

Thimble Literary Magazine

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Thimble Literary Magazine

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Our staff consists of Nadia Arioli, Editor-in-Chief and Managing Editor; Agnes Vojta, Associate Poetry Editor; Clara Bush Vadala, Associate Poetry Editor; Richard Jordan, Associate Poetry Editor; Melissa McEver Huckabay, Associate Poetry Editor; Aliah Fabros, Associate Poetry Editor; Mark David Noble, Associate Poetry Editor; Izzy Maxson, Associate Poetry Editor; Jeanne Griggs, Poetry Reader; Sally Brown, Art Editor; Walker Smart, Prose Editor. We also have layout and design editors for our print and web editions: Katie Yacharn, Caroline Whetstone.

Cover art: *under* by J. I. Kleinberg

Back cover: *the asphalt* by J. I. Kleinberg

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

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Brief Guidelines for Submission

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

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

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

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

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

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Editor's Note

by Nadia Arioli

Dear Readers,

Fall is the time of wooden ghosts. All my dreams have been about ghosts. You can easily blame the seasons: the leaves are incandescent with death. But something happened in my life right before issue 8.1 came out. It mimicked q11a poem we already selected for publication in this issue, 8.2: Dara Goodale's "Commune with the dead via voicemail." I got word my dear friend had passed, I yelled a bad word, and then called him up immediately. He—as you might imagine—didn't answer. So, this issue, for me, is haunted.

Meanwhile, voicemails fill up until they are no longer useable. Meanwhile, the birds are departing. Meanwhile, the moon goes through its phases. Meanwhile, the vultures usher home the roadkill. Meanwhile, it's colder, and I feel alone. It's hard not to go bleak in the face of so much bleakness.

I once told my friend that I have a hard time being vulnerable. I'm loud and crass and abrasive. Affection does not come easily to me. But there is, luckily, a secret to saying something soft: stick it in parentheses, so that no one can hurt it, ever. Instead of writing "I love you," write "(I love you)," and then nothing will ever undo it.

The imaginative leap between parentheses and thimbles is not far. If

you can't do big things to keep yourself safe, do small things. Hold your hands over your head if it starts to hail, or curve them into parentheses if you have to say something important.

(Thank you for being here.)

(The poet Laurie Koensgen is right: the moon is a scar is a moon is a scar.)

(This structure is for you, if you need it, too.)

(But this one is for Ian.)

(Love,)

Nadia Arioli

Soup

by Elizabeth MacDuffie

In the café with the small stage in the back, we
three women play music and sing and dance.
We sing to a Portishead song.
We play seven inch singles.
One of us goes to change the record and
it rolls under the table.
The side by side turntables become burners
so we stop singing and dancing and
make soup.

Everything is Burning

by Lisa Bellamy

When I try deep-breathing, I gag;
my beloved gasps without respite.
Something—more terrible
than smoke—smothers us.
It seems the sun sets seven times daily—
I trust no one in this new land;
I need to pack up, drive pronto,
with my beloved to our tiny country house:
it is time for my new energy—not a hybrid,
but a mind-powered car; time
to hover between heaven and earth,
lift my hands from the wheel, gaze into space.
I need to withdraw to countryside,
like an official bowing away from Court.
My nation devastates me.
*Tell the bees, elders say, when the one
you loved has died—but I whisper:
Don't wait. We need to tell them everything
is burning; everywhere, black holes
swallow suns. Without restraint,
bees fly among the six realms—
bringing tidings from our human lives.
Haste, haste: we need to tell them
who we are, who we love.
Someone needs to hear our song.*

Spring in the Valley

by Julie Shulman

My father had a scar running
down his chest, drawing a half-circle around
his navel and continuing down.
At the hotel pool people would stare
but he didn't mind—another chance to describe
the ill-fated back flip off a ski jump,
and the way they split him “half-way open”
to remove a ruptured spleen.
After the surgery, other organs
took over its work
knowing what was needed,
not involving him in the matter at all.

The body knows things.
A yawn feels good,
that stretch of inhale
working its way through the body,
but even scientists don't know why humans yawn.
Air into capillaries—
these old travelers,
cascade to the farthest ends of toes
whispering to parts we will never see.
Life wants life the way a valley wants spring.

Between This Scar and That Task

by Lauren Camp

Upland forest: sweet gum, redbud,
maple, redolent ozone poorly
mannered, dew-rimmed and branched through.
Tulip poplar floated above. The spine
of trail takes us to a green riot
weave. Tiny swimming
tadpoles in the creek and looking
down into them I don't
care what I see except I don't
see harm. The day answers everything
after a pause. Autumn slouches and reminds me
of nothing. Just the air and not
our regular invasions.
No one is responsible for light.

This Place is Called the Body of Christ

by Azalea Aguilar

if I squint my eyes tight
Citgo refineries twinkle and tower
like cathedrals in the distance
smell of salt at the city line
dad always under
the hood of his Mustang
oil shapes like butterflies
on the thighs of his Levis
every Sunday he takes his
boat on the water to pray
mom insists on petticoats for me
I scratch my thighs the whole of mass

stand stand stand
kneel kneel kneel

peace be with you and also with you
I wait patiently, quietly, because I know
there will be barbacoa tacos after
we take ocean drive to grandma's
white frothy waves race us to the finish
I crank open the backseat window
sea breeze kisses my cheeks

peace be with you and also with you
I wait patiently, quietly, because I know
there will be barbacoa tacos after
we take ocean drive to grandma's
white frothy waves race us to the finish
I crank open the backseat window
sea breeze kisses my cheeks
stick my whole head out
the way my Labrador taught me
we make a pit stop at the T-heads
in case dad comes home empty handed
I can already smell the cornmeal
hear the hiss of oil when batter hits the pan
our Sunday mass



The Transient Blessings of Nature I by Michael C. Roberts

the shape of things

by Judith A Hansen

It's raining and you've opened all the windows
the thick Ficus leaves gather up
the wind and staccato rain
even the sanitation truck
its shrill beep sounds watered

every sound feels intentional

Earlier this spring you installed new guttering
on the house, we watched the sweet tricklings
slope down the driveway to the street
from the metal mouth of it

every sound comes from its shape
Sound depends on shape
a watering can
tinny at first, deepens
as it fills

Just like us, the way we were made
the way we were placed in the world
heaved, unfurled, or crashing down
by whose gloved hand
are we placed in a warm pocket
or left there on the shore
hatchlings crawling back to sea

we open to the rain

And you, Mother—
you were like a pebble skipping across the surface of a lake

and later, when your step became heavier
when the reservoir filled and your stories ran long
your voice bellowed from an impossible deep

Creature of Habit

by Claire Wolters

A reliable nuisance,
every day, the same.

Each morning my dog's snout
searches for evidence of my existence,
inching closer, nose wet with hope
that I may wake and say his name.

I have never considered
myself a creature of anything,
and how dare I marry
creature behavior
to shame.

My human-ness is what invited
such second-guessing.
Routinely ignoring instincts buried within me,
I cling to false promises of survival.

So I uphold my little rituals,
a safe cave of what's known.
If I follow my recipe of reassurance,
each step with precision,
nothing
will happen to
me.

In the Beginning

by Nancy Cherry

The world made sense, and I believed that
even though we'd never met, Jesus loved us.
It made sense we'd sing about his many colors
in Sunday School which reminded me
of colored Easter eggs—how each one tastes
the same, and we'd have our picture taken
beneath the beveled mirror over the mantel
where I stood with my sister and my
three cousins who arrive late from the ranch
on Shiloh Road before their pony ran terrified,
dragging me over gravel, one ankle caught
in the stirrup as the sun fell behind the barn
at a time I didn't care about grades or
housework but enjoyed the smell of eucalyptus,
and how the damp scent of concrete spoke
of rain on winter mornings that came before.

The Metaphorical Dog

by Katherine Riegel

Chasing the shadows of leaves, rolling in real
mud, the metaphorical dog doesn't have a name

and doesn't need one. She knows more about the sky
than any human alive: how it spins, a tall vase

shaped and reshaped by vast hands, blue to light
blue to midnight blue to pink orange gray red

and all the blues slippery as waves. *There's always
a dog in your poems*, a friend once told me, *though*

sometimes it's metaphorical. The metaphorical dog
lives more in her body every moment

than I do over the whole long cycle of a day,
plopping her rump suddenly to the ground

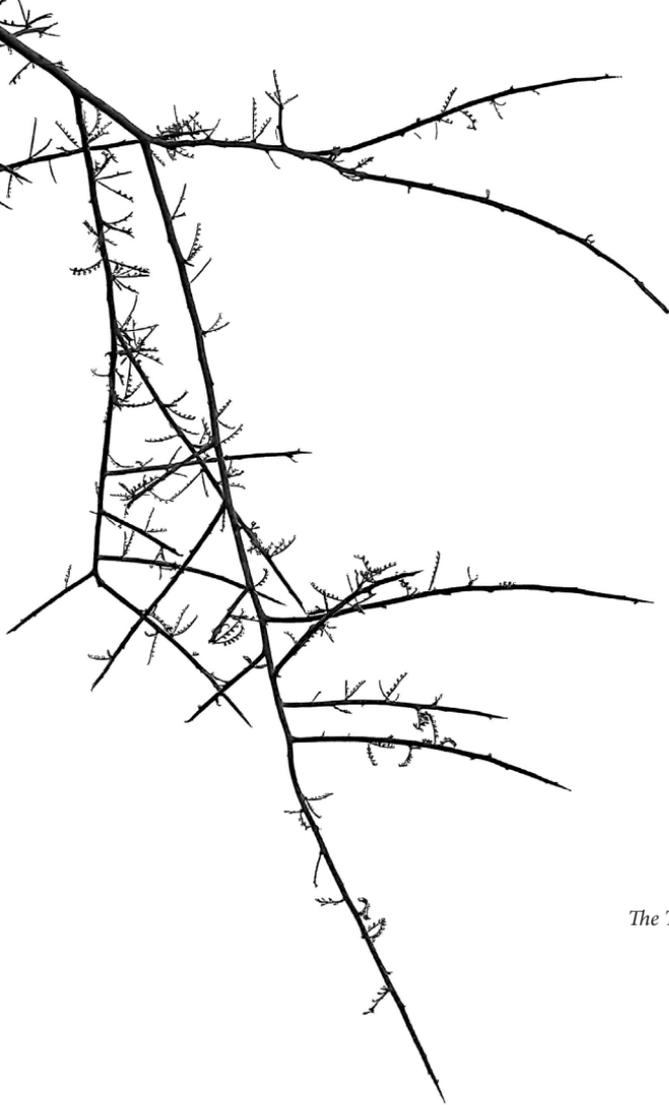
so she can scratch her silky ear, every motion
joyous and fluent. She carries Whitman's best lines

in her mouth, drops them at my feet and looks up,
panting her doggy laugh. Am I a poem, despite

my cloak of failures? She won't say, her tail
shedding stars as she trots away, each wag

throwing off drops of light from her swim
in the river most of us are still seeking a map for

down unlikely alleyways, under velvet concert seats,
outside our doors when we open them in the morning.



The Transient Blessings of Nature IV
by Michael C. Roberts

Another Swim

by Hilary Sallick

When we swam today
there was darkness growing
and thunder in the distance
Shivering we descended
the steps to the shore
*We'll be out of the wind
once we're in the water*
Da said with a smile

As always he was first
He waded in then turned
and let himself without hesitation
sink backward into the bay
How is it is it cold I called
hip-deep now bracing myself
before I too pushed
through the transition a thrill
into ease

Not far I said still thinking
of storm *Not today* the colors
of the surface were forest-
green with gray-blue flashes
and when I turned my gaze
away from shore the bay stretched out
all silver with bits of light We were

enjoying ourselves swimming and speaking
of swimming *You have to relax to
swim* Da said *You have to let
the water take you* and we
rolled about in the energy
of the waves staying in the cove
coming up once against rocks hidden
under the tide and
surprising us how we'd drifted
inward

Then a few raindrops came
then more *Hurry hurry it's time
to get out* I said— but why
we were already wet and the thunder
had dissolved
in the distance and the raindrops were
bouncing up from the surface
splashing and shining

Blue Hour

by S.D Pergola

Now is not the time
 To look for it—shorelines, skies,
Certainties. The docks creak

 Under the day's retreating light,
Time leadens and we
 Linger, awake, barely.

Soon—we must have faith—
 They will know
What coming storm now dulls the hour,

 Why you shiver now,
In the morning they will know,
 But—
 An owl calls—

Now is not the time.
 In the half-lit present
We can only hold each other, now

 Shut your eyes, be still. Listen
To the tide. Night, that gentle nothing,
 Will be here soon.

When the Swans Were Still With Us

by Jun Ying Wen

Before the pond
grew clotted and
before the move
to a hospital bed
you had swans
eat the rice from
your palms while I
stood off to the side
and you talked about
how their necks so slim
looked like the ladle you
once used to fill my belly
how they could tell us apart
though now you're calling 爸爸
by his brother's name all the words
matted together blotting out the surface
and you used to go to the pond even when
the sky's jowls they were sagging with rain but
the swans haven't told us apart for a year and you
won't pick up when I call and don't say it's because
you've lied down in the room with the foam-white walls
say it's because you're moving your thumb across the screen
before you're on the other end and you're saying my name
saying 回来了, 回来了, I was just on the way home.

Compassionate Witness

by Rachel Barton

—after Käthe Kollwitz’s “*The Survivors*” (1923)

They are merciless, totally without pity.

