

Thimble Literary Magazine

Volume 7 · Number 4 · Spring 2025

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Our staff consists of Nadia Arioli, Editor-in-Chief and Managing Editor: Agnes Vojta, Associate Poetry Editor and Proofreader: Clara Bush Vadala, Associate Poetry Editor: Richard Jordan, Associate Poetry Editor: Melissa McEver Huckabay, Associate Poetry Editor: Aliah Fabros: Associate Poetry Editor, Mark David Noble, Associate Poetry Editor, Izzy Maxson, Associate Poetry Editor, Jeanne Griggs, poetry reader, Chloe Bennett, poetry reader: Sally Brown, Art Editor: Walker Smart, Prose Editor: and Kathryn Haney, Social Media Manager. We also have layout and design editors for our print and web editions: Katie Yacharn, Jonathan Garnes, and Loreena Garcia.

Cover art: *Blue Lines* by Tiffany Dugan

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 with the genre in the subject line.

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Editor's Note

by Agnes Vojta

Dear Readers,

January slammed us with winter storms, freezing rain, and bitter cold. As I am writing this, the snow has melted, the sun warms the air, and a pair of wrens call to each other in the redbud tree. The first green tips of the iris are poking through the soil, eager to grow, fueled by the energy stored in their rhizomes. It feels as if spring is imminent. I know it isn't; we are still in for a long winter here, but these random warm days are invigorating, like a thimble-sized injection of hope.

I love mornings and evenings, when the sun is low, and the silhouettes of the trees stand black against the tinged sky. Stripped of their leaves, they reveal their character. The oak branches clutch the air like gnarled fingers. The elms lift their boughs in an elegant curvature. Where the elm is a graceful dancer, the oak is a farmer with calloused hands and a no-nonsense attitude. Both have a dogged determination to survive.

On windless winter days, we burn the field. Old flower stalks and grasses go up in flames. The knots and tangles of dried vegetation disappear and leave a few flakes of white ashes and black scorched ground, ready for seeds to germinate, ready for the daffodils that will come up in a few weeks. In Nicholas Olah's poem in this issue, "*Midwest, Early Winter*", he writes: "It's a marvel—the way an ending and a beginning can look the same."

Maybe it is similar for a human life, too. The poems in this issue span the breadth of life, from the dream of a *not yet bodied baby* to the scattering of ashes. We witness the tenderness of a son taking his blind mother to dinner on her 105th birthday, ponder arriving in the *new country of old age*, and wonder what last words one might utter—perhaps a poem?

In Olah's poem, autumn speaks to winter: "*Please be gentle*". May winter, and this new year, be gentle to you all, dear readers, and may you have energy stores to draw from, like the iris and the daffodils that emerge even after the harshest winter. Thank you for being here.

Warmest wishes,

Agnes Vojta



Getting to Yes by Tiffany Dugan

Small Protections

by Mary Ann McGuigan

To see the words on the blackboard, I'd use a pencil to pierce a hole through a piece of paper. Somehow, when I looked through the hole, the words came into focus. I had no idea why, still don't. I was ten years old, and my teacher finally sent me home with a note informing my mother.

I didn't want to tell Mama why I was squinting so much. My father had lost his sight almost entirely by then, and I was scared that what had happened to him was happening to me. He went blind gradually, the reason a mystery. Mama would mumble something about an accident at the gas station where he used to work and his neglecting to do his eyedrops. The story didn't seem true, even then. Decades later I learned the cause had been something far worse, syphilis, and all eight of us—my mom and all the kids—had to get shots. For years, the disease was a secret my older sisters and brothers only hinted at, one more of the many family riddles that were never explained and off limits to question. But I have no memory of going for shots, and I worried that I'd been overlooked, the way I'd been overlooked for so many things, basic things, like the eyeglasses, vaccinations. All my siblings had a whitish scar near their shoulder, where they'd been vaccinated for smallpox. My arm has no mark.

Other pieces of my life were just as mysterious, like the circumstances surrounding my starting school. The September after I turned six, I

was supposed to enter first grade at St. Thomas Aquinas, just as my five older siblings had. My gray dress, with tiny polka dots and a pink sash, hung on the door the night before. I couldn't wait to wear it. But I never went to school the next day. When I asked Mama why, she tossed out something about the school not having a kindergarten. That was horseshit and I knew it even then. I never did get a straight answer.

I didn't start school until the following year, when I was seven. So I went through first grade and every grade after that explaining to kids why I was older than they were, insisting I wasn't left back. I was grateful I didn't look my age. Unless the subject of birthdays came up, most kids never guessed.

It took two years before I was able to figure out why she didn't send me to school. I was eight by then, and Daddy worked at the Light House for the Blind in Queens, navigated the subway on his own. He rarely used his red-tipped cane in the house, but in the street, he'd tap an arch in front of him, like an undecided pendulum, to make his way. He'd want me to hold his hand crossing the street. I hated that. I wasn't a little kid anymore, and his skin against mine felt foreign. But he'd reach out his catcher's mitt of a hand, and I'd take it because I had no choice. It wasn't safe to make him angry. He could find you later if he wanted to.

Like he found my little brother, Kevin, the day we were rehearsing. My sister Irene and I liked to put on shows for Mama, pull her out of her moods. So we learned old songs from Judy Garland movies, the kind she liked. A thin, faded blanket hung across the corner of the room, tucked into the tops of the windows on each side, creating a triangle of secret space backstage. Drenched in our sister's perfume, Irene danced in Mama's high-heeled shoes before the curtain—a long, slim umbrella, her cane. I directed the lamp with the shade, keeping her within the spotlight. Kevin stood in the doorway, laughing, inattentive at his post as lookout. He didn't see Daddy coming.

His entrance was sudden, insulting. Irene and I scurried to another corner of the room, but Kevin was in his way. The anger was

grotesque: blind eyes wide open, impotently searching, lips spread in a frightening semblance of a smile, the shimmering tip of his tongue protruding between his teeth. I didn't wonder where the anger came from. Our existence was violation enough. He reached down for Kevin, picked him up by the back of his shirt and smashed his face. He bled but didn't cry out; only a pathetic whimper came, a useless defense. The room filled with the smell of his urine.

Daddy let go of him, still cursing, spitting out threats. "Outta my way, you bastard. I'll break your legs." He staggered toward the stage, his arms slicing at emptiness, his huge bulk entering the abandoned spotlight. Then the curtain brushed his shoulder and he tore it down, kicked aside our props and toys until the magical space was once again the dismal corner of the bedroom. That's when Kevin screamed. It was a foolish thing to do, because Daddy's rage was only half-spent and he turned toward the sound of the crying.

I was tiny. I couldn't have stopped him from hurting Kevin, or Mama. And for the first time I wondered if that was why she'd kept me home with her when I was six. She wasn't working yet. Except for Kevin, she'd have been alone with Daddy when he took sick days for hangovers or when he came home unexpectedly in the early afternoons. So maybe my being there protected her. Maybe I made a difference. Maybe it wasn't so mysterious after all.

A few weeks after my teacher sent that note home, I walked into the street sign on the corner near our new apartment, and Mama finally decided I needed glasses. I needed them months and months before that, but I knew we had no money for glasses. She was saving every cent for the new apartment, so I didn't mention it. Plus she had her hands full getting us ready to move. Everybody was happy to be moving out of the basement apartment, excited about the new place. It was on the second floor of a two-family house and had a big kitchen and a big living room, with a porch that overlooked a courtyard.

It wasn't hard to keep Mama from figuring out I couldn't see straight. I'd lost interest in television because the figures all seemed like fuzzy ghosts. All I could do without difficulty was read, and I was already the family egghead, so no one gave it a thought. The day my face met the pole, my brother Kevin made it sound like I'd spun around the thing

like Wile E. Coyote. Not true. The collision hardly left a mark.

I hated the way I looked in glasses, like a mouse in goggles, but at least I didn't have to pretend I had a sore ankle when it was time to play kickball in gym class. And I had one less secret to keep.



Light as a Feather by Tiffany Dugan

2 years of therapy

by Meredith Stafford

I've scythed myself: which, the reflection,
which, the flesh? Tear a pocket of liver—
sertraline rainsticks, a dark swallow
of ache, bird's tail arrowing to phone calls
we had. *Mama,* *I'm sick. I've got to get*
help. There, the fracture, the heart-faced
daughter with folded hands // the boy-
girl born full as a mouth of sky, as a clause;
Already, the tree fork a gathering of roots
and tendons, already the gravity loose
like plum skin. Foals birthed running,
pit the ground in their heat.

How to paint the sky

by Iris Rosenberg

Your first try is a gray wet wash that puckers
the paper—mirroring the sodden rolls

of ocean air that hang overhead and leach color
from wildflowers crowding the road. But

remember, we don't all abide beneath the same
heavens. On the far side of the world, cumulus

has an inky edge, as if brushed by a master's hand.
Learn from this. As Ganku taught his students

long ago: Make your clouds a gentle presence
on a length of yellow silk. Then a hare

hiding in painted grass and the tiger stalking it
forever will be bathed in sunshine

Backwards

by Stacie M. Kiner

For Deborah Digges

The poet
who hurled herself
off the stadium
at Tufts

was happy once—
bounding into class
with her Walkman
singing.

She'd tell me
how the woods
behind her home
in Amherst
would glow with orange
at sunrise
and how her mother
was once a Rockette.

There's so much
to not remember
when the future
becomes
assembled past:

the nest of memory,

bundle of twigs
for fires
in a living room.

Kierkegaard said
backwards
is the only way
to understand this.

As if memory
is a song—

a needle
deep in a groove

that keeps
repeating.

Look, look by Tiffany Dugan



No Matter What

by Alison Stone

Spaniels swim. Spooked geese fly. The river flows.
Under the full moon's eye, the river flows.

Love breaks down like rotting fruit. The Mountain
Goats sing, *I hope you die*. The river flows,

yellow with chemicals. On its bank, kids
play. My daughter asks why the river flows.

Dreams offer reversals—the air clean, Mom
alive. From low to high, the river flows.

The sun sets on today's rage. Over reeds
where bloated bodies lie, the river flows.

An abundance of ducks. My loneliness.
As *we* turns back to *I*, the river flows.

So many metaphors for penis size.
The puffed-up despot gloats, *My river flows*

fastest, holds gold fish. Masked men creep at night
to plunder his supply. The river flows,

keeper and cause of the drowned dead. Without
remorse or alibi, the river flows.

After a summer of muddy trickles,
joyful villagers cry, *The river flows!*

Tan house, fetid with arguments, where we
played pirate, soldier, spy. The river flows

from childhood to repetition. Last leaves
on stark fall branches sigh. The river flows.

Our love's ribbon snapped, we fight and wander.
Through a field shorn of rye, the river flows.

Stone wets her feet at the familiar bend.
Whatever is awry, the river flows.



