

Thimble Literary Magazine

Zero to Infinity by Al Schnupp



Volume 8 · Number 3 · Winter 2025

Thimble Literary Magazine

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Cover art: *Waiting for Godot* by Al Schnupp

Back cover: *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by Al Schnupp

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.

Prose: 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.

Table of Contents

Editor's Note by Agnes Vojta : 6
Contributor Biographies: 105

Art

Cover art: *Waiting for Godot* by Al Schnupp
Back cover: *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by Al Schnupp

Zero to Infinity by Al Schnupp: 1
Crossroads by Al Schnupp: 7
The Site by Al Schnupp: 11
Autumn Leaves in Taos by Linda K. Allison: 37
Toronto Night by Linda K. Allison: 49
Birthday Party All Tricked Out by Linda K. Allison: 59
Hook by Jo Rohrbacker: 67
Wes Anderson by Jo Rohrbacker: 95
Imprint by Terrill Warrenburg: 97
Summer A by Terrill Warrenburg: 99
IMG_5472 by Richard Hanus: 104

Poetry

- A Poem in Which I Live Happily Ever After* by Lynne Schilling : 8
Terra Bella by Shawn Aveningo-Sanders: 16
Your father by J. L. Yocum: 10
Vick's Vapo-Rub by James Owens: 12
Tiny Fish by Wendy Wisner: 13
As If I Were a Meadow/Antonietta by Eve Müller: 14
How to Keep Produce Fresh by Brandel France de Bravo: 16
From East to West by Robbi Nester: 18
a jumping fish in three parts by K. Degala-Paraíso: 19
What Drops on the Ground Becomes Fertile by Barbara Krasner: 23
A Dedication by Alina Zollfrank: 24
When I Left the South by Alyx Chandler: 26
Why a Dove by Ken Haas: 31
The Pool Isn't Empty by Bil Lepp: 32
The Unknowable by Dave Stern: 34
Quatern: Spinoza in Exile I by David Koehn: 36
Snow Angel by Ellen Austin-Li: 38
When I worked security, we'd walk by Ron Riekki: 39
wedding garden by Kathleen Hellen: 40
Rummage by Martha Zweig: 41
Herd Instinct (A Diptych) by Becca Brody: 42
Crawfishing in Macleay Park by Alison Mandaville: 44
Communion II by Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné: 46
How to Make Potatoes Au Gratin for a Family Holiday by Hillary
Smith-Maddern: 47
Loquiphobia by Alexandra Burack: 48
Cactus Fruit by Amanda Vink: 50
Nobody's Girl by Kimberly Gibson-Tran: 52
We Can't Find Where My Grandparents Are Buried by Justin Karcher:
53
Interchange by Brian Duncan: 55
Scavengers by Virginia Ottley Craighill: 56
Shaving by Allison Martel: 58
schedule this message to send at 3am by Amy Devine: 60
Cartload by Janet Bowdan: 61
Camera Obscura as Self-Portrait by Shannon K. Winston: 63

*Returning from an earthworm's funeral procession being carried out by
razor jaw ants, we get stuck in rain* by Lavanya Arora: 64
This doe as a map by Terri McCord: 66
Cicadas, Puente Allen, Yucatán by Gabriela Halas: 68
Stab Shallow by Dana Henry Martin: 70
Vigil by Birch Wiley: 72
Interior by Julia Caroline Knowlton: 74
Medusahead by Natalie Eleanor Patterson: 75
When my lover wakes, there are no warplanes in the sky by Prashant
Pundir: 78
Stones & Stories by Cindy Veach: 80
Fast Friends by Margie Duncan: 81
After One Last Trip to the Store by Matt Mason: 82
Even a Rabbit Can Twist an Ankle by Sophia Beem: 84
Someone Always Needs to Explain by Christine Potter: 86
So Many Books, Too Few Elders by Dahlia Aguilar: 88
Tree-Eaters by Vivian Faith Prescott: 90
Wild by Shaun R. Pankoski: 92
Atoning by Susan Mason Scott: 94
Dick Van Dyke flees his Malibu home by Robert Fillman: 96

Prose

Unclaimed by Karen Regen Tuero: 28
Lily Elsie Before The Merry Widow by Christine Butterworth-
McDermott: 101

Prose Poetry

The River Calls For Us All by Delaney Kelly: 54
*While attending the Deep Vellum ten-year anniversary party at The
Wild Detectives* by Clara Burghleia: 62
Mystic Aquarium by Caroline Picker: 69
How to Lucid Dream by Jessica Purdy: 98
Undertow: A Love Story by Beth Kanter: 100

Editor's Note

by Agnes Vojta

Dear Readers,

Whenever I am by the ocean, I walk on the beach and look for stones, sand dollars, and shells. I collect them and take them home, for no particular purpose but to enjoy their shapes. Sometimes I spot an especially impressive specimen half-buried in the sand and am disappointed when, upon excavation, I find it broken. I want intact shells, not fragments. Virginia Craighill reminds us in her poem *Scavengers*: “but broken things have their own pattern.” So much is broken. We find it disturbing, and our impulse is to fix it. When we cannot restore it flawlessly, we practice the art of kintsugi, the Japanese technique now so popular in the self-help books, to highlight the cracks. But maybe we need to sit with the brokenness for a while, accept it, learn to be comfortable around it, “let them fall in fragments as they will.”

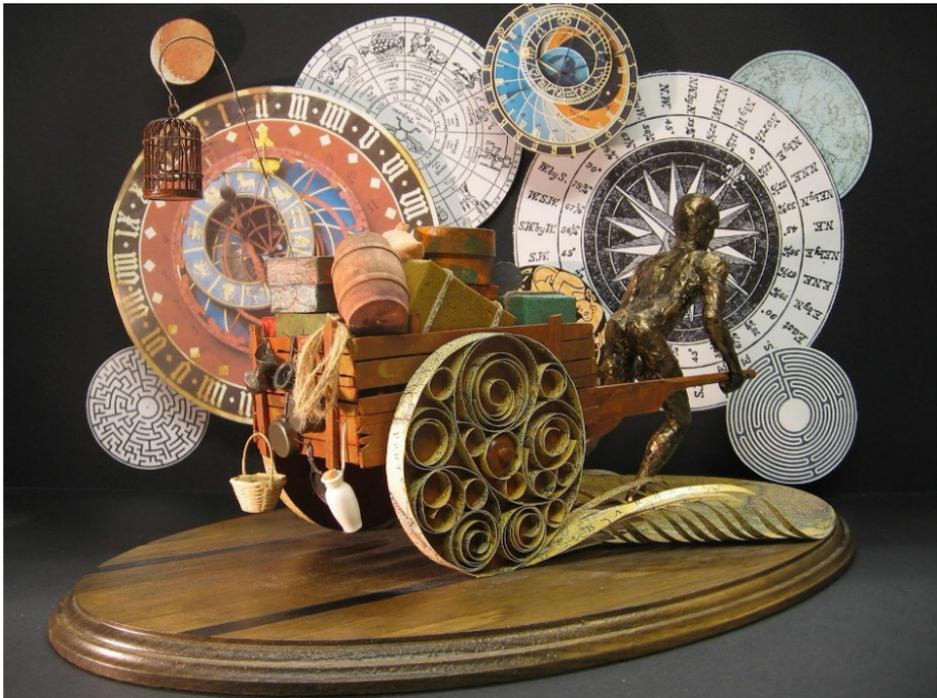
Several poems in this issue speak about grief. When we are left with an absence we cannot fill, a tear we cannot mend, we must sit with the fragments and wait until they reveal their pattern. I love what J.L. Yocum says in his poem *Your father*: “love is the blueprint to grief’s concrete foundation.”

The poems in this issue have us ponder a doe as a map, invite us to an earthworm’s funeral procession, remember grandfathers and fathers.

Many of the poems are strongly rooted in places. We travel to a creek in the Pacific Northwest, to a salt flat on an island in Massachusetts, to the rainforest in a National Park in India. How marvelous that humans in so many different places share this universal impulse to craft their thoughts into poems and to send them out into the world – like the asters that have now finished their labor of blooming and send their seeds on little parachutes into the unknown, not knowing whether they will land on fertile soil. It takes courage and hope. By letting these kernels of human creativity land with you, dear readers, you too, are part of this radical act of hope. Thank you for being here.

Agnes Vojta

Crossroads by Al Schnupp



A Poem in Which I Live Happily Ever After

by Lynne Schilling

You may have seen my shack on the south shore in Key West. A little place—stacks of books everywhere—a speck of a kitchen, a bed with an expensive mattress, my one extravagance, not counting the chocolate supply coming in from France. Of course, I'm worried about erosion in my "front yard," and a storm sweeping me downwind while I sleep. But I'm old, and really, it might be a harbinger of the way many of us will leave this earth. Friends & family visit, some content to pitch a tent in the warm sand, right off my imaginary deck, where we cook snapper over an open fire. Sometimes I say fuck you to my knees and we pedal our vintage bikes to Tropic Cinema to see the latest foreign film, swooning over the young lovers. I don't need to fret about walking on ice. If I fall, it's in forgiving sand or the cushioned sea. My only worries are about missing sunrise or sunset. Or my wits, before I finish this poem.

Terra Bella

by Shawn Aveningo-Sanders

Don't eat the Dieffenbachia! It's hard to keep up with a two-year-old when the world is full of wonderment, where all she wants to do is touch, taste-test, and toddle off to her next amusement. When I play with her my grown-up-ness disappears as I dunk my head inside a thirty-gallon, ceramic planter—*Aaa-oooo-ga! Aaa-oooo-ga! Charlie, can you hear the echo?* She scurries over in her Oshkosh overalls to put her head inside next to mine. Her tiny voice: *Aaa-ooooooh! Aaa-ooooooh! More? More?* Passersby share in our glee as we echo-test every planter we see. They say you can't bury your head in the sand to ignore the ills of the world. But no one said anything about sticking your head in a giant pot to teach your granddaughter the magic of sound.

I text my son
after the earthquake
... blinking ellipses ...

Your father

by J. L. Yocum

We gathered around the hospital
bed in the crowded apartment,
solemn and hushed, like if we'd waited
and watched the widening crack

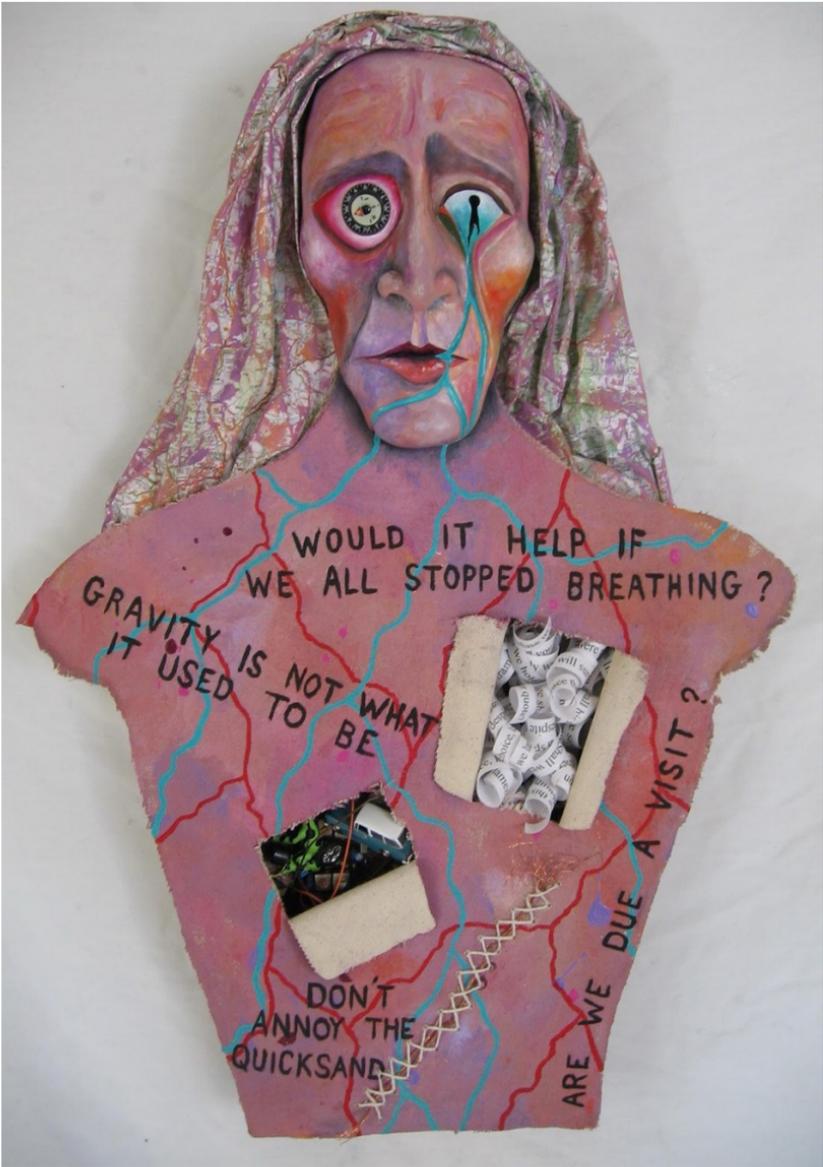
of a hatching egg, his shut eyes
round dark yolks, delicate as a baby bird's.
We circled an inverted cone in the fabric
of Being: his last breath.

You'd scolded your mother the day
before for crying and petting his chest.
"Let him rest," you tsked. Rest for what?

You should have told her to stretch her grief
from his one bony shoulder to the other
like a blanket. Because grief (whichever
direction you face) comes
always backwards, always an ambush.

Because love is the blueprint
to grief's concrete foundation.
Because you're the infinite curve
from which I refuse to escape. Because

the day I first met you
I caught in my teeth the fell thorn
that your death will destroy me.



The Site by Al Schnupp

Vick's Vapo-Rub

by James Owens

You don't know how these shards of broken jar,
The memory of menthol and eucalyptus
Above the sidewalk and littered blue glass,
Have come to soothe the city's hard winter air.

The world has beaten you—money, fear
Of lacking money, received and given harm—
But again you are a child and far from here,
Loved, trying not to weep, in bed and warm.