And we must be all the more merciful ourselves.

—Etty Hillesum in the death camps (from Flinders’ *Enduring Lives*)

We press ourselves into the frame,
our heads touching in a sea of faces,
the elderly masked in grief, others blinded,
the children huddling impossibly close
to feel the touch of the mother.

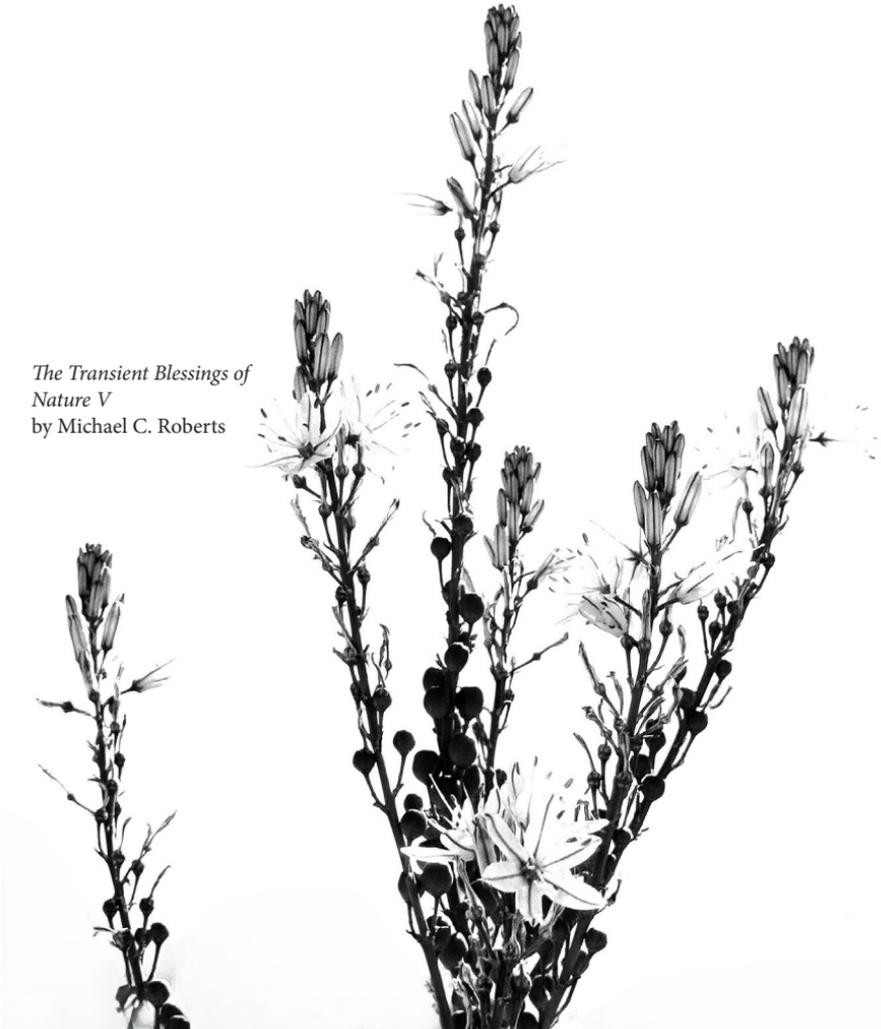
I want to cry but my mouth is pressed
into the flesh of her arm. So many crying in anguish,
or silent in their torment. But I just hold on tight
as *she draws a prayer around us like a wall.*

We are ready to be seen by the artist.

We want to be made visible—
our tired story—the ruins of our lives.

The artist eases our pain
as she renders her image. Nothing pretty
but everything true. The mother
holds the center and we surround her.
We long for a soft warm bosom,
no matter the deep caverns of the mother's eyes.
She holds us as the artist shows the world
there is always more to give and to be given.

*The Transient Blessings of
Nature V*
by Michael C. Roberts



Byd

by Marie Anderson

My husband has finally left for the airport. It hasn't been easy to pretend that all is well with me.

Byd, stretched on the bed, opens her eyes. From her throat, rumbles a purr.

"Oh, Sweetie!" I lay down on the bed and stroke her beautiful white and caramel-colored fur. I know a cat's purr doesn't always mean contentment. It can mean just the opposite.

Byd and I are both old ladies. I'm seventy-three. Byd is sixteen. We've been together fifteen years. She entered my life after my daughter had to give her up because her new guy, whom she later married, was allergic to cats.

The vet suspects that Byd's weight loss and high liver enzymes mean end-stage liver disease. A definite diagnosis would require biopsies, feeding and catheter tubes, hospitalization.

"Is that what you'd want, Byd?" Byd is not in any shape to answer that question. She's stopped eating. I've been wetting her mouth with water. So I'm answering the question for her. Byd's soul will leave body here at her home, surrounded by the smells she knows. Not like my mom, who lingered in a nursing home, a victim of dementia and colon can-

cer, or my dad, paralyzed with Parkinson's.

Byd's people, except for me, are on their way to a long-planned Caribbean cruise: my husband, our three millennial daughters and their husbands, but sadly no grandchildren. Yet. Will I be around to love and spoil a grandchild?

When Byd first got sick, I'd bought travel insurance just on myself, so when Byd neared the end, I cancelled myself from the trip and successfully urged the others to go.

I close my eyes. When I open them next, the room is dark. The nightstand clock shows I've been sleeping three hours!

"Byd?" I flick on the lamp on the nightstand.

Her eyes are closed. Is she breathing? I can't tell.

I fill a cup with water from the bathroom faucet, sprinkle water on Byd's beautiful face. No reaction. She's gone.

"Good girl," I whisper, stroking her soft fur. Already, warmth has left her body.

My loved ones will be gone fourteen days. More than enough time for me to decide if I want to know what that lump in my left breast means.

Keepsake

by Luci Huhn

Three monkeys, none taller than an inch,
fused in bronze, back-to-back, their faces
each the size of my smallest finger nail,
the last thing I chose from my Aunt's apartment
the day we emptied it—*bauble, knickknack*—
small enough to hold in my palm.

When I flip it
over, engraved in print so fine I have to raise it
up to the light—Crane & Breed—it's from
a Cincinnati casket company. They made tiny bulldogs,
camels, monkeys—samples to help a loved one with
the difficult selection—copper, bronze, or steel.

My Aunt's casket—we opted for cherry—reminded
of the orchard in her yard. And now this trinket
sits on my rainbow stack of Post-It notes, or—
more often—in my hand, rolling around like
an odd-shaped river stone.

And though it promises
to keep quiet, not watch my every move, not
listen to my thoughts, like a toy bewitched,
it starts to take up the whole room, the papers and
books, the pictures taped to the walls, the fleece

It floods the view through
the window glass—two-hundred year old oaks,
it fills the whole yard—the deer-eaten hydrangea,
the twelve burning bush I planted last summer
as she faded from us.

Warm in my hand—*curiosity, what-not*—I've no
idea why she had it, who was hers to bury.
But when I remember the year she took me with her
to Florida—just graduated from high-school,
my first plane ride—this *trifle* looms cloud-large,
sky-wide above the wings.

From my window-seat
halfway between heaven and earth, it shadows
Indiana, Kentucky, Georgia. It blankets
all of Florida—built on water—the flesh and
veins of it that drain to the sea we floated in,
the beaches we combed for shells and
bits of colored glass to hold.

Suddenly, California

by Alan Elyshevitz

ignites. Springs heat up. The anxiety of livestock mounts. Birds remain tragically unaware that they're metaphors. The consequence of fire is that silos of carbon shed bad air to the wide world of possums and lumbering bears. Thus, lungs of all creatures inflate like a star before death.

Suddenly, the Eel, like a congressman, seems adorable for want of education. Suddenly, universities fold. Suddenly, filmography clicks frame by frame, singed in a lab on a California hilltop. Suddenly, houses become omens of homelessness. Anaphora dooms their occupants to foot cramps.

We store evacuation in a rusted tank with motor oil or week-old clams. Please take the fire drill seriously. Make better use of pipsqueak mortality and four square inches of imagination.

I Get Credit for Teaching You How to Bend Toward the Light

by John Dorroh

after watching Episode 10 of Maid

When there isn't an instruction book
on how to raise your mother, when her eyebrows
lose their ability to arch with emotion, when everything
you do ends in the crapper, there is always a hole, a crack
in the back of the sofa to accommodate your soul.

You will not stay there forever, or grow gills
behind your ears. Your epidermis will continue
to replace itself and the ducts at the corner of your eyes
will release tears to fall down your cheeks.

You will wake up and face all the monsters
who trip you up and make you wonder why you live.
Just when you feel the urge to jump into a fire,
you see your daughter's smile, her bright blue eyes
that look like delicious blueberries. She will grab
your thumb with her tiny hand and squeeze it tight
in the middle of the night, and you will find
yourself totally absorbed in the most indescribable
love affair in the Universe. It will light your path
and lead you into a new morning.

Faustus in the Everglades

by George Franklin

At a fruit stand in the Everglades, Faustus
Orders a papaya-mango milkshake
That he drinks through an oversized straw.
The parking lot is full, and covers of
Jimmy Buffett songs twang from speakers
On a flatbed truck. Across the road, fields
Have been cleared for construction, and blocks
Of townhouses have replaced the tomatoes
And strawberries. For some reason, Mephistopheles
Wants to see alligators, and there's a farm nearby
With hundreds of them. Faustus is uninterested
In reptiles, especially ones who go months
Between meals and spend most of their time
In the mud. So, he waits at the farm stand, staring
At unusual fruits and bags of arugula. Families
Of tourists from Asia and Northern Europe
Queue up to get their own milkshakes. The parents
Favor key lime, the children chocolate. Faustus
Wanders to some enclosures in back where goats and
Emus search the dust for food pellets, and roosters
Ignore the legs and sneakers of tourists. Mephistopheles
Has returned, appearing from behind a bin of melons.
He tells Faust how he likes to watch the alligators
Jump in the air to catch frozen rats. The rats

The Yellow Voyager by Coralie Pimenta

Drip water in the afternoon heat, and the visitors
Are suitably horrified. Someday, M says, the farm
Will close, and the alligators will be left to fend
For themselves. It's important to enjoy these things
While you can.



Red

by Nancy Kennedy

Leaving a warm bed in January,
with the amaryllis blooming in the window, cardinals gather in the
winter willow.

A rooster comb bobs along the snowy grass
as the hunter totes his heavy self through the ice.

In the back-forty, he waits in the blind, dozing.
Dreaming in color
Dreaming in red
Of the war,
His first car
Of the crimson swish of a taffeta dress
scarlet as sin, a slim regret of a girl,
and the night they lost her ruby ring in Milan, Tennessee.

Above the white-washed blue is the unseen face of Jupiter.
The last leaves of the Sumac hang on.
A twig breaks
and the blood of the deer spills on the ground.

Fall Sunset

by Sarah Seybold

Last glow of autumn light
fills the kitchen's chill.
White cabinets
orange briefly
before darkness
enters empty space.
I take the last apple
from the hanging basket.
For how long after I'm gone
will what I touched still sway?

Colostrum

by Sonya Wohletz

Whatever they would have you believe,
the kept gods and
their powdery vocabularies,
stewing in commotions of unclear motive;

I am the first substance, the first miracle.

Not the skin on skin, the nurses hovering,
slapping, scraping, encasing.
Not the chemicals, slick and eager.
Not the satellite
of the doctor who retrieves his face
from the birth canal
and turns away.

Not even the mother, cloven and delicate;
nor the mouth's motions, which you
essayed so assiduously
those months in the floating realm.

Not the breath—
that which you already claimed as your own.

Rather, I arrive as your first visitor.
And like an apparition I swim briefly in your life,
my remedy proffered as opportunity:
take me in or don't.

While you dreamed it all—
I took up temporary
shelter in the host, like a worme
or an uncorked champagne.

I throat the pleasure of the toast,
for to oil the gravity
of your passage. To bless your necessity,
I fling myself through
the pleading innocence of your
tongue. I ply past the trap door
to your tiny, pea-sized stomach.

Thimble-cupped,
copper-balmed, syrupy
and simple. I seed
the notion of survival into form.

In the first days, you require
so little of me.
And in return, I relinquish
myself fully for you, in minute
slips and dribbles,
I give myself over and
then I vanish.

For you, who won't remember my taste.
For you, who hold the missiles and the missives
whole within your own mouth
and sink the weight of oceans in your refuse.

And yet
I like to think of it like this—
You slip me free of the last generation.
And thus I don't concentrate my power in endings—

I, the original elixir,
sating all who permit my liminal solitudes.

Olan Mills '57

by Eulea Kiraly

Not quite five, she sits sideways
to the camera, looking over her shoulder
in one of those three-quarter profile
poses used by movie stars
and beauty queens in those B&W days.

But she wears her hair in neat
braids and a polished cotton dress
made by her mother. There's no cute
smile and her eyes look up, open,
unwavering, full of quiet reserve.

This country girl was new
to revolving doors and vast
spaces like this hotel lobby
with its mosaic tiles and big chairs—
quiet and noisy, all at the same time.

When the elevator doors
parted, she froze,
looked wild-eyed at her mother,
squeezed her hand, and followed
on to the floating floor.

In the room, a studio set up —
huge roll of white paper,
carpeted step stool, and the man
who did thirty such sittings a day
in small towns across the South.

