

# *Thimble Literary Magazine*

*Volume 7 · Number 2 · Fall 2024*

PROUD MEMBER



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*Thimble Literary Magazine*

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*Thimble Literary Magazine* is based on the belief that poetry is like armor. Like a thimble, it may be small and seem insignificant, but it will protect us when we are most vulnerable.

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Brief Guidelines for Submission

We are not looking for anything in particular in terms of form or style, but that it speaks to the reader or writer in some way. When selecting your poems or prose, please ask yourself, did this poem help me create shelter? Simultaneous submissions are accepted, but please notify us if the work is accepted elsewhere. All material must be original and cannot have appeared in another publication, including social media.

*Poetry*: Please send us two to four of your poems.

*Short Stories*: Please send a single work of around 1,200 words. It can be fiction, creative non-fiction, or somewhere in between.

*Art*: Please send us three to five examples of your art, which can include photographs and photographs of three-dimensional pieces.

All work goes to [ThimbleLitMagSubmissions@gmail.com](mailto:ThimbleLitMagSubmissions@gmail.com) with the genre in the subject line.

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## *Editor's Note*

by Agnes Vojta

---

Dear Readers,

I am one of the associate editors and delighted to get to write the letter for this issue. Greetings from Missouri!

Summer here is hot, humid, and green. So green. The woods are a jungle. Vines obscure the bluffs. The trails are swallowed by vegetation; all kinds of plants cover the forest floor. What appears like a uniform green mass reveals astonishing details once you bend down to look closely. Leaves shaped like hearts, hands, feathers, arrows. Simple and compound. Serrated, wavy, smooth margins. Even if you're not into plants, you better learn to recognize poison ivy.

The spring-fed rivers are cool and clear. You can see all the way to the bottom where colorful rocks form a mosaic, ephemeral artwork created and changed by the currents. On the gravel bars, you can find fossils of shells, prints made millions of years ago.

One of the poems in this issue is titled *Accidental Poetry*, by Laura Buxbaum. Art and poetry are all around us, waiting to be discovered: in the words of a young child or those of a dying man. In the memory of a red velvet coat or a pair of pointe shoes. In a hospital room or on a deserted beach. The poems in this issue show: we just need to listen and look.

It's always the details. You start thinking about the small, concrete thing, and then let your thoughts expand outwards. A mosaic is formed from small colored shards. A life is made from minutes, hours, and days.

For me, writing poetry has changed the way I see. I have learned to pay attention. To notice details. When I do it, I feel more awake. More connected. Paying attention can act as a powerful antidote to grief, sadness, and despair.

Paying attention connects us with the world and each other. Paying attention creates shelter. May you notice the thimble-sized details around you and discover accidental poetry. Thank you for being here.

Best,

Agnes Vojta

# *My Pointe Shoes and Journal Shared a Box Under My Bed*

by Stefanie Leigh

---

When I was twelve years old, I didn't know that on my last day as a professional ballerina, I would be wearing a stupid, oversized black satin ribbon on top of my head. A heavy, circus dress pulling at my waist, my hips. The night before, I had a tutu. I was the second girl dripping down a hazy ramp, snaking slowly through dry ice. Thirty-nine times—

arabesque, plie, fingers long, reach, reach, reach—  
shoulders down, breathe, gulp back the flood puddling  
at my neck. I pressed my weight into the stage to steady  
my cells. The cells that knew the contours of the other dancers'  
relevés. On stage, we bourréed, inhaled—slowly, sensually,  
painfully—moved in unison until our cue to exit.

They lingered in the wings as I emptied my theatre case,  
legwarmers, my last tendus. I imagined the next girl receiving it  
before her first tour, stuffing it full of her own  
hope. Before I darkened my spot at the mirror, I let  
a few dancers who knew the curve of my calves, every pound—  
over, under—pick through the rest of my things. I kept





*The White Light of Universal Upload,  
Etc., Etc.,*

by Jason Ryberg

---

I think, before I die, I'd like to live in a lighthouse,  
for a while, or maybe a succession of lighthouses  
(if I plan this thing out just right), right up to that point,  
I guess, where they carry me out in a bag, hopefully  
not too long after a final glass of something  
ridiculously expensive and some final moment  
of clarity where the soul and  
the synapses are, at last, fused together  
with the white light of universal up-  
load, etc., etc., But please, no bleak burial at  
sea for me, thank you, but instead,  
maybe the seed of  
a Pear or  
Cherry  
tree  
sewn  
up  
in  
my rib  
cage and an  
old burlap sack for  
a shroud, then bury me in a  
shallow grave on a lonely, wind-swept hill somewhere or  
right next to a winding creek, and let the seasons  
do their thing (if the coyotes don't, first).

# *Mother-Me*

by Jessica Purdy

---

“Strip yourself of everything you think you are”  
–Diane Seuss (The Strategic Poet)

–after “still in a state of uncreation” by Camille Dungy

Only visitor. Only victim. Vicious stone.  
Only vibration. Tuning fork. Only breastbone  
hipbone. Only character. Only divide. Conquer.  
Only conqueror. Conjurer. Only crone. Only  
mentor. Post-menses hormone. Only meandering.  
Maroon. Mauve. Only money.  
Only whore. Only moan. Only mother.  
Only other. Only offering. Awful only.  
Full of awe. Some part of only. Lonely.  
Some spark. Saved light. Only you.  
Own it. Only words. Other worlds.  
Wound up. Wind down. Only everything.  
Only displaced vase water.

# *Changing the daisies*

by Emilie Lygren

---

*Cut a daisy, then place it in water and food coloring to produce flowers of a shade similar to the dye. –Instructions for Dyeing Flower Petals, Perennial Summer Daisy Seed Packet*

I put nine pale daisies  
in a clear glass vase,  
add a few drops of blue  
dye to the water.  
Hours later,  
green stemmed daisies with pale blue petals  
sit in afternoon light on the windowsill.  
The breeze sighs:

*Don't we all take up and hold  
what is in the water?*

I cannot live in the world  
without saying that  
how we speak to one  
another matters.

I cannot live in the world  
without asking for more  
champions of kindness.

I cannot live in the world  
and pretend it is  
perennial summer—  
that everything is fixed while  
so many are floodstained by fear, are  
clipped by the hot blade of rage.



*Aperture I* by Chiara Di Lello



# Accidental Poetry

by Laura Buxbaum

---

Jesse said the source of thunder  
is the oyster in the clouds.  
He told us, the baby sheep  
we ate for dinner died  
standing in its field & it knew it was its time.  
Once he was a puppy who had fallen from the sky.  
He was looking for a new home. The people  
he had lived with before would feed him only  
candy & eggs.

My mind speaks in prose.  
Memos, grant proposals, what's for dinner.  
I am not free. Though freer than most.

Today the gray April rain holds me fast—  
not loose, my mind tight as a board clamped  
and waiting for the glue to dry.

When my father was dying, his brain invaded  
by a growth the size of an egg (but not smooth—  
rather, lumpy and tentacled, reaching for his mind's  
far regions), he told us: *the air today is generous.*  
*If I had a balloon I would not be afraid.*  
*I'd like to swim out and have a beer.*

# *Rotaried Darkness*

by Loralee Clark

---

I risk the kitchen cabinets flying open, china cracking to the floor,  
shards ready to spill my blood's swiftness.  
I risk electrical fires with frayed cords  
and when the disposal switch is mistaken for the light switch, I stay.  
I risk that my heart might lie, hidden in the rotaried darkness.

I peel my life away: a potato skinned,  
shavings on the countertop.  
I dream I wear my hair long,  
always laughing; a picture to hang on the wall  
with legs that open wide.

Others stain themselves with my smoke  
and minutes of my hours. They think  
I have met destiny and declared him sinewy,  
raw with charisma to spare.

But when I wake, there is still this wrestling.



# *Wildfire*

by Rachel White

---

After three weeks of suffocation, we raked  
the lawn clean of debris; with hoses we flooded  
gutters stuffed with rags; after  
the twentieth time fire trucks filled up  
at our main, the fireball rainbowed  
like a mid-afternoon sunset; we gathered  
in the village hall, the brigade's trucks  
surrounded us; after sparks stopped flying  
over our backyard trees, the trees  
from Balmoral to Buxton stood charred; after  
we drove through the sunless apocalypse, walked  
the fire's wake in that shut out light,  
the terrain now monochrome, the razed home  
still smoking, I could not photograph.

# *Tocolytic Haze*

by Lara Dolphin

---

Contractions comin'  
But it's not time  
Gotta slow things down  
Gotta hang fire

Help me  
Oh, no, not yet  
Tell the child to wait  
Breathe and be still

Tiri-Tiri Tiri-Tiri Ta Ta  
Ta Ta Ti-Ti Ta  
Ta Ta Ta Ta  
Too Too

Feel what's expected  
Delay delivery  
Hold up the beat  
Back-phrase for your life

Please help me  
Tocolytic haze  
No, no, no  
Oh, oh, no  
Stop the momentum  
Relax the smooth muscle  
Of the myometrium

Need to improvise  
What a  
What a wonderful  
What a wonderful world

*Le temps [Time]* by Marta Nijhuis, photo by Ilaria Triolo



# *The Disinfectant Girl*

by Sean Whalen

---

In the courtyard the first white apple petals float up and out of sight,  
stolen by the breeze. From his bed he observes these small ecologies.

Though they long for each other the petals miss the earth.  
There is a black growth in the damp corner of the window.

He watches an ant carry away a crumb from his tray.  
No more come. He waits

under his blankets as the girl wheels in her sterile cart.  
As she works he asks her again about southern California,

the same way he asks others about Montana or the Louvre.  
She tells him how warm it is there, bluer, the flowers bleed color,

how she feels light and whole lying naked in the sand.  
She tells him the cold bothers her the way it bothers mold: she grows  
but slowly.

The infusion of bleach makes him sneeze – explosions like gunfire  
in old war movies. While she cleans he floats Kleenex into the basket.

“The sun is bright,” he says. “I see the wind is from the south. Is it warmer  
today?”

“Not enough,” she replies, sponge dripping, wiping tile.

# *Mimosa Pudica*

by Shaun R. Pankoski

---

We call it shy grass, he said, as I pointed  
to the dark, creeping foliage, the pert pink flowers  
looking like miniature firework displays.

Then he bent down, looked up at me,  
and ran his forefinger gently along one of the veins.  
The double compound leaflets folded—

like synchronized swimmers,  
like tiny hands in prayer,  
like a Venus flytrap.

I had just moved here. Everything was new  
and amazing. Including him. I felt myself shiver  
as I watched him touch vein after vein.

Now, I pull these from my yard with a vengeance.  
I wear thick gloves with rubber fingertips  
and padded palms. Far from shy, sleepy

or shamed, their taproot is strong and robust.  
Now I know they fold to expose themselves,  
to reveal a million tiny barbs, easily drawing blood.

# *We tore out the garden*

by Alison Amato

---

Stone by stone, we dismantled the wall,  
tossing each piece of bluestone  
into a wheelbarrow—our heaviest love notes.  
We hacked away the shrubs,  
our hands holding tight to what was left,  
heaving and cursing until the roots came up  
clinging dirt, dangling like a placenta,  
leaving a pair of island universes,  
shallow and wide.

And I never meant for this to be about me,  
but that is how I am—a cedar waxwing  
crashing into a window, saliva  
and wisps of snow-gray feathers  
slopped across the glass. A wrecked body  
lying stunned in the walkway, legs drawn in.

What a spectacle we make  
pounding dirt from the roots,  
groaning like two priests in confession,  
limping along with pebbles in our shoes.  
We work until the garden is a crèche  
writhing with worms and grubs.  
Until the amber light beams  
from our faces, and we shimmer  
with mica and reconciliation.

*Le temps [Time]* by Marta Nijhuis, photograph by Ilaria Triolo



# *Love Sponge*

by Kimberly Ann Priest

---

Cockatoos are affectionately known in the world of parrot pet owners as *love sponges*. With a cutthroat squawk, these needy birds will happily soak up their owner's attention 24/7 if possible.