Tiny Fish

by Wendy Wisner

My mother wouldn't want me to listen to the old lady on the other end of the phone, screaming and threatening to call a lawyer because I won't give her money to buy Tylenol, which she hides in her underwear drawers and eats like candy. My mother would tell me to ignore her texts. *Just put your phone away into a drawer*, she'd say. She'd tell me to sit at this desk and listen to the cars sliding by the window as though suspended in air. *Remember when you were like a tiny fish swimming inside my body?* she would say. *Think about that.* My mother would warn me not to listen to sounds that might harm me. She'd understand I have one of those bodies that feels everything. She'd tell me to walk to the window and look at the trees, siren red and blazing.

As If I Were a Meadow/Antonietta

by Eve Müller

“The girl’s face was entirely hairy on the front, except for the nostrils and her lips around the mouth. The hairs on her forehead were longer and rougher in comparison with those which covered her cheeks, although these are softer to touch than the rest of her body, and she was hairy on the foremost part of her back, and bristling with yellow hair up to the beginning of her loins.” —Ulisse Aldrovandi, author of *Monstrorum historia*, catalogue of human and animal abnormalities, Bologna, Italy, 1594

The woman in black unlaces my dress
lifts it over my head and I am bare.

Sun pours through the window and
the hairs on my body shine bright and golden as trinkets.

I am excited by my nakedness and also afraid.
Hush, says the woman. *He will not harm you.*

Dr. Aldrovandi’s hands are gentle
pale and dry as parchment.

He examines me like a map—
traces my skin with his fingers

from the north of my throat
to the south of my pubis.

I am a girl of ten.
A cabinet of curiosities, he calls me.

*

My sisters and I skip through columned halls in silk slippers and gowns
past stern busts of Carrara marble frowning down.

We play with hoops and rubber balls that come
all the way from the New World.

But when the grown-ups are busy
with their tea and flattery—

nursemaid tending to the colicky baby,
laundress stiffening our fat white ruffs with starch and rack—

the other children of the court call us dog-faced girls.
One lifts the hem of my petticoat

whispers cruelties into my hair—
Do you hide a tail beneath your skirts?

*

I can tat lace, tie hitch knots beside the nursery fire,
read Latin as well as the prince.

Yet here in the woods behind the palace
I am a wild thing among wild things.

Hidden among the hawthorn and sweet cherry trees
my body resists naming.

I lie on my back, lift my dress and offer
limbs and belly to the wind.

Rooks clamor in the branches overhead.
Ants scuttle across my arms.

Crickets settle in my fur
as if I were a meadow.

How to Keep Produce Fresh

by Brandel France de Bravo

Never thought to separate
 bananas from their bunch,

except right before I eat one.
 To slow the rot, I'd sooner

swaddle the huddled stems
 in plastic, preserve the nestled

curve of them, row of teenage
 girls turned sideways, hands

on hips as they pose for a photo.
 I like to believe storing pit

with flesh keeps the half-eaten
 avocado green, and that stalks

of asparagus go limp when not
 banded together. I am bound

to credulity and wonder,
 although little child is left.

From East to West

by Robbi Nester

Once, it was necessary to imagine the sky. Small, I saw just a slice of it, tiny puzzle piece, the bit between electric lines and Stirling Street's red brick rowhouses. The moon mostly eluded me, and the fugitive stars, hidden beneath clouds of car exhaust. I had to move out west to see past that illusion. On the ride to California in an over-heating Datsun, New Mexico's wide skies and Arizona's deserts sparked only fear, the space between the lights of human settlements so wide, I shivered. It was a feral sky, home to fire, flash flood, cosmic collisions that could swallow my world whole, belch out a thousand galaxies, swirling like protozoa under the lens. I could see for the first time that matter, even that big tree or you or I actually as insubstantial as a wisp of cloud wafting across the midday sky.

a jumping fish in three parts

by K. Degala-Paraíso

3.

My brother won a fish at a carnival.

I can't remember why, maybe because he smashed
the most gophers with the most force and the least mercy, or
maybe he shot enough sitting ducks in the eye, or
maybe he drowned his own head in a bucket,
voiding the air in his lungs

to break his teeth on the skin of an apple.

All I remember is the moment my brother
dumped the fish into a bowl, filled with nothing
but finite water. The fish was so contained by his own
existence, cornered by nothing but his own reflections ricocheting
off the glass of the bowl, the water, the granite countertop, his own bulbous
eyes, scales, teeth,
everywhere,

there was the fish. The first time he jumped
out of the bowl, he must have wanted

to free himself from his ghosts —

the memory of a mother gone before he could break
through his own egg, the stench of plastic bag, the unforgiving
lights and loud sounds,

the loneliness—we found his body
thrashing

against the cold kitchen floor, heard him gasping
at the wood, a long splatter of water

to show how far he traveled, and I remember

the way he swam when we dropped him back into the bowl: furiously

lapping the perimeter, begging
the glass the water the granite his eyes scales teeth
to take him back. His regret filled the house.
So in the morning, when I came downstairs to see his still
silent body,
a stretch of water seeping into the floor,
I couldn't understand why. I held his corpse in the palm
of my hand til it left a stain on my skin.
Years later,
I clench
the stain of his body
as I am smashed
with the most force the least mercy,
dig fingernails into the mark of his death
as I drown, bury myself in his shadow when
I try to void the violence from my body,
and I remember water pooling
across the floor, and I remember the way light reflects
off a fishbowl, I remember trying to jump
out of my own skin.

2.

a fish

drowned
in his lungs

filled with nothing

but his own reflections

The first time he
wanted
to free himself

we found his body

gasping

furiously

His regret

seeping into
his corpse

I drown in his shadow
the violence
I remember
light reflects
off my skin.

1.

he smashed

the air

of
my

existence,

unforgiving

thrashing

I remember

begging

What Drops on the Ground Becomes Fertile

by Barbara Krasner

The pinecone shows its sturdy scales
in perfect formation. The generations
of my people who strolled to the forest
to plan their futures, to tap the pines
for their sap to make tar paper roofs
for their humble pine-planked shacks.

The pines give life. They outlast
the people, my people, my grandfather,
who once lived on Yosself's Street
off the market square. That mustard-yellow,
vertical-slatted house with the loft.
The scent of pine everywhere.

Under the scales lie the seeds,
each generation's regeneration.
The people, my people, were rounded up,
forced onto a truck, taken out of town
and were shot, buried in a mass grave.

I stand in the pine forest, my feet
resting on the soft bed of needles.
I wish I could say to my long-gone grandfather,
this comes from your forest, Leshner Forest.
I gather enough pinecones to bring to his descendants.

A Dedication

by Alina Zollfrank

My grandfather was a winter man
a dedicated bird man
a serious joke man
an always-thinking man
who cupped tight pale lips
with tight pale hands
and mimicked
the hoots of --- and
the trills of ---
who strode with bowed legs
across heathery paths
who quizzed me on the birds
he wished to attract
and when we walked wanted
to know if I remembered
the difference between African and Asian
elephants & Bengal and Siberian
tigers—

I failed such tests
also the other ones—

how wooden chairs should be soundless
when scooped toward the
round eating table
or how butter bricks should only be cut
from one side, the *one* side.
I watched him for hours watch tennis balls
plop left to right on the TV—
this was preferable (he said) to soccer
to avoid chaos they should just give everyone
a ball
so that humans wouldn't have to fight and also
he was not to be disturbed while
purposefully pushing the old typewriter
to return position and stabbing away
at memories that expounded
on the genetics of Siberian wild horses
and what WWII bombs did to big
mammals at the Dresden Zoo—

He typed timely letters chronicling
daily life, our names—the grandkids —filled
in after the fact
in all-capitals as if he had to look up
who we were
once the story already had taken shape—

or maybe he
wanted to emphasize our lived existence.
He never emphasized, though
the grenade splinter in his leg
or the trek he made on foot
back from the Russian front
or how my grandma would fortify
his morning coffee with breastmilk—
splinter of a man he was and
food coupons were scarce, she said
I had extra, she said, I may as well
get him fed

No, he never wrote about that,
the withering winter man
who strode through life not lightly
and tried to identify birds
to decide what was what.

When I Left the South

by Alyx Chandler

A sapping. Endings devour me
like needle-mouthed mosquitoes,

friends turned lovers for no
reason other than proximity:

that blood suck of libido that
drains a gully of regret into

the pocked skin of collarbones.
Infected are all the bug bites

I slap, little craters and scars
the sun spills its guts on,

freckling me with halos.
When I succumb to adoring

you, I know exactly
how to probe for poison

then siphon it out through
a straw, my throat a grotto

blackened. Isn't everyone
susceptible to becoming a

parasite until they're loved?
I mean, *really* loved—like a

moon loves a planet in the
reign of gravity: a constant

orbit. A science to study.
Unable to articulate goodbye,

I let the phrase *DONEZO*
escape my lips, yelling like

a whack gameshow host
wielding a megaphone.

Gone are my days as some
swollen-hearted woman bowing

to the welt of sentimentality.
I need the blood like you

need the blood: now, right
now, before the mosquito

gets smashed between palms.
Before that itch sucks me in,

and the bite blooms, inflamed
as June's strawberry moon.

Unclaimed

by Karen Regen Tuero

No one came to get the clothes that had timed off in the dryer in the building's laundry. Evelyn didn't know if it was okay to remove the clothes. She had already waited for fifteen minutes and no one had come.

What was the right amount of time to wait? she wondered. Her boyfriend, Adam, whose apartment she lived in, said - when she called him at work - "Just take out the clothes and put them in a plastic bag with a note." But Evelyn felt that if these clothes were hers, and she was late picking them up, she wouldn't want a stranger touching them.

"Okay, well why'd you call me then?" Adam said and they argued.

Evelyn waited longer, but no one came, so eventually she moved the clothes, which were still damp, to a quiet corner spot on the laundry table. By the time her own clothes finished in the dryer, no one came to claim the pile.

She tried to recall the other tenants there when she came down to do laundry. Of the several tenants, none were notable except an old woman sitting in a chair by the bank of washers. The woman wore a red headscarf and had a cane. Evelyn hadn't really tracked her but the woman, who wore beige gum-soled shoes, may have stepped away while Evelyn was waiting by the washers and scrolling on her phone.

What if the woman had fallen down or had some other medical event and been taken to the hospital? In that case, maybe Evelyn should take the pile of clothes with her for safekeeping. But what if the woman had simply left for a nap and overslept and was soon back? She might be upset to find her clothes gone.

###

Evelyn's call about the unattended laundry and her quandary was just the kind of thing that drove Adam crazy about Evelyn. Why was she so worried about how others felt? She didn't know any of the tenants in his building, so who cared what they thought? And why did she always ask him his opinion, turning him into some authority figure to whom she must answer? He hated being put in that position.

But more: once she told him about the clothes, he kept picturing the forlorn heap on the table, a symbol of a tenant whose whereabouts were unknown. When he came home from work that evening, he immediately asked Evelyn, "So, what happened with the clothes? Are they still there?"

She told him the story: when she was ready to leave, the clothes were still there, but she was worried about the night cleaning crew breezing in and throwing them out. In which case, the tenant, who might now be holed up in the hospital, would come home to no clothes. To prevent this disaster, Evelyn used a free dryer to finish off drying the damp pile, watching it toss around until the cycle timed off and the clothes were wonderfully warm. After carefully folding them, she put them in a bag with a note to Management explaining the situation and leaving her name and apartment number. "Please see they get to their rightful owner," she wrote. Then, with a knock on the super's door, she handed over the bag.

"That was smart," Adam said. "See? You don't need me to tell you what to do."

Evelyn made a face. "Who said I did?"

"Well you called and asked me what to do," he said and they argued more.

###

Despite her solution, Evelyn was nervous about the outcome. She thought the super seemed shady by the way he poked his head out of the apartment to grab the bag. His forehead was wide and sweaty. Later, in the elevator, Evelyn saw him with his grown daughter, her black hair draped over the purple floral top that Evelyn had folded and put in the pile.

“The super stole the clothes! What a horrible thing to do,” Evelyn told Adam. “What if the lady comes back? She’ll need them.”

They talked about where the lady could be since neither of them had seen her. They asked around every time they were in the elevator with other tenants. No one knew.

“Let it go,” Adam said, but Evelyn stewed. Especially the next time it was laundry day and she went down and saw tenants putting their clothes in the washers and dryers or folding, continuing on with life as if everything was fine. Evelyn wanted a proper ending to the story.

“Some stories are like that. A mystery,” Adam said and they argued some more.

The End

Why a Dove

by Ken Haas

Noah surely knew that, for the news he needed,
he would have to dispatch a bird that mates for life,
and only one, the female, who, as the waters
waned would nonetheless return, with a branch,
not for Noah, though it would serve his purpose,
but for her partner, the male darkly chosen.

And her message of the severed branch was this:
When I go out again, as I must, but return no more,
find me in the olive grove, waiting and not waiting,
building a nest of twigs and leaves fallen on ground
that has swilled the flood and dried and bloomed.
Found her he must have, for there is a dove hen

this morning on my railing, pale gray back to me,
feathers lifted, burnished head majestic, recalling
another, shaved and scarved, bright eye turned
to mine through slatted blinds, my oatmeal gone
cold on the stove. This dove has also lost the one
who found her, the one who made her feel she did

the finding. I do not know the message of her
empty beak, but read it to serve my purpose. We
who love until death must learn how to find again,
in the way we were found. The ark runs aground.
The earth soaks up every drop. For the drained,
what brims is out there, waiting and not waiting.

The Pool Isn't Empty

by Bil Lepp

The pool isn't empty
there just isn't any water in it.
There are pine needles and leaves
in the deep end.
Someone has thrown the starting blocks in
and the picnic tables
but strangely the diving board still stands.

The black lines my children followed at swim meets
and the black crosses on the walls at the ends
are flaking but there.
It's the first place my children walked to by themselves.
They drained it one September
after a trustee spent the money for a new filtration system
on a family vacation to Myrtle Beach.

I used to stand where that Pepsi can is and
throw my children as far as I could.
Throw my children as far as I could.
You can do that in a pool.
And other children who didn't have dads
would swim over and I would throw them too
and no one seemed to notice that I couldn't throw some of them as far.
They were just happy to be thrown.
Slick with sunscreen, smelling of cocoa butter and coconuts.
Smells mixed with chlorine, tanning oil,
and the oil they fried the mozzarella sticks and nuggets in.

The lights are like busted portholes,
like they broke and the water ran out
and the nothing flowed in.
No, it's not nothing.
The pool isn't empty.
There just isn't any water in it.