Scraps by Tiffany Dugan

At the Ending

by Erika Takacs

for Jeff, with a line by Joseph von Eichendorff

You say you think your last words
will be a poem. That your last exhalation
will be a final musing about old men
and small towns, some syllable offered
in praise of the dogwood or the river,
a phrase unfinished, unpolished, one raw
pearl sitting sandy on the tongue.
Until now I have never wondered
what words I will speak at my own end.
A prayer, perhaps, asking Holy Mary to pray
for me now, and now. Or a delicate weaving
together of love and leaving handed
gently to a waiting ear. I would like
to have the courage to close
with a question—that as the world
turns evening-red I would look
around and ask, lightly, *could this perhaps
be death?* That I would close my eyes curious,
my unknowing the final truth of myself,
ribboning out into eternity. But a poem—
to end with creation, still rolling words
around in your mouth like gemstones,
searching for a last way to bear beauty
into being—could there be
a more generous death than this?

Toast

by Susan Grimm

We like it a little gritty, a food that stands up for itself, a food that will lie down for the butter or whatever else comes off your knife. This shallow altar and you the god to whom the offering. Used to be bread on a fork before GE got involved. Used to be something your mother slid on your plate next to the eggs. Bridesmaid of breakfast—warm, a little rough, a place for your teeth to convene. After she died, we met at a restaurant. I wore sunglasses throughout the meal. I did not order toast which would have spoken to me of every morning in my mother's house.

Sanctuary

by Isabel Cristina Legarda

Summer, 2018

A woman walks away from Notre-Dame along the Quai des Orfèvres,
weeping openly. I want to ask her what's wrong.

The cathedral towers, serene above the traffic, are turning
the color of cream in the afternoon sun.

It's not even the prettiest, as cathedrals go, nor the most unusual—
no oxen atop its spandrels, like the ones at Laon; no Ursuline bone mosaic.

A water spout high above resembles a surgeon I dislike.
We see in these stone beings the gargoyles of our lives.

The plaza was supposed to be a car-park. Digging deep in Paris
risks encounter, risks apocalypse. Sometimes the asphalt sings.

Mass has begun. The processional cross stretches toward the vault,
visible to all. I can't see who's carrying it—too many people.

The priest welcomes us to liturgy in a number of vernaculars.
I hear Tagalog. My heart flies up toward the clerestory.

Through the stones beneath our feet, the would-be car-park exhales
dank secrets of medieval death and Roman conquest. The port of Lutèce
flickers in and out of view. A single laborer's cigarette
could bring down these thousand years. The priest is praying, praying,
a disc of bread, a grail, in his hands. We bow our heads, close
our eyes tight. Out on the quai a woman weeps and walks away, a speck.



Movement by Liza Moore

Keeping hope alive

by Jayne Stanton

Needy as a newborn, you are
insatiable. I set my alarm
for two-hourly feeds,
am catapulted awake by your clamouring.

We share a bed. It's the only solution.
You are pacified by sucking on my little finger between feeds.
I sing lullabies on a loop. Rock a Bye Baby
is an earworm worse than tinnitus.

*

You have a death wish.
Bath water, hob controls, the knife block—
cautionary tales.

*

Outdoors is a nightmare! Wasps and nettles
aren't the only stingers. The garden shed
is strictly out of bounds with its spikes and blades,
to say nothing of those pretty blue pellets.

*

How you love playing games:
Spin the Bottle, Truth or Dare, Forfeits
and Chicken. I lose count of the number of times
I rescue you from the path of an oncoming juggernaut.



Great Light by Liza Moore

[untitled]

by Ian Parker

the edge of the world looked different than we had thought it might. we scrounged our belongings, pulled weeds to make tea, ran on water to save time—short cuts all. I took what sun there was and kept it in a jar. Torpedoed through the foggy notion of *what dies on survival instinct?* You can call us desperados, at least desperate enough to take a chance on seeing the end of the fall.

*Aphrodite
or, Ode to Lube*

by Patrick Roche

Slick god that allows me to hold more than me,
silicone ocean that births love with sweet foam,
that leaves a stained fossil, a discolored circle
on the bedsheet, persistent memory of a night/
weekend morning/Tuesday afternoon/oily epoch
when I was a supplicant, when I prayed to be an
amphora dripping & slippery. O elastic, tidal love.
How many can I absorb? How many eyes, hands?
How many soft waves lapping the archipelago, how
many humid after-hours, aftermaths, after-the-panic-
attacks, after-the-fights over dishes & wedding plans?
How many Mes? How many Yous? How many Yeses?
How many new joys can we balloon & blossom to hold?
How many Manies? & Hows? & then, how many more?

The Case for Planting Lantanas

by Cathy Thwing

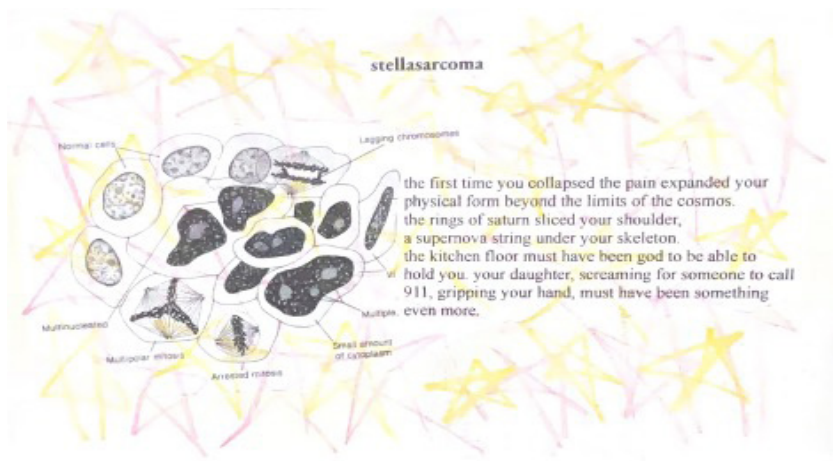
The last day the temperature rose
above 105, the Persian carpet zinnia
wilted its last time. It quit.
That evening, the wind blew
in from the west, and the next
day, we barely sweat.
The marigold bloomed.

Then heat returned.
One of my students confessed
she'd dropped poetry class
three times. This term, she stuck
it out, composing a poem
for her high school English
teacher, which his family read,
In Memory Of.

A newly hatched lizard
munches the dried blossoms
on the zinnia's last
branches, and I decide
I want to be here, after all,
come spring, to see how big
he's grown.

I'll cover the tenderest
plants when frost comes.
I'll stand with bare arms
until goosebumps form.
I'll stay. I'll stay after all.
And in next summer's heat,
I won't plant zinnias.

Stellarsarcoma by Madison Santiago Davis



While We Wait

by Rachel Mikita

I drove you through the canyon
waiting for a cattle drive
to the spot where you'd be
buried within a year.

To be a stone or
a small stand
of delicate
desert grass underfoot

and underhoof

not quite deep enough to be cool

not like the river of God
or

the swimming hole I never
found

but like rain on the mountain
juicy lukewarm drops a steady
hand a small sip

of what it would be like to crack open all my ribs
crawl out
and join in the everything of everything.

Hotel California by Callie Boswell



Something

by Margaux Williamson

Mom asked me and my wife to help with Grandma's move. We prepared for a day of manual labor but had barely lifted one box when Mom mentioned a bin of pictures. Grandma's pictures. She said I could look through them and take what I wanted. I confirmed this with Grandma. She looked up at me, pleased and serene. Brown eyes like wet sand. She said, *Sure*.

Moving paused. Mom and Grandma sat on the couch. My wife and I sat on pearl-colored carpet; it looked and felt new, like no one had lived on it. This depressed me, but I persisted. I perused. I flipped through photos of places and faces and, at one point, encountered a stranger.

They were a few months old, pictured alone in a too-large hat, mid-dribble, mid-babble, surely still foreign to language. I turned to Mom and Grandma, showed them, and asked, *Who's this?* Together, they said, *That's you*. I looked again, unsettled and saddened at my unfamiliarity.

My wife and Mom busied themselves with pictures of another stranger—shots of me from high school with long hair, wearing lip gloss, before I knew who I was, before I knew anything. I focused on pictures of Grandma and Papa from just before he died. Bright-eyed, happy, and in love. Their last cruise. I turned the page. Deck and sky. Water.

Grandma stood from the couch. She asked, *What's that there?* She pointed at the album in my lap, open to a series of oceanic photos taken with a disposable camera. The images were surprisingly clear and so vividly blue that the paper seemed wet. She said, *I thought I saw something there...something you don't know about...something I could show you.* I flipped back a page, then another, again. Rippling pages, nautical miles. Nothing else. She sat back down, disoriented and discouraged. I plunged again to be sure, but resurfaced with nothing. I closed the album, dissatisfied, and preoccupied myself with other times. My parents' wedding. The summer I learned to swim.

Later, photos spilled from our arms as we left. My wife carried my baby pictures to the car, smiling to herself. I held my loved ones in their prime, put them in the back seat, and resisted the urge to strap them in. Driving home, I worked against the high tide of distress—I hadn't known myself. *Who's this? That's you.*

The recollection of Grandma's lost memory floated nearer the closer we got to home. *What's that there?* I hoped she'd find it again, that something—catch it fresh, writhing, alive—and show me. But it was gone, away, far out at sea, somewhere I didn't know about, somewhere I couldn't see.

The Riding Lesson

by Nicole Brooks

To mount a horse you clutch
handfuls of mane. To mount
you swing your leg. You yield
to this chestnut mare. To find the center,
look where you want the horse to go.
You stay calm and she will be calm. To be calm
you look down to your mother's thinning hair.
Her sing-song instructions
roll over this farm's endless green.
To hold the horse between your thighs,
grab her here. Braided leather cinches
the horse's belly. Her stiff tail hair
twitches in the coming evening.
When you were a baby your mother's hair
was brown and feathered. *Let your hips give,*
like a rocking. You smell mud and warm muscle.
You are not prepared for the dismount.
You pull from the stirrups
your feet in borrowed boots.
To get down you must swivel,
press your stomach to the saddle seat.
For a breath your legs dangle,
you trust the ground is there.
Tonight you will lie in bed,

your butt-bones panging,
and think of horse teeth nipping
at the red and white peppermints
your mom unwrapped, put in your palm.
She taught you *splay your hand*.



Desert Rose Joy by Callie Boswell

Six Names

by Charmaine Arjoonlal

I

It is Ordered:

1. That Charmaine Arjoonlal be and is hereby adopted as the child of Dawson Kingdom Lloyd Gilmour and Dorothy Margaret Gilmour.

2. That the name of the child shall be Charmaine Lynn Gilmour.

II

I should have been born Da Silva but my birth father said I wasn't his and Arjoonlal—

my mothers name—was written on my birth certificate.

III

Arjoonlal was actually Arjun but a Trinidadian birth-grandfather played the steel drums and added lal.

IV

In Toronto I was adopted at two years old and Gilmour replaced the name of my mother

on my birth certificate. With a stroke of the gavel and slash of pen, I instantly became another person.

