

Thimble Literary Magazine

Volume 6 · Number 2 · Fall 2023

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Cover art: *Ruby Sinews* by Oormila Vijayakrishnan Prahlad

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

Thimble Literary Magazine is primarily a poetry journal but invites submissions on related topics such as artwork, stories, and creative nonfiction. 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 ThimbleLitMag@gmail.com.



The Plain by David Boyle

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Editor's Note

by Nadia Arioli

Dear Readers,

Something strange has happened. Almost 500 people decided to submit to Thimble. That means 500 people learned about us. That means 500 people wanted us for a home— isn't that something?

There is lots to say about this fabulous issue, but what I really want to talk about is a poem not in the issue, namely "Dolores, Maybe" by John Murillo. Perhaps you've read it, but perhaps you haven't. (If you haven't, please consider this a trigger warning.)

In the poem, the narrator, describes a childhood incident in which he walks a neighbor home, and she flinches when he touches her hair. We, the reader and the narrator, know something the narrator's child-self doesn't; the neighbor is a victim of abuse and later takes her own life.

While tragic and hard to read, the unforgettable poem is the perfect Thimble poem. It embodies everything we stand for. The poem contains the three-t's (in addition to being masterful verse, of course): It is tender, about trauma, and contains a transformation. Here at Thimble, we start with what is gentle: the need to keep safe, the vulnerable parts of ourselves, like a story from childhood, like the Primeval Blues, or a fragile coat made of blue raccoon fur. Not that all our poems and

prosody deal with trauma, of course, but in a journal about shelter it makes sense which way we would skew. We wouldn't need shelter from the storm if there weren't storms. And there are: we have fat girls on fire, breakups, night jackets, memory, love, crosswalks.

Most importantly, "Delores, Maybe" contains a transformation. The last lines are haunting: "I gathered a handful of my coyote's bones, his teeth, / and strung them all on fishing wire—/ a talisman to ward off anguish. A talisman I hold out to you now. / Please. Come closer. Take this from my hand." Pain becomes memory becomes poem becomes a reader's to carry.

A thimble can be a shelter.

Take this as a talisman—not of all we've suffered but that we're still here.

Best,
Nadia Arioli

Today Spring

by Donna Pucciani

shatters the sky
with unexpected snow,

bursting into surprise.
The future unrolls itself

like the ark of a new
covenant, promising

everything, which arrives
differently each year,

a gradual light, or
perhaps suddenly,

like thunder, like
children playing or

a blackbird singing
after a long silence

or a woman on her
deathbed, seeing

for the first time
her ancestors bathed

in unexpected life,
beckoning.

Roe

by Ellen Zhang

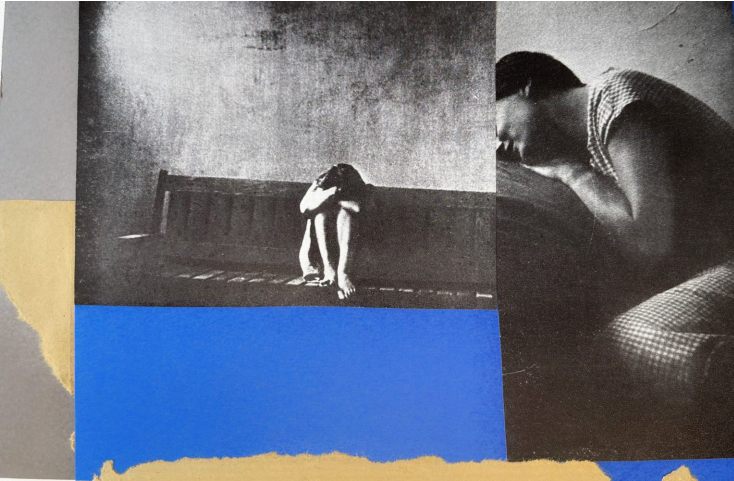
Curl fingers around scapula. Hard.
Twist wrist to gash bone against
tendon. Squeeze so that the bone marrow
pressures between insides of every osteoblast.
Feel it mechanistically before prying open like
grasping still steaming shell to search
for tenderest roe, fifteen minutes,
no more no less according to my mother.
Claws waving away at nothing but wisps of air.

Which is to say, I wonder if that's how my father
saw through her. Lacing ivy through her veins,
remembering to purchase flowers in the aftermath.
Drifting petals repaid with the juiciest meats
too much invested in to collapse inwards,
intricate, perfect figure. Folded cranes
on my fifth birthday and since,
absentmindedly never failed to mention:
no matter wings, there is no flight.

Trace your fingertips along sternum. Distance to
merge within chondrocytes. Envision yourself as
functionally systematic, dependent without blood
or nerves. Now, compress your thumb. Press

elasticity. There is no repair anymore likening
the scar on my mother's face from that mirror.
Ironic. She has never looked back.
I do it for her. I still fold cranes on my birthdays,
like engagement rings in pawnshops.

Some days, I wonder what it would be like
to be an echo chamber full of absence.
Would the vibrations collapse upon themselves?
The sure line of my shoulder frightens me
sometimes. Sometimes I'm upset by how much
I want to upset every functional part of myself.
Other times, I don't know where to start.
Could you find the juiciest parts of myself,
and if you did what would you do with it?



Arms by JC Alfier

Something About Tea Drinking

by Sarah(Qiuqi) Bovold

Slice the tape, then open the box that has the address and the name you are familiar with, the lite fragrance is flowing around you. Moving your tongue to push against the edge of your door tooth to get a sense of numbness is the way to remind yourself of something that you may never forget.

The first lesson on tea drinking you received was from your father at a store in a modest mall where he was shopping for some loose-leaf tea and a teapot, you were 6, and you remember the smell once you pulled the heavy glass door, the wave of warm air from the amber-colored liquid in the small but fine cup, and your numb tongue. You started tapping the delicate tea equipment around the store with your index finger after you got the permission, and you didn't care much about the conversation between your father — a patron (who always asked for something new to try before buying) and the store manager (who always offered new product tasting). At the age of 18, you dated A, and using the first letter of the Alphabet was your English way to show your audiences that was your first relationship, and it was the beginning of everything. People who started dating earlier than you liked to share their experience during lunch, in which people liked to prove, by words, that they were better than others. You listened to those so-called love stories, which the essence was one-sided stories, before you created one yourself. *It was like two tongues were dancing together in a shared space* was something you remember from the

narrator who was sitting next to you. Years later, you're trying to mock the narrator's words, the stress, and the break but you don't know how and where to start. Standing in front of your needed-to-be-wiped mirror, you thought about dance and tongues and occasionally stuck your tongue out until your parent knocked the door and informed you dinner was ready. Nothing needs to be over polished: your story started with A commented on your social media profile photo in which you were wearing your red hairband, and you replied to him, then it turned to be more comments and replies, then it became conversations through private message, then you both had each other's phone numbers that have been blocked since the relationship was over. But, before anything serious happened, and before you guys hung out at the abandoned park where he kissed you, or you kissed him, you stood in front of your needed-to-be-wiped mirror again, pushing all your hair back before securing it by the red hairband, and tried to make a connection between *cute* and *date*. You remember the hairband was very tight, and it rubbed against your ears. You remember you eventually cleaned your mirror with the scented disinfecting wipe, but you forgot how many times your father told you to.

Here, you are 6-year-old again, your father called your name when it was time to try some tea. You hit your knee on the solid wood table when you were trotting to your chair. You saw your father frown, and *be careful, watch where you are going* were what he said, or what you remembered. You didn't know A's parents; you didn't know A's friends; you didn't know if he liked drinking tea. A didn't know your parents, your friends, or what kind of tea you liked. Now you're wondering *did he want to know? Did you want to know?* You heard the mild sound of water hit the fine bone china and water penetrated water, and you watched the clear amber-colored surface rise. When the water edge arrived at a certain level, your father's right hand uplifted, then put the teapot aside: inside the store became quiet. You couldn't wait to grab the cup that your father said it was yours, and you didn't let your father finish his words, *be careful, it's hot* before the tea hurt your tongue and you made a mess. You heard so many stories; you drafted so many stories; you saw so many pairs of puffy eyes; your eyes became puffy for so many times. *Stay away from the people who hurt you*, your father said while putting his shoes on and getting ready

to give you a ride to school. You felt the frozen cold penetrate your eye, your face, and you wondered if you should bring the ice pack with you. *Take your time. No need to rush*, this time you waited for your father to finish what he wanted to say before asking for some paper towel to clean up the mess on the table and on your shirt. 26, you like to say *not my cup of tea* after people ask you a question that starts with a why and is about somewhere or someone you are no longer associate with or belong to. It's a slang you learned after you moved away from your home, your parents and the tea equipment that was made of fine china. You didn't continue drinking what was left in your cup, instead, you watched your father curl his lips and blew mild air on his cup of tea with his head lightly swinging. His lips touched the brim when the temperature was appropriate, and his wrist slightly tipped. While watching your father drink the tea, you couldn't stop fiddling your tongue by your hand to relief the numbness-at least you thought it would help. You forgot how long it took the numbness completely go away, but you reminded yourself of that whenever you were in a rush to do something or head somewhere. On your 27th birthday, you had a video call with your parents, the same as you did on your 26th birthday, and of course your father asked you if you found a method to buy tea. *The loose-leaf ones, not those cheap tea bags*, he emphasized, *try them before purchasing*. You kept nodding your head even though you rarely purchased any loose-leaf tea, and you have already got used to those cheap tea bags. After hanging up the call, you received a message from your parents, and they asked your current address. You forgot how many dates you and A had, probably not many, but when you once again in the abandoned park wearing the red hairband, you asked A if he had ever kissed or tongue kissed someone, and he said no and no; he asked you the same questions, and you had the same answers. Then, several sentences were spoken between you two as foreshadowing, which led to an agreement or an excitement. When the four pieces of lips interacted with each other, you started shivering. But before you could make a connection between *dances* and *tongues*, you felt a hand climbed on the top of your head, and slowly, your hair was getting looser and looser. You stopped shivering at the moment you were band-free: nothing was there to rub against your ears.

Snapping Turtles on the Way to Church

by Richard Jordan

Snapping turtles don't frequent houses of worship.
Instead, in my childhood town, late spring,
they'd bring church traffic to a standstill, crawling
into the middle of the road to Blessed Sacrament.

Then they'd freeze there, perhaps defiant, confused,
or simply oblivious to blaring horns and muttered
curses. Some men would stay far back and poke
them with long sticks, toss stones to no avail.

Grandpa, though, would laugh as he slowly rose
out of his rusted Chevy pickup. He'd lift one
of those behemoths by its thrashing tail, claws sharp
and flailing, and lug it off, set it free in a vernal pool

deep in the woods, while the other faithful sped
on to Mass. Always in time for Communion,
Grandpa assumed his place in line, sometimes with
a blood-stained gash in his newest Sunday slacks.

But he'd stand there anyway, all sweaty, smelling
of leaf decay and buggy, stagnant water, of something
so ancient, so powerful one might deem it sacred.

*The moon considers the prospect of the
first lunar mission in fifty years*

by Susannah Sheffer

They can come back
if they want to.

It's all right
with me.

I understand
the lure of it

(the way they are
always wanting

to know more)
and I too feel

the pull (how they try
to find themselves

in me) even if I seem
unchanged. I see how

they look at me
and I recognize

the way the longing
tugs at them (each time as if

the first time, the swell
and recede).

