



# Last Leaves

Issue 2 | Spring 2021



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*Last Leaves: Issue 2*

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Cover design by Kiera Baron

## Note from the Editors

This issue was heartbreaking, to say the least. We knew the theme RAW would garner all kinds of submissions, from emotions to food to the nitty gritty parts of life. We want to thank everyone who submitted for opening their hearts and souls to us. Writing work under a theme like this can be extremely vulnerable, bringing up some of the worst and best points in our lives. As we read through each piece we received, we felt we grew a little bit closer to all of you. Working on this issue has been such an honor, and we're so excited for what's yet to come.

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



## Content Warning

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

Please read at your own discretion.

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



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RAW  
*Andrew Feng*

## A Madness

*Ann E. Michael*

This is how it starts, while  
weeding out lemon-sorrel and crabgrass,  
pulling up thistle,  
inadvertently uncovering  
bones. Disarranged:  
the fragile state in which  
Mother left,  
her body still wrapped around a bottle  
at the kitchen table.  
Now, she is the bones  
of a baby rabbit  
half-buried beneath geranium,  
she is fallen seed,  
sleeplessness, a dry leaf.  
I push my finger through  
richly organic soil,  
think of all that dies  
enhancing tilth, nutrient—  
I nudge the empty rib cage,  
small shell of remembered running,  
the endless need to flee.  
Mother could not escape, either.

## burnt bush

*c. a. mackenzie*

your chest was pierced in heaped ash / where ribbed flakes of burnt  
metal wreath into dark indigo frills / as if scrapping brightly-painted cars  
meshed / some rare species of wild bramble / my dark-stained mouth  
closed around your breast / & smells of zinc / rusted pipes / stuck on  
our skins like children bathed in well-water / black blood striped down  
from three thorns lodged in your flesh / like chemically glossed pieces  
of raven beak / claw / you prayed dear god i will not feel hurt / i do  
not feel hurt / as a thin film of copper burned over our blue irises /  
& crowned daytime with a flush of brightness / skulls seated firm  
on the atlas / axis / stacked under a cosmos that shines / blind / like a  
newly-minted coin / you rubbed warmth into these cold hands smeared  
orange plasma / breathe with me / you said / breathe in deeply / this air  
rich with tar / hot berries.



## The Door is Open

*Steve Bowman*

I see ghosts everywhere  
    Little lights  
    Little flickers  
closing in  
because the one I need  
reconciliation with won't  
forgive me  
no matter how sorry  
I am

The years ahead are a giant  
skeletal grin, and the years  
behind are the esophagus  
I'm swallowed down  
devoured by guilt  
that can't be forgotten  
until it's forgiven  
There's no digestion  
and no expulsion  
because skeletons don't really eat  
they just sit in sunlit closets  
quietly waiting, smiling  
nodding off with boredom.

## Bones

*KB Baltz*

I have moved all  
the skeletons  
in my closet  
to the garden  
where they can  
weather the seasons  
in the open.  
There is no shame  
in a frost covered  
rib cage  
naked to the elements  
no longer wrapped in  
mothballs and tweed  
trying to pretend  
that they are anything  
but bones.

## WHEN I SPEAK OF THE FEAR

*Ellen Huang*

I mean that the days are tempest and dust  
storm, desert sand slipping through my hands  
then drowning me beneath.

I mean that the second we run  
out of things to say,  
either of us disappear  
into the spaces of time.

I mean that I scare, I confuse, I collapse into a vortex silently  
I mean memory cleansing of when I trusted you with fairy name.

I mean the tendency to morph into others,  
that when I'm not looking in the mirror, I'll have sleepwalked into another's skin  
that when you see me, you see a stolen face.

I mean the curse of words upon words upon words, poison  
that keep me from  
seeing you, reaching back through the mist.

I mean the fear that when the sand runs out and I finally put a hand out  
it will all dis s o l v e b e f o r e m e , s k u l l a n d r i b c a g e  
t o d u s t.

## Piece Parts

*Paul Ilichko*

You cut his tongue out with a knife  
removed his lungs            that wheezy  
bagpipe            sliced his spleen and split  
his liver            and all of this for love

his eyeballs made a perfect set  
polished and shelved for future  
reference            they matched so well with  
cartilage hacks of former ears

so many pieces    incognito  
in their myriad shapes            these chopped  
up chunks of flesh            with broken bones  
protruding            like erections

and so to his experience            carefully taken  
and all intact            jarred and mounted in  
a safe location            never to rot or fade  
never to be of use to anyone again.

## dead mermaid

*c. a. mackenzie*

1. they charred your fleshy thighs with blackened lips / pressed hard like iron into memories blindingly white / clumped sugar / batting the outside of a thin leaded window / liquified

2. you lie among crushed vanilla leaves / as blood pours out from somewhere / or nowhere / but crimson fluid fills the cracks in tree bark / as you finger a trail of ladybugs / skulls blotted ink

3. silver hair coiling forth from hills of ash / looped into the form of empty roses / such a wild garden of shimmering things ravaged your little body / coated in a film of pine needles / snapped

4. the milky way spinning fast in cobalt air / you follow a single star / thorny as the bush beneath which your body / lay crumpled / like a kitten mewling for someone / or no one

5. their faces crystallize into that which is not a face / which is made of luminous grains of mineral / molded into a human which cannot die / floating beside you whispering / snide remarks

6. you cannot sleep bathed in sweat / gritty salt streaked like watercolors down pale flesh / the words golden apples come to mind / golden apples / golden apples / rotting inside your stomach

7. they tell a story about a dead mermaid tail / prismatic scales shed onto steel boulders / encased in a large glass jar / waves lapping / she was tied to wet wooden boards / ears sealed with wax

## Caution

*Antoni Ooto*

All bones taken,  
all blood taken,  
all breath taken,  
this, a ceremony of conclusion.

As the body gathers,  
traces held together  
one last time.

The old ones still remember  
how once she taught them a way to live—  
and breathe quietly in the night air.



Cone

*Michael Moreth*

**MAY—LOVE**

*Robert Beveridge*

A skull bobs  
under the bridge where I first kissed you  
flowers grow from one eye socket

the trees are green  
after the last flood  
but now the rivers have receded  
and once again  
we can sit under the bridge  
and talk, kiss  
touch  
without fear  
of discovery  
by anyone  
except the skull  
with flowers for eyes



**your highest of loves is mortal**

*Ellen Huang*

I think, indignantly. Your everlasting love  
is an overwhelming cacophony. Your promise  
is a ring you kneel on the ground for  
once, and never again, as skin grows  
around it and bones click and flesh sticks.

Your greatest of loves, your “more than friends,”  
your torture, your ever after, your  
death of a bachelor, is all mortal.  
Your wild abandon to say no one else may

receive a touch of your time, except  
the missing piece, the hot other half of your  
soul—is romantic rot and mold. You’ve  
made ghost stories of us now, foolish mortal.

Your exclamations that this is the meaning of life  
has left me a corpse, and shut out all else of the gospel,  
despite a love that so loved the world  
that they made all things possible.

Your insistence on something most  
beautiful, it’s all an end-all, and leaves  
everything else we have in the cold.  
Your deepest of loves is blind and brainwashed  
and a disappearing act, a wormhole.

But perhaps someday I’ll understand.  
And be just as hopeless, just as hopeful.

## The Winter Solstice

*Beulah Vega*

It's Solstice again.  
Another year  
another morning awakened by  
Aurora  
but still unable to see

you. Tonight the bonfires  
will be lit  
in fields ravaged  
by fire, flood,  
sorrow and all other  
synonyms for

humanity. Tonight the fingers  
of frost will penetrate my  
window and tickle my soul  
with the burning ice of your

memory. Tonight I know  
you will sit alone  
shivering, your home  
like the Earth's womb  
in this season, barren and

waiting. You will wait for a poisoned  
princess to morph into  
compassion. You will wait for  
an empty heart to fill itself with  
dreams, with

care. You will wait for her to  
become everything I  
have been for you. Tonight, when  
the moon seems to stall in  
the winter sky, you and I will sit

shivering. Alone-together  
waiting for a dawning light.  
waiting for the warmth of Spring  
waiting for each other.

## Arbeit Macht Frie

*Carolyn Adams*

Gray city, gray city,  
I won't visit you  
or your sinuous lie at the gates.

It is said that to fathom  
an intricate thing  
is to stand within  
and look closely.  
But I won't come near.

Gray city, you're filthy  
with piles of shoes  
still bearing the print of their hosts.  
Ivory-abandoned gold.  
Ash manuscripts  
long dispersed into  
hollow elegies no one reads.

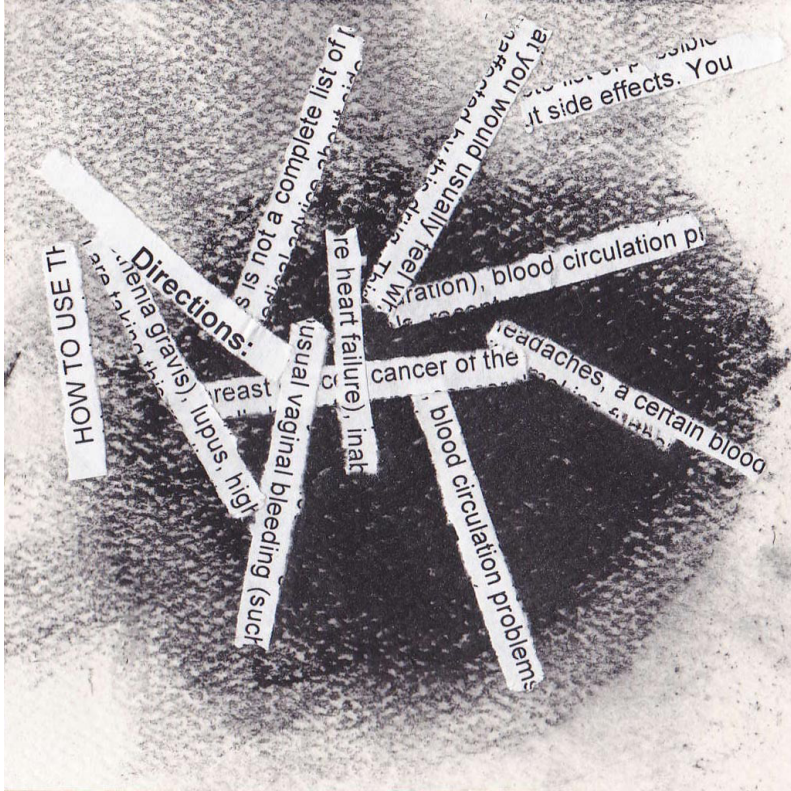
Despair hangs its rags  
in the night barracks.  
Terrors cascade the beds.

Outside the fences,  
crows browse a field  
caught in the teeth of winter.  
So many dead nights,  
so many naked days.  
So many  
bones in the snow.

## The Saints Gave Me Permission to Cry

Nancy K. Dobson

It snowed in Paris today, and though I'm home in California,  
my bones ache for the narrow steps, the statues of saints,  
and a café crema in the corner bistro  
featuring Fabien's Tuesday magic show.  
Obsessed with visiting every church in the city,  
I pushed open the heavy carved doors of Saint Augustin,  
felt its old bones exhale,  
my shoes neatly clicking on its stone floor.  
Something familiar crept in.  
*I've been here before*, my skin said.  
*Silly*, my head whispered back, but it spooked me all the same.  
A shadow in my throat, I studied Mary's face in a mural  
as she dutifully wept at Jesus' feet.  
Resting in a narrow wooden chair near the back,  
I ate chunks of bread from the patisserie with the blue window,  
inhaled the thousand years' recipe,  
and brushed crumbs from my scarf, though I had no one to impress.  
Candles wavered and the doors lamented  
as another sufferer entered behind me.  
I wanted to stay, cradled in anonymity,  
but as I looked from statue to statue,  
the walnut chair creaked beneath me.  
*Go*, the saints chided, *there's a bar on the next corner.*  
*Drink the wine.*  
*You will join us soon enough.*



How to Use  
Carolyn Adams

## Wine and Dark Chocolate

*Courtney Weaver*

I want to be tequila.  
But maybe I'm actually wine and dark chocolate.  
I want to be exciting  
But I'm tired and quiet and lonely.  
Would anyone be excited by me?

I want to be someone's shot of whiskey  
But maybe I'm a little too tame for that.  
In my mind, I'm free and wild.  
But I take pills to be normal and  
I cry when I'm sad.

I want to be someone's famous cocktail.  
But what is there about me to show off?  
I don't know how to dress  
Or how to act or how to flirt  
But I know how to be someone's rock.



## Death and Dining

*Leslee Jepson*

we sit in the dining area  
between the kitchen and  
and living room  
I take my mother's place  
uncomfortable with the promotion

my father pours the wine  
baked russets slathered with butter  
crisp salad anointed with balsamic vinaigrette  
complements the perfectly grilled steak

twenty feet away my mother pleads  
from the hospital bed  
“Help me, someone help me”

we dine as she is dying  
I cannot swallow I can barely breathe  
unable to help, I step out into the January night





## Hunger

*Michelle Mead*

One less bite, then a few more,  
Soon I'll be all gone, for sure,  
How little it takes to disappear,  
My discipline praiseworthy,  
Oh, yes, I'm almost gone,

“You've lost so much weight,  
You look beautiful now,”

I'm starving—

A trinket, a box, a broken toy,  
Ribbons, ribbons, in my hair,  
Words like knives that slice the air,

“You should lose some weight,  
Little girl, you have such a pretty face,”

I'm starving—

Rattle your bones,  
So we can see how empty you are,  
Beneath your flesh there is no more,  
Your soul shaken out between  
Your protruding rib cage,

I'm starving—

Skin turning blue,  
Hair grows no more,  
I can only bleed in my mind—

What is beauty anyway?

## Devour

*Kelli Lage*

When you're ripped to shreds / don't blame me for the sins of the  
wolves / all I have is my walking stick / when I cut my leg and blood  
trickles down / I picture a warm bath / for the thorns in these woods  
are thick / I hear some are still tangled in them / Tuesday will you be  
able to pick up my call? / she gets her nails painted pale pink / each  
Monday / to match her rotary phone / I think she lives and dies / in  
telephone wires / all I'd find would be a heavy dial tone / coffee cake  
for breakfast / bitter tongue / still, I devour

## LEAD WOLF

*John Grey*

In hunger the mind fogs with red-raw visions  
of skin unfolding like rose petals,  
of blood and flesh spilling like uncorked wine

The lead wolf lopes ahead of his brood  
to the upper reaches of the river,  
leaping stones, snapping at the air

as if each breath is a failed kill.  
The others follow, single file, ears back,  
heads low, propelled by their own starved sniffing,

In a distant deer herd, seas of content  
suddenly stir. Surfaces of feeding ripple warily.  
Death lumps in cervine throats.

From a shore of brush and grass, a wolf pack  
flutters like brown and furry canvas,  
sets sail for the islands of meat.

## WOUNDED DEER

*John Grey*

Despite the struggle,  
she deftly tight-rope walks  
the staggered boundary  
of life and death.  
She is both these states within herself:  
futile viscera jar against those still functioning,  
heart feeds the head  
with arcs of light  
and periodic waves of darkness.  
All around her,  
the same contradiction:  
trees arrayed in falling leaves,  
owl atop its mouse pellet heap,  
dead blossoms at the tip of thriving plants,  
a wolf prodding the last of a squirrel carcass.  
A loud frenzy to be  
rakes against a raw and shrieking longing  
for the end.  
Ultimately,  
she finds, in death's motion,  
life's stillness.



## At Fault

Cheryl Heineman

The shot was clean, right through the eye,  
the officer said, grabbing the fawn's hind legs,

and gesturing like an Olympic disc thrower,  
he picked it up, and turning, flung it

into the woods' overgrown weeds.  
Its body still twitching, I watched

from afar the undignified tossing of a life,  
ended randomly, by a passerby's car.

Its spotted coat sputtered and quivered  
in the scrubbed sun's light.

I cannot imagine anything worse—  
cradling my own child's bloody head.

*I trusted you*, his eyes would say.

Usually, the deer come out at dusk.  
I should have seen it coming. Its mother,

not me, should have stroked its head,  
should have been there, should have

taught her child to leap higher, should have  
known how to divine the crossing over.

## Awakening

*Antoni Ooto*

Innocence has returned.

So, he pays attention.  
He's grown closer to insects;  
speaks dragonfly

hesitates for birds  
honors paths of deer  
such is the etiquette of creatures.

They watch, thinking him curious,  
but are willing to accommodate.

Less often but still,

memories of a nightmare coming;  
hooves of two white horses thundering  
the emptied streets of sleep,  
and again, he slips, falls beneath.

Wait, no, not hooves,

the sting of step-father's strap,  
welting his back. And after,

awake shaking,  
staring out at night  
where all shape-shifters wait,

until...

cowering back into sleep at the  
crossroads again, he watches for  
two white horses.

## A Murder of Crows

*Nupur Maskara*

Crow thoughts pluck my eyes  
Whenever I try to sleep  
Caw caw caw caw caw

## INSOMNIAC NIGHTMARE

*W Roger Carlisle*

My eyes fly wide open in disbelief,  
all engines are running full speed ahead,  
the switch has flipped,  
all the lights in my head have been lit at once,  
whole engines come to life, messages fly, dendrites spark,  
synapses whip electricity across my brain;  
my brain itself feels  
like some phosphorescent free-floating jellyfish of the deep,  
luminescent, glowing, awake.