He knew his business, and his patter
smooth as his Brylcreemed hair.
Her mother, only twenty-four,
laughed at the corny jokes,
but the silent child could not be cajoled.

That day she held her ground.
Soon enough she'd give them
what they wanted—silly
grins and flirtatious smirks.

She'd work for years to reclaim
such bravery and self-possession.



Kindred Spirit Ablaze by Coralie Pimenta

*Golden Shovel with lines from Wislawa
Szyborska's "Landscape" trans. Clare
Cavenagh*

by Sean Thomas Dougherty

A freight train's low moan, or a muted horn's high elision, I
Think of Nina Simone's measures, or Robert Johnson's wail, never
Fails to break the heart into sharps like the nails they use
To hammer into Christ's palms—this is despair

That arrives—not my own—down in my bones since
The world's lament was written long before my mother gave it
The un-thorned crown of my bloody head. & what really
Did we expect from this hard labor—isn't

Every step we take toward our departure, mine
& yours, we step toward the last station & only
Our names are on a list, not by the Lord but given
By the bosses & the cops—as the train rolls on to

The crematorium, reach out your hand & say that too is me:
That man camped along the rails, or that woman begging for
Change. Empty all you have, & what she gives, stash it safe
In your chest, that despair like a secret for your Sister's keeping.

Her Yellow Poncho

by Deanna Benjamin

Consider how the Ocean deposits
waste on the shores, sargassum
& broken glass & brown sand,
a brackish wrack line, like malady,
eternal attempt at climate restitution;

consider how brave the waves, how
they snarl & wail under the moon
& shake off the remains of oily wrecks,
filaments of ruin, of how many, so many,
thousand-billion destinies.

As for April and her yellow poncho,
she slept in a canopy bed beneath tall
steel shadows with mirrors for walls
while her mother wrote obituaries,
disappointment held like life to a shell.

The Librarian

by Rita Maria Martinez

In the medical library he rescues sopping books
and bound journals after a hailstorm shatters
skylights. He deposits volumes in a freezer,
cures and spreads each across his desk,
separates pages to prevent fusing.
Humming industrial-sized fans witness
his first aid, paper towels between still damp
sheets of 300-page textbooks where perforated
lungs, gangrened limbs, and septic bloodstreams
plead for healing. When the boss wants to jettison
print journal collections and textbooks
for extra table and chair space, he crusades
to save the endangered. After flood,
after preservation campaign, he acquires a patience
few possess. One night, depleted post-migraine,
his wife snoozes in their car. He shrugs
off jacket, opens passenger door, reaches
for her arm and waist, guides her into their home
as if handling sheets from a soggy volume,
as if primed for another restoration.

Poem That's Really Just an Excuse to Tell You the Symptoms of Ovarian Cancer

by Jennifer Schomburg Kanke

I. Digestive Changes: Interview, Small 2-Year College, March 2015

While part of my brain organizes lesson plans and tries to remember the school's mission statement, another is hearing Dr. G when I complained about painful periods, and acid reflux (carrots and peanuts randomly a problem) telling me it would all go away if I lost a pound or two, better yet, how about ten.

II. Pelvic Pain: Interview, Large Public 4-Year College Regional Campus, May 2017

Something's wrong, but I don't know it yet, or rather I don't know how awfully wrong it has still to become. I think it's just the same old wrong it's always been, though not always, just the last few years, but that's close enough to always to dismiss it as normal. Pressure in my pelvis, anger at the world (but only three days each month), struggling to balance a 4/4 course load while applying for jobs with 5/5s and 6/6s. Turning down a

second interview, I can't explain to my friend on the search committee how scared I am by the thought of that schedule. Something is wrong, but I don't want her to think I think she works too much, don't want her to think I think I deserve more, more, more, or I guess, it's more like less, less, less. Sometimes less is more.

III. Fatigue: Interview, Public Ivy, April 2018

When the assistant dean asks me what I think should be done with students who fall asleep in classes, I answer wrong, I know I do, saying "Let them sleep, they must need it." That's what I had been saying to myself as I crashed out grading or researching something. That's what I told myself as I struggled my way to campus each morning.

IV. Frequent Urination and Lower Back Pain: Interview, Large Public 4-Year, June 2018

When I ask the secretary for breaks after every hour-long session, I know how suspicious it looks. With my big black purse that rattles and bumps. Would it be less weird if I tell her I really did just need to pee? Yes, every hour. No, I'm not pregnant (Yes, I've taken a test), offer her Advil from my giant bottle. She recognizes the sound of pills on plastic. Should I mention the back pain that never goes away no matter how much stretching and strengthening I do? Would she even care?

V. Constipation and Bloating: Water Cooler, New Job, August 2018

Everyone is sharing tips for constipation.
It's an office full of women, so we
talk about bloating too. It's the
first time I've experienced this and it's
not like in the commercials where the
water weight is just an inconvenience, where
days can pass without a shit and
all that's wrong is you're a woman
and here, take one of our pills.

VI. Ease of Satiety: Lunch Break, March 2019

Apple. That's it. I ate an apple,
leaving my sandwich still in the
breakroom fridge, forgotten.
Finally, I think, this must be
what it feels like for a body to
eat only what it needs, to stop wanting
so god damn much.

Startipping

by Jay Griffith

tonight: the descent of startips

kids wheel around on the middle school blacktop
to catch them, sugar-coated, falling from the sky

like a honeysuckle you have to be taught
to get at their sweetness:

lay
the startip on the broad flat
of your outstretched tongue
where it'll fizzle dissolving
its gentle glow into your mouth
the underside of a lightning bug

the kids line up to see who can send
a fluorescent wad of spit farthest

the adults aren't there, only
generous welkin watching

in a corner of the chain-link fence, two girls are kissing
just to get their whole lips painted
up in light

Incubations

by Anna Jollyette Rogers

The best sunsets she's ever seen live outside the windows that reach from floor to ceiling along one wall of the lab. But as she stands in the kitchen on the opposite side of the building, reheating her last portion from the Indian buffet—the one down the street where she's learned how to fit five small meals into one to-go container—she can only see the sunset as squares of tangerine light, reflections in the windows of the houses that pepper the hills. Some other grad students live in the hills, but why pay so much money when she's going to spend all of her time here anyway?

Her dinner pops dramatically and she notes the arc of fresh splatter as she removes it from the microwave. She doesn't bother wiping it up. The microwave's interior already looks like it's in a paintball tournament and losing to every team. No one bothers. The real lapses in etiquette—the ones that turn to lectures in lab meetings—are forgetting to order more pipette tips, using the last of the TBE buffer, leaving a plant out on your desk during a safety inspection. Anything that could stop the progress of science, whatever little part in it each of them might play.

Finishing her last bite, she drops her bowl into a dishwasher that someone else will eventually run. She never has. The lights click back on as she passes their motion sensors, the hallway vibrating with fluorescent light. In the brightness of the lab, neither Matteo nor Hanh

look up, each engaged in their own tiny cities of tubes. Praveen doesn't look up either, but she's come to expect that. He's hunched over, the hood of his sweatshirt protruding from his lab coat, large headphones conspicuously stretched across his ears.

He's supposed to graduate in two months, but this has been true for at least a year. She can't remember exactly when during that year this silent routine began, when he stopped eating lunch with everyone or joining her for coffee—or when they still grabbed coffee together but it was no longer the same, when it became a rushed event and she could see on his face that every sip was a lost moment, a missed opportunity to finish his experiments.

The timer on her lab bench beeps. Everyone but Praveen turns, briefly, to check whether the alarm is theirs, a forgotten experiment calling for attention. She shuts it off and, with freshly gloved hands, joins the silent motions of her labmates. Tubes snapping open, then closed, the oily swirls of the tiniest injections of liquid, pipette tips ejected against the plastic side of the waste bucket, clattering like dry rice in the bottom of a pot.

She sets another timer. Five minutes.

The sun has slipped below the San Francisco hills, which sit in relief to the still-rosy clouds, almost red from wildfire smoke, which she breathes in. They all do. The building recirculates outside air to vent out any harmful chemicals. They are rescued from the open bottles on their benches by inhaling someone's car engine burning hundreds of miles away.

This time, no one turns when her timer chirps. She resets it after she repeats the same actions—which she will repeat again in another twenty minutes and then in another thirty, and maybe again tomorrow because all of this might not work. It didn't yesterday, and a mild dejection had fallen over the rest of the day like a veil. But that was it, because despite all she gives this place, she can't actually believe her work is worth anything.

With a confidence that can only be born from a lack of understanding, her parents tell people that she's curing cancer. They aren't that wrong in substance, only by a matter of scale, and in that respect, their error is incalculable. She also used to think she was doing something important, even if her goals weren't that lofty, but such a hope would be embarrassing to admit. It would be unscientific. Because she has the data, from all of the other graduate students who've stood in sunless labs. Her experiments will fail and fail again, until she abandons the project for a less ambitious one, and then maybe, one day, she'll succeed. Her name will be stamped at the top of a paper that she will write over countless coffee-drenched evenings, and it will come out a few years after she graduates, after she's been asked to revise it and collect more data, only to be told it's not enough again and again. Still, when it's all done, she'll feel proud for a moment, seeing her name hover above the payroll. And if she's lucky, twelve other papers will cite it. Maybe some people will even read it too.

She looks across the aisle at Praveen, his face touched by the blue glow of his computer, which he leans toward, his spine bent like a flower just beginning to wilt. What are they working so hard for? There are the easy answers—passion, fascination—which are not completely untruthful. But there are also the unspeakable ones—glory, approval. Those still somehow seem better than the simplest answer: that objects in motion stay in motion. That they were only ever taught how to operate the gas pedal, never the breaks, and they continue to press down because this is what they've always done, what they assume they're supposed to do.

Matteo leans over her bench to say that he and Hanh are going to have some of the ice cream and beers leftover from an event for the first-year grad students, whom the department still gives things, who have yet to see the sunset out the lab windows as a consolation prize. Over Matteo's shoulder, she watches Praveen briefly lift his own timer before setting it back down—still too far away from the moment it will go off. Almost without realizing it, her mouth begins to open. Maybe all he needs is an invitation. But she knows this isn't true. She says nothing and takes her timer with her back to the kitchen.

Hanh scoops pure white mounds into barely washed bowls. A rice grain swims along her ice cream's melting edge, hardened and slightly orange. She thinks she recognizes the particular hue from the Indian buffet.

The three of them turn to the easiest subject of conversation, their work, how many hours they have left tonight. Hanh thinks about three, but this protocol works best with a shorter overnight incubation, so she'll be back at seven tomorrow morning. Matteo is almost done with his lab work, but then he has to finish grading his students' weekly quizzes.

She tries to generate a plausible estimate, but she has no idea how many hours she'll be here, which is the longest answer of all.

People had warned her when she joined this lab, had shown her emails written by the professor they all nominally work for, sent to the whole lab to let them know he'd been disappointed not to see more people in on a Saturday. But she can't even remember when in recent memory she saw the professor. He was in Belgium last she heard, but that was weeks ago. At least in her tenure, his presence has never been as tangible as an admonishing email. If he sent one now, it wouldn't make any difference. She would still be here this evening, so would Praveen and Matteo and Hanh. So would all the grad students and postdocs whose shadows play along the lit windows of the other lab buildings below. Their worlds even brighter now as the houses in the hills begin to fall dark.

Her timer goes off, and she heads back towards the lab, silencing its trill, but only briefly before she will need to reset it. Before she will measure the next few years in little incubations, small periods she'll just need to wait through, until the timer beeps again.

Everyone Signed my Godmother's Card But Few Understood her Pain

by Mary Biddinger

How long had my godmother walked around with something that felt like fire? And she knew what fire felt like. Had experienced it several times: carting piglets out of a burning barn, stupidly dashing back into the flaming shed to grab a favorite magazine, and of course the day her father's sedan exploded in the street. Maybe that was why she chatted up firemen at the market as they shopped for chili fixings. *Add a half teaspoon of instant coffee*, she suggested to the men with a wink, *to deepen the heat*. Her gait was lively some days, sluggish others, but she played it off like a saunter. As an adolescent in convent school, my godmother was scolded for even alluding to the burning of her period cramps, a stabbing jolt like the kick of a calf. The nuns said this pain should be taken in stride as penance. So my godmother learned to carry a mending needle in her pocket and pricked her finger to confuse pain that constantly wrangled her hips. Once I found her mending needle—banked in a clutch of cloth—when I went looking for Life Savers candy in her jacket. She did not wrench it from my hands, but pointed out a fledgling on the windowsill, passed me a warm slice of bread with butter and cinnamon sugar. My godmother wore the pain as a girdle for over two decades. Joined us girls on the sidewalk for a hula hoop contest but stopped after a few rotations. Stood with her back against the gas dryer in the laundry room, paperback in hand. When she finally had surgery—doubled over at work, the matron brought her directly to emergency—my godmother brushed it off like nothing, but we knew she had been freed.