My husband and I started our family with a pair of cockatoos and built them a cage, fitting it into a three-sided space in our home's guest bedroom, originally meant to function as a desk. We stretched a wired panel, inserted climbing rods at even intervals, and strung these rods with toys for the two birds to jingle and twist.

The cockatoos were gifted away, and the cage dismantled a few months later due to my newly discovered allergy to these birds. Less than two years later, my son was born, and I was thankful the birds were gone since, altogether, the birds and my son would have conjured up a monstrous vocal competition. All these tiny bodies full of lung.

Now I only had one love sponge to deal with. He woke me at 2, 4, and 6 AM, and often in between, to suck the living life out of me. It took us a couple weeks to realize I wasn't making enough milk as he lost weight too quickly and began to cry through the night, inconsolable until my husband rode into town for a jar of powdered infant formula. He rocked our son to sleep that night after the love sponge consumed four ounces, the last few drops lingering in the corners of his downturned mouth.



My husband let me sleep and rest my sore gummed breasts. And he didn't wake me the next morning. He didn't go to work. He spent all day feeding and rocking, listening to our son's soundless coos.

I caught them in their act of worship around 4PM, after my husband had already vacuumed the living room, cleaned the kitchen, washed two loads of laundry, and watched a half dozen re-runs on TV Land. Still tired, I crumbled onto our yellow couch and drifted into an episode of *Bewitched* as everything went blurry again.

I loved that couch. It had a low back that ended before the seat cushion did, trailing off an extra foot, somewhat like the body of a chaise. It also had a large, slanted arm that could double as a headrest when lying down, and tapered wood legs with brass tips. My husband christened it about a year into our marriage, his drunken body hanging over the side vomiting into a bucket mumbling *I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry*. He'd been gone half the night leaving me to worry, waking the next afternoon with a hangover on our couch.

I woke with a backache from sitting on my knees—seven months pregnant—making sure his tortured soul didn't get bile on the carpet. I knew less what to do with fact #1 *He is drunk out of his mind*, a little what to do with fact #2 *He was sorry*, and more what to do with fact #3 *I'm pregnant*.

I did what I imagine most young, impoverished women do at times like this: hope for the best because there are no other options. This wouldn't be the last time he went missing while I cycled between waking, watching TV, cooking, cleaning, and sleeping. In the spring of the new millennia, my newborn son would take the whole of my attention. Those days, I was all future planning, fitting bars to various cupboards and hallways; dressing windows, mattresses, cushions, and floors; stringing stuffed animals and rattles and monitors and my mom's homemade needlepoint opus all over the place. Always calculating risk, possibilities, and consequences to keep my offspring healthy and safe.

One day, before we got rid of the cockatoos, my husband had come home with a small whicker enclosure for their cage, explaining to me that the female was actively stock piling filament to create a nest, so he bought her one. But he didn't plan to let her hatch the babies, he explained. He would steal her eggs and destroy them, he said.

Nevertheless, he added—with soft practicality—*she needs to do this. She needs to nest. And she did.*

*La natura non ha fretta (eppure tutto si realizza) [Nature is in no rush (and yet everything gets done)], by Marta Nijhuis*



# *Screw*

by Shari Lawrence Pfleeger

---

Crisp cotton behind me,  
warm wooliness above,  
our legs braided: a German love spoon.

Our single piece twists to  
touch, caress and curve, to  
disappear the spaces between us.

Next we're castanets, concave shells joined,  
palms full, fingers bent, percussive rotation,  
moving rapidly in frenzied desire.

No tablature nor clef,  
just energetic vibrato:  
making sheet music.

# *Aesthesia*

by Alicia Wright

---

Long years after we'd wandered finally apart  
and you'd cut your hair and sold your truck,  
and we spoke only long enough to share stories  
of hiking trails rimmed in ragged weeds  
like small hellos from another life,

I landed outside your hometown. It was my first time,  
but I knew the washed-out Welcome sign,  
the airbrushed food truck selling knockoff Dole Whip  
from the pharmacy parking lot;

if I forced the realtor's ad from the lawn  
the house was as you'd drawn it: vinyl siding gone  
sun-bleached, kitchen shutter off-kilter,  
fence panel broken and blocked closed by bricks  
from the burned-out bakery a mile away.

I could picture you there, gangly preteen,  
elbows crossed over handlebars and waiting  
for a break in traffic, overloaded backpack  
heavy between your shoulders.

I'd missed the turning as we passed it—  
the last conversation before we stopped seeing.  
Here was an ache: hazed in memories you'd fed me  
in the corners of dark kitchens, never gone, not entirely,  
but stoked back to life without warning, a probing thumb  
poked roughly into an overripe tomato.

*La natura non ha fretta (eppure tutto si realizza) [Nature is in no rush  
(and yet everything gets done)]* by Marta Nijhuis



# *Velvet*

by Joanne Clarkson

---

The earliest pleasure I remember  
is velvet. My grandmother  
sewed a little red coat for me.  
Softness unlike plush or cotton  
or even the robe my morning  
mother wore.

I was too young to know age  
has a number or that the coat  
was something I could outgrow.

Since, I have stroked the fur of a puppy's  
ear. Smoothed warm, fine  
beach sand. Thumbed  
a polished stone. I have cupped

the burn of snow and run my open hand  
through the sundown wind  
but have never quite found the same  
harmony of nerve endings.  
I came closest with a lover's skin.

And have learned that if you stroke the nap  
of woven silk backwards  
it ruins everything.

Fingertips erode with age, touch  
roughened into a crude braille.  
I find feelings now mostly in a word:  
the name of the fabric  
of a little red coat.

*Incessant Spring Rain* by Mary Senter



# *Worn*

by Elizabeth Galoozis

---

When we buried you,  
I didn't know Jews don't do  
clothing after death,

or display bodies  
without breath. You were buried  
without your glasses.

Without shoes. Those clothes  
are for the living, to guard  
us from exposure.

//

We weren't dressed for rain;  
it slashed us through the sides of  
the over-grave tent,

the darkness bleeding  
from our bodies to the dirt  
upended for you.

//



You liked to dress up.  
Popped tux collars suited you—  
slicked hair, breath-shined shoes.

Your ties and cufflinks  
now repose—disembodied,  
still—in my closet.

I'm still holding on,  
too, to your college sweatshirt,  
older than I am

but still hanging on  
by its own threads. I'll wear it  
right into the ground.

*Love Me Some Pizza* by Mary Senter



# *Loss*

by Natalie Marino

---

The morning we left for Catalina  
the clouds were gray  
with doubt.

I stared at the surface of the sea  
and faded  
into nausea

until relief came  
when I coughed  
to make myself throw up.

When we arrived  
at the shore the sky turned blue  
with possibility.

I watched our children play  
in wet sand  
next to bricks

laid by laborers early  
in the last century  
while my husband held my hand.

When our children begged us  
to let them try parasailing

we did, despite being afraid  
they might look like little Icaruses.

We let ourselves see their laughing faces  
turn into tiny bright stars.

*When The Spring Sun Shines* by Mary Senter



# *Ode to My Brand-Name Birth Control*

by Hattie Jean Hayes

---

*Lo Loestrin FE norethindrone acetate and ethinyl estradiol tablets,  
1mg/10 mcg*

oh  
how blessed I am to know your safe embrace,  
my days arranged in order so my blood  
is forced to follow. you, manufactured  
curves. you, immaculate interception  
beneath my thumb, small tokens of freedom  
shining blue, a leading man's interested  
eye. you, more precious than the lovers we  
forget together. for you, I forsake  
all others. I accept no substitutes,  
the witch they turn me into and the welts  
across my stubborn youth. it had to be  
you and I will be loyal as long as  
I can afford to. I cannot afford  
to take my friends' advice, or the doctors  
they echo, a three-letter entreaty,  
*IUD?* well-meaning, misplaced refrain.  
I will remain yours: you alone bring me  
into my body, soothe the savage breast,  
the swell of my age and my anger. how  
could I have loved without you? to ease my

insides, the shift-click-drop of a cycle  
restarting, the cut of the month. my own  
ocean, all ebb, no flow. a mirror held  
against the distant moon, incapable  
of renewal without your guidance, the  
blistered, borrowed light. oh, my darling, eight  
o'clock, tonight, and every night, until  
we outlive all we were created for.

*Echoes of Elders I* by Adeola Davies-Aiyeloja



# *Unless*

by Grant McGilliard

---

A home is not a home unless it was someone else's home first, your mother's and her sisters' and her parents' home, built from a log cabin kit in the mid-1970s.

A home is not a home unless it's in the middle of nowhere in Texas, up 20 miles from the Gulf Coast, where at night you can see the blinking lights of a nuclear plant's reactor domes next to the blinking lights of windmills stretching for miles and miles of farmland. A home is not a home unless those lights sit on the horizon under the Milky Way – because a home doesn't have light pollution, it has clear open skies – and over the heads of the sleeping cows in the pasture.

A home is not a home unless it has bedrooms that have earned names over the years –the Computer Room (now the Bar), the Sunflower Room, the Pink Room (full of creepy dolls), Underella's Room (because a home is not a home unless it is haunted by Underella, a ghost of unknown origin which several cousins will convince you is ready to interrupt your dreams).

A home is not a home unless it has pictures of all the grandkids and great-grandkids and various long-dead relatives lining the walls of a hallway thinner than a bowling lane. A home is not a home unless that hallway now features a hole in the wall of unknown origin after your cousin's husband's bachelor party.

A home is not a home unless the décor is pretty wild all the way around, come to think of it – a jackalope and a deer head and a stuffed bobcat all displayed prominently in the den. A home is not a home unless the stuffed bobcat has a story that involves your grandfather accidentally hitting it with his car.

A home is not a home unless you spend Christmas and Easter and Thanksgiving and pretty much every other Sunday in its walls and on its lawn for the first 17 years of your life. A home is not a home unless you've laid claim to a "spot" for opening Christmas presents, and that spot is on the floor up against the stone wall of the woodburning fireplace, directly the den from your grandfather's old barber chair that your uncle's claimed for his own spot.

A home is not a home unless you can still picture it covered in snow – "eight inches! We got eight inches!" – during the freak storm on Christmas Eve in 2004. A home is not a home unless you've seen the confused look on the faces of the cows who have known nothing but humid Texas heat and are now staring at a six-foot-tall snowman.

A home is not a home unless it's surrounded by dewberries – which are definitely *not* blackberries, as anyone from Matagorda County will tell you, and which thrive on the barbed-wire fences dividing up the ranch. A home is not a home until you've tasted Nanny's dewberry cobbler with vanilla ice cream and wondered if this was what heaven was like, which it might be.

A home is not a home unless you and your cousins commandeer the kitchen island every Christmas/Easter/Thanksgiving, with you sandwiched between the two older boys, looking up to them (physically and metaphorically), trying to eat more dinner rolls than them, trying to impress them.

A home is not a home unless you and your parents and your sister moved in with your grandparents there for four months when you were in middle school. A home is not a home until you've slept in 80-degree inside temperatures because your grandfather had lung

cancer and was constantly cold. A home is not a home unless you've completely slept through an ambulance coming in the middle of the night because your grandmother was worried that your grandfather was dying, even though the sirens were blaring all up the driveway (and Papa would live for a couple more years after that).

A home is not a home until you have your high school graduation party there and your mom and dad put together a video for it and you have to sit in silent embarrassment while "You'll Be In My Heart" from the Tarzan soundtrack plays over pictures of your childhood, even though you've never actually seen Tarzan all the way through and have no emotional connection to the movie or to Phil Collins. A home is not a home unless more than a decade later you realize that wasn't the point.

A home is not a home unless it's played host to "The Mother's Day Incident" a decade ago, after which your mom's oldest sister and her brood stopped coming around to holidays. A home is not a home unless all the men in the family walked outside during The Mother's Day Incident and stood around a truck and talked about their own trucks. A home is not a home unless that's the best the men in the family ever all got along.