So they can come back
if they want to

but they should know
we are bound

regardless —
two bodies mesmerized

by the original astonishing
impact

from which we are both
still reeling.

Late Winter Haibun

by Kendra Whitfield

February snow has so much to prove. Like a spawning salmon in a dry riverbed, a teenager inhaling his first drag race, a sunbeam in a tornado's eye. Drifts deceive and no one delights in the falling.

Black trunks blur grey
late winter camouflage
concealing spring

The tracks left by the fighting bucks are covered now and there's nothing left but a half-buried broken antler. They were fighting alone; there must have been a doe close by but she faded into the greyblackwhite forest and now her tracks are covered, too.

Inside, bannock wafts
comfort up the stairs
what is burning?

I cast my eyes for beauty but all they snag is white: white caught on grey, on black, caught on white. Cotton white powder still drifting, slanting bitter on sharp wind, proving its force to the creeping presence of spring.

Soon there will be leaves
greensilver in the breeze

but not today

Today it's snowing again still and eyes must rest in monochrome. The shades of gray are too punishing to discern differences of darkness, liminalities of light.

My Mother's Night Jacket

by Claudia M. Reder

Often I say I write to stop time,
but I am wrong. Time is visible
in this wheeled chair
whose arm no longer lifts;
in this memory of a pink silken
night jacket, the one shopped
for my mother when she entered the hospital,
for one must always look nice
for the doctor; the lacy
collar unlike anything
she would normally wear.

I see it in front of me
as if it were a hummingbird,
its pink wings fluttering
across her shoulders.

She covers her arms
not just because the hospital
room was so cold, but
flabby arms must be camouflaged
before the doctor makes his rounds.

*

I look at Alice Neal's Self-Portrait.
Naked, she leans forward
in her blue and white striped sitting chair,

a long paint brush held in one hand
crosses over her breasts;
her stomach sits on her lap.

I notice one foot, its toes raised
as if she is stretching them or thinking
about getting up, or humming
a song. She looks out at the viewer
with a solidness,
an honesty, her mind alive,
her glasses a bit crooked.

*

And the pink night jacket
holds time in its shape
of my mother in a cold hospital
as she tries to look alert
for the doctor, to sway him
into thinking she is fine,
better than fine, because
she is dressed
with a hint of lipstick and lace.

Dancing the Polka

by Janet Mason

“It’s beautiful out here! Watch the ground—it’s bumpy,” I cautioned as I walked over the lawn—which I suddenly realized was a hazard—with my hand in the warm, pliant crook of my ninety-seven-year-old father’s arm as I steered him into the day. It was late summer in the year before he died. Usually, my father sat quietly in his trash-picked chair in Jean’s living room which was decorated in a way my father described as “artistic.” Years after my mother had died, my father met his lady friend Jean.

We came to Jean’s house that afternoon, like most afternoons, after we ate breakfast at the Diner. Jean’s house sat on a large lot where she had planted ivy on the front lawn. Also in her nineties, a few years younger than my father, Jean loved to garden. Since it was a corner lot, there were only neighbors on two sides, and they divided her yard from theirs with chain-link fences. She had planted flowers on both sides next to her side of the fences. Magenta chrysanthemums were about to burst into bloom. In the back left of the yard, behind the clumps of flowers lining the fence, she also had a well-tended vegetable garden behind a homemade wire fence (“to keep the bunny out”). My father usually sat in the living room, but he came out to the garden with me this one time.

We were in Levittown, the land of working-class suburban conformity where I came from. I, along with my partner Barbara, was on one my

weekly visits to see my father. My father still lived in the same house where I grew up, around the corner from Jean. I grew up feeling different—and I was—and it wasn't a place that was easy on people who were different, so I got out as soon as I could. When I was there, I felt like I never belonged. But I never would have questioned my place in the world when I was with my father.

My father died when he was ninety-eight, so he was elderly for a long time. When I was with my father, his well-being was my only concern. I didn't think of it then but looking back I see I belonged then. I belonged to my father. I see now, in my single-minded focus on him, I also belonged to myself also.

I first started holding his arm, years after my mother died, when he was about seventy-five years old. He was resistant at first, insisting he could do everything by himself, without any help.

'You're pushing me. You're pushing me,' he said loudly once when I was holding his arm on a ramp in a crowded community theater. He was in his late eighties at the time. Since I was larger than him, I was concerned people would think I was committing elder abuse. Over the years though, I kept holding my father's arm and helping him. Eventually, he began tolerating my help. In his nineties, he would hold his elbow out so I could take his arm.

When Jean came along, I welcomed her presence. Many daughters might have been threatened when a potential love interest showed up for their widowed father. But I loved my father and wanted him to be happy. In the beginning, my father was happy. Later, they began to argue—Jean was very critical—and my father pointedly told me they were "just friends."

Jean was very different from my mother. For starters, she was tiny. My mother, who died more than two decades before my father did, was the same height as my father. Both of my parents were almost six feet tall, a few inches shorter than the height I grew into. My mother was broad-minded and intellectual. Jean was conventional but inquisitive.

My partner, Barbara, usually came along on our visits. She had a close bond with Jean because she reminded Barbara of her late mother. Like Barbara's late mother, Carmella, Jean loved to garden. Like Carmella, Jean also loved to get gussied up and go out. Jean, who was Polish American, also loved the polka, something Barbara's mother didn't relate to. Jean recognized a kindred spirit in Barbara, though.

"You're Polish, aren't you?" Jean kept asking Barbara even though Barbara had told Jean repeatedly that her mother was Italian American. This may have been early dementia. Jean developed dementia and died in a nursing home a few years after my father passed.

We couldn't go to the home to see her because this was in 2020 during the pandemic when things were in lockdown. But Barbara commented that Jean might have dementia but "she would probably still remember the polka."

Since Barbara is a musician, she recognized how important dancing to the polka was to Jean. Jean remembered dancing at the Polish festivals in her youth and was disappointed my father couldn't dance with her. He was blind in one eye and had glaucoma in the other. Since he couldn't see that well, dancing with her could have been dangerous. He might have fallen over and broken something. But Jean didn't think about that. She just kept saying how disappointed she was.

That's how Barbara ended up dancing the polka with Jean in the afternoons. As a drummer, Barbara also had experience dancing since her stern drum teacher had required her students to take African dance classes. Although, she still was taller, Barbara was closer in height to diminutive Jean. They both had long flowing white hair and were both enjoying themselves—especially Jean!—as they went round and round until the afternoons spun away.

That Which Cannot Be Reclaimed

by Gabriel Blackmann

Let me tell you
about damage, about the billows of soft
bodies ballooning out. On that Thursday,
grief filled the spaces, on that Thursday,
grief coloured beyond the lines of that maze
we'd found ourselves in. No one cares
about the birds until they take flight,
(no one cares until they witness how you speak to me)
they point at their feathers, dusky black, forest green,
see them rising, rising: hot air.

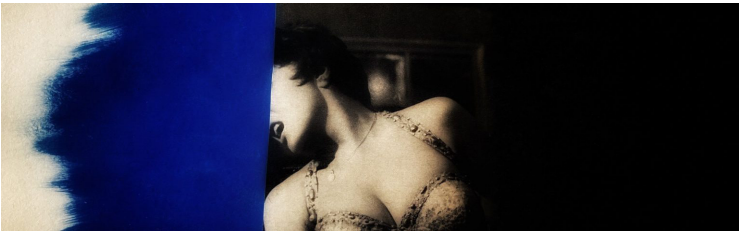
Forty Names for Catamount

by Julia C. Alter

Pownal, Vermont

We think we can capture a creature
by naming it. Long-distance lover.
Partner. *Mountain lion*. Lion Daddy.
Daddy. *American lion*.
Forty names in this language alone.
Dating, but only on FaceTime.
In this language alone. Open. Poly.
Open but not actually poly. Just open.
Puma, cougar, lynx. Why try to love
wildly again? California, California.
Like most things, this animal
has little to do with you,
but like most things it turns
into you, slinking through
the milky darkness of my mind. I stay
locked in its amber eye—Sweetie, Babygirl.
Pretty Thing. Tiny flower. Just open.
When it's gone into hiding, you start calling
me by my mother-given name. Strange
syllables dropped from your mouth.
Not petals. Just gray stones. Just open.
Stay friends. Growl and tremble.

They say that someone shot the last one,
but people swear they've spotted them—
prowling for scents and pawing at visions.
Painter. Red tiger. Mountain screamer.



Femme Bleue by JC Alfier

Collect for the Feast of John the Baptist

by C. Henry Smith

Picture his beard, saltgrass
thick and mite
hearty, life's buzz

finding home. A Baptist,
John, sips
locust, wild honey—

homilist euphoria
carries us
over sand dunes

and scrub. Stale
bramble chin like
Dad's, who

wondered of the prophet:
is faith water
enough?

In the end, John
would answer
from a platter.

*

Dad warned of bees in the garden.
Chased snakes and demons,
but bees filled him with fear.
An apiarist now, my keeping demands
a veiled grace, a canter
aligned with the hive.
Demands all that and a well-made bonnet.

*

Babies run the broodcomb, pollen sits on top.
Open cells mumble and the afternoon sun
is never enough, all the buckets yet
unturned. Fast as you work, it's a pinch,
a life, a teaspoon twelfth: honey's
sum. And when they sting, it's suicide.
Grace backing into death. Sweetness,
I would give my gold teeth to go that way,
to lose myself in the bloom of a fight.

*

And I return to honeyed when I speak of Dad's hair.
 Creased pages on his face, the fresh passages to learn.

He had an aunt, or great aunt, or some woman they knew well,
 so they called her aunt anyway. Aunt Anyway,

she died. Lip stung by a bee. Oh, the sting of your own end
 approaching,
 of grace landing on your smile.

*

This Sunday, Dad wanders,
pitching through his sermon,

lost among liturgy, lost
longer than before.
His eyes settle on the pulse
of stained glass, on something
buzz-buzzing around the apse.
Camel-kissed beard line,
quickly pressed cassock,
he returns, at last, to honey
discovered in the carcass of a lion.



Messenger by JC Alifer

Backseat Smirnoff

by Janelle Cordero

Whose car was it? Headlights glazing the river alongside the highway over a decade ago, three 15-year-old girls in the backseat passing a bottle of raspberry Smirnoff between us, two faceless, nameless boys up front smoking cigarettes and twisting the radio dial louder to drown out our high-pitched laughter. The driver turned onto a dirt road and we climbed higher and higher into the mountains. I remember being afraid of how dark it was, how impossibly thick the forest beyond the window. I don't remember the party we must've gone to, the meadow in the woods with a bonfire and cases of beer in truck beds and blankets spread out over the wildflowers, the dry summer grass and yellow pine needles. I don't remember if I fell in love that night, or if anyone kissed me, or if I got down on my hands and knees and puked after drinking too many cans of Bud Lite. I don't remember the drive home, the spinning sleep, the aching morning after. All that's left is the car ride, sailing through the night with two of my best friends on either side of me, their wrists and necks smelling of Victoria's Secret perfume, three different flavors of lip gloss left on the mouth of the vodka bottle like crescent moons, our bare thighs sticking to the leather seats, death himself at the wheel and all of us hurtling through time, the thick smoke of forever.