The Unknowable

by Dave Stern

Our feet have padded the same seaweed-tangled beaches and alpine trails for almost half a century.
We've gazed at the same gentle lakes and angry oceans.
We've slipped unknowingly into each other's shadows again and again.
But so much about you remains a mystery.
At one time, I sought to understand, to analyze, to quantify the fragment I didn't know
not content with the eighty percent I knew so well.
The uncertainty of what was uncertain taunted me to search, to worry.
When I marveled at your paintings, I felt incomplete.
I couldn't see where the flock of birds lifting off a beach was headed
or imagine the cove where the lone boatman was rowing his dinghy
or read your expression in your self-portrait.
But it's the unfathomable that makes you an ever- evolving partner and lover.
As you say about your art, "Our love is anything you want it to be."
I hear a love song without words on a distant peak we'll never quite reach.

I hear a love song without words on a distant peak we'll never quite reach.
As you say about your art, "Our love is anything that you want it to be."
But it's the unfathomable that makes you an ever-evolving partner and lover.
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or see where the flock of birds lifting off a beach was headed.
When I marveled at your paintings, I felt incomplete.
The uncertainty of what was uncertain taunted me to search, to worry.
I wasn't content with the eighty percent I knew so well.
At one time, I sought to understand, to analyze, to quantify the fragment I didn't know.
But so much about you remains a mystery.
We've slipped unknowingly into each other's shadows again and again.
We've gazed at the same gentle lakes and angry oceans.
Our feet have padded the same seaweed-tangled beaches and alpine trails for almost half a century.

Quatern: Spinoza in Exile I

by David Koehn

If a circle could speak, its god would be circular.

If a triangle could speak, its god would be triangular.

Take the boats out to Oudekerk for the dance

Of the dead by their beloveds in the flowers

Outside the gates; let's talk it through, you and I,

If a circle could speak, its god would be circular.

If a triangle could speak, its god would be triangular.

Do not listen to his words, they said,

Do not read what he has written, they said,

All this before I'd spoken up at all, I was, but what, twenty-four?

If a circle could speak, its god would be circular.

If a triangle could speak, its god would be triangular.

In nature, God does not hate or love, I said,
If god does not hate or love, I said, it is in our nature,
Love (and hate) do not exist, I said; it is only nature.
If a circle could speak, its god would be circular.



Autumn Leaves in Taos by Linda K. Allison

Snow Angel

by Ellen Austin-Li

I heard your voice for the first time
after you died your voice sounded
clear as I knelt in the snow you died
and I knelt on an extra-large ski parka
in the snow it was an unclaimed parka
so I knelt on maybe our nephew Jeffery's
who we lost eight years ago and I wielded
a trowel to excavate the banks to find the lost
car keys in the snowbanks already gone
lost eight years I cry because now my sister
is gone too and I've been searching eight
hours gone are the keys my fingers frozen
and the dark grows and the snow comes
harder the dark and my sister gone
my head drums as the tears splash
drum harder so I beg Mary to come
help me find the lost
keys and Mary's voice sounded not gone
Mary your voice in my head said don't stop
don't give up Ellen Smellin' Watermelon don't
give up just a little bit at a time you will find
the keys they are there all the time I am
here are my keys in the snow five minutes
after I asked Mary my keys are here
in the snow I am with Mary the first
time it was the first time after we lost
you I heard your voice.

When I worked security, we'd walk

by Ron Riecki

forever, all night, into the forever, all night, the forest
on fire, literally, and metaphorically, the horizon red
in the night, this red line, and the smell, the backwards

smell, the smell of burning lace and fingers, burning
mirrors and bones, burning lakes and childhoods, and
burning roofs and ghosts, where I'd try to hold my

breath, but I had rounds to do, a fence to walk parallel
to, uselessly, guarding nothing, in all honesty, maybe
the moon, how I'd keep my eye on it all night, like

this massive lock to the door to infinity, and the bore-
dom hurt, the minimum wage night, the threat—we
were told—of mountain lions that never came. I'd

wish for them, hope for the chewing of my sinews,
but nothing came, not even morning, because we had
eternity to battle, the endlessness of jobs in America.

wedding garden

by Kathleen Hellen

The bride dressed in white is taking pictures in bamboo
beyond the ladies throned in stone at the edge of river
birch. magnolia. i find a bench beyond the tents set up outside
the mansion. beside blue ice. japonica. spirea. i get a little
sad, thinking how i never had a proper wedding. no dress
rehearsal. just a pretty dress and a contract. i get a little
mad it didn't last. no one ever told me that the best we can expect
is contentment. bills paid. books to borrow from the library. maybe
a garden.

i hear bamboo clapping in the wind. happy witnesses. i walk to where
lightning struck the dawn
redwood: a torso like a sculpture clutched to earth. rooted.

Rummage

by Martha Zweig

She examined a used heart & clocked its
serviceable beats, it could tell
yes from no reliably enough
for the time being & could register another

mother's neighborly nod, the do
drop by I'd love some & the coos
to strange irritable babies in passing
through one's body & days.

Two others eyed her tilting it &
conferred, but she'd got there first,
early bird at exactly
this table marginally placed,

though for all one knows there might
be jumbles more of them out back
for when who'sever in charge thinks
to fetch another or ladies just ask.

Herd Instinct (A Diptych)

by Becca Brody

Plum Island

The older women always shout out a greeting:

“What have you seen down that way?”

They offer up a peregrine

a chance for an owl

some tripods set up near the salt marsh

make a worried cluck at the state

of the ice on the walkway

Down a side path, you call my name in a hush

point out the doe watching from behind a scrim of bramble

eyes huge and glistening

ears furred and alert

A few minutes later, a woman asks if we have seen any

deer or if they have killed them all

like the newspaper said they would

culling is a word that hides things

And I worry for the ladies strolling unaccompanied

in the national wildlife refuge human and ungulate alike

Fifty Pounds of Venison

My husband killed a deer
and by nightfall its cooling body
rested in my yard, eyes still
wet and deep
I knew I was supposed to marvel
and be impressed
but what I had to do is rest my hand
on its soft fur and press until
the death rose up,
cluck and say
Oh buddy
Poor buddy
feeling mostly sad
yet determined I would eat him
because the thing had already
been done and it seemed a shame
to be so tenderhearted
that an animal should lose its life
then go to waste.

Crawfishing in Macleay Park

by Alison Mandaville

for Heath

Our flashlight crops the night. My brother and I climb
the stream bed rocks and valley walls rise black

as nothing. We scoop in the wet crotch,
crawdads already startled

by the way water cannot hide
our sizes: some large and some

small, some with exoskeletons
and some with bones on the inside.

Scuttle muck silts our feet, soft,
like something of the air; the great horned owl

releasing pellets of mouse bones, tiny
fur nests for the less useful parts of the dead

animal. We step over these on the way home,
slopping our brittle prizes that climb

the plastic pail walls and knock loose
with each step, each handle tight. Something

moves on the trail ahead and we breathe, *Please*,
the day's energy drawn hard into the dark,

as the battery trickles up and we come out
under the first streetlight, accompanied

by the whiskery click of crayfish,
washed and without words.

Communion II

by Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné

I understand how a body becomes bread.
They set you on my chest, vernix-swirled
quiet and watchful as a new fawn, breath and need
threading us together, making us one.
Your soft cry leavens me, my chest rises
and splits. I have given myself up.
I will never be whole again.

How to Make Potatoes Au Gratin for a Family Holiday

by Hillary Smith-Maddern

At Market Basket last Wednesday,
I was overcome by the need to hurl
myself into the potato display.

That raw, starchy fume—
burned ham, table wine,
swallowed syllables.

It smells like a memory
with its elbows out,
wool sweaters, sweat,
cigarettes that clung for days.

I ache to press my fingers
into each tuber's dirt-ringed eyes,
half-wishing they'd scream.

Grief hits like that.
First, slow worms
against the cheek.
Then, a rapid boil.

Loquiphobia

by Alexandra Burack

He'd been shopped around to every prom
and bat-mitzvah. No fear of the date
who'd gab only about himself, '67 Mustangs,

or screwing. No way he'd dump you
by the punchbowl for skinny Mary-Kay,
no shouting matches over 'The Beatles'

break-up. Didn't matter if you were fat,
cratered with acne, varicose-veined. Prompt
to your door, he'd twitch in a four-inch-wide

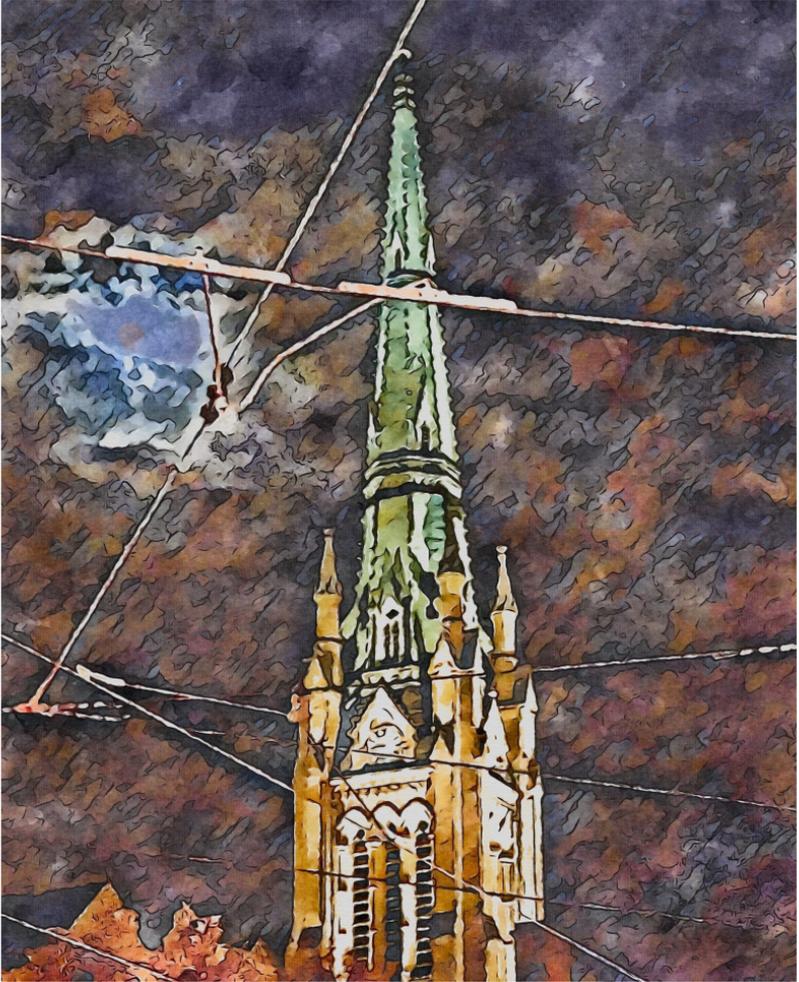
tie knotted so tight, you'd think he'd turn the color
of your taffeta. He'd thrust out the sufficient pink
corsage grabbed as Pete's Supermarket closed, lower

his eyes, scuff one white patent leather shoe over
the other. After mom snapped practice-wedding
photos, you'd wish you could just pat him on the head

and send him home to watch Saturday nature TV. Not
an option. Your mission was to withstand the gloom
of slowdance knowing you'd never *really* be interested

in boys, and if that meant your entire life would be like a salvaged date with a phobic distant cousin. Could there ever be pleasure in pleasure, or just servitude? His mouth

was a thin scribbled line like the scar etched by wire sutures, and close enough for me to hear whatever was trapped there being strangled by its first syllable.



Toronto Night by Linda K. Allison

Cactus Fruit

by Amanda Vink

It's understandable:
Nobody just knows how
to eat one. Nobody expects
fruit from the desert, especially
not under grey winter skies.

Nobody expects it to
look like *that*—an almost purple bruise
that looks lost in aisles of green apples
and pears and the Cavendish banana.
Nobody expects someone
like you to want something
so out of reach.

It's full of seeds,
so you can't bite down, you say
to the skeptical cashier when
you pluck it from your cart
and roll it onto the sticky belt.

He said the same thing, the first time,
when everything was still new.
He sliced one into two equal portions
with a white-handled paring knife
and folded one half into his gums,
an expression dangerously close
to a smile, before handing over the rest.

There are so many things
you'd love to chew on,
so many things you'd love
to learn how to devour whole.

Nobody's Girl

by Kimberly Gibson-Tran

Last night I dreamed about *Thalattosuchia*, that outrageous sea crocodile, Greek-named but raised from the clay in Southeast Asia, on ground I could have traipsed as a kid. The scientists said she might have lived in freshwater. Renderings depict a dolphin barracuda, but I don't know how the artists get there from the bones, those gaping spaces between the ribs—fins that hid longer limbs than expected. Her skeleton dated Jurassic, making me think, of course, of the classic horror theme park of clones I would absolutely visit were it real. I'd go, even knowing what I know about the end, stout legs kicking down a gullet, what one gets for calling a thunder-lizard a "clever girl." The closest we came as kids was when we dug up a pile of skulls in the woods, unleashed our amateur forensics. We took toothbrushes to the clay in the sockets, wiped the long white palates and canine grins. Our parents screamed to bury the dog bones back in the ground again, to stop making disturbances, dirtying our dresses. In dreams I lie back, spine to the iron-drenched soil, summoning that rush of wonder, willing her to swallow me whole.

We Can't Find Where My Grandparents Are Buried

by Justin Karcher

because grass has covered up all the graves.
My mom tells me she's grateful
she has my dad's ashes in an urn.

While walking to the car
we see this white deer
sunbathing next to an old-looking headstone.

When it gallops away
it's the most beautiful thing
I've ever seen. Then for lunch

we eat chicken wings and talk
about how monsters are born
in this world. Pretty soon

there's a basket of bones
sitting between us. We can
arrange them as much as we want

but it won't change a thing.

The River Calls For Us All

by Delaney Kelly

Orla went down to the river and wore dirt like her best church dress before the Protestants swapped Sunday psalms for desperate pleas. It was the soot that washes to shore on bad days that did her in. We call them bad days cause the carbon hangs low on the line like a too-full teacup with the leaves left in. Which was why no one saw Orla wave and flap her arms, and no one saw her kick against the tide of sludge which tugged at her ponytail braid and undid the ribbons on her best white dress. It wasn't until several days later when her face like a blanched apple bobbed to the surface and her stiff knees knocked into Old Jim's schooner. It was a good day. The sky was clear when we brought Orla to the Churchhouse, boxed in the sycamore that we cleared to make room for the culling of more carbon. The ground was sprouting something restless, and the worms came out to say hello as she went down. We all watched her go. But what a foolish thing to go swimming on a bad day. What a foolish thing to go swimming at all.