As I lie in the dark, I wonder if it is still early enough  
to take a sleeping pill. A full panic descends as I  
listen to my galloping pulse, begin to list meetings and  
the fifty tasks I must do tomorrow.  
A biological algorithm bulls through my mental files  
searching out broken bits of code, lost ideas,  
broken shards of mental activity as it desperately  
tries to integrate my broken life.

After pounding the pillow and failing to sink into the mattress,  
I try to hypnotize myself by repeating:  
“I am getting heavy, heavy, heavy, heavy.”  
The clock says 2:00 AM.  
I run into the bathroom and begin calculating my dosage  
of Ambien. The risk of becoming a morning zombie is worth  
escaping the terror of the night.



Groping back to bed after a pee  
I part thick curtains, and am startled by a  
distant, preposterous and separate—moon—  
a white metallic circle of light, piercing  
the saturated darkness of the sky which  
awakens memories of the dead.

I am startled by furniture in the old house glowing in the moonlight  
like it had been washed with lyme, as I inventory  
every stupid decision I've ever made,  
begin planning hiding places where I can  
take naps at work, develop hallucinations of monsters  
at the window, delusions of being Santa Clause, imagine  
I'm hearing the ghosts of Christmas past.

I hide under the covers  
listening for the rattle of chains.

## With a Pinch of Salt

*Lorelei Bacht*

This poem commenced as a long,  
Inarticulate scream,  
The night when I discovered that  
My husband was cheating.  
No word was a boat large enough  
To take my grief to sea.  
There was no star, no route, no map,  
To navigate the gale;  
No food for months, no confidante -  
Saltwater and dead fish.  
I did manage to make it back,  
Mouth full of sand and spit,  
My head still heavy with bad dreams  
From the threatening deep



Untitled  
*Cathy Leavitt*

## Calculus of Failure

*Paul Ilchko*

His festering mouth      like a nest  
of swarm      a source of stink      a field of pain

mapped by calculus      wrapped  
in shadows      he must be caressed

\* \* \* \* \*

shielded from the harshness of family      from  
a melting world of failure      reflected

in the mirror of relationship      his child  
crawling broken and limbless

across the nightmare of his awakening  
the warping of his existence      from one space  
to another

\* \* \* \* \*

a collapsing floor of open windows  
and wind-blasted color fields      where every

promise is rooted in duplicity      where every  
room has reverted into unwallled nothingness

a bastion of blood and fear      and the stillness  
of breaking glass      demanding the decision  
that he is too afraid to make

\* \* \* \* \*

as miles away  
the violence is splitting apart into streams of time

into sonic blocks that shape the borders  
of his empty life that tear apart his fortitude

his payment owed but never sent as compensation  
for a grubby widowing

\* \* \* \* \*

and then a recycled immersion

a rebirth into frames and joisting  
into ascending staircases that lead again

of his slight epiphany to the burning  
that drifted away  
as smoke  
as messaging  
as termination.

## RETURNING

*Gary Sokolow*

Nights at rope's end, obsessing  
self inside of self, brutal

interior landscape from which I  
thought I had been freed

to write of the blue eyes of a young  
girl, the broken hand of a

homeless man, the baby rolling over  
on her little stomach, instead

at the crossing of nameless roads, a child's  
nightmare of a scarecrow's stare,

the four locks on a door and the hall walls  
a shadowy cave, as the woman

in the next room laments the bottomless  
black hole of my egoless-ness,

ponders my journey from life to oblivion  
to life, to sit on a seat on a bus

on an afternoon jostled in the normalcy  
of the everyday, the old woman

sliding her card into the slot, a record of a  
journey from here to there and out.



## The Massage therapist

*Jan Ball*

pulls gently on her neck  
like lifting a vase  
on a pottery wheel,

that drunken night

she, as adolescent-intercede  
in family arguments,  
father's tapered fingers  
this time like a tentacle  
wrapped around her neck  
then

press

choke

mother and sister  
inert with fear, stuck  
in an aquarium castle  
in underwater fairylane

she doesn't remember

she won't remember

but now her neck  
is a magic wand,  
can change mice  
into footmen,  
pumpkins  
into a carriage.

## Sunoco Gas

*Natalli Amato*

I'm twenty-three but I forgot my I.D., so I wait out in the parking lot  
while Connor checks out with the beer like I'm sixteen again.  
Was I ever sixteen?

No. I wired money to China  
just to time travel in the eyes of the cashier at Mercer's gas station.

Across the street there's a sign for the hotel in which my sisters were conceived  
years before my father was my father,  
back when he was just the bartender and if he left  
it was called a cigarette break and there was nothing then  
that could define the location of his will  
as absent when measured in relation to that a mother's.

The sky was somewhere close to me  
before I started looking.



## Thinking about Connor while I sit in Brooklyn Heights

*Natalli Amato*

I took my longing out  
for a drink on Henry Street.  
I ordered a gin and tonic at a wine bar  
sucking it down through that obstacle of a straw  
until it was just glass and ice.  
When the girl behind the bar looked away  
I reached inside the glass with my fingers,  
shoveling cubes into my mouth.  
I had brought a notebook with me  
but never wrote a thing down.  
Just chewed, chewed, chewed.

odd



out

odd out

*Alan Bern*

## Unclothed

*Rachel Landrum Crumble*

This is what it's like to crawl, wet and gangly,  
out of a cocoon—  
not like finally peeling out of too-tight jeans,  
but like scraping the very skin raw,  
chapped and burning in winter wind—  
numb and tingling, so that cold  
alone could coax warmth back in,  
preventing  
frost's deadening bite.

Where are my old familiar clothes—  
why now are they denied me?  
What cruel joke is this  
that I am thus exposed?  
Change comes in hiccups,  
no spoon of sugar can stop or sweeten.

A hopeful convalescent,  
I wrap myself in poetry, sip hot milky tea,  
try to equilibrate.

All day I have been quieted  
by the hush and stutter of wings.

## Lark ~

Christina A. Kemp

Purple flowers are growing through my back door  
between the cracks of what should close.

I slipped and fell downward on the slope tailbone cracked but continued anyway,  
needing to see what was further below.

Stupid of me, I only had that small piece of toast for breakfast  
perspiring, fuzzy, *continue the descent*,

I thought

Then I landed.

I needed this dark day fog settling, in the  
morning

damp, gray the rain misting and then  
clumping down fat upon my cheek.

I couldn't breathe

before -

with so much light in the air.

Now I am settled again mossy and grounded  
and free

Encumbered by the surrounding woods, looking up at those leaves dancing  
branches in the sky

pitter pats of what is sobbing from otherworlds above.

I hadn't written poetry for a time

*Why was this?* Books pages are

consuming.

I killed the battery of my melodies  
of music

Oh well, mud squishing, running between my fingers instead,

And now those dead leaves cling upon the  
black knee of my pants.

Snake tails slithering through the grass --

Twins.

I named them once, I think...

I feel safe wandering here, in being, lostness in the  
mystical  
What a change that is from hypervigilanced requirements  
demands, fatiguing from before.  
A woodpecker nails at that tree from above.

This dark still pond, black beneath hanging branches that  
tickle and descend at the waters edge.  
Nothing moves.  
Down I am immersed into the wet gravity pulling  
beneath the unconscious undertows,  
taking me nearer to the beginning of what was supposed to be.  
Primordial eyes looking back at me—  
You are down here, too.  
The water osmosing in and out of my open mouth,  
  
And somewhere, a lark sang above.

## I Can't be Bothered Writing This Poem

*Kate Maxwell*

Grey gristle-coloured days where sit-coms  
sway their banal fantasies before our faces  
or YouTube struts its clowning dance  
    tumbling, pouting for our dull  
    pleasure  
all with impossibly long legs  
tight skin, white teeth, and all of it  
wrapped in the latest brands, the latest  
catch phrase, and all available  
    to pause  
so we can refill our glass, pop more  
pop-up treats, and seep like warm  
syrup, flattening our saggy arses  
into couch-cushion shapes.

Fold upon fold, flesh rippled over  
flesh, we watch our sucked in selves  
squeeze into beige shapewear  
before the bedroom mirror  
and thank the Gods that we can't  
see each other's gurgling insides  
all the rancid lusting smallness  
of our soft and sad internals.

So, on this gristle-coloured day  
I spit out smiles for check-out chicks  
who dutifully drone, Have a nice day  
and by the way, I couldn't give a rats'.  
And later, I'll prattle on the lounge  
fashion-fed philosophies at you, at me  
in front of the TV. But no one's listening.  
Not even me. So, I'll throw my fork  
dripping with gravy at the pink curve  
of your ear while the television roars.

*What did you say?*

*Forget it.*

## Blocked

*Sam Houty*

The poet's head leans into my chest  
    seductive and slow, picking at my skin  
It feels euphoric at first, feeding his hunger  
    being eaten alive, a strange allure  
my flesh wounds and the darkening sky  
    He's a faraway bird circling, sharp dive  
slurping me in verses and allegories  
    words that were mine flow into ink clots  
After there's nothing left of me to ravage  
    my body exploited until skeletal  
I'm tossed aside, nothing left to say  
A carcass on this cracked terrain

## Night Poems

*Glenn Ingersoll*

I walk the wrinkled corridor between dreams.  
Like trophy heads in a hunter's jungle bungalow  
lamps jut out,  
their glass all glare.

she rides a horse  
wakes with car keys in her hand

Surely these clothes are blankets.  
The shelter I offered silence: my mouth  
What won't wake: my hair.  
Toward something they saw closed, my eyes turn.

Lights lost in  
among handles.

The window is open, standing somewhere,  
open to a door.



## illiterate ills

*Ellen Huang*

without rest,  
life's fences loom taller  
barbed wire stretch tighter  
formulas surround, patterns abound,  
dirt and metal and magnified sound  
random words rambling with emphasis  
chaotic syllables put in rhyme or original  
weirder and weirder images  
just please make sense! in a world so pounding  
my mind lagging, frustrated, groaning.

but with rest,  
poetry is all the world.  
that act of trust-falling asleep  
that submission to warmth of coddled blankets  
that vulnerable peace, a peace of mind  
with death practice opening to dreams instead  
poetry is all the world,  
the language of the essential red ribbons  
that tie the earth together, ligaments of fate  
spiderwebs of truth  
poetry is lifeblood and food and drink  
poetry is why we wake.

## Self-Promotion

*Kendra Nuttall*

There are days the poems crawl in  
like long-awaited desert rain.  
The saguaro opens its cracked lips,  
only for the sun to push away the clouds  
and bake the mud.  
Sometimes I feel like salt,  
little glitter crystals sticking to your side.  
Every word from my mouth is another bee  
dying. Every page written is another tree  
falling. I don't want to bother you,  
I'll give you my words for free.  
*Bless me with a storm.*

## Unwritten

*Gurupreet K. Khalsa*

Thought conservation,  
saving the spools of wound permutation  
tightly packed on stacked racks;  
waiting in multiple colors,  
waiting as untamed others,  
waiting in grays and blacks.

Like so many crawling things  
twisting into rings,  
left alone they creep,  
waiting to be wrestled, looped,  
waiting to be another,  
waiting to be deep.

Attempted aligning,  
resisting or leaving-  
rolling together in tangles, knots.  
waiting for weaving,  
waiting for poetry  
waiting for what is not.

## Repeating Lost Vowels

*by RpVerlaine, G.M.Rose & Joseph M. Gelosi*

*(Written in poetry workshop at a bar.)*

The slack  
of the  
hangman's noose  
escapes me  
like compassion  
love and life  
framed in  
each memory  
you insisted  
defined us.

I seek  
a token  
blessing of  
veritas...a fragment  
of everything  
neither false  
nor real but  
an acceptance  
teaching me nothing  
but how to say  
your name  
again until  
wordlessly  
remaining  
a scream  
nights...  
I keep saying  
can't get  
any darker.



Ring  
*Ellen Mary Hayes*



Abandoned  
*Frabice Poussin*



## Furies

*Meghan Sterling*

Last night, a deep soaking rain, battering the windows and roof the way I'd like to smash everything today. Ruckus and racket, an explosion of feathers. Mid-month, and there's bills to pay, no money to pay them. Again. I handled this truth by attacking a boho pillow with my hands, wringing its textured neck, slamming it again and again on the bed until I was numb.

As long as I don't hurt a person or ruin everyone with cruel words, I feel like I'm one generation improved. As long as my daughter doesn't see. As long as I don't mark my body when I tear at myself in overwhelm.

How am I here? My mother was here, 30 years before.

Pulling chunks of hair out of her head in the hallway, whipping at me with the metal blinds. There was learning there, but I missed it. I'm still carrying the weight of the family's dwindling bank account under my fingernails like grave-dirt, tangled up like the vacuum roller, thick with hair. There's no undoing it—just cut. And cut. Until the blood comes. Until there's relief.

And I see my face growing old with worry—lines along my mouth deeper from furrowing, fingers smeared with ink as I tally again and again, coming up short. I swore I would choose different, be different, and here I am. Even the wrinkles are the same. Even the hideous rage. The furies visited me in my dreams last night, hovering with their terrible wings, asking me again and again,

*Did you think you could escape us?*



## METAL TOILET

*Sita Gaia*

When I told my therapist  
my life was better off  
in pieces of ash,

he marched me out to my Dad's  
car with strict instructions  
to go to emergency immediately.

I fumed like the exhaust  
of the tailpipe on my grandpa's car,  
before he died an honorable death.

I cavalierly texted  
a few friends  
about the attempt.

It was not for attention.  
I had the perfect opportunity  
the night before.

Smothered in love by parents  
who were always home,  
there was no good time.



Deemed unsafe in my own hands,  
I spent the night  
in the fluorescent dark.

When I used the  
washroom,  
I found the toilet was metal.

I kicked it so hard  
with my blue Converse  
low tops.

It was indestructible and steady  
as a rock.  
I couldn't even be trusted to use

a normal toilet.  
Sometimes it's easier to  
shut up about these things.

That's not what  
1-800-SUICIDE  
told me.

## Journey's end

*Sam Houty*

*Malala Yousafzai*

I wonder if she ever imagined facing it  
the gun pointed at her head, the end-all  
of her activism, laying limp on gravelly  
sand. It is the worst outcome – death  
caught in our throats, blood spilled  
voice box silenced against the echo  
of gunshots ringing. I think of that  
the consequences of speaking out  
the inevitability of it and fears plague  
me like the hot sand beneath her head  
force of a bullet pushed into her skull  
yet I am wailing in my heart, enraged  
willing us both to stand up and fight.

## Down

*Chris Jones*

I feel pressed by a persistent winter wind, my reluctance obliged to yield. It plucks all the bright green leaves from my supple branch, one by one, leaving only a skeletal twig. I feel dragged by a current that stops me from standing, tugging at my safety, altering my gravity. Blood thins, shrinks from my fingertips to a soaking heaviness in my heart, sinks to my stomach, and below. The periphery glazes, reducing to a crystallizing core of trapped distraction, tightly wrapped in a fatalistic shroud. It sits me down with leaden certainty as my day tilts, slips sideways, and slides away, leaving me raw in a cold fog, hoping for a lamp. Am I to welcome this dejection? To embrace it? How can I, when I have no warmth to even move?

## A Conversation with my Therapist

Ivanka Fear

**I think I'm sinking deeper,** I told him.

Mrhuh? *What's wrong?*

**I think I'm drowning,** I said.

Er??? *What do you mean?*

**I think I'm severely depressed,** I explained.

Meh.... *You think too much.*

**I seem to be lost,** I told him.

Pop.... *Found you! Can I sit on you?*

**I seem to have no one who cares,** I said.

Head butt.... *I'm here for you. Want a snuggle?*

**I seem to be lonely,** I admitted.

Mm...ow? *Do you want my stuffie mouse?*

**I feel like I've been battered beyond repair,** I told him.

Me...ow me...ow. *I know how you feel.*

**I feel like I've been suffering for too long,** I said.

A gentle smack.... *Snap out of it, silly!*

**I feel like I've been hurt too many times,** I continued.

Knead knead... *You feel tense - need a massage?*

**I'm so tired of it all,** I told him.

Purr purr.... *Just relax, will you?*

**I'm exhausted all the time,** I said.

Snore, snort.... *A short nap will help.*

**I'm sick of my life,** I concluded.

Yow yow yow! *Snack time! You'll feel better with a full tummy.*

Then we sat in silence for a long time and observed.  
Redbreasted robins chirped merrily as  
brown squirrels scurried happily  
from one green branch to another.  
Yellow bees buzzed busily as  
orange butterflies flitted cheerily  
from one pink rose to another.  
Children laughed noisily as  
their black and white dog ran jumpily  
along the grey gravelled roadside.  
The warm sun shone brightly as  
the ruby-throated hummingbird zipped quickly  
from purple petunias to blue lobelia.

And the wise old boy said  
Blink, wink....                    *Don't worry, be happy. It's all good.*  
And he offered up his belly for a rubdown  
as payment for his sage advice.

I think our daily sessions are helping.  
He really puts things in perspective, you know.  
There's a whole world outside our window  
and the thing is, it's all quite amazing..  
but it's the simple things in life  
that simplify life.

## Gone

Lorelei Bacht

Some mornings I wake up believing you  
alive, still. It takes a few minutes  
for the cruel remembrance to settle in:

No, my daughter will never know  
you. She will be you instead. She will carry  
the grudges that you left behind, better

than I ever could. I gave her your name.  
I asked her once: is this your first time  
being here, or have you lived before?