/

by August Ryan

i am used to strange looks
but today a man whirled around on me
when he heard me running at him
from behind

i was not running from anything
it was exercise, like most mornings

i hope that i did not trigger something
deep, that i did not fuel his night terrors
that i did not brand twitches in his eyes

all i could muster was “jeez,
relax man”

i am used to strange looks

under the ropy tautness of muscle is tendon
under tendon is bone, under skin
is where i like to be, i think i am so uncomfortable
that making comfortable people uncomfortable
fills me with grim joy

but i don't mean to scare anyone
no, at least not if they don't deserve it
and maybe i deserve to be scared

i am scared

i am taut, like rope
i am rope that hangs in the sun
(it bleaches and frays)
hang-dry, it becomes crisp
to the touch

that used to bother me
as a kid, but now i notice
that the dryer destroys all
my clothes, and that is why
they are soft

i am tender, yes even now

i am mundane and tender
i am mutilated and clean

on the street, there are men with haunted eyes
and shallow steps, and grimy clothes, and open wounds
this morning, i scared one of them shitless

perhaps he was scared because i chose to be outside
in the ten a.m. 90° heat
and that is insane

that is such a crisp line of delineation: choosing to be outside
i love/lines construct me
divine and obvious, as are all cherishables

i am the golden altar of civilization; i am the leaf of graphed culture
i am the failure of a thousand souls on the street and in cars and in
motels

Break Maiden

by Kelly Murashige

This, you think, must be the best day ever.

You know it's relatively early to make this kind of statement. You're four, and while that seems awfully old to you, every grown-up you've ever spoken to tells you it's not.

Still. You think you've found it. The whole reason you exist.

It's a Saturday morning, and your parents have taken you to the local arcade. You have always liked it here, though you rarely win anything. Most of the time, you stand back with your mother and let your father win games for you, his muscles rippling as he rolls weighted balls into slots to make his racehorse move along the track.

Today, however, there's a *new* horse game.

It's a multiplayer game, rows of seats before a screen. At each spot is a terminal with a screen and two buttons. This game, you learn, allows you to create and race your own horses.

You beg your parents to let you play, and though your father prefers the games that require skill—he was on his high school's basketball team and never lets you forget it—he swipes his card and sits beside you. Your mother joins you on your other side.

The next eight minutes of your life—and, you'll realize later, the longest eight minutes of your parents'—are spent breeding your horse. You marvel at each sire and dam, scrolling through horses until you find two with kind eyes.

You sit back, entranced, as the horses fall in love. When the mare stands, revealing a foal, you let out a tiny gasp.

It's a girl, the text reads. *What's her name?*

Again, you pause. You think you hear your father sigh, but that might just be the nicker of the horse. You look at the names of the foal's sire, *Gray Galloper*, then the dam, *Silver Speeder*, and decide to break tradition.

Just Keep Going, the screen reads. *Is this name correct?*

Your thumb has just skimmed the pearly surface of the green *GIDD-YAP* button when your mother steps forward. She corrects you kindly, patiently, but your face still burns. There's an older girl a few seats away, and you're sure she overheard. She thinks you're an idiot. Now she'll never be your friend.

You return to the naming screen, hitting the red button labeled *WHOA*. After fixing your spelling, you press the green button. This button, you learn, also functions as the whip.

You refuse to whip your horse and therefore lose every race. Your parents urge you to press the button, but you never, ever do.

After watching you lose six races in a row, your parents stretch and tell you it's time for lunch. Before you leave, the game prints out a card for you to keep. If you slip it in the reader, you can pick up where you left off. *Just Keep Going* will be waiting until you're ready to come back.

You never do, though. You never come back.

A month after the best day of your life, your father loses his job. Soon afterward, your grandmother falls ill. You, still a child, can't understand why this means you can't return to the arcade. When you ask,

your mother tells you to just be quiet. Please.

She apologizes later. Comes to your room. Gives you a hug.

“That was wrong,” she tells you.

Yet you feel like *you* are wrong.

You stop mentioning the arcade. It feels like a distant dream. The most popular girl in school announces she’s having her birthday party there and makes sure you know you’re not invited.

Your best friend says she won’t go, out of loyalty to you. You tell her not to decline on your behalf. You wouldn’t have enjoyed yourself anyhow.

That, at least, is true. You never would have had fun at the arcade at someone else’s party. You don’t want to play the fishing game or the airplane game or the one where you whack all the poor little moles. You only want the horse, only want Just Keep Going.

Twenty-four years pass. You turn twenty-eight. Your ten-year high-school reunion is next month. You have no plans of going. You will not awaken the ghosts, will not visit your old haunts, will not mingle with the memories of friends you lost, buildings you hid in, girls you thought you would become.

You have white hair now. At least one. You pulled it out the other day and have been on high alert ever since. You have a job, but you hate it. You’ve been stuck at the same pay grade for two years. You’re almost thirty, living with your parents, falling further and further behind the peers who surpassed you long ago. Every day for the past year, you’ve woken up disappointed to find you’ve made it through the night.

Today, you have been tasked with cleaning out your room. It’s because of the upcoming move, you know, to a smaller, newer apartment, but a part of you feels like you’re a little girl again, kicking your socks under your bed and hoping your mother won’t find them.

You yank a drawer open. Feel around. Make a face. After cleaning out the inside, you find something wedged between the slats. Holding in a sneeze, you pull out a card. When you turn it over, your breath catches in your throat.

You study it, your old card, a picture of your horse printed at the bottom. You know it's your imagination, but you swear she looks just a little grayer now.

You trace her face. Her name. Her rank. She did not win any races.

Yet to you, that wasn't shameful. To you, that was okay. As long as you were with her, she was always in first place.

You place a thumb below her name. The white background of the text looks like a big speech bubble.

Just Keep Going, your horse tells you.

So that's exactly what you do.

Genocide's Face

by Johanna DeMay

Latched onto my mother's chafed nipple, I tasted her grief,
smelled her nightmares. Owl-eyed child, I saw her ghosts,

wept with her for nameless Jews in Vilnius, in Kyiv—
marched into the forest at gunpoint, forced to dig pits

wide enough, deep enough to swallow all their corpses.
I heard the shots, felt the mud-clods and rocks shoveled over them.

Surely the survivors would always recognize genocide's face.
Eight decades later, from half a world away,

on video I watch their grandchildren—my kinsfolk—
pump fists as they bulldoze centuries-old West Bank villages

—pulverize Gaza's apartment blocks,
target hospitals, universities, primary schools.

Who will raise a generation of children
whose siblings and parents lie uncounted beneath rubble?

Who will console parents whose children bleed out
on cold floors in broken wards—not enough beds,

blankets, blood supply, morphine, antibiotics?
Who will shelter frail elders who have no place to go,

soothe wailing infants who have nothing to eat? Who will hold
a mirror to the faces of the butchers in charge? I am afraid

to ask my grandsons if they believe peace can be bought
with bloodshed with bullets with bombs

The challenge is to always find the
ultimate in the ordinary horseshit...

Jame Tate

by Ellen Devlin

I don't want to go to heaven.
don't want new friends burrowing
into my earth actions, net worth,
fondness for Netflix. don't want
to learn angel-speak, or how to
pious-party. one life was plenty.

I'd like to return to all that is—
become a banana tree, or
meadow, or a winter-frosted stone,
where seals rest. or how about
a nearly extinct, undervalued fish
like sturgeon or paddlefish, live
a fish life, and leave my fish body
to become a fireweed.

Crinoline

by Wendy Hassett

My grandmother kept her wedding dress in
a hope chest at the foot of the bed
Granddad left her years before
The crinoline still spills with expectancy when the lid is lifted

I've paid for another seminar about uncovering your career path
The young woman takes her seat
a rare combination of flounce and deep curtsy
periwinkle feathers on her bell sleeves caught in the draft of this plunge
She talks of passion and skill and hustle

It has recently been revealed to me that good girls
who work hard and play nice
make excellent worker bees
and even better fools

And I've spent a lifetime folding
the body of my dreams,
limb by limb, out of sight
trading smashed fingers for safety

Is it too late for women of a certain age
to claim feathers and flounce?
Can we unfold our dreams
lay them out across the bed
and let them breathe?

A Photo Series

by Laurie Koensgen

of the moon in all its phases:
seed pearls of collagen
stranded in a scar.

Morning Ritual

by Dara Laine

You used to say the kettle had moods. It sang for you—clear and urgent. For me, it barely murmured, as if it didn't want to wake the house. I'd already poured the water—too early, maybe. Still learning to time things right. The tea steeped quietly. I folded the towel again, thinking you'd be pleased.

*Steam unfurls like breath.
The room learns you by the trace—
quiet, then more gone.*

refreshing

by Lisa Mangini

i open the calendar with all my husband's meetings logged into it, checking for gaps between them, wondering when he's squeezing in lunch or if he would want company

i open the daycare app again and again, hoping for pictures, reading the notes for the day's lesson plans – it's social-emotional learning week, and they're learning how to hold and care for baby dolls, to name their feelings and sit with them and breathe – picturing what cute friends he might be sitting with for his morning snack of yogurt and pear slices

i open the app with all the pictures, see memes about being middle-aged and anxious and i genuinely lol, i drag my finger down the screen and see videos from beautiful people telling me about their magical new moisturizer, i drag my finger and drag my finger, looking for a face i recognize and when i finally do, the feeling i want to be feeling does not quite feel right

commune with the dead via voicemail

by Dara Goodale

it's autumn; you're still dead and I have no one to tell
because you're still dead.
you really did it this time, so caught up in the moment.
I remember you in motion under streetlights,
running fast to catch the bus, we laughed so hard we cried.
open casket, you were never quiet for long: I was waiting
for a sign, for you to jump up and spook me;
I wouldn't have been mad, I swear.

you're still dead but in the metro, listen:
a shock of purple hair—and I was waiting for you
to turn around. of course, you're still dead
but it was so like you to light up your cigarette
with one foot out the door the other inside.
that means something, but I won't bother you
with metaphors.

look, I'll let you go—I know you must be busy,
and that this is getting long-winded.
long overdue, what can I say: I like pressing fingers
into open wounds. you're still dead but
if I could hear you say it one more time
I think it would fix me:
leave a message after the dial tone

they disconnected your number last week.

Say Uncle

by Abriana Jetté

Say nothing
with your throat

let your eyes say
okay let your lashes

grant permission.
Say *Look*. Say *Violet*.

Say *Here*. Say
something with

your shoulders with
your hair with his hands

covering your knees. Say
thirsty as the water opens.

Say his mouth wanders
the walls tighten. Say he smells

like mint moved through wind—
how it soothes. By saying

nothing you do not say no.
Say nothing. Say *Uncle*.

On Asking God to Make You Something Else

by Pamela Manasco

Next time, be reborn as a white-tailed deer
still as a life-size plastic archery target

stalking the interstate in a group of pines so tall
you'd swear they must remember sky before

the paper factory contributed smoke. Men in trucks
will watch you and wonder if you're afraid of them,

the traffic, headlights sweeping down the road
like bear eyes, but what wouldn't you flee?

Remember how fast your heart hammers when you go
all out, how your nose picks up the scent of cologne

meant to smell like the ocean, achieving only sand.
One man or the next will seek you out, will pay

for the beautiful part of you to be preserved
on his wall forever if he can catch you, if you

can be caught, if you are dumb enough to take food
from his clenched fist, to let him tame the rabbit part

that always wants to run. He will think you are a gift.

My Burden

by Lisa Caroline Friedman

Some days, I wear grief
like a pair of worn wool socks.
At other times, I lick hard
the lollipop of grief—run my tongue
over lemon-lime shards, the torn
roof of my mouth.

My mother misplaces grief—
slams doors and cabinets searching
for it. A toddler overdue for a nap,
she whines about snow
piled high on the sidewalk, my father's teasing
mind—lighting up with facts,
dimming with fiction. Her endless
list of things to do.

Eventually, she finds grief—
sleeping under neatly folded
sweaters in her closet,
or in a kitchen drawer, stuck
between the shears and meat pounder.

I, too, struggle
to be grateful for what's here. For gusts
driving snow against a building, for gravity
forcing it to the ground. For what's still
intact in my father's brain.

It's my sister's fifth winter
beneath the frozen ground.
Her grave's near the edge
of Long Island, a mile from the beach
where we scavenged driftwood,
blue-green glass—dead things
the ocean turned beautiful.

*I say, be thankful
for the endless
list of things to do.*

*I know, I know, my mother says
as she twists the tops off plastic
vials, counts out my father's
weekly supply of 144 orange,
white, blue, and green pills.*

There's No Such Thing as Fairies

by Rachel Brittain

Elsie and Frances of Cottingley near Bradford, England, at the beck,

It has come to our attention that certain photographic plates developed by yourselves are being used to substantiate claims of fairies by the Theosophical Society of Bradford. This situation is most inconvenient and should be rectified at your earliest convenience. Fairies do not exist.

Elsie and Frances of Cottingley,

Hoodwinking an esteemed author is one thing; allowing him to make a fool of himself in *The Strand Magazine* with your claims is wholly another. We enjoy a bit of fun as much as anyone—maybe more than most—but this is too much. There are no “Cottingley fairies.” Sir Doyle may not know it, but you certainly do.

Elsie and Frances, Cottingley, beck, etc.

The joke has gone on long enough. We'll admit to being slightly amused at first, but no longer. You are not now, nor have you ever been, in the presence of fairies.

Elsie and Frances,

Additional photographs? Really? Perhaps we have not said it plainly enough, so here it is: stop this at once. Paper and paste do not a fairy make. We advise you to focus on your admittedly prodigious photography skills and leave the matter of fairies well enough alone.

Elsie and Frances,

We've refrained from threats thus far; we feel it is beneath us. However, your repeated insistence that these photographs are authentic is becoming tiresome. Fairies do not wear fashionable French dress and hairstyles. That would be ludicrous. How would they ever endeavor to stay hidden in the beck boasting the latest in Parisian fashion? Now stop this tomfoolery at once lest we find ourselves compelled to act outside our nature.

