

Thimble Literary Magazine

Volume 7 · Number 1 · Summer 2024

Thimble Literary Magazine

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

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Brief Guidelines for Submission

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

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

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

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

All work goes to ThimbleLitMagSubmissions@gmail.com with the genre in the subject line

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Editor's Note

by Nadia Arioli

Dear Readers,

Here is my Editor's Note. I suppose I am to say something smart-sounding about poetry and craft. I am honored to have so many of you entrust us with your work, so the least I can do is appear well-versed in poetry and an astute student of wonder. Do editors write about William Carlos Williams still? Probably not; there are younger, hipper, more relevant poets these days whom the in-crowd is buzzing about.

But the beauty of this being my magazine and not someone else's is I can write about what I want to in the Editor's Note. You literally cannot stop me. What I want to write about is the Australian television sensation, "Bluey." It's a cartoon aimed at children, featuring cartoon dogs and lots of laughs.

And yet, it's not *not* about poetry. I certainly learned a lot: how simplicity of form (cartoon) can be surprisingly poignant. How the specifics relate to the universal. How replicating through play is a form of healing, is itself art.

What is poetry but replicating through play?

In the episode "Copycat," Bluey, a seven-year-old blue heeler, is copying everything her dad, Bandit, does to his annoyance and our

amusement. Along the way, they find an injured bird. They take the bird to the vet, but it passes anyways.

Later, Bluey and her mum, Chilli, decide to play injured bird and set up a pretend veterinarian's office. Her younger sister, Bingo, joins in, despite not being a part of the bird fiasco. Bingo refuses to go along with Bluey's simulation, and in Bingo's version, the bird lives.

Poetry isn't to give things happy endings (although it can, and I've done it) but to transform, transfigure, so we can go on flying.

In a much later episode, the reverse happens: we know the Heeler family is playing a hilarious game of realtor, with Bandit as the seller's agent, Chilli as the buyer, and Bluey and Bingo as grannies who do not want to move out. As the granny characters, Bingo dresses up as the titular ghost basket to scare away Chilli. When that doesn't work, Bandit disguises himself as a haunted wheelbarrow, which is successful. At the end of the episode, the final shot is of the house, which really is for sale per the sign, and we know now the game of pretend was important all along; it's a way of processing grief and changes.

What games are we playing at here? When is a game not a game? When we make horses. When an ulna pops out of skin in a monkey-bar mishap. When we forage for wine.

So much depends upon a red wheelbarrow.

Best,
Nadia Arioli

Body of God

by Allison Wall

Tonight,
the shape of my
breasts through my
pajama shirt reminded
me of those ancient
statues of fertility
goddesses: voluptuous
and thick-thighed,
naked and unashamed in
their power, and I was proud
and the feeling vanished quick
as breath (all those seasons of
America's next top model absorbed
in my formative years) and it has
been thousands of years since
Tiamat's murder, Gaia's fall,
the annihilation of the
Feminine Divine; still I carry
this body, a living echo of those
statues (which archaeologists
call "squat" "fat" "grottesque")
but tonight, time, that strange
circle, collapsed, and I was
there—and back—too soon . . .
Oh, to live in a world that
reveres the breast, that worships
curving, sensuous bodies, in
which full bodies, my body
is the body
of god

Death Cleaning

by Betsy Mars

To purge or keep, we sort our stacks:
the brochures and maps of cities
we have been or hoped to visit.
In time it all merges, becomes a blur.
Souvenirs that no longer spur memories.

The objects that held such sacred space
in my family home will have no meaning
to my children when I'm gone. Will they
and the things I touched end up in the bin,
or will my survivors do as I do, hold each one,

in a kind of reverence, agape, at everything
my mother touched with her dematerializing skin?

In the Barn

by Brian Duncan

For Uncle Ken

Nights, he milks
under a cobwebbed bulb
fixed low in ancient rafters.

He has sat there forever,
red-rimmed black rubber boots
settled on urine-soaked floor.

His head rests on tawny flanks of mother,
then daughter. As his father taught,
his hands squeeze with practiced rhythm.

The only sounds are flies buzzing from flypaper overhead,
the cows' grunts, hooves shifting on heavy planks,
and the steady beat of milk into the pail.

In shadows wait the silent cats
and kittens that live and die unnamed
behind boxes and bales.

Out in the dark, beyond his reach,
float his drowned twin,
the things he saw in war.

Nothing changes but the names of the cows
and the look of his bowed head
and his hands as they do their work.



Albanian Folk Dance by Silvia Hametaj

How Everything and Nothing Changes

by Gail Thomas

You took for granted the lush-leafed
kingdom outside your window,
the maple you relied on for shade
and song, time's thick anchor.
Never thanked the hands or careless
breeze that sank a seed years ago,
though each fall your back cursed
the endless raking. One summer
day, bursts of rain and wind sent
limbs and trunk crashing across
the roof, splitting beams, snaking
the cold odor of gas through each
room, but sparing your family.
After fear spoke loudest,
you learned
how to mourn a tree.

The worlds goes on

by Ann Howells

In the middle of a lazy afternoon
my eyelids droop—
paper shades against the light—
patterns that precede sleep cast nets
inside my eyelids: electric blue,
pulsing violet-red.
Breath eases, evens, feet cease twitching
& that myotonic jerk
that often snaps me alert,
stills.

Telephones jangle, ballerinas whirl & leap,
TVs blast commercials, salesmen sell shoddy wares,
& anemones wave on the tides.
The world, like a dumb & placid child,
concerns itself with measured spinning,
turns its face to the sun.
It does not march in place because I sleep
but continues on
just as it will do when I am dead.

The Civilian Conservation Corps

by B.A. Van Sise

A hundred years ago, your
grandfather was here and now,
in you, he's here again. He has
a full forest for his last will and
testament. For four million
years it was, here, perfect,

until America mobilized
its teeming teenagers to
head west, young men
bound for the boundless
beauty of virgin land, to

set themselves against
lowlands of forests of
oak and pine and fragrant
cedar and other trees
that had never felt the ax.

So they set to manslaying,
in Idaho. in Oregon. and here
in Placerville, where you
can almost swear you can
smell his cologne in the trees,

see his reflection in the window
of the bar that was once the
brothel. Follow the logger roads
that he freed from the marble
of the unsculpted mountains.

Stop when the sawdust grows
too thick to resist, where the
old trees have softened from
rain and time. Pick the one
that looks most like him,

and wonder what boy he was
before he made the man that
made you. Run your thumb along its grain,
and read the braille of its years.

GPS

by Deborah Purdy

Sea turtles know
where they're going and how to get there.

They read the signals, make maps
and compasses from magnetic fields,
follow the footprints of their sandy birthplaces

to find their own nesting grounds.
That summer Corolla Beach
was our destination

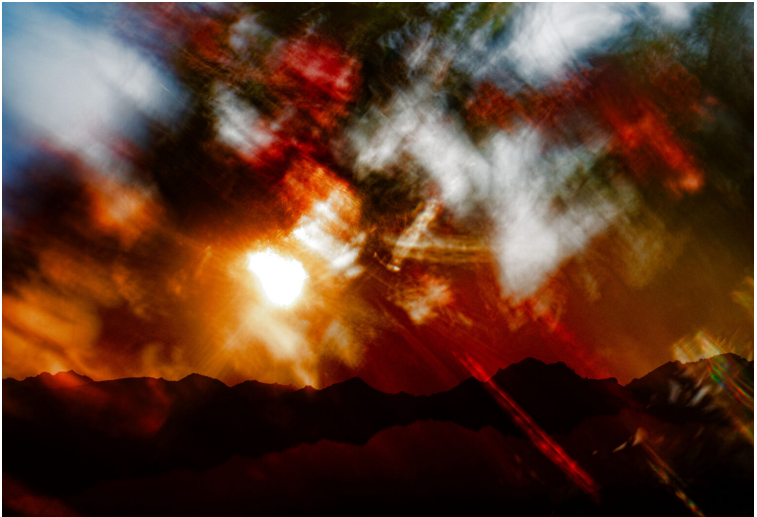
and one windswept moonlit evening we watched
newly hatched turtles make their way
to the water.

At that time, on that beach, our family
still mostly intact, we didn't know
we needed to change direction,

find a new guidance system.
We didn't know how to adjust to unknown coordinates,
how to navigate without latitude and longitude,

how to read the field.
We didn't know how to steer
away from the storm.

We didn't know
it would be the last summer.



Sunrise and Mountains by Holly Willis

One Spoon or Two

by Tobi Alfier

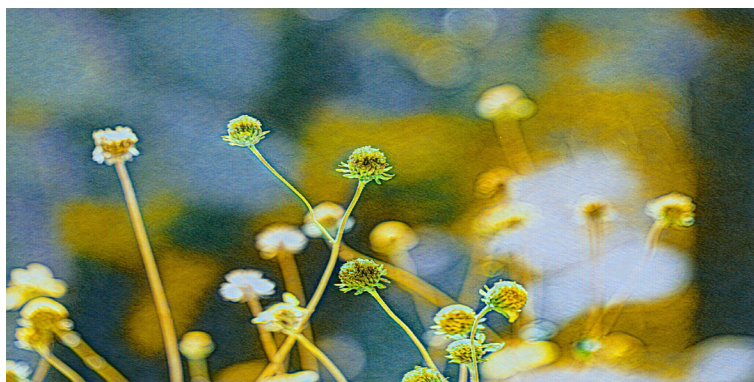
She's pitched fits about your hearing
and you knew she was unhappy.
Still, the sound of her suitcase
being thrown on the bed to fill
hit you like a Taser.

You had no trouble hearing *that*,
you ass. Shrink after shrink after shrink's
talked so much about it, you'd think
there's a picture of you in the dictionary
under *screw-up*.

Her love for you and all your faults
was all that kept you sane. Now it's back
to the bars, strangers you'll only see tonight
—and tomorrow morning when you pretend
to care how much sugar they take,

and how long before you can usher them
out into the heat, the cold, the light,
the dark, the anything but your house.
Your hands touched the skin of a woman
you don't want to recognize ever again;

you're somewhat ill at the prospect of tomorrow.
Close your eyes. You're back in the life
where you were happy. Was there room
for redemption in her parting words—
you can't recall. You weren't listening.



Joshua Tree Yellow Flowers by Holly Willis

Pando

by Lauren Scharhag

“A hydrophone was placed in contact with the roots of a tree (or “stem”) in the Pando aspen forest in south-central Utah. The sound captures vibrations from beneath the tree that may be emanating from the root system or the soil. The recording was made during a July 2022 thunderstorm and represents perhaps millions of aspen leaves trembling in the wind. It was made by Jeff Rice as part of an artist residency with the non-profit group Friends of Pando [www.friendsofpando.org].”

-From Ecosystem Sound, <https://www.ecosystemsound.com/beneath-the-tree>

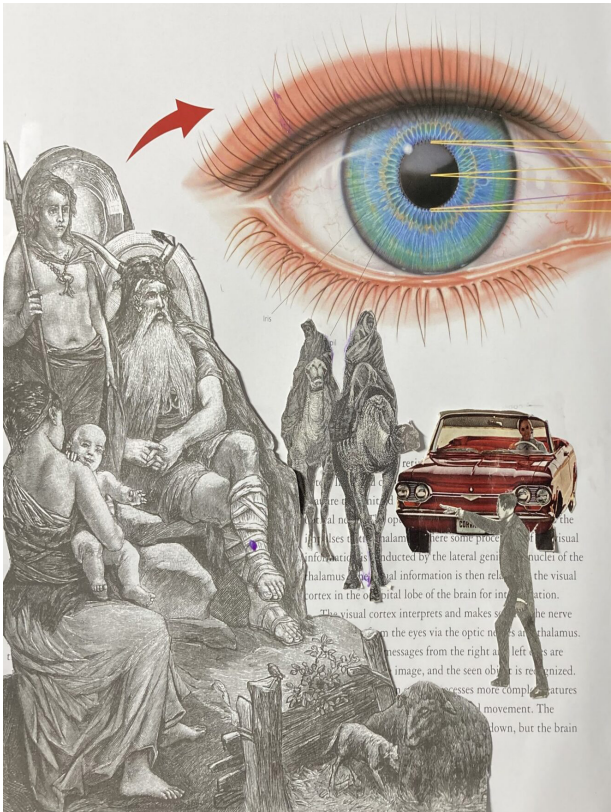
It sounds exactly like you'd imagine:
A breath. A heartbeat.
An immense door opening.

Twelve thousand years ago, while humans were just starting to venture out of Africa, in the Utah mollisol, beneath the tread of bison and mammoth, a seed embedded itself. Now, we know that trees talk. They send distress signals through the mycorrhizal network, warning of disease and insect attack. Having heard the aspen's song, it's easier now to imagine this vegetative language, a vocabulary of fungus, stone, and rain. Blades of grass conspire with mountains, a single leaf trembling eighty feet overhead whispers to its mother-node thirty feet down. A million golden leaves. Forty thousand stems. Creeping rootstalk, laid end to end, could span almost half the globe. Nodes spawn shoots, like galaxies eternally expanding, colliding, dying. The trees we see are stems, a clone army, whose motto is *I spread*. Eventually, the Puebloans will come with their kivas, understanding that you have to descend to ascend, that what lies beneath the surface can still touch the sky.

Twelve thousand years of growing alongside humanity. The Celts saw how its quaking leaves seemed to shimmer in the wind, and concluded that the tree must be touching the world beyond this one. Most parts of the aspen are edible. Roots twine through the dead. We eat from the earth that cradles sucker and bone. For eloquence, Druids would have prescribed an aspen leaf under the tongue. In the yellow grove, we listen for the spirits to speak. Lay a crown of aspen leaves at our gravesides to help guide us to our necrodestination. Cellulose ties that bind. Above or below, we are never alone. Tree of ancestors, we climb.

Now, Pando is in decline. Because of us, of course, and all we do. We took away water. We took away fire. We took away wolves. So, now, a titan must endure the death of a thousand cuts, the insidious slow whittling down by flat-molared herbivores, deer and moose; tunneled into by long-horned beetles, edged out by conifers. And even as Pando thirsts, it longs to burn. Twelve millennia of memory, and somewhere, a root harbors the future, its final pulse and flutter, its final exhalation. The door's swinging shut.

Unsafe at Any Speed by Howie Good



As Highway and Bridge

by Marilyn McCabe

I read that the air is filled with
spiders, wispy legs in the breeze. I inhale

arachnids and when the house smells of rotting
mouse I take that in too and even though

we lose cells every day, are new
matter every year I wonder if the burning

oil and brewing hops I sucked in
on car rides as a child when I couldn't hold

my breath any longer on the Schuylkill
Expressway are still in me and the spiders

get drunk and warm all their hands
around a barrel, my body a world,

rusted and grubby, throwing forth
a little warmth to stand by.