A home is not a home unless the pictures in the bowling-lane-thin hallway change after the house is bought by your aunt and uncle after your grandmother finally moved "into town" and your aunt and uncle take down most of the pictures of you and your sister and replace them with more of your cousins, and yet it still feels like your own place.

A home is not a home unless some relative of your cousin's wife gives your aunt and uncle a bizarre bearskin with bright crimson stitching that now hangs over a wood beam in the den and looks out of place even next to the jackalope and the deer head and the bobcat.

A home is not a home unless it's where you went when your grandmother died, driving down through tears and rushing into the arms of your mother. A home is not a home unless the family gathers there



on that day despite it being March 2020 and nobody knows if we're allowed to hug because of this COVID thing on the news and nobody really cares either, because Nanny was dead.

A home is not a home unless you've defiled it, unless you took your dog out there for a "restful weekend" and drank so much you passed out on the lawn sitting against a tree looking at a star fixed in the sky. A home is not a home unless you snuck into the Bar (né Computer Room) multiple times every holiday past the age of 21 so you could drink more than anyone else. A home is not a home unless your cousin's husband had too much to drink at Thanksgiving and argued vociferously about guitar solos and then passed out on the couch and you were glad because that meant nobody was worried about how much you were drinking.

A home is not a home unless it's seen the worst of you and still welcomes you through its gate and past the cows and up the driveway. A home is not a home unless you're truly nervous to take the girl you love there because you want her to love it just as much as you do, but she's from a big city up north so you're afraid she won't like it.

A home is not a home unless you leave loving her even more because she was so excited to take pictures with the cows.

*Echos of Elders II* by Adeola Davies-Aiyeloja



# *Spaghetti*

by Taylor Sharp

---

My mother gives love like she makes spaghetti;  
she never can tell when it's too much  
until it's already on the table.

When my mother cooks, she waits  
and won't take a bite until you have.  
She watches with eyes wide, almost fearfully,  
waiting for a rejection of what she toiled over.

A mouthful, a smile, and her sigh of relief  
before she loads her fork.

The thing is, no matter how delicious the mouthful,  
how genuine the smile,  
there will always be pasta left for her to put away.  
She'll save it for later,  
hurt that any went uneaten.

It's not her fault,  
she just made too much.

# *On My Birthday*

by Margaret Carter

---

I drive to a beach with windblown sand,  
flat and white like an ice rink next to waves  
webbed with brown foam that clings to the land  
and quivers as I walk, face to the sun,  
my bare ankles red and stinging  
when I see a dead buck, soft and limp  
against the broken cliffs, and a man  
with a black pocketknife gripping  
the animal by its front legs, ripping  
into flesh like cutting carpet,  
and holding the antlers up to his partner  
as if they were a bouquet of flowers  
pulled from the earth with clods of dirt  
dangling from its roots. I stand  
for a moment, inhale the icy air  
before returning to the car. Stepping over  
ropes of seaweed I see what I think  
cannot be but surely is a second dead buck,  
solid and stiff, face slanted toward  
the water as if it collapsed endeavoring  
to reach it. I try to match its gaze,  
to make meaning or merely make note  
of another passing year, its small cruelties,  
the coastline crumbling beneath my feet.

# Degrees of Separation

by Luke Eldredge

---

My tongue  
fishes out the Body of Christ  
from my upper molar. It has lodged there,  
nestling in bone—a ewe in the cradle  
of a snowy bowl.

I'm told, *Everything dies that it may become something else.*

Food breaks down starting with my hands  
which tear  
and then the mouth—  
blooming wet, craving the de-structuring of some  
body, and then the secret

reconstruction the gut exacts on its food.

I know that I eat and what I eat is made my flesh:  
-at first, milk  
-then soft, overripe bananas  
-and now, everything

I can get my hands on.

This wafer, why not an actual body  
if it will become my body.

“The Word became wafer”  
so much less invasive a miracle.

*Echoes of Elders III* by Adeola Davies-Aiyeloja



# *Iago*

by Dave Malone

---

I played Iago once.  
This was after college.  
I already had a career,

but after opening night,  
a crowd of Louisvillians  
flocked me and asked

where I'd trained.  
I told them it was  
a tired cliché—

I had worked my way  
through school  
via the night shift

at a semi-trailer factory,  
stringing lights down the naked  
steel frames of truck beds.

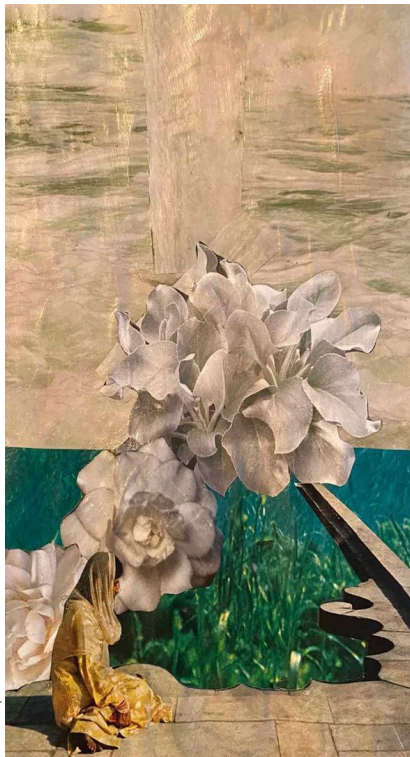
With a standup screw gun,  
I attached wood panels  
to flooring. With steel shards

lodged in blue jeans and boots,  
each night I ate 3 am lunch  
with men who questioned

my sexual orientation. I recall  
it was on a moonlit night  
on the dock when they last asked,

and I had to tell them—  
I wasn't gay *yet*,  
but I'd let them know

when I started to long for them,  
as long as they kept their hardhats on  
the whole time.



*Mourning*

by Michael Singh

# *The Refugee Camp*

by Joanne Monte

---

Shipping crates for houses, some stamped  
Fragile. Handle with Care.

Others tattooed with numbers,  
a red arrow pointing to a gap in the roof.

At night, starlight for lamps,  
sprinkled like salt over the plain.

There, a mother cooks in the moment,  
wishing for chimneys, a sky full of smoke,

a pan to fry fish—her kitchen is now  
only a gaping pit in the ground.

She mixes honeysuckle and water in tin cups  
for her children to drink at the table

of prayers; gives her daughter a tube  
of red lipstick so she can taste

its cherry sweetness; then dresses them all  
in bird feathers and beads at bedtime.



Ingenuity, they say, is not obsolete  
in wartime. There are labels attached

to the most obvious—a crate is a crate,  
bird feathers are bird feathers—

until removed—surrendering  
to what becomes an uncompromising condition.



*Faces* by C.L. Von Staden

## *A May Morning*

by Dannye Romine Powell

---

We're digging out rocks—my three-year-old son and I—  
from the bed by the house where we'll plant impatiens.  
We toss the rocks into a wheelbarrow, his hands  
still plump and smooth, and together we rumble it deep  
into the woods behind our house. Now we roll it back  
empty, spirits high, sun warming our bare legs.  
In years to come, other scenes will play out—his troubles,  
mine—and for a time, a grey silence will settle  
like a cloud between us. But today, we're a team.  
Back to our digging, he crouches so near I inhale the scent  
of fresh sweat that glistens like mica at his temples.

## *In August*

by Theresa Senato Edwards

---

My sister begins her movement like a mother giving birth from her mouth:  
first long, beautiful breaths that open slowly and recede in fear.

Then the slurp of water. The straw, her plastic cord of sustenance because  
her mouth refuses the bulk she needs but cannot open for. After days,

the dropper of water. She cannot suck anymore. Cannot speak but hopes  
that death is time travel or birth into God's language: when the eyelids

waver as the chest rises then lowers quicker louder / quicker louder /  
quicker louder each time. We know this is transition. We are not

ready. Her mouth, once so boldly talkative, closes then opens in waves.  
She must find us in those sprays of memory fading. Windows opened all

around, so her soul can safely slip. And we watch, give her tiny pills  
amid an oddly frigid air. See her labor hard to leave or stay; we're not

sure, not certain if she already knows the future of her son and wife,  
the timid grandchild who will stare often into the blank morning air.

Her chest swells faster; her mouth finds the sound of an old tin  
noise maker hammering / hammering into the cold August night.

*Sparked by an online writing workshop given by Poet Aurora Masum-Javed*

# *Autobiography in Black and White*

by Laurel Benjamin

---

*after Omotara James*

You live in Richmond, California, known  
for warships and the Pullman yard, and  
the *triangle* where cars with boys  
grown kill other boys. You house is  
small enough for four of you, middle  
of the block. Your father tore down  
the gate he built attached to the fence  
so you can see anyone hiding and  
you have a dark-skinned friend who wears  
unruled hair in pigtails, light purple  
stretch shirt tucked into stretch pants,  
and you play games, and you are narrow  
and light colored with braces and nighttime  
head-gear. There are other girls. Across  
the street you discover a friend's room,  
but the front door slams and a voice,  
her father's voice, and her brother,  
sounds like wind suffocating, like  
metal skates, metal teeth. You ride the school bus  
up the hill because the nearer playground,  
you're thrown, bits of flattop embed your  
forehead, and on the bus you're the only

white girl, see-through book bag,  
pencils clattering like locusts dry-winged.  
When you speak you're a black and white tv  
headlining birth rate and cures and I Love Lucy,  
and when you speak you've already lived half  
your life and you don't speak  
just think so, flocked and bartered  
in the words of the boy sitting behind you  
saying what he said long forgotten. In the schoolyard you  
sit with other quiet white girls, and at the end  
of recess a black girl tells you to stay,  
throws the ball *Get it*, and you run and late  
to class the teacher makes you make sense,  
last chair in back. At home, a black friend  
holds dolls in the room she shares with her sister,  
nappy hair, round lace collars  
and we hold them she holds hers  
you don't hold yours, on the patio where white  
metal leaves have wrought the wrong,  
color shouldn't they be green. When your aunt  
teaches you to crochet with multi-color yarn—  
orange, pink, yellow—no black or white,  
and you yarn a hat, a scarf constructs shapes  
for how to live, how you'll keep running  
after the ball like the sun around the earth,  
so much forgotten in feathers attached to you,  
stick-pins holes hidden you hide, hair pony-tailed  
who you are decided by school districts  
and parents, and other kids who keep  
you in a neat and quiet purse  
more no more.

# *The Fourth Dimension*

by David Dodd Lee

---

for Bas Jan Ader

He tumbled from a roof into shrubs (intentionally!) another  
Time he rode his bike off a ledge into a canal and filmed it  
The postcard shows the artist weeping I offered a tribute:  
Just staying in the present kayaking over the backs  
Of soft-shelled turtles until Mary Jo stopped over for lunch  
Seagulls still littering the bay Ader's small yacht capsized  
Two months into his journey I filled two thermoses  
With coconut water a spinning clock like a low-floating  
Cormorant disappearing under the sea surface  
We happened upon a sturgeon swimming like a bomb  
Seeking earth *In Search of the Miraculous* Mary Jo'd started  
A large watercolor pine needles with yellow and blue flowers  
*There are no demarcations between thinking and dreaming*  
She said *it's a miles-long flat surface with feelings*

# *What I Fear to Discover*

by Anna N. Jennings

---

There's a hint of white softness in my father's beard—  
in the blown-up digital photo of an otherwise blue sky.  
An in-the-moment smile not reflecting all the sun  
might have told us. A mind slipping

across the cornfield's horizon.

Those rows—neatly plowed, seeded and grown  
like his ledger books, meticulous.  
Entries penned in a cluttered office—receipts saved  
in case he distrusts. Everything neat and orderly and

simultaneously out of order.

My father scrubbed dirt from his hands with Lava Soap.  
As a child I remember how he would reach into his pocket  
for a knife, pry traces of the day from underneath  
his fingernails

—an effort to remove tragedy.