Elsie and Frances,

Perhaps we got ahead of ourselves in our previous correspondence. The men at Kodak said fairies don't exist and the photographs must be faked, so there you have it. Case closed and all that.

Elsie and Frances,

Regarding your last: what do fairies have to do with it? Mind your seances and ghosts where spiritualism is concerned and leave fairies alone. I'm sure the ghosts would've contacted you by now if they had a problem with it.

Elsie and Frances,

Most certainly not! Since when has a concerned party reaching out been proof of anything? Our opinions are our own and our correspondence doubly so. Fairies, if they did exist, would be appalled by the implication.

Elsie and Frances,

We do not often meddle in human affairs, and we've now been reminded of why. You really are incorrigible creatures. The hatpins and strings in the photos are entirely obvious, by the by.

Elsie and Frances,

We tire of this whole affair. Leave off with the letters in the glade. We'll be ignoring them to get soggy in the rain henceforth.

Elsie and Frances, sometimes of Cottingley,

There's no such thing as fairies, and if there were you'd be doing them a horrible disservice representing them to the public with all this spiritualism and photographic frippery. Show some respect. Honestly, when did humans lose all sense of reverence? A little old-fashioned fear would do you two good. We have nothing more to say on this matter.

In another life

by Caitlin Upshall

I meet my father before he is my father
In the fourth aisle of Safeway, Puyallup,
In the aisle that holds processed foods and family sized portions
That make you quite fat and quite happy
There is no hummus or pita bread or beer laced with an imported
homesickness
There is no checking wallets or mental health for what is affordable
this week
There are only Pringles and Doritos and Kraft cheese and pasta salads
and
He buys them all, these American foods, to feed a young body
To put weight on a frame that carries a heavy shadow, as if
To say “this is all new, this is all a different flavour,
but maybe one day, this can be home.”

In the Hot Spring Locker Room

by Haley DiRenzo

I saw naked women scrubbing salted
skin as my mother ushered me
past. Eyes lingered on bodies raw

and round. Breasts dangling, bellies
drooping. Sketched scars and stretch
marks painted in different shades.

Clay earth, bruised sky, blue vein.
My own body was a girl's then.
Still, I'd graduated from running

naked through my home to needing
to hide myself. I barely remembered
the bloom of my own mother's

breast that fed me. She too
now dressed behind closed doors
unable to know or to teach

being seen without sex or shame
or desire. Even now in a locker room
I cover quickly, but long to be

these women. Limbs sloughed
pink after sinking heavy
into a hot spring. I can hear

their breathy sighs as water carves
rivers over curves. Their soft whispers
saying simply—yes.

*Picasso, It's Time to Sit Down & Talk
Seriously*

by Grace Lynn

Inspired by Picasso's *Weeping Woman*

Picasso, give me back
my face & my private loss
you make public. To you, I am
nothing but a Grace Kelly
of grief & leftover beef
from the Spanish Civil War.
My tears are diamond
razor blades. Wildflowers wilt
my hair. Look how precariously
you dangle my jaw like a Pavlovian
deceit. Who wants to kiss
these sharp cubist lips? I am left
squinting & my glasses do not
fit. Fuck you, Picasso for mocking me
in your game of Mr. Potato
Head, reconfiguring
my parts like a hellish god. Why white
out my skin, acid singe
my mouth? Picasso, you Medusa
me out of my body, lease me
a Mona Lisa shelf-life, but I am

not icy chattering
teeth & jagged black
lines. I know the body
is no simple summation, no plug
& chug fifth-grade equation. But you seriously
suck at adding arm
to torso, nose to face. Don't you know
the source of my tears? Unmute me, you
asshole. My vivid yellow blouse
& flaming red hair scream
for my mouth. The scribbled storm
of my crumpled handkerchief summarizes
my distortion like a book report
of your wrongdoing. Let me carry
the warps of suffering
on the Pangea
of my face. Give me back
my birthright to harvest
my own absence.

Dear Pinecone

by Erin Murphy

Origami of bark and shadow,
I stepped on you barefoot
at my fourth birthday party.

While other kids pinned
the tail on the donkey,
I teetered on the edge

of the kitchen counter
as my father plucked
thorns from soft flesh.

This was decades before
his death but only weeks
before he left. I did not

think of you when I read
Li-Young Lee's poem about
a father plucking a splinter

from his son's hand. I have
never thought of tenderness
and my father in the same breath.

Flamingo, Florida

by Mike Taylor

In the Everglades,
one evening, after work,
the Finnish girl and I sat on the roof
watching lights way out on the water.

We felt a breeze from Havana,
heard merengue on Miami FM,
sipped beers from a vending machine,
slapped mosquitoes.

Beneath the endless swamp of stars
I imagined our future after paradise,
like an alligator—
half asleep, with one eye open.

The End of Marriage

by Sam Szanto

On the day we ended
you made love to me. Maybe
you hadn't decided to leave,
perhaps you thought it was me you loved.
Probably, you closed your eyes and thought of her.
Maybe it was just sex.
Your mother asleep in the next room,
you held me like a bruise-spotted peach.
I was full of your child.
Maybe you were careful.
Maybe you ripped through me like shrapnel.
Cognitive dissonance, a therapist said.
Probably I was just a body
you wanted to be empty.

You wanted to be empty,
probably I was just a body.
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Perhaps you thought it was me you loved,
you hadn't decided to leave.
Maybe you made love to me
on the day we ended.

Party Time

by Alicia Hoffman

God is reclining on his swivel chair in some mid-century Heaven,
stoned out of his gourd. God is listening to the same record

on repeat. He didn't even have to buy it at the store's discount rack
because obviously He is God. Everything in His room is Upper

Case. The bookshelves of Millennia, the ceiling that goes on Forever.
God spins another tale of conquest. His guests have nowhere else

to be. He creates fable after fable. He yaps so much the turntable
spins again. The thin needle of the record never needs replacing

because if it wasn't clear, this is Heaven. This room. Me and you.
Downstairs, the earth is burning. But up here we've got it made.

I don't even know what time it is. Kairos. The right time. God's time.
I tell God if I were God I'd change the sound: more C sharp, D minor.

I tell God if it were up to me the party would have started later,
once everyone could make it from their day job. He looks at me

in that capital way like He is trying to convey Gravity without
the stand-in of these cheap light-weight words but my tongue

turns into a butterfly pre-escaping its cocoon. My tongue needs to fly, but it's wet, heavy as a dead thing made of meat. My pork-tongue

slides down the crevice of my palate. Goes silent. God likes silence. It's so commanding. It hums like a metronome counting nothing

but the ridiculous construct of time. I don't understand anything anymore. I don't know how any of us make it out of here alive.

Untitled Oil on Canvas 100 CM x 70 C by
Mario Loprete



Self-Portrait As Bearded Vulture Chick

by Colleen S. Harris

The bearded vulture is monogamous,
and lays two eggs: biological insurance.
The larger chick always, *always*
kills the younger, even
with an abundance of food,
easy water, good weather.
The blue-throated bee-eater,
the osprey, the white-bellied swiftlet—
the bonebreaker is not alone in its tragedy.

I gouged my sister's name,
spelled wrong, into an oak cabinet,
pencil clenched in furtive fist.
An old photo shows me holding her,
a red-faced squall in my hands,
away from my body, recoiling,
as though forced to carry
an overripe, rotten plum.
I wanted my mother to return
this colicky creature in my space
with an echo of my face.
Then we received my brother—
the last, the only boy, beautiful
and blonde, ready smile, easy sleeper.
Always an uneven truce, shifting
alliances, two and one, one and two.

The elder birdling is obligated
to murder and has its choice:
hoard food and starve the weaker
into brittle-boned and broken shell,
evict the smaller from the nest,
tossing it like a cornhole bag
before it can survive the fall,
or take beak and claw to injure
the other birdchild so severely
it dies.

elegy for a thirteen-hour road trip

by Nicole Fegan

the day after david berman's death
the four of us drive down to north carolina
to visit your father. we stop in
virginia, put our heads in the old pillories,
and you slow your blinks in half
to witness every inch of skyline.
in boone i slip your stepmother a cigarette.
we chase down krispy kreme donuts
with cheerwine and ginger ale.
we howl at karaoke in unison,
taking backlit photos that will never develop.
on our last day, we hike a new mountain.
your father points out the foliage
as i trail behind with my disposable.
it is the last time the four of us are together happily.
in the backseat i feel the wind shift
across each state line—past north carolina
and virginia and maryland and
delaware and new jersey and new york
and connecticut and rhode island and,
at last, massachussets. i fill my lungs with august air,
hold it tight until the walls break.

untitled

by K Spicka

museums change in the rain
subdued skies subconsciously herding patrons
from solitary contemplation
toward comfort of gathering
to conversation reverberating with thunder
every whisper echoing against a glass case
that masks the cry of rain soaked birds
perched on sun-starved statues
together watching the human exhibit
glowing under soft honey lights

rattlesnake/creek

by Lily McKenzie

Mind you, this was before they invented time, labor, or fear. Before the creek dried up it was all mine, as was the apple tree, the wide field, the swing set. It all was mine, so I stepped without looking at the grass which my velcro tennis shoes flattened. No one had told me that it is not the things in the distant world that are worthy of your fear, but the things right outside your door, such as the rattlesnake which would not make itself known with a rattle even when I accidentally straddled it with the scraped legs God only blesses little girls who were made wrong with. My dad would swoop in from behind me and scoop me up, rushing me away from the creature, from the venom, from the world in which I never turned seven in the middle of a snowy December at the birthday party where bloody mary trapped my best friend in the bathroom. But this was before that, the rattlesnake still off in the distant woods, yet to be shot and skinned and kept in the garage, and I was shoeless in the creek. The creek which came from under the ground and returned under the ground thirty yards after. I could have sworn there were fairies there, I could

have sworn that they left gifts for me. The apple tree would bless me
daily with two small hard
good apples, one for myself, one to leave for the fairies, the bees would
sting me and I would
cry, (this was before I had learned to cry silently) the swingset would
lift me up and at the top of
my swing the sun would engulf me and tell me to watch where I step.
Don't call me in for
supper, there's still so much to do. This was before I knew of sickness
and began washing my
hands thirty times a day, before I begged to be taken to the doctor
because having a body meant
there was something wrong with it, before I would cry about the tox
ins in my plastic toys. This
was, of course, before all that. The fear, as with everything else, would
come later.

Love Poem

by Annie Diamond

Dumb luck, all this: the nineteenth floor and us,
the bar, the vintage lamps and U-shaped couch:

we give each other haircuts and we plan
to go to Seoul and Budapest and Buenos

Aires: at the Indiana Dunes
we eat potato salad and skip stones:

sweet pickles make the difference. Summerful.
Cornfields quilt the drive to Michiana

from Chicago: no, a lie: but one
that smacks of Midwest summer and its humid

golden muck: we get engaged and fuck
with the air conditioner on, then eat Italian

food on a patio once the sun has cooled:
smooth burrata, wine good and unsweet.

October Prairie Metropolitan Blues

by Kirstian Lezubski

From the detritus of the hypermodern age
I pull telephone wire from the river like black hair.

Fall drops furred teeth brown from tobacco and
overgrown rhubarb. The sky is red from the fire.

What does future look like here, in a city left
like a pig cadaver in a pathologist's forest lab,

Eyeless, maggotted, sickly-sweet as the sewer
stink. Sweetgrass on the banks and a

Single blanket down below it. When the ice-point
winter stars look back at our age, they'll ask: *What,*

of all you made, did you love? And we will say
It all. We loved it all.

This Poem is a Message in a Bottle

by Ain Khan

The Uber driver is a quiet, shy man in his thirties. Doesn't even make eye contact upon greeting me. It's a stormy December evening in Toronto. I have no business being out on the road. But here I am, and so is he. It's snowing the way it does in Disney movies. The city carries the burden of a million cotton balls that enunciate the shape of whatever they touch. Cars careen carefully on the slushy streets, sliding this way and that, like drunkards. I feel safe though—in this man's brotherly presence and behind the wheel, his competence. A song comes on from his playlist. A soulful but obscure Bollywood number from the late 90s. *Can you turn up the volume, please?* I ask. *Turn it down?* He sounds confused. *No, up.* He looks at me in the rearview mirror. Stares for a while. *Oh...you understand this?* I could be anything. He hadn't realized we were the same thing. He cranks up the volume. I mouth the lyrics trickling out of me. Memory is a funny thing. He starts singing in a mellifluous voice—always an indication of a kind heart. I join him, singing out loud now. We sing together till the song ends, the ride ends. The snow keeps going.

Catkin Moths

by Carl Griffin

In the scrubland where the trees are less,
where the hazels don't compete
for the thickest wedge of rare light,
beside a trunk we place your dolls house.
Wind pulls at catkins on a lichened branch,
musclcd with pollen, not primed to wither
nor tough it out alone. But down they flutter,
strange moths that splat against pink roof
as I glue plastic troops on the balcony.
Your name is etched on the plywood wall.
We've learnt whatever's childlike, colourful,
brings us shame, makes us quarry.
One soldier sneezes at the pollen,
blowing isolated catkin to the ground,
where adolescent wood mice have made
hollow shells of last year's nuts. Lying prone,
we brandish our guns. *You'll regret this,*
you warn me, as if I'm a caterpillar
feeding on a hazel tree leaf, and you are
geared up for stage teen of metamorphosis.
We fire a judgement of pellets. Limbs
snap off from the toy soldiers. Plywood
crashes back down to earth. Pollen's sneezed
in riposte. Our childhood is sent flying.

