish food onto the already murky water.
I had never seen flakes fall so thick.
I had never seen a fish swim so thin.

Toss the Chaos

Mary Baca Haque

take solace in the years
you witnessed undesirable
havoc on shaken ground—
fatigued feet, weary hearts;
are those fragmented pieces
of endurance, yet we yearn
for escape of the attainment
from life’s lecture, survival
ravages our souls, by and by
all shall be well hereafter;
rest in the innermost balance
of yourself, toss the chaos
to the hills, sleep soundly
on your own green grasses
you know the place—
you tucked it away
once upon a time long,
long ago.



The Heart is the Home
Tinamarie Cox

Chuushin Gabriella Brand

Chuushin, says the gray-robed monk and, with a stick,
he draws the Japanese characters in the dirt at my feet,
his soft rope sandals forming a frame. 中心
And then he waits, because that little pause is part
of the lesson, the silent space which allows an idea to squirm inside
a pupil's head and wriggle until it finds a hook, like a fish.

Chuushin, I repeat. *Centered heart*.

The monk nods. He knows what I am seeking,
A quiet place for the spirit, without eddies or rapids,
he says, musically, without irony. *A gentle river*.

I almost laugh. If he could only see the maelstrom of
my days back home, the children eating cereal in the car
on the way to school, me running to my job, one kid's
soccer game, another's piano lesson,
all of us bolting through dinner like piranhas,
then long division, a science project,
a frantic call from a colleague,
a spreadsheet, a headache,
a bedtime story, a couple of glasses of water,
the whole house seeming to teeter.

The monk talks about tides coming and going,
about breathing in and out.
The gentle river is always there, he says.
Just float in it.

It will be years before I believe him.

Instead of Endurance

Katy Luxem

I am thinking about the ants
starting over when
the hill was flooded,
how they moved
at once like oil to leak
out from beneath their
heartbreak, their own
vanishing a threat.
What is danger? What is
living but the process
of learning how to go on despite
monsters or the late-summer
downpour, despite the wide
tire of sorrow moving like a tractor
to us in the back field?
When I am ready to push
forward, I go there and kneel
with my face near
the dirt. I ask if there is
room for me to join them.

Equilibrium

Robin Kathaas

In my last letter I bragged that my thoughts had stopped,
not through slow breathing or quick running,
but because I finally, finally, finally, finally,
got what I wanted instead of what I deserved.
You were kind enough not to reply,
and I won't waste your time with another letter
to tell you what you already know.
Consider this poem my letter
to you. I've started breathing slowly again,
in those moments after hyperventilating,
when I've only just got up
from the supermarket's sticky floor
and wiped the tears off my face,
onto the squashes and half a pumpkin.
On today's run I saw a greyhound, chasing a duck
that was flying directly towards the sun.
Both led my thoughts back to myself,
as predictably as the earth's ice caps melting
towards its burning, rotting centre. But
I also saw a tree. Not very young,
but not old enough to be taller than the others.
It was really just another tree,
and it was in no hurry at all.
The sun bounced off its leaves, and it rested,
lulled to sleep by the knowledge
that more rays would come.
It didn't feel anxious or resentful or nostalgic, giving
some reflections away to the dog's fur and the duck's feathers.
The park was public, so I did not hug the tree.
But I hope you somehow felt it:
I thought of you.



Eventually
Larena Nellies-Ortiz

the deep

Julian Dindal

im stuck knee deep and muddy
in the north carolina marsh
of your boundless eyes

Osprey wings flail
beating inside my cage of ribs,
churning my stomach to a tumbleweed
of feathers.

've never known how to stop a feeling.
i've always given in.

we starved the bird
on purpose.
watched it convulse
on the pavement.

gave it a wide berth
as we worked around it
afraid its disease would spread.

as soon as it was dead

you couldn't look me in the eye.

I scrambled.

started gluing trampled feathers
onto beaten limp wings.
breathing air into a crushed beak
desperate to see its smile again.

we killed the bird on purpose
i knew it needed to be done.

so why do i already miss
its wispy touches on my shoulder
why do i miss
its deep
brown-black eyes?

Trust Walk

Ron Bearwald

Unable to see in the deepest dark
I close my eyes.
In the quiet, I hold out my hand
Until I feel another that rests in mine.
It lifts me to standing
And walks me toward the light.

Convalescently

Gregory O'Neill

I don't want to feel less
because I am whole,
though I have barely begun
to use both hands

where hands are needed
to pass off my heart wholly.
Dusty cells dream of the universe
but only get as far as the moon,

explaining to me patience—
and in that beautiful handshake
I see how limp and hungry
my hope is under a gray coat

of weather. In me stirs
a midnight congress—its inventory
of time, ice—a wasting,
as apples seek their tint of autumn,

the rising constellations
their perfect order. In the upper
left-hand corner, the belly
of the sail is full, and in an

indiscernible fineness,
the infinite quantities of things—
the worm of advice, the boo
of surprise—that I might find

in my tiny inglorious corner—
speck of spark to share
that may be perceived
as an entire upbringing—

so not once more to regret
the day born on its stream—
pure as one, I accept
my self numerous—

the light grinding into
the fractured love of one
still learning its hands of
solitude, ache, radical attention—

soft body awakening.

Modified Villanelle for the Beach at Good Harbor

Sarah Ellis

I cradled the sand in my crumbling hands,
pressed my devoted lips to the wind.
The sun fell further and the sea stretched out

towards the mirror clean horizon line. About
an hour from a low-tided ocean.
I cradled the sand in my crumbling hands.

The service started as the fog rolled in and
we howled, watched the daylight rescind
as the sun fell further and the sea stretched out.

Hymns spilled from the lungs sprouting
wings I watched burn in silent slow motion.
I cradled the sand in my crumbling hands

and sat back down, syncopied on shifting sand.
The sun fell further and the sea stretched out
and it's a lie. It didn't happen here. It was

a different beach on a different evening
but it's all the same ocean.
I cradled the sand in my crumbling hands.
The sun fell further and the sea stretched out.



Aberystwyth Jasper
Katherine Schander-Triplett

HOW AM I FEELING?

T.A.R. Wallace

1

Similar to before. The color of cake.
Made-up, expressed and fleshy.
Intricate, sensate like a spider.

2

Vulnerable. Good and bad.
Close to myself, for others.
Preloved, structured but unclear.