His own childhood he would later relive in search of clarity.  
Today I look at a Sunbelt Expo photo taken years ago  
and notice the fade of Daddy's denim jacket. His mind, also.  
What else is hidden

inside of me?

# *Bedside Manner*

by Jennifer Campbell

---

Add to the list of things  
I never need to see again:

The lifeguard dragging  
the CPR dummy face first  
along the concrete deck

A rabid crowd cheering  
as the young soccer player's collarbone  
snaps on a bad play

The white interior of a slashed kneecap  
towel after towel cherry red  
on the way to the hospital

The encroaching bulb of a sty  
assigning the eye a bully's squint

How you borrowed baggy tees  
and skirts to cover the tumors  
that popped up under your skin  
like moles in need of whacking  
in that carnival game

I'll just take the ankle's impossible fold  
and a leg buckling on the curb  
wind drawn out of me in relief



# *Evolution*

by Dan Schall

---

Before eye and ear, whatever lump of blind muscle washed itself out of the ocean ached for plain survival. Nothing flashy. I think of this as I water the family garden, soil drinking up everything I offer it, then begging again. Days of merciless sun raisining all the flowers, petals curling inward, squeezing themselves to keep cool until they shrivel. By noon the birds quit their singing, except for one inexhaustible wren. Everything waiting for rain in a piss-poor mood. Walking home yesterday, I crossed a wasp's path, waved it gently from my face. His steampunk body hissed at the joints as he wound skyward, then plunged his needle in me—once, on the wrist—as if to say: *Don't you recognize your own father?* Then the marble of red and white, a bullseye blossoming from my skin. Never in my life had I been stung before, and I'm at the age now where the only new things that happen are deaths. But the pressure is dropping, goldfinches and blue jays and cardinals are painting the trees, rust black clouds sound themselves with peals like the sky is bumping over steel plates on some far-off freeway, and in the first gasp of lightning I swear I hear the tin spark, the humming from your forgotten lungs.

# *We Use Acetone to Clean Beakers As if We Still Prize Purity*

by Elizabeth Coletti

---

Each woman in chemistry lab for the first time  
unscrews the bottle of acetone and smells  
the shame of home, the crisp shriveling shock back  
to nail polish remover on hardwood furniture,  
cotton balls and girlhood and pretty we won't  
want to let last. Washing beakers, I am in my best  
friend's bed as she paints. I am in a Catholic church,  
matching plaid uniforms, the priest cleaning  
sacred vessels. Baby-faced blue, silver chrome,  
lipstick red, she picks the polish from each nail,  
lacquer dandruff in the pews, as he tilts beads  
of holy water to catch the last precious drops  
of blood wine, chalice clutched tight with both  
his hands. I mirror the sway, the swirl in this metal  
room where vents drone an organ's harmony and know  
all these places are the same place. All these  
motions echo us home, cut to the hidden pink  
of flesh beneath, still schoolgirls in plastic gloves.

## *River Song 2*

by Emma Galloway Stephens

---

I need to swim in God  
like a river—  
to drown.

I want to be a catfish  
feeding on holy muck  
at the bottom of the lake

that silvers  
God's ankles  
around the white throne.

Sixty-six books  
and prayer  
is not enough.

I want to swing between God's arms,  
a child between her parents  
flying down the gravel road:

one for the money,  
two for the show,  
Father, Son,

and Holy Ghost.

# *Flying Lessons*

by Kellie Brown

---

From my home in the foothills of the Appalachian mountains, spring doesn't so much arrive as sneak. It certainly doesn't descend all at once like Mary Poppins, full of confidence and industry. It is a coy visitor. It hints with a crocus or daffodil, with a warm sunny day, then retreats behind gray clouds and frost warnings. This shy dance of days frustrates as we long for a full-blown spring of warmth and green. Finally, after a month or more, spring's teasing relents to the unreserved generosity of all that is lush and vibrant.

One true sign of spring I rely on is the gestation of a family on my front porch. Every year a robin couple in their red-breasted attire finds the corner of the left eave to be prime real estate and in surprisingly short order constructs a sturdy nest, the unused remnants of twine and twigs discarded across the porch for me to sweep away. Then comes the vigil, theirs and mine. I sit at my writing desk and peer out the window. The stern gaze of the bird perched on the nest stares back. There is determination and challenge in those black eyes. Precious cargo rests underneath.

I spend the next few weeks keeping watch on the nest, as if I have a role to play. I observe the ritual changing of the guard. Then one day, my ears catch rapid cheeping sounds. I try to get a hatchling count. Is it three or four? It's three. No wait, a fourth lies buried in the fluttering of fluffy down. The bird parents fly airdrops of food to greedy mouths

that reach up and open in desperate chorus. They grow at a miraculous rate and soon I'm nervous because they push and shove each other, no longer fitting together in what was once a roomy nest. My other worry is that they won't be brave enough to leave, to take flight. In due course, one by one, they make their way out of the nest and into my azalea bushes.

But there is always that one "failure to launch." I sense the anxiety in the bird's flickering eyes. I witness the loneliness of its solitary ramble around the nest. I remember my own abandonment. Constant checking out the window keeps me from my intended tasks. Meanwhile, the unlaunched robin's family, a blush of parents and siblings, establish life in the bushes and underneath the maple and pear trees. Fledglings hop along, eager to explore and test their new-found wings. The one left behind grips its tiny talons onto the edge of the nest, emitting pitiful peeps. No one comes; no food catering arrives. It's a tough love parenting practice. One day stretches into the next. Should I intervene? Should I gently use a broom to encourage him or her to take flight? Of course not. I must trust in the wisdom of nature. As with all living creatures, some of us just need a little longer to be sure of the next step, to catch the uplift to flight.

# *What Otherwise You Might Forget*

by Sarah R. Wallace

---

*after a fresco in Herculaneum that depicts peaches and a waterglass*

Sheened water, heaviness  
ready to crash freshly to your lip;  
down, pleat, flesh  
to fill your palm, tang  
to curl and fuzz your tongue; stone

exposed.

All left by the one who has tasted  
and gone forth. Guest-gift—  
precocious fruit and the freedom to leave  
what is proffered, what is generous,

and to seek. Shadows hover, not quite right,  
and the branch submits to their slide. I am still,  
strangely, yours.

# *Who Were You in a Dream?*

by Satvika Menon

---

Wet lilies rest on the Pontiac. The tarmac is coated in ivory grease, like spilt French fries on the driveway. But underneath, it is red. Maroon like wine. Carmine like the powdered beetle-crushed and squashed between my nails. All the ivory in the world cannot consume the red. It reverberates and bleeds into the dahlias that grow near the grass. The petals divulge secrets:

*Who were you in a dream? Who were you on the tarmac? Who are you now?*

The police come. They look at the greasy tarmac, the lilies, the Pontiac. The red.

The dahlias bear teeth—

*Do you remember how it felt when the whole world smelt like blood?*

# *Foresight*

by Lynne Burnette

---

The kid has moxie, loves to play  
devil's advocate, grill his parents  
separately on what they believe and why.  
He's going through life eyes wide open,  
the way he arrived—gazing through a  
sudden window, pulled from a dark room.

Home for a weekend, he is large  
in gesture, first to put down his bags  
and hug, last to leave the dinner table  
where he engages his father in debate, tries  
to solve the world's economic problems.

Brilliance resides in a mind that's not afraid  
to be rubbed and polished by other points of view.  
An ability to listen—the basic currency  
of respect. Depth in that heart. Is this not what  
the world needs, young people who care?



Our forks have long been laid down  
when there's a beep by his plate and he  
announces our conversation's been recorded  
because it's this kind of interaction between  
us he loves most, and misses. To hear it at will  
would keep him connected, fortify his spirit.

*Especially, he adds, after you've both passed on.*  
Is it a failure of imagination we haven't died  
in our own minds yet? After the long audible *o*  
of our mouths becomes an instrument of mercy  
riffing on our joint exhalation, and after I get up

to clear the dishes, there's a sweet plum thud  
in my chest: to be loosened from my life like this,  
to be a shell put to his ear—how fitting! Didn't we  
once listen and look for evidence of him in an ultrasound?—  
little cashew in the surf and swoosh of the amniotic sea,  
morse code of a heart beating *yes yes oh yes I'm here.*

*Orchid Shadows* by Katie Hughbanks



# *Pain is a Dagger Burning into my Heart*

by Annah Atane

---

To bear a child means to carry an egg on a finger or  
to nurture a seed in the desert.

My mother is at one corner of the labor room, beating  
on her breast, in a faint voice, somewhere at the state's  
specialist hospital, dampened, going fallow like the last  
portion of spilled tea. The tulip in her eye is losing its glow  
along with the alluring scent. For the past nine months, she  
had nurtured the unborn child, rummaging the twine that binds  
them together. I wish I never wished for a sibling, guilt is sitting  
beside me, like silent thunder. Can I say the same for my father?  
because this pain is a dagger, burning into my heart and to think,  
that when she is about to bear this child, her life and the child's were  
hanging on a weak weft—mother struggling to stay alive and her child  
fighting between a murky vale and a pristine world. “to be a man  
would be easier”;

that was what another woman said at one corner of the labor room—  
after the light in my mother's eyes traveled into darkness.

# *To a Departed Pekingese*

by Mihaela Mihailova

---

When a dog dies,  
yours does too, all over again,  
because all dogs are a shared memory.

When a dog dies,  
every other dog must live longer  
to make up for it.

When a dog dies,  
you wish you had learned to howl  
when you had the chance.

# *My Daughter, the Volcano*

by Edidiong Uzoma Essien

---

Volcano is what I call the daughter my insides pieced together from semen and gametes, the pint-sized evidence of a pleasure so fleeting, it frays in my memory. Volcano is what she is. I don't invoke that title when Mma is awake. How will she shed her molten skin if I name it? My finger traces the letters on Mma's small thigh while she sleeps, quickly so she doesn't stir.

The volcano baby is a wish I'd yanked from the sky carelessly, almost a year ago. I was in a different kind of love at the time, a cavalier feeling not at all like what her father and I bat amongst ourselves now. I wanted, deserved, an heir. A child with his face and mine. What would become of us when the meat on our skeletons sloughed off with age? We are orphans, her father and I, and only children. Alone in the universe but for each other. And I suspected he would die before I did. He hates when I speak so plainly about his impermanence but that is the sort of luck I have. *Let us make a child in our image*, I said to Mma's father, just a man then, not a sleep deprived parent. *She will be our sentient museum, carrying all our histories in her brain.*

Her father did not understand my agonising need to transcend time, but he was as foolish as I was then. He held my hips to his and poured and poured and poured into me until he was blue in the face. To hold her steady in my womb after he had done his part, I laid flat on my back with my knees to my chest for ten uninterrupted minutes. Wait-

ing until I knew the semen had settled. I didn't need to wait that long, folded up pretzel-like on her father's bed. Mma was desperate to exist.

She erupted, our Vesuvius, from the cave between my legs in the parking lot of a hospital. Mma had stolen my impatience, the clever girl, and made it her own. *No hospital bed for you*, she crowed. *Let me out now, please*. Weary in the head and legs, I squatted over her father's hands, out there in the open. That is how my volcano was born.

She has not lost any of that impatient steam since her birth. Mma's discontent crowds our mouths with the aftertaste of unease. We cannot decipher the ragged gurgles and roars slipping from her little body. Our ears are too green, not yet attuned to the nuances of infant-speak. *Why do you hate us?* I want to ask her, but I cannot. The overpriced baby manual gathering dust on my nightstand warns against wielding incendiary language around infants. A baby is incapable of hate, the author asserts on the book's second page. But the smug bastard does not know my Mma.

It is not a pleasant morning in our duplex. Mma is teething. As she batters socked heels into her cot's firm mattress, we flow around her, gathering items we believe will restore peace, our tributes to an unforgiving despot. Her father presents a rattle he'd purchased at a nearby flea market the day before. Chock full of beads and seeds and whatever else. The rattle's fluted body is orange in some places, solid green in others. Colours wrung from lead in a distant factory. Mma hates the stupid rattle, how its noise competes with hers. She flings the toxic thing at her father, and it connects with the centre of his forehead. *Clack*. The rattle draws blood. A dot of quivering red emerges between his plucked eyebrows. I stare at the blood, and he stares at me. Mma's father abandons us in the nursery, allegedly in search of something cold to chill our child's inflamed gums. Coward.