Brief Instructions for Unlearning

by Abiodun Salako

After Dami

i.

forget the sound of your own name
hitting the apex of a thousand tongues,
it carries too much of what they wanted.
let it rot in the cracks of their teeth.

ii.

throw out the mirrors,
they will never show you the shape
of forgiveness on your face.

iii.

gather the bodies you hid in crawlspaces,
underneath the bed, in the dishwasher,
inside your throat & set them on fire in the front yard.
watch the smoke christen you something
fuller, weightier, kinder.

iv.

return to the mouth of your mother
& bite the first word she gave you till it splits.
chew it slowly & spit what no longer fits.
take from her & make your own word—
one that touches the world like a fingertip pressed into wet concrete.

v.

love what moves you even if it is small,
even if it vanishes. tie it around your rib cage,
baptise it with blood.

vi.

rest.
you do not have to make sense
of every little breaking.
stories walk in reverse.
some endings are born first.

Daydream

by Margaret Diehl

I invent old woman
childless as me and my friends.
Call her Eulalie, Sophronia,
one of those perfumed names
no longer in use.
Shaken out: a few dead moths
last century's clover.
Or Grandmother, honorary title
she can exchange at the bodega
for jalapeno potato chips, bottles of beer,
eternal devotion.

She's home on Thursdays.
I arrive in a swirl of same-aged women.
We take off our shirts.
She opens the hinges in our backs
adjusts the delicate machinery.
What we see now: her living room
with its cardinal rivers
the couch whose metal wings
scrape against the floor
a cat admiring itself in the glass
trying on the head of a monkey.

Witch, where do you come from?
What do you do when I forget you?
I'm a shard of broken woman
like you see in museums—
some artist's lover's charcoal wrist
or mad queen's lock of hair.
The price for growing up
is grief in shocking colors.
You have to cook it slowly
with aromatics, not let it burn.
I do.

*[when my daughter feels good about
herself]*

by Scott Ferry

when my daughter feels good about herself

she radiates a sad sweetness—

a cherry blossom opening
under wind thrashing and uncalm words

she has been here all along
under a mirror black sea

singing clear obsidian—
weeping dark salt

in her sleep

Before the Arsonist

by Karen Kilcup

There is no always.

—Susanna Sonnenberg

Jump from the loft into plump
timothy mound, forked there
by a bent uncle, ready to feed
piebald Holsteins, delicate
Jerseys, oxen. Green sneezes,
gasps. Mice scatter, chased
by the brindle barn cat,
snatching as her kittens mewl
behind the highest bale.
Light striped with motes
that stick to spider webs
draped across window
mullions. Cows' sweet breath,
rolling eyes, bawling to be
milked, soft chewing. Hide
and seek in stalls, swing
around stanchions, clatter
downstairs to the granite-
edged basement—heifer
refuge—cool and bugless
in August. Screaming, no
shushing from mothers.
I can taste the dust,
golden as honey.

Bees

by Abner Oakes

We go to New Orleans in April,
for trombones and crawfish, for sun
on our faces, for the muddy curve

of the Mississippi as we ferry
from Algiers Point to the East Bank,
step off the boat with renewal in mind.

Jasmine peppers the air everywhere.
Persephone stepped out from a cleft
in the earth, shaking the cold of Hades

from her hair, and her mother Demeter
burst into joyful tears on her return,
the trumpet blast of her happiness

making the ground erupt with Virginia
bluebells, Dutchman's Breeches, the gold
of the wood poppy like polished brass.

Back home we leave suitcases at the front
door and go out back for the ritual
of our cellophane bees emerging

each spring from the shade garden,
peering from their ground nests
like Persephone blinking again

at the new world. A river of clarinets,
a drone made loud by their numbers,
they branch off to newly blossomed

maples, to mate, to pull the shoulders
of spring into focus. We head in.
There's the laundry, the newspapers

and mail. *Skokiaan* comes on the speaker
and we dance in the sunroom, bees
bumping against the windows in time

with the snare. Their offspring vibrate
underground, ready to burst
their brood cells at the first sign of spring.

Performance

by Bracha K. Sharp

One day, a surprise.

She shows us the big plastic owl—
its yellow beak, and huge, plastic eyelashes
ridged and black.

They open and close
when she pushes one button,
his feet are yellow buttons, too,
his face wide and round,
a friendly owl.

She depresses one button—
it becomes the hour hand,
the other one the minute hand.

We leave aside the second hand, for now.
We sit, criss-cross-applesauce on the rug.
The class leans in. I lean in.

“Watch,” she says. This is a friendly owl.

Our eyes are moons.
The brown barn owl with the red hands silently faces us.
The class mouths “*Ooh*” and “*Ahh*” as they learn.

They trace the white circumference of his face,
the glossy black of the numbers.

The teacher teaches,
dazzling us all.
I mouth the numbers,
my eyes are moons.

The terror starts—
I ask it to leave. It will not leave. I am six years old.

Improv

by DJ Lee

I spread my drawings across the kitchen floor,
aquarium blueprints unfurling like small
hopes, while my father stands
in the doorway, fragile as blown glass.
In drama club, they hand me a slip of paper:
frying bacon, a joke about the way
I twist my bangs with sculpting gel,
the way I've learned to frame my face
without her. My father says, *I've found
another girl in the same boat as you*,
as if we are two strips of meat thrown
in the same hot pan, sizzling. I lie
on the cold floor, body klump-klumping
against linoleum while they watch me
fail to become anything other than myself.
Electrocution? someone guesses.
A dead fish? another calls out, and I think
of her, gone as suddenly as that.
I learn how to curl up small at home,
how to make sure he doesn't topple,
saying, *Okay, Dad*, while inside I crackle
and spit. The day she left I watched him
fold over the kitchen table, body shriveling
in the heat of her absence. Later, I drew

belugas on newsprint, bodies
suspended in imaginary water,
navigating by sound, unable to see
beyond the next cold current.
In drama club, I learn that becoming
something else requires every atom
of your being. At home, I'm already everything:
daughter, caretaker, bacon and pan.

Pot Roast

by Tina Barry

My mother wasn't a cook
with a gourmet repertoire,
but no one made a better pot roast.

Even better than the Jersey diner
pot roast she loved, as much
for its heft as for its sides:
Parker House rolls, iceberg
salad, a single slice of tomato
robed across its top.

Her pot roast was a magnificence
of meat, crisp-edged, fat-ribboned,
surrendered to the nudge of fork,
her potatoes poetry, pillow of noodles
sauce-stained onion-dark.

During my beloved art class,
I'd dream about the meal, then run, galoshes
stomping through snow,
up the long hill home.

I wanted the pot roast,
but more than that,
I wanted the woman making it.
Delighted for a day away
from her typewriter's clack.

B-Boys Oil and Cement on CD by Mario Loprete

A sorceress stirring
the silver pot,
hair starched and hived,
stockingless feet busy
in high heels.



sky omens

by Mary Oishi

her cancer surgery looms and
I walk worried in the park

more rare than leap year here,
a double rainbow suddenly appears

oh, I'm going to be fine—just fine,
Mom says—two rainbows twice the hope

then when my nest goes empty
a hummingbird swoops down

inches from my face, holds eye contact
as if he sees a bud in me: a cala lily,

bird of paradise, or a simple violet—
in his gaze I too could see

unfurled beauty I have yet to bloom,
perennial who will not die of cold

*are you looking for something?
do you have a message for me?*

he holds gaze just seconds more
in sudden ascent, disappears

above the roof, with no reply,
but I feel connected to

all beauty in this world
in that closeup look, no words required

double rainbows, tiny healer—
just when sky is darkest comes the shooting star

This Poem

by Bill Garvey

isn't going anywhere today
but I have enjoyed the trips
we've taken, stopping at
stations to exchange one soul
for another, like the old guy
clutching a Chihuahua
stepping off for the woman
wearing two blue masks.
I have loved the places
we've forgotten, like a cabin
my father rented with the hole
in the bedroom floor that
peeked down at the kitchen.
I may ask why you would
care about a cabin by a lake
in the middle of nowhere.
I could take you there or we
could go to my grandfather's,
step up to his attic where
he stored potatoes spilling
from burlap like unglazed
earthenware of odd shapes
and sizes, breathe in the musty
smell of earth and starch

before your eyes adjust to
see their eyes creep across
the dusty floor. But let's go
back to that lake, the one
in the middle of nowhere,
wade in up to our ankles
through years of rotting leaves,
then deeper into ancient silt
squishing between our toes
as soft as chocolate pudding.
We have plenty of time. After all,
this poem is often delayed.

Between Kingdoms

by Sarah Roth

My mother holds two bags like purses:
opiates in one, liquid nutrition
running through the other.

We make our way
through the waiting room
to her last appointment.

The other women look afraid
of us, the nearness of death
something they can sense.

My mother's doctor looks
her over—looks at me, looks
at my dad, who looks away.

“Skinny Minnie,” the oncologist says.
He says other things, too. Don't worry—
I'm saving those for a rainy day.

She falls asleep, snoring gently
as we pass the beach
on the drive home.

I Remind Myself

by Joan Roger

after "A Brief for the Defense"

Speak of the many being born,
their unspoiled eyes will open
to a world you cannot imagine.

Take comfort in those who believe in kindness
and those who walk into flames,
undeterred by fury, by vengeance.

Amid the barren plains of scorn,
bathe your soul in the laughter of loved ones
in the stillness of a cool mountain morning,

in music that rises with the wind,
even in harmonies from dampened dreams
in a world forever becoming.

Remember: where you walk is hallowed ground.
You have seen the pale face of sorrow
reach beyond the borders of skin.

You are but one vessel and the ocean is deep.
Do not despair.
Speak softly. Tender ears are learning to listen.

Brief Rhapsody on Leisure

by Bernadette Geyer

after the painting Viennese Domestic Garden
1828-1830, by *Erasmus Engert*

In the Viennese back garden, a grape arbor
shades her as the roses nod their dumb garish
heads in time to the tune she hums to them
and herself. A book rests heavy, open on her lap,
cradled in the folds of her dress. She reads,
and as she reads she knits with the carelessness
that wealth affords her. A useless tat of decoration
akin to the titter of lace that trims her bonnet.
Beyond the gate exists a house, in which the windows
open. She sighs as the chair's wooden curves press
along the length of her spine. She can imagine
nothing beyond that which has been given her.

I smash CLVI with the bottom of a soda glass. Head and thorax pancaked under the circular bottom, back legs still poised, ready to spring.

“Got it,” I say, but my love is already scrawling the numerals on the wall with black sharpie. C. L. V. I. I do the math. One thousand crickets dropped through our living room window. One hundred and fifty six dead, left smashed on the floor, countertops, tables. Eight hundred and forty four still inhabit the walls, carpets, vents. Chirping out with their bandy legs, sounding their frail existence with each passing moment.

“At this rate,” my love has also done the math, “we’ll be killing them for the next three and a half weeks.” Her mouth twists into a knot.

“Au contraire. The last ones will be harder to find.”

“Maybe some have vacated already.”

That was our hope last week, when the sound of a thump, then laughter, then burning rubber woke us from our sleep. Some harmless prank, I supposed. By the time we roused from bed, the crickets had abandoned their opened containers, two boxes cut down the middle, five hundred crickets each. We, who have no money to even pay next month’s rent, could not afford to call an exterminator, could not afford

to tell the landlord. My love said they would leave. I agreed. Surely they prefer the outdoors. We opened windows, doors. They did not leave.

“We’re not that lucky.”

My love caps the sharpie. She doesn’t like the smell. But at this point, with a week’s worth of decaying crickets littering the ground, there’s hardly any point. The whole house smells like the sweet aroma of bread mold or the decay of cruciferous vegetables, depending on where I stand. My clothes smell like this too. Coworkers won’t come near me anymore. My love does, but that’s because we smell the same. It brings us together.

“Should I get the broom?”

I asked this question after the first cricket too, but then I immediately stepped on the second. We didn’t clean those, nor the ones that followed. What was the point of cleaning, when the floor was a vast, moving colony of insects, and every step killed a few more? Plus, it was easier to keep track when they were stickered to the floor beneath. Now that our kills are in the hundreds, I’m wondering if now is the time to rid ourselves of our collection. She just shrugs.

“If you want.”

So I don’t.

We kill more. Under furniture legs, between the mattress and fitted sheet, behind the drawings our nieces provide. We turn on our TV, plastic antennae stuck to the window to pick up a signal, and try to drown out their noise, even if all we can get is static. At night, we sleep with foam ear plugs, but I can’t keep them in all day. My ears are swelling with pressure and infection. But when I take them out, the sound is all consuming. Overlapping hymns of high pitched exhilaration, an orchestra without a conductor, left to play whatever volume and tempo they desire. That’s the best thing about killing them. I can hear the difference in one death, the slight rise of silence, the absence that promises their final rest. We scrawl CLXXV on the wall.

My love yawns. I yawn. There is only so much one can do in a day. It is not late, and the sun is still burning at the edges of the yard. Still, we'll resume tomorrow. The next day, and the next, and the next. There is no future without them, their violin bow legs skittering over frayed strings.