3

Phenomenal, abstract, unrecognizable.
Like a project, fixed perhaps
while every attempt shows.

4

Deceived. Simply by looking,
by occasions, by the flash of my character
and even by desire.

5

Possible, always.
Complicit, admittedly;
absolutely here.

How Do I Say it?

Will Boesl

I had a panic attack?

A panic attack had me?

What about:

- I have anxiety
 - My to-do lists have to-do lists
- After my leave from work, I nearly left my newborn
- I failed parenting in one full moon
- I’ve been initiated into fatherhood

What about a funny anecdote?

Paramedics asking

if my meditation was working,

Only it wasn’t a joke

and I was laughing,

rehearsing the old song

controlling me all along:

“Maybe I have been doing it wrong?”

Maybe I was right,

Maybe I

did

die

What’s more urgent than being alive?

Tearing Through Plastic

Elizabeth Birch

Sometimes joy
seems wrapped in Saran-coated sadness,
the world's crunch muffled, edges
smoothed, clear cling reflecting fluorescent light
and my wide wet eyes. Sometimes I can smell
its artificial neutrality. If I licked it,
I'd taste nothing.

But sometimes joy is as simple
as a dog on the beach
lunging for a log of driftwood. I brace
for his disappointment at being unable to lift it,
but as his jaw clamps down, a small piece,
softened by the sea, breaks off,
and he leaps in the air, unaware
of his lesser accomplishment.
Bouncing ahead, nose high,
he twists to show off his treasure.
Later, he drops it in the sand,
too enthralled with watching the waves
to remember anything precious.

I don't know how to find joy as easily as this,
but from the bluff, I watch an old woman
slowly strip in the cold October air
and walk into the icy ocean.
She doesn't swim, just dips in.
I suspect she knows something
about tearing through plastic.



View in Japan
Rachel Turney

Holiday Neuroscience Baskin Cooper

father says, it's the holidays
you'll have to make peace
with your mother

he suggests memory, *hippocampus*
remind her of the year the ham was perfect
he shakes his head, she keeps the burned one
the single time
you forgot to say thank you

we suggest *amygdala*
quiet the alarm
he laughs, her nerves are grasshoppers
she'll bounce off the chair before you sit down

we suggest reason, *cortex*
logic, apology, charts
he waves it off
closed for business

we suggest gifts
pleasure centers, *dopamine*
he sighs, she'll take the earrings
and begin berating everyone

at last he tells us
appeal to the reptile
cerebellum, primitive law

bring chocolate, set it before her
wait until she stills
then enter slowly

like easing past
a sleeping animal

The Difference

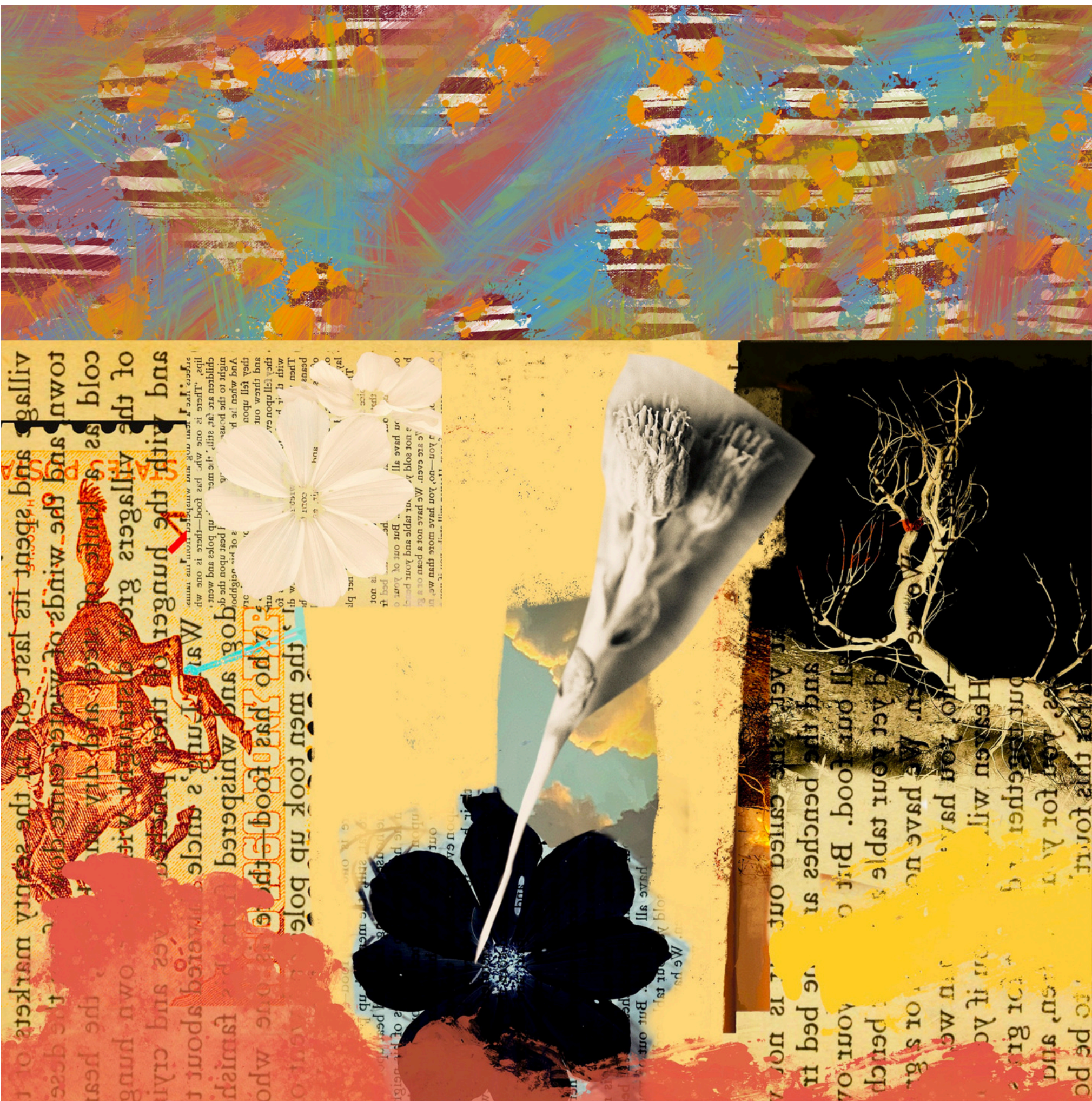
Esther Beland

A noumenon has come rest
upon the noosphere's floor
and we must pick our teeth clean
of its
incomprehensibility.