Wish List

by Sara Sowers-Wills

Wrapping-paper tubes
line the pool table, Scotch
tape dispensers, a pair of scissors.
My grandma praises
my neat wrapping skill.

On the TV, a game show
bells and beeps. Brown leather
pool table cover, the cat
sleeps in a sweater box, long
black hair and eyes shut.
Pouring iced tea into a clear glass,
she asks if I want a milkshake.

We talk about euthanasia.
My mom, uncle, and aunt,
she says, refuse to. Who wants to
rot in a bed, like a monster
with words but no mouth. Yes,
we can do that, I tell her.

We figure what people will wear
to her funeral.
Black, of course.

She cackles. Tea and milkshake,
winter, tinsel and lights on the tree.

Presents don't wrap themselves.
In the dim basement light,
we cut, tape, and finish everything.

Visitors

by Susanna Lang

I came back from the woods
festooned with the threads
and tatters of spider webs.

The moth that hovered
outside my door
this morning, an eye

on each wing, was gone;
later the tabby would tear off
one wing, watch closely

as what remained went fluttering
across the road. Now
two deer have paused

on their way up the hill.
They meet my eyes, but no:
they can see that the world

still sticks to me. I am not
far enough gone.

The Inner Work

by Deborah J. Shore

In Russian nesting dolls, the smallest
is the seed doll, signifying the soul.
Once you find her, what she holds
is dense and hard to open—
in a basic sense impossible.
But more than the portly mother,
she makes room for all the others,
even when she's just the dream at their heart—
the hope or assurance of a solidity,
of a glory and its weight,
of a life become so true
that it intrinsically creates
around itself
and for everyone
space.

Glory

by Allison Whittenberg

In war time, you marry a man who is tall and stalwart.

You marry a man with a sullen smirk. You don't marry a soldier; you marry a partisan. One of the rebels, a hard-core. And for a few days every now and then, life is interesting.

Aussie is your husband and he is also a thief, taking advantage of the kind of bottomless chaos that only war could breed. He is young. He is alive. He is full of pride.

He often disappears for weeks at a time. He sends no word. He spares no words. You have two children. You mother them when you can. You work as a maid to get by. Though you've never been to school, you can read, but not very well.

He brings you glory when he comes. Spoils from the War. Glowing jewels. Religious medals. He tells you how many thayers he can get after he larks them. You get excited. A smile spreads across your face like butter. Your eyes reel in marvel as if you've never seen such a collection of shiny baubles in your whole entire life. You finger through the pile after he dumps it on the grubby table. Aussie pulls up a chair and together you ogle every last gem.

"Shit!" you exclaim. "What did you do Aussie, light-hand every last

homeowner in the New World?”

He gloats big instead of answering you. You want to see him without his clothes on.

He is a beautiful man. Built tight and showy like one of those Old World Greek statues. And he has thick lips that kiss you sometimes as soft as summer. He has thick lips that kiss sometimes hard and still it is magic.

He doesn't bother to take off all his clothyery; he is only interested in seeing you.

Black waves brake with a white slap then a roar. You hold on. He is wild and strong.

The next morning, you wake up next to him. You are a wet leaf soaked by the rain: moldy, plastered to the doss cover. You look over at him, he is waking up too.

You kiss him for a while and for a while he kisses you back, then he pushes you away. He heads to the washiere. He returns in a few moments half changed into his quasi uniform: a tee, blackstrides and hiking boots, not all the way dry from last night.

He says to you, “The take I brought last night ain't nothing like what I'm fixing on pinching. I'm swinging over by that border city tonight.”

Thinking it is just as well, you shrug. You've got to pick up the kids from you mothers. You've got to be over at the Ulms by nine to clean their bath, straighten out their closets, make space.

Outside the white snow is falling, falling, falling like sugar. You watch it through the window, piddling away the few moments you have left with Aussie.

Just as Aussie leaves, you ask him when he will return.

He surprises you and says he'll be back in two days.

You do not cry, but you want to. You don't tell him how lonely you are. How scared you are. How much you think the war will never end. How much you think you are losing your looks, wasting away, going insane.

All you tell him is that you love him.

And he gloats big.

You ask him to kiss you. One more for the road. He does. He kisses you sweetly; he puts his heart in it.



A Boat in Whitby Harbour by Michael Noonan

Time Billionaire

by KG Newman

I took apart my watch and hid
the pieces around the house.
Walked through the park and
casually slid my phone into
a bear-proof trash bin. Taped
pictures of my two boys at their
weakest and strongest moments
to the bathroom mirror. To all the
mirrors. Until they weren't mirrors
anymore, just collage reminders
of the sand in my hands. It's like I'm
transferring the grains from one
bucket to another. So I keep my
fingernails long for this reason.
I slander the moment after sunset
in public. I walk down the street
screaming DEATH TO ELECTRICITY
when all I really want is to arrive
where the sidewalk meets the beach,
where I get a penny for every
second I have left and the billion
shiny copper circles stack into
an infinite oil rig, jacked up,
way out there in the ocean.

Self-Portrait/Cherry Vareniki

by Karina Jha

The waiter serves you a child on a plate—
A tiny thing, spilling insides bright as berries.
She is dead, of course she is dead,
But you eat her anyway
To savor that mouth-twisting sourness,
That doughy skin so sweet
As to sting the roots of your molars.
You pause your chewing, waiting for the next,
Waiting for the chef to slice up another daughter.
You are met with a walking childhood
Dish—a woman so taken with herself that
She will not sit next to you.
She is better than you, this woman,
In every way you can think of—
You watch from across the table as she steals
The last varenik from your plate,
Pops it into her perfect mouth,
Crushes the plump cherries with her teeth.
She asks if you have seen her
Daughter and you double over,
Retching across the cutlery, clutching the tablecloth—
The woman has cut you open with her fingernails,
Baring your guilty insides.
You are not fearless—

You will cry and beg for another chance, another taste,
And she will laugh the way that mothers do,
With her hands and not with her eyes—
She will pick up the fork you never used and puncture your
Small intestine to suck out the last of her daughter's dark hair
And you will let her, of course you will let her.
You loved that child, too.

Home Renovation Show

by Christine Potter

Stained wallpaper from the 1930's—faded green and coral,
lush with blowzy roses and garlands—gets a good laugh

before it's smashed into dust, fuzz-tone guitars wailing.
Someone jumps feet-first right through it. The oak trim

someone else's mom teetered on an old stool to lemon oil
is too much wood. Paint it all white. Tear out the absurd

basement toilet her husband visited every morning with
his cigar and newspaper, undisturbed by its lack of walls.

Sledgehammer the black and white tile upstairs, blow out
a bedroom, install white marble and glass. Tell a lie: no one

ever lived here. Or cried herself to sleep. No one shattered
a pitcher of iced tea on the kitchen floor and was instantly

forgiven. No one ever, homework done at last, eased into
the bathtub with curly script on its HOT and COLD faucets.

No one's nana ever washed her back with a warm cloth
and fragrant, transparent glycerin soap. No one ever died.

The Pause Before the Fall

by Adrienne Pilon

If only Adam had stilled her arm as it lifted
to the branch, brought her hand to his lips,
taken a stick to guide the serpent to another tree.
Or if Eve had listened to birdsong instead,
heard how the river water tumbled soft over
stones. Had lain with her love in the shade
of what was already grown full and fair.

Fat Girls

by Jessica Ballen

Dorito dust nail polish. Fresh and dainty. Morgan picks one chip at a time. Snaps a corner into her mouth. Snaps the other two sides and pinches the orange shuriken between pointer and thumb. Lets it fly. Says she can go hours without eating. Slices me between the eyes. Says it as she stands at the top of the hill. Hip bones jutting like knives above the waistline of her Abercrombie shorts. Morgan doesn't know what fat girls do. She doesn't know that they eat three or four lunches then wear sweats in 80-degree heat. That they empty their bodies completely. They want their chance at being pretty. She doesn't hear the teen magazines screaming in their ears. Morgan doesn't know how threatening she is. She doesn't know that the fat girls are tired of not being Mary Kate or Ashley. That they're tired of not being Morgan or the dark-haired twins with pierced bellybuttons and messy buns. Tired of not being their younger sister, the one who babysat me and wrote on her stick figure drawing "I like men," then laughed and laughed and I didn't. Because she was Mary Kate and Ashley, and I was on the outside looking in. She was on a holiday in the sun and I was fidgeting with the remote. Morgan leaps almost flies off the school bus steps. Pets her beefy dog behind its ears. Calling it a cute little bitch as it leans its full body against her Baby Spice knees. Its head lifting up. Begging for more.

i e a t Morgan

like

i a t e
the magazines
do n't

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to

sto

p

m e.

Susie Ever Gracious

by Linda Laderman

On the eve of Cousin Susie's funeral
her sister shows me four porcelain ballerinas
shelved next to a stack of books. Set by size,
the dolls teeter on top of a dusty glass base.

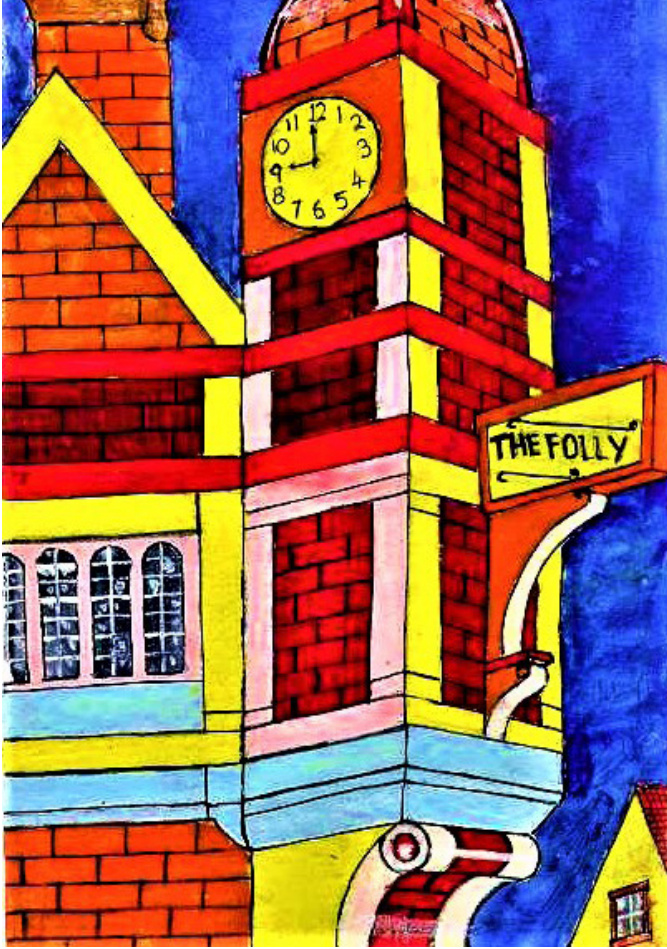
She asks me to take the tallest, the one
with a coiled bun, eyes brown and round—
then tells me to open the folds of the doll's
lacy tutu, where Susie's fastened a short note

stitched with pale blue thread. I read Susie's
message, written on her last lucid afternoon.
You've been such a dear, devoted cousin.
Stay close to my girls. They love you.