She looked perplexed, much older than  
her age of four. She thought on it,  
then asked: *What do you mean?*

*I don't know what I mean, I said, let's  
Talk about it when you are a tiny bit  
Older. She said alright. She tracked*

my retreat from the children's room,  
her eyes narrowed, a living question mark.  
Perhaps you have not recognized

yourself in her, yet. Or perhaps only  
some of you made it through the year elapsed  
in between your departure and her arrival.

I wonder where the rest of you has gone.

## The Closet

*Charlene Stegman Moskal*

I gave away parts of you today;  
some significant, others not,

some never claimed as your own,  
some familiar.

I could see you only as a fading snapshot  
wearing them, casual, no big deal.

They no longer had your scent on them;  
I checked.

My nose struggled to find you,  
buried itself in cotton, linen, raw silk.

Perhaps if your musk was on them,  
if I could recall the cologne,

the smell of your hair that brushed the collar,  
your sweat lingering in the folds under the armpits

I would have broken my silence,  
my lips that held back denials, my clenched teeth

that refused to release a keening of *NO's*  
would have burst forth wheeling above my head

dressed in a shroud of black crow feathers -  
but today they were only pieces of cloth.

The fabric of you has left the closet  
and settled into the fabric of me.

## Late Night Pancakes

*Valerie Frost*

I miss  
not being able  
to keep secrets  
from you, because

you always  
knew what I was  
thinking before  
I said it, and

sometimes you would  
even finish my  
sentences for me out  
loud.

I miss  
when you would  
hold my hand and  
when you let

me kiss you in  
public, even though  
I knew you hated  
PDA, but

you let me do  
it anyway.



I miss  
going to IHOP  
at 3 AM, because neither  
of us could sleep.

I miss  
when we first  
got married, and  
you used to  
leave your phone with me  
to use when you  
went to work.

I miss  
getting presents from  
you, like when  
you finally bought  
me my own phone and  
changed the password on

yours, along with the  
passwords to all  
your other logins. So

I started having  
to go to the ATM  
to check the debit  
card balance before I

paid our bills. I guess it  
was a good thing I  
couldn't log in to  
see the bank statement

anymore, except it also  
comes in the mail, so  
that's how I knew  
you spent \$60 at IHOP

without me. Maybe  
you went with  
that girl you work with

that you text so much about  
secret work stuff that I

can't know about, so  
you turn the phone  
away from me when I  
walk by. Did you

ask if she wanted  
bacon strips or pork  
sausage, or did  
you just already know?



## Pork Belly

*Lisa Ashley*

I love bacon. I order it every time I eat breakfast out  
refusing to tether its crispy succulence  
to those early morning bedroom visits.

You'd think the fry-smell that woke me then  
would repulse me now,  
the salty fat choke in my craw  
like the fear that jumped me when your calloused hands  
slid under my flannels while the others slept.

The back rub was melt-in-the-mouth pork crackling,  
until your heavy hands wandered like pigs rooting for slop  
around to my breast buds, under my waistband,  
down over my soft pink butt  
smooth as baby powder.

I carried my dark secret heavy in the belly  
like a pregnant sow, my child's need for your love  
trumped my no. My shame slung about me all day,  
clotted mud to hooved pig's feet.

Morning after morning this baffling, silent  
backrub-not-backrub packed streaky rashers around my waist,  
crammed my never-asked questions back down my throat.

Time to slaughter this pig.  
Skin it, gut it, hack it up—  
ham hocks to smoke,  
the tender loin, the chops,  
finally, the bacon, the best part.

It's all mine, this thick square of prime belly meat  
lying under the ribs, right next to the heart.



Safe

*Ellen Mary Hayes*

## Guarded

Charlene Stegman Moskal

To describe something that has been scraped  
with its surface exposed, left susceptible,  
a place that should have remained protected  
one says, *I've been rubbed raw.*

It could be a sore throat, a knee fallen on gravel,  
an elbow skidded along rough pavement  
when you have fallen off your bike  
or it could be a hollow somewhere inside you

where love or anger or fear or even hope once lived  
guarded and secured against the need to share.  
When that sacred place is no longer covered  
I imagine the deep pockets, sacs holding memories

are hung raw on meat hooks like sides of beef  
in a slaughter house to show vulnerable parts  
that were never meant to be naked,  
brought into the light, for anyone with a cleaver to see

to chop away at, refrigerate, put the private pieces  
somewhere they may be observed dry, cold,  
allowed to age as a film envelopes, tenderizes them  
and gives time a chance to heal all wounds.

**Ounce**

*Amanda Jane*

The blood  
Drips  
From my knife.

So raw  
So blue  
So fresh.

How do you like it cooked?

Rare,  
Medium,  
Cremated?

## A Bunch, A Lot, Abunchalot

*KB Baltz*

In the end  
I suppose  
the end should  
have been more  
obvious  
because I never  
wrote a love poem  
about the touch of  
your hand or the  
curl of your hair  
or the special way  
you would never  
ever respond  
to all the memes  
I sent you.

I never wrote  
a poem about the  
way I said I love you  
the first time  
my hand shaking as  
it reached for yours  
while your eyes  
settled to mid-distance  
as though I had  
asked you about  
the first time  
you had seen a dead body  
which would not  
happen for a few more  
years and then you  
would accuse me  
of misappropriating  
your pain into another  
excuse to say I love you.

But back to the first time  
I said those words,  
after a passing moment  
you gave me a half-smile  
and said, “I like you.  
I like you a bunch,  
I like you a lot,  
I like you abunchalot,  
I like you so much  
I created a whole new word  
for how much I like you.”

But I said I love you  
and you said it  
means the same thing  
and kept saying it  
until you slipped up  
mid-orgasm a few  
years later  
and were upset  
when I responded with  
“are you fucking kidding me”  
instead of an outpouring  
of oxytocin gratitude  
for finally granting me  
the crumbs of your  
assured affections.

You said that  
every time you say  
it the relationship ends  
and in the end,  
I suppose,  
the end  
should have been  
more obvious.



## S&M, Anyone?

*Nupur Maskara*

The Internet is a dominatrix  
Everywhere you click, it says  
Submit, submit, submit.

## A Question of Telecommunications

*William Doreski*

Strange voices infect my phone,  
conversations I can't enter.  
You claim this hotel is haunted,  
but the only ghost I believe in  
is mine. Every night the numbers  
of the rooms change. We entered  
room three-fifteen and today  
it has become three-eighty-five.  
You claim the ghosts have done it;  
but pulling the brads from brass  
numerals and nailing them up  
on different doors is the work  
of gnomes, the whole clan trained  
centuries ago as cobblers.

The academic conference lasts  
only one more day and then  
we must puzzle our flight home,  
a dogleg involving Atlanta.  
I can't use my cell phone, and even  
the hotel phone gibbers in tongues.  
In the lobby we confront the clerk  
and demand to know whose voices  
have addled both cell and land lines.

The clerk endorses your theory  
of hauntings. A previous hotel  
burned a hundred years ago  
with many of the dead unclaimed,  
unidentified. These lost souls  
slipped into the telephones  
to cuddle in the warmth of talk.  
But that's a silly legend. Gnomes  
are little nodes of fact sporting  
pointed red or green caps, but ghosts  
are chimeras fading in daylight.

Still, we must confirm our flight,  
so I walk three blocks to employ  
the pay phone in a coffee shop.  
When I return you've vanished;  
and when I wield my cellphone  
I hear you whispering among  
the strange voices, your grasp  
of this unknown dimension  
confirming my faith in you.

## God's Plan

*Robert Pegel*

We are all on the same path.  
Some of us will get there sooner than others.  
Don't let your mind be troubled.  
You will be stuck in a mystery.  
For as long as your eyes can see,  
your heart beats,  
and until your last breath.  
Turn inward.  
Look for messages along the road.  
Don't curse your destiny.  
Even if it is foretold.  
Ask for strength.  
Pray for peace of mind.  
Love.  
Light.  
Divine energy.  
You are spirit after all.  
Dwell in being.  
Surrender your old ways  
of understanding.  
Put on the new.  
Even if it seems not to fit.  
You were born for a reason.  
Worry no more.  
God's armor will shield you,  
from the pain and suffering  
of this world.

## Progressions

*KB Baltz*

I.

Thoughts circle  
on warm eddies  
swirling back and forth  
like crows  
spiraling down  
into the dark  
velvet ratholes  
of uneven boundaries  
always digging, biting, scratching  
at haphazard walls  
circling an unstable self.

II.

Thoughts circle  
drifting down  
to settle  
on cedar branches  
like starlings  
each bough  
bending beneath  
the weight  
but never breaking,  
only bowing  
before the wind.

III.

Thoughts circle  
settling on the  
ocean surface  
like gulls  
before drifting  
under slow waves  
falling  
floating  
into the  
quite space  
below.

## Revenge fantasy with God and water

*Anonymous*

but so the scorpion climbs on the frog's back  
and the scorpion has been imagining  
this moment forever  
they get halfway across the river and  
yes - god - the point  
sinks past mucous into muscle  
and the frog says now we'll both die -  
why did you do that?  
and the scorpion says you probably don't remember me but  
/  
the scorpion was sinking  
and she saw an angel come to  
carry her off and the angel said  
be not afraid  
and the scorpion said yeah  
don't worry i've seen worse  
no offense  
i myself have been a pair  
of fiery-eyed wheels  
a venn diagram charting the overlap  
between coming of age  
and hurtling skullfirst  
toward a hard slab of ocean



For Another Season  
*Fabrice Poussin*

## if god gave you an orange

*Dimitra Merkouris*

if god gave you an orange  
would you reach out your hands  
fingers splayed  
grasping  
gasping  
biting  
into its sweetness  
knowing that  
explosions of juice  
would spray your face  
trickle  
down  
your  
chin  
settle  
into the deep crevices  
of your chest?  
a perfectly divine  
stickiness  
extracted  
from  
sun-warmed  
heavy-hanging fruit  
echoing the hum  
of half-drunk  
bumblebees  
drowsily,  
mind-numbingly  
random  
intent  
on pollinating



the whole  
wide  
world  
or  
would you give  
the impression  
of rapt attention while  
dangling that  
damned  
orange  
against your earlobe?  
scoping out  
reasons  
to complain  
about  
natural sugars  
versus artificial sweeteners  
that left you with the world's  
most  
bittersweet  
aftertaste.  
I think you will always find  
reasons to  
complain,  
even  
if the aftertaste  
left  
in  
your  
mouth  
was laced with  
honeyed  
sunshine.

## Grapefruit

*frank carellini*

i remember your baroque body  
and admire you the way  
one admires Rembrandt  
but merely interprets.

your oil is sacred and is  
the trace of gods of war  
and scrumptious fruits  
and beheadings.

in my mere hands — like grains of sand  
brushing on the sphinx —  
your precious pulp is a tinge  
of grapefruit and original sin.

you came to this world, likely  
across a raging sea where  
leviathans bowed and deliberated  
about who your creator could possibly be.

in my fugue thoughts  
i read your plump  
Balthasarian lips  
and worship your Rubensian hips.

the best i could do to speak  
affection is avant-garde  
and my geometrics melt  
under your seismic sun.

i wish they hung me across you  
but i belong with the moderns  
because i am of lines  
and you, flesh.

## Under the Lights

*Holly Day*

I open my mouth and imagine butterflies are going to fly out  
that inside me are flocks of brilliant monarchs that have struggled  
to hatch and pupate and transform into brilliance for years.  
I command these butterflies to fly out of me, through my open mouth,  
to burst through my skin in brilliant flocks of black-tipped wings and rainbows.  
I can almost feel them inside me, encourage them  
to force their way through my body, through my skin  
can almost feel their tiny claws struggling to find purchase  
along the slick, wet meat inside my chest.

Nothing comes out and I am empty, I don't understand  
why the room isn't filled with rainbow-tinted butterflies  
why there aren't sparkling clouds of wings filling the room  
obscuring the quiet crowd before me. I was sure there was something  
better inside of me than what could be seen through my skin. The audience  
stares at me in impatient confusion from rows of folded metal chairs  
they came here to see me do something special  
they came to see something wonderful, or just something.  
The butterflies I thought would carry this performance  
die just short of emerging, perhaps suffocated by doubt  
or just unable to find a clear path out.

## DRY RYE TOAST

*Gary Sokolow*

How did you end up in some college town, left by some setup  
girl, friend to your friend's blue-eyed Irish girlfriend,  
who separated each fragile eyelash with a straight pin, like the  
petals of a flower opening. And all of you were together  
to shoot a student film, your steady hand on the eight millimeter  
camera capturing your friend and his girlfriend tumbling  
down a hill, rolling in and out of flying leaves, the centerpiece shot  
that would win him first prize, and how that night your setup  
girl was picked up by two sailors, complete, you swear, in starched  
uniforms, white sailor caps, and how she'd howl at the moon  
in the room you left for them, fine you were to be drunk and alone,  
the circumstances you drag yourself through that might lead  
someday to meaning, and early that next morning, you wandered  
Albany's backstreets, past boarded up storefronts, abandoned  
warehouses, stumbled into a place, bar by night, breakfast joint by  
morning, you sat at the bar and ordered two eggs over easy,  
dry rye toast, and how you felt the eyes of the locals upon you as you  
stared at the Christmas lights blinking the length of the bar,  
it took everything within you to keep it down, desperate as you were  
to grease away the vodka nausea and the shame.

## In Praise of Cabbage

*Ellen Roberts Young*

Pale green, stiff, long-lasting: what iceberg  
lettuce aspires to, cannot attain. It can be cooked  
with onion or chard or both, or chopped  
for coleslaw—don't stint on the carrots—  
or a salad with apples and walnuts.  
It stretches a soup. The food of kings?  
The walrus links them, while Peter Rabbit,  
preferring sweeter greens, leaves the cabbage  
patch to a family of dolls. Huge vats  
or a crock in the basement turn it  
into sauerkraut, necessary for corned beef  
sandwiches or—if you're German—  
with turkey, but when eaten raw,  
cabbage satisfies the chewing jaw.

## The Other Side of Flight

*Ivan Peledov*

The sky is a mashed potato  
stashed away by a stray angel.  
It reeks of dead hawks, and the days  
begin stealthily, with  
inarticulate slogans extracted from the otherworld.  
Meanwhile envelopes for voices and tails  
are cheap like noxious autumn leaves  
and ramshackle fences guarding emptiness.

## Peeling

*Natalli Amato*

I bring the carrot peeler to the waxy skin  
of a garden butternut squash.  
It comes off in chunks  
instead of ribbons even after  
I adjust the wobbling blade.

Diana Ross' On the Radio plays on the turntable.  
I hear my mother sing.  
She is not in this house.

I sing over her.  
I sing over Diana.  
I force a ribbon  
where there isn't.  
My finger bleeds.

## Fistful

*Kami Westhoff*

The saddest story I ever heard: a mother,  
two children, a freckled spaniel huddled  
in a closet under the stairs. The mother,  
in a smoke-choked delirium, thought it  
the safest place to wait out the fire.

My father was there that night, his first  
shift as a volunteer firefighter. His last.  
Two decades later he told me it was  
the children's hands that skewered him,  
(that was the word he used, skewered)  
one clutching their mother's hand,  
the other a fistful of spaniel.

I was a grade above one of the children,  
and even as a second grader I understood  
the inclination to cling when she said  
*Don't let go*, follow her into the smoke  
when I could see the path fresh air,  
trust her ability to protect me even  
after the fire finds us.



## Sin Dad in Savannakhet

*Regina Beach*

I lost all my Bhat (and some of yours)  
on roulette and blackjack on our first date  
Rolling into town on your Honda Win, Delilah  
I missed the easy conversation I took for granted  
before moving to a place devoid of my mother tongue

Under a corrugated plastic roof, I ordered in Lao  
Two big beers, small cups with ice and a tin pail  
of hot coals gingerly placed in the middle of  
the table, where we sat, the only *falang* there, side by side  
gingerly prodding the other with questions of the heart

Between bits of grilled meat, boiled eggs and soup  
from the moat around the *sin dad* catching the fatty drips  
as the beef sizzled and turned brown  
I catch your hazel eyes lingering on the profile of my face  
silhouetted by Christmas lights, up 365 days a year

You were honest, unreserved, counter to your British roots  
But I didn't know this would be the first of many barbecues  
when we parted ways without kissing goodnight

### Notes

1. *Falang*- Lao for 'French' but applied to all Western foreigners
2. *Sin Dad* - Lao vegetable and meat hotpot cooked at the table over coals

## Desert Melon

*frank carellini*

i.

there must have been lotus on your tongue  
because i couldn't take my mouth away  
my numb lips are buzzing from friction  
on pricks of residual hairs that you let  
grow a little wild            like the ones  
on the vine of the melon i found in the  
rotting field        a mirage in a thirsting desert

ii.

i voyaged from lotus to the hanging  
gardens below your naval            trading a  
wonder for a            wonder i had only  
heard of them as they were fit for  
gods and i, mere mortal    your ferns  
unravelling sticky spores onto my cheeks  
incantations of transmutations i digress

iii.

they say rain doesn't read on camera so  
milk is used for drastic effect    you  
would read just fine        as we create physics  
it seems i both live and die between  
what are Grecian in scale            as the blood  
rushes like rivulets spotting red across  
your body        flickering embers in residual fire

iv.

it has been days since i've eaten  
outside of this bed        the oil of your skin  
and salt of your sweat            calm the pangs  
i fill my lungs with your chloroform breath.  
occasionally i must break to log-on  
to file something            away beneath  
tossed clothes            where is the floor?  
You are the floor

## Home Shoes

*Karen Mandell*

My mother's house slippers were periwinkle blue vinyl  
Closed-toe vamp, lightly padded footbed,  
tucked under the bed at night, by day  
their padding quiet as the fridge.  
I admired their softness, their malleability  
In harmony with my mother's firmness,  
Her tread determined but light.  
No stomping, she'd tell me as, between books,  
I roamed the house, looking for brother  
Or sister to tease, shoeless and sockless,  
Once stepping on a glass sliver from a cup  
I'd broken. You're a *vilda chaya*, she charged,  
A wild animal. At the playground  
I stalked around the sandbox with its concrete ledge,  
A tiger, a grizzly, a monster conjured in the dark.