My whiteness didn't show on the outside but being asked and asked
and asked,
"Why a name like Gilmour?" I married a Jaikaran—
but my outer brownness was forced to toughen into a shell...

V

The shell wasn't brown enough and tough enough to survive his
threats and hits
and it cracked, whiteness previously submerged, resurfaced as Traynor.

VI

I stayed awhile, became a wife, bore a son, lived...
cracks started to mend but I lacked a Self—

Brown skin, loving hotdogs, Timmies and Canadian beer but asked,
always asked, why a name like Traynor?

An invisible illness I've had my whole life, a shadow, searching...

VII

I became Traynor-Ruitenberga—a new beginning, another attempt at
Self...
Yet Arjoonlal—my birth name— is peeking through.

VIII

After eighteen years, and visiting with my birth mom four times,
she told me how to pronounce Arjoonlal.

Just as it's written, she said, her Trini lilt singing like the sky and sea
and sun.

"I am Ar-joon-lal," I said, reaching for my drum.

"Yes".

*If you were to ask what I believe, I might
tell you yo-yo string*

by Lucinda Trew

the ratty, knotted stuff that connects us cosmically
confoundingly, with equal parts arc and ache
sweep and sorrow

the tether of playground twine or celestial
thread that binds us, sends us spiraling
plummets us to graze pavement
touch heaven

a continuum so taut it quivers
spinning atoms and plates, molecular
chains, the tripwire and tailspin of stars
joy and grief

twin discs held by miraculous axle—sun
and moon, back and forth, a ripcord pulled
spiraling free from the noose of ourselves
and of earth

Early October, White Aurora

by Mistee St. Clair

5 a.m. and almost clear skies. The stars
bright but fuzzy, a bleeding white watercolor.
She walked the dog in monotony because
this year each day was the same rise and fall.
Only the darkness seemed different when the season
was something that just happened.
When she looked up, she noticed a pale haze,
a ribbon pulsing across the sky. She stopped walking
and thought *an alien force field?* And then,
oh God, will I fight or will I flee?—
and then, *no, no, it must be a wave of global pollution*
riding a current around the world, so then
she was grappling with guilt and frustration,
her own contribution, how impossible
humanness is. Please know she doesn't sleep well.
She is often afraid and sad. So maybe that's why
it took her so long to feel it, that familiar
pull of the aurora, a pull like a tide neither stranding
nor swallowing, and knew, with a sigh,
the lights without color, and she thought
how sometimes even the spectacular has a faint form,
and so she kept looking up, and I loved her then,
this woman so briefly, briefly,
outside herself, making her way back.

Silent Scene

by Freyr Thorvaldsson

changers trying not to run
go about the solemn business of moving
chairs, beds, guitars, walls, raising floors,
putting keys in doors. On the plane back I
watched someone watch Columbo watching
Columbo himself watch a magic show while
he (Columbo) was watched. Scene change:
I left you my blue teeth to find, imagining
you baring your incisors right back at 'em.
Sometimes it's smoother to spectate yourself
from the vantage of third person singular
nothing's easier than cracking open a cold
smile at someone else's bubbling misfortune.

Midwest, Early Winter

by Nicholas Olah

In December, the sky turns
blue-grey and branches bend and sway
like a ballerina.

Winter is here and we denounce it.

It's a marvel—

the way an ending and a beginning
can look the same. Autumn slowly fell asleep
tapped winter on the shoulder

ever so softly

and said

*It's your turn; be gentle.
Please be gentle.*

Punching Out, 1995

by John Dorsey

for jim daniels

poems or gears covered in grease
it's doesn't matter
it's all a factory in your brain
when i pick up a book
at the bookstore
in local mall
before a reading
i'm not thinking that the author
could still go to bed hungry
both the mall
& the bookstore
now long gone
time demolishes everything
except regret
& ten bucks
doesn't buy much anymore
except peace of mind
on an
empty stomach.

Ellen Bass Has Great Hair

by Hilary King

And I aspire to that, a cap
of milk-colored curls close
on the skull, a bit flaring out
at the back like a giggle.
Each wreath of strands lies
exactly right. I wouldn't edit
a single one. I'd like to fill
workshops too, or at least
my living room with friends
smart and funny as hers.
I'd like to keep the same
friends, the same living room,
the same hair though I'm sure
she's had to cut it and grow it back,
cut it and grow it back,
a steadiness under scissors
I haven't learned to wear yet.

The Wonderful World of Mary Blair

by Annie Przepyszny

Mary Blair (1911-1978) was a concept artist for Walt Disney Animation Studios, whose work shaped several of Disney's Silver Age films, such as Alice in Wonderland and Cinderella

This is Cinderella.
She looks a bit like me:
blonde and poised
despite.
In this one,
soap bubbles swallow
her reflection. Still,
she sings. Her song,
clean as glass;
no color is so clear.
In this one,
she dances
with her prince
because in such stories
women do.
It's almost midnight.
That's why I made
the sky so black
and their silhouettes
so stark and white.

*

This is Alice.
She looks a bit like me:
blonde and lost
in wonder.
In this one,
she is small
among huge flowers.
When I choose colors,
I mean it: see
how the starlit yellow
is overlapped by deep,
haunted purple.
For Alice blue
and white, because
she's like the sky:
drifting, shifting,
ungrounded.
In this one,
she's grown,
tower-tall,
and her tears: rain
she must learn
to swim in.

Detour

by Judith Lagana

Along back roads,
low branches, snow-weighted,
skim the car's roof
with a fade
and groove as if a waning beat
could signal closure and we'd
be done for good with things.
I loved you most in winter.

That hum
of sleet and tires.
The uncertainties of ice
and a narrow road.
The phone's bad connection.
Your voice breaking up.

Home-work or Bone-work

by Hibah Shabkhez

Break it, you said, into manageable
Pieces. Break it down, home-work or bone-work;
Break, and prosper. You told half the fable
Then, leaving out the life-long quest for gold
 To lace mending-lacquer.

All I know are fragments. Pieces of shell
Floating in the egg-white, above the yolk,
The soul still miraculously whole, swell
My heart with hope. So I glue myself back:
 Your way, but in reverse—

I am introducing my spine to steel
Sound by sound, like the phonics of a new
Language, like the science made to unreel
Year by school year, truth doled out in doses
 Just right for absorption.

Complimentary. Drink.

by Laura Hamel

Looking out the airplane window,
I hover over clouds and
bleached coral like
an omnipotent
observer

of every wave crashing below
the sky is silent to metal
noise and turbulence
pressure clogging my ears.

A stewardess pushes a cart
down the grooved
narrow strip, offering
complimentary sodas in
clear plastic cups. I accept,
except guilt bubbles inside and

this container will be empty
soon and likely floating beside
translucent jellyfish
and clumps of red algae
blooming together
in turquoise waters
under these
manmade
wings.



Coral-Lime Seascape by Callie Boswell

My Mother's 105th Birthday

by Steven Luria Ablon

She is mostly blind with occasional
bursts of light but mostly darkness.
But every day she goes out for dinner.

I help her lift herself into the car,
connect her seat belt, smooth her
purple cashmere scarf over her shoulders.

Today I take to her favorite bistro
my arm around her, maneuvering
the walker to ease her into the chair,

pushing her close to the table.
She is wearing her favorite pin,
a delicate gold filagree tree

with garnet chips for leaves.
I read her the menu and she asks
the waiter about the specials.

For years she went out for dinner,
immersed in the buzz of voices.
She doesn't want help with her fork

which she lowers to the plate
like a giant crane. With peas
she rarely spears one.

Today she orders French toast.
I cut thick squares like a checkerboard,
pour on Maple syrup and help her

hold her fork. She rarely misses,
lifts one square after the next.
She will not let anyone help her,

but she cannot see that I move
the plate under her fork. I hope
that if I reach such an age

I can live with such an appetite
for life, braving the world
each night for dinner, dressing

slowly, maneuvering
to an evening meal, that burst of light
in a day of mostly darkness.

Mom Can't Remember

by Elise Glassman

Mom can't remember her collapse. Not just that it happened but whole days, the week around it, are just gone. So when she calls out, alarmed, *What happened to my hair? Why are there staples in my head?* I know she's glimpsed her shaved head in the bathroom mirror and needs reminding.

(Once when she forgot, church lady Mrs. O was visiting and she chided, *Why haven't you girls told her*, as though my sisters and I wouldn't tell Mom she suffered a catastrophic brain injury, that we'd lie, say she lost a bet, pretend her shorn head is a fashion choice gone wrong knowing Mom, a pastor's wife, is fully committed to modesty, her formerly shoulder-length hair a glory and a covering.)

To calm our mother, we take her hand, steer her away from the mirror, tell her again what happened. We use simple terms—a blood vessel broke open, you were in coma—not the words the doctors and nurses use, the clinical language—subarachnoid hemorrhage, angiogram, shunt—that defines her as a head injury patient and not our mother.

What else did I forget? Mom prods, after yet another retelling of her collapse, the weeks in critical care, the church people crowding the waiting room each night praying—not for healing, Dad insists, but for God's will. She listens to us, head cocked to the side, the way she watches her favorite black-and-white movies starring Mickey Rooney

or Humphrey Bogart. like it's an interesting story that happened to someone else. We leave out the painful parts, how scared we were (are), how a weeping nurse took us to the ER to say goodbye to her, the breathless hours waiting out her brain surgeries. The words we use to describe ourselves—heartbroken, pleading, terrified—stay the same and we don't say those around Mom either. We pretend like we always knew God would spare her, that she'd wake up and be our mother again.

"Do you remember Kansas?" I ask her a few weeks later. I'm portioning meds into a plastic pill box with little cubes for each day of the week. Mom's neurologist advised us to weave her past back in as naturally as we can; I've wondered whether her hometown, her parents and siblings still lurk in her memory.

Yes I remember Kansas, I'm not an imbecile, Elise, my mother says tartly. *It's where I had my surgeries,* she adds, but that's wrong, she hasn't visited her childhood home in years. The neurologist also warned that our disciplined mother might confabulate, become angry or despondently sad. Sometimes she insists Dad is her son, that JFK is still alive (*I voted for him, I ought to know*), that she has to heal up quick so she can return to her nonexistent job at the post office.

I feel like I forgot me, Mom says wistfully. She's home finally, after two weeks at a rehab center. She relearned how to bake brownies and complete Sudokus in record time. Her therapist marveled. If healing were competitive, Mom's a winner.

But her post-aneurysm handwriting is small and cramped, as though she's about to vanish into the tiny cursive. The aneurytic stroke filled her left eye with floaters so instead of reading her KJV Bible for hours a day, she binge-watches TV shows, "Green Acres" and "Wheel of Fortune." And she's so patient and kind, waiting uncomplainingly for me to help her off the toilet, never yelling when I let the back door slam or when my little sister smarts off after being scolded about a too-short skirt.

Watching Paige flounce upstairs to change skirts, I comment, "If Rose

or I ever sassed you like that—”

“What? What do you mean, Elise?”

“You’d have spanked our behinds until we couldn’t sit.”