Interchange

by Brian Duncan

Where they built the new interchange,
and overpasses squat on fat haunches,
shouldering their burden of cars that speed along
and away, ignorant of past and future,
the oldest houses of the town once stood,
and heavy oaks touched limbs across the street,
stole the light and water, and the ground
was a fine beaten dust that dirtied socks and gave mothers fits.

And a concrete grave now carries the little brook
that ran behind one of those houses,
where we went to visit a polite white-haired lady,
and while she and Mom drank tea and talked,
I fished with stout thread and a bent pin in water
that was clear...and perfect...and fishless,
and watched the waterstriders
jerking their shadows along the brown bottom.

Scavengers

by Virginia Ottley Craighill

The seagull stands on one leg,
 reflected in a tidal pool,
 not reflecting.
 Why should it
consider the existential?

Maybe it misses
 the easy chips, fries,
 sandwich crusts of summer,
 must rely
on small crabs, quick fish.

Lone men with metal detectors
 comb the sand for old coins
 or watches
fallen out of pockets, out of use;

others look for trash:
 bottles, butts, beer cans,
 stray pieces of Styrofoam,
but the beach is empty now.

I search for shells,
 their names a litany of childhood:
 whelk, scallop, angel's wings,
 conch, cockle, mother-of-pearl,
olive, auger, baby's ear.

But they're all broken, stepped on,
 crushed, shattered, mixed-up,
 mollusks long gone,
 shields shed
like hamburger wrappers.

Still I pick up the pieces, spread them out
 like loose letters in a game
 make disconnected words:
oh help pal lock swing clinch clock juggler.

But broken things have their own pattern:
 scattered pelicans rise
 from the sea's surface to form a V;
 doves fly out
of a cracked sand dollar.

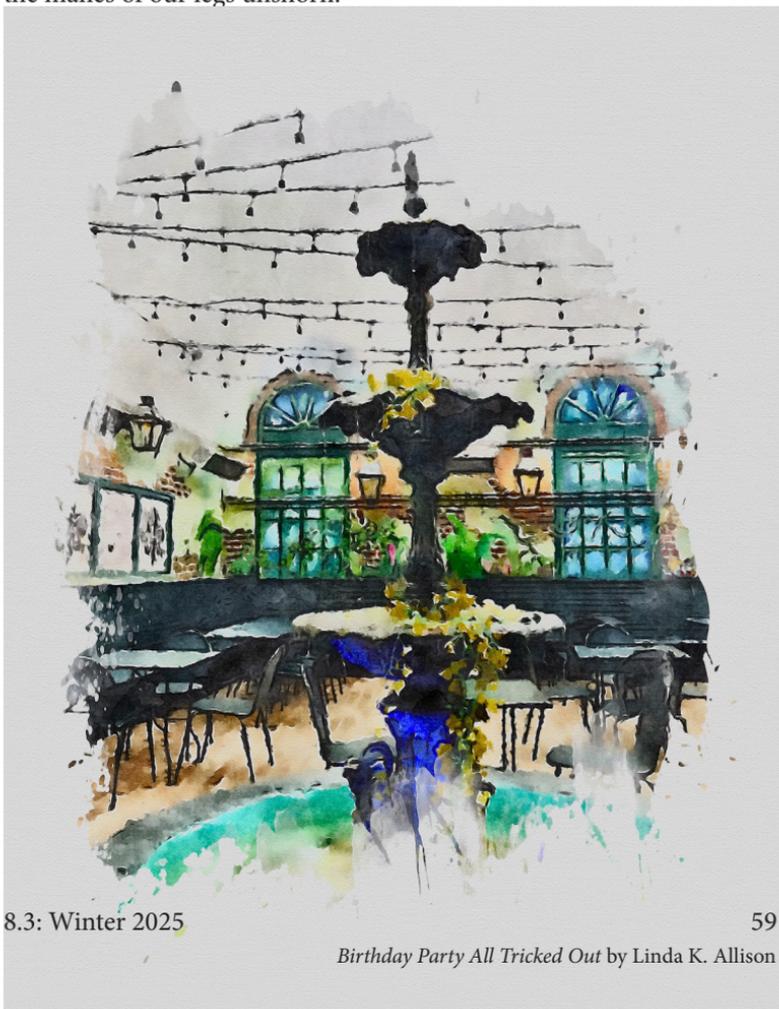
I let them fall in fragments
 as they will, wait
 for the new language,
 the *miracle*,
hope I can learn to speak it.

Shaving

by Allison Martel

Shaving is political the twelve-year old says
as if she has ever shaved, as if she was my
daughter. Her gait is lopsided and lovely
in the way of a colt that has just emerged
from her mother's womb, fully-formed
yet insecure for years. I remember
wishing I was a horse girl at her age,
my legs as hairy as a foal and as dangerous.
How self-assured and confident those girls were!
Their pure love for an animal that could snap
their backs and trample them in an instant.
Each summer we watched them perform at the Big E,
knuckles tight on their reins, manes coiffed better
than the hair on any of our heads.
Our cousins had a beautiful white horse, Benazir,
whom I loved but wasn't allowed to ride lest my allergies
kill me. I haven't thought of Benny in years
but I'm reading Ada Limón and learning more
about breeding mares and stallions than ever.
And I'm American enough to have a sense
of what it means to have bred a thoroughbred
but grew up betting on the greyhounds in New Hampshire
instead of saddling up to tame my own horseheart.
I remember Gramps handing me twenty-dollar bills

to bet on the dog I thought would win each time we went.
It never worked save the one time I guessed
the dog that ambled slow as molasses with his trainer,
then rabidly raced toward the rabbit: a whirlwind, a hunter, a
reverie. The twelve-year-old rolls a candy
cigarette between her fingers like I did at her age,
sighing and pretending to know it all, the *knowing*
just a pantomime of adults doing their adult stuff.
I'm seeing the ways in which we lack the same things now:
Around us the horse girls, all of them,
circle around us both, steady as can be
with the weight of a thousand hooves
thundering underneath,
the manes of our legs unshorn.



schedule this message to send at 3am

by Amy Devine

And that's the other thing about my mother,
she won't tell me that she's sick unless she has a story
about the nurse who took her blood pressure
in the emergency room.

I know that so much of her leaked into me but, God,
how I yearn to burden my friends at all hours of the night
with my musings on Didion, on modern slang like 'menty b',
on the crunch of cicada shells on my lunchtime walk.

This is the life I have found via the breadcrumbs left behind
and I want them all to know that, to me,
they are home and there is always a light on in this front room.

Cartload

by Janet Bowdan

Why Haibun are showing up everywhere these days, I can't say for sure but I suspect people enjoy the imbalance, the disquisition propped on top and a tiny haiku at the bottom as if a giant cart is propelled by a single wheel, maybe a roller ball for that little ink flourish. The wheel or ink has to carry too much, but so do all haiku, a task designed for a different language, a distillation of rice into wine. This week I'm adding to my cart three days in a tent in the pine woods of a state park in Cape Cod, two bike rides twenty miles along the ocean where my entire being focused on not panicking on the downhills, and just in that three days Israel bombed Iran and a Minnesota lawmaker and her husband were murdered by a killer dressed as a policeman. We are at the slippery slope, or one of many. This week I'm adding rain when it wasn't predicted and a coming heat wave; I'm adding Noah's first day of work at the movie theater, I'm adding Juneteenth, and maybe I've overloaded and this cart will topple and spill everything I don't know what to do with.

*Mozzarella toy
jaunty tomato beret
so cute—out of stock.*

*While attending the Deep Vellum
ten-year anniversary party at The Wild
Detectives*

by Clara Burghelea

The Dallas streetcar runs between Downtown and Oak Cliff and goes back to 1872 when it was mule-drawn. Nine cars and eighteen mules. I google the one in Bucharest. Born in 1870, drawn by horses. I sip warm beer and listen to the reading. On the lit wooden stage, the Romanian writer wears an intoxicating fuchsia dress, adorned with a wide blue belt and beady necklace. She reads in English with a thick, yet familiar accent. Behind me, two Iranian women in my grad program, are whispering in an elegant Persian. I want another beer, except I'd have to step on people's toes to walk back to the bar. The funny lady serving is called Juanita. Her almond-shaped, teal glasses make her look sophisticated. I bet she's read everything in the bookstore, maybe just the good books. The guy next to me barely touched his Paloma, such a waste. The heart Juanita puts into that cocktail. I feel the hum of the streetcar in the sole of my flats. The wet in the air is reeking of early April. We are all swimming inside a snow globe. The writer's deft fingers keep shaking it, we all wobble inside the womb of language, one big fetus, several hearts.

Camera Obscura as Self-Portrait

by Shannon K. Winston

An image stutters in the aperture.
I clear my throat. A molasses-like
darkness. An image swims
in the aperture. I reach out to touch it:
a blue-ish white. I stutter in the aperture.
I want to say: *love*. Instead, I say:
I don't know. I say instead: *Love*,
I don't know. I only see a polished metal,
an inverted image. A toilet paper roll
and a shoebox might have worked
just as well. My image swells
in the aperture. *Oh well, who can tell
anything?* Anything, I will make do
with anything. Suck the world in
through a tiny hole, project it
onto cardboard. Or press an eye
against glass. Yes, glass. I meant
to say *glass*, but stammer *alas, alas*.
A transparent grief shimmers
in the aperture. I clear my throat,
push syllables into the light.
I glimpse my image and mutter:
we look nothing alike.

*Returning from an earthworm's funeral
procession being carried out by razor
jaw ants, we get stuck in rain¹*

by Lavanya Arora

Nagarhole National Park, Karnataka

The earth is littered with the rainforest's decaying longings.
All shades of brown, from acceptable to unacceptable, lying
On top of each other, shuffled for suitability of daddy long legs
And Russell's vipers. Two hours ago, our guide had shown us

unmistakable footprints of a memory
of elephants. We'd wondered then, like we wonder now,
wet heads under this mud-brick, thatch-roof shelter engulfed by
flame-of-the-forest, rosewood, crocodile bark,
about the dead earthworm. Its udon noodle body lifeless.

All of its four pairs of hearts finally at rest, unable to love anymore
Itself and the mud. *How will the ants eat it?*, You'd asked the guide,
after taking several photos of the procession on your mirrorless camera
its eye the only eye at dawn
whistling schoolboys and spotted chevrotains couldn't avoid.

They'll probably take it apart, skin first, organs later, he'd said.
Your claws clutched my arms tighter than the mandibles of the razor jaw ants
heaving back to their underground lair, an earthworm-shaped feast.

Even the hearts?, you'd asked, the memory of gouging chicken hearts
At the new Korean restaurant in Bangalore last month already mulched.
Transformed into the Himalayan balsam's seed pod
a millisecond before its explosive dispersal, he muttered
under his breath, *Tell me, saar, what good are dead hearts?*

We gawked at each other, then at the grumbling clouds so close
To the canopy, we could touch them, if we wanted to.

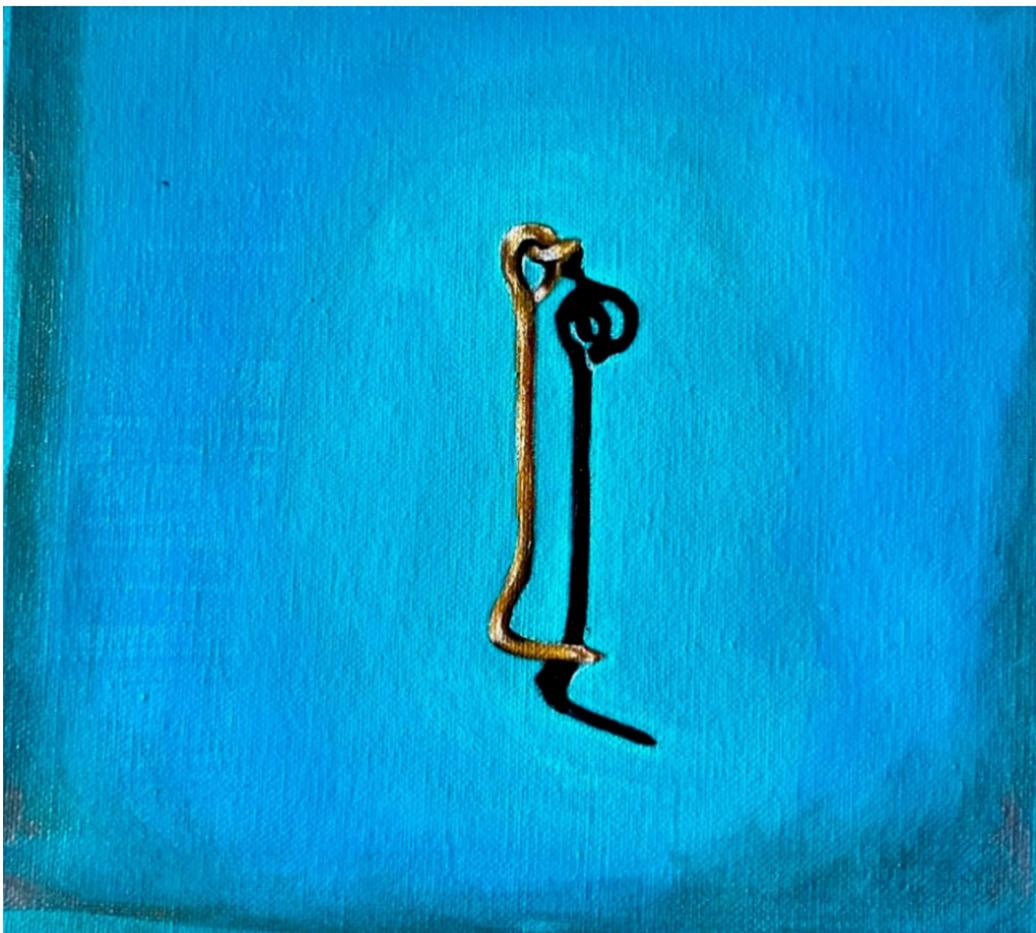
¹The landscape of this poem contains flora and fauna found within the Nagarhole National Park. Some of them endemic to the region, others endangered or invasive. Here's a list of them in order of appearance in the poem: razor jaw ants, daddy long legs, Russell's vipers, elephants, flame-of-the-forest, rosewood, crocodile bark tree, whistling schoolboys, spotted chevrotains, Himalayan Balsam tree.