We dared to dream of things postpartum,
of opacities unfingered by the sunlight.
There is no hurt
in a world of intransitives
where the subject has no hands.

The word "pachyderm" has burst open
above a droughted Manhattan
raining hordes down which have little to do
with one another
and yet are bound together by placenta-strands.

The sun wants no part in this
and remains thus whole.
We're running out of old calendars —
how shall we know
when the old years ended?



Cinder
Melissa Jordan Willis

Bubble Family

Cody Draco

when in the perilous depths
of a cluttered sink full of dirty dishes
I saw my domesticated image
reflected in a family of bubbles
I thought it was God's way of showing
how surviving the death sentence
that is the life of an artist
allows the unordained few
a glimpse at what matters
not the much discussed creative body
or the fiercely derided feral mind
but the softness of the lather
clearance aisle dish soap can provide
when purchased by a lover
who knows your favorite scent is lime.

Camping as a Child

Haley DiRenzo

One morning a moose bolted past
spearslicing the sky. Delicate
and dangerous. I was the only one
who saw it. Close enough to touch
if I'd reached out my hand. I have
never been an adrenaline seeker.
Must talk myself on to roller coasters.
I do not even camp any longer.
But I remember swallowing
that wildness whole. How it swelled
in me. A ballon can only carry
so much air before exploding.

Years One Through Ten

Katy Luxem

I do not remember every second
nor the guacamole and spoon raising
to her mouth some days. Which is to say,
I was there and I was sometimes not
patient. The drive to swim lessons, the creep
of evening traffic. The silky bunny blanket
we left at a grocery store. Little accidents
where I meant to say one thing and yet
my tone conveyed another. Now, I find
an old iPad and somehow, across the years
her photos show up: Dozens of slightly different
angles, favorite boots, blonde wisps in her eyes,
blurry animals. The dog was smaller then,
nothing held still in a thousand squares.
But here and there, I could see her
keeping the love I gave.



Too Far the Moon?
Joel Lind

Balance

Louise E Boddy

Each day tilts differently, I find
and I suppose that's the way it's always been.
But now the world feels sharpened,
every edge honed to a blade.
I scrutinise the smallest things
the flicker of light on a cup,
the pattern of dust upon the sill,
the way silence swells between moments.
Grief magnifies the minute,
making the trivial immense,
and in its magnification
it smothers joy, extinguishes wonder.

Some days I balance better.
I juggle life's demands and I almost believe
I have not dropped a single piece.
I pat myself on the back for holding a conversation without weeping,
for taking Albie out and remembering to fill his bowl
though a typical spaniel, he has perfected the permanently starving look.

I focus on surfaces, polished counters, folded laundry,
floors swept into temporary order.
For a moment I can stand back,
survey the stillness and whisper that things are almost as they should be.

Other days the balance wavers,
becomes a mishmash of near misses.
I arrive at appointments,
though I check and recheck the time,
afraid I will lose the thread of hours.
And sometimes I show up too early or even not at all.
Still, I get through with a smile,
a smile practiced so well it almost looks real,
although it never quite reaches my eyes.

And then there are days when the scales tip without mercy,
when equilibrium vanishes,
and grief collapses in on itself,
a black hole at the centre of my being.
My mind crumbles under its weight
names vanish mid-sentence,
thoughts scatter like startled birds.

I find myself bent over a public bin,
convinced I've thrown away my credit cards, my life, my sanity.
I root among the litter my hands steeped in the rot of strangers,
only to return home
and find the missing cards resting by my computer.

This is my life of balance now
a constant negotiation,
a seesaw of moments that never quite steadies.
One day upright, the next unravelled,
always teetering between survival and collapse.
And yet somewhere in this swaying,
in this endless recalibration,
I keep standing.
Not whole, not steady,
but standing somehow.
Even when it threatens to bring me to my knees.

From within the substance of grief

Emily Benson

I call you to imagine them being loved:
Your wrongdoers
Your ciphers

Interrupt the fists and curses
Watch them tie their shoes
Loop a lace around one finger,
pull rabbit ear through hole

But your heart beats too fast to see
And you claw fingers through your hair
until it stands on end
Electrified by misunderstanding
You, a thrumming Faraday cage
of intimate betrayals

I know you feel it as a curse
The way your synapses run

The day you clung to the arborvitae
after saying again that you wanted to die
More of my heart sloughed off,
rust-red and brittle as the fallen needles

But I can only say:
Maybe they're loved this way, too:
Tenderly, carefully,

Like keeping a tiny bird in the mouth
Dark, tense jaw and gentle breath,
Yearning for a safe release

Grief, Slowly

Haley DiRenzo

Social media cracked open the tiny egg
of the world. The yolks, the destruction
in our backyards and the other side
of the sea. Sometimes I feel more grief
when an influencer dies than at the latest school
shooting. Even though after Sandy Hook
my father and I locked wet eyes watching
the news. *Surely someone will do something
now?* Our tears half fear, already knowing.
It does not matter the whole world is watching
when we gorge on tragedy til it comes
back up as bile. I would say I am numb
but I am trying to believe it is okay to carry
grief slowly. One terror at a time. To steady
the vertigo and keep my throat open
toward a stomach hungry for hope.



Restless Quiet in a St Ives Garden
Ingrid Brown

audience slows Kenneth Kesner

within margins already written
somewhat to be finished
ungiven

intervening in a time that walls
everything so late somehow
want to sketch a dream
no one knows

phantoms now their ghosts
they talk say the same
puzzles you must forget to solve
where answers fall apart

pictures that are read then lost

The Rejects

James Armstrong

They said they'd buy my old books,
the ones cluttering up my shelves,
that I'd probably never read again anyway,
and they'd give me cash, or better yet,
store credit,
so I could buy more books.

It sounded like a good idea, so
I packed a bunch of them tightly in
an old shoebox, carefully stuffing paper
into the cracks between them
so they wouldn't get damaged
jostling about,
and I took them downtown to the store.