*Don't leave me alone with her*, my eyes say to his back, but he does not hear the plea. Mma turns her focus to me, suddenly placid. She wants to be held. I scoop my volcano up gingerly so she does not burn my forearms, consulting the rolodex in my brain for a song she might tolerate, something with a fluidity to it. The lullaby comes to me. It is not one my mother passed down. Mma will not accept used gifts.

The song is about a crying baby, much like Mma. This baby is justifiably upset. An eagle has disrupted its peace. The baby's mother, incensed as any mother would be, comforts her baby with this promise - she will cook a soup with *uziza* leaves and pepper, a meal so spicy it will bring a hiccupping end to the troublesome, and apparently greedy, bird.

Mma seems to enjoy the Igbo lullaby, despite my butchering the lyrics, and rubs her scalp against my chin. She smells all baby, of milky, powdery loveliness. Her volcanic alter ego is appeased. I continue to rock her and myself, humming only the melody. I feel her father's eyes watching us, from the nursery's doorway. He will not come close, not yet. The man does not want another lump on his head.

The volcano is dormant, temporarily sated by expressed milk and Tylenol, so I hide from father and child in the guest bathroom. *You are safe*, I whisper to my bloated reflection. She does not look convinced and points weakly at the bathroom's door. *Lock it*, the mirror-me implores, wide eyed and agitated. I obey.

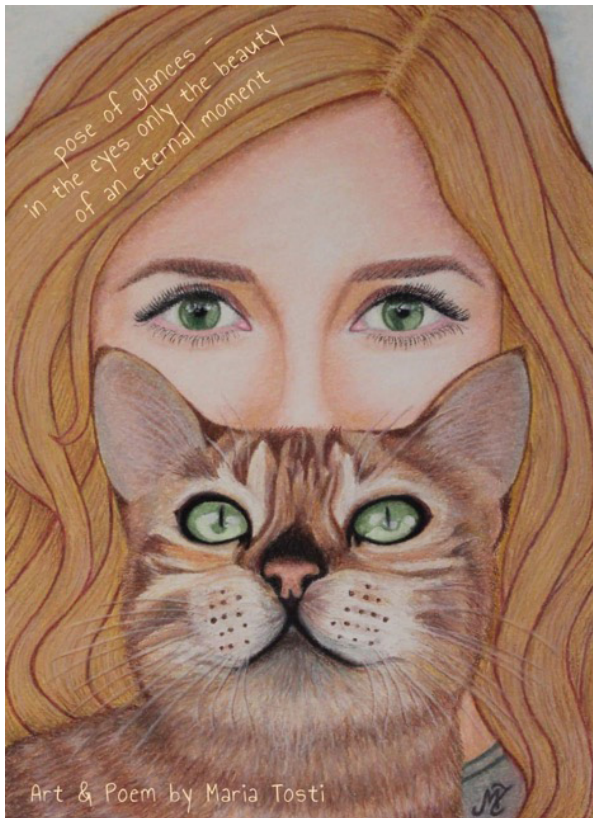
My midday ritual can commence. The scarred pouch Mma came from peers dolefully at me from its prison, a cropped nightshirt riddled with moth holes. I place a hand on the ruched skin and cannot feel it, not even when I press down hard near my belly button. The skin has lost its elasticity and sensation. Mma took it all with her, leaving me with nerveless fat. I remove the shirt and knead ointment squeezed out of an unlabelled tube onto my stomach.

Hot water. I splash handfuls on my neck and cleavage. *Warm me up*, I ask the tap water, and it pities me. The liquid slurps up the pressure wriggling inside me, and I can exhale finally. I close my eyes and visualise the petrol gauge of a car ticking upwards until it fills. The mental exercise works, somewhat. I feel less like a mangled tampon.

My body holds the stains and smells of another too easily now. Its loyalties have changed, the turncoat, and it never hesitates to remind me of this chilling fact. *Mma reigns supreme*, my swollen breasts an-

shrivelled nipples bleat in mammary unison, and my sternum agrees, curved into the perfect shape to receive my baby's curled up frame.

Mma hears me thinking of her somehow and calls out, a shrill cry that slams fists against the closed bathroom door. I hunker down in the tub I have only just filled, covering my ears with cupped palms. *Stay put*, I say to myself. *Her father will fetch her*. And he does. I listen for his laboured footsteps. There they are, marching reassuringly towards the nursery. My clenched buttocks relax when the baby ceases her shrieking. I am free for another half hour. *Not enough*, the bath water pouts. *Stew a little longer in me*. But I can't. This is the bed I have made, and I must sit in it.



# *The Apartment, In Its Resting State*

by Mira Samara Persaud

---

We start here.

The smell of wet paint  
Grout on tile  
Ripened peaches sit soft

I am blossoming.

Again,  
Putting nails in the walls  
Hanging picture in frame  
Batting eyes at  
Vintage  
Ceramic  
Glasses

Making plans  
Burning bridges  
Interrogating sounds  
Sequestering the books away

I will never be what I do not know.  
Remaining efforts to pursue  
The denial of it all

In perpetuity,

The beginning is always the end.



## *Roxbury, 1968*

by Michael Salcman

---

Just passing by on my way to breakfast  
I could tell it was Earl from the HPI,  
the History of my friend's Present Illness  
up high on the auditorium's chalkboard  
at BCH, all those multiple admissions  
to Boston City Hospital for liver disease  
and pancreatitis, his left hand and forearm  
shot off in Korea. We used to go out singing  
and drinking in run-down neighborhoods,  
me doing a white baritone, him strumming  
on my Spanish guitar, a matchbook cover  
folded in his metal claw. In the early Sixties  
we played folk music in dark living rooms  
where they sang along drinking cheap wine  
in paper cups and bitter beer in the can.  
Earl said he wanted to die on the hospital steps  
and explode like a star. That was the last time  
he took my guitar and I never saw either again.

## Souvenirs

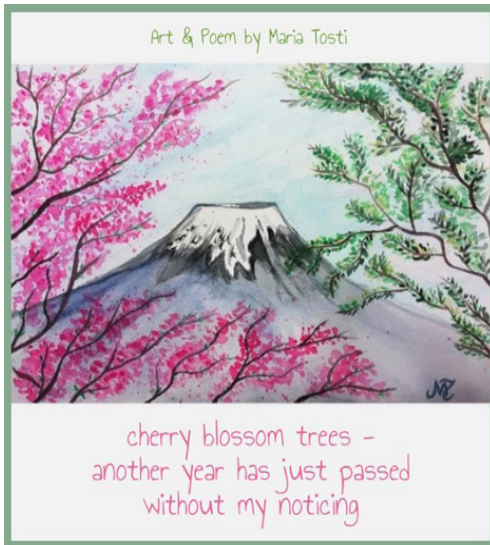
by CJ Giroux

---

In the memory ward, I unwrap a bulb, bulging, of wax paper,  
like pages of the Times circling Murano glass.  
The transparent encases an iris: yellow tongue, blue petals;  
the fragile nestled among tinsel, tin icicles in the attic.

Other creases reveal themselves, origami in the unmaking,  
and then marzipan (lemon shaped) and candied fruit slices  
(watermelon, orange).

I raise them to your lips like a priest offering communion.  
Smell, taste, do this in memory of me.



# *Lugubrious*

by Sarah Hurd

---

I.

I find it funny  
that a word so soft and round  
means sad, gloomy, glum—  
then again, grief sometimes feels  
like melting, softly fading.

II.

Like wax collecting  
in the tip of a tapered  
candle, in time it  
runs over—great orbs stacked tall,  
vertical to the table.

# *Day of the Goose*

by Kevin Oberlin

---

On the storybook page where the grandmother puts a finger to her  
chin,  
glances out the window at the star-speckled dark and contemplates,  
where the setter sleeps at the foot of the stairs, and the cat in step  
with the children follows them up to bed, where the big clock bathes  
in the firelight, and the magical farm in middle America silvers  
itself into slumber, I wonder what thoughts adrift will collect  
enough stardust to catch the bow of your lips when you smile,  
tamed into questions. You've just put our boy to bed, and we're both  
tired in our shoulders and necks, though you've stretched on the  
purple  
yoga mat, the second trimester motions more reserved  
than the first—except for the still-deep squats to prepare  
for birth, to ease it along—and I can't imagine we've left  
the gate unlocked again, much less compose a response.  
But you do your best thinking in the shower at night,

and I agree it's here among our bathroom's faux brass  
fixtures scuffed through years of someone else's use,

my feet pressed into the carpet's rough piles—  
who carpets a bathroom, and who will replace it—

that we're most likely to puzzle out our next child's name,  
the big to-do's, the reasons we know our love will outlast

any ten-year slump, and the secret flavor of the longings we've yet  
to uncrate, to sample and staple down at the baseboards.

When our goose gets loose, I dream the dream that we're pretending  
to be tired, the way our son pretends to nap for a moment,

then shakes his head with the loud and vigorous question, "Wake?"  
You and I nestle in each other's arms, facing together

and away in a tornado of sheets that lofts us above the horse  
as it gazes with disinterest at the defenestrated toilet, the day's

storybook disasters, our own shingles, split and sublime.  
There is no last page. The tableaux of children at bedtime—

on winged horses or with swords pointed at a troll's neck,  
or turning the page in a yellowed book with a wizard in a tower,

moon-white on the edge of a pond where a snake moils—  
is not a page, but a scroll for us to unfurl.

# *Hide-and-Seek*

by Shahryar Eskandari Zanjani

---

“Ready, you’re not; here I come,”  
snarls wet Winter, having mercilessly  
counted to only eight  
—years old.

A parentlessly invisible child’s  
camouflaged between Vali-e Asr’s  
idling buses—canopied by an endless  
row of embowering gallows-to-be—  
inside an exhaust’s embrace.

The visible are now boarding his untoy  
bus. I hate that all I can do to help him is  
end the poem here.

# *When the Girl with the Golden Ball rejects young Ewan McGregor's praise*

by Kelli Allen

---

Nothing about her need to be seen has surfaced yet.  
That blondness, those questions overshadowed, a penguin's  
rock still more meaningful than those lashes. A woman

carves her body's boldness free and her mother's skirt  
remains a cave, a shallow lean-to sheltering against  
intention and intentional stares. This daughter of mine

turns away from mouths, from untested hands reaching  
for her waist. A reflection insists on sixteen-thousand feet  
to grandiosity, but my girl, nubile argument against failing,

this is experience. Swallows taught you that nonexistence  
is a fairy story when, in backyard solitude, you wore  
berry lips pursed into a beak meant for nectar, for noticing.

The old men will cinch their vests each time you arrive. Convert  
your expectations into open palms and I will tell you how feeding  
desire is a blueprint to write again, tuck away, share as a deck

of cards that contains twelve queens, each with stems trimmed  
sharp. Distribute your mistakes early, fall easily into someone's  
admiration, because we are all latecomers in accepting our worth.

# *The sky as we (don't) know it*

by Salaam Odeh

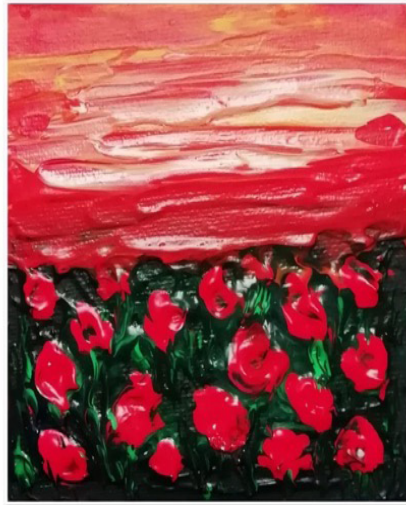
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The birthmark spilling out Jupiter's stomach is a magnificent storm— a leviathan dream erupted into a nightmare, saffron ochre, bright  
and bleeding like the convulsive curiosities of spirits trapped on earth.