## My grandmother's sarung

*Patricia Pinto*

My grandmother's sarungs  
Are light, airy, and comfy  
Stiff to look at  
Soft to touch

My grandmother's sarungs  
Are bright, colourful  
Made in the old batik style  
When they sold them  
The way you get replacement shirts and pants  
From today's pasar

My grandmother's sarungs  
Are smaller  
Than the hospital's  
Easier to wrap, simpler to handle

My grandmother's sarungs  
Are sarungs of fantastical flowers  
Yellow, blue, red and gold  
Some are of the night,  
Dark blue against cooling flowers of purple and pink

My grandmother's sarungs  
Said she was here  
Looking after children, caring after little ones  
Mama was never more at home

Than in a sarung at home  
To wear mama's sarung  
You slip it on  
Careful! They have a proper inside out  
Then you lift one side and hold it away  
Put your hand on your waist,  
Fold the side over  
Then you tuck and roll  
Remember, outside, not inside,  
So it doesn't come undone  
When you move a lot

Mama used to tie hers with a piece of string, the same colour as her sarung  
I wonder  
Where did it go?

## The cure hurts more

*Beulah Vega*

I was wounded-tortured-a million tiny cuts-sliced by my mother's words  
-slit by my father's hate no longer bleeding-

*-but not healed-*

larger wounds-gashed by fickle lovers-gouged by inconstant friends-  
Insidiously drawn by my own hand-branded into soft folds by my own  
hateful thoughts-

*-not able to heal-*

I am cajoled/threatened/drugged/imprisoned-implored to make a  
change- to morph- to crawl from my skin into someone I have never  
known.

*-72 hours at a time-*

The genetic disposition -for self-harm- self-hate- self cruelty cant be  
cured-but it, like I-can be controlled with pills-soft voices-pastel colored  
rooms-

*-mindfulness-*

I don't understand the creature they want me to become-without de-  
spair-without terror-without  
anger-without passion-without bliss-without ecstasy-

*-without me-*

Slowly they peel back my skin-plowing through the old wounds-yanking  
open old gashes-  
excavating through healed dermis-grinding through old pain with coarse sand-

*-therapeutically of course-*

Once opened- probed-studied-violated-the wounds are cut out with no anesthesia-in their taking the skin holding me together-goes with them leaving me-

*-flayed and bleeding-*

My entire psyche is like a new wound-the laceration pried open and clamped into place- then I am let out into dust-choked wind- and covered in-

*-salt-spray-*

They tell me that new skin will grow-cover tendons- protect veins- hide nerve endings now dangling like old wiring in a dilapidated building

*-still sparking-still hazardous-*

But each step now is on decorticated feet-naked muscles sending shocks of pain-terror-distress to a heart

*-suddenly disconnected-*

A heart disconnected from its overmedicated brain-lobotomized soul-suffocated anima-its psyche-its drive-its peaks and valleys-

*-from itself-*

So forgive me-If I am short-If I flinch at your touch-If I question every word/motivation/emotion/trust we once had-forgive me if my once vibrant eyes-

*-carry nothing but tears-*

I am raw,  
and this world becomes more ground glass every day.

## Throwing Things Away

Rachel Landrum Crumble

*“As if there was such a place as ‘away.’”*  
—William McDonough, *Cradle to Cradle*

I.

I was a hoarder of broken promises,  
unwitting curator of childhood’s abandoned  
treasures. Even paper yellows,  
ink fades, cloth rots, books mildew.  
Don’t be like me. Let it go.

II.

A marriage is not a thing—  
it is an ecosystem,  
except when the ground lies fallow  
season after season, until, inch by inch  
it buries you.

III.

Static is the amplified absence  
of connection, when one side is plugged in,  
waiting. Nine years is long enough.  
This unrequited expectation of joy  
belongs in a curbside bin, or perhaps,  
mixed with clippings, brown paper,  
coffee grounds, might compost  
and bank a heat to stave off  
an Alaskan winter...  
No. Let it go.



## The Longing

*Amrita Valan*

I wither, I shiver,  
I feel my face fall  
Like a ghost deflating  
In a scream no one  
Else may hear, my heart  
Feels the puncture in  
My lungs that only I  
Must bear. Till the  
Sanguine chambers  
Corrode, I can feel the  
Walls erode. Unwanted,  
Leper!, Stay away, I am  
Helpless when denied  
Right to communion,  
Participation, cool  
Wishes project warmth,  
“Try your luck elsewhere.”  
And I will. My blood buzzes  
Inside still, with dreams,  
Hopes, aspirations that my  
Lungs susurrate as they  
Succour my soul. Mother’s  
Love was my first breath,  
She whispered,  
“Never say die.”

**is was**

*Jason Melvin*

It's difficult to watch  
is turn to was  
the words forming  
on recently widowed lips  
a struggle with semantics  
while struggling  
Words hard enough without  
concern for proper grammar  
is present  
was past  
and you were  
just two hours ago  
standing  
right  
there



Damp Splintering  
*Alan Bern*



## Immolation

*Bruce Gunther*

The attendants pour gas  
carefully over the monk's head,  
cars honk in the Saigon intersection.

"I respectfully plead," begins his letter to the autocrat,  
"that you take a mind of compassion  
and implement religious equality to maintain  
the strength of the homeland."

He sits in full lotus,  
feet resting on his thighs.  
He lights the match, eyes cast downward.

If we listen carefully we hear the voice  
of MLK.  
We shake off the dream of a shooter's nest in Dallas.  
We sense the peasant guiding his water buffalo  
through the rice field.

The flames lick higher,  
their lethal fingers invite us closer  
while we watch from 9,000 miles away.

The boy closes a notebook  
covered in American flag stickers  
on his desk in an Ohio classroom.

The smoke travels over continents,  
its traces linger above a Klan meeting  
in Mississippi and move on.  
Hear the rubber stamp come down on a deferment  
that sends the millionaire's son home.

How about a wink and a nod  
as the wails of anguish  
compete with the honking horns of Saigon?  
Faces peering from car windows.  
Nuns cover their faces,  
the smell of burning human flesh,  
the monk unwavering.

And in the jungle darkness,  
a soldier flinches  
at the sound of a twig snapping.

## Living Color

*Bruce Gunther*

How you remember it:  
the purple popsicle  
mittens of the girl  
on a school bus.  
The egg yolk glare  
from the carny's booth.  
The neon red of the cardinal  
as it drops to the forest path.  
The tanned leather knuckles  
of a fist coming toward you.  
The olive green line of the heart  
monitor as it becomes still.  
The spit-shined black of  
the policeman's boots.  
All of it light separated,  
reflected, on a perpetual canvas.



## Bite

Kami Westhoff

Today, she is ripe with anger. Teeth-shaped wounds scatter her lower lip, the nurse's arm, the paper bowl of oatmeal. I press my palm against the sticky skin of her shoulder, out of range of the bite.

The caregivers speak of the soothing nature of the circular, of knowing what departs returns so I move my hand in a circular motion, punctuate each circumference with a heartbeat pause so she can tell when one ends and next begins.

I lean to snag her focus from the tv where newscasters and talk show hosts won't stop asking her questions she cannot answer. *I'm here, Mama*, I say. Her pupils, fat with whatever they've given for her, eclipse her irises. *I know*, she says, *but you always leave*.

She's right. I'll leave after I wheel her into the cafeteria, crick her bloated legs to fit underneath the table. She'll reach for me, a motion jumpy as a fake bat on a string. She'll cry as I walk away, ask what she's done to deserve being left alone.

There must be heartbreak, too, perhaps obscured in some secluded cell, but when I push the code and the door clicks open, I feel nothing but relief.

I cough out the sour air of last breaths as the dew settles its damp on my face, and the safety lights click on. It's only four-thirty, but the sky's already swallowed by the dark throat of night, my mother cries alone at a dinner table set for four, and day is only a scribble of light on the shadowed canvas of the horizon.

## Unsolvable

*Kami Westhoff*

I dream you in my passenger seat, 40 years old,  
hair coiled from Nice & Easy home perm,  
glasses that swallow your cheeks when you smile.

It's been three years since I've driven you anywhere,  
formula of lift and lower, shift and scoot, door handle,  
seatbelt-- an unsolvable equation.

One day it took us 45 minutes to maneuver you  
into the car, our cheeks aching with laughter  
long after there was nothing left to laugh about.

We never claimed we were good at being forgotten,  
but we kept visiting even when you thought we were  
staff, asked repeatedly when your daughters would visit.

In your last week, you were more bone than body, but  
still we tended to you: twisted Q-tips to clear wax, carved  
away the spoiled food wedged beneath your fingernails.

We lotioned the ashy skin of your elbows and heels,  
wiped scabs from your lips and dabbed them with balm,  
trickled Pedialyte into your mouth with an eyedropper.

But you aren't being dreamed about to discuss things  
any decent daughter would do for a dying mother. You're  
pissed. Want to know, How could you let them burn me?

In the dream, I stay silent. Drive you to the bay. We bite  
the bottoms off cones and suck strawberry ice cream  
through their soggy tunnels, eat until we're sugar-sick.

Days pass like this—stomachs aching with curdled  
cream, strawberry seeds caught in our teeth. We  
don't say a word, but our mouths never stop moving.

You are light as ash when I carry you toward the shore.  
Arms wisps on my shoulders, legs a halo on my hips.  
We submerge into water so warm I can't tell sea from skin.



## I See You In ICU...Do You See Me?

Gerard Sarnat

*thanks to Eliana V. Hempel M.D., Blood Ties,  
NEJM, 28May20*

Distraught woman before us  
with that hunted look  
in her eyes seems all too familiar.

Filigreed monogrammed hankies  
make repeated trips  
from mouth to lap then back again

as our collective horror  
at the rapidly increasing amount  
of bright red froth intensifies.

She's barely able to breathe, let alone  
talk rationally, as once pleasant  
smells vanish with a mom's viral fear.

## Medical Matryoshka

Isla McKetta

*Smoke over fire* I remember as they  
attach electrodes to my gown-clad-wiped-  
clean mother, terms taught using my body  
as test. Scrub colors bleed washes of words—  
her dilaudid, my ketamine gaba-  
pentin soothes nerves a hematology  
alert (just in case) when I had only  
screams. Her ten hematocrit might need blood  
my seven should have allowed another  
body pumped in as one was ripped out. Would  
I then know—these tears borne  
of me or her?

## Fathoming

*Marjorie Power*

Since you asked about the haiku  
you've hooked to the end  
of your voices-in-the-void piece:  
go with the first fourteen syllables,  
then find another three. Fathoming  
pulls me out of deep space and into the bathroom  
where my husband mumbles  
while brushing his teeth.

He's trying to speak only because  
I asked a question. Still, he sounds lost, almost drowned.

Get those marbles out of your mouth  
and back onto the sidewalk.  
Flick them against each other so I can hear  
their usual click, my friend,  
my old, old friend.

## In Translation

*Clay Waters*

crossing a border when language fails you,  
taking tight turns to mock the maps,  
memory crimped—

until a long empty hall  
rushes everything back  
and strands you at the door  
that will never open again.

submerged into strange words  
spoken in strange places  
where letters tumble like laundry

you emerge dizzy  
babbling volubly into a passport  
to drown the silence  
(how do they speak when you're not there?).

reflexive verbs  
point the finger back at you  
in the bar or pub or inn  
where the past stays tense  
and there are too many sorry's in the world,  
where hasta la vista doesn't mean goodbye (it doesn't)  
and voila! you've missed another connection  
caught catatonic at high noon.

under a black remote sky  
with no familiar light  
how strange to believe  
you will meet again  
around some unseen bend,

spouting sunny absurdity  
that defies all phrasebooks

lodged together forever  
in some fantastic place  
after all the maps have run dry.

## Soul

S. J. Perry

*for Dad*

*“Every bit of data I’ve ever seen tells me your consciousness is the sum of  
chemical and electrical impulses. Get over it.”*

*—Neil deGrasse Tyson*

### I

A body is a home for its own soul,  
but that’s enough. If a soul is the sum  
of chemical reactions, that’s enough.

Alone, a soul can’t move itself around  
or hold or heal or eat when it’s hungry.  
A soul may love, but it can’t act on love.

And if a soul is sad, a body still  
survives, though it may sicken, slow, or stoop.  
Without a body a soul is inert.

### II

When you died late last month—I’d like to think  
you chose the day—the chemistry had stopped,  
the soul—the electricity—at rest.

In the last days you reached into the air.  
“They all do that,” the gray hospice nurse said.  
“They’re reaching out to those who’ve gone before.”

A soul who’d made such lasting marks on me,  
who’d finished all the honest words and deeds,  
was over it, was done with a body.

## A soul divine

*Mark Andrew Heathcote*

Raw and savage, beauty  
is abreast of the world.  
She sits in her arbour  
an ardent little girl.

Raw and savage, beauty-  
is a blending of pure design.  
Hopscotching-to-her duty  
as subtle as a soul-divine.

## Deception

*Joan McNerney*

Traces of lace cover walkways.  
Snow so white it almost blinds us.  
You came with a spectacular glow.  
I became awed by this splendor.

Everyone was so captivated  
by your charm, wit, words.  
We wondered if the sun rose  
and fell under that magic.

Pure white snow turns gray  
from exhaust fumes.  
Hardening on roadsides, icy  
frost plunge cars into ditches.

Deceived by your wicked smile  
and simmering blue eyes.  
Tricked by razzmatazz. Only mud  
and freezing rain lies underneath.

Some thought the fault was mine.  
How could this have happened?  
There must be something else.  
Something I have hidden away.

Caught in claw of memories now,  
regretting the trust given to you.  
But I will never be betrayed again  
even if hell freezes over.



## The Wounds It Has Made

*Carolyn Adams*

You're given an impossible object.  
It's little more than a belief.  
It twists in your hand,  
shifting in shadows.

Uncertain landscapes,  
specificities you're not sure of,  
memories questionable in their accuracy.

An indescribable tenderness.  
Music from the next room.  
A coupling,  
its heat unquestioning,  
Unsustainable.

A silence, empty of argument.  
Indifference, distance, neglect.  
A hard rain in a parking lot  
as you're leaving.

Each angle transmogrifies.

Two women walk between  
you and the geometry in your hand.  
Their stories are here, too.

A child you don't know  
asks a question. She's crying.  
She doesn't know you.  
You give her the object,  
request that she repair it.

How can you ask her to do that?

You find yourself  
at a distance,  
staring at this intricate thing.  
Studying the wounds  
it has made in you.

## JUST TO WASTE THE MORNING

*R.T. Castleberry*

Too early for dogs barking,  
for the train's rolling whistle,  
the sun is seized by night's glassy course.  
November rattles the sidewalk's seam,  
studio apartment windows above  
a winter-shuttered pool.  
Mealy apple, day old doughnuts for breakfast,  
I'll spend the day finding  
the cheapest copy of a desired book,  
a match for a print lost to breakup.

Stepping past grapefruit, dropped  
and rotting on the sidewalk,  
I wear a Bosque Redondo tourist tee  
under a German greatcoat,  
a twelve dollar haircut beneath a newsboy cap.  
Unsteady on the landing,  
optical illusions of cracked stone,  
pebbled strip, rusty wrought iron  
trip me up.  
The clinic doctor's instructions  
rattle my last nerve.  
Addresses and keys in hand,  
like Son House striding his blues pony,  
I'll slake my sorrows in collection remains.