A pleasant young woman
looked at them, smiled,
and shook her head to each one.
"I'm sorry," she said.
"I can't take any of them."

Some were too old, out of fashion.
Others had cracked spines caused
by overenthusiasm.
Others had parts underlined
that had seemed important once,
but it hurt their resale value.

No, she couldn't offer me anything,
but the store could take them off my hands,
if I wanted,
and I wouldn't have to carry them home.

I declined.

I packed up my books
carefully again
in the old shoebox
and brought them home,
put them back on my shelves,
paused,
took one down,
opened it,
and began an old adventure
one more time.

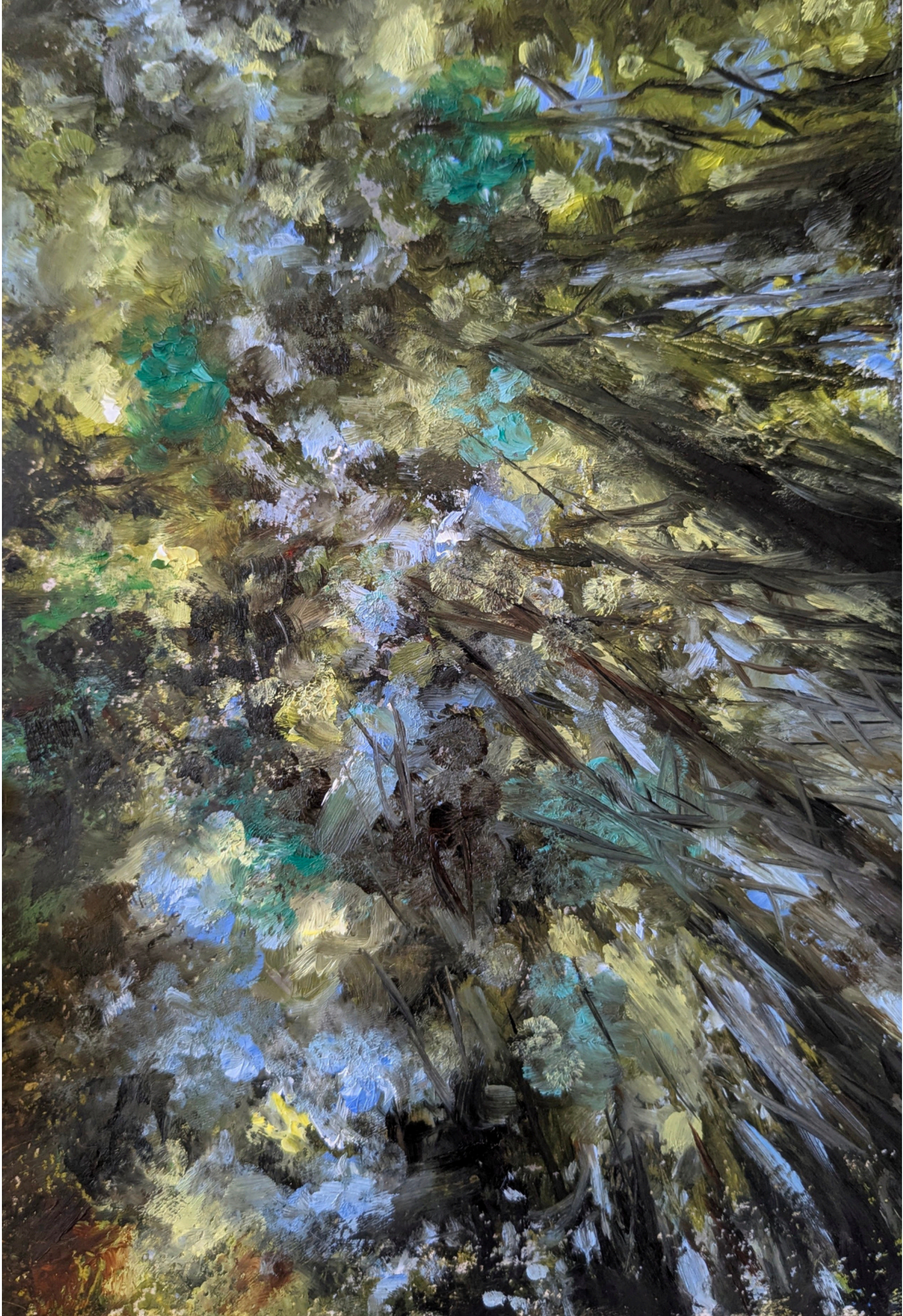
The Meaning of Life Is What You Give It

Molly L O'Dell

(Asha Greer, 1935-2022)

Wisteria flaunts her purple clusters all over the neighborhood and along roadsides. So determined to spread beauty, she employs rhizomes, runners and seeds. After a nourishing rain, squiggles who didn't squirm fast enough to avoid dehydration festoon sidewalks. Those who did, slither away from the path with peristaltic locomotion, glistening pink through green blades sparkling in the sunbreak. Inside his shop, the woodworker shapes a hard rim of oak with a chamfer.

Let the rough edge melt
Succumb to our world's delights
Watch a full moon rise



Lingering Canopies (Filtered Light)
Ingrid Brown

On the Edge

Arvilla Fee

teetering, feet precariously perched
on the razor-thin edge of laundry,
children's lunch boxes, a puking dog

just one twist of an ankle, and I'm done,
frayed nerves splayed like tattered rope,
a pounding in the back of my skull

the bus puffs away with three pairs of feet,
and I return to an open bread bag, smears
of peanut butter on the counter, empty plates—

but I don't lift a finger to clean up the mess,
just walk to the coffee maker, pour a fresh cup,
add a dollop of hazelnut cream and sit down,

absorbing the silence, the smell of my brew—
allowing peace to burrow into my bones,
the hands on the clock suspended

a half-hour passes, and I stand, stretch,
this time sure-footed as I shove another load
of clothes into the washer and press start

Equilibrium

Megan Moriarty

I can see the future coming
when a thunderstorm approaches.
Dense clouds dismantle the sky,
brimming with static electricity.

Each flash of lightning attempts
to restore balance between charged particles.

Earthbound negative electric charges
meet positive ions on the ground
and the sky becomes a line graph
measuring the search for connection.

I've heard that the atmosphere
is always trying to reach an equilibrium.

Temperatures are most stable when solar energy
is equally absorbed and reflected back to space.
Now pollution disrupts that symmetry,
fueling more intense storms.