I'm one such spirit, probing and meddlesome— I want to know as fervently as I want to remain simple. What I mean is that I ache to commiserate with the suspended rocks beyond my reach, to dust a pinch of void onto my tongue and taste its confusion, to walk along the edge of Neptune's Arago ring, where probabilities hang by a dimly lit strand of bravery waiting for a witness, willing and barefaced to offer acceptance,  
and what I mean is  
that I ache to stay still, to know of nothing but what the infinite neurons flickering in my brain like to conjure up—vermillion rain, chortling blades of kelp, dancing and



you, you are one such spirit, adrift at city, lost  
between grieving the pavement anthill's collapse beneath  
your boots and begging the clouds to relinquish their thrones  
long enough to encapsulate you in their tears so that maybe  
then you, or I can rest in the tender knowledge that we are  
the rain, the hurricane, we are the sand, its surface  
warmth, its belly bursting with a crystalline core and  
we are our mothers' mournings, our fathers' silent thirst  
for pride, raptured and impossible, we are  
the fallen fig gone rotten, the starlings' hunger  
for its bruised insides, we are the wasp,  
and the queen, and  
the crumb



zephyr sighs  
among vermillion poppies -  
stillness around

Art & Poem by Maria Tosti

# *The Dustrunners*

by Keegan Shoemaker

---

If you stare at the end of the empty suburban street for long enough, you might see a long lost vision approach.

It's a hazy thing, a sweaty chain of dirty-shirted tweens with dust under their nails, on their faces, and in their eyes, the fool's-gold bronze of their shoulders cracking like snakeskin beneath the crush of the summer sun. Their brace-laced smiles and the ambition-drunk glint of their eyes only glowing brighter as they strut closer, they're all taking turns kicking a loose stone, playing a game of release and reclamation that only ends when they finally decide to punt their token into the nearest gutter or puddle. As they move, you notice, a Holy Ghost halo of dust hovers around them, a mark of their zealotry to youth.

These are the Dustrunners.

The name was, of course, self-given, a moniker of yelled unison that only heightened their parents' horror the first time they'd returned home filthy from conquest. None of their mothers or fathers had expected their children to get so gritty when they'd first set them out on the suburban streets, much less scrounge together some sort of identity; and yet, it was a pillar of Dustrunner philosophy to create Everything out of Nothing.

*Where were you?* Their parents blubbered as they spritzed their chil-

dren with strain treaters.

Though the Dustrunners' souls had first been forged in the crucible of their shared cul-de-sac, their true realm laid a half-mile walk South, discovered through a fresh seamline-rip in the trees surrounding their neighborhood and down the wet-black asphalt leading towards the center of what used to be a cornfield. Used to dead-ends, the children hadn't expected to find anything down this new road; and yet, when the late-afternoon sun cast the veil of itself over the freshly razed plot with the right shade of passion, even the most wizened of travelers were able to see the sudden empire's grand silhouette: the high spire of its central tower, the surrounding rings of walkable bulwark, the moat diving deep as a dream.

But it was only the Dustrunners who were still able to see the monument's majesty once the sun did away with the shade.

The construction workers having rent a large rift in the middle of the field so as to lay their foundations, tons of excavated dirt were piled high into the blue to form a ziggurat of debris. A tower of tumbling pebbles and torn roots that resembled the ruin of something once beautiful, the molehill that was an eyesore to the adults of their community seemed to the Dustrunners a mountain, the ground wisdom teeth of some ancient God of Youth: he wanted faith, and they wanted something to lean theirs on. And so, the sweat on the Dustrunners' backs and the blood on their scraped knees became sacrificial offerings to this dimming deity, hours and then days passing as they set to clamoring up their mound's cliffs, hollering from its peak, and rejoicing in the rubble of the ever-crumbling kingdom of their youths. Their only law here was liberation, and their only maxim was that naivety was akin to enlightenment.

And yet, their transcendence did not open their eyes to an infallible future: deep down, the Dustrunners knew that this would not last forever. The ouroboros-catch of the American suburbia that they were developing in, of modern life itself, is that it grows by breaking things down. The Dustrunners had seen it happen before their very eyes, they were playing in the bloody mess of its process, and they could even feel themselves beginning to change, a numbness quietly stilling their young hearts' romantic aches. And yet, it was this very incom-

ing oblivion that bound them to this place, ground their heels into its weary turf, turned every cough of dust into a bittersweet prayer.

*Because if everything is going to fall apart, they thought. Why not love it hard until it does?*

So they did. Running, tumbling, laughing, tearing up and down the dust which they first came from and to which they knew they would one day return, taking a piece of the end into their hands, the Dust-runners let out every bit of their hearts on the hill until, eventually, it disappeared. A new house identical to all the others took its place. The clan dispersed: some moved away, others stayed put, the rest vanished into the future's fog.

But they did not mourn. For the kingdom of the Dustrunners, collapsed beneath the fantasy of forever, had already fallen long, long ago.

# *Changed Landscape*

by Maureen Sherbondy

---

I didn't miss it until all was gone—  
the sky-reaching branches, olives  
and figs dangling in the groves.

My eyes kept scanning for land  
only to find water, then more water.  
How I missed the sand and dirt.

Tops of familial tents,  
fires blazing near brambles,  
sunsets over mountains.

Orange leaves coloring  
the horizon. Now at the ark's bow,  
I stare at absence.

A hole opens in my chest.  
Such loneliness in boundless seascape,  
nothing missed until it's lost.

## *Passages*

by Karen Kilcup

---

*Ample make this bed, / Make this bed with awe—  
—Emily Dickinson*

Emergencies are common things.  
Today the cat brought home  
a tufted titmouse with seed-black eyes,  
breast skin stripped, heart pulsing,  
body bare as a tongue. My lover  
swabs the gore with Q-tips and peroxide.  
He wants some cotton thread, a needle  
to sew the shreds together,  
a clean cloth and quiet box.  
Still, the bird will die.

My father's bed is raised or lowered  
at the head and foot by buttons  
he insists I push to demonstrate.  
Hung high, the TV plays scene  
after scene of Wile-E-Coyote plotting  
to bomb the Road Runner,  
only to find himself charred  
by a circular fuse. It comforts us  
to think the good guy always wins.  
My father, who cannot hold a pen,  
is composing a story I transcribe  
to enter later into my computer's memory.  
Before I go he lifts his gown to show  
the tubes implanted in his gut,  
holding me with washed blue eyes.  
His skin hangs on his frame like silk.

Leaving the elevator, head lowered, I bolt  
down the hall, but workmen have barred  
the automatic door, and I can't get out  
this way. I am not prepared for detours.

At home, I discover hidden in the grass  
a pair of thin dun feathers tipped in gold,  
gather them to adorn my traveling hat.

# *Migration*

by Elinor Ann Walker

---

Everyone talks about October light as if  
it's a singularity, but light is  
a variable one month can't contain. Light is  
a life story in which the world  
glances through space while the last  
hummingbirds cut the air with delicate  
precision & trees are on the wing,  
their leaves & their leavings, & once,  
looking up, I saw birds impossibly  
high in a broken line (if pattern could be  
syncopated), bird by bird in staggered sequence:  
sandhill cranes, which explains the length  
of their passing ghostlike above, long silhouettes  
in & out of clouds, reminding me  
how my mother dappled in & out of my view—  
after her diagnosis, metastasis, we were farther  
than a wingspan apart even when I was right  
next to her bedside while nothing changed  
but everything. I hold light more tenderly now,  
knowing how it goes.



# *Little Criminals*

by Sara Eddy

---

*for John*

We thought we were in deep woods  
where no one would find the newspapers  
we'd dumped rather than delivered,  
and instead rode our 3-speeds  
to the convenience for popsicles.

But we were kids, and the papers  
were only 10 feet from the path,  
so our parents spotted them  
and called out our shame.  
I felt the confusion of a good girl

who has done a bad thing.  
I've held this memory all this time  
like a bright black stone  
in my belly, but I'm not ashamed.  
I've long since forgiven that stupid little girl,

but in the flinty bond of siblings  
I will deathgrip forever the  
camaraderie I felt with my brother,  
in our brief life of crime.

# *Gravidas*

by Midge Hartshorn

---

An empty  
womb is approximately  
the same size and shape as a small,  
inverted pear. I carve it out of my soft belly  
with the toothy edge of a grapefruit spoon.

I cradle it in my palm to judge its ripeness  
by its trembling weight. Carefully, I divide it  
with the spoon into more manageable bites.

I feed my lover spoonfuls of my  
swollen, pulpy flesh lowered  
to waiting lips like  
a mother feeds

her new baby  
planefuls of  
rice cereal.

Ahh.

ah.

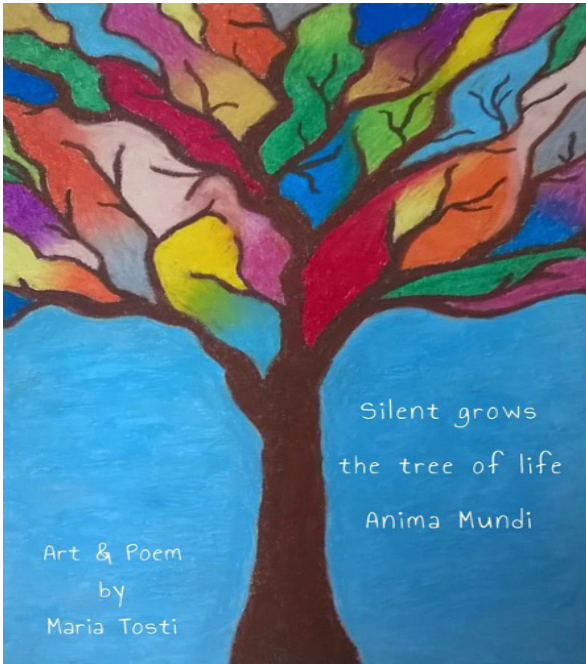
oh.

# *Glyph Aubade*

by Shira Dentz

---

tree trunk branches  
in a clump of U  
sprout like a pitchfork  
of chicken bones  
guarding its meat.



*prayer, it might be called*

by Arlene Naganawa

---

I do my best, reverent with remedies,  
warm hands, picture of a bear with cub.  
I make up stories as if the perfect character  
will cure your suffering. Driving at night,  
headlights on the painted lines, I try to remember  
signs from any deities, owl lifting from a shadow,  
lamp in a stranger's window. An approaching car,  
a beast, something fallen from a star.

## *Contributor Biographies*

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Kelli Allen's work has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies in the US and internationally. Allen is the co-Founding Editor of *Book of Matches* literary journal. Allen's latest book is *Leaving the Skin on the Bear*, C&R Press, 2022. She currently teaches writing and literature in North Carolina. [www.kelli-allen.com](http://www.kelli-allen.com)

Alison Amato lives in Maryland and studied creative writing at Florida Atlantic University. Her work has been published in *Sweet Lit*.

Annah Atane is a Nigerian writer. She holds a BSc in Animal Science from the University of Maiduguri. Her works have appeared in *the brittle paper*, *Ric Journal*, *Spill Words*, *itanilè*, *writersque*, *The Kalahari Review*, and elsewhere.

Laurel Benjamin is a Cider Press Review Book Award finalist. She is active with the Bay Area Women's Poetry Salon, curates *Ekphrastic Writers*, and is a reader for *Common Ground Review*. Publication credits current and upcoming include: *Pirene's Fountain*, *Lily Poetry Review*, *Cider Press Review*, *Taos Journal of Poetry*, *Mom Egg Review*, *Nixes Mate*. *Lily Poetry Salon* has featured her. Nominated for the *Pushcart Prize* and *Best of the Net*, Laurel holds an MFA from *Mills College*. She lives in the San Francisco Bay Area where she invented a secret language with her brother.