## Release

*Hiba Rasheed*

### ***Release #1: Occupation***

I did not see it coming  
A train of armed passengers  
Seizing power  
Spreading animosity  
Self-loathing  
Throughout the cities that flourished for decades  
Under the sun of my now sallow skin and creased heart  
I let them in  
They sensed my weakness  
Political disunity  
Religious hypocrisy  
Among the parts of me  
I am now but a massive puppet  
Under the mental erosion of emptiness

### ***Release #2: Falling***

Soul: Pieces of light strung together to make me  
Mind: My controller; my guide  
Conscience: Battlefield where mind and heart hold their clashes  
Then come the cells, tissues, muscles, and bones  
Encapsulated in a carnal vessel  
Fastened by love  
I stand at the edge of the abyss  
Body unraveling at the seams  
Contents spilling  
Melting  
I lose myself

***Release #3: Walking out on (of) Oblivion***

Nine months ago

We met

A faint stir of a heartbeat

Lulling in the darkness

We met

Somewhere between my subconsciousness and your consciousness

We met

In a state of limbo

Where inception could have meant beginning or end

I floated

Lost in the wilderness of my past

Conflicting with my present's descent into you  
and setting me free

## Heart Press

*Maggie Walcott*

Remember the first. Her tiny face  
tender and raw like the day  
she erupted from your quivering body  
openly covered in mucus, so disgustingly  
beautiful you could not help but press  
your hard lips to her heart, that  
small clementine sized organ,  
hidden below layers of newly knit skin  
compact and unripe and yet (and yet)  
still bursting with meaning and life  
so sweet, it scaled your mouth  
to think this tiny heart would soon grow  
fist-sized, clenched with courage  
long before you were ready  
your own heart has been a fist  
for so long you could weep  
but not yet (not yet), first you must  
erupt with tender possession  
signal tenure with hard application  
of your lips to her cheek, her lips, her head  
to her heart, mercifully still an orange  
cradled gently in your grasp, for now

## The Back and Forth

*Jeremy Wm. Farrington*

We spent the afternoon  
like teenagers, holding hands,  
walking the neighborhood like  
we didn't have licenses  
and kissing when we thought we could  
get away with it.

On a swing set we traded  
lyrics to old songs  
before we debated  
for half an hour whether or not  
you would actually be the one  
that saved me.

The words coming out of your mouth  
are new but also familiar  
and comforting at the same time.  
You move behind me and with two hands  
set me in motion, away from you,  
then back, establishing a rhythm --

groan of metal chains,  
my feet dragging on the ground  
both ways. The patch where the grass  
is gone is the groove in the record  
where the DJ drops the needle  
and the crowd goes wild.

The sun, like a pocket watch, set in the vest pocket  
of the stand of trees in front of us and let us know  
that even with you standing still, we were running out of time.  
The trees cast shadows, arms that reached towards us then shrank  
as it got darker, as you stopped my trajectory  
by wrapping your arms around me.



Heart  
*Ellen Mary Hayes*

**Aurora**

*S. J. Perry*

mornings in our bed  
I like to be the small spoon  
when I'm the big spoon  
your gray hair tickles my nose  
and my old back gets too cold



## **We thought that**

*Ellen Sander*

it was that night you trembling held me voicing  
thrilled currents running wrecked through my  
limbs, relocated the Pleiades one by one between  
sobs of laugh gasps.

We shivered under cover of jackets mumbled  
nonsyls and bablets, that it was happiness, that life  
would be such and ever. We read maps and fit  
furniture, paused passing art, ate uni on a dare,  
tongued the raw quail egg till it burst, salty cream of  
its swell spreading in our palates. We flew to  
Haleakela, hiked its sulphur gullet and lava tubes,  
ate poi on a dare sighed sinsemilla vapors into one  
another's mouths.

## Two Lovers Parting At Dawn

*Denise A. Martin*

I turn to reach for the warm familiar contours of your body  
Brush my lips across your shoulder  
Run my hand along your thigh  
The icy mattress etches a silhouette that startles me.

Dawn's creeping fingers  
Grip the dresser drawer you never close  
Shine glints of light on your favorite watch  
Time stopped, battery dead.

## Guinea Pig

*Kendra Nuttall*

Look at you, little jellybean,  
freshly grown from fairytales.

You and I are the same—  
small toys in a giant's land,

shy under the giant's hand.  
I'll plant you in fleece,

bury your velvet nose  
in blanket folds until it's time

to surface from security.  
It's you and me

against the world.  
Will you cuddle into clouds

or storm the castle?  
I'm not asking you to be strong.

I'm asking you to stay alive  
when the sword comes crashing down.

## Weeping Willow

*Catherine A. MacKenzie*

I rest under a weeping willow,  
Watching a darting dragonfly,

A ladybug lands on my shoulder,  
Over yonder, a red cardinal chirps,

Earlier I found a polished penny  
And days before a velvety feather,

All signs from heaven,  
A deceased delivering love.

## There Are Things Prettier Than Flowers

*Kendra Nuttall*

*“Do not go gentle into that good night.  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.”  
—Dylan Thomas*

I bury myself in mountains  
and press flowers in glass coffins,

because we're prettier that way,  
out of reach.

I don't want eternal life  
unless my dog lives forever too.

Don't make me  
watch the world decay.

I'll go into that good night  
if you open the door when I arrive.

**'No One Can Explain How Planes Stay in the Air'**

*Clay Waters*

bees are born with lift  
clouds make thunder  
without meaning to

life staggers blind  
across a booby-trapped planet  
miraculous and mathematical

streams of probabilities break and hum  
soothing you to sleep  
when your daughter is out too late  
dodging drunks

but the same reckonings  
that win the lottery  
crash the planes

and a lone prime  
may one night  
stick like a bone in the throat  
dividing you by nothing

## First Light

Margaret Koger

*Like frost on the narrow.*

—May Sarton

my heart muscled to a tree

limbs leafed open

palms scooping up sun riddles

pulse frothing on Dagger Creek falls  
coaxing a salmon mother's roe to red

me—raised an avian      kited on mesa winds  
weaving pied rhapsodies of dawn prayers

and tumbled into the arms spread-eagled  
his spell of love

raw as a cut artery

## Desire

Diana Raab

*(In response to: "Love Sonnet XI" by Pablo Neruda)*

I lust after every part of you—every one: your mouth—that lake  
where we met—and your eyes brilliant as its waters.

We walked slowly on that lake's edge, afraid to leap in too fast,  
afraid to dip into dangers living in its depths.

You kissed every fingerbreadth of my body. Even my scars  
enchanted you—oh, and how another human could be formed

with those stitches that hold me together.  
Was there one part of my body you didn't cherish?

Your tongue slithered— a tiny snake—up and down my aging body.  
It sang under that spell. You loved my years, a twinkle in each wrinkle.

Your cerulean gaze lit my crevices  
all at once limp and tense  
with desire. I watched you mirror my lust.

Such tantric waiting! We waited and waited until I could no longer  
keep my hands and mouth away from you.

And I remembered: just allow, be with it—once again  
we were brought to desire's edge, before reality grabbed us back.



## Actinic Keratosis

*S. J. Perry*

appears when  
you have long been  
too much in the sun

like any day  
when you're of a certain age  
it could kill you  
but  
it probably won't

it'll instead just fade  
away  
or crumble  
away

the odd chance  
that it'll develop  
squamous cell carcinoma  
adds a bit of purple

to otherwise  
spotty grayness

## O, Medusa

*Meghan Sterling*

Countless, the time I spend imagining my way out of a paper sack,  
where the sack is actually solid rock, bills, stones, inherited rage,  
the hoist and heft of the daily task of work, of being mother, of being wife.  
Hand-holding, notes to self: spinach, toilet paper, laundry,  
garbage out Thursdays,  
she likes her milk cold. Countless, the hours I write numbers and lines to  
figure out how to make it all run—the house, the job, the meals,  
moonlight in the pines, a heap of leaves to turn into a craft. What a  
wizard, what a saint. But really, I'm wound tight as a clock,  
my shoulders pinned to the sky, my body steel,  
my face patched and worn like a tire.  
Even the moonlight gets tired of shining. Even the pines get to hide in the dark  
sometimes. Even the cat. I found her under the bed yesterday, sitting on a guitar,  
half of a stuffed mouse hanging from her maw. Too many other guitars  
were under there, or I'd have joined her. Somedays, I dream of Iceland.  
Others, of Greece. The place inside projected out,  
where I don't flinch every time  
someone says my name, where I don't hate the sounds of being alive,  
because there are  
fewer. O Medusa, O Madame, where is power when I need it,  
when each day becomes  
more mundane and less magic? I'm afraid my gladness is losing its luster.  
Bring me your particular poison, help me funnel my dreams  
into a basin of witch water,  
help me refocus my gaze onto the extraordinary within the ordinary—  
my husband's smooth hands, my daughter's lips on my cheek.

## Cedar River, January

*Jeff Burt*

i.

What year is longer than another? This.

A storm comes through  
me, again, icing  
the shack I raised  
in the winter of the heart.

ii.

These are unusual days:  
crack-cold killing the thaw,  
weather of forcing in.  
So to my spirit  
walled by the wind.

iii.

A red fox trotting on ice—  
fire trapped in a mirror.  
A red cedar falls on the frozen river,  
King's dream on the hearts  
of a new generation.

iv.

Oxygen depletes.  
I gulp more  
for less. Fish harden  
below the ice,  
I above.

v.

Love withheld is not love.  
Love engages, love connects,  
embraces through, holds.  
To melt the ice,  
I do not need a fist.

## Sonnet for the isolation

William J. Joel

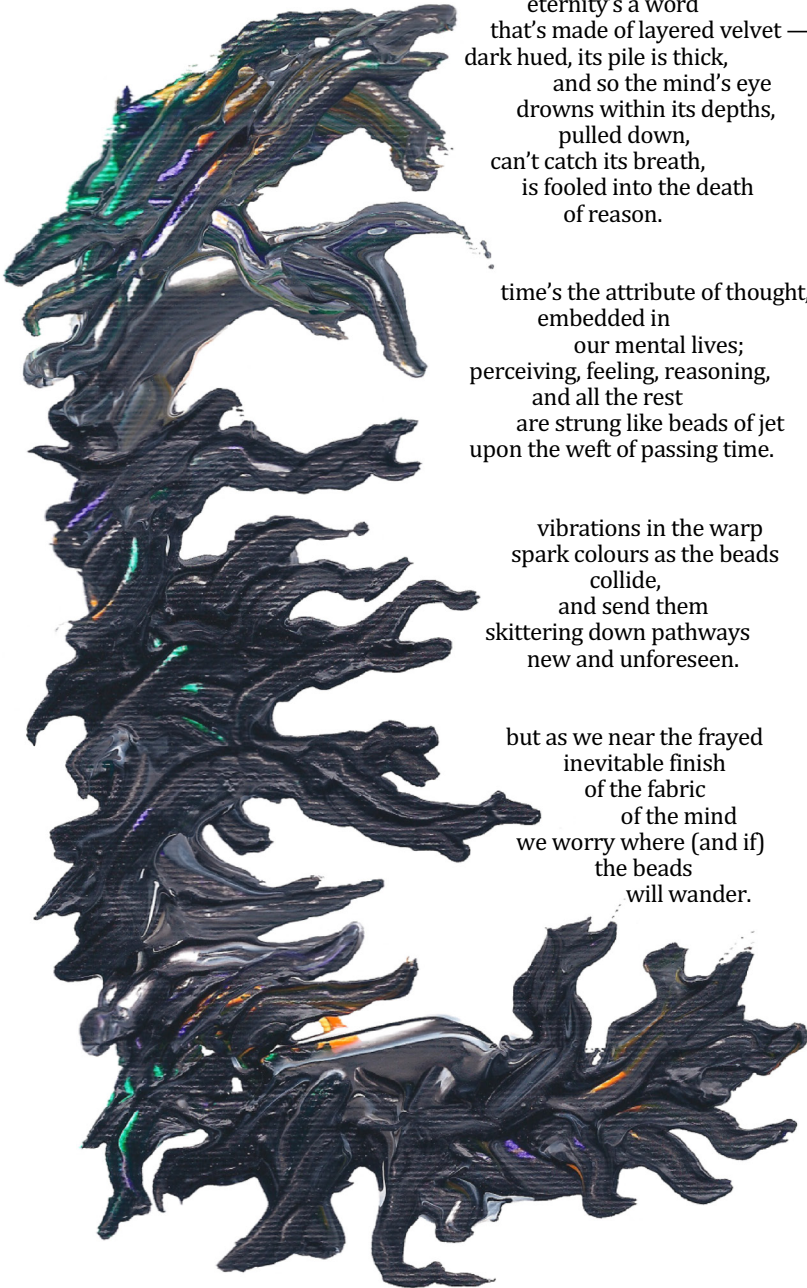
*“Home is a shelter from storms—all sorts of storms.”*

—William J. Bennett

Go back inside! Go back inside! Don't stand  
around on corners, swapping stories. Stop  
embracing friends, no heartfelt hugs. Don't slam  
your palms against each other's, spreading droplets,  
bits of virus, faster, bringing plague  
to those whose bodies are too weak to fend  
off illness. Just because your cough is vague  
and fading does not mean that in the end  
someone you touch, or come too close to, can't  
contract this scourge that knows no nations, flies  
across our borders, seeks out hosts to grant  
it entry—watch it quickly colonize.  
But isolation's not too much to give,  
if doing so will mean that more might live.

## Vespers

Peter J. King



eternity's a word  
that's made of layered velvet —  
dark hues, its pile is thick,  
and so the mind's eye  
drowns within its depths,  
pulled down,  
can't catch its breath,  
is fooled into the death  
of reason.

time's the attribute of thought,  
embedded in  
our mental lives;  
perceiving, feeling, reasoning,  
and all the rest  
are strung like beads of jet  
upon the weft of passing time.

vibrations in the warp  
spark colours as the beads  
collide,  
and send them  
skittering down pathways  
new and unforeseen.

but as we near the frayed  
inevitable finish  
of the fabric  
of the mind  
we worry where (and if)  
the beads  
will wander.

## Craving You

*Diana Raab*

*(In response to: "I Crave Your Mouth, Your Voice, Your Hair" by Pablo Neruda)*

I crave after every part of you,  
from your perfectly aligned toes  
to your balding head with snowy flecks.

This morning, you stand at your shower door—  
peek as you enter under water droplets,  
I peer through frosted glass and yearn

for you to hold me, lift me up  
and twirl me around, like the ballerina  
we loved at last night's show.

I want to do everything with you:  
watch you place two steaks  
on our barbeque, baste potatoes,

and lick ice cream drips from your cone,  
and sprinkle me with kisses. I want  
no sunrises and sunsets without you,

but long for fleeting rainbows to encircle us  
and shooting stars, the guards of all our wishes.

## Enough of Sadness

(A Plea in Villanelle)

*Russell Willis*

Enough of sadness  
Of stars when crossed  
Is it too much to ask, to ask for kindness?

Enough of rage's stress  
When even righteous anger exhausts  
Enough of sadness

When 'my' advantage is the one you press  
And at that moment "us" is lost  
Is it too much to ask, to ask for kindness?

What of our blindness  
To hate and at what cost?  
Enough of sadness

We form lines of words to artfully express  
Our deepest fears and angers glossed  
Is it too much to ask, to ask for kindness?

To know affection's tender caress  
In words and verse not willfully tossed  
Enough of sadness  
Is it too much to ask, to ask for kindness?

## Summer Nuptials

*Karen Mandell*

I ran home to Rose, lying on a chaise lounge  
In the shared yard of our Michigan summer rental.  
I could barely speak for excitement.  
I'm going to be married next time, I said,  
Raising the bouquet I'd plucked from the air  
When the child bride tossed it.  
I held it like a torch inches from Rose's face.  
I caught it, so next it's my turn.  
Calm down she said, take it easy.  
A wisp of irritation, like a down feather  
Floated between us. Take it easy?  
I'll be the bride next week.  
What did Rose see in her daughter's face  
That moment? Wild short-sighted eyes,  
Over-excitement, exultance. It didn't bode well.  
Too much for her high strung seven-year-old.  
Next there'd be crying. As usual.  
I knew what she was thinking,  
But I was too high to come down that fast.  
And I didn't want to. That feeling,  
The giddiness, the rawness, the delight.  
Did I get married the next week?  
Who was my beloved?  
Of that no trace, unmarked memory;  
Catching the bouquet, the astonishing luck of it,  
Its joyful unexpectedness, its explosiveness  
Nothing could compare to that.



## At the End of the Day

*William Pruitt*

My son calls me up to tell him goodnight. He is four.  
I ascend the stairs, he is already in bed with Teddy.  
He asks me to sing him the song I made up for him.  
I sing it every night. It has birds and fish and sun and stars,  
trees and rivers and mountains..  
It comforts both of us, a routine to end the day.  
To tell a story of how each member  
of our family loves him, how he loves them back.

As I sing and we both listen, I am allowed in this moment  
to step away from son—he's not just that—but  
another human being, deliciously close.  
Together we make a life.  
It has an arc, a story, a poem, a song.

I know I am young, going somewhere wonderful  
But it will never be any better than this.

## **But Here**

*Ivan Peledov*

This land's secret obsession is my best friend.  
It's full of unsound traffic lights  
and trees with the gloves and masks  
of innocent fiends caught in the branches.  
It laughs at my signatures, my name,  
my wording, my accent. It wants me to be  
a nobody like that lucky traveler  
who could dupe himself and become the other,  
not even a reflection in a sacred pond.

# Lauds

Peter J. King

delayed by hills, maybe,  
or banks of cloud but definitely on its way  
to dissipate the gloom of sleeplessness



(a moth  
blunders  
through the open  
window,  
beats its  
wings  
against  
the glass  
until  
by chance  
it gains  
the dusky  
garden once  
again)

sensed somehow  
by uncounted  
birds that call  
in individual delight  
(no chorus, this)  
at what is yet to come,  
prognosticators  
of the dawn

to us,  
for whom the  
darkness seems to have  
no ending (even  
the alarm clock's  
dial and hands  
lack

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)

sunflowers are a fever dream, named  
for a myth of childish hopefulness.



## Watching Always

### *Holly Day*

When I was 20, a man showed up at the office I worked at,  
filled out a job application  
asked when I'd call him back. I told him I didn't make the calls,  
it was my boss  
and I thought that was it.