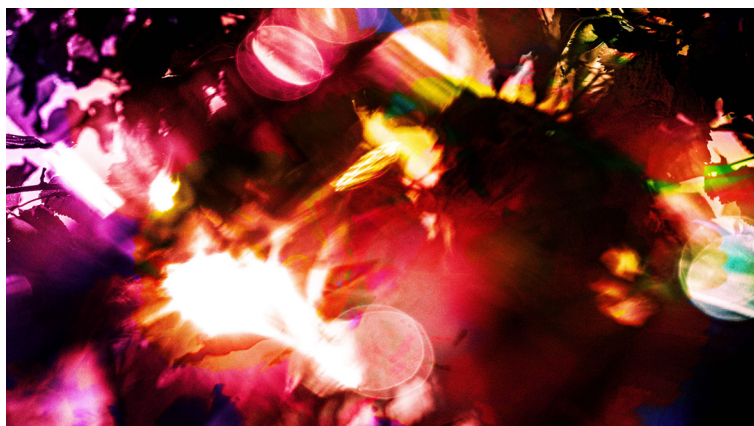
Annual Visit

by Robert Harlow

It's easy walking backward up a river,
he said. Stay close to the bank.
If you fall, fall backwards
and point your feet downstream.
It's better to break your legs
than your head, and try not to lose
any of the fishing gear.
Only let go if you absolutely have to.

Better not to fall at all, I thought.
But I was not the father.
And I was not the son
I was supposed to be.
Looking downstream once a year
but only because I had to,
not because I wanted to.
Wanting the visit to be over.

Not wanting to walk the river
backwards or forwards,
upstream or down.
Knowing I'd never do so
on my own, if only to show him,
as if he didn't already know,
what I could do without him,
to show him everything
I had already let go of
the other fifty-one weeks of the year.
Finding it easier and easier
to let go of what I never had.



Joshua Tree October 14, 2023 by Holly Willis

Matching Blue

by Áine Greaney

From the boss woman's car you all cross the hot parking lot to that shopping mall restaurant where the server asks if anyone around the table has a food allergy.

"None," says the boss.

"None," chorus the other five girls in your office marketing team.

You have a gastro intolerance for garlic, but in this restaurant and at this table, you stay mute because nobody likes an outlier or an upstart.

The food comes and you girls break bread, as if this is a blessed communion and as if somewhere, a clock *isn't* counting down and as if this shopping mall meal isn't about ticking an "Employee Appreciation" box.

You push your food around the plate and sniff for garlic and nod and 'uh-huh' your way through the chatter.

Rhianna and Claire, the two 20-something paid interns, are just out of college.

Two months ago, in spring, both girls' parents had engineered their daughters' gigs in your office. Now, it's almost Autumn and Rhianna is

talking about her upcoming move to New York City, where her mother has secured her a Manhattan apartment. Claire is headed to the west coast. Earlier this summer, her parents flew across the country to help her find an apartment and buy her new furniture.

Hold the breath. Push the food around that plate. *This, too, shall pass.*

Yikes! Now, Rhianna is looking down the table, straight at you. The way she asks the question, you know that it's a repeat-ask of some question that you were too checked out to hear.

“Why did *you* come here, like, to America?”

Ah. Easy peasy. In three decades, the response has become a blathery jingle: *I was bored back home in Ireland. Just wanted an American adventure. Ha. Ha.*

The boss chimes in. “But who did you *know* here—like, when you landed?”

This is the 50-something boss lady who interrupts meetings to answer calls from Daddy because Daddy is at her house, fixing the sink or mowing her lawn. The previous winter, this boss lady asked you for ideas on workplace diversity and inclusion. You asked why this nonprofit doesn't recognize Martin Luther King Day as a public or official holiday. “If a day like that means that much to someone like you, you can take it out of your vacation time,” she said.

Now, in this sub-zero restaurant in this shopping mall, on this hot summer day in America, you decide to liven up the employee recognition party.

So you tell about the airplane and how you spotted those blue swimming pools on Long Island, New York and, how, from your airplane window seat, you feared that those matching blue pools were actually nuclear spills.

You tell about the long, long immigration queues at JFK Airport. You tell about the Greyhound bus north and how you kept looking for a garden gate or a barking dog or any sign of human or animal life on

that highway. You tell about the off-highway Holiday Inn hotel where you were supposed to meet a musician friend of your brother-in-law back home. You'd never seen a photo of this American man. So in that Holiday Inn lobby, you didn't know who to look for. When you couldn't find him, you checked the (borrowed) cash in your pocket and wondered how much it would cost to fly home tomorrow.

As you tell, you pretend not to notice the WTF and OMG looks that pass between these girls breaking bread around this table.

"Oh. My. God," says Rhianna. You could've been, like, kidnapped or trafficked."

"Yeah," says Claire. "You really could. I mean, this would make a great Netflix series."

Finally, the office lunch is over and you're re-crossing that hot, blacktop parking lot. In her big, shiny car, Boss Lady turns up the air conditioning to keep you all cool, cool, cool as you head back to your office.

Some days in that office, you imagine the roof creaking open and an airplane flying overhead and the pilot or a passenger pointing down to say, "Look! Down there! All those matching chairs and matching desks and matching people in their matching blue cubes!"

Why We Let the Striped Bass Go

by Margie Duncan

The day I turned 23
a few weeks before our wedding day,
I caught my first striped bass,
hefted its weight, rainbow hide pressed
against my thighs. Nine, ten pounds, a guess
before we put it back, face first,
into the dark Long Island water.

Bass brought five bucks a pound
that fall, and we were famishing
for everything that makes a life.

The floor, hard that night as ever,
supported us while we swam in our sleep.

Neighbors

by Tina Barry

My road quirks and climbs, its trees, one heavy at the hips, split
in the middle. A neighbor's home painted green and plum,
like a bruise.

Peaches opens the door
to let the dog out
but never leaves the house

I met a neighbor drinking coffee in a café—a child-woman,
palm-sized, patchouli-reeking, weighted with beads. We talked
about the famous artist who lived in our hamlet. She told me
she loved me. I loved her, too.
(For that moment, anyway.)

When she died in a fire
my room filled with smoke
I can't recall her face

From behind the curtain of his window, a neighbor stared.
I'd bustle about my kitchen, sip coffee. Once, I pretended to talk
on the phone for an hour, just to see how long he'd watch.

I noticed him peering
and placed my palms
against the pane

The realtor brought us inside a small home where a man
lived alone. In one corner of the living room sat his drum set—
no art on the walls, no rugs or plants.

Above the stove stuck
to the hood a post-it note:
Learn to love someone

Artichoke

by Lauren Crawford

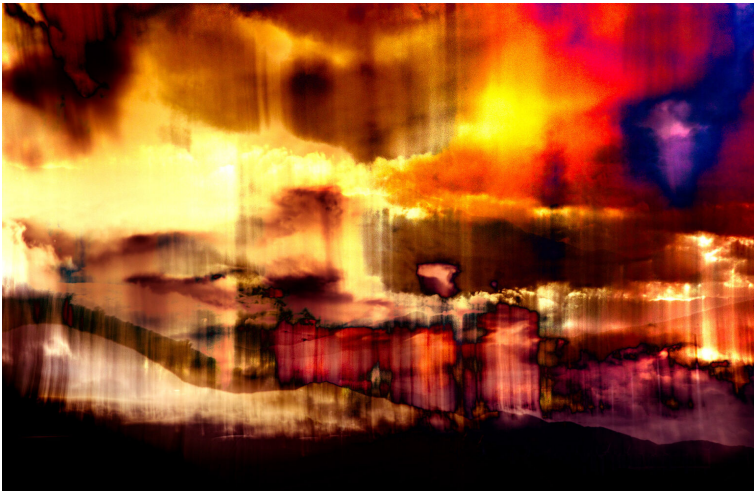
While your curved blooms climb higher,
the beets rest beneath layers of compost heat,
egg shell peels, and decaying newspaper headlines
depicting a stolen girl, a crashed war vessel,
a new vaccine cure-all.

Hard as fists, purpling in the dirt, whether shoved
in a corner where nothing else will grow or stuck
between wild catnip, you grow nonetheless.
Many times, I have wanted to be you, privy
to the prying tongues of bees,

building layers of buttresses inside a thistle shell
like a cathedral in wartime. At the center:
your heart; a relic, an alter with holy water,
a treasure made from sunshine and pure rain trickle.
I, a bloom, a single heart-clutched hand reaching up,

a landmine field around me the color of bruises:
the beets nursing from the dirt. I, a something to someone.
I, a word that means people live. I,
tempered time, I, a scent that says I am ready
to leave, I am ready to see the ordinary,

I am here to survive. I have nothing in common
with a family with their heads in the ground.
I am ready to mark myself as different. They find nothing
from looking up at the sun, why would they?
Up at the distance between us, up at the color
of sky's undivided attention, up at the hungry eyes of bees,
up at the benevolent scans of birds searching for seed
while I build my temple that tastes like sugar
at least to someone; while I open my mouth to drink.



Sunset in Joshua Tree, 2024 by Holly Willis

Centaur

by Kate Chadbourne

The postman, like the barista,
is another modern centaur.
You rarely see his legs.

Ours is jolly,
all grin and belly.
Pleased when I meet him
at the box
to spare him the walk.

“Brought you a present,”
he loves to say,
leaning the parcel over the
sill of the square window
that serves as vantage
and counter for him.

“You’re the best.”
He is.
Sometimes I bring him
a napkin of cookies.
“Do I look like a guy
who says no to cookies?”
he laughs, hands out.

Wasn't Chiron, best of
centaurs, also a carouser
and also of good cheer?
Wasn't Chiron,
like my postman,
skilled at way-finding
and healing—
and kind?



Don't Look by Howie Good

Epiphyte Lessons

by Pamela Klem

The first orchid I ever met
was a gift presented to my grandmother
by an elegant neighbor who came for dinner.

My grandmother received it reverently
transferred the arching stems into a cobalt porcelain planter
adjusted the spires on their supporting stakes
and laid it upon the carved chest in the foyer.
So I knew it was precious, and rare.

My grandmother could make anything grow
in her long clipped contoured beds
but indoors was different.
Despite her daily mist and weak tea
and anxious hovering
that orchid was dead within months.

Great trees fall. My grandmother died
just as the daughter I named for her was born.
Some years later I took that daughter to Monteverde
where orchids attach themselves haphazardly
to decomposing logs, in jointed nooks
between canopy tree branches
the mossy bases of trees

Orchids don't rely on soil for their sustenance.
They can pull what they need from moist air and refuse
suspended particles of fog, tiny stagnant pools,
half rotted leaves

Listening to Women Talking I recoiled
when Scarface spat, *Want Less*.
There surely is a difference
between enforced wanting less
and possessing the ability to draw real sustenance
from air
and dirty water.

Invisible Work

by Jeanne Griggs

On the walls of my high school
I taped dozens of campaign posters
for George, the invisible man, urging everyone
to vote for him, promising that they would see
results, and my triumph was when my friend Bill,
in on the secret of who was making the posters,
told me I'd made a farce of the whole election.
On the streets of my small town
I would hop out of a yellow Ford Pinto and lie
on the ground while the car sped off,
until someone noticed and then the car
would swoop back, I would hop in,
and we'd do it in another place
until we got tired of the game,
Dead Body, we called it, and the aim
was to startle all those small town people
out of what I imagined was complacency.
In the mailboxes of neighbors I'd never met
I put papers, nonsensical hand-written notes
about our place in the universe and what I knew
about life at 16, words sent into a void
in an adolescent agony of anonymity and angst
we flapped tennis rackets
out the passenger windows of the Pinto

and when my friend Brad got pulled over
he asked me to open the glove compartment
but when I did, a roll of toilet paper
fell out, ready for our next mission:
uncoiling it all over the guest bathroom
of Nancy's parents, who might have expected it
outside but thought it safe to invite us in.
Another night we drove slowly down Main Street
with my leg hanging out of the trunk.
We drove the wrong way, sober, down Broadway.
I climbed on the top of the Pinto and it felt like flying
and nobody got hurt or noticed our work
to release an excess of exuberance,
survive the force of our feelings,
escape the trap looming in the corner
of my wary eyes. We could always find another way
to leave the heat of that small town behind us
as the Pinto sped up, faster and faster

Loblolly Pine in August

by Sarah Banks

Nudge of dawn, and they stir
in half-light. Still air hangs
heavy—not a bird, not a trill.

Eager, the sun pulses
under the skyline—
flickering then flushing

pink-gold before breaching
the horizon, now bursting
through, firing up orange

to stash cumulus behind blue
as the pines stake themselves
into place—bark-cased statues

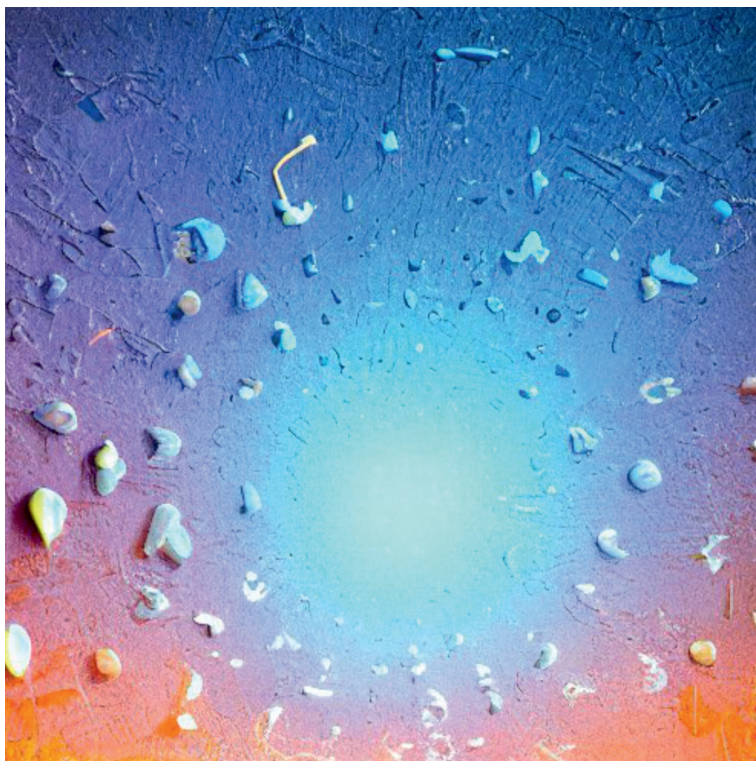
carved out vertical,
their plumage fanned to points.
Prickly tufts eye and yield

as cerulean swells to a bulge
netting hot on heat.
The firmament balloons

to capacity. Mississippi red
clay underneath, loblolly pine
breathe in and hunker

down to outlast
summer's closing
heave.

