

# *Thimble Literary Magazine*

*Volume 8 · Number 4 · Spring 2026*

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Our staff consists of Nadia Arioli, Editor-in-Chief and Managing Editor; Agnes Vojta, Associate Poetry Editor; Richard Jordan, Associate Poetry Editor; Melissa McEver Huckabay, Associate Poetry Editor; Aliah Fabros, Associate Poetry Editor; Mark David Noble, Associate Poetry Editor; Izzy Maxson, Associate Poetry Editor; Adam Jon Miller, Associate Poetry Editor; Jeanne Griggs, Poetry Reader; Sally Brown and Elizabeth Ranieri, Art Editors; Walker Smart, Prose Editor; Katie Yacharn, Design and Layout Editor.

Cover Art: *Li'l Red on Her Way to Her Grandma's House* by Phyllis Bramson

Back Cover: *The Bliss of the Picturesque (Romantic Misfits)* by Phyllis Bramson

*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](mailto:ThimbleLitMagSubmissions@gmail.com) with the genre in the subject line.

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## *Editor's Note*

by Nadia Arioli

---

Dear Readers,

Poets are dangerous. I never set out to make a poetical magazine, anything with a kind of bent. But given that we are about shelter, it became political. Who deserves to be safe? Who deserves to be saved?

Poets are dangerous. Our purpose is to witness, to record, to legally observe. We make inventories for small losses.

Poets are dangerous. We see how it all connects. Poets are dangerous, and I'm tired. The work continues, awful and rarely cheerful.

And yet—the spiders are making their webs. Icarus shows us how to fly. We hatch escape plans, metaphor by swinging metaphor.

It's cold comfort in this world of ours. I'm tired. A few years ago, I visited Elizabeth Bishop's grave. Previous visitors left stones. I learned later this is to say "You are not forgotten." I thought it meant, like gentle graffiti, "I was here."

Could there be a poem where those mean the same thing? Maybe all the poems in this issue were chosen for that reason, because that is what they are saying.

You are not forgotten.  
I was here.

Best,  
Nadia Arioli  
For Renee Nicole Good, poet

# *Irritable Bowel Syndrome*

by Tracie Renee

---

My doctor warns me not to stress,  
not to strain, but already it's too late,  
that's why I'm here  
again, because of the blood  
and the pain  
and the way it interrupts dreams.  
She says the colonoscopy was clean  
aside from one small constellation  
of internal hemorrhoids,  
just a belated gift  
of pregnancy but also  
evidence that I'm not dying  
yet, only mostly  
miserable.  
She calls my bowel  
irritable.  
She tells me to modify  
my diet  
again,  
to breathe deeply  
and a bit more often  
and follow up in six months  
if I continue bleeding  
and crying

and not dying  
yet  
and isn't it great how my body's just  
raising a red flag, giving me another crack  
at softness, another crack  
at the way life  
shouldn't be this hard because  
it's simple, really: all I need to do is

hold the world inside me  
and then just  
let it go.

# *Blackberries*

by Robbie Gamble

---

The thickets are blowsy and serrated  
as August scrapes past its zenith.  
You'd think them as impenetrable  
  
as a fence of penitentiary razor wire  
but bears have ploughed tunnels  
the breadth of a storm drain  
  
in the wake of their snacking  
and on the path, piles of scat punctuate  
their claim to this spread. A blackberry  
  
is a drupelet, cousin to the solitary plum  
but bunched in clusters, a tiny  
glistening aggregate bearing flecks  
  
of pits that stick in my molars'  
clefts. Syrupy and astringent, they are  
the flavor of waning summer.  
  
Seasons fester on. The bears  
in their indiscriminate forage  
left me enough fruit for one more

batch of scones. I pluck onward  
through their thorny negative space.  
How do bears pack on enough calories

in these shortening days to smolder  
through winter, self-anesthetized  
in their dens? Soon we will cluster

round the woodstove, flannel-wrapped  
and bland, that purpling sweetness  
a gritty memory on the tongue.