The next day, the man showed up at the office I worked at,  
handed me a card that said  
"Can we be friends?" I laughed and shook my head and  
said something like  
"I'm too busy for friends," because I didn't want to be mean  
and I really didn't want to be friends.

Over the next few months, he showed up in my life every single day,  
would just sit  
in the lobby of the office and state at me through the reception window.  
I'd find reasons  
to leave my office every chance i could get, would volunteer  
to help other secretaries  
with their filing, or to run paperwork out to the warehouse,  
or ask my boss if I could use his  
computer  
to type up reports. When I'd get back to my office, the man  
would still be sitting there  
unless someone chased him away for the day.

He found out which bus I took and would be on it already when I got on,  
would sit in the back  
while I sat in the front, trying to discover which stop  
I got off on. I would ride the bus  
to the end of the line, and just tell the bus driver

I'd missed my stop, that I'd just wait until he turned around and catch it on the way back. The man at the back of the bus would get frustrated and just get off, as if he knew I might ride that bus back and forth all night waiting for him to get off before me. And I would have, too.

Eventually, my boss asked me why the man kept coming in and I told him how he wouldn't leave me alone, how we should call the police how I didn't want to get the company in trouble so I hadn't done it myself. The police were called and the man was hauled away twice, but the office manager insisted that I must have done something to lead him on that maybe the man was an ex-boyfriend who just wouldn't let go—he called these lectures “fatherly talks.” The last time I saw the man

was right before the police came to get him for the third and final time. He came into the lobby with the same ripped-up red t-shirt he'd had on for weeks a pair of dirty jeans, his hair wild and disheveled. He was so angry at me told me I wasn't a very good friend and said I should be careful how I treated people.

## legacy

*Corey J. Boren*

you recall this much:

pounding fists, the shaking brown door,  
your mother's arms grasping, shaking,  
not enough limbs to pull  
all of her children into her, not enough skin  
to press into skin, not enough skirt to cling to,  
the second story window overlooking  
the neighborhood, the swirls  
painted onto the ceiling in plaster,  
and finally, cruel fingers slipping under the crack  
in between the oak or maple and the carpet,  
pulling, pushing, hinges twisting and gasping,  
the knots and swirls of the wood  
giving way to cracks and canyons  
and shattering and hallways.

you remember nothing after.

## Gideon's Bible

*Cheryl Heineman*

I was told to check into a Chicago motel,  
just off a busy freeway, alone.  
A man named Rudy would come.  
It would cost three months' rent.  
A woman tells the story on the radio  
about her abortion forty years ago.  
Rudy showed up in a crumpled brown suit  
with a paper bag in his hand.

Maybe there shouldn't have been Gideon's Bible  
in the drawer next to the bed when I woke  
in bloody sheets, the man gone.  
Maybe it wasn't the time for insistence  
of life, as I rode the train back home  
past spring's curled gardens bursting  
with so much lily of the valley.

## a selective bastard writes

*Paul Tanner*

he was curled up  
under the bus stop bench.  
I stood apart, looking at the empty road.  
he groaned  
from under the bus stop bench.  
I stood apart.  
there came  
from under the bus stop bench  
the unmistakable squelchy sounds  
of his vomiting,  
but still I stood apart  
and I stood apart  
when the vomiting finally stopped  
to be replaced by  
the gurgling of  
his clogged throat  
for my shift was done  
my night shift at the shop  
was done  
and I refused to nanny  
another drunk  
especially on my own time  
so I stood apart  
as the blister of the sun  
bled all over the car park  
I stood apart  
as even the gurgles  
stopped  
I stood apart  
until the bus  
never showed  
and then some.



## Everyday Stress

*Ann E. Michael*

Whatever lays you low this arid day  
under the sky's pressure too blue to bear  
it isn't forbearance—  
you've nothing new to add to the discussion;  
everyone's under duress, you're not alone  
in this strained torpor.  
It isn't Xanax, not Prozac  
or booze you require. The outside world's  
too hot, too raw. Go in. Turn on the air  
conditioner, gaze out glazed windows.  
Thunder, earthquakes,  
brimstone at the threshold,  
creditors trampled, your wife in your arms.  
Say you have saved someone  
and the tension's all worthwhile,  
you've fixed the thing that was broken,  
clockworks, spinning wheel,  
axe handle, heart, the heart,  
the seized-taut alternator  
of your heart.

## Beautiful Once

*Lorelei Bacht*

You disgust me, make me sick -  
broken glass in my mouth.  
Perspectives petrified:  
everywhere a wall. I thought -  
I don't know what I thought.

How does anyone hold a thought?  
A long, long cry, piece of metal  
along the scalp. Electrified. What  
passes for thinking, these nights:  
dark images, repeated talks

with no-one. Each reprise  
a descent. One more step, one  
more step, a pool of black,  
a bucket - filled with what? What  
was it, what is it you want,

or don't want? I want nothing.  
I want a blank sheet of nothing.  
A big blank check, a white blanket.  
I want to be five and not now,  
my mother to call school. I am

not well. I need a rest. Every step  
taken so far must have been  
a mistake - I ended up in the wrong  
place, with the wrong face, something  
broken inside. I never wanted it

so dark. I wanted light. You were  
Beautiful once.

## Hard Water

*Jeff Burt*

squandered tire tread,  
voice cracking to a song  
when the pavement buckles or emotion rises,  
ravens power-lifting daylight out of darkness,  
road white with age and rage  
like the muzzle of old dog,  
and difficult, missing shoulders,  
wild weeds reaching like taming hands  
to slow the wheels as they pass,  
anger dissipating into asphalt,  
Kendall's death once a mirage  
settling into hard water,  
the road leading to a void  
where loss can be emptied  
and to some other place without joy,  
without peace, without anger,  
not a destination since it's not  
where I set out for,  
not a start, a beginning,  
but a place to start to find a place to begin

## I Cannot Listen

*Kate Maxwell*

Don't talk to me of ocean, songs  
sunshine days, and whispers.  
Hissing in the winter wind  
the icy hand of melancholy  
has called itself my friend  
even as I've pulled my wrist  
from its cold grasp and pushed  
front teeth over lips to name it.

Talk instead of empty rooms  
floating dust and sucking  
silence or cardboard boxes  
rough with dull surrender  
and brown as cracked earth  
where hours and years are  
packed away with masking  
tape to fade into forgetting.

Or talk of stale-breathed  
mornings, musty doona as  
I watch the mouldy ceiling  
listen to the screeching whine  
of neighbour's plumbing  
and run cold fingers down  
the empty half of my double  
bed while I wait for purpose.

But don't talk to me  
of summer-baked Sundays  
or a warm scented neck  
where I'd stupidly nestled  
my breath, my flesh, my years.  
Those words are scabby fists  
against my purple head.  
I cannot listen yet.

## Looking back

*Anonymous*

Remember the childhood habit  
of speaking every sentence twice,  
the second time in a whisper,  
another opportunity to catch  
the liquid idea in hands  
whose knobby fingers could not keep even light  
from slipping between.

The dream is not a clever animal;  
it reveals itself in noises spilling from  
the moonhidden brush –  
a susurrus spelling out the second chance  
of grieving alone. In the dream the  
figure can be pushed away. The intrusion  
is prevented the way it happened:  
permanently, and sometimes, yes, the  
trespasser is cracked against the sink  
and bleeds dark blood.  
Meanwhile the childself,  
in all her pink formlessness,  
walks on her knees on the sidewalk fearing God  
and gropes into the future for the right words  
and cannot be warned  
of what happens in a few years  
when she finds them.

## Letting It Happen

*Carolyn Adams*

Private music.  
Peculiar  
architecture.  
Miles of  
various grays.

Feet submerged.  
Motionless.

The instrument  
is non-essential.  
The hour  
irrelevant.  
The cause  
Absent.

Eyes closed.

A red sun  
explodes.  
A final note  
to end all things.

My favorite song.

## I did something wrong.

*Lorelei Bacht*

I thought  
that I wanted it to happen;  
but when it did, it was not  
the shape or colour  
that I wanted at all. It was  
larger and uglier  
than the idea of it,  
and no fun. I said  
words - when they were  
nothing more than words,  
I wished them all  
to become real. It was going  
to be: my revenge,  
my final win - I deserved it.  
Sitting here a posteriori,  
the words have lost  
their initial appeal.  
i can see them  
for what they were  
all along: hurtful, wrong.  
i am afraid  
of the ugliness I have  
manifested. It stares at me:  
black wings. It refuses  
to go away, until  
everyone knows  
that I was the one  
who did it.

## inheritance

Corey J. Boren

even if i wished it—

all your blue eyes, brown eyes,  
brown hair, blonde hair,  
your irish melting into their danish  
and falling into my american, your home movies,  
accents almost transatlantic as you wave  
at the blaring fire engine, my spiderman light-up  
tennis shoes skidding along asphalt,  
stubby fingers raised in saltwater taffy praise,  
your deliberate slicing of the wedding cake, suit  
and dress and black and white, the grainy filter  
over every photo of you, the selfie i send on snapchat  
and hope she screenshots, or at least replays,  
singing little brown jug to mesmerized toddlers,  
the suckers i stick between my teeth and pretend  
are cigarettes, your russet skin, my tan skin,  
the splinters and calluses and handcarts  
and my sleeping in, missing church, feeling guilty,  
the ice cream parlor just off of main street  
where you hid the ring in the vanilla scoops,  
the soda i bring her every time i drive over,  
your stiff leg, my quaking legs, cresting the final mountain,  
losing breath at the sight of the valley, the mountains  
i named after people i knew, the valley i cannot leave,  
your panic in the dark cave, gripping the hem  
of your dress, begging the tour guide to let you  
back out into the sunlight, my lithium, desvenlafaxine,  
aripiprazole, the endless reasons i cannot find my breath,  
your quiet tragedies, your blessed mistakes, your bleeding knees,  
my quiet tragedies, my blessed mistakes, my bleeding knees,  
and if nothing else, the ribbon of cells once belonging to you,  
all the days you lived or didn't giving way to my birthday  
tell me this path is not my own, i owe debts to the dead

—i cannot be rid of you.



## Winner of Rehab Jeopardy

*Robert Armstrong*

I'm surrounded  
by beasts,  
They sit at a table  
Wearing  
Skins of man,  
Shouting,  
Screaming,  
Rutting,  
Snorting,  
Spitting,  
Humanity gone  
From their eyes,  
An orgy of  
Mass hysteria,  
Incomprehensible  
Words screamed  
To the heavens,  
In animalistic  
Ecstasy, and  
It's sad to watch,  
This madness,  
This degradation,  
Of the Human  
Condition.

## The War Begins

*Gurupreet K. Khalsa*

Like a molten basketball, fairy fire,  
the red sun sinks painfully in the West.  
Heaven pulls its special hood over its head,  
graveyard-still, silent as a cat in a bush.

In a flash, the boom ruptures the night,  
cannon splits the ice,  
flame writes its words, swimming in waves  
across the ocean.

Roxy and her friends, in terror, rush  
to pressed huddle.

Oh mama, your Nikes are melting, they  
don't have any substance, it looks bad for  
America.

There isn't anything I can do  
she replies. There will be no succor  
for any of us. Babies will die.  
We're lost.



## Stuck in a Moment

*Steve Bowman*

His grandparent's stairs are cheap  
wooden slats with see-through spaces  
between. Each one creaks and groans  
with familiar complaint. They go  
on and on. Ominous sounds  
float around him; the soft whine  
of a baby muffled between walls  
distant, inconsolable.

Unnerved he turns to go back  
but the steps are no longer wood.  
They are crunchy brown leaves.  
The kind kids jump into  
at Halloween time. But it is too hot  
for October, and this is no front yard.  
The ground slants down. At the bottom  
he sees a meandering creek.  
The baby screams become the distant hum  
of his grandpa's tractor, working the tobacco fields.

He turns and sees what he tried to ignore  
for nearly thirty years: his child self,  
further down the slope in a clearing  
between trees. The child is on all fours,  
his blue jeans around his ankles.  
A few steps closer, the child's eyes  
widen with shock and wonder.  
Behind the child is his uncle.  
His jeans pulled down too; his eyes  
closed with a determined smile.  
They move back and forth  
like new leaves on spring trees.  
This is not what he wants to see  
but he can't stop, can't blink.

The scene is ever present  
in the theater of his mind.  
Shame and fear speed him forward.  
His mouth opens in a silent roar,  
his arms and clawed fingers  
ready to hurl his uncle  
to the black water below.

His hands touch nothing  
but air. His uncle shimmers  
in the afternoon sun, then blows up  
like a puff ball. The blue and pink  
pieces of his skin and jeans  
skitter like bugs across the leaves  
in hundreds of directions.  
Some rematerialize and gyrate  
with that determined smile.  
He hates that smile  
and stomps the nearest bug.  
Another poof ball and hundreds more uncles  
skitter off, smiling and gyrating.  
Grandpa's tractor still drones  
merrily in the fields above.

## Blind Alley

*Michael Igoe*

Caesar is the past master  
who quotes patient makers,  
only conversing in sunlight.  
He lives the outdoor life;  
likes the smell of melons.  
It will waft toward him,  
carried on a mild breeze  
coming from a pitchman.  
He's furnished with silver,  
but what he needs is gold.

## A 300-pound man

*Sandra Vallie*

hefts a metal crucifix from his shoulders.  
Waves it like wrath

strikes two officers and four bystanders.  
He has a history. The cops shoot barbs

into his skin.  
Stun him through the wires.

He apologizes. Looks fine to them –  
they can't hardly see he's already dead.

He has a history –  
thinks it best to leave town. Walks

76 miles from Albuquerque  
into the Jemez Mountains. He has experience

can translate the heat ahead to degrees  
of sag in his legs when the sun sweats his body dry.

His bare feet, bleeding  
spot and pickle hard packed sand.

Soon the talus will wear through. The tibia,  
pegged, whistles with his steps.

The path ends at a cliff wall. With nowhere to go  
he considers disembodiment

different methods and designs. Chooses  
to swing that wrought-iron cross

into the cliff where red stone and the white  
share boundaries. That sound so loud

pulls his blood from the chambers of his heart.  
That sound — where hymns and the music of flesh

silence each other splits his cells. Quiet  
he hears lives brush against branches.

The connection's unclear and those in the know  
hear a message from god. His pain looks like a grin

rusty and chapped. Right palm flat on the geology  
he scans for electricity. The crucifix

pulls his arms to the ground. No idea better than this.  
Some crackling hum completes the circuit.

“I’m just saying,” he screams, and throws the crucifix so high  
its light melts into the full moon bright as morning.

## She Speaks

*Amrita Valan*

Sleek brass figurine  
Deity of knowledge  
Saraswati pristine  
Goddess upon swan  
Plays the Veena  
On my writing desk.  
Blessing my thoughts  
Manifold expressions  
Curlicues of insane  
Longings, passions  
Flash frozen despair,  
Trinkets aside.  
Bling blindsided,  
My compass is her  
Constancy. Veracity  
Shuns false tidings  
Truth keeps the  
Heart floating  
Atop past baggage.  
So, upon this premise  
I unsheathe my quill  
I write my reveal  
I write what I feel  
So, help me Goddess  
Sitting yonder, so  
Surreal and still.



## Garage Sale Rooster

*Cheryl Heineman*

Because of rust, what you overlooked,  
you paused for its bent rebar feet,  
marred beak, and yellow  
head topped by a crimson comb,  
for its wattles dangling  
over an Iowa green body,  
paint fading.  
Because your once bright, not  
leathered, arms carried grain  
with innocent hands, you fed them,  
the chickens, your simple mission for the day.  
Then you saw one dragged. Then.  
It was cruel, the head chopped  
bloody, feathered-black  
the body flopped on, without a head,  
sight spurting  
from its veins, the noonday sky  
red-fired with sharp streaks, slack, sudden.  
In the kitchen, a waiting  
pot boiled on an old stove.  
It had its own distress, that old pot.  
Into the heat, the salt  
the onions, the butter,  
the body, finally quiet, fell  
for supper, for you  
on the farm who ate, because,  
because you could not resist.

## Centipede.

*Lorelei Bacht*

Centipede. Murderous  
Mess of body fragments.  
I have children - I have  
To do it: inflict preventive death  
With a blunt instrument.

Necklace of clawed segments.  
At the distance of a handle,  
Long and short enough to ensure  
The safe delivery of intentions.  
Me on one end, inventing myself

Resolute. It on the other end,  
Speaking of a phenomenon  
Unknown to us both, until  
Only one of us receives  
The last knowing.

I watch it writhes its final  
Happening. Disorderly ripples,  
Indicative of nervous  
Ganglia. The flesh all white,  
Lucent viscosities.

Fallen giant, jaws of poison  
Now pathetic - I feel  
Sorry for it. Bound by  
The immediacy of its demise,  
It has stopped perceiving me.

One last thrust, an attempt  
At a short and humane  
Delivery of death. It comes  
Undone. Something of it  
Goes somewhere else.

What remains is nothing.  
Everything to the ants, the mold  
That begins to advance.  
Everything says:  
Your turn now, our turn later.