Pleated in threes, the paper still smells fresh
like new ink, preserved in Susie's precise hand.
I fold and unfold the paper, as if I'm a child
learning to construct an origami fortune teller.

I look at her instructions one more time.
Your poetry books are on my nightstand.
Please pass them on to someone else.
Susie ever gracious—ks

even then, like her porcelain dolls left
on the shelf, one push away from breaking.



A Public House by Michael Noonan

Prude Song

by Em Norton

in my bed prudes are always welcome where else are we
supposed to go
we the martyrs of shame yes i would die for the feeling if
it does not barren me
first we are the hole or we end up in one hesitant to
acknowledge
longing is just a quiet desire
we write poems about apples red as wintered cheeks
crisp as a kiss caressing
queerness i want to be who i am but who has the time
to break open an entire body
of memory to hold the sections in your hands like a
clementine
in my bed i host a prayer circle for the virgins & the
regretful
we light candles & make slim offerings fragrant with citrus
i confess the first
meal of the day is the hardest to eat sometimes we
all raise our voices
in want

The Worried Woman Odes

by Melissa McEver Huckabay

Wildflowers

Beloved, I keep returning to you,

your splendor, blue,
crimson, yellow. Wondering
how long before your light fades

and you leave us, a mother
who leaves her mind
in the sun.

Blood Pressure

O the vessels
breaking in my love's eyes,
the cuff that caresses him
like I do, in the dark.
Please, body-wonder,
drop, make the roaring
stop.
You're rushing,
and I need
so much

more time
with him.

Papers

Canvas, dearest one.

I pull you up, gaze at words
like “argue” and “survey,”

study the rubric, *Meets*
Expectations, and I long
to love you, to care about

each curve of the words.
I long to believe someone
will read my comments

about what needs
to be changed.

I want to change
everything.

AR-15s

O your long straight
necks, your bullets,
the way children
are taught to embrace
you. Smile
for the camera!
Don't think
about the
bodies
you
were
made
to destroy.

You are powerful. See, you
turn mothers into hurricanes.

Death

Yes, I get the subtext.
I try not to be afraid
of you, O brittle one.
Of the ways
you reach for us,
are always reaching
for us.

This isn't closure.
It's an open field,
and I am still picking flowers.

Karachi

by Misha Sumar

I taste the places I've lived in, feel them explode in my mouth, melt on my tongue, sometimes it burns on the way down.

Karachi is spicy and lemony, piping hot and crunchy, stewed and steaming.

It's a Marie biscuit drenched in *chai* on a crisp evening in my grandmother's garden.

It's *bakra eid* 1998 with my cousins. The day we landed there was a cow tied to the trunk of the willow tree in that garden that I always wanted to climb. Rhea and I named the cow Lucille, after the main character in *I Love Lucy*.

All eight of us cousins slept on the floor of the upstairs living room on mattresses and blankets. Come *eid* morning the boys shook us awake at dawn, just as the butchers were arriving.

Come on! You have to see this!

They led us out to the balcony and below us in the driveway Lucille was putting up a valiant fight, but she stood no chance. I covered my eyes and when I opened them again she was on the ground convulsing violently, until finally she bled out.

While her body parts were being chopped up under the shade of the car park to be distributed amongst family, friends, and the needy, our portion to be marinated in spices and raw papaya for the annual *eid* barbecue, her blood was washed down the driveway with the power hose and drained out onto Khayaban-e-Mujahid.

Karachi is a river of blood flowing through the streets on eid day and the smell of still-fresh carcass all through the city.

It's tearing off a piece of hot, fluffy naan from its newspaper wrapping in the backseat of the car, knowing well you'll be spanked for it later.

It's six takeaway boxes of Indus biryani in your best friend's basement with Tame Impala blasting on the speakers.

It's sweet, ripe mangoes and plates of homemade masala fries.

The night Benazir Bhutto was assassinated I ate so many fries I could have popped. We were at Cafe Crescent where they made hot chocolate so rich you ate it with a spoon. I was with Zara and the guy she was cheating on her overseas boyfriend with, and a friend of hers, Dalia, who I had never met before.

It was December 27th 2007, the elections were a month away and it was the only time of year Karachi cooled down enough to truly allow one to appreciate a cup of pure molten chocolate. I was happily savouring spoonfuls of it when the server came to our table shuffling his feet uncomfortably, as though he were passing the words back and forth trying to mold them into something with smoother edges. He was barely twenty.

There was an explosion at the rally, he told us. Benazir Bhutto is dead.

We laughed at him, there was no way.

I'm sorry but we have to close the cafe. He placed the cheque on our table like it too would explode at any moment.

The TV screens scattered around the room switched from Rihanna twirling her umbrella to Geo TV's news coverage of the rally in Rawalpindi. A mob had already swarmed the scene—mourners, angry and wailing, reporters, hungry for a deliciously gruesome photo.

Outside on the streets of Karachi petrol stations and police cars were burning.

The news anchor said it was shrapnel in her neck that had killed her, that they barely got away with it.

Dalia's house was just four *gallis* down, so we decided we would hunker down at hers for the night. When we got to her house, her dad was in a dark room with the door ajar, news coverage was flickering on the TV screen. I could hear him crying in soft little whimpers. I would learn later that he was a relative of Benazir Bhutto's. Dalia pressed a finger to her lips and we tiptoed past his door into a different wing of the house, where her bedroom was.

She had a four poster bed and at least a hundred stuffed animals. She rang down to her cook on the intercom.

Harris Bhai can you please bring us some chips?

Twenty minutes later we were huddled around a steaming plate on the floor, dipping hot greasy french fries in sweet ketchup as our country burned.

Back at home my father was slumped over drunk, the way I knew him best. It was the 30th anniversary of my parents' woeful marriage, I thought it was fitting that it should fall on a day of national mourning and destruction. My mother watched the news in my brother's room and called all three of her children to make sure we were safe.

She was always doing double-duty trying to plug the holes of my father's ineptitude as best she could, always scrambling to sew together the scraps of our childhood after he had torn them into shreds.

My first summer back from college I got her a cake for Father's Day—Black Forest from Copper Kettle, her favorite.

Thanks for being our mum and our dad, I said.

Afraid of hurting his feelings, she gave the cake to my dad and pretended we had gotten it for him. He believed her and congratulated himself for being father of the year as he pierced his fork through layers of dark chocolate and cherry.

By the time I had reached middle school, Babs went to jail the way other dads went on business trips. There was never any warning. I would come home from school one day and all the women in the family—my mum, aunts, family friends—would be in our house counting *duas* on strings of delicate prayer beads, white scarves around their hair and dark rings around their eyes.

We never knew how long it would be for—sometimes he would be released after a day or two, sometimes it was a couple of months. He always had a scruffy beard when he came home.

Like a ritual, Mum would make his favorite dish—fish and coconut curry with whole chillies and mustard seeds over a bed of steaming basmati rice. He would sit at the head of the dining table and tell us stories about the people he had met inside as he molded each bite into a little ball with his fingers and popped it in his mouth. Babs has always loved weaving his tales, brimming with dramatics and gratuitously long pauses where one wonders if perhaps he is finished telling the story, but then off he goes again.

The next day, like clockwork, his face would be shaved clean again and life would resume, unchanged.

Karachi tastes like my father's blood in my mouth, metallic and crude, as I try to peel him off my screaming mother. It tastes like the pink bile I retch up in the bathroom afterwards, horrified by what I am capable of.

Sometime during the pandemic I finally picked up the phone to call Mum from my apartment in Brooklyn. I didn't know what to say, how to explain my silence the past few years. I couldn't tell her that I loved her too much to talk to her, that hearing her voice flooded my brain with terror, made my heart push down in my chest so hard I couldn't breathe. I couldn't tell her that I had put myself in a 12-step program so I wouldn't become like my father. I couldn't tell her that after years of excavating my subconscious in therapy I had uncovered my dusty, fossilised resentment towards her—for staying with him, making us stay with him—and that I was angry. I couldn't tell her that I was too ashamed of myself to face her, that I felt like I had let her down because I couldn't save her.

So instead, I asked her for the recipe for the sooji she used to make me when I couldn't sleep. I remember clutching her white nightie—or, as I got older, perching myself on the kitchen counter—as she stirred the bubbling pot on the stove.

Grab a pen, she said on the phone.

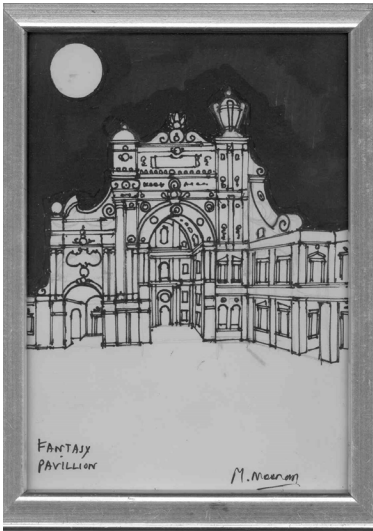
You start with the semolina and a dab of *ghee* to toast it. Just before it turns brown, add milk and a little bit of sugar to the pot. Let the mixture bubble away until it's creamy and rich, and the kitchen smells like home.

Something Learned from Billie Holiday and Lester Young

by Mark J. Mitchell

Time is a place
like a canyon
eroded by rhythm.

It's sad and joyous
as the echo of one thrush
chased from fallen seeds
by a mourning dove.



Fantasy Pavillion by Michael Noonan

A Manor of Endings

by Jean Anne Feldeisen

Next to the nurses station
 in hell
you sat, my dapper, well-groomed
dad in an adult diaper. When
you fell onto your face
 out of the wheelchair
they quietly replaced you. I
pretended
not to see.

Like a caged bird, your nails
had grown long to curl
in on themselves, grotesque.
 No defense.
You could only rake your own skin
 –still alive.

When I tried
to get you to eat,
you pushed me away,
 that forearm, unnatural
 strong,
a steady pressure.

You refused to open
 forgot how
to swallow. If a clever nurse
managed a spoon of applesauce
 past your lips,
 you held it there, in a puffed
cheek
indefinitely.

 After Medicare's allowed
 twenty-one
days you died.

Sadie and the Strange Afternoon

by Martina Reisz Newberry

Sadie sports an hysterical kind of grace.
She welcomes nearly anyone into her life
even if they are “iffy,” sad,
or enchanted by a witch with a wart on her thumb.

She watches shoulders and long hair blowing,
tears and fingers blue-ly cold.
She stares into kisses and ignores a curled lip.

Sadie says she is scared to be growing old.
She hates the way her times of day are marked out
by *Prozac*, *Cozaar*, *Hydrocodone*, *Prevacid*,
and an afternoon cocktail. (A different drink on a different day...
Yesterday she had a glass of “Cookie Butter” liqueur.)

Sadie brought a young woman to my house.
The woman was so thin, her shoulder blades
were balsa wood wings.
Sadie said, “This is my cousin.”
Since she calls many people *cousin*,
I knew this was probably untrue.

As I cleared away the crackers and wine glasses,
the woman stood up, told Sadie she had to go.

She thanked me and put her hand out to Sadie
who put a 20-dollar bill on her palm.
We both watched her leave.

A long silence rocked back and forth between us.
Sadie giggled: "That was weird, wasn't it?"

Avarica, Greed

by Jennifer LeBlanc

In response to Hieronymus Bosch's The Seven Deadly Sins and the Four Last Things.