Asemic Metamorphoses of Space, (vers 14) by Alexander Limarev



Enthralled to the Dead

by Bethany Tap

Archer and Max lived next door to Kiki. She was five; Archer was six and Max, four. The three were inseparable in the quicksand way of all childhood friendships: shifting, enveloping, and vanishing.

Behind their houses sat a graveyard. Stone markers puckered the earth like ant hills. Through the slats of the fence, Kiki and Max admired the graves. They were enthralled to the dead, playing at lifelessness on the grass. Max would close his eyes, while Kiki knelt beside him, crying. They switched, and he cried for her. Sometimes, they were married, siblings, or parent and child. The relationships changed. The game remained the same.

Archer preferred to search for bugs or read. He would turn away from them as they played and yawn at death, preferring the living and imaginary.

Summer came and bewitched the graveyard. It became an enchanted place, full of purple clover, goldenrod, and lily of the valley. The grass was carpeted in regal newness and Archer wanted nothing more than to dance among all that fresh life and magic.

Because he was the oldest and default leader, when he climbed the fence, Kiki and Max followed. On the other side, they stopped in a stair-step line, Kiki between the two boys. Archer looked out at the

glory of the sunlight against the stones and flowers. Kiki looked up at him, waiting. Max looked at her. He reached for her hand, but she pulled away. As Archer walked forward, Kiki reached for his hand, and he accepted hers. The two did not look back at Max, who stood watching the two people he loved most in the world go ahead of him.

The summer went on like this: Archer leading, Kiki at his side, and Max trailing behind.

In July, Kiki stopped playing with Max. For her birthday, she got an ant farm, which she and Archer spent hours watching.

In August, Archer told Kiki a secret and she kept it. Half the keeping was forgetting, but she told Max that it existed, which was enough to make Max rip out half a dozen pages of his brother's favorite book.

In September, Archer and Kiki started school and Max was left alone.

Seasons passed. The next summer, Kiki's family moved across town and the friendship left with them.

When the boys were men, married and fathers, they heard from their mothers that Kiki had died.

"Leukemia," Mom said.

"So young," Mama sighed.

At her funeral, Max and Archer stood shoulder to shoulder. The brothers hadn't seen each other in nearly a year, although they lived less than a mile apart. Archer squeezed Max's shoulder. Max touched Kiki's cold face, half-expecting her to open her eyes and laugh.

"She looks so old," Archer said.

"So do you," Max said, but Kiki looked decades older than either of them, like the cancer had been a fast-forward button, careening her life to its end.

After, at the bar, the brothers drank in cold silence.

“She was a weird kid,” Archer said.

“She was lovely,” Max replied.

“Well, you were just as weird,” Archer chuckled.

They drank another two rounds without speaking.

“I gotta go,” Archer said, standing.

Max didn't reply. Archer put an arm on his shoulder.

“Max, we barely knew her,” he said. “You'll be alright.”

Max said nothing. Archer paid the tab and left. A fleeting thought danced through Max's brain: he wished he'd never have to see Archer's smug, stupid face ever again. It was a childish, brotherly thought. He shook his head to dislodge it and when he got home, curling into bed next his husband, he felt nothing but affection for his stoic, logical brother.

In the morning, when the call came in, he kept repeating, over and over, “My fault, my fault, my fault.”

His husband held him. Later, he asked him: “How much did Archie drink?”

Max shook his head. He felt Archer's hand on his shoulder, heard his last words again and again. Had he slurred them? He remembered the thought, which ricocheted around his mind, a niggling bug that would forever pop up in his darkest moments to remind him of everything he should have done differently.

“My fault,” he whispered.

Max never forgave himself for the thought, or the accident, or his mothers' tears, the way they stopped smiling, their hair and faces gray-ing into sudden old age. He never forgave himself for the childhood

game, which felt like a premonition, like a spell he'd carelessly cast. He never forgave himself for living.

But live he did, through grown children, grandchildren, even four great-grandchildren.

Finally, as an old man on his deathbed, he recalled that moment in the graveyard in all its devastation and splendor: the sparkling quartz, the violet and golden ground, the pink ribbon in Kiki's yellow hair, the red of Archer's tee-shirt, and the feeling, deep inside him, like his stomach was being squeezed, pulled, and rubbed with sandpaper. Max thought, *This must be what death will feel like*, not an emptiness, but everything, the rush of life becoming far too much to bear.

He took a deep breath and followed them. He would follow them anywhere.

Nothing Compares

by Ivy Raff

Eyes of October's Irish Sea – all temperatures at once.

I was too young for a love like that but her vocals carved a gorge. Today I accept the bottomless well: I may not see the love I think I need during this collection of breaths I call a life.

()

In my early twenties I lived in a dirty tenement in Hell's Kitchen. Single handedly populated the ground floor's karaoke bar with musician friends. Every week I nagged Mary Hanley to do "Nothing Compares 2 U." It never wore. No matter what drunken hookups or brawls brewed, everyone silenced when Mary inhabited Sinéad. Mary – wisp of fairy Goth-daughter, smeared Merlot lipstick, too-thick eyeliner, torn fishnets. When she sang that song she was an angel.

Sinéad refused to perform sexuality and allure. Karen Finley asked me, *How do you relate to that?* I said, *With the same admiration I hold for mountain*

climbers & others who achieve what I will never. I stand on my little bound feet, mirror-check several times a day, ensure this dress lays properly over my silhouette, my hair curls according to my will. I do not know whether femininity was born in me like the propensity for freckles, or beaten into me like the lie that screamed at the inner walls of my skull this morning when I secured the door shut behind my new man. He can't get away from you fast enough.

()

I would be an awkward colt with a shaved head. In my feedbag gather a thousand grains that taste like the Stanley Steemer carpet cleaning tech telling me he wants to rub my pretty toes. He'd knelt on the floor to show me where old glass chips buried in the padding. Men's desires: gardens I tend. Fat red bell peppers slice open, reveal flat white seeds.

()

After Norman's death, my grandmother lamented in my arms, *What is a woman's life if there is no husband to need her?*

I pen achievable action plans every day. I need written-out structures. Else I hack at my arms with shards of funhouse mirrors.

()

My mother was – is – weak in her constitution. I grit sand on her soft pink tongue, never turn pearl. She hardly breathes around me, much less sings her violin's long plaintive cries. Mine drowns hers. When I was young she locked me where walls would absorb my sound. This is common in addict households. She feared kicking the wasp nest of my

father's habit, doused her daughter in pesticides instead. Her eyes reside at the geographic center of a billowing white tent.

This is what I inherit from my family: lemming-like desires to numb. I never called it that. I called it pleasure, rocketed to the one place I didn't have to think about how small my world had become. How, in that cold corner of Michigan, in a whole week the only human voice I heard was my own addict husband's.

()

I'm not for this public. They're not for me. I fantasize about the year 2183, a century from my death. Advanced humans unclasp their UV protection suits to kiss into each other's mouths potable water infused with my microchipped poetry. That's how I want them to transmit me, via love to which nothing compares.

()

I harbor the harmed. No longer a fighter, nor a brawler. I fought for the better part of my life. No one's lot improved for it, least of all mine. I shelter the damned, as Sinéad did. Good days come one at a time.

Noble life is to sit, quiet. Let your death take its time. Wade in the sea. Watch sunlight on its ripple.

Loosdrecht Schaatsen by Verónica Mier y Terán



*shame and the way it from the body like
wet linen*

by K Weber

the drag-down, the heft:
hair a soaked depression

how a marionettist danced
off the edge and left the puppet
slumped

scars cool in a pooled sweat
surrounded by
little hairs softly waving hello/

goodbye amid the bruised
ache of human fruit

Life Cycle

by Dwaine Rieves

the caterpillar stage of the catalpa sphinx moth
feeds on green catalpa tree leaves in the human
being the formative stage of fulfillment feeds on green
feelings I think death I also think
is simply another stage of crawling

we typically feel time I think
as a tree feels time dirt and seasons simply
lived with like reasons I could grow out of it
but for now as I understand it catalpa trees evolved
to endure a moth's freaky beginning
I once saw them caterpillars falling
from a catalpa tree as the luxurious leaves gave way
green eating green all the way down

the tree limbs lay bare for they had borne
the process it's a fact
not unlike the fact that the world is not mine
to change or explain
noble to think otherwise I thought until
I felt the telling crunch of leaves playing
dead beneath my feet that sound
a change a hope gnawing
on the limbs I hear high above this earth
 sap purling to nub over
every place where the fluttering goes

The Walker

by Elizabeth Hill

I write poems
Because my mother died,
Compelled,

Like my father
Accepts the walker
Pressed on him

By the aides
At the home, who say
Get him to try it.

His eyesight shrinks
Like the end of a
Looney Tunes cartoon.

The old folks croon
He is so popular here
With everyone.

Like my husband with his
Easy chatter on the
Work Zoom,

The way he too
Blithely navigates the
Difficult ones.

Day Care Center.
Each small child
Demanding something of me,

Saying *Read*
This book now or
Pick me up.

My father held my mother up
In a bear hug
While she hung limp.

She was hollow
At the end of the phone when
She told me she was dying.

I feel her presence
With the soft antennae
That I strangely have.

I see her around
The corner of my eye,
Beside myself.

She is so nearly
Present. Even the way
She sometimes was:

Your brother was the smart one.
Would she love my poems
Or compete with them?

Today a River
by Kerry Trautman

(after *Mountain River* by Lisa Curry, oil on canvas)

My feet know the glass tingle of cold waiting there in water
that used to be peaked snowpack, views of cragged horizon. Born

in July, my body craves always sun-doused prairies and beach
sand radiating from footsoles upward like a griddle. Tree-

climbing brings my skin that much nearer sun. But not
all beauty is heat—some is fish-chilled—as if warmth equals rot.

To stay cool as snowmelt is purity liquified,
reflecting heavens—their snowishness of cloud

their crystal blue or black black spacecold speckled in starlight.
My ankles anticipate the leaden cold water there waiting to

weigh them to the riverbed, as if fixed into ice bricks—chipped
from Lake Erie's January, wagon-drawn to hay barns. Calf-deep

I would wish I knew how to fly-fish, whooshing line whirlingigging
round and round my sky to plunk sinker into frigid ripples

and tempt the icy bodies flickering there in silvery zags
and zigs. The mountain peaks will always be nearer sun than I am

and the redwood trees' uppermost scraggly needles like
unanswerable prayers. Were I to scramble up those peaks

skree would slip and skitter down to the river. Were I to climb those
trees, resin would gum my fingerprints. Today I am low

in lavender frost of what's grounded and underground. Sun tries
to green what needs to be green here. Today the water is

a river. Today I am a woman, feet on cold stone, face to sun.
I probably didn't climb trees as often as I remember doing.

This Man On the Street

by Edward Lee

A man on the street asks me if I want to be saved, his hands clutching a coverless book, the visible pages rusty with age and damp. His eyes are wide with a shine that looks like it belongs in the sky just on the cusp of a summer storm and not in the eyes of anything human or otherwise.

Normally I would walk by anyone trying to offer me what I do not believe in—and I must assume he is speaking of some religion or other—but I stop and tell him I would love to be saved.

He looks at me a moment, almost, it seems, in shock, that someone has stopped; am I imagining that he was already moving onto the next passerby before he had finished asking me, so sure was he of a dismal? I can see he is replaying my reply in his head, searching it for mockery or sarcasm—perhaps even my use of the word ‘love’—before concluding that neither is present and I meant what I said, which I did, surprising myself with those words almost as much as I am surprised that I stopped. Yes, I do indeed want to be saved, and have wanted to be for some time, consciously unaware as I may have been right up until the moment I was asked by this man on the street. Or, if not saved, at the very least, made secure, for the past few years of my life have been spent adrift as I move from apartment to apartment every time the rent is raised, each one smaller than the one before, and from jobs every time the wage is lowered, both of these things happening with

ever-increasing rapidity. Who would not want to be saved from a life like that, even if the offer is from a man met on the street? Who would be foolish enough to risk losing such a chance, no matter from where that chance might be originating? This man on the street, despite his battered book and shining eyes, is respectably dressed—possibly even more so than me in my dark hoody and faded jeans—and his manner of speaking seems almost cultured, like an off-duty actor speaking in their everyday voice, the sweep and flow of projection absent but hinted at with every second or third word. Nor does he give off the fumes of alcohol, or—bar those shining eyes—any suggestion of drugs taken. At the most I would say he is a man touched, perhaps, by some soft madness, but nothing dangerous, nothing to tip a person's natural instinct into warnings of danger.

And then he smiles, this man on the street with the shining eyes, and in that smile I see something close to viciousness, a cruel decision made which will demand a cruel action to implement. Whatever stopped me vanishes in a moment and I walk away from him, my steps swift, my heart racing in my chest, expecting him at any moment to give chase. My now alerted instinct tells me that the salvation this man offers is one of pain and endings, and I do not need any help achieving the latter, for have I not considered it many times in the past few years, fleetingly, a way out of it all when it all finally—as I fear it must, for the human heart and mind surely have limits to their endurance—becomes too much?

But he does not follow, and eventually my steps slow and my heart regains its normal beat. I continue on in the life I am trying to live by simply surviving, any chance of being saved fluttering and fading behind me like an echo without an originating sound. I even laugh, a small, frail sound, more a release of abrupt fear than any humour, but a laugh all the same.

I cannot remember the last time I laughed. I find myself thankful that I stopped to speak to that man on the street, however brief it was. And while I do not feel saved or even secure, I feel the weight of despair that is a permanent presence in my chest lessen somewhat, like a breath coming easier than the one before with the fragile possibility that the next one might be easier still.

Alder and Salmon

by D. Walsh Gilbert

The comfort of smolder tendrils over red flesh—
a salmon, deboned and fileted and arranged
atop a steel rack, gradually, ardently, inflames.

The poet chooses alder wood fresh from the edge
of Alsop Pond, the one the tree's been sucking
as it spills its yellow catkins into April's rain.

Cut into kindling, the timber bleeds red sap,
pleads once again to be a warrior shield or bowl,
but its destiny is to burn today and feed.

This poet does believe the first man sprang alive
from an alder tree long ago—both dripping blood.
A man who would trace to her, who would provide.

Sweet, wet, greenwood smokes what will nourish,
cures the rawness of an ocean into edible bits
the way the early crocuses soften a cold winter.

Caught in the smudge of a blackened alder's soot,
the salt of the Atlantic is preserved, and the vigor
of muscle remains. The fish's migratory perseverance
can retell a poet's own history of resolve.

There lies the wisdom of the salmon—its story—
fluid-transparent, elusive, shadowy at best,

then, a clean evisceration, its skin pink, green, silver.
It's been sacrificed to the hardened steel and fire,
but it's still able to speak ancestral myths. Truths.