## Flowerbed

*Sam Houty*

If someone calls you a flower **crush yourself into potpourri**  
hold their hand and explain **until fragrance emanates from your pores**  
that you're not a woman **masked by the wind**  
In time that might change **overcome by this essence**  
she sleeps inside of you **dreaming of flowerbeds**  
Counts falling petals **their concentric folds**  
buds that never wilt **that curl until Spring**

## Glory Be

*Emelia (Mia) Maceasik*

I am an unplanted garden  
fertilized with unread emails and ignored phone calls

doubt is a vine in my lungs  
and those leaves look beautiful in between my lips

I'm choking with a grin  
I don't know any other way of living

I tell myself I like the dirt  
Because I just can't imagine growing something healthy

in a plot made out of clay.

## The Tiniest Rose

*Bobbi Sinha-Morey*

I felt like the tiniest rose  
in the garden, born to  
blush but never to be seen,  
so many long necked ones  
far above me bathing their  
petals in the warm morning  
light, selfishly hiding the sun  
away from me. I drink in the  
brief April rain like the blades  
of grass do, but it doesn't sate  
me, never pierces me with  
a joy for living. My hope  
already begins to curl in on  
me, my dark red petals forever  
untouched by human hand, my  
life unblessed by an unseeing  
god, my spirit beginning to die  
on its stem.

## Empty

*Olena Prusenkova*

You accuse me of having empty days,  
But what is emptiness if not  
Noise?  
Of the people that don't know your birthday or your colour,  
Of the cars that buzz as they pass with indifference,  
Of the past that crawls in without permission,  
Of the longing that has turned into a devil's habit?  
Emptiness is people  
And people running away from it.  
But if we are running inside the hamster's wheel,  
Is there really an exit?  
Emptiness is you, and me, and him,  
And her with her on a Sunday morning:  
Touching someone's hand when departing  
For the last train to never.  
Making love and imagining others in your mind,  
Never saying anything  
When your soul has a story boiling within.  
If you think that busyness cures emptiness  
Then you're yet to look inside,  
To confront, and see, and love the monster  
Who is You, who is Beauty, who is Fault -  
For the most cherishing thing about humanity  
is its mistakes.

## As Late as Never

*Bennie Rosa*

Look beyond stars  
There,  
You see,  
That far corner  
Of a night.  
As far from home  
As wrong  
From right.

Will silhouettes fly  
On wings of dreams  
Or melt away  
In Fires  
Of Light?

Listen, listen closely then,  
Listen as they breathe  
Their final hymn  
They wait.

Dreams take time,  
Time takes forever,  
Sometimes late,  
Sometimes,  
As late  
As never.



## When the Wind Blows Backwards

Gurupreet K. Khalsa

*Yes, a dark time passed over this land, but now there is something like light.*

—Dave Eggers, *Zeitoun*

Zephyrs they are not, howling horizontal harridans;  
yowling, exhausting explosions erupting,  
xystus unroofed by disastrous destroying demolition;  
whirlwinds of passion and power produce  
violence in the sky, ranting, raving, roaring,  
until our nerves are shocked, shattered, splintered;  
twisting, thumping, terrible tempests  
scream and bluster; bombastic battles  
rumble, grumble, and tumble across  
quailing coasts that bellow and boom;  
protection, none, from keening cacophony,  
ominous squalling shrieks, snarling strikes;  
no shelter from the clomping, stomping,  
moaning winds that bash, lash, smash  
like raging furies: fulminating, fractious,  
kicking trees on their faces, spitting;  
jolting, juddering, jangling  
invective from awful angry angels  
harangues the earth and finds no berth:  
gales that whack and whoosh and wail  
fulminate through crying, crushing clouds;  
encircling gusts twine and twist,  
defeating fragile faltering flowers;  
crushing, thundering shouts, yells, and yelps,  
baying, barking hounds that howl and growl.  
As it calms: sun; silent, still, serene, soothed.

## Ravin' Baltimore

*James Penha*

Urged by po' grave Edgar lying  
cornered at Westminster  
Churchyard, he picked  
Jody's hottest sauce  
for his biscuited Baltimore crab cake  
a buck eighty-five at Lexington  
Market. Succulent flakes blushed  
by cumin and chiles brought him round  
to The 400 Block. Stepped right in  
urged cornered picked bal-ti-more crab  
cake buck market succulent blushed hot  
cumin brought him round

## Responsive Reading

Jeff Burt

We are the cheap leather of shoes and walk like fugitives  
who forage all day for their food.

*We are steers in the prairie eating dry words as we wander  
waiting for the shock at the end of the chute.*

We are the cotton in shirts that makes us love the touch of  
hands  
that pull and rub our skin.

*We are tufts in the field tinged with the blood of slaves  
singing to Jesus, soul, funk, spiritual jazz.*

We are the metal in the ring that signifies how we can be  
hard, cold,  
and hurt the one it signified to love.

*We are glints of gold, not nuggets or lodes,  
if strikes, like an errant swing.*

We are the tint in our hair, the dye in our beards that tricks  
the mirror-mirror on the wall.

*We are camouflage, misdirection, we are smoke  
without fire, hide beauty by stain.*

We are suits, ensembles, decoration, pseudo-form and fit,  
the clothes that make the person.

*We are Levi's, Prada, we lurch from the gates of Lauren,  
we are Abound, Gucci, we are Swoosh.*

## Inside

*Holly Day*

*You should have stayed out of me*, I think  
as I dig into my skin with the burnt end of a safety pin  
expose the hiding place of the tiny insect that's burrowed into my flesh  
expose it and its invisible brood to sunlight and air.  
*You should have picked another spot*, I amend

wondering how long it would have taken me to discover  
the little creature hiding beneath my flesh  
if it had decided to settle into a spot in my ass crack  
in the middle of my back, somewhere in my foot.  
It probably would have taken weeks before I realized  
that the itchy patch in the spot I couldn't reach

was a spreading colony of mites  
the descendants of an unwelcome passenger  
picked up during a weekend by the lake.

## driving south on interstate 15

*Corey J. Boren*

in las vegas, i think,  
but maybe provo,  
she is telling her children  
to pile into the car  
above the screams,  
above the shattered kitschy plates  
and overturned rocking chair,  
slipping behind the steering wheel,

barely pulling into reverse  
before his hand bursts  
through the driver's side,  
fingers dug in her 70s bob,  
their screams too feral, too inhuman,  
pale arms raking plaid sleeves,  
pushing the gas pedal, backing out the garage  
in a vicious dance between slacks  
and tires and fistfuls of brunette,

and my mother is staring  
from the passenger seat,  
her hair hovering like corn silk  
in the static, rolling up the window  
on her side, and then rubber meets asphalt,  
and suddenly, he is gone,

and i'm going twenty  
over the speed limit,  
desperate to catch up  
to her station wagon.

i'm on my way, i'm thinking.  
i'm on my way. i promise.

## The Fourteenth

Margaret Koger

What if this nation under guns can't breathe?  
Have you called your mother yet?

*One, two, buckle your shoe...*

What if an EMT lit on fire isn't enough?  
What if a soldier dies in Afghanistan just because?

*Three, four, shut the door...*

Shall I record everyone near me in the park?  
Can you see the trees breathe out oxygen?

*Five, six, pick up sticks...*

If a tree falls on the greenbelt do leaves suffocate?  
If a mask is too much trouble... cough, cough?

*Seven, eight, lay them straight...*

When would you cry for a chocolate-moon pie?  
What if boogaloos get on (with) your life?

*Nine, ten, a big fat hen...*

Why is my nephew flying The Stars and Bars?  
Since grandmother said never trust an Irishman...

*Eleven, twelve, dig and delve...*

Do you imagine our seedlings will survive?

*thirteen, fourteen, draw the curtain...*

## HANGOVER, GREENWICH VILLAGE, 1992

*Gary Sokolow*

What have the poets taught?  
A dead-man's float in a Minneapolis river?  
Dry land dry?

I've been here far too long, the police sirens bleeding  
Through the walls, the morning procession

Of funeral headlights, fail to move me: maybe you can  
Pin it down for me, deconstruct the hegemony

Of my heart, how it all falls out of balance, a line  
Failing to follow a

Line, the divining rod of my future lost.

I've lived on dry toast, I've drank the blackest of coffees,  
I've felt the broken cobblestones along Lafayette,

Remembered the furniture sanders missing from Great Jones,  
Remembered the Yippie Press, a boarded up Bleecker Street memory.

In my childhood it was a mother on our block who committed suicide  
With a cracked open head, a classmate with jet black hair too scared

To leave her home. In our house, it was the orange flower wallpaper hanging  
In our kitchen that drove us mad, the endless rage of summer fan,

The broken-hearted landlady below us who sat in her nightgown at  
the window, 'Jakela, Jakela', she cried out after her dead husband

As all day long the window coughed opened and shut.

## Contributor Bios

**Jan Ball's** three chapbooks and first full length poetry book, *I Wanted To Dance With My Father*, were published by Finishing Line Press. Besides the books, Jan has had 336 poems published or accepted in the U.S. and internationally, in journals like: *ABZ*, *Atlanta Review*, *Chiron*, *Main Street Rag*, and *Phoebe*. Her poem, "Not Sharing at Yoshu" was nominated for the Pushcart by Orbis, Great Britain, 2020.

**John Grey** is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in *Soundings East*, *Dalhousie Review* and *Connecticut River Review*. Latest book, "Leaves On Pages" is available through Amazon.

**Ellen Huang** (she/her) holds a BA in Writing + Theatre minor from Point Loma Nazarene University. She has pieces published in *Bleached Butterfly*, *Polemical Zine*, *The Wild Word*, *Moonchild Magazine*, *Apparition Lit* and *Periwinkle Lit*, among others. She also reads for *Whale Road Review* and runs a fantasy-inspired blog: [worrydollsandfloatinglights.wordpress.com](http://worrydollsandfloatinglights.wordpress.com).

**Michael Igoe**, Chicago Now Boston, city boy, neurodiverse, numerous works in journals online and in print. recent: [anserjournal.org](http://anserjournal.org), [theblenib.com](http://theblenib.com), [musicalprimates.com](http://musicalprimates.com); *Avalanches In Poetry Anthology* available at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com), National Library Of Poetry Editors Choice Award 1997. Twitter: [MichaelIgoe5](https://twitter.com/MichaelIgoe5). Urban realism/Surrealism- I like the night.

**Karen Mandell**. I've taught writing at the high school and college levels and literature at community senior centers. My short story Goddess of Mercy is forthcoming from *Notre Dame Review*. I've written Clicking, interconnected short stories, and *Rose Has a New Walker*, a book of poetry.

All things are connected. That's the premise of what **William J. Joel** does. Each of Mr. Joel's interests informs each other. Mr. Joel has been teaching computer science since 1983 and has been a writer even longer. His works have recently appeared in *Common Ground Review*, *DASH Literary Journal*, *The Blend International*, *Liminality*, and *North Dakota Quarterly*.



**c. a. mackenzie** (she/her/hers) is an MSW student for interpersonal practice and has a BA in English, Creative Writing, and Psychology from The University of Michigan-Ann Arbor. c. a. mackenzie is a graduate intern in outpatient child/adolescent psychiatry with interests in trauma-related conditions and intergenerational trauma.

**Ivanka Fear** is a former teacher now pursuing her passion for writing. Her poems and short stories appear in *Spadina Literary Review*, *Montreal Writes*, *Adelaide Literary*, *October Hill*, *Scarlet Leaf Review*, *The Sirens Call*, *The Literary Hatchet*, *Wellington Street Review*, *Aphelion*, *Muddy River Poetry Review*, and elsewhere. <https://ivankafear.wix.com/mysite>

**Joan Mc Nerney's** poetry is found in many literary magazines such as Seven Circle Press, Dinner with the Muse, Poet Warriors, Blueline, and Halcyon Days. Four Bright Hills Press Anthologies, several Poppy Road Journals, and numerous Poets' Espresso Reviews have accepted her work. She has four Best of the Net nominations. Her latest title is *The Muse in Miniature* available on Amazon.com and Cyberwit.net

**Natalli Amato** is the author of the poetry collection "On a Windless Night." She currently works for Rolling Stone and lives in Sackets Harbor, New York.

**Chris Jones** has felt poems emerge from within since he was a teenager but didn't start writing in earnest until he turned 60. Chris's journey to become a leadership coach has heightened his self-awareness and many of his poems describe that experience and self-reflection.

**Paul Tanner.** I've been earning minimum wage, and writing about it, for too long. Was shortlisted for the Erbacce 2020 Poetry Prize. "Shop Talk: Poems for Shop Workers" was published last year by Penniless Press. "No Refunds: Poems and cartoons from your local supermarket" is out now, from Alien Buddha Press.

**Catherine A. MacKenzie's** works include short story compilations, poetry collections, and children's picture books. Her third novel, *My Brother, the Wolf*, will complete *Wolves Don't Knock* and *Mister Wolfe*. *My Heart*

Is Broken memorializes her son in poetry. She lives in West Porters Lake, Nova Scotia, Canada.

**Charlene Moskal** volunteers with The Alzheimers Poetry Project. She is recently published in *Humana Obscura*, *Connecticut River Review*, *Sandstone & Silver; an Anthology of Nevada Poets*. Her second chapbook is “One Bare Foot” (Zeitgeist Press). Charlene is in her seventh decade, laughs often, loves coffee ice cream hot fudge sundaes.

**Valerie Frost** is a Garden State native. She lives in Central Kentucky with her twin three-year-olds. Her poems have appeared in the *Eastern Iowa Review*, *Anti-Heroic Chic*, *Thimble Literary Magazine*, and elsewhere.  
@TheMillBradshaw

**Kendra Nuttall** is a copywriter by day and poet by night. Her work has appeared in *Spectrum*, *Capsule Stories*, *Chiron Review*, and *What Rough Beast*, among other journals and anthologies. She is the author of *A Statistical Study of Randomness* (Finishing Line Press). She lives in Utah. Find her online at [kendranuttall.com](http://kendranuttall.com) and on Instagram @kendra.nuttall.

**Hiba Rasheed** is a UAE-based Sudanese slam poet, and three-time winner of the Rooftop Rhythms Slam Poetry Competition in Abu Dhabi. Hiba has performed at a plethora of events and has had her poems published in several online and print magazines; in addition to being featured in several track singles with local producers and rappers. Hiba has released two poetry videos and is currently working on her third project.

**Ellen Sander**, a rock and roll heart, lives in Belfast, Maine. Her chapbook, “Hawthorne, a House in Bolinas,” is published by Finishing Line Press. Her next chapbook, “Aquifer,” will be published by Red Bird Chapbooks. More importantly, the cat is sprawled out over everything important on the desk --snoring-- that’s how the day is going.

**Jeremy Wm. Farrington** always wanted to be socially distant but never had the opportunity. He is the father of twins and is a distance runner. You can read about his other heartbreaks in *River River*.

**Yash Seyedbagheri** is a graduate of Colorado State University's MFA program in fiction. His stories, "Soon," "How To Be A Good Episcopalian," and "Tales From A Communion Line" were nominated for Pushcarts. Yash's work has been published in *The Journal of Compressed Creative Arts*, *Write City Magazine*, and *Ariel Chart*, among others.

**S. J. Perry's** poems have recently appeared in *Writing from Inlandia*, *Cholla Needles*, and *MUSE*. He studied at Emporia State University and the University of Kansas. A retired high school English teacher, he has lived in Southern California since 1985.

**Clay Waters** has had poems published in *The Santa Clara Review*, *River Oak Review*, *Literal Latte*, and *Poet Lore*. His website is claywaters.org, featuring his self-published cozy mystery *Death in the Eye*. Clay lived in Florida until the age of four and returned to find it hasn't changed a bit.

**Marjorie Power.** My most recent full length poetry collection, *SUFFICIENT EMPTINESS*, is forthcoming from Deerbrook Editions. A chapbook, "REFUSES TO SUFFOCATE," appeared in 2019 from Blue Lyra Press. Publications which have taken my work recently include *MUD-FISH*, *COMMONWEAL*, and *SOUTHERN POETRY REVIEW*. I can be found at [www.marjoriepowerpoet.com](http://www.marjoriepowerpoet.com).

**Kami Westhoff** is the author of the story collection *The Criteria* (Unsolicited Press, 2022), and chapbooks "Cloudbound" (Dancing Girl Press, 2021), "Sleepwalker" (Minerva Rising, 2017), and "Your Body a Bullet" (Unsolicited Press, 2018), co-written with Elizabeth Vignali. She teaches creative writing at Western Washington University in Bellingham, WA. Rp Verlaine lives and writes in New York City. He has an MFA in creative writing from City College. His first volume of poetry *Damaged by Dames & Drinking* was published in 2017 and another, *Femme Fatales Movie Starlets & Rockers*, in 2018. A set of three e books titled, *Lies From The Autobiography 1-3* followed.

**Ellen Roberts Young's** third chapbook with Finishing Line Press, "Transported," is due out in early 2021. She has a full-length collection, *Made and Remade* (Wordtech, 2014) as well as poems in numerous print

and online journals. She is an editor of *Sin Fronteras/Writers Without Borders Journal*, and blogs at [www.freethoughtandmetaphor.com](http://www.freethoughtandmetaphor.com).

**Sita Gaia** is a TEDX Alumnae and has been writing poetry since grade three. During the pandemic, she has honed in on new skills and made new connections in the poetry world. She was first introduced to W.H. Auden by her older brother, and her collection of poetry books continues to grow. She also loves owls, drinks way too much coffee, and lives in Vancouver with her wife and their plants. Her instagram handle is [joeyjo422](https://www.instagram.com/joeyjo422).