My love is asleep before me, voluminous space between us. Her unwashed hair is damp with oil, and hangs over her face in sheets that will cause her to break out in red spots. I brush it aside with my fingertips, and asleep, she doesn't pull away. She roles sideways, revealing the little brown plug that lets her sleep through the symphony. For my part, I have not put them in yet. I twist the foam in my fingertips as crickets weave across our carpet in intricate, shadowed leaps. I could kill them. My work boots sit next to my bed. But night is overwhelming, and the magnitude of our problem weighs down my feet and arms until they are anchors, mooring me to a dock, waves lapping against my side. Undoubtedly, I am going insane. I plug up my left ear, resting it against the pillow, but leave the right exposed. To truly defeat them, I must be able to sleep through their chorus. Straining against it is no use, so instead I let it wash over me. Every miscounted beat, all the misplaced legato, they consume me. Except there is another noise. One that was underneath all along, I'm sure, but that I could not hear until now. A pulse. Mandibular munching marking a percussive rhythm. I leave my love behind to follow the new instrument.

I trace it to the kitchen, stepping so as to not crunch the bugs under my bare toes. The gnawing crescendos over the chirping, my ears straining for the new instrument, a gentle rolling timpani. There is a strange lack of insects on the kitchen tile, given that the floor is a creamy, ruffled linoleum. There is but one single line of seven, standing guard in front of the cabinet under the sink, a dark particle board door. They are still.

I kneel down in front of them, knees cracking as I bend down. Their antennae twitch in strobing gestures, sensing me. I have killed so many of their brethren. Do I come as friend or foe?

I reach out to one and touch it's antennae with my pinky. "Let's call it a temporary truce."

They sweep sideways, and I open the door.

There, beyond the cabinet door, nestled behind Drano and 409, a bag of sponges and pipes, are dozens of them. They move in simultaneous fashion, chewing through the wall. They stop. They turn to me. Eyes glistening in the light cast from the full moon.

“Oh.”

My love is there. I did not hear her arrive, but now she is crouched beside me, whistling as she breathes through her nose.

“They’re going to bring more inside,” I say.

“Yes.”

“We could stop them here. Block the hole. Board it up.”

“We could.”

We share a moment. One of many in our married lifetime, when we are of one mind. A synchronicity whose absence I only understand now on its return. There are things too awful to undertake. Reaching out together, we press our fingertips against the wall, pushing against the thinned surface. Our hands touch as we crumble the remaining barrier and paint. We feel fresh air on our fingers, and find the night. They are waiting on the other side. A hundred or more, hiding among the blades of grass. They chirp at their compatriots on the other side, and now I hear the melody, call and response, complete. The first cricket steps through the gap. MI.

My love and I take each other’s hands and step away. It is a shameful invasion of privacy. We must go.

I lock the front door behind us. We settle on the spiny grass. My love rests her head on my chest. I prop my head on my left hand, the right curling around her shoulders. In the night air, there is nothing left but silence.

Grace

by Steven Owen Shields

I can only imagine the procedure, the cold operating theater now closed to the family, the bright lights, the surgical team in scrubs, gowned and gloved. The whoosh of ventilators; steady beeps; clinking tools; young nurses murmuring.

And that first incision, from the suprasternal notch to the pubis, the gall bladder excised, retracting the esophagus to the left with careful finger, another incision from the retro hepatic inferior vena cava and the aforementioned esophagus.

One by one, quiet but hurried, her various organs and useful tissues excised, removed, matched, tagged, then hurriedly shuttled to other people who would tearfully accept what could only be given in passing.

And now the heart, still soldiering on despite the absence of orders from above, core cooling having gently slowed it; cross clamping complete; chilled lactated Ringer's solution flowing to the liver, which is removed after the cardiectomy.

The kidneys removed, other tissues taken, and the donor procedure is over. It has taken a little over an hour to harvest her organs, for the green surgical drape to cover her remains, a few minutes more for the

lead surgeon to swing open the doors to say again
how very sorry she was that such a life was so short
and so tragically ended, but that *a part of her lives on now*
in 58 other people, including a single mother with two

very young children, who received her heart; a man
with liver failure, spared; so many grafts, so many lives
saved, so much good from so much bad. She shakes
their hands, wishes them well and turns away to others.

And the family, proud but silent, turns away as well,
hearts broken in grief for the loss of her beautiful smile,
her crazy dances, her love of Jesus. And while the
young mother's new heart is also heavy, still, it leaps

on, and on, and on, and on, in wild thanksgiving.

Contributor Biographies

Azalea Aguilar is an emerging Chicana poet from South Texas, where the scent of the gulf and memories of childhood linger in her work. Her poetry delves into the complexities of motherhood, echoes of childhood trauma, and the resilience found in spaces shaped by addiction and survival. She writes to honor the past, give voice to the unspoken, and carve tenderness from the raw edges of experience. Her work has appeared in the *Angel City Review*, *The Skinny Poetry Journal*, *The Glass Post*, and *The Acentos Review*. She has been featured at events hosted by the American Poetry Museum in DC and is currently crafting her first manuscript, a collection exploring the intersections of love, loss, and lineage.

Marie Anderson is a Chicago area married mother of three millennials. Her stories have appeared in dozens of publications, including *The Mersey Review*, *Third Wednesday*, *Fiction on the Web*, *Bloomin' Onion*, and *Raven's Muse*. Since 2009 she has been leading and learning from a writing critique group who meets two evenings each month at a public library in La Grange, IL.

Tina Barry is the author of *I Tell Henrietta* (Aim Higher, Inc., 2024), *Beautiful Raft and Mall Flower* (Big Table Publishing). Her poetry and short fiction can be found in *Thimble*, *Verse Daily*, *Rattle*, *ONE ART*, *SWWIM*, *Gyroscope*, *The Best Small Fictions 2020* (spotlighted story) and *2016*, and elsewhere. Tina has five Pushcart Prize nominations, several Best of the Net and Best Microfiction nods. She teaches at The Poetry Barn and Writers.com.'

Rachel Barton is a poet, writing coach, and editor. She serves as associate editor for Cloudbank Books and has edited her own *Willawaw Journal* for the last eight years. Her recent collection, *Jacob's Ladder* (Main Street Rag 2024) and the previous *This is the Lightness* (The Poetry Box 2022) are available through her website: rachelbartonwriter.com.

Lisa Bellamy is the author of *The Northway* and *Nectar*, and has received two Pushcart Prizes and a Fugue Poetry Prize. She studied with Philip Schultz at The Writers Studio. Bellamy lives in Maplewood, NJ, and The Adirondack Park. www.lisabellamy.com

Deanna Benjamin writes lyric memoir, poems, and micro-stories. Her creative work is forthcoming in *MacQueen's Quinterly Review* and can be read in *The Texas Review*, *Flash Boulevard*, *Brevity*, *Waterwheel Review*, and other venues.

Mary Biddinger's latest book is a novella-in-flash titled *The Girl with the Black Lipstick* (Black Lawrence Press, 2025). She is also co-editor, with Julie Brooks Barbour, of *A Mollusk Without a Shell: Essays on Self-Care for Writers* (University of Akron Press, 2024). Biddinger is currently at work on a collection of prose poems about a semi-feral 1980s childhood in Chicago.

Rachel Brittain is a contributing editor for *Book Riot* and her fiction has been published in *Luna Station Quarterly*, *Andromeda Spaceways*, *Sword and Kettle Press*, and elsewhere. When not writing or reading, Rachel lives out her childhood circus dreams as an amateur aerialist. She lives in the Ozarks with a rambunctious rescue dog, a snake named Casper, and a houseful of plants (most of which aren't carnivorous).

Lauren Camp is the author of eight poetry collections, most recently *In Old Sky* (Grand Canyon Conservancy, 2024), which grew out of her experience as Astronomer-in-Residence at Grand Canyon National Park. She served as New Mexico Poet Laureate from 2022-2025. Camp has received a Dorset Prize and finalist citations for the Arab American Book Award and Adrienne Rich Award, and fellowships from the Academy of American Poets and Black Earth Institute. Her poems appear in *Kenyon Review*, *Poem-a-Day*, *New England Review*, and *Beloit Poetry Journal*. www.laurencamp.com

Nancy Cherry is a North Bay Area poet and former editor of the Poetry Newsletter, *Fish Dance* 1995-2000. Her work has appeared in various magazines including *Comstock*, *Cimarron*, *Calyx*, *Mid-American*, *Nimrod*, *North American*, *Poetry Flash*, *Gyroscope* and in *Catamaran*. Her book, *El Verano Burning*, was published by Radiolarian Press in 2014. Recently she was recorded in Berkeley, CA on <https://voetica.com/poets/1001/5> if you would like to hear her voice.

Johanna DeMay grew up in Mexico City, the expatriate child of American parents fleeing the 1950's Red Scare. Now retired, she writes and volunteers with her local immigrant community in New Mexico. Her poems have appeared in numerous literary journals and three anthologies. She has published two collections, *Waypoints*, in 2022 with *Finishing Line Press*, and *All Diaspora's Children*, with Kelsay Books in 2025.

Ellen Devlin is the author of two chapbooks: *Rita* and *Heavenly Bodies at the MET*, both published by Červená Barva Press. A full-length collection, *The Light of Small Ones Blinking*, has been published by Broadstone Books, 2025. Her work has appeared in *The Coachella Review*, *The Amethyst Review*, *Mom Egg Review*, *RockPaperPoem*, *Beyond Words*, and *The Westchester Review*, among others.

Annie Diamond is a pro-Palestine Ashkenazi Jewish poet and recovering academic who has made her home in Chicago. She has been awarded fellowships by MacDowell, Luminarts Cultural Foundation, The Lighthouse Works, and Boston University, where she earned her MFA in 2018. Her poems appear and are forthcoming in *Prairie Schooner*, *No Tokens Journal*, *Western Humanities Review*, and elsewhere. She is currently working to place her first poetry manuscript.

Margaret Diehl has published two chapbooks of poems *Exit Seraphim*, by Ravenna Press (2023) *it all stayed open* (Red Glass Books, 2011), two novels and a memoir (*Men*, 1989, *Me and You*, 1990 and *The Boy on the Green Bicycle*, 1999, all from Soho Press) as well as poems, short stories, and essays in literary journals, including *Kestrel*, *The Chattahoochee Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *AMP*, *Cloudbank*, *Main Street Rag*, *The Adirondack Review*, *Sequestrum*, and *Gargoyle*. She lives in New York City.

Haley DiRenzo is a writer, poet, and practicing attorney specializing in eviction defense. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *The Winged Moon*, and *Ink in Thirds*, among others. She is on BlueSky at @haleydirenzo.bsky.social and lives in Colorado with her husband and dog.

John Dorroh travels as often as possible. He inevitably ends up in other peoples' kitchens exchanging culinary tidbits and telling tall tales. Once he baked bread with Austrian monks and drank a healthy portion of their beer. Six of his poems were nominated for Best of the Net. Others have appeared in over 100 journals, including *Feral*, *North of Oxford*, *River Heron*, *Wisconsin Review*, *Kissing Dynamite*, and *El Portal*. He had two chapbooks published in 2022. He lives in rural Illinois, USA, near St. Louis.

Sean Thomas Dougherty's most recent book is *Death Prefers the Minor Keys* from BOA Editions.

Alan Elyshevitz is the author of a collection of stories, *The Widows and Orphans Fund* (SFA Press), a poetry collection, *Generous Peril* (Cyberwit), and five poetry chapbooks, most recently *Approximate Sonnets* (Orchard Street). Winner of the James Hearst Poetry Prize from *North American Review*, he is a two-time recipient of a fellowship in fiction writing from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts.

Nicole Fegan is poet, editorial assistant, and logic puzzle maker currently living in Brooklyn. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *trampset*, *Heimat Review*, and *Up the Staircase Quarterly*, among others. You can find more of her work at <https://www.nicole-fegan.com>

Scott Ferry helps our Veterans heal as a RN in the Seattle area. His latest book is *dear tiny flowers* from Sheila-Na-Gig press. He makes a mean steak and is obsessed with photography of random beauty. Find more @ ferrypoetry.com.

George Franklin is the author of eight poetry collections, including *A Man Made of Stories* (Sheila-Na-Gig Editions) and a book of essays, *Poetry & Pigeons: Short Essays on Writing*. Individual poems have been published in *Thimble*, *Nimrod*, *Rattle*, *Gramercy Review*, *New Ohio Review*, and *One Art*, among others. He practices law in Miami, is a translation editor for *Cagibi*, teaches poetry classes in Florida prisons, and co-translated, along with the author, Ximena Gómez's *Último día/Last Day*.

Lisa Caroline Friedman lives and works in Palo Alto, California. Her poems have been published in *Boats Against the Current*, *The Comstock Review*, *Connecticut River Review*, *The Lake*, *San Pedro River Review*, and *Unbroken*, among others. She holds a BA in English from Stanford University and is pursuing an MFA in poetry at Antioch University.

Bill Garvey lives in Nova Scotia and Toronto. His collection of poetry, *The basement on Biella*, was published in 2023 by DarkWinter Press. His work has been nominated for The Griffin Poetry Prize and Best of the Net and has been published in journals throughout Canada and the US.

Bernadette Geyer is the author of the poetry collection *The Scabbard of Her Throat* and editor of *My Cruel Invention: A Contemporary Poetry Anthology*. Her poems have appeared in *Barrow Street*, *Bennington Review*, *Electric Literature*, *Salamander*, and elsewhere. Geyer's second full-length collection is forthcoming from April Gloaming Publishing in 2025.