Through burned-blood fog, this is what the poet bites.

The Forgotten Tree by Verónica Mier y Terán



Induced by the Ice Moon,

by Claire Massey

barren January births
red camellia buds.
In winter's bloodless womb,
hope takes root, blooms.

At South Lido Park, When My Husband Has COVID

by Madeleine French

Rain cleared the beach
where I'm walking off the worry
while he naps.
On this in-between day
sudden gusts shake the quiet, and
my solitary steps swirl sand
into tiny tornadoes.

At the water's edge, a heron
shrugs winged shoulders.
Slate blue feathers match
semi-circle clouds
lined up in the sky,
like my high-heeled shoes
in the closet.

He lopes off toward the bay
on spindly yellow legs,
his awkward gait tracing
a graceful, gradual arc—
as if he'd eased a seam
around a difficult curve.

The Making of Horses

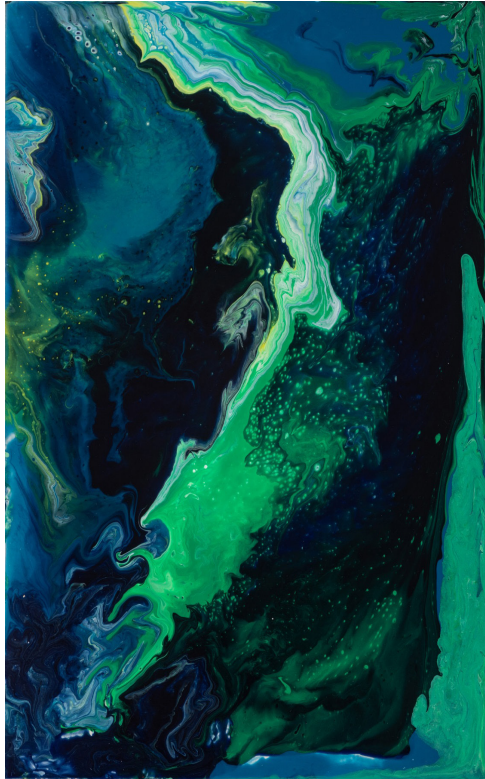
by Terri McCord

I made horses out of
fuzzed pipe cleaners, and then
my hand, middle finger
curved just so
to form
the horse's bowed head,

and sometimes
lifted
the index finger
when the horse
reared and said "neigh"
and I practiced the sound of the horse,
nay, the right hand, then both,
the corpus collosum a fence
I mended my hands
not spiders, though they can be
lovely, too, but horses, the quilt,
the carpet their field.

My mother called me
“lover,” and Sam, and Clyde, and Pedro.
These horses kneeled
to each other
 and played.
Imagine the beauty in fingers
 the innocence
in the soft flare
 of the horse’s lip
over the apple.

A Decade of Seasons I by Leila Pinto



Ice Cave

by Susan Shaw Sailer

7,000 feet up Mount Rainier,
inside Paradise Glacier, walls
and ceiling glow blue, half
a million years compacting
snow. Through a round opening
I stoop to enter, stand but can't
stretch out my arms. Enclosed,
womb-like, some presence makes
me feel beheld, silence-wrapped.

Summer melts made globby knobs
on cave roof and walls but warming
Earth works differently. Behind
melting ice, Paradise retreats for
decades. The cave where I'd stood
shrinks, sinks, the whole vast network
of interconnected caves, world's
largest, gone.

Sixteen when I stood inside that cave,
old woman now, in memory I see
again that glow-blue light. Silence
wraps me still, recall I was beheld.

Nonverbal Communication

by Shamik Banerjee

When she exhales an 'uff', she needs a hand
With threshing. Forehead-wiping indicates
Myalgia's kicked in; she cannot stand.
I take her place. Her quick looks at my plates
At lunchtime mean she's asking, "How's the food?"
My restless jaws reply, "It is lip-smacking!"
Her daytime lie-down tells: she wants a good
Massage to keep her knee cramps from attacking.
But in my case, such signs are not required.
Tea—sharp at five. Used clothes—turned clean and clear.
The bed is made before I say, "I'm tired."
She makes my world just how it should appear,
Yet needs no cues. My mother's mind and heart—
Indeed, The Maker's most impressive art.

The Pregnancy Pillow

by Taylor Miles-Behrens

Every night, the four of us latch onto the u-shaped pregnancy pillow: one from the middle, one from inside me, one with his head nuzzled into my neck, and one curled up into a furry ball between my stomach and the pillow – defeating the pillow’s whole purpose; but the cat insists: he is and will always be the first baby.

A week later, and I still can’t sit in chairs. They staff more people at hospitals on full moons and during storms and she tells the 41-week pregnant woman to go to the Italian restaurant next to King Soopers. “Point to your belly and they will know” – the eggplant parmesan that sends a city into labor.

I look up one day when walking out of the store and I see it there in the strip mall: large white letters above a green and white canopy, “IL PASTAIO.” I laugh and think about how we should go there for dinner before remembering how superstitious I am: We will not be stepping foot into that restaurant until it’s time for me to eat the eggplant parm.

Soon enough, the four of us have completed another day’s tasks: one grading never-ending essays; one forming brain cells; one computing water leaks; and one squeaking at squirrels. We migrate our drowsiness from the couch to the bed, briefly awake enough to contemplate

what's next before latching back onto the pillow. The soft cushion guides us toward a future we will never fully understand until it is here, so we hold tight and float forward.

A Decade of Seasons III by Leila Pinto



Wisława Szymborska and the Wounded Angel

by George Franklin

A Polish poet was taking her exam on the History of Humanity. It was still winter, but the first snowdrops had pushed their way through the hard earth. The grass was still brown, but there were bushes with leaves. Inside, a pencil scratched stubbornly against a sheet of cheap paper. The questions on the exam were difficult, were impossible. Beyond the window, the sky would not let go of winter, and no one was warmed by the sun. She closed her eyes and saw the two boys. The one in front looked straight ahead. His hat, jacket, and pants were so black they could have been made of stone instead of cloth. His shoes had been repaired and repaired again. If he had any hopes left, they were for a bowl of soup and a slice of gray bread that tasted of rye and lard. The other boy wore a jacket too small for him. He was angry and, if she had asked, would have told her to throw the pencil onto the floor and leave. There was something sadistic in the way his eyes squinted at her. She could not force him to recognize her or anyone. The boys carried an angel bent over on a stretcher. A bandage covered the angel's eyes; there was blood on one of her wings. The angel carried the exam answers in her hand, a few white snowdrops she couldn't see. Her robe trailed along the ground.

The Polish poet knew it was too late. She'd grown old, and the exam was already over. But the boys refused to stop walking, and the angel still allowed herself to be carried, bent over on the stretcher. The Polish poet

Returned to her apartment, sat at her desk, and listened to the traffic outside.
She could hear footsteps in the hallways.



Harmony of Humanity: Evolving Empath by Laura Notari

Sunrise, September Five

by John Spiegel

Sparrow flies by the corner room's corner window. Flies when it sees me. Faces East. So much hair; dark, "It looks cherry in this light," my mother says through the phone. My other daughter at home with grandma. I don't know how to do this: share myself. With mother. You.

I elevator down to the cafeteria, grab coffee and dark chocolate. Climbing stairs still hurts my stomach; 3 sets of stitches.

"In your own words, say what we're doing to you."

I say *Emergency Appendectomy*, and they corrected me;

"Removing your appendix," as if I shouldn't know the words this high. As if I shouldn't own what's mine. I am leaving me. Or being taken. My appendix, my mind. I don't remember what happened next. "Why don't hospital beds have USB ports yet?" I ask. "We'll make millions."

Going under, the surgeon asks what I do for a living. I tell him I teach English.

"What are your favorite books?" he asks, trying to gauge when I'm asleep, I think. I'm conscious long enough to ask him which genre, to say *Of Mice and Men*, *Art & Fear*, *Counting Descent*. To tell him I reread those books the way I reheat meals.

Waking up, my throat is too dry to ask, but the nurse hands me soda anyway. When the surgeon checks in, he mentions that he's never read Steinbeck. I'm falling asleep, but tell him to read the shorter books. I tell him a poem is a book. I tell him that I know what the word "appendectomy" means. You meet me in my room soon after, and we wait. We're just glad we aren't sharing a hospital bed. I try to stand but can't.

At home, I couldn't roll over. Your hips hurt from the weight and we haven't shared a bed in weeks. The couch rested your belly or I wanted to give you extra room.

"In your own words, say what we're doing to you."

"Inducing labor"

"We're gonna get this baby out of you," again, correcting.

"Sure," you say.

We wait. Sleep, if we can. During labor we watch game shows with the doctor and nurse between contractions. I'd feel bad about being inattentive if you weren't joking about it. Why do hospital beds not have USB ports yet? you ask. We'll make millions.

In my own bed two weeks ago, I am on a couch in the corner room of the mother and baby wing. On the phone with my mother, you say, "We're just happy we weren't sharing a hospital bed." (Again? What is the joke, now?) Charlie is born and I rest my forehead on yours. This bed we aren't sharing is the bed we share now. I have forgotten my second skin. What's mine was never mine.

*“Even Though My Ulna Popped out of the Skin When I Fell
off the 6th-grade Monkey Bar...”*

by John Dorroh

1.

I want it all back, my playground where I was catapulted
through the air, six feet off the ground, landing on my left arm,
exposing gray bone, nerve & artery paralleling my fifth-grade
universe. Mrs. Harrison calls my dad who's walking out the door
to go fishing on his only day off. Instead of the river we go to the
hospital
where I get a shot with the world's longest needle. The nurse with her
crisp
clean uniform tells me that it won't hurt. They always lie. My sister says
I told you so. I shoot her the middle finger & mean it. *I hope you die*
she says.

2.

I outspell everyone in my classroom, except Mimi Sullivan whose
father
took her to Tokyo for a radiology convention. We have a spell-off & I
beat her
by one word. I buy ice cream from Brookshire's Dairy with my
winnings
& a big chocolate sheet cake as big as Texas. I'm the hero for one day.
I misspell
circular at the county bee & lose to Connie Dick who was a dick, but
a nice one.

3.

Miss Evangeline Tubbs, our music teacher, was a staunch advocate of
German lyrics,
the fat on the underside of her upper arms, swinging like hammocks
as she directed choir.
She forced me to sing a solo in the Christmas musical & I told her
that I was gonna mess
it up, & I *did* mess it up, & I felt vindicated & powerful at least as
much as a kid can feel
vindicated & powerful.

4.

I popped the sleeve of a nylon parka in Rebecca Bowden's left eye, &
she yelled that her mama was
gonna pay us a visit & I lived on pins & needles all night but they
never came. Rebecca was a sort of hero
with her pirate patch & she never spoke another word to me & that
was okay because I knew that what she
had said to me was malicious & uncalled for. Fairview School made
me happy & I wish that I still fit into
the mold. Sadly, my body has outgrown its youth, but my brain
retains memories. At least for now.

Wood Ear

by Megan Friedman

September's breath came knocking
On summer's fallen elder—this

An unburdened log, where I knelt
in space between tree rings; those

Memories of year: a holding ground
For lost souls to collect, consume

And listen. As wandering spores
Amass gone-away things

Found again, only in harkened
Softness, in decay—and I

Could chew the fleshy aftertaste
Of death: of thoughts of thoughts

Of thoughts—deciduous digestion
Pitted, gnawed upon, and spit

Like toughened tongues roll
Apricots against our aging cheeks

Soaked in sweetened womb and
Wonder, decomposition's best

Attempt at drawing lines between
Forest and floor. What is below

Our feet? But knowing when to
Look, bow down, and swallow.

Foraging for Wine

by Richard L. Matta

I explain I'm not a local.

I must have that put-together look—
a roadside talking map to articulate
the way from this B&B to wine country.
It's the first right, second left, right at the fourth
stop, left again, go two miles, take the dirt
road you can barely see. I don't offer
and they don't ask the names of roads.

The signs are too hard to see, even if
I could remember them. I offer compass
directions, but their eyes gloss over, and then
landmarks: the red barn, big white house,
a gnarled oak (you can't miss it), and they nod.

Then I remember the honeybees, their seed-
sized brains. How they cooperate, share
the way to flowers. They return with loaded
legs, take their place in a special honeycomb
space where they perform for a captive audience
waiting for directions.

I tell my new friends imagine you are bees.
The nectar stash is thirty degrees from the sun.
I position myself accordingly, like a worker bee
on a hive's navigation platform. I start my dance;
begin turning and turning. It works again.
As I get dizzy from spinning and the earlier
wine tasting, they're gone. I wait, hope they
remember this hive; bring a bottle of nectar
after they fill up at the foraging grounds.

What Noah's Wife Did

by Bryana Joy

You know that woman wore herself plumb out toting feed to critter after critter up and down the narrow stairs. Dinners were a dismal affair in the hold of the dark ark. No one who was around left any sign of Noah's wife. What we know about her is not about her. I know she spruced up that rat's paradise as best she could, could turn one olive branch into a whole bouquet. Some people know she's alight in the hot fires of hell. They see Noah droning on a full century with no converts and are certain: That wife of his.

Bracken

by Amy DeBellis

it would be easier to kill something / less separate from myself / my
body now a temple of scarred wood / ribs sharp like a windowless
room / spine bowed from the pain of bringing another smaller room
into the world / underneath a salt-colored sky / sun swinging like
a metronome / these days scraping down to nothing / shedding silt
along their edges like riverbeds / & despite all of this i have been told
that the best time to hunt deer is early morning or dusk / mist unfurl-
ing over the grass / does picking their way through juniper / wild plum
/ generous elderberry / all the children of the flowers my mother grew
for her children / before she turned to wax in the hospital / her body
choked by cement and marble & not returned to earth with the vibur-
nums / the spicebush / the soil swollen with root like a belly / love al-
ways a resigned counting down / but deer have no concept of numbers
/ of time / they escape this eventuality / & i can't believe i used to shoot
them at the moment they looked most beautiful / eggshell cathedrals
/ rooms with smaller rooms inside them / half-hidden by bracken /
already drifting away over the dogwood / already turning to ghosts

Parent's Day

by Eva Eliav

she wanted to look
perfect

instead, a wasp
transformed her lip
into a plump pink cushion

the nurse's hands
were quick
her eyes as sugary and hard
as jelly beans

her mother wept

her father handed her
a dollar bill
went back to playing rummy
with his cronies

there was a buzzing
in her chest
a wasp of words

Germination

by Audra Burwell

	<i>To Love</i>	<i>To Grieve</i>	<i>To Empty</i>
<i>Past</i>	<p>satin pink tongue stained strawberry scarlet/ candyfloss lips dripping honey-soured jealousy/ the taste of cooked carmine</p>	<p>bark of persimmon poured down parchment needle throat/ crushed rose water boiling fractured bone silver shards/ loss a foreign lover</p>	<p>charm-candles cast upon Yuletide/ an altar seeping souls & crystal blue stripped velvet/ worship atonement of wood-splintered knees</p>
<i>Present</i>	<p>glass-cut eyes swollen with radiance & salted thirst/ sea-snarled hair swept asunder/ equinox nights a burning sky of broken bedrock</p>	<p>acid-bathed blades scissoring terracotta flesh/ lungs eviscerated/ a butterfly ambered mid-flight/ blood-bleached brains beating still</p>	<p>slit the belly of Jupiter & bite gristle-pork entrails/ bowel your marrow's hate & expel sustenance/ impregnate pain with primrose sap & lust</p>
<i>Future</i>	<p>rooms drowned in moth-eaten cloud-skin/ cotton throats stitched with oleander & pearls/ your hand to light my funeral pyre</p>	<p>gold-veined acrylic tears weeping rusted canvas/ tongue threaded through sweet-rot burial soil/ the scent of sun-starved onion saplings</p>	<p>cup smoldered silver in spleen/ let life gush from iron-gouged thighs & tuck death beneath tamarind tongue/ breathe blighted beauty</p>

If you could be any animal?

by Erin Coughlin Hollowell

Of course, I'd choose a bird.
Smitten by feathers. Forgetting
how easily birds break against
the windows. Limp and ruined.