**Bennie Rosa** lives in the high desert of Central New Mexico where he writes short stories, flash fiction, novels, and drama. His writing will appear in an upcoming *Grey Borders Anthology* entitled “Daddy: A Cultural Anthology” and was recently published in *Dream Pop Journal*, *New World Writing*, *The Writers Club*, *Barrio Beat* and others.

**KB Baltz** was born in a Cosmic Hamlet by the Sea, a month early and sideways. She has been doing things backward ever since. When she isn't writing, KB can be found screaming into the void while starting a master's degree in GIS. You can find some of her other work at *Atlas and Alice*, *Pure Slush*, and *Rouge Agent*.

**Frank Carellini** tends to poetry as a mechanism to grasp the fleeting enormity of life, nature, consciousness. raised in Brooklyn, NY, Frank has recently published poetry in *communion* and *tiger moth*. Educated in business and biochemistry, he builds life science startups that make the world a bit better.

**William Doreski** lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire. He has taught at several colleges and universities and retired after three decades at Keene State College. His most recent book of poetry is *Stirring the Soup* (2020). He has published three critical studies, including Robert Lowell's *Shifting Colors*. His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in many journals.

**Meghan Sterling's** work has been published in *Rattle, Glass, Sky Island Journal*, *Red Paint Hill*, and many others. She has been awarded a Hewnoaks

Artist Colony Residency in 2019 and 2021. Her first full-length collection, *These Few Seeds*, is forthcoming from Terrapin Books in 2021. Read her work at [meghansterling.com](http://meghansterling.com).

**Kelli Lage** lives in the Midwest countryside with her husband, and dog, Cedar. Lage is currently earning her degree in Secondary English Education. Lage states she is here to give readers words that resonate. Awards: Special Award for First-time Entrant, Lyrical Iowa.

A native New Yorker, **James Penha** has lived for the past quarter-century in Indonesia. Nominated for Pushcart Prizes in fiction and poetry, his work has lately appeared in several anthologies: *The Impossible Beast: Queer Erotic Poems* (Damaged Goods Press), *The View From Olympia* (Half Moon Books, UK), *Queers Who Don't Quit* (Queer Pack, EU), and others. His essays have appeared in *The New York Daily News* and *The New York Times*. Penha edits *The New Verse News*, an online journal of current-events poetry. Twitter: [@JamesPenha](https://twitter.com/JamesPenha)

**Diana Raab**, PhD, is an award-winning memoirist, poet, blogger, speaker, and author of 10 books and is a contributor to numerous journals and anthologies. Her two latest books are *Writing for Bliss: A Seven-Step Plan for Telling Your Story and Transforming Your Life* and *Writing for Bliss: A Companion Journal*.

**Bruce Gunther** is a retired journalist and freelance writer who lives in Michigan. He's a graduate of Central Michigan University.

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

**Jason Melvin** is a father, husband, grandfather, high school soccer coach, and metals processing center supervisor, who lives just outside of Pittsburgh. His work has appeared in *Rat's Ass Review*, *Kitchen Sink Magazine*, *The Electric Rail*, *The Front Porch Review*, and *Shambles*, among others.

**Amrita Valan** is a writer from India, mother of two boys. She has worked in a variety of professions, from BPOs, five star hotels to being the content creator of questions in deductive logic and reasoning in English. Her work has been published in several anthologies and online zines.

**William Pruitt.** I am a poet, fiction writer and storyteller, and an Assistant Editor with Narrative Magazine. I have published poems in such places as *Ploughshares*, *Anderbo.com*, *Otis Nebula*, *the Tipton Poetry Journal*, and *Cottonwood*; two chapbooks with White Pine (Ravine Street) and FootHills (Bold Cities and Golden Plains); and the self-published *Walking Home from the Eastman House*. My short stories have appeared in *Crack of the Spine Literary Magazine*, *Midway*, *Indiana Voice Journal*, *Hypertext*, et.al.

**Regina Beach** is an American living in Bristol, UK. She writes about art, culture, travel, wellness and the people and places in those spheres. She is most at home pedaling her bicycle or on her yoga mat. Read more of Regina's writing and listen to her podcast at [reginagbeach.com](http://reginagbeach.com).

**Glenn Ingersoll** works for the public library in Berkeley, California. A multi-volume prose work, *Thousand* (Mel C Thompson Publishing) is now available from [bookshop.org](http://bookshop.org) and as an e-book from Smashwords. He keeps two blogs, *LoveSettlement* and *Dare I Read*. Recent work has appeared in *Spillway*, *Door Is a Jar*, and *CutBank*.

**Ivan Peledov** is a poet living in Colorado. He has been published in *Unlikely Stories*, *Eunoia Review*, *Sonic Boom*, *Illuminations*, and other magazines.

**Rachel Landrum Crumble** has recently published in *Bindweed*, *Common Ground Review*, *Spoon River Review*, and *Detour Ahead*. She is awaiting a contract on her first poetry manuscript *Sister Sorrow*. Having taught kindergarten through college, she currently teaches high school. She and her jazz drummer husband of nearly 40 years are Yankee transplants living Chattanooga, TN. Look her up at [poetteachermom.com](http://poetteachermom.com).

**Corey J. Boren** is a junior at Utah Valley University who enjoys decoding song lyrics and spending too much on Panda Express orange chicken. He has been published in *Blue Marble Review*, *Riggwelter*, and *30 North Review*, among other publications. To see more of his work, visit [@corey.j.boren](https://www.instagram.com/corey.j.boren) on Instagram.

**Olena Prusenkova** is a Ukrainian-Australian writer based in Sydney. She likes to write fiction, personal essays and poetry, and her work has been pub-

lished in several Medium publications, such as *The Ascent*, *Be Yourself*, and *Written Tales*. She loves travelling, reading and learning about different cultures.

**Patricia Pinto** deals with words. A lot. She's a copywriter by day and reads, writes and does voice overs at all other times. The best temperature is a balmy 28 - 32 degrees Celsius, thanks. You can find her over at <https://patriciapinto.asia>

**Bobbi Sinha-Morey's** poetry has appeared in a wide variety of places. Her books of poetry are available at Amazon and her work has been nominated for the Best of the Net Anthology in 2015, 2018, and 2020 as well as having been nominated for the Pushcart Prize in 2020. Her website is <http://bobbisinhamorey.wordpress.com>.

**Sandra Vallie's** work has appeared in *Adobe Walls*, *Airplane Reading*, *The Más Tequila Review*, *The Malpais Review*, and [plumeforwriters.org](http://plumeforwriters.org). Sandra is originally from Michigan, where she earned a BA at Eastern Michigan University. She currently lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico where she writes and learns how to garden without water.

**Antoni Ooto** is an internationally published poet and flash fiction writer. Well-known for his abstract expressionist art, Antoni now adds his voice to poetry. Reading and studying the works of many poets has opened another means of self-expression. His recent poems have been published in *Amethyst Review*, *The BeZine*, *Green Ink Poetry*, *The Poet Magazine*, *Brown Bag Online*, *The Wild Word*, and many journals and anthologies. He lives and works in Upstate New York with his wife poet/storyteller, Judy DeCroce.

**Gurupreet K. Khalsa** is a current resident of Mobile, Alabama, having lived previously in Ohio, Washington State, India, New Mexico, and California. She received her Ph.D. in Instructional Design from the University of South Alabama. She is a part time online instructor in graduate education programs.

Retired children's librarian **Alan Bern** is a photographer with awards for his poems and stories and is also a performer with dancer/composer Lucinda Weaver as PACES: dance & poetry fit to the space and with mu-

sicians from [composingtogether.org](http://composingtogether.org). Lines & Faces, his press with artist/printer Robert Woods: [linesandfaces.com](http://linesandfaces.com)

**Carolyn Adams'** poetry and art have appeared in *Steam Ticket*, *Cimarron Review*, *Topology*, *Apercus Quarterly*, and *Blueline Magazine*, among others. She is the author of four chapbooks and has been nominated for a Pushcart prize, as well as for Best of the Net.

**Leslee Jepson** began writing in her seventies. She reports galloping toward eighty, pen still in hand. Leslee has had work accepted by the WI Fellowship of Poets for calendar years 2017-2019. She lives in SE WI with two dogs and one husband.

**Margaret Koger**, a Lascaux Prize finalist, is a school media specialist with a writing habit. She lives near the river in Boise, Idaho. See more of her poetry online at *Amsterdam Quarterly*, *Thimble*, *Trounville Review*, *Tiny Seed Literary Journal*, *Ponder Savant*, *Subjectiv*, and *Last Leaves*.

**Jeff Burt** works in mental health in Santa Cruz County, California. He has contributed to *Williwaw Journal*, *Heartwood*, *Rabid Oak*, and *Red Wolf Journal*. He won the 2017 Cold Mountain Review Narrative Poetry Prize.

**R.T. Castleberry** is a widely published poet and critic. His work has appeared in *Roanoke Review*, *Sylvia*, *Blue Collar Review*, and *Last Leaves*, among others. Internationally, Castleberry's work has been published in Canada, Wales, Ireland, Scotland, New Zealand, and Antarctica. Mr. Castleberry's work has been featured in the anthologies *Travis-An Anthology of Texas Poetry*, *The Weight of Addition*, *Anthem: A Tribute to Leonard Cohen* and *You Can Hear the Ocean*.

**Ann E. Michael** lives in Pennsylvania's Lehigh Valley, slightly west of where the Lehigh River meets the Delaware. Her most recent collection of poems is *Barefoot Girls*. Her next book, *The Red Queen Hypothesis*, will be published sometime in 2021. More info at [www.annemichael.wordpress.com](http://www.annemichael.wordpress.com) or [facebook.com/ann.michael.35](https://www.facebook.com/ann.michael.35)

**Lorelei Bacht** is a European poet living in Asia with her family, which includes two young children and a lot of chaos. Her current work is pri-



marily concerned with motherhood, marriage, and aging as a woman. This year, her work has appeared, or is due to appear, in such publications as *OpenDoor Poetry Magazine*, *Litehouse*, *Global Poem*, *Visual Verse*, *Visitant*, and *Quail Bell*. She can be found on instagram: @the.cheated.wife.writes and @lorelei.bacht.writer

**Nupur Maskara** lives in Pune, India. Nupur received the Orange Flower Poetry Award in 2020. She has authored two poetry books, *Insta Gita: With Arjuna's Perspective in Poetry* and *Insta Women: Dramatic Monologues by Drama Queens*. Nupur blogs at nutatut.com. Tweet to her @nuttynupur and email her at nupur.maskara@gmail.com.

**Maggie Walcott** lives with her family in the Michigan wilderness, tucked away in a house they built themselves. Her first nonfiction piece, "An Open Vessel," was published by Mothers Always Write in 2019. Her poems "I Carry" and "Hammer and Nail" were featured in the *Dunes Review 2020 Winter Edition*.

Ethicist and online education entrepreneur **Russell Willis** emerged as a poet in 2019. Russell grew up in and around Texas, was vocationally scattered throughout the Southwest and Great Plains for many years, and is now settled in Vermont with his wife, Dawn.

**Andrew Feng** creates surreal, horror artwork and portraits through drawings, paintings, and digital art. He would describe himself as a metal head, fashion enthusiast, and a lover of black who spends his time blasting metal music while drinking boba tea. Andrew hopes to spread awareness about mental health through his horror-style art.

**Amanda Jane** (West Yorkshire, England) is a new poet who is enjoying creating poetry for others to pleasure. Later this month her work will be published on *Trouvaille Review*. She is also taking part in a community poem, which is being hosted by Baker Publishing. [www.facebook.com/groups/moresuccessfulsubmissionsbyamandajane/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/moresuccessfulsubmissionsbyamandajane/)

**Lisa Ashley** descends from Armenian Genocide survivors and has spent eight years listening to and supporting incarcerated youth. Poems can/will

be found in *The Tishman Review*, *The Journal of Undiscovered Poets*, *Dwelling Literary*, and *Amsterdam Quarterly*. She writes in her log home among the frs on Bainbridge Island, WA, having found her way there from rural New York by way of Montana and Seattle, WA.

**Isla McKetta** is the author of *Polska, 1994* (Éditions Checkpointed) and co-author of *Clear Out the Static in Your Attic: A Writer's Guide for Turning Artifacts into Art* (Write Bloody). She writes in Seattle and serves on the board of Seattle City of Literature. Find her on Twitter at @islaisreading.

**Robert Armstrong** is a writer from the Hudson Valley in Upstate New York. A former bookseller, he's been published in a local magazine, *ART-LESS & NAKED* as well as in *MOCKING HEART REVIEW*, and he's currently working on poetry chapbooks, short stories and a fantasy novel.

**Denise A. Martin** is a Language Arts and Social Studies teacher in Loudoun County, VA. Her poetry and essays can be read on TEACHA-FAR blog, at *tiny seed journal online* and in the Spring 2019 edition of *DASH Literary Journal*.

**Gary Sokolow** has a long ago MFA from Brooklyn College and currently works in finance. His work has appeared in *JMWW*, *2 Bridges Review*, *Salamander*, *Eye Flash Journal*, *Posit*, *The Shot Glass Journal*, *Nixes Mate Review*, and *Third Wednesday*

**Robert Beveridge** (he/him) makes noise (xterminal.bandcamp.com) and writes poetry in Akron, OH. Recent/upcoming appearances in *Fleas on the Dog*, *Dissections*, and *Instant Noodles*, among others.

**Courtney Weaver** is an English major in progress. She works with adults with disabilities and lives in Missouri with her dog, Eccleston, and cat, Bellatrix. She has bipolar disorder and is passionate about mental health awareness.

**Kate Maxwell** is yet another teacher with writing aspirations. She's been published and awarded in many Australian and International literary magazines. Kate's interests include film, wine, and sleeping. Her first poetry anthology will be published with Interactive Publications, Brisbane, in 2021. She can be found at <https://kateswritingplace.com/publications/>

**Ellen Mary Hayes** is a poet and visual artist embracing the transcendence of creativity. Her recent work reflects themes of sacred relationship. She has had work featured in *Easthampton City Arts*, *Meat for Tea*, and elsewhere. Ellen is based in Western Massachusetts. She can be found at [ellenmaryhayes@gmail.com](mailto:ellenmaryhayes@gmail.com), [EllenMaryHayes1](#) on Instagram.

**Steve Bowman** teaches writing and literature at IU Southeast. His work has previously appeared in *The Review*, *The Legacy*, *Amarillo Bay*, and *The Zen Space*. He is currently working to rebrand the lesser-known genre “Rust-Belt Literature” as Northern Gothic Literature.

**Cheryl Heineman** graduated in 2017 with a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from San Diego State University. She also has a master’s degree in Jungian Psychology and has published three collections of poetry: *Just Getting Started*, *something to hold onto*, and *It’s Easy to Kiss a Stranger on a Moving Train*.

**Gerard Sarnat** won San Francisco Poetry’s 2020 Contest, the Poetry in the Arts First Place Award plus the Dorfman Prize, and has been nominated for handfults of 2021 and previous Pushcarts plus Best of the Net Awards. Gerry is widely published including in *Buddhist Poetry Review*, *Gargoyle*, and *Main Street Rag*, as well as by Harvard and Columbia presses. He’s authored the collections *Homeless Chronicles* (2010), *Disputes* (2012), *17s* (2014), *Melting the Ice King* (2016). Gerry is a physician who’s built and staffed clinics for the marginalized as well as a Stanford professor and healthcare CEO. Currently he is devoting energy/resources to deal with climate justice, and serves on Climate Action Now’s board. Gerry’s been married since 1969 with three kids plus six grandsons, and is looking forward to future granddaughters.

**Sam Houty**. I’m a poet with a MFA in creative writing from Kingston University, London. I have completed three poetry chapbooks. My poetry has been featured in *Synkronicitati magazine*, *Big A little a anthology* and *The Start literary journal*. I was the winner of The Writers Hub poetry competition.

**Robert Pegel** is a father and husband whose only child, his son Calvin, died four years ago. Calvin was 16 and died in his sleep of unknown causes. Robert writes poetry to process his pain and loss. He hopes he may show others suffering from loss how putting things into words may help in coping

with the unimaginable. Robert graduated from Columbia University where he majored in English. He has only begun submitting his work recently and has been published in *Down in the Dirt* and *The Unique Poetry Journal*.

**Christina A. Kemp** is a writer, dancer, and psychology professor. Her recent work “Adirondack Chairs” was published in the anthology *True Stories, Volume III: The Narrative Project* and her coming memoir *Currents*, is in its final revisions. She lives on Bainbridge Island, Washington.

**Peter J. King** (b. Boston, Lincolnshire) was active on the London poetry scene in the 1970s, returning to poetry in 2013. His work has been widely published in magazines and anthologies. His available collections are *Adding Colours to the Chameleon* (Wisdom’s Bottom Press) and *All What Larkin* (Albion Beatnik Press).

**Beulah Vega** is a writer, poet, and theatrical artist living and working in California’s Bay Area. Her poetry has been published in *The Literary Nest*, *Sage Cigarettes*, *Resist! With Every Inch and Breath*, and *Blood & Bourbon* among others. She specializes in work that gives voice to those traditionally marginalized in literary and performing arts. And occasionally she writes a book of love poems such as her forthcoming book by Fae Corps Publishing, *A Saga for the Unrequited*. She is still amazed when people refer to her as a writer, every time. To follow her lunacy (artistic and otherwise) find her on Facebook @BFVegaauthor and Instagram/Twitter @Byronwhoknew