# *waxing lyrical about something you said*

by Brent Cantwell

---

Because my boy's awake,  
and the gap in his curtain  
casts what cannot be a coincidence  
of light  
on balcony slats,  
criss-crossing  
the mathematics of the moon,  
the outdoor couch's cushion  
yields a touch for a tired spine.

Because I can hear my daughter softly  
flicking a pencil,  
I am able to draw  
a soft breath enough  
to shade the day  
into falling away...

Because I know my third  
is writing a novel  
as she waits for the moon  
to reframe  
itself in a cathedral's curtainless window,

I can tidally lock myself safely to sleep,  
and wane away.

# *Taxidermy Childhood*

by Trinity Richardson

---

Hot plastic tube scalded skin / karma for spring lovebugs I pulled  
apart / mean in my unknowing / Seagrape choker, ugly bug defender  
/ Lonely, deimatic child / who mistook cicada whir / for sun's rays /  
beating down on the back of their neck / blistered skin peels / reveals  
possum-teeth-sharp smile / whispering in a soft bee-hive purr / (*Show  
them your teeth*) / Jar of wings and tiny femurs and porous membrane  
coral on bookshelf / (*Show them your teeth*) / Dead ringneck curl  
burned into retina / fixed in a shriveled "C" / Bright orange under-  
belly mimic / (*Show them your teeth*) / Shared gluttonous appetite /  
of polka-dot wasp moth / but human child eats / alphabet soup, Kraft  
mac & cheese, canned green beans / (*Show them your teeth*) / Four-  
eyed, bold spider jumping / daring darling inspires fear and loathing /  
through double-dating swing jumps and dizzying monkey bar heights  
/ (*Show them your teeth*) / Self-soothing growl and imaginary friends  
and 4pm end-of-the-world cataclysm / Meanwhile, / (*Show them your  
teeth, show them your teeth, show them your teeth*)

# Conversation

by Francine Witte

---

I could tell you a story.

*I don't want a story. I want the truth.*

The truth is too expensive. It tears out our hair.

*Don't we need to hear it anyway?*

Don't say I didn't warn you.

*It's okay. I brought a hat.*

Love is an invented thing. Like holidays and time.

*Why does my heart beat faster? Why does my stomach flip and flop?*

Learned responses. Like wanting candy on Halloween. Wanting a drink at 5 o'clock.

*If we did invent love, wouldn't we have made it kinder?*

You'd think so, but jumpuddle love, the kind that makes us want to smell nice, sells more perfume.

*So the ache in my heart from made-up love is not at all real?*

No. That is real. The tears, the longing. All of it real. It just isn't the truth.

*Why do we do it? Have real responses to something made up?*

Because, the truth is, the truth doesn't make a good story.

# *On the Land*

by Chris Dungey

---

Gulls are first to be on the land  
near Saginaw Bay, this Monday  
after Easter, pecking in the corn  
and navy bean stubble  
at the end of mud time.  
But, by *on the land* those  
growers mean: *to be turning over  
furrows and breaking clods*  
with disc harrows honed sharp  
as Peter's sword, except once drawn,  
used until the job is done.

\*

Auto workers, though,  
have another day to roll their stone  
back into place; maybe drive  
up where perch are rumored to be  
running off Bayport or Caseville.  
Along their way they'll see  
the breath of tractors chugging  
under gravity tanks in the dawn  
barnyards, then all those gulls  
and remember: *We'll need fresh  
outboard gas. And bait.*

## *Book Signing*

by Jessica L. Walsh

---

How cruel  
the altar that christened you  
into a second body

brings not-you before me  
to rouse you  
from my memory

where I've let you rest  
a decade—more—  
as though you had died.

Have you died

I want to ask  
this woman with your name  
like letters tether you

Or are you where I lost you:  
in the dusty palm of Michigan  
long-sleeved for cold and collapse  
your eyes glassed,  
glasses gone  
along with every book,  
eight teeth,  
your only child.

I write your name  
and below it  
my own.