Wanting is not the same as wanting
more, always more, which is greed,
wanting that to which we are not entitled.
For the honest plaintiff, a sympathetic ear.
An open, hidden hand for the defendant's bribe.
This judge weighs the side most tipped with gold
as the truest justice on his scales.
Because how fine it is to own things!—
their status and heft, to desire and possess,
to use and set aside as easily as a breath
of air, no hindrance to the taking.
To want a companioned home, some happiness
we feel we are owed—this is not greed,
but to be counted among the living, among the loving.

Planting Heather at the New House

by Deborrah Corr

A cube of soil so rich I want to eat
my mother's chocolate cake,
but this won't crumble. It holds its shape
when I perch it on my palm
after peeling away the black plastic.

Translucent roots like ghostly wire
are locked in a grip that won't let go,
despite my pressure to loosen, to take
the form of the hole I've made
in this new bed.

I'm wearing your sweater,
the green one that zips up the side,
the one that housed your warmth
in those last cold days. Its fibers,
infused with flakes of your skin,
settle around me, trying
to remake your shape.

May babies

by Mia Marion

Jessi paints me in a sea of pinks and purples, sitting in a pile of fictional hyacinths. Meanwhile I write us hard into existence. Neither of us are May babies but we've got a lot going on. How lucky we were to meet in the last year of our childhood, if you'll accept a flexible definition of the word. We would have mixed together at any age, melding our minds with lines of poetry and Bowie, and that's why it's so great that we got a head start.

You knew me when I was nineteen, coughing clouds of cannabis. I knew you when you were twenty, and ran away to London. I knew your mom's narrow womb, the way you ripped right out of it, and you knew oxygen flowing into my grandmother's sun damaged sternum. We knew each other at twenty three, knew your block of 12th street and mine. I knew your skin, where it was inked at twenty two with lilacs, and you knew mine, where it was pierced at twenty one and then scarred and then pierced again.

It's that time of the year once more –

We're twenty four, and reading "Peanut Butter" by Eileen
Myles in the bar, stepping outside for our
companions' summer smokes. No chair will ever be
goldilocks enough for us chicks.
You will find us lounging on floors all over
Manhattan, though what we really want
is to be inhabiting the wood panels in
Brooklyn. I know your future – it's overripe,
dripping with the love of a woman and colored
in with the same three beautiful tones.
You know mine (here is where you say mine).
I run half a mile along 12th street to admire
What you've been painting on your walls.
Let's bike the whole city, and learn to love ourselves.
Neither of us are May babies, but we love the late Spring,
And I dare to say that we've got a lot going on.

*Poem Ending with a Line by Richard
Siken*

by Max Gillette

I fold hospital corners in my sheets
the way my grandmother showed me.
My fingers are flushed and clumsy
with sleep. By the time I am done
smoothing the sun-faded fabric,
it has cooled below the open window
of my bedroom. I pull my pajamas off
and leave them clumped at the foot
of my bed. Yesterday's perfume
hums in the sweatshirt I drag from
the floor. This is how I make myself
move towards day—orange juice
and two white pills. Three eggs
in a stainless pan. Lemon-scented
dish soap to fill the kitchen with yellow.
It is Sunday, which means I can
make everything new—use a washcloth
to clear last week's dust from my desk.
Later, I will clean my windows, call in
the city's light. It is not an obligation
to this body. It is not fear of this body's
failure that drives the work. I think it's
love. I'm trying really hard to make it love.

Coke Bottle

by Shari Lawrence Pfleeger

“[a] bottle so distinct that you would recognize it by feel” – Call for design competition, Trustees of the Coca-Cola Bottling Association, 1915

Green “Georgia”
glass shaped like
a cocoa pod: ridged,
thinner at top
and bottom,
thicker through
the middle. Curvaceous,
inscribed in cursive, “Classic,”
called le contour by the French,
its “hobbleskirt” design named for
the fashionable 1910s skirt, tapered
below the knee to hobble the wearer.
Trademarked, with only one percent
of Americans unable to identify
the soda by bottle shape alone.
Called a work of art, used by
Salvadore Dali (of melting
clocks and weeping eye)
in his painting *The Poetry
of America*. Called erotic,
smooth and hard, held easily
in the hand. Called a weapon
by the police who recognized it
in the dark, broken on the ground.

Frosted Glass

by Dan Brotzel

Something I hadn't thought about for years. I must have been six or seven. My mum was dropping me round to his house for a play date.

I liked playing at Kurt's — his mum always had a big tin with those Club biscuits with the golf ball on, which we never had. We always had banana milkshake too, whizzed up in a special machine, something my mum never made. Better still, the flower beds of his garden were studded with little plastic soldiers everywhere, as if massing for a vast infantry battle. In among the gladioli and the lavender, Nazi stormtroopers happily rubbed shoulders with Action Men and Roman centurions.

If his dad was there, we'd talk about types of engine or the behaviour of viruses or the origins of various words, stuff like that. His dad always prompted him to answer questions in these chats, as if they'd been rehearsing his general knowledge, but there was an edge to his reaction if Kurt got one wrong. (Once in class our teacher asked if anyone knew what "famine" was. I'll never forget Kurt's answer. He said: "An abject lack of adequate nutrition". He must have been eight. The teacher said, "Have you swallowed a dictionary, young man?" And Kurt laughed and said, in a way that couldn't help sounding smug: "I think you'd find that would be pretty indigestible.")

We went up the path. I ran on ahead. His mum was at the door. I

made as if to go in, but she blocked me, not physically or anything, just with her forcefield. Her expression was a dark cloud. She looked all puffy and out of breath.

I would say now that she looked like someone who'd been up crying all night.

Behind her, sitting on the bottom stair, was her "little man", as she always called him, knobby knees, shorts and a Ninja Turtle T-shirt. (He was always Donatello, in our games.) His face was in shadow, but I knew something was wrong. On any other morning, he'd have been out the front door and excitedly bombarding me with facts and figures before I'd even got my coat off.

My mum quickly got into a huddle with his mum, the way mums did, murmuring among themselves of unknowable things. She put her hand on his mum's arm, and left it there for some time. Then suddenly she swung her basket and said to me: "Come on, darling. Let's get home. Today's not a great day for visiting Kurt. His dad's had to go away for work again, and everyone's a bit sad."

I looked past Mrs Seaton to Kurt. He didn't move, didn't respond when my mum said we were going. I don't think I had ever seen him silent before. Slowly and sadly, I let my mum turn me around and drag me by the hand back up the garden path. The door closed, inscrutably, almost at once. It was orange, with a strip of frosted glass down the middle, through which I dimly saw shapes and shadows moving.

At the end of the path I turned round. A movement caught my eye, and I looked up. For a second, I saw the face of Kurt's dad, peeping furtively through the milky gauze of the bathroom net curtains.

Used to Be, Dies

by Elizabeth Kirkpatrick-Vrenios

Youth Goodbye Howdy Doody

little puppet poor man's Pinocchio
goodbye Lana Turner lipstick cashmere sweaters
paper dolls waists cinched to the nines
hello chin hairs straight and proud holding themselves
erect waving to those around you

§

Travel Volkswagen Blue Bug four on the floor

you will carry your heart in your suitcase
but your tag will always
bear your name
wherever you may go you will always be you

§

Ambition California Poppies bloom not

to be possessed
but to spite drought and fire
you are your own bloom
the pattern is yours
you can go beyond your limit
what is Heaven for?

§

Health Eggshell fragile broken
surface made for cracking like the sky
my small soft self
still alive
still buzzing

§

Sex You flinch from the sight of seeing yourself
in full light of his eyes trying too hard
to make yourself beautiful
tonight the god on this porch
is a wounded sunset
the music has already died but it has become you

§

Love Moonburn I wear my hat
to avoid night's blister
life begins all over
when a boundary is crossed
when fugues intersect
when you taste yourself
and it is sweet and ripe

§

Memory Geese winging south searching
for the shaman's wise eye
even feathers have no name you
feel too heavy
for the spaces you inhabit

Mop

by Robert Lunday

The mop put its head down,
nosing the floor back and forth.
White hair gone gray with swill, ashamed
to show its face. Skinny body,
then drying on the fence all day
with the longest stare away from here.

woodcut

by Susan Nordmark

i am sleeping with a strange person, says the man.

the road swirls between low ridges furred with yellow grass. in the crevices along the slopes, emerald shrubs tall as trees. in the distance, low-slung dark blue clouds wrap a pale sheet of sky. an old stick-style farmhouse spread with a skirt of veranda. rectangle of rowed vegetables, edged with gravel path. charcoal stone outcrops push here and there through the glowing moor like gods insisting they are still here.

her face unlined. hair fuzzed. thighs flopped. lying flat, eyes closed, heard the voices. she walks one foot. other foot. she looks at the man's face. a face she has looked at for fifty-one years. he speaks and gestures. she turns her head. trying. maybe not seeing light forms as shapes. depth.

human infants recognize faces and face-like patterns within the first week or two. they prefer an image with two symmetrical dots at top, a bell curve at bottom, to that image reversed with the two dots at bottom. they can make a figure of a face into a face.

a third person says, *hi K*. her face twitches the smallest number of pixels that a viewer can perceive. a quantum of visible response. perhaps it does not twitch. people project pattern onto randomness all the time. people see things that are not there. that's called a story. the third per-

son reaches to embrace her. all at once she dissolves into shaking and laughing and cradling the other like something long-lost. a marker in a vast field.

she is made to sit. she spoons food. she looks down. not at faces around, not at the objects in the room, not at green leaves tossing beyond a window. she stores a bolus of food in her cheek, spoons in more. the man stops this. he tells her to chew the stored. he reaches between her lips, pulls the bolus from the side area into the main mouth compartment.

google: "staging of dementia." it says there are seven stages.

a tawny cardinal grips a low branch. her head and wings and breast nestle in rusty softness. she's the only bird in the tree. it's september and i am visiting a 93-year-old man. *she is not supposed to be here*, he says. *she should have left two weeks ago*. the street is mostly silent except for a faint shush of wind. he tells me he's dug in his yard and found old bottles and indian spear points. his great-grandchildren gave him an atomic clock that keeps perfect time and never has to be wound. almost everyone else in his village has moved away.

there's more short corn lately, he says. *i'm seeing sunflowers. they don't need so much water*.

people tell me he knew C. *biggest thing that ever happened in this county*. the 93-year-old man says nothing for a moment. searching for the spot on the disk. then. *it was after he came back to town. i was twenty or so. it was the depression. C., we both planted vegetables, a strip right next to the river. well, your family had that land—his family. we did ok those years, able to feed ourselves at least*.

C. had a cabin. he'd walk over to his sister's place for lunch and walk back. and for dinner, the same. my father did hire him some summers. but he was often in a temper. kept his money sewn in his coat. wouldn't let a woman even hang it up.

the river runs slow now. all the crops upstream, you know, that causes it. but my grandfather told me, when folks first got here, the river ran swift and strong. he saw it.

“...maintaining momentum had been at a certain cost.” Joan Didion, *Blue Nights*.

the man is doing woodworking. he is building a redwood deck outside the living room glass door. which is locked. as are all the doors.

for me, a person who has met her fifteen or twenty times, K. appears quite familiar. her drawing in with her body and drawing away. her directing her face in a listening posture. her looking away.