This doe as a map

by Terri McCord

the parameters
of a continent
or a country
each hair grass-like
the flank
a stretch of plains
topographical
small hill
the ribs here
large roots
across dirt paths
slight elevation
in a bone
and the eye
visible in profile
might be a destination
or a scenic spot
like a wide lake
a waterfall
the ears large and folded
calla lilies there
the knee that bends forward
like a human knee
the soft turn
or incline of a trail

The map that bounds away
the picture it leaves
in place



Hook by Jo Rohrbaker

Cicadas, Puenta Allen, Yucatán

by Gabriela Halas

I want to return to that beach, garbage strewn, feigning
privacy. The dirt road we drove, crooked like the cattle
spine we found, jumble of twisted vertebrae. Thin palms exposed
our naked bodies to tourists (like us) intent on the same rutted out lane,
this sacred atmosphere of make-believe. I love dead-ends,
roads that lead to stony-faced lizards. The abandoned lighthouse,
though we couldn't find a way inside. Smooth sealed body,
cinder cool in our hands. We sought shade beneath that giant pillar,
wondered at the potted aloe in a small pool
of smashed glass. The cicadas sang mercifully. Cried for us
to stop arguing and enjoy the view (eventually, we did). Afraid of coral depths,
I stayed
shallow. Watched your back, supple, propel through constellation pinpricks,
the water's reaching hand. Suspended, I grasped at rock, the volcano's
bleached bone surrender to sea. We watched the terns cackle and dive,
each timed and hurtled swell.

Mystic Aquarium

by Caroline Picker

For Katie

Looking at the water, it's quieter. You can hear the slow flap of ray wings, a beluga whale smoothing the water, the pulse of jellyfish, crown shy and boneless, like the friend I didn't call, and then couldn't, because she died. When I heard the news, I thought of how you and I were moms together, our garden variety lives weighty like toothbrushing or putting the kids to bed. Just today, I remembered when I planted echinacea and motherwort from your garden into mine. A whole chicken can dissolve in the stockpot before you notice. Sometimes, we, too, go to tiny murky parts. Ada's dad wouldn't let the grandkids eat carrots because he choked on one once. The winter he died, you gave her a prism to hang in the window. Every cell that was once you is now thunder. The last time we texted, I asked you to go on one more walk before I moved away. You were visiting your in-laws and said you would absolutely let me know when you were home. That was a few years ago, which happens sometimes. You were the one who told me you took your kids to this aquarium every winter. That despite the crowds, it's worth it.

Stab Shallow

by Dana Henry Martin

The behavioral health unit spans the hospital's top floor.
Its windows look down on a lot packed with white SUVs.

This is the Mojave desert. White reflects heat. But you think
all that white is a sign that you're safe. Or maybe the opposite.

Inside every angel is a devil these days. It's hard to feel like
anything good's happening when everything's taken away.

Hair clips. Toothpicks. Your father's masonic ring,
which the staff pass around like a sacrament and lord

on their fingers. The one pen you're given is too small
for a child's hand and only writes in spurts when held

at ninety degrees. The idea is if you stab yourself,
or someone else, you'll stab shallow. That's not the worst

motto for living. Your paper consists of flimsy placemats,
which you fold into strange origami animals after filling them

with notes about your time here. You write some poems,
short ones, mostly about people in the parking lot.

A guy with five kids. You imagine his wife inside dying.
An older couple you think might belong to the local

alt-right militia but it's hard to tell from five floors up
and looking through a window obscured by patients' art.

You write about people moving with urgency, in wheelchairs,
with walkers, near strangers, and worse—alone. Who comes

to a place like this alone? You did. You include the date
on everything you pen. The psychiatrist likes it when

you know what day it is. It means you're lucid enough
for him to tell you what a failure you are for being here.

When will you learn, he asks, as if living with trauma's
a moral failing, a crack you can stabilize with epoxy or prayer.

Here, seconds are minutes and minutes are hours and hours
are days and the days don't end until the insurance does.

Vigil

by Birch Wiley

Instead of sleep, a book of poems
by a dim lamp in the chair
opposite the hospice bed.
Every two hours another
dose of oxycontin crushed
and dissolved, liquid morphine poured
onto my father's bright blue tongue.
I thought to steal from this fresh
supply of oblivion, but—
the sun came up cold behind
fogged glass. Birds visited feeders.
After silent hungry hours
the nurse—brusque, cheerful—drove
up the long driveway as the house
woke up. This ordinary
business of dying goes on
like this, until it doesn't,
and days get long. Late afternoon,
my sister and I took a walk
along the road's iced edge,
talking a little, breathing
mostly, listening to snow drip
from branches as it melted.
A cardinal—loud, bright, insistent—

landed on a low redbud branch.
We knew before our uncle's car
turned onto the empty street, sent
by our aunt to retrieve us.

Interior

by Julia Caroline Knowlton

I stand in line, invisible
in the grocery store
(post-menopausal)
my hair silvering

wearing cargo pants
and a dumb puffer jacket.
Thanksgiving week.
I stare at horrible

corn syrup pies and piles
of bleached, swollen turkeys
entombed in wrinkled
thick industrial plastic.

Who could guess
that within me I am with you
in our pure, nowhere union
of dusk pink, in the absence

of what won't happen,
the mistake we will not
make, nearness growing
darker, forbidden duet.

Medusahead

by Natalie Eleanor Patterson

fade in from black: a field
of rats running like horses from the slaughter

fire tower hovering heat lines
over the dry hills

the camera quivering in an unseen hand
a mouth darkens the lens—

-

anyone can be inside anyone else—

I mean this in the way of the body:
the plumbing past its hard rind

to a center that can be divided & divided

a testament to ruin: a girl is born a corpse
& spends her life walking backwards into her body

or a girl is born a body
& walks steadily into the frame of her own burning

she is complete when the edges
falter & meet

-

when I said *I feel like a ruin*
you said *I know* *I ruined you*

-

when I close my eyes I see
no darkness but your face

Snake River splitting the landscape
in two & one gash of earth is me & one is you

juniper choking out the sagebrush
bright ring of barren soil around every dying thing

-

I whisper your name in bed enough times
& my body becomes it:

just a raw keening in the blue night

I'd cut myself open if I knew
you would bow your head & drink

I'd turn up the static on the car stereo
if I thought it'd make you sing

medusahead rye grass overtakes the shot
lone arm gesturing back to the gorge

the camera pans back shakes a little
goes dark once more

-

-

before you my queasy little body
hallucination in a shock of dusty light

red-tailed hawk at the neck of a dead deer

I tell the story over & over again
until neither of us knows who is inside the other

-

blue delphinium red paintbrush

blood & juniper the fire
coming for the fields

*When my lover wakes, there are no
warplanes in the sky*

by Prashant Pundir

They say a poem means nothing
until you hand it over to your
lover to read it in the dark.

I hand everything over to my lover,
even my own hands,
for all the ways she is with them
that I am not.

I think I was a vessel in a past life
carrying hundreds of soldiers back
to their forbearing wives;
I hope they all made it home.

The last thing water wants is to hurt
you even if you shoot all its waves
in the head.

Early this morning in the garden,
I saw a man dancing in the corner
with his belly out,
it was as if he wanted to keep his
happiness as a secret,
but now I saw him, and I didn't know
what to do with someone else's
happiness.

When I got back home,
my lover looked at my belly and asked
what am I hiding?
I laughed, but I wanted to tell her it is
not my happiness,
it is someone else's.

Sometimes I feel I am alone as a
cop is alone,
until he catches a murderer to
prove his bravery.

But I wouldn't share this with my lover,
I would have her eat her dinner in peace,
without any voices.

When she wakes in the morning,
her face resembles the horizon—
blue, bright, and sunny;
birds sing folk songs
their mothers once taught them,
and for a moment,
there are no warplanes in the sky.

Stones & Stories

by Cindy Veach

The child picks up a rock
flings it into a creek that's appeared
out of nowhere after days of rain.
She has a good arm; even small stones make a splash.
What will she remember of me?
Hide and seek? The thrill of finding me?
She loves the wet stones, how they glitter.
I don't tell her
this creek is ephemeral will dry up in a week
these rocks will lose their shine
become gray and unremarkable as my hair.
We can't know what stories will survive—
she aims, lets go and the water erupts
moving outward in wider and wider rings.

Moving outward in wider and wider rings
she aims, lets go and the water erupts.
We can't know what stories will survive.
Gray and unremarkable as my hair
these rocks will lose their shine.
This ephemeral creek will dry up in a week.
I don't tell her
because she loves how the wet stones glitter.
Hide and seek? The thrill of finding me?
Is that what she'll remember?
She has a good arm; even small stones make a splash.
After days of rain, into this creek
that's appeared out of nowhere,
she flings rock after rock.

Fast Friends

by Margie Duncan

I chase her wheels up and down
the concrete driveway

together we dare
a figure eight out in the pebbly street

her new bike dazzles,
flashes red and gold

my hand-me-down answers
with squeaks and skids

grass, trees, houses, fence, twirling
spokes and streamers, her bright flying hair

the pink and orange plaid
of her late-summer shorts

the air shines and sparks,
the spins uncenter us
until we collide
and stop
and spin again.

After One Last Trip to the Store

by Matt Mason

we all came home and locked the door,
ready, we felt, to wait
out this threat that swept
country to country to state
to state, and
we had toilet paper, coffee, and pasta,
enough dish soap, enough sugar, and
we looked at one another,
then went to different rooms
to wait.

And we had Disney+ and Netflix,
we had YouTube recipes from celebrities' kitchens,
concerts broadcast from condominium bathrooms, tributes
to Ellis Marsalis, Bill Withers, prayers for John Prine,
the news anchors in their own basements,
live, telling us
how many people died overnight
while we waited,

while we talked about restaurants,
about canceled events, movie theaters, our friends, our offices,
we started to wonder
was that enough toilet paper after all?
Does anybody know how long
it's been?

And we broke out
the Monopoly board, read poetry
books, started pasta craft projects,
looked out the windows
less and less,
stopped turning the TV on for the president,
the governor, the news, we wonder

will someone find us
someday as the ghosts
of who we locked in here, souls
that tired of waiting,
though kept on waiting,
our bodies lighter,
our spirits feverish,
bright, impossible
to recognize?

Even a Rabbit Can Twist an Ankle

by Sophia Beem

My dad tells me that if I pick up the baby rabbits
In the downy hollow
And I put my reckless fingers on their infant bodies,
Their mother will sense me and
They will never be loved.

But a child with shaking hands
Does not know what it means to hold.
And a father with an instinct and a command
Does not know what it means to nurture.

When I am 9 the neighbor's dog drags bunnies
From a burrow next to the fence
And I see them bleed red and I hear their bones snap quick
Like a warning
In the jaws of something bigger.

I know it is my fault because I wanted to hold
Their heartbeats in my hands
And I wanted to feel their wispy fur against my chest.
And I wanted to be a daughter that was gentle and good.

I hear my dad's warning hot in my ear like the breath
Of a barking dog.
I hope it's true that some predators don't have a taste for rabbits.

The first time I run 3 miles I am 11 and my dad is jogging ahead of me
Turning around and backpedaling, like it's easy, and
Telling me to make my body work.
I throw up in the gutter and we walk home
And he tells me it's ok, but it's not.

I twist my ankle at 13 on a run and I sit
On the front step outside my house
Cool cement against my thigh, heat spreading
In sick twangs through my body.
A rabbit running, stops in the yard stark still and looks at me.
Its eyes are black and its ears are wiry and
It knows what I have done.

In high school my dad tells me that if I lose 15 pounds I will be faster,
Like he's afraid of the way my body makes me woman.
And he doesn't see the way I turn to face the window in the car
And he doesn't hear the way my heart thumps
Like a bunny in the mouth of a dog.

So I run hard at dawn on the 3 mile loop and some white furred
Wretched thing darts across
The tar black road and across
My path and I know
Even a rabbit can twist an ankle.

Someone Always Needs to Explain

by Christine Potter

Somebody always needs to explain to you
all starlight is dead—often a man who also
must point out each constellation, intoning
all their names: Orion, Aquarius, Taurus

the bull. You know he's not exactly correct,
but that sequin pleasing you on the horizon?
Time, the speed of light...it could be. So you
stand in a ring of friends somewhere the

sky's dark enough to feel close, rummaging
for warmth inside your sweatshirt pockets
as the late autumn lawn stiffens under your
sneakers. At least the mosquitoes are gone.

And now you're remembering a long flight
at night, how each city you passed held out
its long arms of light: shopping centers with
day-bright parking lots, with luminous arenas

carpeted in lush grass. And what a rush as
you landed: moving headlights, bridge glitter,
bright boats in dark water, then a drumroll
beneath the wheels: a song of earth's welcome.

Of course we could be about to blast it all to nothing. It was nothing before. Dry leaves rattle in the trees. But tonight someone has lit a wood fire that makes me think we could

live here forever. Sparks fly up and vanish. All we know is what shelters us now: night, morning, the comfort of our old stories and laughter, the patient wordlessness of the stars.

So Many Books, Too Few Elders

by Dahlia Aguilar

new women

we hold waters inside

collapse in ourselves

gulf swimming

concrete walls creak as they swell

body hollers

you see the gown, sister

barely covers the dome of me

how I swelled, 'couldn't know

no elders

underwater cry,

I am not embankment

not beach,

not dam

tides crash the shore of flesh

gulf against seawall

laughs, laps over, no one has
such force, no one has such might

you held my hand, sister
I held my breath

almost ended myself
almost ended him

I gave up, like pier
like port for hurricane

he came, they wiped gulf muck from his face
sea salt from his eyes

earth blood off his little body, placed baby
boy in my arms, elders in his eyes

Tree-Eaters

by Vivian Faith Prescott

The full moon-shaped muskeg pond
is covered in a thin film of ice.
I walk around it, my feet crunching frost,

my face haloed in winter sunlight.
I'm gathered here among the dried grass
and winter-spent, creeping vinelike stems

and all around me, are the old ones, those
300-year-old bull pines, bent in wind-shapes.
I consider my ancestors, scraping, drying

and grounding the pine bark into flour.
In the frozen mirrored pond, my ancestors
question me with curious eyes, their orbits

formed in patterns of icemelt like my own
ice-blue eyes. I don't have any answers for them.
I feel I'm failing and falling away

from our traditions. Instead, I cut a small tree
for the holidays and bring it back home.
I decorate the branches with old fishing gear

and the green, plastic hoochie squid,
my father's favorite lure for catching salmon,
now a holy token.