*Mary, Mary is Quite Contrary, How Does Your Garden Grow* by Phyllis Bramson

# *What Built the Ground*

by Laura Hilger

---

Jasmine rice of my house  
the pink of my breath  
the bone of my book

I buffed every mushroom for my girl  
yes fellas I've done it  
I can make what I want here

Underneath grass  
a coating of the earth  
a layer beneath

Is another fact  
one where we  
remember the letters

But forget the number  
to get out  
with our lives

Tonight  
I brought home pale lip chrysanthemums  
for fun

Now let me read Rita Dove in the dark  
by flashlight and a weak green candle

# *Earning the Day*

by Lynne Burnett

---

*Rub my head, my son says. Rub it again. Rub more.*

I cradle the round perfection of a head that never had to push up against vaginal walls, a head that never had to burst through a door too small to get to this world, that had instead another door calmly, graciously opened for it, the light pouring in all at once upon his already open eyes as if he had only to knock and we would answer. I pause, thinking of the chick that can't peck its way out of the shell that enfolds it, how it will die as surely as the chick whose shell is broken for it. *Rub my head*, he commands again.

See, he wants that pressure against the strong bones of his skull, he wants the undulating pulse of my fingers pressing down, circling, tunnelling him through the adolescent years to come, my palms flat and open, hot with rubbing. Sighing with pleasure he doesn't want me to stop, not before he is born into the dark folds of night and fights his way along the corridors of dreams when others would sleep—a mighty presence heaving his body up and down mountainsides, thrashing his cocoon of blankets off until he straddles *his* heaven, *his* earth and wakes, having earned the day.

# *Battle with an Ant Hill*

by Sarah Banks

---

After days of heavy rain,  
an ant hill blooms  
in the grass. Their underground

channels submerged,  
the worker ants surface  
to scale the dune

built on spiky green blades  
of Bermuda. Late afternoon  
they patrol the peak.

Like copper flecks, the ants shine  
as I dot the hill with bait,  
sprinkle granules like sugar crystals

onto the mountain. They carry  
toxins back to the colony,  
spread poison through tunnels

and kill the queen.  
Survivors clear the hill  
of the dead, stack remains

into a midden then scatter.  
With my shovel, I level the mound,  
mix residue into the grass.

Bodies clumped, the mass shrivels  
in the sun, but one ant flickers  
on top of the heap.

Watching it there, I wonder  
how I'll leave  
the world. After the toil,

the ant still shimmers.  
Its thorax glints in the sunlight—  
one solitary spark.



*Painting Partners (Painting is a Pastime)* by Phyllis Bramson

# *Nurture at Cooper's Rock*

by Kim Malinowski

---

It is always at the overlook, where my destiny meets chasm,  
to fly over edge free as the eagle I have memorized for an hour  
or walk back to my rusting car feeling the tug of future centuries,  
as if there are companions in the hush of seasons.  
Spring filled with magnolias, summer, lichen and pine,  
fall, oak and ash and beech, winter, rain and snow and wildness.  
Sometimes there is a hand to guide me over weathered rocks.  
Sometimes there is only me and I must press on into some sort of destiny.  
Willpower more potent than word power. Hunger a slow churn.  
One day, I will be that circling eagle, drifting on currents,  
my voice will not be my voice, but thousands, millions.  
My words, incantations drifting into those fighting in solitude.  
Let my words bring lilacs, summer driftwood, moss and decaying earth.  
Let me be the hand you hold when the cold rains pelt you as you  
sit on the rock wondering if you should eagle, let me wipe the salt  
from your face and help you dream yourself into wild.

# *Water Whistle Pantoum*

by Susan Carroll Jewell

---

Sunlight whistles off the tip of each wave as it sails  
home. Every seabird finds its own way to live  
with water. You have no water and the kitchen sink is dry  
as bones. The toilet flushes but doesn't fill and there you are

home. Every seabird finds its own way to live  
with shipwrecks and shells and souls wingless  
as bones. The toilet flushes but doesn't fill and there you are  
useless as a poem when a well runs dry. But you are alive.

With shipwrecks and shells and souls wingless  
as you are, you stand in a basement with a pump that's dead,  
useless as a poem when a well runs dry. But you are alive,  
without water, the whistle of water in a space that's dark

as you are—you stand in a basement with a pump that's dead.  
How the silence of absence jostles our senses, the Earth  
without water, the whistle of water in a space that's dark.  
We never know the end until space simply stops, hearing

how the silence of absence jostles our senses, the Earth  
with water. You have no water and the kitchen sink is dry.  
We never know the end until space simply stops hearing  
sunlight as it whistles off the tip of each wave as it sails.