Dr. Kellie Brown is a violinist, conductor, music educator, and award-winning writer of the book *The Sound of Hope: Music as Solace, Resistance and Salvation during the Holocaust and World War II*. Her words have appeared in *Galway Review*, *Earth & Altar*, *Ekstasis*, *Psaltery & Lyre*, *Still*, *The Primer*, *Writerly*, and others. More information about her and her writing can be found at [www.kelliedbrown.com](http://www.kelliedbrown.com).

Lynne Burnett lives on Vancouver Island. Her poems have appeared in many magazines and anthologies in the US and Canada. A Best of the Net and Pushcart nominee, she won the 2016 Lauren K. Alleyne Difficult Fruit PP, the 2019 Jack Grapes Prize, Kelsay Books' 2023 Women's Poetry Contest, and was a finalist for Arc's 2018 Poem of the Year and the 2022 Montreal International PP. Finishing Line Press published her chapbook "Irresistible" in 2018. Visit her at <https://lynneburnett.ca/>

Laura Buxbaum is a re-emerging poet at 65. She has spent a long time working in non-profits writing mostly memos, emails, and grant proposals—the last poems she published were in her college literary magazine. She lives in Maine where, in addition to her job, she raises goats and grows a garden, runs, hikes, skis, sings, and plays the cello.

Jennifer Campbell is a writing professor in Buffalo, NY, and a co-editor of *Earth's Daughters*. She has two poetry collections, *Supposed to Love* (Saddle Road Press, 2013) and *Driving Straight Through* (FootHills, 2008), and a chapbook of reconstituted fairytale poems called *What Came First* (Dancing Girl Press, 2021). Jennifer's work has recently appeared in *American Journal of Nursing*, *The Healing Muse*, *Slipstream*, *ArLiJo*, and *Crosswinds Poetry Contest* issue.

Margaret Carter is a writer from the San Francisco Bay Area. She holds a BA in English and Spanish from Villanova University and is currently an MFA candidate in poetry at Columbia University.

Loralee Clark is a writer who grew up learning a love for nature and her place in it, in Maine. She resides in Virginia now as a writer and artist, with two awesome kids and a loving husband. Her Instagram is @make13experiment. She writes poetry and non-fiction. Myth is her love language. She has been published most recently in *The Taborian*, *Superpresent*, *Thimble Literary Magazine*, *Impossible Task*, *Studio One*, *Cannon's Mouth*, and *Big Windows Review*.

Joanne Clarkson's sixth poetry collection, "Hospice House," was released by MoonPath Press in 2023. Her volume, "The Fates," won Bright Hill Press' annual contest and appeared in 2017. Her poems have been published in such journals as *Poetry Northwest*, *Nimrod*, *Poet Lore*, *Alaska Quarterly Review* and *Beloit Poetry Journal*. Clarkson has Masters Degrees in English and Library Science, has taught and worked for many years as a professional librarian. After caring for her mother through a long illness, she re-careered as a Hospice RN. See more at [Http://Joanneclarkson.com](http://Joanneclarkson.com).

Elizabeth Coletti is an editor and writer from North Carolina now living in New York City. She is a recipient of the Louis D. Rubin Jr. Prize in Fiction and a finalist for the James Hurst Prize for Fiction, and her prose and poetry has appeared in the *Pomona Valley Review*, *Panoply Zine*, *Neologism Poetry Journal*, and elsewhere.

Adeola Davies-Aiyeloja is a multidisciplinary non media specific artist.

Shira Dentz is the author of five books including *SISYPHUSINA (PANK)*, winner of the Eugene Paul Nassar Prize 2021, and two chapbooks. Her writing appears in many venues including *Poetry*, *American Poetry Review*, *VOLT*, *Cincinnati Review*, *Iowa Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *jubilat*, *Pleiades*, *Quarter After Eight*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Colorado Review*, *Brooklyn Rail*, *New American Writing*, *Poets.org*, and *NPR*, and she's a recipient of an *Academy of American Poets Prize*, *Poetry Society of America's Lyric Poem and Cecil Hemley Awards*, *Painted Bride Quarterly's Poetry Prize*, and *Electronic Poetry Review's Discovery Award*. More at [www.shiradentz.com](http://www.shiradentz.com)

Chiara Di Lello is a writer, educator, and artist. Her poems and essays have appeared in *Catapult*, *Variant Lit*, *Whale Road Review* and others, and her art has been exhibited in Brooklyn and the Hudson Valley. Learn more at [necessarymess.wordpress.com](http://necessarymess.wordpress.com).

A native of Pennsylvania, Lara Dolphin is an attorney, nurse, wife and mom of four amazing kids. Her chapbooks include *In Search Of The Wondrous Whole* (Alien Buddha Press), *Chronicle Of Lost Moments* (Dancing Girl Press), and *At Last a Valley* (Blue Jade Press).

Sara Eddy's full-length collection, *Ordinary Fissures*, was released by Kelsay Books in May 2024. She is also the author of two chapbooks (*Tell the Bees*, A3 Press, 2019, and *Full Mouth*, Finishing Line Press, 2020), and her poems have appeared in many online and print journals, including *Threepenny Review*, *Raleigh Review*, *Sky Island*, and *Baltimore Review*, among others. She lives in Amherst, Massachusetts, in a house built by Emily Dickinson's cousin.

Theresa Senato Edwards has published 3 poetry books—1, with painter Lori Schreiner, winning *The Tacenda Literary Award*—and 2 chapbooks. Nominated twice for a Pushcart, once for Best of the Net, and once for Best Small Fictions, Edwards is also poetry editor for *Emerge Literary Journal* and managing editor for *Rise Up Review*. Her website: <http://www.theresasenatoedwards.com>.

Luke Eldredge holds an MFA from Colorado State University where he received the Crow-Tremblay Poetry Fellowship. His work has appeared in *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Figure 1*, the *Concrete Desert Review*, *Radar* and elsewhere. He is the Senior Poetry Editor for *New American Press* and has worked for *Colorado Review* as well as the *Colorado Prize for Poetry*. He lives in the Rockies with his wife and dog, where he works for the University of Colorado Colorado Springs.

Edidiong Uzoma Essien is a Nigerian writer and digital marketing professional living on the U.S. East Coast. She has been previously published in *Strange Horizons* and *Brittle Paper*. Essien enjoys reading, creating content for her book review page, playing video games, and surrendering herself to the whims of her 3-year-old cat.



Jessica Furtado is a multi-passionate artist whose visual work has been featured in Grub Street, Muzzle Magazine, Waxwing, & elsewhere, and whose writing has appeared in Qwerty, Rogue Agent, & VIDA Review, among others. Jessica's poetry was a finalist in Best of the Net (2020), and her debut chapbook *A Kiss for the Misbehaved* (2023) is available from BatCat Press. To see what she's up to next, visit Jess at [www.jessicafurtado.com](http://www.jessicafurtado.com)

CJ Giroux resides in Michigan and teaches college English. He is a reader for Dunes Review, and his most recent chapbook is *Sheltered in Place*.

Elizabeth Galoozis's debut full-length collection, *Law of the Letter*, won the Hillary Gravendyk Prize from the Inlandia Institute and will come out in 2025. Her poems have appeared in *Air/Light*, *Pidgeonholes*, *RHINO*, *Witness*, *Sinister Wisdom*, and elsewhere. She serves as a reader for *The Maine Review* and *Abandon Journal*, and has been nominated for two Pushcart Prizes and for Best of the Net. Elizabeth was selected by Claire Wahmanholm for AWP's Writer to Writer Program in 2022. She works as a librarian and lives in southern California. Elizabeth can be found on Twitter and Instagram at @thisamericanliz, and at her website <https://elizabethgaloozis.wordpress.com/>.

Raised in Idaho, Midge Hartshorn is a poet and astronomer currently living in Massachusetts. Midge's work can be found in *The Mount Holyoke Review*, *Zeniada*, and a forthcoming print issue of *SARDINES*.

Hattie Jean Hayes (she/her) is a writer and comedian from Missouri, who lives in New York City. Her first chapbook, *Poems [For, About, Because] My Friends*, was published in 2023. She is the creator of *I Was Never Cast in Annie*, a solo parody musical, and co-creator of *Reporter Quarterly*, a documentary zine launching in fall of 2024. She also has a Substack newsletter, if you want to read poems she enjoys or hear how she feels about different eyeliner.

Katie Hughbanks is a writer, photographer, and teacher whose photography has been recognized nationally and internationally. Her photos appear in more than 30 publications, including *Cool Beans Lit*, *Peatsmoke Journal*, *In Parentheses*, *L'Esprit Literary Review*, *New Feathers Anthology*, *Glassworks Magazine*, *Azahares*, *Paper Dragon*, *Sage-ing*, and *Black Fork Review*. Her poetry chapbook, *Blackbird Songs*, was published by Prolific Press in 2019, and her short story collection, *It's Time*, was published by Finishing Line Press in July 2024. She teaches English and Creative Writing in Louisville, Kentucky.

Sarah Hurd is a literary fiction writer and poet living in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Her work appears in *Creation Literary Magazine* and often explores grief, sexuality, womanhood, and self-perception. She has a BA in creative writing and English literature from Grand Valley State University.

Anna N. Jennings grew up in rural southwest Georgia and currently lives in the Green Mountains of Vermont; along the way her journal entries turned into poems. Jennings is a registered expressive arts therapist. She leads a poetry group at a state correctional facility.

Farm girl, rock climber, and professor, Karen Kilcup feels fortunate to be getting old. Her book *The Art of Restoration* received the 2021 Winter Goose Poetry Prize, and *Red Appetite* received the 2022 Helen Kay Poetry Chapbook Prize. A Pushcart Prize nominee, she has also published the chapbook *Black Nebula* and has a forthcoming full-length collection, *Feathers and Wedges*.

David Dodd Lee is the author of eleven books of poetry, including the forthcoming *The Bay* (Broadstone Books, 2025). His poems most recently have appeared in *Southeast Review*, *New Ohio Review*, *Ocean State Review*, *Guesthouse*, *Copper Nickel*, *TriQuarterly*, *The Nation*, and *Willow Springs*. He teaches at Indiana University South Bend, where he is Editor-in-Chief of *42 Miles Press*, as well as the online literary journal *The Glacier*.

Stefanie Leigh is a poet and ballet dancer based in Toronto. She was a dancer with American Ballet Theatre and is currently working on her first poetry collection, *Swan Arms*. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Rust & Moth*, *SWWIM*, *Frozen Sea* and elsewhere.

Emilie Lygren is a nonbinary poet and outdoor educator whose work emerges from the intersections between scientific observation and poetic wonder. Her first book of poetry, *What We Were Born For*, was chosen by the Young People's Poet Laureate as the February 2022 Book Pick for the Poetry Foundation. She lives in California, where she wonders about oaks and teaches poetry in local classrooms. Find more of her work and words at [emilielygren.com](http://emilielygren.com).

Dave Malone (he/him) is a poet and playwright. A three-time Pushcart nominee, he is the author of eight collections of poetry. Recent work appears in *Science Write Now*, *Skipjack Review*, and *Delta Poetry Review*. One of his favorite writing projects is his free monthly e-newsletter. More at [davemalone.net](http://davemalone.net).

Natalie Marino is a poet and practicing physician. Her work appears in *Pleiades*, *Rust & Moth*, *Salt Hill*, *South Florida Poetry Journal* and elsewhere. She is the author of the chapbook *Under Memories of Stars* (Finishing Line Press, 2023). She lives in California. You can find her online at [nataliemarino.com](http://nataliemarino.com) or on Instagram @natalie\_marino.

Grant McGalliard is a writer based in Bay City, Texas. This appearance in *Thimble Literary Magazine* marks his first publication. He has a dog named Max.

Satvika Menon is a young poet from India who was raised in Malaysia and New Jersey. She now resides in Hong Kong. Her poetry has been previously published in *Rogue Agent*, *Plum Tree Taven*, *Scarlet Leaf Review* and the 2021 poetry anthology *The Kali Project*, among others. As a young woman of colour, most of her poetry is centred on feminist depictions of the world, body and self, as well as themes of adolescence, youth and growing up.