Tears turn Mom’s dark eyes to liquid chocolate. “Did I hurt you girls? Was I a bad Mom before the aneurysm?” she weeps.

“No no, you’re still our same old Mumsy,” I lie, using our childhood nickname. To the church people and even Gramp and Gram, she’s still beautiful Marian, with a dazzling smile and servant’s heart. But for Dad and my sisters and me, a different, strange Mom came home.

When we were little, Mom would sometimes pretend to be a monster we called Ugly Eye. One minute she was peeling potatoes, the next, her permed hair was mussed in her face, eyes rolled back, and she’d moan, *Look out it’s the Ugly Eye*. My sisters and I would flee in terror, bare feet slipping on the kitchen linoleum. I was pretty sure Monster-Mom wasn’t really Mom but where had she gone, where was the calm, capable mother who sewed our matching culottes and listened to us recite Scripture verses?

I feel a similar fear now. Who is this fragile, emotional mother, so kind, so weak? Who never gets angry, never tells us we’re bad Christians, bad daughters, bad girls? Where’s the mercy-less pastor’s wife who punished us with spankings, forbidding us to cry, praying with us as we thanked God for a mother who loved us enough to beat us with a ping pong paddle?

It’s one thing to forget what happened. It’s another to forget who you were. Who you are.

Is she absolved, now that she’s no longer that Mom? And if Mom’s not Mom anymore, who are we? Who am I?

Is old Mom buried somewhere inside her damaged brain, concealed like a pill in the meds box? Each day we flip open the little shutter to

the day's dosage and as she swallows the tablets that keep her alive, gulping down apple juice and laughing, I sit beside her and think, *Where's the monster? Is this the real her, the real Mom? Am I the real me?*

Road Landscape by Callie Boswell



Portrait with Widower

by Laura Sweeney

who approaches you on the beach
as you discard the residue of the world

he pursues and persuades
and you defer to the domestic
make fruit cake his mother's recipe

your life turns like the lake
at just the right time of summer
into muck

after he admits he liked to bake
with his late spouse

and he returns to the home he shared with her
forgets to call you forgets to tell you
he still has her ashes and
their debts

he says "I want a pure marriage"
like a line or a hit to heaven as if
you are an adulteress or his mistress
not a woman of any significance

so you'll return to the lake to
this complicated grief
then search for a home of your own

petrichor

by Henry Opeyemi

to say a famine is made whole from a theory of abundance, a twister of souls, i was at the discotheque purging this latitude for coloured lights. reins, cloudscape, rainfalls, dewdrops & the remnants of the fire called down by Elijah. burning through the sacrifices, ruining bodies into an incense raised above heaven. the children beneath these clouds clotted their souls an embankment to life, swift into reciting this epistles into chapters of burnings, a notebook of conflagration passed down through a pontifex of faceless descendants. I too was there, not enough to miracle these stones for bread. I saw through the same piercing for years until there was no voice matching it reverberation. it's nothing new. it the simplest mechanism for disappearing, to walk past this burnt house without encountering the faces that once domiciled in it. dittany, an elderly praying himself into alms, plates heavy from stone in carrying self, a lineage uplifts their souls in rhapsody. I spoke in little tongues & bodies outgrew the flood. forgot how best this forgetfulness remembered not to drown, it's always a miracle, that death has never ripped us off our clothes.

Condiments on the Shelf Long After the Expiration Date

by Grace Black

With relaxed despair, my mouth mimes words as idle fingers tuck around a coffee mug. I chew meaning and tug on rain boots to sit outside on my porch at daybreak when the moon has not yet set. In this still unrehearsed moment, birds perform a choral concert at the feeders, and I breathe. I think of the mustard that hides in aisle 3 at my local grocery store, the brown seedy kind, and country eggs from farmsteads that no longer exist, with yolks the color of this rising sun and how when you toss them in a food processor together with some vinegar and salt you get this mucilaginous substance. This creamy whitish glue paste. Mayonnaise. Where does all the color go? With yolks once yellow as my rain boots and mustard the color of seed droppings the birds have discarded during their morning chatter, how does pulverization make all the color fade? And why does divorce feel like this googum, a quasi-colloidal landscape, near colorless but not quite beige, leaving one to ponder weird words like *mayonnaise* at sunrise and how it clings to the tongue after nothing else remains?

ESL

by Neha Rayamajhi

I don't owe obedience to English
I am not its
It's mine
 to bend
 to break.

Grammar is too small of a classroom
I prefer playgrounds
where words
 become sand
 become sentences.

Spellings are strands of jackfruit
—stuck—
in between two teeth
 I roll my tongue
 spit out.

When Ruth recounted how

by Stephen K. Kim

her parents hugged her upon coming out,
he wished he could also share
how after his confession his mother
stilled, stood up, and shuffled down the hall,
how he heard the click of her bedroom door
as he balled his fists, head bent,
while his father stared out the window
at the birdhouse, empty since the swallows
flew south to flee the encroaching chill.

He was afraid Ruth would then
arrest his storytelling with tears
and well-meaning declarations
of how his parents didn't deserve him,
how lucky that he now lives
three states away, untethered
from their callous neglect.
It'd be awkward to mention

how next morning, in the kitchen
he found no one yet saw
a steaming bowl of rice porridge,
wafting the aroma of ginger and
scallions and sesame oil, with a dollop
of chili crisp blooming crimson around it,
how his bike tires were re-inflated to
proper firmness between his thumb
and forefinger, how as he left for work,
he whispered thank you and noticed
sunlight flecking the front door.



All Four Works (as a collection) by Callie Boswell

inheritance

by Nathaniel Sverlow

my father collected horror books
over the course of his life,
the kinds with skeletons
and vampires
and demons
crawling out of the earth
looking for souls
to swallow

he amassed an entire library
and carted them
from house to house
as we would move from California
to Colorado to Michigan to Pennsylvania
then to California again

“these books are priceless,”
he would tell me
“all first editions
signed by the author.
they are your inheritance”

but when my father died
from acute alcoholism,
and my mother was desperate
to leave their final house behind,
an appraiser told her
the books were worthless

all those years
carting them around,
fitting them into mylar covers,
placing them behind clear glass drawers
like museum exhibits
to gaze upon
in wonder
and delight,
they weren't worth a thing

and all those skeletons
and vampires
and demons
were carted to the dump

and my father
was burned to cinders
that my mother later spread
at an old campsite
along Diamond Lake, Oregon

she poured him
from a Ziploc bag
and he carried with the wind
away from us

our final chapter,
our inheritance,
not worth the paper
it was printed on

Easter

by Hal Wright

All churches smell of biography
At three in the morning.
The gibbous moon squints
As water from the priest's brush
Hits us like Hosanna.

We pick the *paska* with our fingers,
Coveting bits of candied fruit
To hoard on our plates.
A sin some say,
Though God bid us to save treasure for later.

If Jesus rose, why shouldn't they?
Rooted in the rubble of revolt
As mushrooms sprout from devastation
Waiting for some angel to roll
Away the stone.

Painted *pysanky* guard the square.
Imagine if they all hatched at once!
An orange sky cacophonous with wings
Clambering to heaven,
And we left with candy-colored shells
Useless as confetti after the celebration.

*Pero Yo Ya No Soy Yo**

by Alicia Viguier-Espert

I search on the hidden face of the moon
for the sadness my mother left on my temples
every time she kissed me missing me already,
and the steady hands with which I gambled
an enviable future for this American world.

A memory of my beginning shapes into a fist.
Our home in the country crumbled long ago.
I imagined I could return to the pine trees
my father planted, swim in the same sea
tinted the color of Homeric wine at sunset.

At every meal, saffron threads bonded us,
colored filaments my mother toasted inside
a white folded paper next to the fire
between two unknowns—one here today
the other when I left all the rice behind.

Outside the window a local bird sings.
I speak to it in one tongue, dream in another
dressed with the garb of the beloved place
of no return, the voice of my mother gone,
my father's brow consumed by loneliness.

I long for the blank page of the moon
to write a song under swaying Aleppo trees,
the sharp breeze disinterring the cadence
of my language; anoint myself with olive oil.
pero yo ya no soy yo, ni mi casa es ya mi casa. *

“...but I am not who I was, and my house is no longer my home.”
”Romance Sonámbulo,” Garcia Lorca.



I'm OK by Aaron Lelito

Shadowdog Catches the Number

by Adam Jon Miller

Everything here talks back to me in
blacks and whites. Everyone is
wearing long coats. There is a giant
clock with letters instead of numbers.
The numbers have no meaning here
and have entered a dark tunnel
bidding no farewells. Silver and blue
and laureled, the children activate the
backs of their heads, only their
backs, showing like wings of dark
birds flying away. They walk
forwards and backwards at the same
time. This is an underground thatch
with an entire city running like a
prison through its walls and veins,
but everything here is forgotten by
someone. A shadowdog ghosts this
burning landscape until it *Goes Out*.

This New Country

by Valentina Gnup

We will always find night again,
how it returns us to ourselves—
tired children lifted from the backseat
of our fathers' Buicks.

Did you say every line we write is a self-portrait?
Then I am bewildered magpies,
the rectangle pupils of sheep,
the tart persimmon taste of resignation.

You miscast me.
Ten years it took to erase us.
I am exactly unencumbered.
I left the convent with an iron frying pan
and my shattered silence.

I am identical to nothing,
afraid of this new country of old age—
a sad map of unexplained aches,
receding hair, hands too weak to open the pickle jar.

Tell me I can still be lovely as sunlight
framing blue eucalyptus leaves.

Huckleberries

by Daniel Z. McKenzie

I leapt from the mud,
Fistful of a writhing garter snake I'd caught.
Soft leather flesh pulsed with life
Wrapped around my wrist.
From the berry bush my mother called
And told me pies take dedication.
Dedication. Death dictation.
Dead irrigation. Dread isolation.
Dinner is so long from now.
Ten huckleberries for my tongue.
I'll save five for the pie.
Leave the rest for the grizzly guest.
One simply does not work for pie
When snakes are in the bog.

Lace

by Gregory Luce

An ancient piece of lace,
one light touch raises
a whiff of fine dust.
I think of my grandmother,
powder rising from
the thin skin of her cheek.

In the pantheon for the day

by Oormila Vijayakrishnan Prahlad

after Sandro Botticelli's The Birth of Venus

// Do you remember that time you dropped a gold ring (your father's backup token) into a pint of beer? It hissed in a haze of metallic bubbles, threatening to dissolve. The nightclub pulsed with techno beats and migraine lights. You looked at the face across from you and said that the ring swimming in the glass looked psychedelic. Prophetic even. It turned out to be the worst scare tactic ever. You never saw anyone vanish that fast on a first outing.

// The river drops into the sea, mingling in a centrifugal waltz.
The blue herons darting in the rushes appear stark, unpaired.
The mangroves are circled with salt.

// You burn with the desire to know the gilded world beyond your reach. So many Venuses stare at you from the walls. Their flowing hair is adorned with the shells of calico scallops and the waves propel them to their pedestals in the sky. They are framed in sepia perfection. You know nothing of this orbit of existence.