My father has died, and it's been a year.
This is the second winter without him,
and though the cold-nip of grief still aches,

all that is on my mind is I don't know how
to make pine flour either. I lean into the tree
for a sniff, and think of those intoxicating

long, red woody cones that will bloom
on the bull pine in spring and how
I will be there to witness it all.

Wild

by Shaun R. Pankoski

I read a poem at my father's funeral.
White Flowers, by Mary Oliver.
I stand at the podium, dressed
in a bright outfit, and think
about his inappropriate children.

There's me, jet-lagged, coming
from as far away as I can fly
and still be in America, reading
a poem about sticky blossoms,
sugary vines and death.

My older brother shows up
in a Mercedes with an oil leak,
looking like an undertaker
in a black suit and tie, his briefcase
bulging with a rambling script.

Baby brother pours himself
out of a rented Hummer
that's loud and belching.
Just like him, still smelling
like the round-buying night before.

Now older brother channels a preacher,
droning on and on to a confused
and mourning congregation.
Baby brother blubbers loudly,
snotty nosed, feet in the aisle.

I place an orchid lei
on the military headstone—
after the 21 gun salute,
after the gravediggers
hand both of my brothers a shovel.

They look at the men quizzically.
Suddenly, wild,
I push them all away. I kneel down,
grab fistfuls of dirt,
wishing I'd worn black.

Atoning

by Susan Mason Scott

1

Mother is a place, hidden in breast an aumbry, in the crux a son.

2

You see but look away from my paling flesh,
don't even graze. I see me too—
unwanted visitor, sinkhole, dark star, vapor.

I believe sometimes believe I must, will you
believe me? Lament for my child, the raw scent,
decay and Lysol, doesn't rub off.

3

Touch me.

4

My thoughts reverb reverb echoes echoes tsunami
in my mind I mind. Please stop stop it hurts inside.
Inside, voices anvil anvil like a hammer hammering
iron wrought—

the scratch won't heal.

Every day, metallic and sour I smell fresh blood.

Did I hear the screen door creak? Did I?

5

The prized young warbler
will return Spring's yellow light
but rare the sighting.

6

I left the door ajar, please come in. Come in.

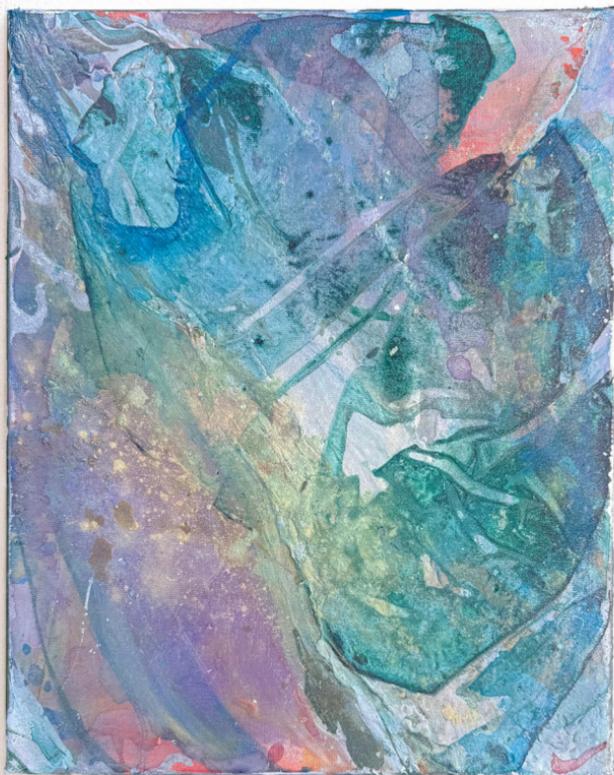


Dick Van Dyke flees his Malibu home

by Robert Fillman

in the wake of the Franklin Fire just a couple days from his ninety-ninth birthday. I imagine him composed, still able to sidestep that pesky ill-placed ottoman on his way out the door even in old age. Only instead of his house, the apartment in New Rochelle, that stylish “wedge” couch, everything mid-century modern. And it is Mary Tyler Moore, not his wife braced by his side. The whole scene is black and white, a little grainy, the contrast just a little too sharp for grasping any of it. He posts online that the evacuation went smoothly except for his pet cat, Bobo, who escaped. Then I recall how someone once said (I don’t know who) *Life’s a tragedy for those who feel, a comedy for those who think*, which makes me chuckle, begin to muse that with the right ensemble cast, a few well-timed puns, and a happy ending, the search for the feline possibly

could make a good sitcom episode. For now, we have a cliffhanger though—chaos and smoke, a brain the size of a human pinky, its owners gone, how the loneliness of an orange tabby cat maybe sheltered within a culvert or some other dark out-of-the-way place catches in our throats like dust, as bushes and weeds ignite in our minds, that red wall of heat now pushing against the backs of our eyes.



Imprint by Terrill Warrenburg

How to Lucid Dream

by Jessica Purdy

When I begin dreaming, I will remember that I'm dreaming. I was born with all the eggs I will ever have. I don't talk much, but when I dream I yell my head off. I remember the details: when I'm flying I'm late for the flight and the airport doesn't exist. Each of my flight bones exists, but I can't see them all at once. The ground is like the bottom of a pool. My legs push and I fly.

When I begin dreaming, I will remember that I'm dreaming. My ovaries are two floating thumbs. I'm empty of womb and glad. I have a sense of myself: round hole to a square peg. Sounds I make wake me: *Oh! Fucker! Help me! Stop!*

When I begin dreaming, I will remember that I'm dreaming. I lift my skirt and I'm wild. Untethered. My feet in the cold stream with the salamanders. I remember a spiny body. I remember flying a drone to see myself at the bottom of a lake.

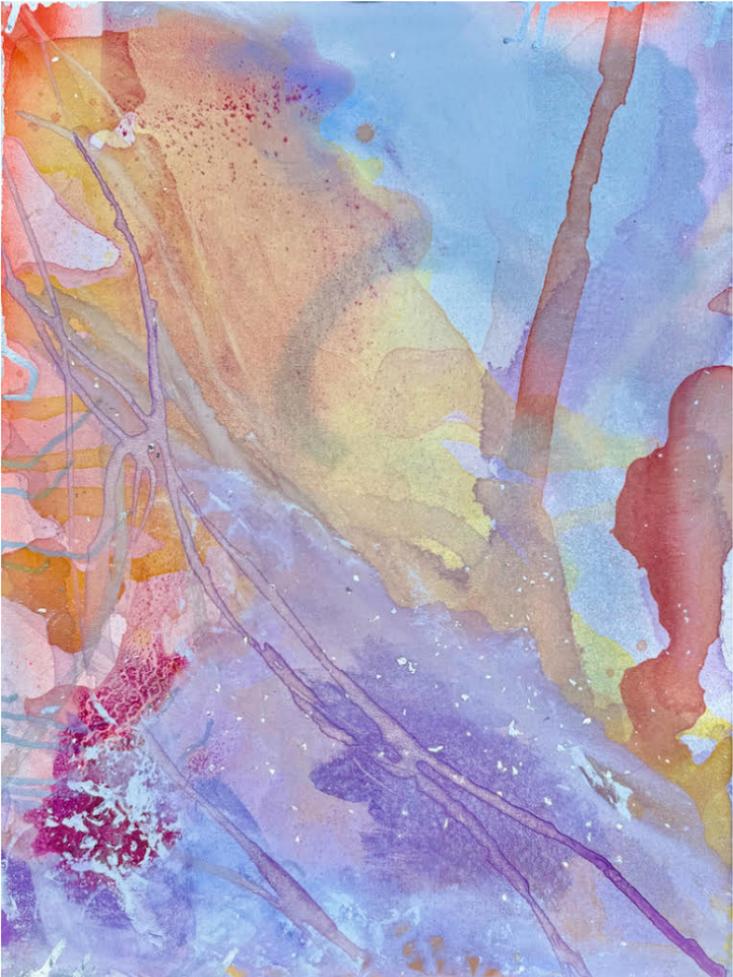
When I begin dreaming, I will remember that I'm dreaming. I remember I said *oh good this dream's going to be a revenge movie where not a lot of innocents die*. I remember being pregnant in a hospital birthing room where all the other mothers were getting plastic surgery afterwards. I will remember hearing screaming bunnies. Leashed to the house. They're not unhappy, but their sounds make you think they are.

When I begin dreaming, I will remember that I'm dreaming. I will die with nothing but a shape beneath my eyelids. A square with something on it. A tray. A record player. A blocked tunnel.

When I begin dreaming, I will remember that I'm dreaming. Some mothers walk the other way as their sons in business suits walk straight into the ocean. I pull my baby out of the brine amazed she can still breathe.

When I am awake, I will ask myself: *Am I dreaming? Am I dreaming?* I will ask myself, when I am awake. Awake am I, when dreaming I am.

Summer A by Terrill Warrenburg



Undertow: A Love Story

by Beth Kanter

We take our chances on the rocks that sweat yesterday's storm. Arrive at sea level intact. A holy place now before us. Queens and kings, mothers and fathers, lovers and storytellers reside here. Buried long ago beneath dunes overlooking an ocean so unpredictable that she sometimes seizes waders by the ankles. We don't need a reminder to keep our distance. Have already learned to revere the sacred. He sits on a piece of driftwood near the warning sign. Absorbs the water's roar and wail. I turn my back to him, her. Lured away by the whispers of the mothers beneath the sand. *We cried that ocean into life.* The sun tries out different places in the sky. Soon will set. We find each other. Always do. Motion toward the trail now hot and dry. Choose to climb back up

Lily Elsie Before The Merry Widow

by Christine Butterworth-McDermott

I. Daly's Theatre, 1907. Opening Night.

You're about to descend the staircase.

Breathe.

Remember, rosin is on your soles so you won't slip. Remember, you are not going to die. No one actually dies of stage fright. If they boo, you're just back to playing Lally in the New Aladdin.

How fear coats like cotton, a swabbing over your head!

You've tried to tell George how your heart beats like an anxious bird each time, even though you've performed ever since you were a spindly girl of ten. It happens every time.

He's not listening. You can't seem to make him understand.

II. Queen's Theatre, Manchester, 1897

The stage is a forest and you are draped in a red cloak and there's a jolly fat actor in a suit with a papier-mâché wolf's head. He opens his coat and you duck under it and through his legs, disappearing from the audience's view. Everyone thinks he's eaten you up, but you just

scurry back into the dark wings to be resurrected.

At the end, everyone applauds darling Little Elsie!

On the best nights, in the dressing room after the applause, Wolf gives you biscuits from a paper bag and tell you about his little son at home.

Wolf says, “Don’t worry so, sweet, you’ll soon be home, too, safe in bed.”

“I want to quit,” you say, not telling him home is far from safe. But he knows, he’s heard the whispers.

“But you’re so good,” he says. “You’ll be the star someday.” When he says it, his kind eyes crinkle. You want to tell him how absent fathers make ample bills and that’s why you are doing it. But you don’t.

III Daly’s Theatre, 1907. Rehearsal.

George says you’re so good, too.

You practice again and again. You think the part is much too sophisticated.

“No,” you tell him. “‘Vilja’ wants an opera singer and I’m no singer. I’m not a widow. I’m not even twenty-one.”

George says, “Dear Elsie, you will astonish them all.”

IV. Queen’s Theatre, Manchester, 1897

You have been Elsie who works. Elsie who models. Elsie who pays the bills. You have been Little Elsie and Dear Elsie and you’ve been Lily Elsie and once Elsie Hodder and maybe Elsie Cotton. Maybe. You don’t know. Your mother can’t tell you the name of your father. There are so many choices.

Deep down, you’re just Elsie.

V. Daly's *Theatre*, 1907. *Opening Night*

The music trills. A minute—before it all begins again.

The cap's not red now. It's huge and black and casts a shadow. But that's later. The hat's in the third act.

You gulp for air, head spinning. Fatherless daughter, fearful girl. What if you tumble down the stairs, a rustle of oyster satin and beading? Will you suffocate?

You can't stop thinking about what might come at you once you're out there, what might come from the darkness of shadow, what might be demanded of the light. Everyone may hiss when this meager thing called a voice departs your throat.

Your mouth is so dry, your head is so stuffed. It's all so much cotton. Why? Who owns this voice and has told it to be so quiet? All your potential fathers are like ghosts who flit into the forest. They hold no round remembrance like Wolf, the provider of biscuits. They are no saviors.

Tonight, you're not Elsie maybe-Cotton, little or otherwise. You're Sonia, the merry widow. Though you can't forget Sonia in Franz's original version is named Hanna.

"See, her name keeps changing, too," George has told you. "It didn't stop her."

Blink. *Breathe.*

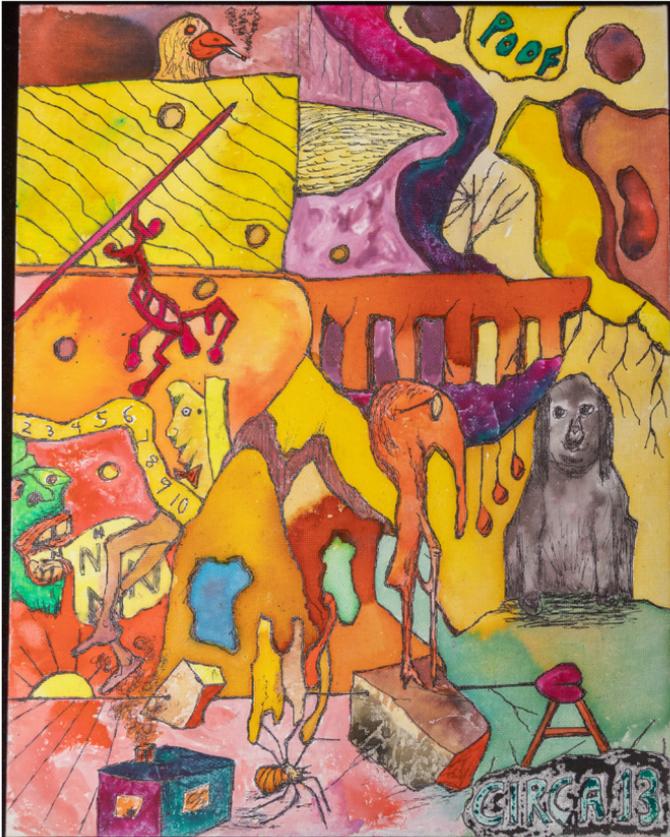
Prepare for blinding lights. Prepare for women's beating fans. White gloves that will raise to clap or point the way off stage.