I had my first dream of flying
when I was fifty-eight. I'm not
sure what that says about me.
My dream life is replete

with houses of many rooms,
but always grounded, even
subterranean. I pay close
attention to birds. Listen

to the rhythm of song, rattle
of notes from branches, flocks
like ribbons or battalions.
My mother fed songbirds,

but would bang on the window
if starlings arrived. Or squirrels.
She had a particular desire
to see only sanctioned beauty.

When a grosbeak slammed
into our front window, we rushed
to scoop it into a cushioned box,
pretending it might recover.

A female, red only in patches,
instead, she stiffened. When
I get up in the morning, it takes
a few moments to limber up,

that's probably not going to get
better. In my dream, flying was
not effortless. I had to struggle
to break free from the ground.

When My Mom's Ghost Comes To Visit Me

by Sage Tyrrtle

We make pumpkin pie together.

My mom's wife used to make us popcorn, glorious popcorn, popped in oil and coated in butter and so many cloves of garlic we could hear the vampires overhead, flapping their bat wings faster and faster to escape the waves of garlic wafting from the windows, and then of course nutritional yeast because nutritional yeast appears in your cabinets the moment you understand you are a lesbian, and there was salt, and pepper, and while she made us the popcorn my mom and I would sit like baby birds, watching her, our mouths open with popcorn want.

But when my mom's ghost comes to visit me, we make pumpkin pie. Neither of us can cook so we use canned spiced pumpkin and one egg and a crust in a box and we whip the cream in a bowl with a whisk which we call cooking and we laugh in delight because we are together, and just like always the pumpkin pie seems to take hours in the oven but it means we get to spend longer, squatting in front of the warm oven window, saying words and words and words that seem like a conversation but all mean I still dream you're alive, I still remember the feel of your calloused hands, I still can't look at photos of you even though it's been ten years, I still, I still, the words all mean I love you. I miss you.

And when the pie has cooled and we have each smothered a piece in

whipped cream, my mom's ghost leaves when I'm looking away. When I least expect it.



Taboo and Emotional Ambivalanece by Laura Notari

Elevated Convection

by Skylar Camp

It isn't raining yet, but the sky is covered with gray, heavy clouds. Wind blows the bare tree branches against the window.

She pushes her nose against the window pane. It's cold. Her eyes are unfocused. Her breath fogs up the glass.

Her son runs into the dim room. She flinches. His boisterous energy often startles her. She pulls back from the window, eyes abruptly focused on the circle of fog from her nostrils.

"Have you seen the clouds, mom? The sky is almost black if you look out the back door!" His volume hurts her skin. "I want to make sure the squirrel who lives in the maple tree isn't scared!" He runs out of the room.

She draws in the fading fog with her finger: two dots, one curved line. Eyes and a sad mouth. She wipes the face off the glass with the palm of her hand and leaves a smudge. A low rumble of thunder rolls in the distance. She turns around, leans against the window, sinks to the floor. The cat nuzzles her hand, but she ignores her. She thought thunderstorms weren't supposed to happen in the winter. Lots of things weren't supposed to happen, though, and they still did. Bumblebees shouldn't be able to fly, but they can. People say they will always love you, but they stop. Thunderstorms shouldn't happen in the winter, but

one is about to.

Her left thumb rubs her ring finger. She still expects to feel the familiar circle of gold there, but it's gone now, thrown into the field outside in a fit of rage and grief.

Lightning flashes, temporarily brightening the room. Thunder shakes the wall. The cat jumps up, meows, darts behind the couch. Her son is on the front porch, yelling, "Mom! ...my storm book! ...convection!" The wind sweeps his words away. She needs to call him inside. It's not safe out there.

She opens her mouth to speak. Nothing happens.

She licks her lips. Tries to swallow. Her throat is too dry.

She closes her eyes, counts to three, and forces herself to stand. She walks out of the room, through the dark hallway to the front door. Her body feels like it's trapped in sludge.

The front door is open. She looks through the glass storm door. Her son is standing on the porch railing. She needs to get him inside before something bad happens.

Suddenly, the rain begins. Her son tosses back his head, holds on to a post with one arm, throws the other arm into the air. He screams a primal shriek into the sky.

She moves forward, pushes the storm door open, steps onto the porch. It's so cold.

He turns to look at her. His cheeks, still soft and curved, are wet. She realizes it's not from the rain. His eyes and nose are red and leaking. They look into each other's eyes and she sees her own pain mirrored in his.

She goes to him, puts her arm around him. He stays standing, one arm around a post, the other around her shoulders. She looks at the ragged yard and the driveway. The once-green grass is muddy and brown. The empty space beside her car mocks her. It feels like the rain is attacking

the earth, attacking her.

Her son closes his eyes and screams again. She isn't startled this time. She closes her eyes, lifts her head, throws out her arm, and opens her mouth. This time, sound comes out. She screams with him.

There is thunder, lightning.

They scream until their voices begin to give out.

The rain slows, the storm rolls into the distance. She wipes his tears, picks him up off the railing, holds him close. They're both shivering.

She takes him inside, turns on a lamp, wraps him in a blanket, lays him on the couch. His book about storms is on the coffee table. He picks it up and flips through it. She goes to the kitchen to make chamomile tea for herself, hot cocoa for him.

His voice travels from the living room to the kitchen while she mixes cocoa into a mug of hot milk. "My book explains all of it! Thunderstorms happen in the winter when the surface of the earth is cold, but there's a warm layer in the atmosphere above that provides energy for the storm. It's called elevated convection! So cool."

She picks up the warm mugs and feels her lips turn upward into a smile.

She will go back into the living room, set his cocoa down on a coaster near him. She will smooth his hair and kiss his head and settle in to cuddle with him while his voice washes over her, boisterous and sweet. The cat will emerge from behind the couch and purr by her feet. The house will feel warm. Tomorrow morning, she will wash the windows.

Marigolds

by Joel Bush

My mother planted marigolds
along the pathway to
our front door.
Their orange and yellow
frills lit my steps,
even in daylight.
Our house was hemmed in
by the auto body shop
next door.
Its junk yard loomed,
overgrown with weeds—
hulking storage containers
left rusting like
fossils from some
prehistoric period.
The shop revved
engines and honked horns
late into the night,
the men howling curses
with beery cheer.
Hope
was the only four letter word
mom knew,
and the marigolds her
only act of defiance.

Turbulence, a Zuihitsu

by Catherine Arra

My voice barbs. I shy from its pointed horns
afraid to show myself stark-stripped. I listen
in the shower, making the bed, in a yoga class,
cooking dinner, in the dentist's chair, in my belly
in the unearthed archaeology of the unspoken.

I spent last evening with all the versions of myself.
How cocktail choices change.

I once had a black cat. Now I have
a purring toilet with a long-slow fill.

He loves me and will never love me.

Half the world is burning in wildfires; the other half
has already drowned.

One man do-si-dos out of my life, another bungee-jumps in.
School-boy crush wants to kiss the teacher.

Citrus salmon with jalapeño combine two recipes to delicious.

I don't share well or concede. *It is what it is*
makes me spit. Twice.

She warned me: too much wading in murky lagoons,
you are a sea turtle trapped in fishline.

He tells me the obstacle is the way.
Close the distance. Release the heart.
Collapse the crater of cancer like a black hole.

A lone doe in wooded green watches. I wonder
what she wonders about the swath of lavender robe
drifting behind French doors.

Female deer amble, long-necked and languid,
sashay-swing flicking hips.
Bucks prance like parade horses, hoof-heavy, heads high
above muscular girth, balancing the architecture of their sex.

The stumps are dust. Pulverized like coffee beans.
Old roots tripped up the island
of lawn where I will cultivate a garden.

Turbulence
dredges. Fantasy and delusion surface
like long-accumulated trash from lake bottom

vibrates an airplane ascending in altitude.
Drinks spill.

I will assimilate him as oxygen, nourishment,
the sweetest orgasm in every cell
before I let him go, and still, I never will.

Missing Persons Report #3

by Izzy Maxson

“To the centre of the city in the night, waiting for you”
– Joy Division, “Shadowplay”

The last time I saw you alive, last March, I closed my eyes while hail
and wind scattered and slid outside on a metal roof,
I could feel the storm making the ridgeline plot of a rotating neutron
star, in black and white, like the one on an old t-shirt
“To help with circulation in the cold”, you said,
You removed my coat, peeling me away into the unlit corners of the
room, unbuttoning me with pickpocket-subtle hands,
Pressed ear and breath and beard and mouth, to the snare drum taut
skin of my back
And said my heart beating was like a hummingbird’s wings, a thou-
sand times a minute

One seeks unconscious respite where one can find it, often in hind-
sight
And often with the previous attempt, still spinning down to stillness

Like how last month I accidentally fell asleep, for a moment, while I
was getting my hair cut at the salon
The stylist poked my shoulder and I apologized quietly, told her I'd
been sick but not with what
What could I possibly say
To explain

These unrelated turnings over,
One a pre-death ritual and one a fever
Take your pick, I ask you though
As your spell-like canticles circle me into the new year, halos of birds
too fast to see
Gentle in the moment, greens shot from black earth, clippings swept
away down the drain
Things I would have told you, that would have been amusing in their
triteness and their unearned honesty
Now paraphrased in asphalt and freezing ozone, bitter bitter

*Would you hum the empty world again
Bring it to life, a truce, it's a murder of crows, a parliament of owls, an
armistice of blackbirds
Like radio waves, the shadowgraph machine, documenting on burnt
paper, the imagined moment, the assumed, like breathing smoke, escape
velocity, trailed after and gone into a sky, as black as your, remembered,
eyes*

What's It Like to Be a Guinea Pig?

by Constantine Contogenis

for Thomas Nagel

Let your child play with death: a pet loses fur,
stops whistling for spinach, stops the funny
running for life, the hiding under a couch.
And it dies with dignity, found in its plastic house

ready for the vet's small furnace. It felt pain,
of course, mammals do; and looked sick
and tired, for a while. But all without self-pity—
what would be the evolutionary gain?

When the surviving guinea pig sprawled
for two days in front of the dead one's empty blue
plastic dome, you might've assumed the same cause.
But the pig returned home, again whistled for food,

again fled for cover. Did you wonder, had this guinea pig
been mourning for his lover, his aging friend and guide?
Of course such words do cause some a brief quiver.
But how pitiful, you might have cried.

Red Signs

by Whitney Vale

I can imagine my mother loving Logan's Market on St. Catherine Street: the bustle, food, gifts, food, jostle of vibrant shoppers, food—I can see her inspecting a crimson beaded necklace from Colombia and hungering for a cinnamon roll, forbidden by diabetes. Now she is buried in Cave Hill surrounded by the vibrancy of cardinals and the hushed stirring of spirits. Every cardinal I see is a sign of her, her passions, her curiosity, her daily question, “what are you thinking about?” when I was a child, my eyes carrying dreams. I never believed in death, but I longed to see angels.

Today I bought a necklace of glass hearts, red and clear, the center heart of oxidized copper, a turquoise color, my mother's favorite stone, a sky stone, a good luck stone. My love is glass. My heart is breakable.

All red belongs to my mother.

Desert Penumbra

by Linea Jantz

hope flies on silent wings
she has had enough of this place

you rub your thumb
across sun-warmed obsidian

swipe a swathe of dust
from the arrowhead's glowering face

this is your only warning

despair boils over the ridgeline
storm wool carded in gleaming spines

of prickly pear melting
reduced to vascular mesh in the sand

lightning crackles across sheetrock skies
spackling the clouds with veins of gold

pristine ore
you mine with eager eyes

the wind moans
fingers twisting in your hair

thunder growls from the junipers

**first line is the last line from Owl Moon by Jane Yolen*

Keep Child Away From Window

by Lauren Kalstad

—a warning label seen on a windowsill

keep their ears clean of wind
which like the piper's song
will draw them out

they will see the sky, the trees
and push through
making their fingers like leaves

keep child away from window
they'll live in the bushes
and fatten like berries

they'll burrow in the monkey grass
and lie folded on each other
like sleeping petals

they will bathe in rivers
and learn to howl and yelp
and sing to the moon

they'll pull up houses
from piles of stone
and light fires at dusk

keep child away from window
they'll lap up the rain
and stomp their music into the earth

they will lie awake 'til morning
eaten up with light

they will burn like stars

By Water

by JoAnne E. Lehman

Consider this ten-year-old girl, tall, with winsome dimples and ocean-blue eyes. She's shy around adults, talkative with her friends. Her straight brown hair almost reaches her waist, and her black cotton robe covers a swimsuit no one sees. Barefoot, she steps down into the baptismal tank, its sides and bottom painted blue. When she stops she is chest-deep and the gown is soaking. The water is not quite bathtub-warm. It's Easter Sunday evening. She's as ready as she can be, which is to say not very. And she doesn't like going under, but she knows how to hold her breath.

Consider her father, age forty-seven: same blue eyes, same dimples, but taller, with short blond hair turning gray. He is her pastor. He's a quiet man, often silent except when preaching or praying, or telling a silly joke to his family. In plain white shirt and black trousers, he stands waist-deep in the tank, where he'll receive, question, and immerse each candidate, then hand them up the opposite steps, dripping, to be enveloped by church ladies with towels. He does this a few times a year, always on Sunday evening, usually for a few adults. This time it's children, upper-elementary students. One—this one—is his own. She is his youngest, his baby girl. She joins him in the water. His blue eyes sparkle and shine.