I like to think that this moment is a current
connecting the past and future.

Sometimes I can almost feel it, like the space
between two hands reaching for each other.
What happens in that space depends on the actions
of each hand, the sparks they generate.

At the Door / An der Tür

John RC Potter

(Written in German and translated by the author into English)

You said to me:
never again.
I had heard it too often.
I left you behind.
In my past.
Just a memory.
Nothing more;
nothing less.

Years ago, I was in Germany.
In a place of shadows
and death.
At the door, there was a book to sign.
Someone had written:
Never again! Never again!
But how can this be possible?;
a world of hatred has begun again.

I have a dream;
I have a hope.
God in Heaven!
Never again!

Du hast zu mir gesagt:
nie wieder.
Ich hatte es zu oft gehört.
Ich habe dich zurückgelassen.
In meiner Vergangenheit.
Nur eine Erinnerung.
Nichts mehr;
nichts weniger.

Vor Jahren war ich in Deutschland.
An einem Ort der Schatten
und des Todes.
An der Tür lag ein Buch zum Signieren.
Jemand hatte geschrieben:
Nie wieder ! Nie wieder !
Aber, wie kann das Möglich sein?;
eine Welt des Hasses hat neu begonnen.

Ich habe einen Traum;
ich habe eine Hoffnung.
Gott im Himmel!
Nie wieder!



Holding Space
Melissa Jordan Willis

IN CONCLUSION IV

Marc Janssen

And it was morning, the air, clearer now that the smoke had fled, gave way to a clear blue the kind of cloudless sky that entices one to reexamine, revise, and set a new course; I pulled the car over and on a slightly crumpled gas receipt wrote a poem to you:

I can still hear your
Words clinging to memory
A soft reminder

I feel your hand on
My face even though now you've
Grown white breathless wings

I closed the door behind me and finding a path up through the salal and twisted pines, picked my way up the hill; behind I could hear the Pacific, ahead the branches cackle clacked to one another, and in that soft cacophony – I felt the wetness at the corner of my eye; this time I didn't wipe it away, I let it linger and strode on toward the crest.

Author and Artist Bios

Alex LeGrys received her bachelor’s degree in sociology from Bard College in 2023. Her work has appeared in Apricity Press, Oyez Review, The Whistling Shade, Flora Fiction, Blue Lake Review, and The Queens Review.

Amelia Pozniak is a writer and artist from the Hudson Valley, New York. She has previously been published in NAME Magazine, the Lavender Review, and more. She is a senior at Mount Holyoke College, where she studies English and Italian.

Anita Pinatti lives in the Connecticut River Valley where three hobbies (walking, poetry and photography) have helped her through difficult times. Her work has appeared in The Orchards, SALT, Sage Magazine and many other journals.

Arvilla Fee lives in Ohio, teaches English, has been published in numerous presses, and her three poetry books are available on Amazon. Arvilla's life advice: travel with snacks. Website and magazine: <https://soulpoetry7.com/>

Barbara Krasner holds an MFA from the Vermont College of Fine Arts. The author of six poetry collections, her poetry has been featured in more than seventy literary journals. She lives and teaches in New Jersey.

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Charlene Langfur is an LGBTQ and green writer, an organic gardener and she lives in the southern California desert. She is a Syracuse University Graduate Writing Fellow with many publications in poetry essay writing and fiction.

Christopher McCammon is a teacher and writer living in coastal Virginia. His philosophical work has appeared in The American Philosophical Quarterly, Ethics, and The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. His poetry was recently published in Blue Collar Review. With friends inside and outside local jails, he co-organizes Tidewater Solidarity Bail Fund.

Cindy Rinne creates fiber art, poetry, and zines in San Bernardino, CA. Her poems have appeared in journals, art exhibits, and dance. Author of: Structures Break Down (Cyberwit.net), Dancing Through the Fire Door (Nauset Press), and more. Her poetry appeared in: Unleash Lit, Mythos Magazine, and others.www.fiberverse.com. cindy@fiberverse.com.

Cody Draco is an emerging queer poet, settled but never stagnant, creatively restless in the rural sanctuary of southern Kentucky, United States. Unflinching yet deeply human, his poetry pushes boundaries while distilling meaning from the void of 21st-century existence in an intentional effort to code a new masculinity.

Cyn Kitchen is professor of English at Knox College. She is the author of TEN TONGUES. Her book of poems, BROKEN HALLELUJAH, is due out in 2026. Cyn's work appears in such places as POETRY SOUTH, POETRY QUARTERLY, and CUTLEAF. She lives in Forgottonia, a downstate region on the Illinois prairie.

Dan Fitzgerald an award winning poet. His work has appeared in many journals. He has two Pushcart Award nomination and is the author of full length collection of poems “weatherman” (Kelsay Books). He lives quietly in Pontiac, Illinois tending to home and garden.

Darlene Bester is a poet living in the quiet four seasons of Minnesota. Her poetry has been featured in Bella Grace Magazine, Door Is A Jar Magazine, The Orchards Poetry Journal, October Hill Magazine, and Floating Acorn Review.

Davis Hicks lives in Apex, North Carolina. Davis got his bachelors in English at Samford University before moving to pursue his masters. He has been published or is upcoming in Wide Angle, Prosetrics Literary Magazine and Trident Poetry Collective, among others. He can be found @davis.drafts on Instagram.

Deborah Sage is a native of Kentucky, USA. She has been published in Eternal Haunted Summer, Literary LEO, Fairy Tale Magazine, the 2022 Dwarf Stars Anthology, Amethyst Press All Shall Be Well anthology for Julian of Norwich, Eye to the Telescope, Lothlorien Poetry Journal, and Ephemeral Elegies among others.

Denise Bossarte is an award-winning author, poet, photographer and artist whose passion is inspiring others. Her daytime job in IT helps to keep the household running. She enjoys writing, exploring new art forms, and teaching contemplative photography workshops. She lives in Texas with her husband and literary cat, Za' Ji.

Diana Dinverno, a Best of the Net and Pushcart nominee, is the author of When Truth Comes Home to Roost (Celery City Chapbooks, 2022). Her work has appeared in the Paterson Literary Review, The Gyroscope Review, and other publications. Currently, Diana writes in Houston, Texas. For more information, visit www.dianadinverno.com.