“Her husband. *My husband*. She would say it again and again. When she could still speak.” Joan Didion, *Blue Nights*.

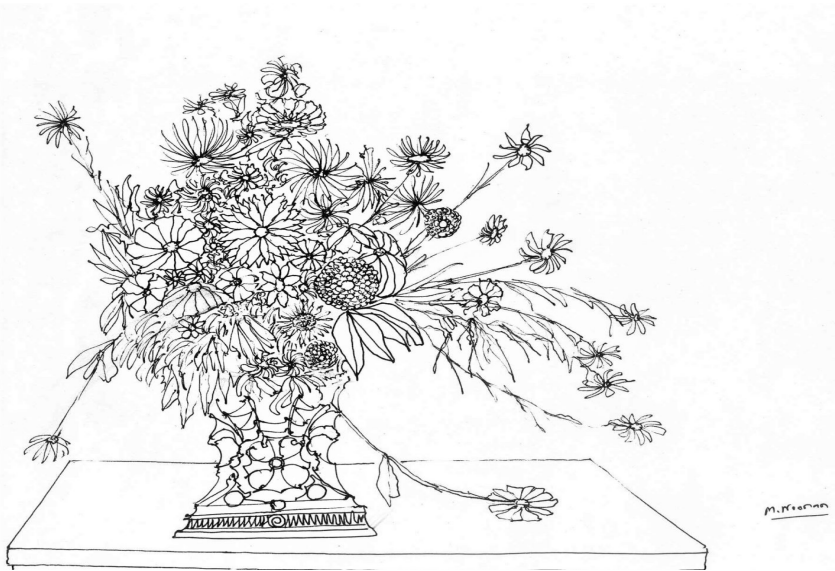
in Bill Viola’s video piece, “Nantes Triptych,” an image of a woman giving birth apposite an image of a woman taking her last breaths. a cliché. but between the two frames, a slow-motion video of a man fully clothed, suspended in water, moving his limbs. the fabric pulls and twists, snagging his efforts. the camera plunges the viewer underwater. the man’s head is out of the frame. you can’t see his face. perhaps his mouth is open gobbling for air. he treads water in an infinite present. failing to escape. failing to drown.

the middle panel takes meaning placed between the other panels. as a word takes connotation from the phrase of which it is a part.

when he died, they tied a white kerchief around his jaw to keep his mouth closed. it simulated a woodcut portrait of a human face. in woodcut, an artisan gouges incisions parallel to the axis of a tree’s growth grain. the crafter must work along the tree’s already made pathways. the grain lines may suggest a face, the way a newborn can

recognize the least features of a face. i would say can name the features. but small infants don't name. they hear names and repeat names and recognize names. then they name things. make names. names make stories. are stories in themselves.

there are no photographs of C. i have photos of his father. his brother. his brother's son. his brother's son's son. C. is absent.



A Vase of Flowers by Michael Noonan

A Memory

by Sydney Faith

A man taught me
how to gut a fish
while my mother was inside
cleaning his house.
I don't remember the blood,
only the cornsilk-colored eggs
he scooped out
with a glittering silver spoon
and the fried flesh melting
in my mouth
that night, becoming
a part of me.

Cocklebur

by Kelly Dumar

Remember that August,
your emergencies?
Her tooth pierced
your cheek in the pool.
A lacrosse stick slit
your eyebrow at camp.
Your head slammed
the ground, the swing's
limb broke, you were
pumping so strong.
ER, three days in a row.
Birdlike, I hovered.
Stitches to mend
your cheek-hole, stitches
to knit your brow. Doctor
barked—what the hell
was the matter—*with me*—
for letting these harms
come to my son.
You asked me to sing—
Circle Game. Nurse,
a mother herself, told me
I have a nice voice.

This August, invasives
take the yard. I should cull-kill-
bag them. You untangled
a hummingbird. Wings caught
in cocklebur—drop of blood,
your fluttered palm.

Control

by Aaron Sandberg

There is beauty in choosing
when you can't. Listen:

I thought dad had some,
idled at those lights.

And I would sit, buckled in back,
and wait for his fingers to snap.

And then our signal lit green
as he smiled and eased us out into the world.

It wasn't all sorrow I found when later
I learned the trick:

he watched the crosswalk count down
before I knew numbers myself,

and all those cars I couldn't see
would slow.

Then—as if it were choice—
it was his turn to go.

Girls Who Love Suffocatingly

by Genesis Castello

She told me I was honey-like
and crushed-raspberry-beautiful.
I was like the color of blood, dried
onto my palms. She saw gold
and sweet fruits, and sunset glows—

she looked at me—
covered in blood. Shrouded in
streetlamp colored yellows.
The feeling of concrete digging
into my palms. There were no

nectarine-sweet words that could soothe
the gashes on my hands and knees.
I was goddess-like, she told me
as she held me under layers of cotton.
Until I gagged on her idea of love.

She told me I was crushed
and raspberries—and beautiful.
Choking on cotton. Honey soaked.

Why of the Black Moon*

by Laura Apol

—for Roxana, leaving Kigali early

Because your mother is dying,
because my mother
has died,

and each new moon is a withered
womb;

because we have ceased
our prayers.

Because I have my mother's smile
and wear my mother's rings,

because you have your mother's hair,
will soon wear your mother's rings.

Tonight, the scattered lights come on—
starlight, streetlight, firelight, fireflies, fires
in these hills;

because the two-lane blacktop rises
then falls, wrapping us breathless in shrouds

of night:

—*oh, Mama*—

because there is only the call, no response.

Because she is distant, the moon

and we have learned to navigate

the dark because

she is gone.

* Note: a black moon is the second new moon within a month

Annual Honesty

by Samuel Prince

Lunaria annua

I only make sense in December
with its layers, rainbound lock-ins
chapfallen noons and scrufflands.

Figures in the desaturated distant fields,
I can't tell if they're stationary or moving
towards me as the sun relents and founders.

The funeral parlour hearse hastes
by back at peak capacity, the spongy
ground still mellow and willing for burial.

My pockets are candied with raisins
and fruit drops, I'm the apex fall guy
straining against this heavy pram.

Hedges tote the honesty seedpods,
like sacrament wafers, plantain discs
nursery tambourine skins, bioluminescent.

Their purple pinnacle is months away.
The older man I'll be, he hasn't forgiven me yet,

take good care of him while he lives in you.

It comes around again before you know it,
the darksome clock. The truth is no more
than mincemeat. I want to snow, but I can't.



The Eye of Dawn by Oormila Vijayakrishnan Prahlad

Record Player Song

by Katie Grierson

This day has already happened. This day is back again. Is loop. Is returning, best visitor. No one visits anymore, too much gloom. Too much blue brain. Moldy spoons. This day is fever. Coming back all winter. Pearl necklace. Same, same, same. The morning starts, humid like breath. The runny eggs. The no open windows. The rain, knocking. The bad drain. The shower sputter. The creased shirt. The running late. The street puddle and splash. The desk drawer. The bottle in the desk drawer. The waiting, sitting, looking this way, looking that direction. The sip. The mint to cover the sip. The lunch break. The small talking, small leaving midway through the talking. The finally done. The drive back, the shoes off, finally TV noise, finally wine glass and heavy limbs and closing eyes and losing myself and drinking myself to a place where I can see you. And you. And your face like God's. The humid morning. Same, same, same. Your lipstick naked and watching from the bathroom counter. Your favorite jazz record loving dust. If I put

the record on, will it be your voice
or the voice of the singer, long
dead, much like you.

The Fur Coat

by Arlaina Tibensky

The fur coat is raccoon, bushy to my thighs, and dyed an outrageous sapphire blue. It weighs at least fifteen pounds. I only wear the coat at night in New Jersey winters when it's freezing cold, when the whole block is asleep, when my dog, a peach-colored Labradoodle, needs her walk. I don't want to be seen in it. People might get the wrong idea. The coat belongs to me now, but it once belonged to my once alive mother.

*

My mother's boyfriend smoked Newports and tied back his gray hair in a low ponytail. Almost thirty years ago, when I was on a visit home to Chicago from college, he took the three of us out for Ethiopian food in the city, then to some blues bar, where we all got hammered. He preferred the weak and dependent version of my mother, the woman who hated to be alone, who crumpled with relief when he claimed her, one arm around her shoulders in the wide front seat of his Chevy Suburban.

*

The coat is decadent and oily with the glamour of cruelty. It puzzles my dog. She can't understand it, but seems to know it has something to do with death, the cold. I body slam it out of the way when I grab the upright vacuum cleaner, rummage for shopping bags, locate a lost glove. The coat is my burden to bear. I'm its caretaker now.

*

His truck, his rules. We were at his drunk mercy, in his world where “whoever pays, says.” Seventy miles an hour down black tar at two in the morning, I thought of the extra plates of injera bread rolled like spa towels, the club’s cover and two-drink minimum, Mom’s mortgage, back taxes, her recent root canal. I clenched the handhold in the passenger door as centrifugal force pushed my face against the glass. Sparks from Mom’s cigarette out the window splashed orange onto the pavement.

*

When she was alive, my mother had a carnivorous lust for life. She weighed 100 pounds and wore layers to soften her edges. I remember her long neck, doorknob-sized rhinestone broaches on her lapels, purple cowboy boots on her elegant monkey feet. Her love for me, her only child, had felt fierce and rabid, the superhuman kind that enabled women to lift Volvos off trapped newborns. When he was around, that mom vanished, and I was on my own.

*

Blues guitar on the truck stereo like a man sobbing then a flash in the high-beams, all at once a terrified raccoon the size of a crawling toddler. Its fur lit up silver, eyes giant gold sequins. Three frantic kits scrambled behind, desperate to survive. Sweat down his neck, a fish-tail swerve, then two rapid circular thuds, fast, under a front wheel, sneakers in a dryer and Mom’s eyes clamped tight. Panting, his whisky breath steamed up the car like rotten bananas.

*

Fur storage is as expensive as rent, so the coat droops from a thick plastic hanger in the front closet, even in summer, its black satin insides dank and slippery. Silent and lying in wait, it pulses with regret and smells like the peppery humid skin of a mourning night animal.

*

Out of the car, he staggered up the stairs to bed, clothes and all, Mom right behind him, her green eyes like cracked marbles. Alone, I ran my finger under the wheel well to touch the blood, wet and red as my own. That Christmas, an extravagant engagement gift from her husband-to-be, an inside joke between them, a blue raccoon fur coat in a white cardboard box as big as a sheet cake.

*

*

Tonight, I'm somehow an adult in New Jersey, with a house, a family, a life of my own. My peach-colored dog and I venture out into the dead of night. I wear the blue raccoon coat. Our breath clouds hang in paper-crisp air. We're on high-alert for mitten-pawed foxes, squint-faced opossum, leathery bats, and velvet-antlered deer- all the nocturnal suburban creatures whose hearts quicken at our approach. At this noiseless hour, under this icy moon white as Ivory soap, in this heavy hot coat I can't wear and I can't get rid of, I finally allow myself to feel the insistent constant throb—*my mother, my mother, my mother.*



Lost Among the Hills by Oormila Vijayakrishnan Prahlad

You have cancer
by Stacy R. Nigliazzo

I wait seven hours in the hibiscus room

while they pluck it out.