Eight months ago on a trip out west, this girl and her father viewed two bodies of water. In Oregon she learned that impossibly blue Crater

Lake (the color so solid it looked fake from their lookout above) was almost 2000 feet deep. “I would drown in that!” she said. No, he said, not necessarily. Drowning isn’t about depth; you could drown in a foot of water. She’s not sure. She imagines sinking so deep she can’t make it back to the surface to breathe. If her feet touch the ground and her head is above water, is she safe? If she goes under but holds her breath, is she safe?

At Yellowstone Park they followed a boardwalk without railings across a crusty landscape, past bubbling hot puddles of mud, to a turquoise thermal spring called Morning Glory. A sign said the pool was bottomless. Steam rose from the surface. She couldn’t see far down its snaky, tunneled interior.

“Daddy,” she asked, “if I fell in, would you jump in and save me?”

Fifty-five years later she will imagine other ways he might have answered.

What he did say was honest: “No, I wouldn’t. It would be too late. That water is so hot you would be dead already.”

Back at home, life goes on. She misses some of fourth grade due to sickness, yet stays at the top of her class. A precocious reader, she browses her father’s books about faith and doctrine, developing worries she can’t express. When the flu keeps her out of the first two sessions of his baptism preparation class, she figures she won’t get baptized this year and is relieved, though she tells no one. But when she recovers, he helps her catch up. He doesn’t know that anything troubles her.

In the waters of baptism, the depth and temperature are perfect, the surface serene; she can see to the bottom. He asks for her testimony. “I realized I was a sinner,” she recites, “and Jesus died to save me.”

“Do you trust in Christ as your savior?” His blue eyes are kind.

“Yes,” she says.

He says the official words: “Upon the profession of your faith I baptize

you...” and as she holds her breath he leans her under, just for a second, then lifts her back up, water running off her long brown hair. His heart is full. He has done what he can to place her in God’s hands, safe for eternity.

But she will harbor doubt. Not that he loves her and always will. But that she can ever be safe.



Dialogue with the Innocent Dragon by Emelly Velasco

This is My Impression of a Very Good Girl

by Olivia Muñoz

I am a perfect person; these are my organic groceries.
These beer cans are my recycling and I give

during the holidays. I say Good Morning
to my neighbors, even the ones whose names I don't know.

This is me doing school. This is me writing good.
Don't I carry so much on my back? A backpack full

of books and pigs' feet and pieces of bridges. Look
at her: La Always Reading, La Always Writing.

That's not the kind of good they wanted, the kind
that's good for me. It's just that I am good

at impressions, see? This is my impression of a scholar.
This is me thriving. This is an impression of an impression.
What else can I do with what I see?

Starting from Scratch

by Johanna DeMay

Once driven by need, now I go thrifting for sport.
In Women's Clothing I sort through pre-owned blouses, handbags,
shoes;
survey cook-pots, toasters, bins of kitchen utensils in Housewares.

The woman beside me fingers wooden spoons,
mismatched cutlery, a wire whisk; lifts a mixing bowl,
sets it down, hefts chunky white restaurant mugs.

While she tallies prices, counts cash, her son reads
"The Adventures of Curious George" to his sisters.
Matching pink dresses—lace collars and cuffs,

bows tied behind like butterflies' wings—the twins preen
in their mother's handiwork. Brother's white shirt is buttoned
up to his chin, bluejeans pressed with a crease.

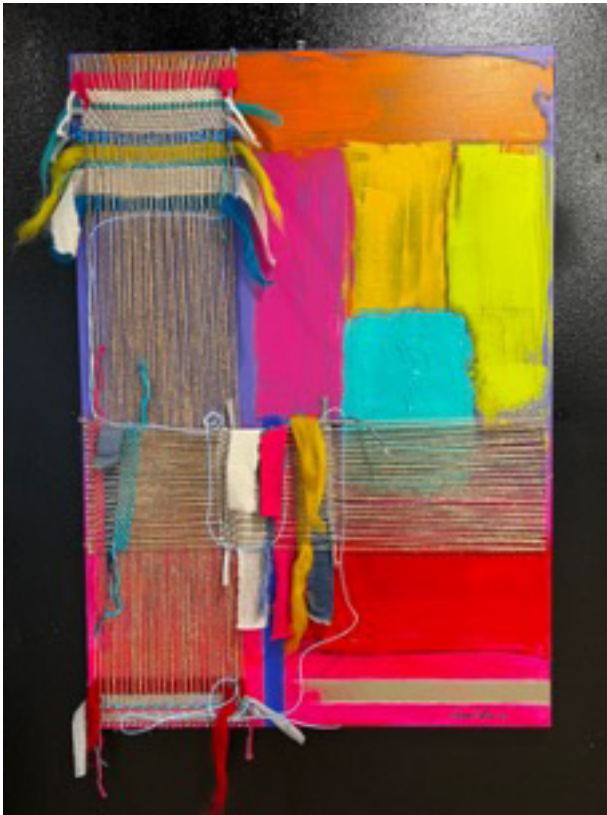
Do they live in an apartment, a trailer? Does she have steady work,
decent pay? I recall starting from scratch in an unfamiliar country,
creating a home for my small son from other people's leavings.

Brother's fingertip scrolls down the page. Noses crinkled,
lips pursed, the girls sound out English words.
He frowns, ¡Atención, niñas! En inglés se dice así...

Mother gives up a saucepan, agrees to one book—
¡No más uno!—quells dissent with an eyebrow.
Brother returns three books to the shelf.

Shoulders squared, Mother guides her children
past oblique glances toward the checkout stand,
shadowed by a Thrift-Mart employee.

In line, a beet-faced shopper carps about *those people*.



The Light at the End of the Tunnel by Laura Notari

Bird Singing in the Moonlight

by DeAnna Beachley

After the Morris Graves painting

Black bird perched on a black rock
beak wide open
 head bent in song

tangled brushstrokes
braid webs, white and yellow
 upward to the moon

sound and form collective in song.
But what song is sung?

This painting, this bird, sings to me
from the first moment I see it,

singing to my loneliness in a relationship
with a damaged man,
my despair, to contemplate
 a bird singing at night.

Moonlight pregnant with messages

The mnemonic FINISH neatly summarizes the symptoms of antidepressant discontinuation syndrome

by Meredith MacLeod Davidson

I read everything about the disorder
online these case study demons hatch
a titration plot the withdrawal triggered
nausea uneasy tilts at confessions

right that's me gumming at the cavern
termagant plaiting fennel and blister
skin for the taste—I told you two weeks
too late you're liable for the migraine peeling

the pith under the eyelid like mudclots
off a hoofpick no I can't "hang out"
I'm preparing my unsupervised decomposition
I'm climbing in the mesh burying the mint

I'm bathing my flaking heels in an apple
vinaigrette (you'll praise me for that in the
morning) pigeon and jasper shavings falling
into the split in the floorboards the nepotism

baby allegations have been taken too
far! Ping the morality play for a prescription
review I've completed the form twice
now but this isn't a text you can respond to

so certainly I claim to warrant a change
a calving of the oblong I no longer can find
on UberEats I'm busking for healthcare at the
counter soft-striking the bars with half a white

pill in the fridge it's plum preserves which I'm not
unhappy about, just expected a different jam.

Bad Omens

by Ronita Chattopadhyay

I have heard a dog cry
for two nights now.
It is a bad omen I am told.
Maybe, whoever made this up
just wanted people
to help dogs who were in pain.
Or maybe not.

Blues

by Jodi Balas

"I've got a red, hot heart; and your hearts as blue as the blood in your veins."

-Tracy Chapman

There is a woman
whose throat is a bruise—
a chord of major pain.

There is brine in my eye
and a woman, whose
tongue is an eternal deluge.

There is a hook in the
house of my heart. A light in
in the sea of her throat.

There is a hum in my
veins, a wave, sweeping
me out past the shore.

There is a woman with
blues in her heart. Another,
with her heart in the blues.

The Drive Back Home from School with Mom

by Matthew Johnson

Having two other older children as practice,
My mother already understands that me, currently in the backseat,
Who shyly climbed into the family minivan and let loose
The loudest of sighs, indicating without words,
That I am not in the mood to talk at this moment.
She has no favorites and loves each child no more than the other,
But love comes in different forms and shades, and she does love
differently.
For one child, she's a therapist, reflecting in dialogue
Complex issues that may not have an easy answer, but simple ones.
For another, she's a hype man, building up confidence in a child
Whose self-esteem swings back and forth in the form of a preteen
pendulum.
For me, who she has known my entire existence,
I will never disclose if there was a problem at school or with a girl,
Or if I had a bad practice. She just understands that all I would like
Is to sit in silence for the twenty-minute ride back to the house.
I look out the window as late September sunlight surges into
darkness,
Seeing other drivers, who look back at me with stern faces,
As if they're telling, *don't look at me unless you'll remember me.*
I just close my eyes in the back seat and let out an afternoon yawn.
I finally spoke up and asked if she could change the station

To my favorite sports radio show,
And she obliges, despite her disdain
For meathead shock jocks talking about overpaid jocks,
Because that is the best way she can display her form of love to me
right now.

Two Defenseless Haibun

by Ed McCourt

Salmanoid

Trout have tender scales: a fleshy, unctuous parcel with bones buried so deep it is a fatal squeeze that feels them. But gutted and grilled, each rib pops up delicately, curved like an eyelash. Hook the right one, and it is a fight from bank to bank: running line, bending rod, spooling the reel. Catch many, but keep only the one who gives himself up, who does not thrash from your grip as he faces the stream's current.

Gasp your soft belly
shine that slick prism for me
surrender, this once.

Thin Skinned

All of us softer than beetles: No shell, sharp claw, beak bramble or bark. Just this flushed flesh (easily sunburned, too). A painless, pea-sized lump, like a pearl, the chart reads. Not the melon a Kumamoto suggests or the Blue Point's mineral finish (raw boys, we called them). Rocky Mountain oyster, pearl-less and then black-pearled. Like the

pearl, Houseman wrote, poetry is a morbid secretion. There is no other sanctuary: the ovary, too, hangs like the moon, turgid and pale, against a malignancy of night.

What hull of what ship

What membrane, what casing could
ever shelter us?

Hairpin

by Ann Weil

One should always have a secret life.

Great Aunt Edna always wore
her silvery hair tight in a bun—

at night she unpinned,
and the glistening waves

came crashing to her waist.
I liked to watch

“prim and put-together”
transform to little mermaid,

sitting at the gilded vanity,
sliding her tortoise shell comb

through the strands.
Someday, my little-girl-self

would grow into the kind of woman
who could choose if —and when—
to let loose the wild seas.

Ordinary Nights

by Jenny McDougal

Suddenly the house is still. Our cats
turn on their cushions, safe
from the children for another day.
Sometimes we make dinner, closing
cabinets gently and speaking low. Ginger
and onion perfume our kitchen.
Outside the air is quiet, or sometimes it buzzes
with cicadas and lawnmowers. We
settle together, finally ourselves, more animal
and undone. You tell me about a house
up the hill, a door stood alone in the yard,
wild chamomile growing across the threshold.
The morningpale willow sweeps its branches
in the moonlight. This is a story, you say.
We listen to Jimmi Harvey play through
the speakers. These ordinary nights unmother
me splendidly. I could turn myself inside out
if I wanted. In our yard, the tawny owl perches
in the cedars. A wild duck lays her eggs
in the boxwood. She sits in the half shadows
while we light a joint, its honeyed smoke
pulled into the night sky. O, these half-lives lived
each night. We are as we were, tough and hardy,
like the crabapple tree dropping its small gems.

Contributor Biographies

Tobi Alfier is published nationally and internationally. Credits include War, Literature and the Arts, The American Journal of Poetry, KGB Bar Lit Mag, Washington Square Review, Cholla Needles, James Dickey Review, Gargoyle, Permafrost, Arkansas Review, Anti-Heroin Chic, and others. She is co-editor of San Pedro River Review (www.bluehorsepress.com).

Nadia Arioli is the editor in chief and managing editor of *Thimble Literary Magazine*.

Catherine Arra is the author of four full-length poetry collections and four chapbooks. Recent work appears in *Anti-Heroin Chic*, *Unbroken*, *Impspired*, *Poetica Review*, *Piker Press*, *Rat's Ass Review*, and *Unleash Lit*. Arra is a native of the Hudson Valley in upstate New York, where she lives with wildlife and changing seasons until winter when she migrates to the Space Coast of Florida. Arra teaches part-time and facilitates local writing groups. Find her at www.catherinearra.com

Shamik Banerjee is a poet from Assam, India, where he resides with his parents. His poems have been published by The Society of Classical Poets, *Sparks of Calliope*, *The Hypertexts*, *Snakeskin*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *Autumn Sky Daily*, *Ekstasis*, among others. He secured the second position in the Southern Shakespeare Company Sonnet Contest, 2024.

DeAnna Beachley is a bird watcher, hiker, historian, award-winning poet, and essayist. Her poetry and essays have appeared in *Red Rock Review*, *Sandstone & Silver*, *Thimble*, *The Ekphrastic Review Challenge*, *Slant*, *Blue Earth Review*, *Gyroscope*, *Liminal.Spaces*, *Anatomy of an Essay*, and *Awakenings: Stories of Body and Consciousness*. Her debut chapbook, *The Long View*, is forthcoming by Kelsay Publishing.

Jodi Balas is a neurodivergent poet from Northeast Pennsylvania. A lover of words (salacious, being a favorite – it just rolls off the tongue), her poetry has been accepted in *Hole in the Head Review*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Wild Roof Journal*, and elsewhere. Jodi's poem, "His mouth, mine" was selected as a finalist for the 2023 River Heron Review poetry prize and her poem, "Bone Density" won the 2023 Comstock Review Muriel Craft Bailey Award judged by Danusha Lameris. Jodi is in the process of developing her first Chapbook to market to the poetry world. You could follow her musings on Instagram @jodibalas_

Sarah Banks writes poetry and short fiction. She lives in Mississippi where she uses the landscape of her home state to inspire her writing. Her poetry has appeared in *Autumn Sky Poetry DAILY*. Sarah teaches nursing school and enjoys traveling, hiking, and working in her garden.

Tina Barry is the author of *Beautiful Raft* and *Mall Flower* (Big Table Publishing 2019 and 2016). Her writing can be found in numerous literary journals and anthologies, including *Thimble*, *Rattle*, *Verse Daily*, *ONE ART: a journal of poetry*, *The Best Small Fictions 2020* (spotlighted story) and 2016, *trampset*, *The American Poetry Journal*, *A-Minor*, *Gyroscope Review*, and elsewhere. Tina's third collection *I Tell Henrietta*, will be published in 2024 by Aim Higher Press, Inc. She has several Pushcart Prize nominations as well as Best of the Net and Best Microfiction nods. Tina is a teaching artist at *The Poetry Barn* and *Writers.com*.