Diamante Lavendar is an award-winning artist and author based in the Midwest, USA. Her work centers on inspiration, spirituality, and their effect on the human psyche individually and collectively. You can find Diamante’s website at www.diamantelavendar.com.

Elizabeth Birch lives in Plymouth, Massachusetts. Her poetry has been featured in the Yellow Arrow Journal, The Tiger Moth Review, Nixes Mate, Writers Resist, Willows Wept Review, Stirring, Third Wednesday, Portrait of New England, The Orchards Poetry Journal, and elsewhere. You can find her on Instagram and Facebook at [ebirchpoetry](https://www.facebook.com/ebirchpoetry).

Ella Astbury is an aspiring filmmaker and writer, currently studying at Champlain College in Vermont. She plans to amalgamate these passions, and someday, write films that disturb the comfortable and comfort the disturbed.

Emily Benson lives in Western New York with her husband and two sons. Her work has been featured in The CryptoNaturalist podcast, Deep Wild Journal, Gastropoda, Literary Mama, Moist Poetry Journal, Paddler Press, and others. Read more at emilybensonpoet.com.

Eric S. Chapman writes spare, image-driven poems that move between ritual and ruin, intimacy and disappearance. His work favors imagery over statement, exploring the uneasy border between tenderness and violence, faith and fatigue. A native of Flint, Michigan, his sensibility is shaped by post-industrial landscapes and memory.

Erin Jamieson's writing has been published in over eighty literary magazines, including two Pushcart Prize nominations. Her poetry chapbook, Fairytales, was published by Bottlecap Press. Her debut novel (Sky of Ashes, Land of Dreams) was published by Type Eighteen Books.

Esther Beland is a transgender poet. She was raised in Virginia and lives in Brooklyn.

Gabriella Brand's writing appears in such literary publications as Room (Canada), Cordite (Australia), New Haven Review (US) and Shiuli (India). A Pushcart Prize nominee in both fiction and poetry, Gabriella teaches in the OLLI program of the University of Connecticut.

Gina Gidaro is a first-generation college graduate with a bachelor’s degree in creative writing, a minor in studio art, and an associate degree in arts and humanities from Ohio University. She's passionate about stories and anything spooky. Her publications can be found at <https://ginagidaro.wordpress.com>

Greg Hill is a poet and adjunct professor of English in Connecticut. He has an MFA from Vermont of Fine Arts and his work has appeared in Cider Press Review, Atlas and Alice, Cargo Literary, Six Sentences, and elsewhere. Twitter: @PrimeArepo. Website: <https://www.gregjhill.com>.

Gregory O’Neill lives in Washington state. He writes, in hope, that readers may feel less alone in their ambiguity, more whole in their partial truths. His work appears in Eunoia Review, Cathexis Northwest Press and Closed Eye Open, Half And One, and Relief Quarterly.

Hania Qutub is a Palestinian American poet and physician. She has worked in the United States and overseas with Syrian Refugees in Jordan. Her work includes publications in Mondoweiss, and FestivalofPoetry.com , Rowayat upcoming in Passager and Gordon Square Review.

Hannah Phillips Mollenkamp (she/her/hers) is a queer poet, theologian, and storyteller. Originally from Austin, Texas, she currently resides in the Chicagoland area. Her poems have appeared in Pleiades, Voices de la Luna, Up the Staircase Quarterly, and Quibble Lit. You can find her on Instagram @hpmreadsandwrites.

Haley DiRenzo is a writer and practicing attorney specializing in eviction defense. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in January House, Thimble Literary Magazine, Gone Lawn, and Ink in Thirds, among others. She is on BlueSky at @haleydirenzo.bsky.social and lives in Colorado with her husband and dog.

Helen Nancy Meneilly is an Irish poet and MA graduate, currently living in Canada. Her work has appeared in The Shore, Autumn Sky Poetry Daily, San Pedro River Review, The Orchards Poetry Journal, and elsewhere.

Born in Atenas, Costa Rica, 1969, Henry Vinicio Valerio Madriz is a teacher -English Teaching and Linguistics and Literature. Photography lover. He has published poems, short stories, and photographs, both online and print (in the USA, Canada, UK, India, Philippines, Germany, Pakistan, Palestine, Israel, and Nigeria).

Hillary Smith-Maddern is a committed dilettante. A proud cat lady and collector of neglected plants, she enjoys diving into the shallow end of everything. You can find her work in Whale Road Review and Only Poems among others.

Hugh Findlay’s writing and photography have been published worldwide. Nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2020 for poetry, and the Best Microfiction Anthology 2024, he is in the third trimester of life and hopes y’all like his stuff. Instagram: @hughmanfindlay. Portfolio: <https://hughmanfindlay.com>

Ingrid Brown is a figurative artist working in drawing and painting. Her practice explores nature’s dualities: growth and decay, fragility and strength, reflecting human experience. Guided by light, texture, and form, she creates images that invite recognition and connection, encouraging viewers to pause and sense balance in states of change.

James Armstrong has shucked oysters, been a hedge fund correspondent, taught classes in Renaissance dance, and provided back-up vocals in a Greenwich Village cabaret. He currently lives in a tiny apartment in the Bronx with way too many books.

James Fleet Underwood writes poems rooted in place, season, and daily life. His work explores quiet rituals, the body under strain, and the small balances that keep us moving. Recent work appears or is forthcoming in various journals. X: @jamesfleetpoems · Substack: jamesfleetpoems.substack.com

Multi-disciplinary mixed media conceptual artist Jennifer Weigel lives in Kansas, USA. Author of Witch Hayzelle’s Recipes for Disaster trilogy and a myriad of short stories, poems, art discourse, and more drifting around the Interwebs. Learn more on her website here. jenniferweigelart.com

Joel Lind writes poetry, makes collage art, and photographs moths in various handmade miniature settings. He holds a B.A. in English from George Mason University. His most recent work is featured in Door is a Jar. He lives in an old house in Virginia.

John Delaney’s publications include Waypoints (2017), Twenty Questions (2019), Delicate Arch (2022), poems and photographs of national parks/monuments, Galápagos (2023), a collaborative chapbook of his son Andrew’s photographs and his poems, Nile (2024), poems and photographs about Egypt, and Filing Order: Sonnets (2025). He lives in Port Townsend, WA.