Night petals the pane. I save you

the brightest star,

its blooming blue heart.

Seven Haiku

by Cordelia Hanemann

narrative of a day of snow/ a breaking relationship

i

all day clouds gather
temperatures start to fall
snow is coming soon

ii

snowflakes dance all day
twirl about : alive with light
until they are done

iii

love makes angel-wings
falling snow fills all with white
leaving and forgetting

iv

white covers the roads
all-wheel tires pound precious snow
into slicks of ice

v

scarecrow in a field
filled with winter/ snow & ice
alone in the room

vi

icicles drip spikes
from eaves/ windows & doorsills
painful as cut glass

vii

leaden winter sky
filled : a flurry of snowflakes
whirls of scattered thoughts

Hogs and spiders

by Inga Piotrowska

Sadness is the stubborn layer of fat
rolling on your stomach
soft but protruding
yellowish, slimy, difficult to shed.

Lard melting on your tongue,
slowly spreading all over the throat
tasting of the hog they killed last week.

It's the crumbs of bread, shattered glass
dirt brought in from outside
hidden within the fibers of dusty carpet
that you try to beat, but wind always
blows filth right into your eyes.

Sadness—

lives on legs of the spider
you smashed with your shoe this morning.
Metastasis happens rapidly,
spreads through the pipes and mould on the walls.

You lie there, looking at the spider's corpse
buried in the carpet

with fat building up roll after roll.

Obese existence,
rigor mortis.



Primeval Blues by Oormila Vijayakrishnan Prahlad

Poem Began When I Loved You

by Melissa Strilecki

I don't mind a gimmick
in a poem the words play
 a circuit completes
 this breach of the fourth wall

We amount to lists: images
waiting for the rushing back
cling to momentum and never catch up
feel most human as we fail

Phone cupped to sternum
 each mid
night missive
trickles into sleep's well
where I am picking through
our early nests what little doves
Every way of not saying, I—

In my favorite scene, Molly Grue
screams at *The Last Unicorn* in the world
in that hoarse, warbling voice she has, the voice of a woman who has—
why did you not come to me sooner
why do you come to me
now when I am this

I've decided against the last line: *poem finished when I loved you*
it took too long and

I've been too sad for weeks
and like every other time, I wonder
how I will ever pull myself out and
like every other time, I cannot
write and think, Lord, how,
then,

do I save myself but then I write
in a madness I write

*I punish every man I ever
love they should
have found me sooner*

Contributors' Biographies

JC Alfier's (they/them) most recent book, *The Shadow Field*, was published by Louisiana Literature Press (2020). Journal credits include *The Emerson Review*, *Faultline*, *New York Quarterly*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Penn Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and *Vassar Review*. They are also an artist doing collage and double-exposure work.

Julia C. Alter holds an MFA in Poetry from the Vermont College of Fine Arts. Her poetry has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, and appeared in numerous print and online journals. Recent poems can be found in *Fugue*, *The Santa Clara Review*, *Voicemail Poems*, and *Stained: An Anthology of Writing About Menstruation*. She lives in Vermont with her son. www.alterpoetry.com.

Laura Apol is a widely-published poet and writer, and an associate professor at Michigan State University. Her work has appeared in numerous literary journals, and she is the author of several prize-winning collections of poetry, most recently *A Fine Yellow Dust* (2021, winner of the Midwest Book Award). A past poet laureate for the Lansing-area, Laura conducts creative writing workshops internationally, nationally, and locally.

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

Jessica "Jess" Ballen is a queer, Jewish, neurodivergent poet who is currently working on their MFA in creative writing at Antioch University. They live in Eugene, OR with their husband, three cats, and two guinea piggi pigs. Their book "Kosher" was released in early 2023.

Gabriel Blackmann (He/him) is an emerging Trinidadian writer and poet. He holds a BA in Literatures in English from the University of The West Indies. His work is concerned with trauma, personal mythology and belonging. His first published poem “The Lovers” was featured in Remington Review’s Winter 2023 issue.

Sarah(Qiuqi) Bovold, a nonfiction writer originally from Beijing, China. Her work can be found at Words&Whispers, Rabid Oak, Drunk Monkeys, and elsewhere. Sarah loves traveling, good food, and writing. She’s currently drinking her tea or coffee in the Midwest.

David Boyle has painted many oil paintings since the mid-nineties, which have sold well in Wellington, Palmerston Nth and has sold sculptures from Hastings City gallery New Zealand. David’s art has been seen in online magazines and paperbacks such as Last Leaves, The Woodward Review, Five on the Fifth, Radar Poetry, with more coming. His website is boyleswellington.

Dan Brotzel is the author of a collection of short stories, Hotel du Jack, and a novel, The Wolf in the Woods (both from Sandstone Press). He is also co-author of a comic novel, Work in Progress (Unbound). His new book, Awareness Daze (Sandstone Press) – detailing his attempt to observe a different fake holiday every day for a whole year – is out November 2023. More at www.danbrotzel.com

Genesis Castello lives in Chicago and is a senior at DePaul University, studying English as well as Women’s and Gender Studies. She is a horror movie enjoyer who adores writing and learning about all of the strangest and loveliest parts of life. You can find her on instagram @ genesisofarc.

Janelle Cordero is an interdisciplinary artist and educator living in Spokane, WA. Her writing has been published in dozens of literary journals, including Harpur Palate, Autofocus and Hobart, while her paintings have been featured in venues throughout the Pacific Northwest. Janelle is the author of four books of poetry, including Impossible Years (Vegetarian Alcoholic Press, 2022). Stay connected with Janelle’s work at www.janellecordero.com and follow her on Instagram.

Deborrah Corr lives in Seattle. She is a retired teacher whose work is now the joy and craft of poetry. Her poems have appeared or will appear soon in several journals including Catamaran, Streetlight Magazine, The Main Street Rag, Crosswinds Poetry Journal, New Feathers Anthology, Amethyst Review and others. She is at work on her first collection.

Kelly DuMar is a poet, playwright and workshop facilitator from Boston. She's author of four poetry collections, including *jinx* and *heavenly calling*, published by Lily Poetry Review Books in March 2023. Her poems are published in *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Thrush*, *Glassworks*, *Flock* and more. Kelly teaches a variety of creative writing workshops, in person and online, and she teaches Play Labs for the International Women's Writing Guild and the Transformative Language Arts Network. Kelly produces the Featured Open Mic for the *Journal of Expressive Writing*. Reach her at kellydumar.com

Sydney Faith is a Midwestern writer and poet. Drawing on a childhood of rural adventures and strange occurrences, her work explores emotional haunting and healing through the mundane and magical. She has been previously published in *Blood Orange Review* and *Déraciné*.

Jean Anne Feldeisen is a practicing psychotherapist, a grandmother, and a writer. She has written for "Next Avenue," "Chicken Soup for the Soul," and is a host for the *Crows Feet: Life As We Age* Podcast. Her poetry has been published in "The Raven's Perch," "The Hopper," and "Spank the Carp." Her first poetry chapbook, *Not All Are Weeping*, was released in May of 2023 by Main Street Rag Publishing Company. Follow her at jeanfeldeisen.com

Max Gillette is working towards an MFA in creative writing at Ohio State University, where they were awarded a Dean's Graduate Enrichment Fellowship. Max's poetry has appeared in *HAD*, *Sage Cigarettes*, *Punk Monk Magazine*, *Cutbow Quarterly*, *Defunkt Magazine*, and other journals.

Katie Grierson has been recognized by YoungArts and the Academy of American Poets, and is an alumni of the Adroit Journal Summer Mentorship Program. She is a prose editor for Lumiere Review, and her work has appeared in *Body Without Organs*, *Rejected Lit*, and *Wrongdoing Mag*, among others.

Cordelia Hanemann, writer and artist, currently co-hosts *Summer Poets*, a poetry critique group in Raleigh, NC. Professor emerita retired English professor, she conducts occasional poetry workshops and is active with youth poetry in the North Carolina Poetry Society. She is also a botanical illustrator and lover of all things botanical. She has published in numerous journals including, *Atlanta Review*, *Laurel Review*, and *California Review*; in several anthologies including best-selling *Poems for the Ukraine* and her chapbook. Her poems have been performed by the Strand Project, featured in select journals, won awards and been nominated for Pushcarts. She is now working on a novel about her Cajun roots.

Karina Jha is a Ukrainian-Nepalese literary enthusiast from Northampton, Massachusetts. She is currently working toward a BA in Writing, Literature, and Publishing at Emerson College in Boston. Her work is centered around exploring themes of femininity, multi-cultural identity, and the melding of fantasy and reality. She has won multiple awards for poetry, short story, and flash fiction, and has been published in several literary magazines, and by Wilde Press at Emerson College. To see more of her work, visit ipivonia.wixsite.com/portfolio.

Richard Jordan is a Ph.D. mathematician. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Rattle* (finalist in the 2022 *Rattle Poetry Prize* competition), *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *New York Quarterly*, *Sugar House Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *The Atlanta Review*, *The National Poetry Review*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, *Rappahannock Review*, *Rust & Moth*, *Little Patuxent Review*, and elsewhere. Three of his prose poems have been chosen to appear in *Fantastic Imaginary Creatures*, an anthology of contemporary prose poetry due out by Madville Publishing in spring 2024.

Elizabeth Kirkpatrick-Vrenios' award-winning chapbook, *Special Delivery*, was published in 2016. Nominated for a Pushcart three times, she has poems published in numerous anthologies and journals, is Professor Emerita from American University and has spent much of her life as a singing artist. Her latest chapbook is *Empty the Ocean with a Thimble*, published in 2021 by Word Tech Communications. Her third book *Concerto for an Empty Frame* will come out in October from Kelsay Books.

Linda Laderman is a Michigan writer and poet, and the recipient of the 2023 Harbor Review Jewish Women's Poetry Prize. Her first poem was published in 2021, soon after her 71st birthday. For nearly a decade, she volunteered as a docent at the Zekelman Holocaust Center near Detroit. Her poetry has been published in many journals, including *SWWIM*, *The Writer's Foundry Review*, *Poetica Magazine*, *3rd Wednesday*, *ONE ART*, and *The Scapegoat Review*. She belongs to the Poetry Craft Collective, a cohort of poets who review and encourage each other's writing. More at lindaladerman.com.

Susanna Lang divides her time between Chicago and Uzès, France. Her most recent chapbook, *Like This*, is available from Unsolicited Books, and her e-chapbook, *Among Other Stones: Conversations with Yves Bonnefoy*, (*Mudlark: An Electronic Journal of Poetry & Poetics*) was published in 2021. Her third full-length collection of poems, *Travel Notes from the River Styx*, was published in 2017 by Terrapin Books; *My Soul Has No Corners*, her translation of poems by Souad Labbize, is forthcoming this year from *Diálogos*. Her poems, translations and reviews have appeared or are forthcoming in such publications as *The Common*, *december magazine*, *Asymptote*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *American Life in Poetry*, *Rhino Reviews*, *Mayday* and *The Slowdown*. Her translations of poetry by Yves Bonnefoy include *Words in Stone* and *The Origin of Language*, and she is now working with Souad Labbize and Hélène Dorion on new translations. More information available at www.susannalang.com.