// The wedding band was made of Kolar gold with a sacred symbol carved on the inside.
Only a single dimple puckered its otherwise smooth skin.

// June will make a floodplain of these fields—
monsoon tears and white whirlpools.
You must loosen the girdle and plot your escape before that.

// The oceanids are surrounded by laurel trees. They throw down a
shower of roses.

Cattails kiss their porcelain feet.
Not a day goes by when they don't remind you
that you belong to the wheel,
that you are made of wet earth.

// You still have that ring. It blazes on the fourth digit of your left hand
Shadow gold—*the one ring to frighten them all.*

// Wouldn't you want to know what it is like to be celestial, to be
adored without reason,
to be served privileges on a platter?
Wouldn't you like to wear a halo,
dazzle in the pantheon for a day?

// *Tsk.* Just look at you, drawing shiny nimbuses—
saying all this as if you get to choose.

// *Maybe you do get to choose.*

Foraging

by Liz Kendall

Walking the streets I saw from your shoulders in childhood,
I remember the important places; I cross them with my feet.
The line where the stag beetle trundled before us, gleaming.
The patch on the road that held one squashed frog,
sun-dried to leather. How sad I was.
I respectfully avoid the lords and ladies,
their berries ripe with poison, bright as laughing eyes.
I no longer avoid the stings of nettles, knowing how
their acid heals arthritis. That information gathered recently,
and stored up for my future; towards an age you never reached.

Her Upper Arms

by Lucas Simone

She has red goosebumps always, on the backs of her upper arms, like she draped them on a railing and it rusted to her. So today I don't stretch my own canvas.

Usually romantic. Usually what I do. She gives me an old childhood dress, something that was soft enough to play in, something with curling faux-satin roses on the neck, an embroidered pastel studding. And I stretch it over a frame, make a taught wall, and sculpt her with oil.

Not today. I buy a prestretched canvas today. From Micheals. I break all the rules today. I take it back to the studio. A real art-school crime. Sneak in after closing so nobody sees. Golden hour giving my palette a warmth it won't have in gallery light. Another crime. And I put such a small dab of red on my brush it can only reach the cheap canvas bumps.

There she is. Her upper arms.

Miracles

by Tony Gloegler

(Jesse Malin Benefit Concert 12/1/24)

After your back to the wall balcony
tickets were upgraded to third row,
center orchestra, aisle seats, due
to a cell phone snafu. After Alejandro
Escovedo opened the show singing
Sensitive Boys and Rickie Lee Jones
wore what looked like the red beret
from her back in the day, 1979, Chuck
E's In Love video and sang Sinatra's
Cycles beautifully. After a brief break
the curtain lifted, and voila —Jesse Malin—
spotlit, front and center, perched on a chair
leading his band, strumming his guitar
and singing, his head sliding side to side
like an owl watching wide screen porno.
After long lasting overflowing loving
standing ovations. After Little Steven
walked across the stage head down,
finally found a seat, played unimpressive
guitar on a song your ears didn't know,
Jesse put aside his guitar and slowly
shifted, scooched, pushed and slid

his ass, rocked it back and forth a bit,
summoned the strength of a newly shorn
Samson with pillars of strain and struggle.
After who knows how many bed pans,
tubes, catheters and pain pills, nurses,
doctors, PT sessions filled with sweat
and gritty persistence, there's Jesse
standing at a mic, rocking out a twenty
song set. After Lucinda Williams and Elvis
Costello slur, moan, slither their way
through Wild Horses and that annoying
Counting Crows guy plops behind a piano,
bellows out a very fine Long December.
After the all-hands on stage closing Rudi
Can't Fail final encore. After one last
never ending standing ovation, trying
to imagine how wonderfully satisfied,
gratified Jesse felt playing The Beacon
surrounded by a crowd of friends less
than two years after a spinal stroke,

You head for the EXIT and slow down
as you walk by the woman you loved
longest, deepest, standing by her seat
The woman you hadn't seen in twenty
years who lives five states away and still
looks good and almost as surprised as you.
She's smiling, slowly mouthing she can't
talk while shaping her fingers into a telephone.
You move on guessing her husband's nearby
and never forgot about her affair and even
though you know she won't slip away, wave
a cab down, meet you at your Queens place
and leave a sweet note when you go for bagels
in the morning, somewhere on the way
to the subway, the first night of December
turns into a mid-May evening, an Italian
café in The Village, your first date. Jesse
Colin Young, who she later confessed
she confused with Jesi Colter, cancelled
his concert at the Beacon and you remember
you were either falling in love or already
long gone, over your heels, over the edge,
arms flailing, as you stood on the platform
looking in the tunnel, waiting for the C
to transfer you to the E and carry you home.

딸기

(*Dalki*)

by Kate Kadleck

Please come back while our neighborhood still resembles itself. The white brick house is

waiting. Your grandma's Brittany spaniel is gone, but sometimes I still hear her phantom

bark. Remember when we gathered dead blossoms & pinecones in my parents' backyard?

Played restaurateur with only the unwanted as ingredients? How did you twist the weeds

into something pretty? I need you to finish teaching me Korean. I can only recall the word

for strawberry. And even then, my useless hands forgot the characters' shapes. I thought

that first taste of kimchi would tattoo my tongue, but it turns out there was never any

visible evidence. Only the shimmery feeling. Most importantly, I wanted to tell you—

Weird Bread

by Patricia Russo

is fitting for
the odd moments
sandwiched between
the days of shadow
and the days
of marginalia

weird bread
tastes brown
and stays chewy
the geese
calling in the rain
want some too

upstairs
the quiet woman
rumbles a table
into position
opposite the window
to watch the trees
as she kneads

there will be
no weird bread today
we can tell
by the sound
of the clouds breaking

but there might
if the aspen start to sing
be weird bread
tomorrow



Seedpod by Sarah Walko

Tendrils

by Ann E. Wallace

I stoop to loosen a thread of wild clover woven tight
through my spotty lawn, and recall the morning
I knelt on my small patch of yard and pulled

stretch after stretch of unwanted stem, made room
for grass in the barren spaces, my belly eight months full,
pulling, pulling at home in the Jersey August heat.

I vowed to yank out every last bit. I rarely tug
at the thin tendrils these days—I no longer need
a soft surface for kiddie pools and yard toys.

My lawn's future is short now, as I welcome
the spread and creep of native flowers,
but the green threads winding across the earth remain

a portal into the summer before motherhood, before I
learned that disruption and love equal joy, when I tended my garden
with the careful plans and ferocious hope of a new parent.

City beehives

by Anna D'Alton

After Claudia Rankine

We are not supposed to use the fire escape but
here I am on the roof. Skyscrapers rise, monochrome,
small buses tilt on the bridge and cross the river.
Offices stack below me, tasks undone, but up here
no-one owns the atmosphere, not one breath of it.

Along the edge there's a row of potted rosemary,
thyme and mint and boxy, man-made hives for bees.
I observe them reanimate after winter, plug back into
the world's organism. They float out and taste spring on
their tongues, dance to signal new-found nectar.

Sun sweeps my eyelids, the bees hum. If we want
we can stretch out of ourselves and into every
living thing.

Spy Wednesday

by Esther Lay

I'm supposed to be writing a list of sins
for my Holy Week confession,
so I can float weightless, pure
into the Great Three Days and Eastertide,

but instead I fuss, re-ordering my study,
filling a vase with water,
trimming pink and white carnations,
indulging in private vices in my head.

From the window, I can see the other ordinands
talking together on benches, walking across the lawn.
Their sins, I'm sure, are smooth as milky enamel:
frustration, impatience, desire for time alone.

That kind of thing makes confessors
shake their head and fold their hands
in dainty reassurance—*That's no sin at all*—
and everyone goes home smug.

But my transgressions crackle iridescent,
myriad tiles, explosions of colour, impossible to list,
a dark mosaic of oil spill—and the trouble is,
I like each one too much to give it up.

Don't get me wrong: once I'm absolved,
I'll swim as grateful as I ought in the cleansing water,
drifting a happy penitent,
forgiven, transformed.

But oh, that glitter beneath me—
that texture at the bottom of the pool—
the way those sharp-edged pieces feel



*Nature is perhaps a hand which comes carefully
rearranging* by Sarah Walko

Fossil

by Yuyuan Huang

after "Love Song to the Alpacas of Solomon Lane" by Kenzie Allen

The pterosaurs know nothing of life today. That is, they know water and membrane and flight, not the metal drain, or the electric fence, or the black well in the desert. They don't know all the ways a person can ruin, or all the things ruining us. How thin a sheet of plastic seems compared to the angiosperms. Past creatures needed nothing of artifice, immaterial illusion—just the endless cycle of returning to earth, swallowed and swallowing whole. Their four-fingered wings no longer fit in our digital hands. How many years until they are gone, until even the earth is a memory. As though we are the only creatures who know the muffled shriek of loneliness. If only they could see us now, using their old bones to kill

new flesh, blood turned bile,
black. Perhaps we will live
to see the comet, that brief
wide-lipped undoing of it all,
memorialized in unknowing
fear. That gleaming light,
low on the horizon. Look up.



Portable Landscape by Sarah Walko

Imagine a Bird

by Megan Huwa

I comb through the familiar
knots at the nape of my neck

and trill my fingers in the wind,
goodbying every blond strand,

wishing them anew,
and ruminating on this season

that begins with a wooly blanket of fog
and ends with a pink veil of sunlight—

a season where I wonder if it's spring or fall—
I live so close to that veil.

I imagine a bird—a wren afresh
into nesting, gathering one invisible strand

of blond in its beak, flying to its knobby perch,
and weaving the strand through twigs,

clay mud, and color-leeched leaves.
If I cannot rebuild with what I relinquish,

I reckon you, wren, are readying your nest
with a restless joy.

Latex Allergy

by Natalie Raab

Are you always this tense? my physical therapist asks with her fingers inside me. She says my muscles feel tight to the touch, like rubber bands.

Learning to relax the floor of me after months of strain feels lewd and wrong—indolent, perilous—precarious, like the foundation will fall out beneath me, like nightmares of losing teeth.

Relinquishing the control I've held feels like breathing from my belly for the first time since middle school, feels like ordering what looks good on the menu instead of what fits my total daily energy expenditure, feels like backtracking over my *no, thanks for the offer* to say *actually, I do want something, anything*, feels like the childish desire to roll down the grassy hill when I know I have to walk it.

You may not bounce back, she warns. But if I don't let go, I sense my hold will loosen regardless, against my will, the way a rubber band slackens when stretched too far, for too long.