John RC Potter (he/him/his) is an international educator from Canada who lives in Istanbul. His story, “Ruth’s World” was a Pushcart Prize nominee, and his poem, “Tomato Heart” was nominated for the Best of the Net Award. He is a member of the League of Canadian Poets.

Julian Dindal is a filmmaker and poet born and raised in a small town in Massachusetts. Always an artist, they strive to create works which are honest, vulnerable, and campy.

Born and raised in New Jersey, Justin Ecarma is a writer outrunning his computer science degree as we speak. While he is on the run, he is writing poetry and attempting to jump into any creative outlet he can find.

Katherine Schander-Triplett is an emerging photographer whose deep love of nature is inspired by her time growing up in Arizona. She spends her time documenting the small, magical moments of life through written word and photography. You can find her work in Willows Wept Review and Blue Crystal Literary Magazine.

Kathryn DeZur is a poet, essayist, and professor emerita of English. Her poetry chapbook, Blue Ghosts, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2019. Her poems have appeared in The Fourth River, FEED Literary Magazine, and numerous anthologies. For more information, go to www.kathryndezur.com.

Katy Luxem lives in Salt Lake City. Her work is anthologized in Love Is For All Of Us (Hachette, 2025) and has appeared in Rattle, McSweeney’s, HAD, One Art, Rust & Moth, and others. She is the author of Until It Is True (Kelsay Books, 2023).

Kenneth Kesner (肯内思) splits his time between the Caucasus and South East Asia. Some recent works are featured in: the engine(idling, Flora Fiction, Midsummer Dream House, Pictura Journal, and Plato’s Caves.

Kenneth Pobo (he/him) has two new books out: *At The Window, Silence* (Fernwood Press) and *It Gets Dark So Soon Now* (Broken Tribe Press).

Krista Ruffo graduated with her BA in English from UCF in 2024. She's a writer of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and does both art and photography. She currently works as a Content Coordinator for a family magazine and a blogger.

Lain is a current college student at Champlain College in Burlington VT, studying both Game Art and Writing. They have had poems published by The American Library of Poetry and Scholastic.

Larena Nellies-Ortiz is a self-taught photographer from Oakland, California. Her photography has been featured in *The Sun Magazine*, *Barren Magazine*, *The Ilanot Review* and *Stonecoast Review*, among others. She loves to color, texture and shadow hunt in golden hour.

Linda Vigen Phillips is an award-winning author of two verse novels, *Crazy and Behind These Hands*, and a poetry chapbook, *Thoughts at Crossings*. Her poems have appeared in *The Texas Review*, *The California Quarterly*, *The Christian Century*, *The Clay Jar* and more. She and her husband live in Savannah, GA.

Loralee Clark's first chapbook, *Solemnity Rites*, (Prolific Pulse Press, 2025) used her artwork for the cover as well as for grayscale inserts within the book. Clark resides in Virginia; her website is sites.google.com/view/loraleeclark. Her Substack, which focuses on the process of creativity, is nosuchthingasfailure.substack.com.

Louise E Boddy writes poetry directly from the depths of the most awful grief. Their poetry is raw, unfiltered, and littered with pain. Boddy does not offer happy endings or tidy resolutions. They write to tell the truth as they live it: brutal, bewildering, and relentless.

Madeleine French lives in Florida and Virginia with her husband. Her poetry appears in *Gone Lawn*, *The Waxed Lemon*, *ONE ART*, *Dust Poetry Magazine*, *West Trade Review*, and elsewhere. You may find her on Bluesky, @madeleinepoet.bsky.social.

Madi Corell is a poet and educator from Virginia. Their work explores nature, identity, grief, and memory. They are a current MFA candidate at N.C. State University in Raleigh, North Carolina. You may find their poetry at Silly Goose Press and the Screen Door Review.

Malisa Anne is a hospitality professional based in Sonoma County, CA. She is passionate about all things writing and has been writing poetry since childhood. Malisa is currently studying for her yoga teacher certificate and lives a peaceful life with her two cats, Tuxie and Jax.

Marianne Celano, PhD, is a family psychologist and Professor Emerita in Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Emory University School of Medicine. She is a co-author of four children's books published by Magination Press/American Psychological Association.

What is there left to say about Marc Janssen? Maybe, his verse is scattered around the world in places like *Pinyon*, *Orbis*, *Pure Slush*, *Cirque Journal*, and *Poetry Salzburg* also in his book *November Reconsidered*. Janssen coordinates the Salem Poetry Project and keeps getting nominated for Oregon Poet Laureate.

Martha Ellen is a retired social worker living on the Oregon coast. MFA. Poems and prose published in various journals and online forums. She writes to process the events of her life.

Martin Willitts Jr, a Comstock Review editor, has 25 chapbooks including the Turtle Island Quarterly Editor's Choice Award, "The Wire Fence Holding Back the World" (Flowstone Press, 2017), plus 21 full-length collections including the Blue Light Award 2019, "The Temporary World." His new full-length is "Harvest Time" (Deerbrook Press, 2021).

Mary Baca Haque, a Chicago poet who loves gorgeous words in verse, is featured in *The Wild Roof Journal*, *Cosmic Daffodils Journal*, *Closed Eyed Open Journal*, *Amethyst Review*, *Seraphic Review*, *The Bluebird Word*, *Macrame Literary*, and *WayWords Journal*. Her publication *Painting the Sky with Love* (MacMillan, 2024) acquired for a picture book.

Megan Moriarty is the author of the chapbook *From the Dictionary of Living Things* (Finishing Line Press). Her poems have appeared in *Indiana Review*, *Rattle*, *Split Rock Review*, and elsewhere. She holds an MFA in poetry from Virginia Tech and currently lives in Brooklyn.

Melissa Jordan Willis paints and writes to process her own struggles with the fractured communication that comes from loving people who have autism, heroin addiction and schizophrenia. She earned her B.A. at the U.C.L.A. School of Fine Art in 1991, and continues to draw and collage daily.

Michael VanCalbergh currently lives in Normal, IL. His work previously appeared in *Panoply Zine*, *Feral*, *Best New Poets 2021*, and other spaces. He's an editor at SRPR and writes reviews for the Comics Beat. You can find him on Bluesky (@mvcpoet.bsky.social) and his website *Widely Read* (<https://widely-read.ghost.io/>)

Michelle Brown is a writer on Turrbal land in Australia. She is published in *Under the Basho*, *Unbroken*, and *Red Fern Review*. She is forthcoming in the *Zest of the Lemon*, *Australia Magazine* and *The Cove*.