In the dim lights you can see George, beaming in the wings of the stage, eyes twinkling, believing. Believing in *HannaSoniaElsie*. Believing in *you*.

The velvet curtains sweep to the edges of the proscenium and the stage is like the belly of the coated wolf.

But this time, you won't disappear. This time, you walk toward the audience. This time, you embrace the second chance to be born, to cry unabashed. You sing. You let the merry notes ring out.

And this time, everyone listens.



IMG_5472 by Richard Hanus

Contributor Biographies

Dahlia Aguilar is an emergent Chicana writer and daughter of Corpus Christi, Texas. An educator of over 28 years, she now works as a consultant and writer. She is an alum of the writing residencies Under the Volcano, Macondo and Elk River, and a grantee of the DC Arts and Humanities Commission Fellowship for poetry. Her work appears in the anthologies *Somos Xicanas* (2024) and *Boundless 2024 & 2025* as well as in various journals and publications including *The Skinny Poetry Journal*, *Journal X*, and *The Acentos Review*. She lives in the Deanwood neighborhood of Washington, D.C. with her son, two dogs and menopause.

Linda K. Allison is a recovering banker who lives among the trees with the love of her life in the aptly named Woodlands, Texas. Her writing and photography have appeared in various anthologies and journals, most recently *The Sun*, *Burningword Literary Journal*, *The Milk House*, and *Moon Park Review*. You can usually find her on a hiking trail, with a camera in hand, or foraging for rocks and mushrooms. Should you come across her on a golf course, duck.

Lavanya Arora (they/he) is an independent researcher and writer from Uttarakhand, currently based in Bengaluru, India. Their work has appeared, or is forthcoming, in *Frontier Poetry*, *Tamarind Literary*, Third Space anthologies, and elsewhere. In a past life, they tried understanding plant and bacterial DNA. They often dream of going on extensive lunch dates with Arbus and Manto. Instagram: @lavaurora

Ellen Austin-Li's 2025 debut collection, *Incidental Pollen*, is the runner-up to Madville Publishing's Arthur Smith Poetry Prize. Finishing Line Press published her chapbooks *Firefly* and *Lockdown: Scenes From Early in the Pandemic*. Ellen is a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net-nominated poet whose work appears in many places, including *SWIMM*, *Salamander*, *The Maine Review*, *Lily Poetry Review*, and *One Art*. Sundress Academy for the Arts (SAFTA) has supported her work. Ellen holds an MFA in Poetry from the Solstice program. She curates the reading series Poetry at Artifact at Sitwell's in Cincinnati, where she lives. Find her here: <https://ellenaustinli.me/>

Shawn Aveningo-Sanders' poetry has appeared in journals worldwide, including *Calyx*, *OneArt*, *Quartet*, *Timberline Review*, *Cloudbank*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *MacQueen's Quinterly*, and many others. Her newly released book, *Pockets* (MoonPath Press) was a finalist in the Concrete Wolf Chapbook Contest. Shawn is two-time Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee. A proud mom and Nana, she shares the creative life with her husband in Oregon, where they run a small press, The Poetry Box.

Sophia Beem is an Illinois writer who has spent most of her life in Central Illinois, except for when she briefly lived in Vienna, Austria. She is the editor-in-chief of *Green Observer Magazine*, and you can find her environmental writing in *Q Magazine* and *Planet Forward*. She lives in a pink house and sometimes hosts local bands in her basement.

Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné is a poet and visual artist from Trinidad and Tobago. Her work has been published in *Poetry London*, *The Rialto*, *The Prairie Schooner*, *The Asian American Literary Review*, *Wasafiri*, and others. Her first collection of poetry, *Doe Songs* (Peepal Tree Press, 2018) was awarded the OCM Prize in Caribbean Poetry.

Janet Bowdan's poems have appeared in *APR*, *Tahoma Literary Review*, *The Rewilding Anthology*, *Sequestrum*, *Lit Shark*, and elsewhere. The editor of *Common Ground Review*, she lives in Northampton, Massachusetts, with her husband and their son (when he comes home from college). Janet has just cleaned out her office after 30 years of teaching at Western New England University and is surrounded by stacks of books she does not have space for.

Becca Brody is a writer, mixed-media artist and librarian living in the woods of Western Massachusetts. Her writing has been published in library-related publications and various defunct feminist websites. Her creative practice involves interrogating the connections between nature, loss, and the cognitive dissonance of the Anthropocene.

Alexandra Burack, author of the chapbook, *On the Verge*, has published ekphrastic and other poems recently in *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Pangyrus*, *Metphrastics*, *ucity review*, and *The Sewanee Review*, among other venues. She serves as a Poetry Editor for *Iron Oak Editions* and *Poetry is Currency*, and a Poetry Reader for *The Los Angeles Review*, *The Adroit Journal*, and *West Trade Review/Trill*. A retired college creative writing professor, she works currently as a freelance editor, writing coach, and tutor. Her website is: <https://www.alexandraburack.com>.

Clara Burghlea is the author of two poetry collections: *The Flavor of The Other* (Dos Madres Press 2020) and *Praise the Unburied* (Chaffinch Press 2021). Her first poetry collection in translation, *The Clear Sky*, was published this year with Dos Madres Press. Her poems and translations appeared in *Gulf Coast*, *Delos*, *Mantis*, *The Los Angeles Review*, and elsewhere. She is Review Editor of *Ezra*, *An Online Journal of Translation*.

Christine Butterworth-McDermott is the author of two chapbooks and three books of poetry, the latest of which is *The Spellbook of Fruit and Flowers* (2023). Her fiction has appeared in *Beloit Fiction Journal*, *Bellowing Ark*, *Lunch Ticket*, and *Uncharted/Voyage YA*, among others. She currently lives in Texas.

Alyx Chandler (she/her) is a poet from the South who now lives in Chicago. She received her MFA in Poetry at the University of Montana, where she was a Richard Hugo Fellow and taught poetry. In 2025, she won the Three Sisters Award in Poetry with *Nelle Literary Journal*. Her poetry can be found in the *Southern Poetry Anthology*, *EPOCH*, *Greensboro Review*, and elsewhere at alyxchandler.com. Follow her on Instagram @alyxabc.

Virginia Ottley Craighill lives in Sewanee, Tennessee, and Little Deer Isle, Maine. Most recently her poems have appeared in *Colorado Review*, *NELLE*, and *Appalachian Review*. She has also had essays published in *The Sewanee Review* and *Best American Sports Writing 2018*.

K. Degala-Paraíso (she/they) is an NYC-based experimental writer. Her work has appeared in *[PANK] Magazine*, *Okay Donkey Magazine*, and elsewhere; and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. She teaches creative writing and is allergic to cats. More: kdegalaparaíso.com.

Amy Devine is an artist from a lineage of artists whose work has been featured in several publications including *The Antigonish Review*, *flashglass*, and *Beyond the Veil Press*. Her first book *Speaking of Bees* was published by Harvard Square Press in 2025.

Brian Duncan lives in New Jersey with his wife, Margie, and two cats. He worked in a virology laboratory for many years. He enjoys devoting his retirement time to poetry, gardening, hiking and reminiscing. His poems appear in *Gyroscope*, *ONE ART*, *Passengers Journal*, *Rust & Moth*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *Thimble*, *Whale Road Review*, and others.

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

Robert Fillman is the author of *The Melting Point* (Broadstone Books, 2025), *House Bird* (Terrapin Books, 2022), and the chapbook, *November Weather Spell* (Main Street Rag, 2019). Individual poems have appeared in *Salamander*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, and *Verse Daily*. He has received prizes from *Sheila-Na-Gig online*, *Third Wednesday*, and *The Twin Bill* for select poems. Fillman teaches at Kutztown University in eastern Pennsylvania and is the poetry editor at *Pennsylvania English*.

Brandel France de Bravo's third collection of poems, *Locomotive Cathedral*, was chosen in the Backwaters Press contest for publication by the University of Nebraska Press (March 2025). Her poems have recently appeared in *Best American Poetry*, *32 Poems*, *Barrow Street*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Conduit*, *the Southern Review* and elsewhere. She has received fellowships from the DC Commission for the Arts, the Hermitage Artist Retreat and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. Brandel is from Washington, D.C., and teaches a meditation program developed at Stanford University called Compassion Cultivation Training.©

Kimberly Gibson-Tran studied linguistics at Baylor and the University of North Texas. Her writing appears or is forthcoming in *Rust & Moth*, *Baltimore Review*, *Passages North*, *Reed Magazine*, *The Bombay Literary Magazine*, *Porter House Review*, *Third Coast*, and elsewhere. She lives with her husband and cats in Princeton, Texas.

Ken Haas lives in San Francisco, where he works in healthcare. His first book, *Borrowed Light*, won the 2020 Red Mountain Press Discovery Award, as well as a 2021 prize from the National Federation of Press Women. Ken has been nominated for multiple Pushcart Prizes, has won the Betsy Colquitt Poetry Award, and serves on the Board of the Community of Writers. His poems have appeared in over 50 respected journals and numerous anthologies.

Gabriela Halas immigrated to Canada during the early 1980s, grew up in northern Alberta, lived in Alaska for seven years, and currently resides in B.C. She has published poetry in a variety of literary journals including *The Antigone Review*, *Cider Press Review*, *About Place Journal*, *Prairie Fire*, *December Magazine*, *The Hopper*, among others; fiction in *Menagerie Magazine*, *Room Magazine*, *Ruminant*, *The Hopper*, *subTerrain*, among others; nonfiction in *Poetry Northwest*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *The Whitefish Review*, *Grain*, *Pilgrimage*, and *High Country News*. She won first prize for her poetry chapbook *Bloodwater Tint* from Backbone Press (2025). She lives and writes on Ktunaxa Nation land. She holds an MFA from UBC. www.gabrielahalas.org.

Richard Hanus: had four kids but now just three. Zen and Love.

Kathleen Hellen's debut collection *Umberto's Night* won the poetry prize from Washington Writers' Publishing House. She is the author of *The Only Country Was the Color of My Skin*, *Meet Me at the Bottom*, and two chapbooks. Featured on *Poetry Daily* and *Verse Daily*, Hellen's work has appeared in *Arts & Letters*, *Barrow Street*, *The Carolina Quarterly*, *Colorado Review*, *jubilant*, *Massachusetts Review*, *New Letters*, *North American Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Salamander*, *Subtropics*, *Vassar Review*, *Witness*, *World Literature Today*, and elsewhere. Awards include prizes from the *H.O.W. Journal* and *Washington Square Review*.

Beth Kanter's work has appeared or is forthcoming in a range of publications including *X-R-A-Y*, *Whale Road Review*, *Emerge Literary Journal*, *New Flash Fiction Review*, and *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*. She is a Pushcart Prize, Best Small Fictions, and Best Microfiction nominee. The author of five books, Beth's novel-in-progress, *Paved with Gold*, received a UCLA James Kirkwood Literary Prize. When not writing, Beth leads creative nonfiction workshops, works individually with other writers, and tries to grow things in the ground with varying results. You can find her online at bethkanter.com and follow her on Instagram and Bluesky @beekaekae.

Justin Karcher (Twitter: @justin_karcher, Bluesky: @justinkarcher.bsky.social) is a Best of the Net- and Pushcart-nominated poet and playwright from Buffalo, NY. He is the author of several books, including *Tailgating at the Gates of Hell* (Ghost City Press, 2015). Recent playwriting credits include *The Birth of Santa* (American Repertory Theater of WNY) and *The Buffalo Bills Need Our Help* (Alleyway Theatre). <https://www.justinkarcherauthor.com>

Delaney Kelly is a writer and playwright from Cleveland, Ohio, now based in Brooklyn. Her short fiction has appeared in *The B’K*, *After Dinner Conversation*, and *Flash Fiction Magazine*, and her plays have been produced at Red Bull Theater, The Chain, and Yale Cabaret, among others. BA: Oberlin College. leftyscissors.net

David Koehn’s third full-length poetry collection, *Sur*, was released by Omnidawn in Fall 2024 and is a finalist for a Hoffer Award. He also recently published several new chapbooks, including *intervals of* (Blue Bottle, 2024) and *As a Signal Magnification of the General Miracle* (cuckoo grey, 2020), both co-authored with Rebecca Resinski. David recently joined SJSU as a lecturer teaching comp and creative writing. He also has new work forthcoming in *Lana Turner*, *Swing*, *Atlanta Review*, and *Blood + Honey*.

Julia Caroline Knowlton is Professor of French and Creative Writing at Agnes Scott College in Atlanta. Recognition for her work includes two Georgia Author of the Year Awards and an Academy of American Poets College Prize. She has published a memoir, a full-length collection of poems, a children’s book and three chapbooks. She lives in Atlanta and Paris.

Barbara Krasner is the author of three poetry chapbooks, including the ekphrastic *Poems of the Winter Palace* (Bottlecap Press, 2025) and a forthcoming ekphrastic poetry collection, *The Night Watch* (Kelsay Books). Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Nimrod*, *Cimarron Review*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, and elsewhere. A multiple Pushcart Prize nominee, she lives and teaches in New Jersey.

Bil Lepp is usually a professional storyteller and humorist. His works have been published in, or recently accepted by *Rattle*, *Appalachian Journal*, *Revolution John*, *Paragraph Planet*, and *Close to the Bone*. His book, *The King of Little Things*, won the PEN Steven Kroll Award for Picture Book Writing. He has been a Featured Teller at the National Storytelling Festival since 2002. Lepp has published several books, and twenty-five, or so, audio recordings. He lives in West Virginia.