Mihaela Mihailova is an animation studies scholar, researcher, and educator at San Francisco State University. Her edited volume, *Coraline: A Closer Look at Studio LAIKA's Stop-Motion Witchcraft* (Bloomsbury, 2021), won The Norman McLaren/Evelyn Lambart Award for Best Edited Collection in Animation. She is the co-editor of *Animation Studies*, an open-access online peer reviewed journal dedicated to the history, theory, and aesthetics of animated media.

Joanne Monte is the author of "The Blue Light of Dawn," which received the Bordighera Book Award. In addition to receiving a Pushcart nomination, she is the recipient of numerous awards, namely Sixfold, the Jack Grapes Poetry Award, Princemere Poetry Award, the New Millennium Writings Award, and Sheila-Na-gig.

Arlene Naganawa's full-length collection is *I Dream a Nest of Foil* (Kelson Books, 2024). Her chapbooks include *Private Graveyard* (Gribble Press), *The Scarecrow Bride* (Red Bird Chapbooks), *The Ark and the Bear* (Floating Bridge Press), and *We Were Talking About When We Had Bodies* (Ravenna Press). Her work appears in *Thimble*, *The Inflectionist Review*, *Waxwing*, *La Piccioletta Barca*, *Calyx*, and other. She has been awarded several grants from CityArts (Seattle) and Artist Trust. She has been a Writer in the Schools, Hugo House instructor, and poetry mentor for incarcerated youth.

Marta Nijhuis is a transmedia Italian-Dutch artist, lecturer, and author, whose eclectic plastic work is intertwined with a rich philosophical research. A Ph.D. in Aesthetics, she focuses her practice on the philosophical topic of identity. The artist questions the subject of identity via a threefold process: the observation of Nature, the prism of cultural memory, and the elaboration of a personal "post-digital" technical process consisting, as she explains, "in oxymoronicly returning forward to the hand as the supreme technology," whose slowness dialogues with the fast perceptual mutations the digital world insinuates in our bodily identities. In the past fifteen years she has been regularly collaborating as a Lecturer with the Jean Moulin University of Lyon, EAC Lyon and, more recently, Shanghai University. Her work has been displayed in art galleries and cultural centres both in Europe and the US.

Kevin Oberlin is the author of two chapbooks: *Steamboat Alley* (2022) and *Spotlit Girl* (2008). His poems have appeared in neat journals like *Pilgrimage*, *Cider Press Review*, and *Dunes Review*, as well as in the anthology *Wayfinding: Poetry Celebrating America's Parks and Public Lands*. He lives in Moscow, Ohio.

Shaun R. Pankoski (she/her) is a poet most recently from Volcano, Hawaii. A retired county worker and two time breast cancer survivor, she has lived on both coasts as well as the Midwest as an artist's model, modern dancer, massage therapist and honorably discharged Air Force veteran. Her poems have appeared in several literary magazines, including *Gargoyle*, *Sheila-na-Gig*, *Gyroscope* and *MacQueen's Quinterly*.

Mira Samara Persaud is a therapist and queer woman of Guyanese heritage based in Toronto. Outside of her practice (Samara Psychotherapy), she is passionate about experimental photography and writing as outlets for relational and collective healing.

Shari Lawrence Pfleeger's poems reflect both natural and constructed worlds, often describing interactions with family and friends. Her work has been published in *District Lines*, *Thimble Literary*, *Blue House Journal*, *Green Light*, *Paper Dragon*, *Boats Against the Current* (online and print), and *Young Ravens Literary Review*, and in six anthologies of Yorkshire poetry. Her prize-winning collection of Yorkshire sonnets was launched in Britain 2021 at the Fourth Ripon Poetry Festival. A former board member of Alice James Books, Shari lives, writes and rides her bicycle in Washington, DC.

Dannye Romine Powell's fifth collection, "*In the Sunroom with Raymond Carver*," won the 2020 Roanoke-Chowan Award for the best book of poetry by a North Carolinian published that year. She's received fellowships from the NEA, the NC Arts Council and Yaddo.

Kimberly Ann Priest is the author of *tether & lung* (Texas Review Press), *Floralia* (Unsolicited Press), and *Slaughter the One Bird* (Sundress Publications). An assistant professor of first-year writing at Michigan State University, her work has appeared in *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Copper Nickel*, and *Birmingham Poetry Review*.

Jessica Purdy holds an MFA from Emerson College. She is the author of STARLAND and Sleep in a Strange House (Nixes Mate, 2017 and 2018), and The Adorable Knife (Grey Book Press, 2023), and You're Never the Same (Seven Kitchens Press). Sleep in a Strange House was a finalist for the NH Literary Award for poetry. Her poems and micro-fiction have been nominated for Best New Poets, Best of the Net, and Best Micro-Fiction. Her poetry, flash fiction, and reviews appear in Gargoyle, About Place, On the Seawall, Radar, The Night Heron Barks, SoFloPoJo, Litro, Mom Egg Review, Heavy Feather Review, and elsewhere.

Jason Ryberg is the author of eighteen books of poetry, six screenplays, a few short stories, a box full of folders, notebooks and scraps of paper that could one day be (loosely) construed as a novel, and, a couple of angry letters to various magazine and newspaper editors. He is currently an artist-in-residence at both The Prospero Institute of Disquieted P/o/e/t/i/c/s and the Osage Arts Community, and is an editor and designer at Spartan Books. His latest collection of poems is Fence Post Blues (River Dog Press, 2023). He lives part-time in Kansas City, MO with a rooster named Little Red and a Billy-goat named Giuseppe and part-time somewhere in the Ozarks, near the Gasconade River, where there are also many strange and wonderful woodland critters.

Michael Salcman is the former chairman of neurosurgery, University of Maryland and president of The Contemporary Museum, a child of the Holocaust and a survivor of polio. Poems in Arts & Letters, Barrow Street, Hopkins Review, Hudson Review, New Letters, Notre Dame Review, Raritan and Smartish Pace. Books include The Clock Made of Confetti (nominated for The Poets' Prize), The Enemy of Good is Better, Poetry in Medicine, classic and contemporary poems on medicine, A Prague Spring (Sinclair Poetry Prize winner), Shades & Graces (winner Daniel Hoffman Legacy Book Prize), Necessary Speech: New & Selected Poems (2022) and Crossing the Tape (2024).

Dan Schall is a poet based in Pennsylvania. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in Merion West, The Shore, The Light Ekphrastic, Arboreal Magazine, Moria: A Poetry Journal, Right Hand Pointing, Cactus Heart Press and other journals.

Mary Senter is a multi-disciplinary artist who creates in a cabin in the woods on the shores of Puget Sound. She earned certificates in literary fiction writing from the University of Washington and an M.A. in strategic communication from WSU. Her work can be found in *North American Review*, *Gulf Stream*, *Paper Dragon*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *Ponder Review*, *Cleaver*, and elsewhere. She is the founder of Milltown Press. Visit her at [www.marysenter.com](http://www.marysenter.com).

Taylor Sharp is an Appalachian girl with a heart for Chicago. She studied literature at Elon University and is in awe of the storytellers before and around her. She has no publication history to share and she pays her rent by being a corporate sellout. She's just happy to be here.

Maureen Sherbondy's forthcoming book is *The Body Remembers*. Her work has appeared in *Calyx*, *European Judaism*, *Stone Canoe*, and other journals. Maureen lives in Durham, NC. [www.maureensherbondy.com](http://www.maureensherbondy.com)

Keegan Shoemaker is a writer living in Indiana. His work includes fiction pieces, creative essays, and film/play scripts.

Michael Singh is an interdisciplinary artist originally from Southern California. He worked as an art teacher across 3 studios in Los Angeles. In 2021 he briefly studied painting at The New York Art Students League and The 92nd St Y. He currently works and resides in upstate New York.

Emma Galloway Stephens is a neurodivergent poet and professor from the Appalachian foothills of South Carolina. Her poems have appeared in *The Windhover*, *The Nature of Things*, *Ekstasis Magazine*, and two anthologies. She dreams of earning her PhD in gothic literature and then disappearing into the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Maria Tosti is an Italian poet and artist from Perugia. Her passions are writing, photography and drawing. She is a video maker too. Her literary debut was with the multilingual poetry book “Voci ai confini dell’anima” – “Voices to the Bounderies of the Soul” - published by Thoth Editions/Mario Vallone in the year 2014 with poems in Italian, English, French and Spanish, in various literary genres. One of her haiku was set to music by master Paolo Scatena. Many of her literary and artistic works have appeared in various national and international literary journals, magazines, blogs, websites and anthologies: China, India, Canada, USA, Brazil, United Kingdom, Germany, New Zealand, Ireland, Australia, Wales, Argentina, Romania, Switzerland. She has also written the text of some songs in Italian, two of them have been set to music, one by the Italian composer Pasqualino Moscatelli, and the other by the master Daniel Cianelli.

Agnes Vojta grew up in Germany and now lives in Rolla, Missouri where she teaches physics at Missouri S&T and hikes the Ozarks. Agnes is the author of *Porous Land* (Spartan Press, 2019), *The Eden of Perhaps* (Spartan Press, 2020), and *A Coracle for Dreams* (Spartan Press, 2022). Her poems have appeared in a variety of magazines; you can read some on her website [agnesvojta.com](http://agnesvojta.com).

C.L. Von Staden is a self-taught artist based in Central Texas. He graduated from Concordia University in Austin, Texas with a Master’s degree in Education and currently teaches Special Education. He focuses on painting and drawing themes which convey strong emotions through color and motion.

Elinor Ann Walker (she/her) holds a PhD in English from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, lives near the mountains, and prefers to write outside. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *AGNI*, *Nimrod International Journal*, *The Penn Review*, *Pirene’s Fountain*, *Plume*, *Poet Lore*, *Shō Poetry Journal*, *The Shore*, *The Southern Review*, *SWING*, *Terrain.org*, *The Vassar Review*, *Verse Daily*, and elsewhere. She has recently completed a full-length manuscript of poetry and two chapbooks. Find her online at <https://elinorannwalker.com>.



Sarah R. Wallace teaches, wonders, and wanders on Treaty 6 territory in Canada. Her work has been published by *The Lamp*, *The Antigonish Review*, and *The Mitchell Prize*.

Sean Whalen lives near Pilot Mound, Iowa, and enjoys what life close to home has to offer. Recent poems have appeared in *Halcyon Days*, *Last Leaves*, *Smoky Blue*, *After Happy Hour*, *The Ocotillo Review*, and *Oakwood*.

Rachel White (she/her) is an American-born poet and artist who lives and works on Kurna land in South Australia. Her poetry has been featured in *Kissing Dynamite*, placed highly commended in the 2022 Woorilla Poetry Prize, and has been nominated for Best Microfiction 2024. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *The Shore*, *Lunch Ticket's Amuse Bouche*, *Rogue Agent*, *Third Wednesday Magazine*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *Amethyst Review* and *Porcupine Lit*. You can find Rachel on Instagram @rachelwhite.studio.

Alicia Wright is from Appalachia and received an MFA in poetry from Bowling Green State University. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Crawfish*, *Same Faces Collective*, *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, *Kestrel*, *The Cape Rock*, *Sweet Tree Review*, and elsewhere.”

Shahryar Eskandari Zanjani is a writer, teacher, and editor. His work has received an honorable mention in the 2024 Witness Poetry Prize competition (*Southern Humanities Review*), won second place in *Nine Muses Review's* inaugural poetry contest, and appeared in *The Hemlock Anthology* (Lighted Lake Press, 2024). Shahryar's debut book, *English Phonetics and Phonology for Farsiphones*, was published by *Booka* (2020). He has edited several books at *ATU Press* and is the translator of *Zahhak's Inferno* (Markosia, 2024). His poetry has also appeared in *Willow Review* and *Sky Island Journal*, among others. Shahryar lives in Tehran, Iran.