Molly L O'Dell loves being outdoors, her primary influencer. She received an MFA from University of Nebraska and published a chapbook, *Off the Chart*, a multi-genre collection, *Care is A Four Letter Verb* and *Unsolicited 96 Saws and Quips in the Wake of the Pandemic* was published for her public health colleagues.

Muheet Olawale writes poetry and prose. He has works published in *Brittle Paper*, *PoetryColumnNND*, *The Kalahari*, and elsewhere. He tweets and grams @_muheetolawale.

North Bay Area poet, Nancy Cherry, lives in Novato, CA. Former publisher of the Poetry Newsletter, *Fish Dance*, her work has most recently appeared in *Gyroscope*, *Mid-American Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *Nimrod*, and *Thimble*. Her collection, *El Verano Burning*, was published by Radiolarian Press in 2014.

Nicholas Castine is a poet whose work focuses on family, nature, and the strange. He is currently working on a chapbook of poetry and microfiction. His work has previously appeared in *50-Word Stories* and *MacQueen's Quinterly*.

Nissi Odessa O. Mandanao is a 20-year-old budding author in Davao Oriental, Philippines. She currently majors in creative writing at the University of the Philippines - Mindanao. She also explores visual art through experimental poetry. She, just like her works, is still becoming.

Patricia Hemminger's poems are inspired by her love of nature and science background. Her poems have been published most recently in *Cider Press Review*, *Streetlight Magazine* and her chapbooks *What Do We Know of Time?* and *All Things Gone*. She is a Pushcart Prize nominee and Drew University MFA graduate.

Patrick Roland is a writer and educator living with cystic fibrosis. He enjoys exploring other people's attics and basements, where most of his writing ideas are created and sometimes lost. His work appears or is forthcoming in *Hobart*, *Sky Island*, *Wild Roof*, *scaffold*, *Maudlin House*, and others.

Paul Hostovsky's poems and essays appear widely online and in print. He has won a Pushcart Prize and two Best of the Net Awards. His newest book is PERFECT DISAPPEARANCES (Kelsay, 2025). He makes his living in Boston as a sign language interpreter. Website: paulhostovsky.com

Rachel Turney, Ed.D. is an educator and artist located in Denver, Colorado. Rachel is on staff at Bare Back Magazine and is a reader for The Los Angeles Review. Her poetry collection Record Player Life is forthcoming with The Poetry Lighthouse.

In 2023, Rikki Santer was named Ohio Poet of the Year. Her forthcoming collection, Shepherd's Hour, won the Paul Nemser Book Prize from Lily Poetry Review Books. Please contact her through her website, <https://rikkisanter.com>.

Robin Kathaas is a poet who was born and raised in Belgium, but now lives, laughs, and loves in Brighton. Their cat is more interesting than they are. They can be found on Instagram at @robin.kathaas.

Ron Bearwald is a career educator, certified leadership trainer, contracted mentor, writer, and former school district CEO, university professor and department chair. B.A., Beloit College; M.Ed., University of Illinois; Ed.D., Indiana University. Published works can be found in: Natural Life, American Trails, and Educational Leadership. Contact him at 1dayatatime@att.net

Sam Calhoun is the author of six chapbooks, the most recent First Things (Eulogy Press). Follow him on Instagram or X @weatherman_sam, or his website, www.weathermansam.com. He lives with his wife in Elkmont, AL.

Sandra Beth Levy is a retired psychologist now pursuing her dream of immersion in creative writing. She raised two biracial sons while honoring her Jewish-feminist identities. Sandra has published poems in numerous poetry anthologies and online presses, including Anomaly Poetry, Small Gems Press, Arcana Poetry Press, and A Curious Moon.

Sara Jorgensen is an art educator and a lifelong artist. Her work has been featured in publications including Carolina Muse Magazine, The Orange Rose Literary Magazine, and FLARE Magazine, among others. Her website, which functions as a digital portfolio, can be found at: sarajorgensen.art.

Sarah Ellis is a chemist and Reed College graduate who lives and writes in Massachusetts. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in Poet Lore, Ranger Magazine, and Oyster River Pages, among others.

Sean Whalen lives near Pilot Mound, Iowa, where he finds inspiration close to home. Recent poems have appeared or are forthcoming in Last Leaves, The Ocotillo Review, Unbroken, New Feathers, Stone Poetry Quarterly, Thimble, Assignment Magazine, The Avenue Journal, Chiron Review, Songs of Eretz, Steam Ticket, and Canary.

sef adeola is a Nigerian Illustrator & Textile Designer who uses cave art & Yoruba textile design motifs in his work. His illustrations have appeared in Lolwe, The Continent, Minority Africa, The Believer etc. You can see more of his illustrations here: sefadeola.com

Sonia Nanescu is a former dentist with shaky hands, so she had to reinvent herself, and while doing so, she gained two PhDs in Biology. Now, during the workday she is a scientific administrator, and during the weekends, sometimes a poet, a nonfiction writer, or she's drawing

Steve Wilson's poetry has appeared in journals and anthologies nationwide; as well as in six collections, the most recent entitled *Complicity* (2023). He lives in San Marcos, TX.

Susan Michele Coronel lives in New York City. Her debut collection, "In the Needle, A Woman" (Finishing Line Press, 2025) won the 2024 Donna Wolf Palacio Poetry Prize. Susan's poems have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and have appeared in journals including Pedestal, Mom Egg Review, Redivider, and SWWIM.

T.A.R. Wallace (he/his) is a yoga therapist and table tennis coach living in Bendigo, Australia. His poems have been published in The Brussels Review, Conduit, Slope, Volt. He won the Lane Cove Literary Awards Poetry Prize 2023.

Tinamarie Cox lives in an Arizona town with her husband, two children, and rescue felines. Her written and visual work has appeared in a number of online and print publications under various genres. You can explore her work at tinamariethinkstoomuch.weebly.com.

Will Boesl is a poet, songwriter, and spiritual director from Milwaukee. They hold a master's degree in Spiritual Formation from Episcopal Seminary of the Southwest. Recent writings have appeared in Soul by Southwest and Abbey of the Arts. You can find their writing and music at willboesl.com