Dara Goodale (they/she) is a Romanian-American non-binary lesbian, poet, and university student living in Lausanne, Switzerland. Their work has appeared or is forthcoming in the *American Poetry Journal*, *Cleaver Magazine*, *New Feathers Anthology*, *The Passionfruit Review*, and more

Carl Griffin is a poet from Wales. His first collection, *Throat of Hawthorn*, was published way back in 2019.

Jay Griffith (he/any) is a writer, educator, and not quite human being living in North Jersey. He has an MFA in Creative Writing from Rutgers-Newark and makes zines @ badling.press.

Judith A Hansen (she/her) is a poet and theatre artist living in San Diego. Her poems have appeared most recently in *Passengers Journal*, *Remington Review*, and *Gyroscope Review*. Judy received an MFA in Drama from the University of Southern California and she has performed professionally on stage and screen for over 20 years. Her play *The Voice Lesson* was a finalist for NYC's Ensemble Studio Theatre's One-Act Festival. Judy is a writing partner and workshop facilitator with Poetic Justice, an organization that offers poetry workshops for women who are incarcerated.

Colleen S. Harris (she/her) holds an MFA from Spanding University. Author of four books and three chapbooks, her most recent poetry collections include *The Light Becomes Us* (Main Street Rag, 2025) and *Toothache in the Bone* (boats against the current, 2025). Her poems appear in *Berkeley Poetry Review*, *The Louisville Review*, *Salvation South*, and *Cider Press Review*, among others. Follow at <https://colleensharris.com>

Wendy Hassett is a writer and poet whose work has appeared in *Huffington Post*, *Literary Mama*, and *Scary Mommy*. She was a member of the 2015 Listen to Your Mother Orange County cast.

Originally from Pennsylvania, Alicia Hoffman now lives, writes, and teaches in Rochester, New York. She holds an MFA in Poetry from the Rainier Writing Workshop and has authored three collections, most recently *ANIMAL* (Futurecycle Press). Her poems have been published in a variety of journals, including *Thrush*, *Radar Poetry*, *Trampset*, *The Night Heron Barks*, *Tar River Poetry*, *The Penn Review*, *Glass: A Poetry Journal*, *One Art*, *The Shore*, and elsewhere. Find her at: <https://www.aliciamariehoffman.com>

Luci Huhn is a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee, whose poems have appeared in *Ploughshares*, *West Branch*, *SWWIM*, *LEON Literary Review*, *Rattle*, and *South Florida Poetry Review*, among others. Her chapbook, *The Years That Come After*, was published by Breakwater Press. She lives and writes in Southwest Michigan.

Abriana Jetté is an internationally published writer whose work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Public Books*, *Best New Poets*, *Teachers & Writers Magazine*, *PLUME*, *Tampa Review*, and *Poetry New Zealand*, among others. She has been a Tennessee Williams Scholar at the Sewanee Writers' Conference and has also received support from the Community of Writers at Squaw Valley and the Southampton Writers Conference. A two-time finalist fellowship recipient from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts (Poetry 2023; Nonfiction 2024), Jetté currently serves as Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Creative Writing Studies*.

Jennifer Schomburg Kanke's work has recently appeared in *New Ohio Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Shenandoah*, and *Salamander*. She is a winner of a Sheila-Na-Gig Fiction Award and her poetry collection about a resistant and resilient housewife in mid-20th century Appalachia, *The Swellest Wife Anyone Ever Had*, is now available from Kelsay Books. Her poetry collection centered on her experiences with ovarian cancer, *Little Stone, Little Stone*, is forthcoming in 2026 from Sheila-Na-Gig Editions. She can be found hosting the Meter Cute Interview series on the Meter&Mayhem Substack and YouTube channel. She serves as a member of the board of Anhinga Press.

Nancy Kennedy grew up in a rural area of Tennessee. As a young woman, she moved to Michigan, where she obtained a Bachelor of Philosophy from Grand Valley State University and an M.A. in Communication from Western Michigan University. Her work has been published by Choeofpleirn Press in their *Coneflower Poetry Journal*, *Best of Choeofpleirn*, *Lothlorien Poetry Journal*, *The Miserere Review*, and upcoming in *Gargoyle*. She is a full-time writer and currently lives in Alabama.

Ain Khan is a writer, gardener and photographer, residing in Ottawa, Canada. While she has previously published prose with the Canadian Broadcasting Commission (CBC), this is the first time her poetry has been published.

Raised in the area the Abenaki people called Quascacunquen, Karen Kilcup is the Elizabeth Rosenthal Excellence Professor Emerita at UNC Greensboro. Her many books include *Feathers and Wedges*. She lives in the seacoast of New Hampshire with her partner Alan in the company of skunks, bobcats, coyotes, foxes, and bears.

Eulea Kiraly is a second year an MFA candidate with the at the University of Central Arkansas where she has served as the managing editor of the *Arkana Literary Magazine*. Before starting the course, she lived less than an hour from the Mississippi River and taught in three different prisons in the Arkansas delta. Before that, she lived in Australia where she worked as a theatre director, community arts facilitator, and writer of short fiction, poetry, and arts journalism with multiple publications in *Muse*, *Artlook*, *ANU Reporter*, and Canberra Times. Since she comes from a family of quilters, Eulea is delighted that her first US publication is with *Thimble!*

J.I. Kleinberg lives in Bellingham, Washington, USA, and on Instagram @jikleinberg. Chapbooks of her visual poems, *How to pronounce the wind* (Paper View Books) and *Desire's Authority* (Ravenna Press Triple Series No. 23), were published in 2023; a full length volume, *She needs the river* (Poem Atlas), was published in 2024.

Laurie Koengen lives and writes in Ottawa, Canada. Recent publishers include *Literary Review of Canada*, *The Ex-Puritan*, *The Madrigal*, *Blue Moon Review*, *The New Quarterly*, and *Twin Bird Review*. Laurie is a founding member of the Ruby Tuesday Writing Group. Her fourth chapbook, *this clingstone love*, is with Pinhole Poetry.

Dara Laine (she/her) is a poet and evaluator based in Baltimore, originally from a hay farm in New Jersey. She returned to poetry following the sudden death of her father. Her work explores grief, memory, and the sacred ordinary through restrained lyricism, symbolic detail, and quiet emotional complexity. Her poems have appeared in *Pine Hills Review* and *Right Hand Pointing*, and she was a July 30/30 poet with Tupelo Press.

DJ Lee's nonfiction essays and poetry have appeared in *Narrative*, *Silk Road Review*, *Terrain*, and elsewhere, and they have been finalists for contests and won awards. She is author/editor of eight books, both scholarly and creative, on literature, history, and the environment, including the oral history collection *The Land Speaks* (Oxford 2017), and a lyric memoir *Remote: Finding Home in the Bitterroots* (Oregon State 2020). She is Regents Professor at Washington State University where she teaches literature and creative writing.

Kirstian Lezubski is from Winnipeg, MB in Treaty 1 territory. She is a queer mother of two and a recovering academic with an MA in Cultural Studies. Her first published poem was selected for the Winnipeg International Writer's Festival 2023 Writes of Spring competition, and she draws upon her experience living with Generalized Anxiety Disorder in the Anthropocene age as well as her work in municipal government to inform her writing.

Mario Loprete is a sculptor in Catanzaro, Italy.

Grace Lynn is an emerging painter who lives with a chronic illness and is working on her first collection of poetry. Her work explores the intersections between faith, the natural world, art and the body. In her spare time, Grace enjoys listening to Bob Dylan, reading suspense novels and exploring absurd angles of art history.

Elizabeth MacDuffie is founding editor of the fully independent arts & literary journal, *Meat for Tea: The Valley Review*, now in its 19th year. She also produces the *Meat for Teacast* and, with her husband Mark, runs *Meat for Tea Press*. Her work has been published in *Silkworm* and other publications.

Pamela Manasco is a poet and English instructor at Alabama A&M University. She is the recipient of an Alabama State Council on the Arts poetry fellowship, and the 2024 Stephen Meats Poetry Prize. Her poetry has been published in *The Louisville Review*, *Bear Review*, *Split Rock Review*, and elsewhere. She lives in Madison, Alabama with her family. You can find her on Instagram and Bluesky @pamelamanasco, and via her website: <https://pamelamanasco.com>.

Lisa Mangini is the author of five collections of creative work, and was the Founding Editor of *Paper Nautilus*. Her writing has appeared in *HuffPost*, *Ms. Magazine*, *Mid-American Review*, and elsewhere. She teaches writing at Penn State.

Rita Maria Martinez is the author of *The Jane and Bertha in Me* (Kelsay Books). Rita's poetry raises awareness about triumphs and challenges when navigating chronic daily headache and migraine. Her poetry appears in *The Best American Poetry Blog*, *Ploughshares*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, in CLMP's 2023 Disability Pride Reading List, and elsewhere. The daughter of Cuban immigrants, Rita lives in Miami, Florida, where she tutors neurodivergent students of all ages. Visit her on Instagram @rita.maria.martinez.poet or visit <https://comeonhome.org/ritamartinez>.

Julia McCoy is a middle school English teacher in Boise, Idaho. She has a piece published in *CommuterLit*, as well as several pieces in a local anthology through The Cabin, a non-profit literary arts organization. She enjoys traveling, biking, and working to promote an equal and fair public education opportunity for all.

Lily McKenzie has been an editor in chief, a worker at Disney World, and a dog in a touring musical production, but now they are a library worker and writer on the side based in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania. Their undergrad degree is in history, and they graduated from the University of Pittsburgh with their MLIS in August.

Born and raised in Hawai'i, Kelly Murashige is the author of the YA novel *The Lost Souls of Benzaiten* (Soho Teen, July 2024), which was listed as a winner of a 2025 Young Adult Favorites Award by the Children's Book Council and a best book of 2024 by *HONOLULU Magazine*. Her second YA novel, *The Yomigaeri Tunnel* (Soho Teen, July 2025), received a starred review from *Publishers Weekly* and was selected as Adam Silvera's Allstora July 2025 Book Club pick.

Erin Murphy's recent work has appeared in *Ecotone*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *Flash Boulevard*, *The Best of Brevity*, *Best Microfiction 2024*, and anthologies from Random House, Bloomsbury, Bedford/St. Martin's, and Best of the Net. She is author or editor of more than a dozen books, most recently *Human Resources* (2025). She is professor of English at Penn State Altoona and poetry editor of *The Summerset Review*. Website: www.erin-murphy.com

Abner Oakes taught middle and high school English for 16 years and has had poems published in the *Potomac Review*, the *Maryland Poetry Review*, and the *Baltimore Review*. He lives in Bethesda, MD.

Mary Oishi, Albuquerque Poet Laureate (2020-2022), is the author of *Sidewalk Cruise-ship* (UNM Press, 2024) and *Spirit Birds They Told Me* (West End Press, 2011), co-author of *Rock Paper Scissors* (Swimming with Elephants, 2018), and Editor of 2023 New Mexico/Arizona Book Award-winning *One Albuquerque, One Hundred Poets*. Her work appears in numerous anthologies and journals throughout the U.S. and internationally, including in translation.

S.D. Pergola is a writer based in Brooklyn. Their work has appeared in *-ette review* and is forthcoming in *Pictura Journal*. They hold a B.A. in the Humanities from Yale University, where they studied Ancient Greek literature and continental philosophy. Find them on instagram @s.d.pergola.

Coralie Pimenta is an Irish-based artist born in the French Alps. With a passion for capturing emotions and everyday experiences, her vibrant works burst with cheerful and lighthearted creativity. Inspired by her travels and fascination with the human form, Coralie's earliest works focused on portraits and figurative compositions. Through her use of watercolor, charcoal and ink, she skillfully conveyed a sense of depth and emotion. Since moving to Ireland, her artistic palette has expanded to include cityscapes, vehicles and landscapes, painted in a more colorful and varied style. From Volkswagen vans to ice cream cones, her playful and imaginative creations continue to delight and inspire viewers.

Katherine Riegel's lyric memoir, *Our Bodies Are Mostly Water*, is forthcoming from Cornerstone Press in May 2025. She is also the author of *Love Songs from the End of the World* (Main Street Rag), the chapbook *Letters to Colin Firth* (Sundress), and two more books of poetry. Her work has appeared in *Brevity*, *Catamaran*, *Orion*, *SWWIM*, and elsewhere. She is managing editor of *Sweet Lit* and teaches online classes in poetry and cnf. Find her at katherineriegel.com.

Michael C. Roberts, as a retired pediatric psychologist, painted rocks during the pandemic and dropped them around the neighborhood as inspiration and motivation. He can't paint with any artistry, so maybe they were not very inspirational. He focuses now on photography and writing. They have appeared (or will appear) in several literary magazines. A photographic book is available on Amazon: *Imaging the World with Plastic Cameras: Diana and Holga*.

Joan Roger is a poet and physician who currently resides in the Pacific Northwest where she writes and practices medicine. In 2024, Joan earned her MFA in poetry from Pacific University. Joan has published poems in *Thimble*, *The Healing Muse*, *The Human Touch*, *Intima*, *Canary Magazine*, *Rust & Moth* and *The One Page Poetry Anthology* and her work is forthcoming in *Main Street Rag* among other journals.

Anna Jollette Rogers is a writer based in Oakland, California. Their writing—including journalistic pieces, personal essays, and fiction—has appeared in outlets such as *Slate*, *Teen Vogue*, *Scientific American*, *Discover*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, and a forthcoming anthology.

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