Audra Burwell is a creative writing major at California State University Fresno, pursuing a Master of Fine Arts degree with a specialization in poetry. *Entropia* is her first full-length published work, a dystopian fantasy, multimedia collaboration featuring a fashion line designed by *Fastened By Lyn* and photography provided by *Raven & Crow*. Audra is a member of Sigma Tau Delta English Honor Society and has headed literary workshops at the Young Writers Conference as well as working on the editorial board of the *Spectrum* journal. Her poems “Residing in Your Veins” and “Concealed Oasis” were both selected as finalists for Fresno State’s Art Song Festival.

Joel Bush reads things. He also writes things. Well, sometimes he reads the things he writes. That tends to help. He is the winner of the 2021 CSUF Earth Day Poetry Contest, and his work has been featured in *Meniscus*, *Poetry Super Highway*, and *Quibble Lit*.

Skylar Camp (she/her) lives in Columbus, Ohio, with her two kids, her partner, and their fuzzy kitty. Her writing focuses on religious trauma, divorce, polyamory, queerness, parenting, and more. Her work appears in *Queerlings*, *Anti-Heroin Chic*, and *Sky Island Journal*. Find her at skylarcamp.com.

Kate Chadbourne teaches harp, piano, singing, and writing, as well as Irish language and folklore. Her poems and essays have been published in *Rosebud*, *Salt Hill*, *Parabola*, and *Women on Poetry* among others. She runs a yearly April Poetry Celebration on YouTube which is open to poets of all ages. Kate is an enthusiastic walker, a hungry reader, and a delighted museum-goer.

Ronita Chattopadhyay (she/her) finds refuge in words. She also makes a living out of it while supporting not for profit organisations in India. Her poems have appeared in *The Hooghly Review*, *Roi Fainéant Press*, *The Afterpast Review*, *Akéwì Magazine*, *Setu*, *Rogue Agent Journal*, among others, and anthologies by *Querencia Press* (*Winter Anthology 2024*) and *Sídhe Press* (*To Light The Trails. Poems by Women In a Violent World*).

Constanstine Contogenis's collection *Ikaros* (Word Press, 2004) won a First Prize "Open Voice Poetry Award" from *Writer's Voice*. He co-translated *Songs of the Kisaeng: Courtesan Poetry of the Last Korean Dynasty* (BOA Editions, 1997). His work appears in *Joining Music with Reason: 34 Poets, British and American: Oxford 2004-2009*, chosen by Christopher Ricks (2011), and *Pomegranate Seeds: An Anthology of Greek-American Poetry*, ed. Dean Kostos (2008). He has been published in numerous journals including *Whiskey Island*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *MAYDAY Magazine*, *Paris Review*, *Pequod*, *TriQuarterly*, *Chicago Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *Crazyhorse*, *Asian Pacific American Journal*, *Literary Imagination*, *Lullwater Review*, *MacGuffin*, *Meridian Anthology*, *Western Humanities Review*, *Poetry East*, *New Orleans Review*, *NY Quarterly*, *Nimrod*, *Red Wheelbarrow*, *South Carolina Review*, *Water-Stone*, *Westview*, *Worcester Review*, *Grand Street*, and *Yale Review*. His work was also featured by Poetry Society of America's Poetry in Motion program. He is a fellow with *Incite @ Columbia University* and lives with his wife in Manhattan.

Erin Coughlin Hollowell's poetry collections *Pause*, *Traveler*, and *Every Atom*, are published by Boreal Books. Her collection *Corvus* and *Crater* was published by Salmon Poetry in 2023. She is most recently published in *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Orion Magazine*, *Terrain.org*, and *Rust + Moth*. She lives in Alaska, where she directs *Storyknife*, a women writers' retreat, and the *Kachemak Bay Writers' Conference*.

Lauren Crawford holds an MFA in poetry from Southern Illinois University, Carbondale where she served as an associate editor for *Crab Orchard Review*. A native of Houston, Texas, she is the recipient of the 2023 Willie Morris Award for Southern Poetry and the second place winner of the 2020 Louisiana State Poetry Society Award from the National Federation of State Poetry Societies, and her poetry has either appeared or is forthcoming in *Poet Lore*, *Passengers Journal*, *The Appalachian Review*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, *The Worcester Review*, *The Spectacle* and elsewhere. Lauren currently teaches writing at the University of New Haven with her husband and is a reader for *Palette Poetry*.

Amy DeBellis is a writer from New York. Her work has appeared in various publications including Pithead Chapel, HAD, Ghost Parachute, and Pinch. Her debut novel is forthcoming from CLASH Books (2025). Read more at amydebellis.com

Johanna DeMay grew up in Mexico City, the bilingual child of American parents. Early on, she began writing poems to bring her two worlds together. Resettled in New Mexico, she made her living for forty years as a studio potter. Now retired, she writes and volunteers with the immigrant community, tutoring ESL students and new residents as they prepare to take their citizenship exams. Many of her poems reflect experiences of dislocation—her own and those of the people with whom she works. Her poems have appeared in numerous literary journals and three anthologies. “All Diaspora’s Children,” a collection of new poems, is forthcoming from Kelsay Books in 2025.

Brian Duncan lives in Kendall Park, New Jersey with his wife, Margie, and two cats. He worked in a virology laboratory at Princeton University for many years and is now happily retired. He enjoys devoting his time to poetry, gardening, and hiking. He has poems out this past year in ONE ART, Thimble, Passengers Journal, Whale Road Review, Elysium Review, Sheila-Na-Gig, and in a forthcoming issue of Santa Fe Review.

Margie Duncan lives in NJ with two tuxedo cats, the ghosts of two dogs, and her husband, Brian. When she retired from the business side of academia, she returned to writing poetry and looking out the window. She spends some waking time hiking in the woods. Her poems have appeared in Thimble, OneArt, Rust & Moth, Lily Poetry Review, Gyroscope Review, and Halfway Down the Stairs.

John Dorroh has never fallen into an active volcano, nor has he caught a hummingbird. However, he did manage to bake bread with Austrian monks and drink a healthy portion of their beer. Five of his poems were nominated for Best of the Net. Others have appeared in over 100 journals, including Feral, North of Oxford, River Heron, Wisconsin Review, Kissing Dynamite, and El Portal. He had two chapbooks published in 2022.

Eva Eliav received her BA in English Language and Literature from the University of Toronto. Her poetry and short fiction have appeared in numerous literary journals, both online and in print. She is the author of two poetry chapbooks: *Eve* (Red Bird Chapbooks, 2019) and *One Summer Day* (Kelsay Books, 2021). You can find a selection of her prose, poetry, and art at www.evaeliav.com.

George Franklin's most recent poetry collections are *Remote Cities* (Sheila-Na-Gig Editions) and a collection in collaboration with Colombian poet Ximena Gómez, *Conversaciones sobre agua/Conversations About Water* (Katakana Editores). Individual poems have been published in *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Rattle*, *Cagibi*, *New York Quarterly*, *Cultural Daily*, *Thimble*, and *Nueva York Poetry Review*. He practices law in Miami, teaches poetry workshops in Florida prisons, and co-translated, along with the author, Ximena Gómez's *Último día/Last Day*. In 2023, he was the first prize winner of the W.B. Yeats Poetry Prize. His website: <https://gsfranklin.com/>

Madeleine French lives in Florida and Virginia with her husband. A Best of the Net nominee, her work appears in *Identity Theory*, *ONE ART*, *Dust Poetry Magazine*, *West Trade Review*, *Door Is A Jar*, and elsewhere. She is working on a full-length poetry collection.

Megan Friedman (she/they) is a poet from North Carolina with familial roots in Nova Scotia, Canada. She is currently working towards an MFA at UMass Amherst's MFA for Poets & Writers. You can find her previously published work in *Short Édition*.

Howie Good's latest book is *Frowny Face*, a mix of his prose poems and collages from Redhawk Publications. He co-edits the online journal *UnLost*, dedicated to found poetry.

Áine Greaney grew up in rural Ireland and now lives outside Boston. In addition to her four published books (Simon & Schuster, Writers Digest/Penguin Random House), her essays, features and stories have appeared in various outlets, including Creative Nonfiction, The Boston Globe Magazine, The New York Times, Books Ireland, Another Chicago Magazine, NPR's WBUR Radio, Salon, Huffington Post, The Mindful Word, IMAGE Magazine, Generation Emigration (The Irish Times), The Wisdom Daily, The Feminist Wire, Pulse: Voices from the Heart of Medicine and other publications. Her fifth book, a short story collection set in greater Boston and Ireland, is being published in 2025.

Jeanne Griggs is a reader, writer, traveler, and violinist who directed the writing center at Kenyon College for 30 years. Her poems have appeared in the Mid-Atlantic Review, Lothlorien Poetry Journal, The Inquisitive Eater, and Autumn Sky Poetry Daily. Jeanne is the author of Postcard Poems (Broadstone Books).

Robert Harlow is a poet.

Silvia Hametaj was born in Vlora, Albania, and currently works as a freelance painter. She studied law for a Bachelor and Master at the University of Tirana and worked for a short time in this profession. At the same time, she followed her childhood passions, which are painting and literature. She published a book of poems and organised her individual painting exhibitions, but she also took part in collective exhibitions. Her interests and hobbies are related to art, philosophy, psychology, and spirituality. Silvia believes that continuous study has a positive impact not only on the profession but also on the personality.

Elizabeth Hill was a finalist in the 2022 Rattle Poetry Contest. Her poetry has been/is soon to be published in 34th Parallel Magazine, Blue Lake Review, Last Stanza Poetry Journal, and I-70 Review, among other journals. Hill is a retired Administrative Law Judge who decided suits between learning disabled children and their school systems. Hill lives in Harlem, NYC with her husband and two irascible cats.

Ann Howells edited Illya's Honey for eighteen years. Recent books: *So Long As We Speak Their Names* (Kelsay Books, 2019) and *Painting the Pinwheel Sky* (Assure Press, 2020). Chapbooks *Black Crow in Flight* and *Softly Beating Wings* were published through contests. Her work appears in many small press and university journals.

Linea Jantz has worked in a wide range of roles over the years including waste management, medical records, paralegal, and teacher. Her writing is featured in publications including *The Greyhound Journal*, *Beaver Magazine*, *Unbroken*, *The Dyrst Magazine*, and *EcoTheo Review*. Her poetry was featured in the ARS POETICA juried art exhibit at *Blowing Rock Art & History Museum* and has received a nomination for Best of Net. She has been a presenter for the Poetry Moment for *Spokane Public Radio* and is the current Writing the Land Poet for the *Sunnyside-Snake River Wildlife Area*.

Matthew Johnson is the author of *Shadow Folks* and *Soul Songs* (Kelsay Books) and *Far from New York State* (NYQ Press), as well as the chapbook, *Too Short to Box with God* (Finishing Line Press), which recently went on preorder sale. His work has appeared in *Front Porch Review*, *Roanoke Review*, *Northern New England Review*, *Third Wednesday*, and elsewhere. Recipient of Best of the Net and Pushcart Prize nominations, he's the managing editor of *The Portrait of New England* and poetry editor of *The Twin Bill*. matthewjohnsonpoetry.com

Bryana Joy is a poet, illustrator, & independent arts educator who has lived in Türkiye, Texas, & England, & now resides in Eastern Pennsylvania. Her poetry has appeared in over 50 literary journals, and her book "Summer of the Oystercatchers" is forthcoming with Fernwood Press. Since 2021 she has been teaching regular online poetry workshops to foster meaningful arts community & support writers. Find her at www.bryanajoy.com or on Instagram & Threads at [@_bryana_joy](https://www.instagram.com/_bryana_joy).

Lauren Kalstad is a poet and author of the children's book *To the Stars in Bumper Cars*. She received her MFA in Creative Writing from New York University and currently teaches at the University of North Texas. Her poems have appeared in *The Alarmist*, *The Coe Review*, *The Belleville Park Pages*, and others. She lives in Dallas, TX with her husband, daughter, and dog.

Pamela Klem lives in Wilton CT. She is a longtime reader of poems and very new to writing them.

Edward Lee is an artist and writer from Ireland. His paintings and photography have been exhibited widely, while his poetry, short stories, non-fiction have been published in magazines in Ireland, England and America, including *The Stinging Fly*, *Skylight 47*, *Acumen* and *Smiths Knoll*. His poetry collections are *Playing Poohsticks On Ha'Penny Bridge*, *The Madness Of Qwerty*, *A Foetal Heart* and *Bones Speaking With Hard Tongues*. He also makes musical noise under the names *Ayahuasca Collective*, *Orson Carroll*, *Lego Figures Fighting*, and *Pale Blond Boy*. His blog/website can be found at <https://edwardmlee.wordpress.com>

Alexander Limarev, freelance artist, mail art artist, curator, poet, photographer from Siberia / Russia. Participated in more than 1000 international projects and exhibitions. His artworks are part of private and museum collections of 72 countries. His artworks as well as poetry have been featured in various online publications including *UNDERGROUND BOOKS.ORG*, *BOEK861*, *KILLER WHALE JOURNAL*, *BUKOWSKI ERASURE POETRY*, *UTSANGA*, *ANTHOLOGY* (Silver Birch Press), *NOKTURNO.FI*, *TREEHOUSE ARTS*, *ZOOMOOZOPHONE REWIEW*, *BACKCHANNELS*, *BRILLER MAGAZINE*, *THE GAMBLER MAG*, *CARAVEL LITERARY ARTS JOURNAL*, *Style-Blueprint*, *TUCK MAGAZINE*, *ANGRY OLD MAN MAGAZINE*, *CALIBAN ONLINE MAGAZINE*, *DEGENERATE LITERATURE*, *NYUGATPLUSZ LITERARY MAGAZINE*, *GALLERY & STUDIO ARTS JOURNAL*, *ZOUCH MAGAZINE*, *MAINTENANT* etc.

JoAnne E. Lehman earned an MFA through the Naslund-Mann Graduate School of Writing at Spalding University. She has published creative nonfiction in *The Cresset*, *The Writing Disorder*, *Farmer-ish*, and *Round Table Literary Journal*.

Meredith MacLeod Davidson is a poet and writer from Virginia, currently based in Scotland, where she lives with her partner and their ginger rescue cat, *Ciro*. A Best of the Net nominee, her poems can be found in *Propel Magazine*, *Cream City Review*, *Frozen Sea*, *Poetry South*, and elsewhere. Meredith is a graduate of the University of Glasgow, where she was awarded an MLitt with distinction in Creative Writing and served as editor of *From Glasgow to Saturn*. She currently serves as senior editor for *Arboreal Literary Magazine*.