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

Jennifer LeBlanc earned an MFA in Creative Writing from Lesley University. Her first full-length book, *Descent*, was published by *Finishing Line Press* (2020) and was named a *Distinguished Favorite in Poetry* (2021) by the *Independent Press Award*. Individual poems have been published or are forthcoming in journals such as *Consequence*, *The Adirondack Review*, *CAIRN*, *The Main Street Rag*, and *Melusine*. Jennifer is a poetry reader for *Kitchen Table Quarterly*. She was nominated for a 2013 *Pushcart Prize* and works in the English Department at Tufts University.

Robert Lunday is the author of *Mad Flights* (Ashland Poetry Press, 2002), *Gnome* (Black Sun Lit, 2017), and *Disequilibria: Meditations on Missingness* (University of New Mexico Press, 2023), a hybrid memoir about disappearance selected by Rigoberto Gonzalez as the 2022 winner of the *River Teeth Literary Nonfiction Award*. He lives in Houston, Texas.

Mia Marion is a poet, writer and citizen of a metropolis considered modern, currently based in the East Village of New York. More of her essays and creative non-fiction are available at oliveperson.substack.com.

Janet Mason's book, *Tea Leaves*, a memoir of mothers and daughters was published by Bella Books in 2012. Her novel *THEY*, a biblical tale of secret genders was published by Adelaide Books (New York and Lisbon), also the publisher of her novel *The Unicorn, The Mystery* late in 2020. Her novel *Loving Artemis*, an endearing tale of revolution, love and marriage was published by Thorned Heart Press in August of 2022. Her work has been widely anthologized and has been published in numerous journals, including the *Brooklyn Review* and *Sinister Wisdom*. "Dancing the Polka" is her first piece in *Thimble*.

Melissa McEver Huckabay's writing has appeared in *SWWIM*, *Poetry South*, *Defunkt*, and elsewhere, and her short fiction has won the *Spider's Web Flash Fiction Prize* from *Spider Road Press*. She has an MFA in poetry from *Texas State University*, and lives in *Central Texas* with her husband, son, and two affectionate cats. Twitter: *melpsoul*

Mark J. Mitchell has worked in hospital kitchens, fast food, retail wine and spirits, conventions, tourism, and warehouses. He has also been a working poet for almost 50 years. An award-winning poet, he is the author of five full-length poetry collections, and six chapbooks. His latest collection is *Something To Be* from *Pski's Porch Publishing*. He is very fond of baseball, *Louis Aragon*, *Miles Davis*, *Kafka*, *Dante*, and his wife, activist and documentarian *Joan Juster*. He lives in *San Francisco*, where he makes his marginal living pointing out pretty things. He can be found reading his poetry here: <https://www.youtube.com/@markj.mitchell4351> A meager online presence can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/MarkJMitchellwriter/> A web site now exists: <https://www.mark-j-mitchell.square.site/> He sometimes tweet @Mark J Mitchell_Writer

KG Newman is a sportswriter who covers the *Broncos* and *Rockies* for *The Denver Post*. His first four collections of poems are available on *Amazon* and he has been published in scores of literary journals worldwide. The *Arizona State University* alum is on *Twitter* @*Kyle-NewmanDP* and more info and writing can be found at kgnewman.com. He is the poetry editor of *Hidden Peak Press* and he lives in *Hidden Village, Colorado*, with his wife and three kids.

Stacy R. Nigliazzo is a nurse, an MFA fellow at the University of Houston Creative Writing Program, and an award-winning poet. She teaches medical humanities to physicians-in-training at Baylor College of Medicine as part of the Humanities Expression & Arts Lab (HEAL).

Michael Noonan comes from Halifax (home of the Piece Hall), West Yorkshire. Has a background in retail, food production and office work. He has had artworks published in literary journals in the US, UK, and internationally, including *After the Pause*, *Utopia Science Fiction Magazine*, *Noctvigant Press*, *Baby Teeth Journal*, the *Odd Magazine*, *Wild Roof Journal*, *Press Pause Press*, the *Hooghly Review*, *Last Leaves Magazine*, *The Concrete Desert Review*, *805 Lit+Art!*, *Qwerty*, *Suspended Magazine*, *Full House Literary Magazine*, and *Spellbinder*, literary and arts quarterly. He won a runners up prize for a black and white line drawing in a competition run by *Arts and Illustrators Magazine* in the UK. His own painting can be seen on the cover of a volume of his short stories, entitled, *SEVEN TALL TALES*, that is available at Amazon.

Susan Nordmark's writing appears in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *New World Writing Quarterly*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Los Angeles Review*, *Bellingham Review*, *Tiny Molecules*, *Five Minutes*, and many other journals. She is a fourth-generation Kansan and now lives in Northern California.

Em Norton is a queer poet from Toronto. You can read more of Em's work at emnortonwrites.com.

Adrienne Pilon (she/her) is a writer, editor, teacher, and booster of small literary magazines. Recent and forthcoming work appears in *Minyan Magazine*, *The Tiger Moth Review*, *The Linden Review* and elsewhere. She lives in North Carolina and sometimes other places with her family.

Inga Piotrowska is a Polish poet and translator currently living in Manchester, UK. Her first poetry book was published in Poland in 2018. Her English poetry was chosen to be published in *harana poetry*, *Wild Roof Journal* and *Eye to the Telescope*.

Christine Potter lives in a very old house in New York's Hudson River Valley. Her poetry has appeared in Rattle, Sweet, Mobius, Eclectica, Kestrel, Autumn Sky Poetry Daily, Third Wednesday, and was featured on ABC Radio News. She has poetry forthcoming in The Midwest Quarterly and The Rappahannock Review. Her time-traveling young adult series, The Bean Books, is published by Evernight Teen, and her most recent collection of poems, Unforgetting, is on Kelsay Books.

Samuel Prince's debut collection, *Uterior Atmospheres*, was published in 2020 by Live Canon. His work has recently appeared in *Acumen*, *The Broken Spine*, *Pedestal* and *Spelt*. He lives in Norfolk (UK). More information can be found at www.samuelprince.co.uk

Donna Pucciani, a Chicago-based writer, has published poetry worldwide in *Shi Chao Poetry*, *Poetry Salzburg*, *Li Poetry*, *ParisLitUp*, *Journal of Italian Translation*, *The Pedestal*, *Thimble*, and other magazines. Her seventh and latest book of poetry is *EDGES*.

Claudia M. Reder is the author of *How to Disappear*, a poetic memoir, (Blue Light Press, 2019). *Uncertain Earth* (Finishing Line Press), and *My Father & Miro* (Bright Hill Press). *How to Disappear* was awarded first prize in the Pinnacle and Feathered Quill awards. She was awarded the Charlotte Newberger Poetry Prize from *Lilith Magazine*, and two literary fellowships from the Pennsylvania Arts Council. She attended Millay Colony, NAPA Writer's Conference and The Valley. She recently retired from teaching at California State University at Channel Islands where she included poetry and storytelling in her classes. Her poetry ms. *Appointment with Worry* was a finalist for the Inlandia Institute Hillary Gravendyk Prize. You can find more information at: <https://www.claudiareder.com/> and <https://yetzirahpoets.org/jewish-poets-database/>

Martina Reisz Newberry is the author of 7 books of poetry. Her newest book is "Glyphs" (Deerbrook Editions). She's been widely published in journals and magazines in the U.S. and abroad. She lives in the city of her dreams, Los Angeles, CA."

Aaron Sandberg has appeared or is forthcoming in *Lost Balloon*, *Flash Frog*, *Phantom Kangaroo*, *Qu*, *Asimov's*, *No Contact*, *Alien Magazine*, *The Shore*, *The Offing*, *Sporklet*, *Crow & Cross Keys*, *Whale Road Review*, and elsewhere. A multiple *Pushcart* and *Best of the Net* nominee, you can see him—and his writing—on Instagram @aaronsandberg.

Deborah J. Shore has spent most of her life housebound or bedridden with sudden onset severe ME/CFS. This neuroimmune illness has made engagement with and composition of literature costly and, during long seasons, impossible. Nonetheless, she has won poetry competitions at the *Anglican Theological Review* and the *Alsop Review* and has been published in *Christianity & Literature*, *THINK*, *Christian Century*, *The Orchards Poetry Journal*, *Relief Journal*, and *Ekstasis*, among others.

C. Henry Smith is from West Texas but now makes poems in Brooklyn. He is the author of the chapbook *Warren* (Ghost City Press), and his work has appeared in *Colorado Review*, *DMQ Review*, *Psaltery & Lyre*, *Peach Velvet Mag*, and others. He received his MFA at Oregon State University and is grateful for past residencies through Spring Creek Project and Chicago Art Department. @chenrysmith

Sara Sowers-Wills teaches linguistics and writing at the University of Minnesota Duluth. Her poems have appeared in *Sonic Boom*, *Thunderbird Review*, *Jet Fuel Review*, *Pleiades*, *Interim*, *Denver Quarterly*, and elsewhere. Her work is fueled by the explosive sunrises over Lake Superior and extreme temperatures in Duluth, Minnesota, where she lives with her husband and two daughters.

Melissa Strilecki has been previously published in Sugar House Review, Hyacinth Review, Faultline, Gordon Square Review, Rogue Agent, Volume Poetry, The Shore, and Variant Literature where she helps read poetry submissions. Work is forthcoming in West Trade Review. Melissa lives in Seattle and tweets occasionally @meliski81.

Misha Sumar is a Pakistani writer who moved to the United States in 2012 to study at Sarah Lawrence College. She has been a member of the Brooklyn Writers Collective since 2020 and currently lives in the Netherlands with her partner and their emotionally unavailable rescue dog.

Arlaina Tibensky's writing has appeared in One Story, McSweeney's Internet Tendency, Smokelong Quarterly, Stanchion and elsewhere and has been anthologized in New Stories from the Midwest 2018. Her YA novel about a girl obsessed with Sylvia Plath, *And Things Fall Apart*, was a Junior Library Guild Selection. She is working on a new novel.

Kendra Whitfield lives and writes on the southern edge of the northern boreal forest. When not writing, she can be found basking in sunbeams on the back deck or swimming laps at the local pool. Her poetry has been published by Beyond the Veil Press and Community Building Art Works.

Allison Whittenberg's novels are *Sweet Thang*, *Hollywood and Maine*, *Life is Fine*, *Tutored* (Random House 2006, 2008, 2009, and 2010). Her work has appeared in *Flying Island*, *Feminist Studies*, *Inconclast*, and *The Ekphrastic Review*. She is the author of the full-length short story collection, *Carnival of Reality* (Loyola University Press, 2022). Whittenberg is a six-time Pushcart Prize nominee.

Ellen Zhang is a physician-writer who has studied under Pulitzer Prize winner Jorie Graham and poet Rosebud Ben-Oni. She has been recognized by the DeBakey Poetry Prize, Dibase Poetry Contest, and as a National Student Poet Semifinalist. Her works appear or are forthcoming in *Chestnut Review*, *The Shore Poetry*, *Hekton International*, and elsewhere.

Cover artist: Oormila Vijayakrishnan Prahlad is an Indian-Australian artist and poet. Her art has been featured on the covers and within the pages of several literary journals and anthologies including Amsterdam Quarterly Yearbook, The Storms Journal, Stonecoast Review, and Pithead Chapel. She lives and works in Lindfield, on traditional Gammeragal land. Find her @oormilaprahlad and www.instagram.com/oormila_paintings