They say the Devil

by Charlotte Murray

is in the details. She pictures him there,
leering like a drunken lech at the bar,
sizing her up the way a cuckoo eyes a nest.
She scoots her chair so far back
from the table that it's an island drifting
apart from an archipelago.
Her sanitiser-parched hands reach
towards her glass as she ponders if it's safe
to drink: how many people have held it
before her, left greasy thumbprints or—
worse—wet half-moons around the rim?
Her fingers snap back to her lap
like a released tape measure, resume shredding
little pieces of themselves. A sharp opiate.
Someone is talking about clearing
their late mother's house but her mind
spider-weaves from bar to hands to glass:
she carried it to the table, and so bears its taint
on her downturned palm and in the gulleys
of her finger joints, and hasn't she fiddled
with her earring since, adjusted her top,
peeled away the skin around her nail
like a sticky satsuma? So many ways
for disgrace to enter. She is her own stain,

the fluids left behind when a body rots.
She counts the seconds between the coughs
of the man behind her, calculates and recalculates
the distance between him and her
and all the while nods along and shreds
and thirsts until OCD tells her a fresh drink
still in the bottle might be safer.



Catching Z's

by Ari Blatt

You are on the river. On a gravel bar. Dressed in waders and wading boots, layers of fleece underneath and a warm beanie on your head. The day is chill, but it is dry. The sun reaches through the branches of alders, maples, hemlocks, spruces, and firs. The light warms you. Your work warms you. You have been there for some time, gaff in hand. On the bank behind you is your boat. Beside the boat is a pile of your catch. You keep your eyes upstream. When you see one making its way down to you, you get ready. You step into the water, balance against the current on the cobble, reach out with your gaff. There. Hooked it. Easy. You bring it back to the bank. Place it in the pile. Back to the water you go. You are catching z's.

Each z looks just like its namesake, rigidly wiggly. Going this way, then turning forty-five degrees and going that way. That way then turning forty-five degrees again to go this way. They all do this. They all look the same. All turn back on themselves to decide the best way is forwards. They must. How would they know otherwise?

Their turning makes it easy for you to catch them. Your pile is getting quite large. In the pile, the z's interlock with one another like one big, convoluted hand hold. It is sweet how they tangle. Z's smell of lavender and chamomile and peppermint. They coo and whimper like an old dog who's had a good life. They seem full of life, unmoving as they may be, unmoving if not by the river's flow at your feet. You know, really

everything is the river. Every *thing* is the river.

Every drop of dew backlit from the sun on the tips of branches, dangling down moss. Every tree standing tall and every tree that leans. Every inch of ground from your feet up to the ridgelines so high above you in the forest you can hardly see them. Every wisp of cloud in the sky above. Everything is the river. Your pile of z's. You.

You have made a good catch today and the planet has shifted so that the sun's light is not so warm now. You pack up the z's into the base of the drift boat and drag it back into the current and jump in. You float down the river and a kingfisher rattles and a water ouzel dips and an otter scurries and a bald eagle perches. You run the rapids and the z's bounce around in the boat and water splashes your face and that touch is sublime and then one then two then three z's jostle up and out of the boat into the water and float on down the river alongside you in the boat and you don't mind because you are all the river anyways.

You reach a deep pool and see the z's outside the boat settle down to the bottom, so deep your gaff could never ever reach. The angled sun light sometimes hits through the water right and those z's and little particles of sand sparkle as they descend. You look into those depths and glide on by. There will be more rapids, more pools. The river goes on and on and on.

You will beach your boat eventually. You think of the people you will give z's to. Those in dear need. Those who do not get to see the river near enough. It may be temporary, but the z's will return them to where all belong. To deep forests and deep pools. To gliding water and sliding sunlight. To eagles and otters and ouzels and kingfishers. To gravel and cobble and sand.

The Myth of Being Human

by Alina Kalontarov

The clock has abandoned count. It simply hums now
and I need to tell you things so I don't disappear.

I lay in bed with the fog draped over my body,
squirming in place, both vulture and prey.

My teeth are soft and all I really want
is to lick your wounds. I'm drawn to the fix, you see,
the clotting of blood.

The stars are empty prayers, offerings from some god
that accidentally dug us up. I can't tell

if they blink in jest or in apology.
The moon gapes with a hollow hunger,
demanding its harvest. All night,

I try to feed the vital and fail. It can't be done.
How do we survive if the mind wants to forage
but the body needs to hunt?

It doesn't matter.
Just take what's left of me
in the early morning.

Hold it up.
See if it matches the bruising of the sky.

Second-Hand Grace

by Douglas Fritock

based on the photograph 'Grace' by Eric Enstrom

I'd peg the odds of finding a copy of this well-known photograph
at any thrift store or rummage sale in the state of Minnesota

somewhere between better than average and practically guaranteed.
It depicts an elderly gentleman with a snow-white beard

and a plaid hunting shirt frozen in prayer before a humble meal
of bread and soup, his hands folded into a two-fisted knot

and his head bowed, while nearby rests a bible, although
one suspects it's actually just a dictionary posing as a bible.

You can usually find an example for a few dollars or less
in a battered oak frame hanging unassumingly on the back wall

of a second-hand shop, or buried in a stack of discarded artwork;
sometimes sun-faded, often dust-covered, and frequently

with faux brushstroke texture. Once, at a flea market,
I had a dealer tell me she collected over a dozen copies

in just the greater St. Cloud area alone. Imagine how devout
they all must have looked displayed in her home; side by side,

plaid elbow to plaid elbow, a gallery of recurring grace.

Contributor Biographies

Steven Luria Ablon, poet and adult and child psychoanalyst, teaches child psychiatry at Massachusetts General Hospital and publishes widely in academic journals. He won Academy of American Poets' Prize 1961 and the National Library of Poetry, Editor's Choice Award 1994. His poems have appeared in many anthologies and magazines. His collections of poetry are *Tornado Weather* (Mellen Poetry Press, Lewiston, New York, 1993), *Flying Over Tasmania* (The Fithian Press, Santa Barbara, California, 1997), *Blue Damsels* (Peter E Randall Publisher, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 2005), *Night Call* (Plain View press, Austin, Texas, 2011), and *Dinner in the Garden* (Columbia, South Carolina, 2018).

Charmaine Arjoolnal is a writer and social worker and mother to Ben. She lives with her husband and two spoiled dogs in Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada. Her writing has appeared in *Lothlorien Poetry Journal*, *Last Stanza Poetry Journal*, *Pinhole Poetry*, *Field Guide Poetry Magazine* and elsewhere. You can find Charmaine on x/twitter @arjoolnal on Instagram @charmainerjoolnal or visit her website charmainerjoolnal.wordpress.com.

Grace Black mingles with words as she navigates this realm. She is the founding editor of *Ink In Thirds*. Her work appears in *Bending Genres*, *The Turning Leaf Journal*, *Roi Fainéant*, *For Women Who Roar*, *Maudlin House*, *Eunoia Review*, and others online and in print. Find more at <https://graceblackink.com> and @graceblackink on Insta and X.

Ari Blatt is a co-founder, reader, and editor for the forthcoming, bi-annual digital publication *Tethered Literary*. Her own writing can be found in *Cirque* and *SHARK REEF*. She has previously written for the independent newsweekly *The Corvallis Advocate*. She is a 2022 Tom Jay Memorial Scholar and Blue River Writer. Ari received a MFA in Creative Writing from Oregon State University--Cascades.

A multi-award-winning fine arts painter, interior designer, intuitive healer, and World War II narrative nonfiction author, Callie Claire Duritsa Boswell, MA, NLP, has been featured in *Southern Living*, Comcast, *The Washington Post*, *Washingtonian Magazine*, *Home & Design*, and winner of the Capital Home Show. She is the creator of the *Native American Spirit Wheel Dream Journal* and collaborated with the World War II Foundation on a documentary featuring Frank Wal of the *USS San Marcos*. Where history inspires resilience, creativity reignites purpose, and intuition unlocks destiny, Callie's legendary, trusted mentorship empowers visionary Fortune 500/5000 leaders to transform life's challenges into legacies of strength and meaning through on-point advisory & forecasting; sublime, bespoke interiors and intricately woven narrative nonfiction. Her website is: www.HomefrontDiary.com.

Jody Boyer is an artist.

Nicole Brooks is a writer and editor and works in university communications. She earned her MFA in poetry at Butler University, where she served as poetry editor of *Booth*. Nicole's poems have appeared in *West Trestle Review*, *Bracken*, *Anti-Heroin Chic*, *Barren Magazine*, *The Indianapolis Review*, and more wonderful publications. She is a former newspaper reporter and ballet and modern dancer who has lived and studied in East Texas; Seattle; Chicagoland; and the Florida Panhandle. After a decade back home in Indiana, she recently moved with her family to Missouri. Please see nicolekbrooks.com for more.

Anna D'Alton is from Mullingar in the midlands of Ireland and lives in London. Her poems have appeared in journals in Ireland, the UK, the US and elsewhere including *Abridged*, *Porridge*, and *Shearsman*. She is working on her first pamphlet.

Madison Santiago Davis is a grad student who writes sometimes

John Dorsey is the former Poet Laureate of Belle, MO. He is the author of several collections of poetry, including *Which Way to the River: Selected Poems: 2016-2020* (OAC Books, 2020), *Sundown at the Redneck Carnival*, (Spartan Press, 2022), and *Pocatello Wildflower*, (Crisis Chronicles Press, 2023). He may be reached at archerevans@yahoo.com.

Tiffany Dugan is a Houston-raised, New York-based collage artist and writer who works to bridge art and community. In her art, she examines the ever-evolving cycles connected to identity. Her work is abstract and rhythmic and feminine with an edge. She received the Sarah Lawrence College Gurfein Fellowship, Nonfiction (2019) and was a Diderot Artist-in-Residence, Chateau d'Orquevaux (2020). She presented on the intersection of collage and poetry at Kolaj Fest, New Orleans (2024). Her artwork has been in 30+ shows and has been featured in *82 Review*, *The Penn Review*, *Beyond Words*, *Peatsmoke*, and *CALYX*. Visit: W: tiffanydugan.com, IG: @tiffany.dugan

Paige Winegar Fetzer is an MFA student at Brigham Young University, where she is studying wine poetry and serving as the assistant editor of BYU's literary magazine, *Inscope*. Her work has most recently been published in *Sink Hollow Literary Magazine*, *Eunoia Review*, *Metaphor Literary Journal*, and *The Rising Phoenix Review*, and is forthcoming in *Wayfare Journal*.

After spending many years on the East Coast, Doug Fritock now lives with his family in Redondo Beach, California but still pines away for snow. Previously a tobacco chemist, he has since given up the dark arts and now spends his days driving carpool, tending native plants, swinging kettlebells, and working on poems. His work has previously appeared in *Little Patuxent Review* and is forthcoming in *Ponder Review*, *Puerto del Sol*, and *The Black Fork Review*.

Elise Glassman is a New Orleans-based writer whose stories and essays have appeared in journals such as *The Colorado Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *The Portland Review*, *Per Contra*, *Spank the Carp*, and *San Antonio Review*. She is an assistant fiction editor at *Pithead Chapel* and is currently at work on a memoir.