Betsy Mars is a prize-winning poet, photographer, and assistant editor at *Gyroscope Review*. Her poetry has been published in numerous journals and anthologies. Recent poems can be found in *One Art*, *MacQueen's Quinterly*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, and *Autumn Sky*. Her photos have appeared online and in print, including one which was a Rattle Ekphrastic Challenge prompt in 2019. She has two books, *Alinea*, and her most recent, co-written with Alan Walowitz, *In the Muddle of the Night*.

Claire Massey is the author of *Driver Side Window: Poems & Prose*. A 2023 Pushcart Prize and Letter Review Prize nominee, her work has twice won awards from the National Soul-Making Keats Competition. Among others, her poems have appeared in *Snapdragon Journal of Art and Healing*, *Lucky Jefferson*, *Panoply*, *POEM*, *The Listening Anthology*, *Raven's Perch* and *The Avalon Literary Review*. She is poetry editor for the quarterly print magazine, *The Pen Woman* and a selection editor for *The Emerald Coast Review*. Claire teaches creative writing through the Center for Lifelong Learning, a continuing education provider.

Richard L. Matta is originally from New York's Hudson Valley and now lives in San Diego, California. Some of his poems appear in *Healing Muse*, *New Verse News*, *San Pedro River Review*, *Hole in the Head Review*, and many international haiku journals.

Izzy Maxson is a writer and performance artist. The author of several collections of poetry including most recently "Maps To The Vanishing" from *Finishing Line Press*, they live in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Marilyn McCabe's poetry has won contests through AROHO, Word Works, Grayson Books, and NYSCA. Collections of poems include *Being Many Seeds*, *Glass Factory*, *perpetual Motion* and *Rugged Means of Grace*. Videopoems have appeared in festivals/galleries. She talks about writing at Owrite:marilynonaroll.wordpress.com and the podcast *Whirled Through a Poem's Eye*.

Terri McCord loves language, visual art, nature, and animals. She has received several Pushcart nominations and a Best of the Net nomination. Her latest published collection is *The Beauts* from *Finishing Line Press*.

Ed McCourt is an Assoc. Prof. of English and creative writing at Jacksonville University. His poetry and nonfiction have appeared in the *Red Booth Review*, the *Portland Review*, the *Little Patuxent Review*, *Barely South Review*, and many others.

Jenny McDougal is a poet, home baker, and union shop steward from Minneapolis, Minnesota. She earned her MFA from Hamline University and is a semi-finalist for the Pablo Neruda Prize in Poetry and Pushcart Prize nominee. Her poems have appeared in *CALYX Journal*, *Water~Stone Review*, *Midway Journal*, *Nimrod* and elsewhere. Jenny lives in mysterious St Paul, Minnesota with her husband and two kids.

Verónica Mier y Terán began her career as a photographer during her work as a Lighting Engineer at company events where she currently continues to work for 22 years. The magic of the lights and the desire to capture those moments of spontaneity in the expressions of the public and the artists were the elements that motivated her to professionally study the career of photography, and it was there that she developed more skills and knowledge in the world of digital photography. Her studio is located in Hilversum, her website is www.veronica-mieryteran.eu

Taylor Miles-Behrens is an English and creative writing instructor living in Boulder, Colorado. Her work has recently appeared in Roi Faïnéant Press, Fjords Review, and MORIA. She studied North American literature and culture at Freie University (Berlin) and creative writing at Kingston University (London).

Olivia Muñoz is a Chicana writer, artist, and educator born and raised in Saginaw, Michigan, to Mexican parents. Her writing has appeared in the Twitter literary journal edited by Chen Chen, The Lickety~Split, San Pedro River Review, Association of Mexican American Educators Journal, About Place Journal, and in *No Tender Fences: An Anthology of Immigrant & First-Generation American Poetry*. Olivia was selected for the Tin House Winter 2024 Workshop and is the 2024 winner of the Latin American Poetry prize from the Blue Mountain Review, judged by Richard Blanco. She lives on the West Coast.

Laura Notari, a contemporary artist and public accountant, merges global inspiration with a drive for social change. With roots in Argentina and Spanish heritage, she now resides in the Netherlands. Her intuitive painting style incorporates diverse materials, reflecting nature's expressive elements. Based in Hilversum, she runs her studio and advocates for visual arts exploration. Notari's passion extends beyond art; she founded the Laura Notari Art Foundation to empower underprivileged children in their artistic endeavors.

Leila Pinto is a NYC and Hamptons based artist who works with oil and mixed media to create stunning paintings that explore themes around current events, culture, and nature. Inspired by her career on Wall Street as a Managing Director, she creates large abstract paintings about events that shaped the global economy like the financial crisis and Brexit, translating those emotions and impressions into colorful, expressive canvases. She spoke on a panel in Davos on NFTs and the Metaverse; was featured in the first All-Female exhibition in Singapore and was named one of the top 5 NFT artists to watch, follow and invest in. Her paintings have been included in prestigious juried art shows, shown in galleries, received awards, published, and displayed on a grand scale on the Jumbotron in Times Square, at the Oculus World Trade Center, in Hudson Yards and on a giant 24-foot-tall Monolith at SCOPE Art Fair during Art Basel Miami and at the Metaverse Summit in Monte Carlo. Her artwork can be found on her website: www.leilapinto.com

Deborah Purdy lives in the Philadelphia area. She is the author of *Mermaids in the Basement* (dancing girl press) and *Conjuring an Epiphany* (Finishing Line Press). Her work has appeared in *The American Poetry Journal*, *Mom Egg Review*, *Heron Tree*, and other publications.

Ivy Raff (she/they) is the author of *What Remains / Qué queda* (bilingual English/Spanish edition, Editorial DALYA forthcoming 2024), winner of the Alberola International Poetry Prize, and *Rooted and Reduced to Dust* (Finishing Line Press, 2024), hailed by Bruce Smith as “lacerating, fearless.” Individual poems appear in *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Electric Literature’s The Commuter*, *Nimrod International Journal*, and *West Trade Review*, among numerous others, as well as in the anthologies *Spectrum: Poetry Celebrating Identity, Kinship: Poems on Belonging* (Renard Press, 2022 & 2023), *London Independent Story Prize Anthology* (LISP, 2023), and *Aesthetica Creative Writing Prize Annual* (Aesthetica, 2023). Her Best of the Net-nominated work has garnered scholarship support from the Colgate Writers’ Conference, Hudson Valley Writers Center, and *Under the Volcano*, as well as residencies with Atlantic Center for the Arts and Alaska State Parks. Read more on ivyraff.com and follow her on IG @ivy_raft.

Dwayne Rieves is a medical imaging scientist in Washington, DC. His collection, *When the Eye Forms*, won the Tupelo Press Prize for Poetry.

Lauren Scharhag (she/her) is an award-winning author of fiction and poetry, and a senior editor at Gleam. Her latest poetry collection, *Moonlight and Monsters*, is now available from Gnashing Teeth Publishing. A short story collection, *Screaming Intensifies*, is forthcoming from Whiskey City Press. She lives in Kansas City, MO. <https://linktr.ee/laurenscharhag>

Susan Shaw Sailer has published three volumes of poetry: *The Distance Beyond Sight*, *The God of Roundabouts*, and *Ship of Light* as well as two chapbooks—*COAL* and *Bulletins from a War Zone*. Sailer taught in the English Department at West Virginia University, retired, and then earned a master’s degree in writing poetry.

John Spiegel is a poet and English teacher from Fairbon, Ohio where he lives with his wife Courtney and two daughters. He received his MFA in Poetry from Miami University in 2020. He is a poetry reviewer for *The Constant Critic*, as well as a poetry reader for *West Trade Review*. His Op Eds have been featured in *Vine Leaves Literary Journal*, and his poetry, nonfiction, and fiction have been published by Milk & Cake Press, *Indiana Voice Journal*, *Typehouse Literary Journal*, and others. His manuscript *In Bloom* (2024) is published by *Finishing Line Press*. He loves bonsai trees, *The Muppets*, and punk rock.

Bethany Tap received her MFA in creative writing from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Sleet Magazine*, *Chautauqua*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *ballast*, *The MacGuffin*, and *Emerge Literary Journal*, among others. She lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan with her wife and four kids.

Gail Thomas has published six books of poetry, most recently *Trail of Roots and Leaving Paradise*. Her poems are widely published in journals and anthologies and have won awards and Pushcart Prize nominations. She teaches poetry for Pioneer Valley Writers' Workshops, helps refugees resettle and visits schools and libraries with her therapy dog, Sunny.

Kerry Trautman is a lifelong Ohioan and a co-founder of *ToledoPoet.com* and the "Toledo Poetry Museum" page on Facebook, which promote Northwest Ohio poetry events. Her work has appeared in various anthologies and journals, and her books are *Things That Come in Boxes* (King Craft Press 2012,) *To Have Hoped* (Finishing Line Press 2015,) *Artifacts* (NightBallet Press 2017,) *To be Nonchalantly Alive* (Kelsay Books 2020,) *Marilyn: Self-Portrait, Oil on Canvas* (Gutter Snob Books 2022,) *Unknowable Things* (Roadside Press 2022,) and *Irregulars* (Stanchion Books 2023.)

Sage Tyrrtle's work is available in *New Delta Review*, *The Offing*, *Lunch Ticket*, and *Apex* among others. She is the author of the novella *The King of Elkport*. Her words have been featured on NPR, CBC, and PBS and she's been nominated for Pushcart and Best American Short Stories. Read more at www.tyrrtle.com.

B.A. Van Sise is an author and photographic artist focused on the intersection between language and the visual image. He is the author of two monographs: the visual poetry anthology *Children of Grass: A Portrait of American Poetry* with Mary-Louise Parker, and *Invited to Life: After the Holocaust* with Neil Gaiman, Mayim Bialik, and Sabrina Orah Mark. He has previously been featured in solo exhibitions at the Center for Creative Photography, the Center for Jewish History and the Museum of Jewish Heritage, and numerous group exhibitions; a number of his portraits of American poets are in the permanent collection of the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery. His short nonfiction and poetry have been featured extensively in an array of literary magazines, and he has been a finalist for the Rattle Poetry Prize, the Travel Media Awards for feature writing, and the Meitar Award for Excellence in Photography. He is a 2022 New York State Council on the Arts Fellow in Photography, a Prix de la Photographie Paris award-winner, a winner of the Lascaux Prize for Nonfiction, and an Independent Book Publishers Awards gold medalist.

Whitney Vale, MFA Creative Nonfiction from Ashland University. Poetry includes the chapbook, *Journey with the Ferryman* (Finishing Line Press) and poems in *Gyroscope Review: The Crone Issue*, *Harpy Hybrid Review*, *Prospectus: A Literary Offering*, *Autumn Sky Poetry Daily*, *Quartet*, *RockPaperPoem*, *The Crab Creek Review*, *Anti-Heroin Chic*. Prose can be found in *The Palisades Review*, and the anthologies *Awakenings* (ELJ Editions,) and *The 2023 Writer's Block Anthology* (Hydra Publications.) She has been a finalist for the Joy Harjo award, Barry Lopez award, and Minerva Rising's memoir award.

Allison Wall is a queer, neurodivergent writer. She has an MFA in Creative Writing from Hamline University, and she has published short speculative fiction, personal essays, and book and film reviews. Connect with Allison on her website, allison-wall.com.

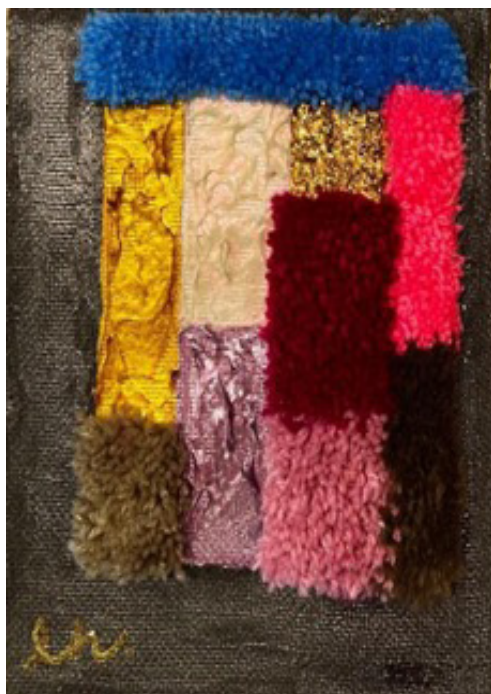
D. Walsh Gilbert (she/her) lives in Farmington, Connecticut on a former sheep farm at the foot of the Talcott Mountain near the watershed of the Farmington River, previously the homelands of the Tunxis and Suckiaugk peoples and near the oldest site of human occupation in Connecticut dating back 12,500 years. She is the author of six books of poetry, serves on the board of the Riverwood Poetry Series, and as co-editor of Connecticut River Review.

K Weber is an Ohio writer with 10 online books of poetry. She obtained her Creative Writing BA in 1999 from Miami University. K writes independently and collaboratively, having created poems from words donated by more than 300 people since 2018. K has poems featured in publications such as *The Hooghly Review*, *Writer's Digest*, *Fevers of the Mind* & her photography/digital collages appear in literary journals including *Barren Magazine* and *Nightingale & Sparrow*. Much of K's work (free in PDF and some in audiobook format) and her publishing credits are on her website: kweberandherwords.com

Ann Weil is the author of *Lifecycle of a Beautiful Woman* (Yellow Arrow Publishing, 2023) and *Blue Dog Road Trip* (Gnashing Teeth Publishing, October 2024). Her poetry has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net and appears in *Pedestal Magazine*, *DMQ Review*, *Maudlin House*, *3Elements Review*, *Okay Donkey*, *SWWIM Every Day*, *The Shore*, *Thimble Literary Magazine*, and elsewhere. She earned her doctorate at the University of Michigan and lives in Ann Arbor, MI, and Key West, FL.

Holly Willis is a writer and photographer interested in abstract, botanical, landscape, and experimental imagery. Recent projects have included an ongoing experiment using the footage from 1980s action film, which involves dissolving, burning, scratching, and sewing on the frames, and then re-photographing them. Other projects include abstract images made in Joshua Tree, studies of water, and floral images made in a back-and-forth workflow using digital and analog photography practices.

Cover: At the age of 30, Emelly Velasco travels the world sharing knowledge, exhibiting her work and as an artist she creates most of her works based on feminine aesthetics, cosmovision and recognition of the astral, as well as highlighting elements of power with hierarchy of royalty, with experimental techniques including oil, acrylic and gold leaf; including her own blood, her work has been presented in El Salvador, Mexico, United States, The Netherlands and Italy.



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