Alison Mandaville grew up in Oregon, Turkey, Massachusetts, and Yemen. Her own poetry and translations from Azerbaijani have appeared in *Terrain*, *Superstition Review*, *Magma*, *Seattle Review*, *World Literature Today*, and *Two Lines* among other places. She has received cultural heritage grants from UNESCO and funding from the Open Society Institute for work with Azerbaijani women writers and artists. She splits her time between Seattle and Fresno where she teaches comics, writing and literary civics at California State University, Fresno.

Allison Martel (she/hers) is a poet and librarian living in Western Massachusetts. As an undergraduate studying English literature and creative writing at Framingham State University, Martel won the 2006 Marjorie Sparrow Literary Award for Poetry. Her work can be found in *FLARE Magazine* and *Thimble Literary Magazine*, among others. She is currently considering pursuing an MFA after many years away from the writing life.

Dana Henry Martin's work has appeared in *The Adroit Journal*, *Barrow Street*, *Cider Press Review*, *FRIgg*, *Laurel Review*, *Mad in America*, *Meat for Tea*, *Muzzle*, *New Letters*, *Rogue Agent*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *SWWIM*, *Trampoline*, and other literary journals. Martin's poetry collections include the chapbooks *Love and Cruelty* (Meat for Tea, forthcoming), *No Sea Here* (Moon in the Rye Press, forthcoming), *Toward What Is Awful* (YesYes Books), *In the Space Where I Was* (Hyacinth Girl Press), and *The Spare Room* (Blood Pudding Press).

Matt Mason served as the Nebraska State Poet from 2019-2024 and has run poetry workshops in Botswana, Romania, Nepal, and Belarus for the U.S. State Department. His poetry has appeared in *The New York Times*, and Matt has received a Pushcart Prize, as well as fellowships from the Academy of American Poets and the Nebraska Arts Council. His work can be found in *Rattle*, *Poet Lore*, *Prairie Schooner*, and in hundreds of other publications. Mason's 5th book, *Rock Stars*, was published by Button Poetry in 2023. Find more at: <https://matt.midverse.com/>

Terri McCord is a visual artist as well as poet. She loves interweaving nature with lyricism and the visual. She has work forthcoming in *Jarnal Journal*, *Straylight Literary Review*, and *Otis Nebula*. She is a Best of the Net nominee (including 2026) and Pushcart nominee. She is a former *Thimble* contributor.

Eve Müller lives in Eugene, Oregon with her sweetheart. She has recently published in *About Place*, *Camas*, *Marrow Magazine*, *Sea Wolf Journal*, *Sequestrum*, and *Timberline Review* among others. Some of her work has been anthologized, and she has had two books published within the last two years: *Guide to the Ruins and Birds and Saints*. She was awarded a PLAYA artists' residency this year, was a winner in the Cirque poetry contest, and her work was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. When Eve is not writing, she bakes, hikes, conducts research on autism, hangs out with her mom and two feral daughters, and skinny-dips whenever/wherever she can.

Robbi Nester is the author of 5 books of poetry and editor of three anthologies. She currently curates and hosts two monthly poetry reading series per month. Learn more at her website, <http://www.robbinester.net>.

James Owens's newest book is *Family Portrait with Scythe* (Bottom Dog Press, 2020). His poems and translations appear widely in literary journals, including recent or upcoming publications in *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Channel*, *Arc*, *The Classical Outlook*, and *Atlanta Review*. He earned an MFA at the University of Alabama and lives in a small town in northern Ontario.

Shaun R. Pankoski (she/her) is a poet most recently from Volcano, Hawaii. A retired county worker and two time breast cancer survivor, she has been an artist's model, modern dancer, massage therapist and an honorably discharged Air Force veteran. A 2024 Pushcart Prize nominee, her poems have appeared here and in *ONE ART*, *Quartet*, *SWIMM*, *Jackdaw Review*, and *MockingHeart Review*, among others. She was selected as a finalist by Lefty Blondie Press for her chapbook manuscript, *Tipping the Maids in Chocolate: Observations of Japan* and as a first runner up for their Editors' Choice Broad-side Series for her poem, *Lupine*.

Natalie Eleanor Patterson is a poet, editor, and instructor from Atlanta, Georgia, with an MFA in poetry from Oregon State University. She is the author of the chapbook *Plainhol-low* (dancing girl press, 2022) and the editor of *Dream of the River* (Jacar Press, 2021), and has work featured in *Sinister Wisdom*, *CALYX*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, and elsewhere. She has received awards in poetry from Salem College as well as Best of the Net and Pushcart Prize nominations. She is Managing Editor of Jacar Press, an editor for *One* magazine, and a reader for the Julie Suk Award. She is currently pursuing her PhD in poetry. Find her at poetnatalie.com.

Caroline Picker (she/her) is a queer parent, poet, community organizer, and fundraiser for movements for collective liberation living in Southern Vermont on Abenaki land. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Subnivean*, *West Trade Review*, *Pensive*, *Ballast Journal*, and *Literary Mama*, among other publications.

Christine Potter is the poetry editor of *Eclectica Magazine*. Her poems have been curated by *Autumn Sky Poetry Daily*, *Rattle*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Grain*, *The McNeese Review*, and *After Happy Hour*. Her time traveling novels for young adults, The Bean Books, are on Evernight Teen, and her latest collection of poems, *Unforgetting*, is published by Kelsay Books. Christine lives in the Hudson River Valley with a very pretty cat and a patient husband.

Vivian Faith Prescott (she/her) was born and raised on a small island, Wrangell, Kaachxana.áak'w, in Southeast Alaska where she currently lives and writes at her family's fishcamp on the land of the Shtax'heen Kwáan. She's a member of the Pacific Sámi Searvi, an Indigenous Sami diaspora group, and a founding member of Community Roots, the first LGBTQIA+ group on the island. She mentors Alaskan writers in two writers' groups: Blue Canoe Writers and Drumlin Poets.

Prashant Pundir is a queer, outsider artist from a small town in India who enjoys knocking on doors. They don't know if they'll ever get in, but they don't mind only being outside. To them, poetry is a response to the everydayness of life. They enjoy writing about loss, grief, complex relationships, mundane aspects of life, miscommunications, empty spaces, and much more.

Jessica Purdy is the author of *STARLAND* and *Sleep in a Strange House* (Nixes Mate), *The Adorable Knife* (Grey Book Press), and *You're Never the Same* (Seven Kitchens Press). Her poems and micro-fiction have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, Best Spiritual Literature, Best New Poets, Best of the Net, and Best Micro-Fiction. Her work appears in *Thimble*, *-ette review*, *On the Seawall*, *Radar*, *Mom Egg Review*, *HOOT*, *Gone Lawn*, and elsewhere.

Jo Rohrbacker has lived in Flagstaff, Arizona for over 30 years and attended college in the northern Arizona mountains. When she earned her degree in fine arts and art history her goal was to teach, being that she knew she could be an artist without a college education. It was important for her to create safe environments for other creatives to discover their own passions. The artist's process can be so humbling and empowering in equal measure and she found herself grateful to get to experience the ebb and flow of the creative journey through others, not just through her own experiences. Although her comfort zone lies within the medium of painting, she has always loved telling stories. She hopes to create children's books in the near future, accompanied by her watercolor illustrations.

Ron Riecki has been awarded a 2014 Michigan Notable Book, 2015 The Best Small Fictions, 2016 Shenandoah Fiction Prize, 2016 IPPY Award, 2019 Red Rock Film Fest Award, 2019 Best of the Net finalist, 2019 Très Court International Film Festival Audience Award and Grand Prix, 2020 Dracula Film Festival Vladutz Trophy, 2020 Rhysling Anthology inclusion, and 2022 Pushcart Prize. Right now, Riecki's listening to Jeff Buckley's "So Real."

After a long career as an academic in pediatric nursing, Lynne Schilling began writing poetry seriously four years ago when she turned 75. She has published in *Quartet*, *The Alchemy Spoon*, *Rue Scribe*, *MacQueen's Quinterly*, *Lucky Jefferson*, and others. She has a poem forthcoming in *contemporary haibun online*. You can find her at <https://lynneschillingpoetry.com/>

Al Schnupp is a retired university theatre professor. He has designed and/or directed about 100 productions. He has written about a dozen plays; many were produced in university venues, regional theatre, and Off-Off-Broadway. Several of his plays feature real-life female artists and activists.

Susan Mason Scott is a retired adult math educator living in Madison, Indiana. She never settles for long, moving to new adventures in several of the United States, Sierra Leone, Nicaragua, and Italy. She was awarded first place in the Nebraska Poetry Society Open Poetry Contest and chosen as a finalist in the 2025 *Sweet* Poetry Contest. Her work appears in several publications referenced on her website: susanmasonscott.com.

Hillary Smith-Maddern is an educator and committed dilettante. She enjoys diving into the shallow end of everything and scrolling casually through JSTOR. She aspires to fake her death and never return to America. She will obviously take her cats with her.

Dave Stern is new to the community of writers after decades working as a physician scientist and health sciences administrator. He has recently placed pieces in *The Write Launch*, *Windmill*, *Free Spirit Publishing*, *1922 Revival/VOICES*, *Streetlight Magazine*, *the Awakenings Review*, *Manifest Station*, and others. Dave grew up on the North Shore of Long Island where he spent summers sailing on Long Island Sound. He lives with his wife of almost fifty years, Kathleen, an artist, in Asheville, NC.

Karen Regen Tuero is a Pushcart-nominated writer whose stories have been published in *North American Review*, *Lunch Ticket*, *New World Writing*, *Potomac Review*, *Gargoyle*, and elsewhere. Find links to her work at: <https://linktr.ee/kregentuero>

Cindy Veach is the author of three poetry collections: *Monster Galaxy* (MoonPath Press) a finalist for the Sally Albiso Award; *Her Kind* (CavanKerry Press) a finalist for the Eric Hoffer Montaigne Medal; and *Gloved Against Blood* (CavanKerry Press) a finalist for the Paterson Poetry Prize and a Massachusetts Center for the Book "Must Read." Her poems have appeared in the Academy of American Poets *Poem-a-Day*, *AGNI*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *North American Review*, *Poet Lore*, and *Salamander* among others. Recipient of the Philip Booth Poetry Prize and the Samuel Allen Washington Prize, Cindy is poetry co-editor of *MER*. www.cindyveach.com

Amanda Vink is a writer living at the edge of Lake Erie. She is the author of the novel-in-verse *And We Call it Love*. Her writing can be found in libraries across the globe and online at <https://smallinabigworld.substack.com/>

Agnes Vojta grew up in Germany and now lives in Rolla, Missouri where she teaches physics at Missouri S&T and hikes the Ozarks. She is the author of *Porous Land*, *The Eden of Perhaps*, and *A Coracle for Dreams* (Spartan Press), and her fourth collection *Love Song to Gravity* has come out from Stubborn Mule Press in 2025. Her poems have appeared in a variety of magazines; you can read some of them on her website agnesvojta.com.

Terrill Warrenburg is an interdisciplinary artist and independent curator living and working in the tri-state area (New York, New Jersey, Connecticut). Terrill's artwork is non-representational and rooted in self-discovery and meditative practice. In her artistic practice, she explores the relationship between chance, digital manipulation, and repetitive mark-making. Never considering an artwork "complete," she revisits her evolving two dimensional "painted" surfaces, often years later. Warrenburg's painting practice is rooted in a dialogue between intention and chance, where organic forms, emotional resonance, and time converge. Layers of pigment, loose powders, and spray paint accumulate over years and years, creating surfaces that merge memory with the present moment. Gravity, fluid movement, and the natural flow of materials introduce elements of unpredictability—turning accidents into opportunities. Drawing inspiration from natural phenomena such as fluid dynamics, geological layers, and cellular structures, these abstract compositions echo the impermanence and interconnectedness of life. Each painting invites the viewer to look closely, uncovering subtle shifts and hidden details, and to consider the beauty of transformation and imperfection.

Birch Wiley is a transsexual poet living in New York. Their work can be found in *Pleiaides*, *Voicemail Poems*, and *Querencia Quarterly*, among others. Their debut collection, *Mythweaver*, is out now from new words {press}. You can learn more about them at birchwiley.com.

Shannon K. Winston is the author of *The Worry Dolls* (Glass Lyre Press, 2025) and *The Girl Who Talked to Paintings* (Glass Lyre Press, 2021). Her individual poems have appeared in *Bracken*, *Cider Press Review*, the *Los Angeles Review*, *RHINO Poetry*, *SWWIM Every Day*, *West Trestle Review*, and elsewhere. She lives in Bloomington, IN. Find her here: <https://shannonkwinston.com/>.

Wendy Wisner is the author of three books of poems, most recently *The New Life*, published by Cornerstone Press (University of Wisconsin Stevens-Point) and named a finalist for the Foreword INDIES Book of the Year. Wendy's poems and essays have appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *Spoon River Review*, *Passages North*, *THRUSH*, *Verse Daily*, *The Washington Post*, *Lilith Magazine*, and elsewhere.

J. L. Yocum is a musician and poet living in Brooklyn. He holds a B.A. in English Composition, concentration Poetry, from the University of North Texas. His poems have appeared in *Albatross*, *The Orchards Poetry Journal*, *ionosphere*, *The Big Windows Review*, and *The Broken Teacup*. More are forthcoming in *\$ Poetry Is Currency*, *The Comstock Review*, and *Pinhole Poetry*. His musical endeavors span a few decades and a handful of projects, including work on the soundtrack of at least one award-winning film. He pays the rent working in a fine-art-adjacent industry and splits the bills with his wife and their indolent marmalade tabby.

Alina Zollfrank dreams trilingually in the Pacific Northwest. Her work has been nominated for Best of the Net and The Pushcart Prize and recently appeared in *SAND*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, *Door Is A Jar*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Full House*, and several anthologies. Alina is a grateful recipient of the 2024 Washington Artist Trust Grant and committed disability advocate.

Martha Zweig's five, full-length poetry collections include *Get Lost*, Dream Horse Press; *Monkey Lightning*, Tupelo, *What Kind* and *Vinegar Bone*, both from Wesleyan University Press, and *Snails of the Apocalypse*, forthcoming October 2026 from River River Press. Her chapbooks are *Powers*, Stinehour Press, Vermont Council on the Arts, and *A Skirmish of Harks*, Jacar e-book. Zweig's recognitions include Hopwood Awards, a Whiting Award, Pushcart and Best of the Net nominations, and a Warren Wilson MFA. She lives in Vermont where she worked ten years as an advocate for seniors, after ten years handling garments in a pajama factory where she served a term as ILGWU shop chair.

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