Tony Gloggler is a life-long resident of NYC who managed group homes for the mentally challenged for over 40 years. Poems have been published in *Rattle*, *New Ohio Review*, *BODY*, *One Art*, *Paterson Literary*. His most recent book, *What Kind Of Man* with NYQ Books, was a finalist for the 2021 Paterson Poetry Prize, and *Here on Earth* is forthcoming on NYQ Books.

Valentina Gnuip's poetry collection, *Ruined Music*, was published by Grayson Books in March 2024. In 2023 she won the Tucson Festival of Books Literary Award for Poetry and second place in the (NYC Yeats' Society) Yeats Prize for poetry. In 2019, she won the Lascaux Prize in Poetry; in 2017, she won the Ekphrastic Challenge from *Rattle*; in 2015, she won the *Rattle* Reader's Choice Award; and in 2011, she won the Barbara Mandigo Kelly Peace Poetry Award from the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation. Her poems have appeared in many literary journals including *December*, *Brooklyn Review*, *Nimrod*, and *The New Guard*, and she has two chapbooks published by Mille Grazie Press and the North Carolina Writers' Network. She lives in Oakland, California.

Susan Grimm has been published in *Sugar House Review*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Phoebe*, and *Field*. Her chapbook *Almost Home* was published in 1997. In 2004, BkMk Press published *Lake Erie Blue*, a full-length collection. In 2010, she won the inaugural *Copper Nickel* Poetry Prize. In 2011, she won the Hayden Carruth Poetry Prize and her chapbook *Roughed Up* by the Sun's Mothering Tongue was published. In 2022, she received her third Ohio Arts Council Individual Artist Grant.

Laura Hamel is a mother, sister, daughter, horticulturist, and poet. Her work braids together eco-poetics, ethnobotany, and personal identity. Originally from north central Massachusetts, Laura now resides in Oklahoma City, where she recently completed her BA in Creative Writing at the University of Central Oklahoma. She sees herself soon venturing into an MFA program. Outside of writing, Laura values family time, with its ensuing chaos and priceless hilarity. Connect with her on Instagram: @lh.scribbles and LinkedIn: <https://linkedin.com/in/lhamelwrites/>.

Yuyuan Huang is a young poet from the Boston area. Her work has previously been published in the *Inflectionist Review*, *Glass Mountain Magazine*, *Blue Marble Review*, and *Ice Lolly Review*, among others. She has been recognized by the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards since 2020. She is constantly searching for new wonders.

Megan Huwa is a poet and writer in southern California. A rare health condition keeps her and her husband from living near her family's farm in Colorado, so her writing reaches for home—both temporal and eternal. Her work has been published in the *Clayjar Review*, *Vita Poetica*, *Solum Literary Press*, *Calla Press*, *Ekstasis*, *San Antonio Review*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, *LETTERS Journal*, and elsewhere, and featured on *The Habit Podcast* and *Vita Poetica Podcast*. Find her at meganhuwa.com.

Kate Kadleck is a marriage and family therapist and lifelong nesting doll collector. She spent her girlhood in a northern suburb of Chicago and her college years in Gambier, Ohio. Kate currently resides in a midcentury modern house in Dubuque with her fiancé, two dogs, four hens, and presumably a ghost or two. Her poetry can be found in *The Indianapolis Review*, *The Garlic Press*, *Tenth Muse*, *One Hand Clapping*, *Prairie Margins*, and *Persimmons*.

Alina Kalontarov is a teacher of English literature in New York City. Poetry and photography have always been a way for her to rummage through the unspoken and unseen spaces in the world. Her work has been published in various literary magazines such as *Sky Island Journal* as well as anthologies, including the forthcoming *Words Apart: A Globe of Poetry*.

Liz Kendall is co-author of *Meet Us and Eat Us: Food plants from around the world*, which celebrates biodiversity in poetry, prose, and fine art photography. Her poetry is published by The Hedgehog Poetry Press, Candlestick Press, *Mslxia*, *Thimble Lit Mag*, and *Amethyst Review*. Visit theedgeofthewoods.uk, @rowansarered on Twitter/Facebook, and @meetusandeat us on Instagram.

Stephen K. Kim (he/him) is a queer Korean American writer and college educator in upstate New York. He enjoys spending time with his husband and his cat. His poems appear or are forthcoming in *Ghost City Review*, *Fifth Wheel Press*, and elsewhere. He can be found online @skimperil.

Originally from the Blue Ridge mountains of Virginia, Hilary King is a poet now living in the San Francisco Bay Area of California. Her poems have appeared in *Ploughshares*, *TAB*, *Salamander*, *Belletrist*, *Fourth River*, and other publications. Her book *Stitched on Me* was published by Riot in Your Throat Press in 2024. She loves hiking, travel, and ribbon.

Stacie M. Kiner is a former fellow at the Vermont Studio Center and Hannah Kahn Memorial Award recipient. Her poems have been published in *Calyx*, *The Charlotte Poetry Review*, *Madison Review*, *Comstock Review*, *Meridian Anthology of Contemporary Poetry*, *Apalachee Quarterly*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Lavender Review*, *Panoply*, *Rhino*, *The Southeast Review*, *SWWIM*, *Chameleon Chimera*, *An Anthology of Florida Poets* and, Finishing Line Press – the chapbook, *Inventory*. Stacie is the former moderator of a poetry talk show in Miami, a retired librarian, Essays Editor for the *South Florida Poetry Journal* and an urban gardener. She lives in South Florida with her wife and too many tomato plants.

Judith. A. Lagana's poetry has appeared in *Burningword Literary Journal*, *Cider Press Review*, *Heron Tree*, *Rattle*, and elsewhere. She is the author of the poetry collection *Make Space* (Finishing Line Press, 2023) and a forthcoming chapbook *Edge of Highway*. She was a finalist for the 2023 Julia Peterkin Literary Award in Poetry. An avid bird-watcher and knitter, she is a founder and former co-editor of *River Heron Review* and lives in a Bucks County, PA river town where she raised her family. Learn more at [jlagana.com](https://www.jlagana.com).
<https://www.jlagana.com>

Esther Lay is an American writer, classical singer, and Anglican priest based in Oxfordshire, England. She is the winner of Write By the Sea 2024, won third prize in Trio International 2024, and has been shortlisted for the Bridport Prize and Oxford Canal Festival Prize, and longlisted for the Fish and Canterbury Prizes. She has work in *Allegro*, *The Waxed Lemon*, *The Ghost Furniture Catalogue*, and *Grain Magazine*. estherlay.com

Isabel Cristina Legarda was born in the Philippines and spent her early childhood there before moving to the U.S. She is currently a practicing physician in Boston. Her work has appeared in the *New York Quarterly*, *The Dewdrop*, *Cleaver*, *Ruminate*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *The Lowestoft Chronicle*, and others. Her chapbook *Beyond the Galleons* was published in April 2024 by Yellow Arrow Publishing. She can be visited at www.ilegarda.com or on Instagram (@poetinthOR).

Aaron Lelito is a visual artist and writer from Buffalo, NY. His poetry chapbook, *The Half Turn*, was published in 2023, and he released a collaborative notebook/art collection titled *If We: Connections Through Creative Process* in 2024. His work has also appeared in *Stonecoast Review*, *Barzakh Magazine*, *Novus Literary Arts Journal*, *SPECTRA Poets*, *Peach Mag*, and *Santa Fe Review*. He is Editor in Chief of *Wild Roof Journal*.

Gregory Luce, author of *Signs of Small Grace*, *Drinking Weather*, *Memory and Desire*, *Tile*, *Riffs & Improvisations*, and *Smells Like Rain*, has published widely in print and online. He serves as Poetry Editor for *The Mid-Atlantic Review*. In addition to poetry, he writes a monthly column on the arts for *Scene4* magazine. He is retired from *National Geographic*, works as a volunteer writing tutor/mentor for 826DC, and lives in Arlington, VA.

Mary Ann McGuigan's creative nonfiction has appeared in *Brevity*, *Citron Review*, *The Rumpus*, and elsewhere. *The Sun*, *Massachusetts Review*, *North American Review*, and many other journals have published her fiction. Her collection *Pieces* includes stories named for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net; her new story collection, *That Very Place*, reaches bookstores in September 2025. The Junior Library Guild and the New York Public Library rank Mary Ann's novels as best books for teens; *Where You Belong* was a finalist for the National Book Award. She loves visitors: www.maryannmcguigan.com.

Daniel Z. McKenzie is a 22 year-old college student studying English, Greek, and Linguistics at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. Daniel was raised during his later childhood in Cusco, Peru and although he constantly misses the Andes Mountains, he now contents himself with backpacking and general tomfoolery in the American outdoors. When he is not out sleeping in the back of his Subaru or climbing a mountain, Daniel can be found studying long-dead languages while sampling his own expansive tea collection.

Rachel Mikita (she/her) is a writer and poet from Blacklick, PA, and Flint, TX. She attended Sarah Lawrence College and is currently based in Brooklyn, NY. Her non-fiction work has been published in *Love and Squalor* and *The Coal Hill Review*. She was a finalist for *The Plentitudes* 2023 Prize in Poetry. Her poem “Stranger Daughter” was published in *Columbia Journal* as the winner of the 2022 Print Poetry Contest.

Adam Jon Miller graduated from the University of Kansas with a BA in English and an Emphasis in Creative Writing. Adam’s poetry was recently included in the *William & Mary Review*, *OxMag*, *In Parentheses*, and *The Dewdrop*. His photography has been included in various literary journals. He scribes brew narratives for Idyll Hounds Brewery. Visit him and his work anytime at www.adamjonmiller.com.

Liza Moore is an artist who resides with her husband and son in Round Rock, TX. She has created three children’s books, and some of her artwork, poetry, and essays have been published in various journals including *Fathom Mag*, *Ekstasis Magazine*, *EcoTheo Review*, and *Apple Valley Review*. To learn more about Liza and her creative work, please visit: https://campsite.bio/liza_moore_art.

Charlotte Murray is a Creative Future Writers’ Award winner and won the Prole Laureate Poetry Competition 2024. She has been published in various magazines and anthologies, including *Propel* and *Green Ink*. She is a member of Hive Poetry Collective. Twitter: @charlowriter.

Nicholas Olah has self-published four poetry collections, *Where Light Separates from Dark*, *Which Way is North, Seasons, and You Are Here*. Olah’s work has been published in *Humana Obscura*, *The Poetry Lighthouse*, *Anti-Heroin Chic*, *Wild Roof Journal*, and more. Check out more of his work on Instagram at @nick.olah.poetry or visit his Etsy shop at <https://www.etsy.com/shop/nickolahpoetry>.

Henry Opeyemi is a graphics designer, photographer, sign language interpreter, chess enthusiast and a poet. He hails from the northern part of Nigeria. His work has appeared in *Green Climate*, *Natures Bird*, *Frontier*, and more. When he is not writing he is teaching hearing impaired kids how to play chess.

Ian Parker is a poet and musician living in Portland, Oregon. He has been previously published by *orangepeel literary magazine*, *infinite scroll*, *Literary Forest Poetry Magazine*, and in a forthcoming issue of *wildscape. lit journal*.

Annie Przepyszny is a poet from Washington, DC pursuing an MFA in Poetry at the University of Maryland. She is an intern at the DC Writers Room and has poems published or forthcoming in *Bear Review*, *The Emerson Review*, *Sugar House Review*, *Tampa Review*, *Atticus Review*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Beltway Poetry Quarterly*, *The Champagne Room*, *The Shore Poetry*, *Cider Press Review*, *Soundings East*, *Poor Yorick*, and others.

Oormila Vijayakrishnan Prahlad is an Indian-Australian artist, poet, and improv pianist. Her debut collection, *Patchwork Fugue*, was published by Atomic Bohemian Press, UK, in February 2024, and her chapbook *A Second Life in Eighty-eight Keys* won The Hedgehog Poetry Press UK’s Little Black Book Competition in May 2024. She has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, the Dai Fry Memorial Award for Mystical Poetry (Wales), and multiple times for the Best of the Net. She lives and works in Sydney on the traditional lands of the Eora Nation.

Natalie Raab is a poet and fiction writer. Natalie's work has been featured in publications such as *Dogwood Alchemy*, *Heartland Society of Women Writers*, and *The Broken Plate*. She can be found on Instagram at @thenatalieraab.

Neha Rayamajhi is a cultural worker who uses multidisciplinary praxis to disrupt and build. Her works have appeared in *The South Asia Journal*, *Arkana Magazine*, *The Kathmandu Post*, *The Asian Arts Initiative*, and other exhibitions and publications. Born in Kathmandu and raised by Nepal, she currently daydreams in the unceded land of the Massachusetts and Pawtucket people.

Patrick Roche is a queer poet, mental health advocate, and Carly Rae Jepsen enthusiast. He is the author of *A Socially Acceptable Breakdown* (Button Poetry, 2021), which was named a Finalist for the Eric Hoffer Award. His work has been published by *UpWorthy*, *Buzzfeed*, *The Huffington Post*, *BroadwayWorld*, *FreezeRay Press*, and his mom's fridge. Patrick has shared stages with Darryl "DMC" McDaniels of RUN DMC, *Pitch Perfect* star Brittany Snow, and *Abbott Elementary* star Tyler James Williams. He currently lives with his husband and their dog in Astoria, NY.

Iris Rosenberg lives and works in New York City. She has written widely for businesses and news organizations; taught business communications at Baruch College (NYC); and served as a poetry reviewer for *Library Journal*. Her poems most recently have appeared in *Rust & Moth*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Club Plum*, and *Ekphrastic Review*.

Patricia Russo's work has appeared in *One Art*, *The Sunlight Press*, *Vagabond City*, *The Engine Idling*, *Revolution John*, and *Metachrosis Literary*.

Hibah Shabkhez is a writer and photographer from Lahore, Pakistan. Her work has previously appeared in *Penine Platform*, *Rust and Moth*, *Think Journal*, *The Font*, *The Raven's Muse Magazine*, and a number of other literary magazines. Studying life, languages, and literature from a comparative perspective across linguistic and cultural boundaries holds a particular fascination for her. Linktree: <https://linktree.com/HibahShabkhez> Twitter X @hibahshabkhez Insta: @shabkhez_hibah

Lucas Simone is a playwright from San Jose, California. He currently lives on the Southside of Chicago.

Meredith Stafford (they/she) is a writer and artist from Chattanooga, Tennessee. They are currently an undergraduate student in Creative Writing at Berry College and a poetry grant recipient from the Georgia Writers Association. Their work has appeared in *Ramifications* and *Rock Creek Review*.

Jayne Stanton's poems have appeared in numerous print and online magazines and anthologies. She has written commissions for a county museum, University of Leicester's Centre for New Writing, poems for International Women's Day, and a city residency. A pamphlet, *Beyond the Tune*, was published by Soundswrite Press (2014).

Mistee St. Clair is a Rasmuson Foundation and Alaska Literary Award grantee and has been published by *The Alaska Quarterly Review*, *The Common*, *Northwest Review*, *SWWIM Every Day*, and more. Born and raised in Alaska, she lives with her family in Juneau, where she hikes, writes, wanders the mossy rainforest, and edits legislation for the Alaska State Legislature.

Alison Stone is the author of nine full-length collections, *Informed* (NYQ Books, 2024), *To See What Rises* (CW Books, 2023), *Zombies at the Disco* (Jacar Press, 2020), *Caught in the Myth* (NYQ Books, 2019), *Dazzle* (Jacar Press, 2017), *Masterplan*, a book of collaborative poems with Eric Greinke (Presa Press, 2018), *Ordinary Magic*, (NYQ Books, 2016), *Dangerous Enough* (Presa Press 2014), and *They Sing at Midnight*, which won the 2003 Many Mountains Moving Poetry Award; as well as three chapbooks. Her poems have appeared in *The Paris Review*, *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *Barrow Street*, *Poet Lore*, and many other journals and anthologies. She has been awarded *Poetry's* Frederick Bock Prize, *New York Quarterly's* Madeline Sadin Award, and *The Lyric's* Lyric Poetry Prize. She was Writer in Residence at LitSpace St. Pete. She is also a painter and the creator of The Stone Tarot. A licensed psychotherapist, she has private practices in NYC and Nyack. <https://alisonstone.info/> Youtube and TikTok—Alison Stone Poetry.

Laura Sweeney facilitates Writers for Life in Iowa and Illinois. She represented the Iowa Arts Council at the First International Teaching Artist's Conference in Oslo, Norway. Her poems and prose appear in seventy plus journals and twenty-three anthologies in the States, Canada, Britain, Indonesia, and China. Her recent awards include a scholarship to the Sewanee Writer's Conference. She is a PhD candidate, English Studies/Creative Writing, at Illinois State University.

Nathaniel Sverlow is a freelance writer of poetry and prose. He currently resides in the Sacramento area with two cats, an incredibly supportive wife, and a rambunctious son. His previous publishing credits include *Typehouse Literary Magazine*, *Divot: A Journal of Poetry*, *Right Hand Pointing*, and *Black Coffee Review*. He has also written three poetry books, *The Blue Flame of My Beating Heart* (2020), *Heaven is a Bar with Patio Seating* (2021), and *From One Fellow Insect* (2023), and one prose collection, *The Culmination of Egotism* (2022).

Erika Takacs is an Episcopal priest, teacher, musician, and poet originally from Wilmington, Delaware. Her writing has been published in *Earth & Altar*, *The Christian Century*, and *Braided Way*. Outside of her work and her family, her three great loves are the music of J.S. Bach, books, and baseball. She currently resides in North Carolina, where she and her husband serve at the pleasure of their very spoiled beagle.

Freyr Thorvaldsson is an Icelandic writer living in London, where he spends his time writing poems and stories. He is currently working on his debut novel.

Cathy Thwing has been teaching writing at community colleges since receiving her MFA in Creative Writing from Eastern Washington University. You can find some of her recent poems in *Blue Heron Review*, *Meniscus*, the *Orchards Poetry Review*, and *Whitefish Review*. Gardening, practicing cello, and swinging in hammocks fill her life's other nooks and crannies.

Lucinda Trew lives and writes in the piney, red clay Piedmont of North Carolina. Her work has been featured in *Burningword Literary Review*, *Sussurus Magazine*, *Trace Fossils Review*, *Bloodroot Literary Magazine*, *storySouth*, and other journals and anthologies. She is a two-time Pushcart Prize nominee, a Best of the Net nominee, and recipient of *Boulevard's* 2023 Emerging Poet Award.

Alicia Viguier-Espert, a three times Pushcart Award nominee, was born and raised in Valencia, Spain. Her work has been published nationally and internationally in journals, print media and anthologies. Winner of the San Gabriel Valley Poetry Festival in 2017, she is also the author of three chapbooks. In addition, she's included in "Top 39 LA poets," "Ten Poets to Watch 2018" and "Bards of Southern California: Top 30 Poets," by *Spectrum*.

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.



January Moon by Jody Boyer

Sarah Walko is an artist, director, curator and writer. She has her Master of Fine Arts degree from Savannah College of Art and Design and Bachelor of Arts from the University of Maryland. She is currently the Director of Visual and Performing Arts at Lenox Hill Neighborhood House and she has directed non-profit arts organizations for seventeen years. Her visual art exhibitions have included: Creative Climate Awards Exhibition, *Between the Feast and the Ground is Where We Live Now*, a solo exhibition on Governors Island, *Urban Reverence* at Valerie Goodman Gallery and the Voelker Orth Museum in New York, *Raising the Temperature* at the Queens Museum of Art, *Prerenatural* at The Museum of Nature in Canada, *Codex Dynamic Film Exhibition* on the Manhattan Bridge Anchorage, *Case Studies* at Index Art Center in New Jersey, *Baker's Dozen: 13 Artists on Found Objects* at One Black Whisker Gallery in Pennsylvania, *Fair Play*, group video exhibition in Miami, Florida, *So That I Might Speak to You of Your Magnificence*, a solo exhibition at The Teaching Gallery in New York, *Rewoven*, Innovation Fiber Arts Exhibition at the Queens Community College, CUNY in New York, *I Embody* at 310 Gallery, Marrietta College in Marrietta, Ohio and *Earth Revisited*, a video exhibition on the Manhattan Bridge Anchorage in New York. She was an invited artist in the inaugural *The First Ten*, New Hope Artist Residency Program in 2021 and selected as an inaugural participant in *Art For Good: HATCHING A Better World* program in 2020. She has been an artist in residence at many residency programs including Chateau Orquevaux, IPark and the Elizabeth Foundation. She has been a visiting artist at Endicott College, Hudson Valley Community College, Kansas City Art Institute, University of Missouri, Roger Williams University and Savannah College of Art and Design. She is a NYFA Immigrant Artist Mentor and a published author of fiction and nonfiction essays. She is a contributing writer in four anthologies that were published in 2022 and 2024: *Sacred Promise* (Women Changing the World Press), *Neon Guides Me: A Monograph of Artist Anne Katrine Senstad* (Praun & Guermouche), *Royal Beauty* (Arts by the People) and *Transpecies Design* (Routledge).

Ann E. Wallace is Poet Laureate Emeritus of Jersey City, New Jersey and host of *The WildStory: A Podcast of Poetry and Plants*. She is the author of two poetry collections: *Days of Grace and Silence: A Chronicle of COVID's Long Haul* (Kelsay Books, 2024) and *Counting by Sevens* (Main Street Rag, 2019). Find her online at AnnWallacePhD.com and on Instagram @annwallace409.

Margaux Williamson (she/her/they) is a queer reader and writer. Her work has appeared in *Complete Sentence*, *Transients Magazine*, *EDGE CITY*, and elsewhere. She lives in the Midwest with her wife and cat.

Hal Wright is a queer writer whose prose has been published in *Ninth Letter*, *X-R-A-Y*, *The Hunger*, and elsewhere. His poetry is inspired by the time he spent teaching English in Ukraine.