## *Listing in One Direction*

by Paul Ilechko

---

I would like to make a list of all the things  
that I have forgotten but of course that is  
impossible and therefore I will list out everything  
that I remember and you can read in-between  
the lines and when the wind blows there will be  
a scattering disparate pieces becoming stranded  
and separated the swans on the river staying close  
to the shore close to where the boys are skimming  
stones there's supposed to be a storm today  
but nothing is showing on my radar I'm wearing my  
waterproof boots just in case I'm carrying an umbrella.

# *Poem For H.D. After Online Shopping*

by Amelia Sage Van Donsel

---

This velvet sack  
contains your fingernails.  
I got them off of eBay.  
When the wind picks up,  
I clean them. Sorry,  
I just trampled all  
the calla lilies  
on your grave,  
a decade in bloom.  
You must have been pretty  
even in the dark.  
You must have looked  
just like my mother.  
Pretty one, here is my skull  
to match yours. I like  
a Toblerone every morning  
and a short skirt.  
I go shave in the woods,  
donate to the fun razor.  
My new girl's fine but  
mute as a pair of milkers.  
Sometimes she makes me a statue  
of my mind in the dirt.  
It looks so like a couch.  
She tells me to get off  
the internet, only I don't  
have your toenails yet.

# *Duct-Taped Green Chair*

by Laura DeHart Young

---

The coffee's cold.  
I've been staring at it  
for an hour.  
Don't want to get up—  
kitchen table the glue  
holding me together.

A knock at the back door—  
Sandeel with a flower arrangement  
that smells a lot like Lulu's  
Dollar Store perfume.  
"Hey, baby doll."

She walks in a circle, floor creaking  
under her weight—  
unsure of where to put the flowers  
or what to say.  
Lays the bouquet on the counter.

Picks me up out of the chair,  
bear hugs me until my eyes bulge.  
Sets me down.  
Kisses my forehead.

The dog leans against her leg.

“Hey, my cows were acting weird  
this morning. Yours?”

“I sold mine. This is all I have left.  
Gonna hang in my truck.”

I hand her a copper cowbell.  
Sandee turns the bell over in her hands.  
It’ll rattle every time you hit a pothole,”  
she says. Then adds,  
“That’s probably the point.”  
She gives it back,  
eyes drifting toward the living room—  
empty boxes everywhere.

Sandee hangs her jacket,  
packs like she’s bagging groceries  
while I watch—  
inertia my new hobby.

A few hours later,  
boxes are sealed and stacked.  
“What furniture you taking?”  
Sandee asks, wiping sweat  
with a shirt sleeve.

“Nothing. Except that.”  
I point to the old green chair  
by the window.  
“You’re taking that old thing!”  
Sandee stares at it,  
pauses—as though remembering.  
Runs a hand  
along frayed fabric.

“Oh, yeah. Sorry, Kate.  
I’ll carry it out to the truck.”

Twenty boxes and a duct-taped  
green chair.

I follow it all to what’s next.

# *ode to dissociation*

by Jennifer Mills Kerr

---

now I remember the tangled  
clothes, piled on your studio table,  
blue jeans and flannel shirts  
you once loved ripped into  
strips,

how I convinced myself  
your hands smelled of turpentine  
even when you could no longer paint,

how you held my hand each night,  
as we watched sit-com's  
weeks before your

and how I left the remnants  
untouched, closed the door  
so not to see.

when every wall between us  
held blank canvases,  
screaming white like sunlight  
against shaded windows.

planned escape to another house:  
an old barn with weeping willow  
at the end of a dusty road.

after you left, I finally  
gathered the torn clothes,  
and arrived at your new home,

the ex-wife, cradling our  
heap across the tattered lawn,

I knocked at the backdoor,  
calling your name,

The hushed kitchen, shadowy  
as an empty glass, with a pine  
table, only my hands

your once-hidden woman  
pulling weeds in the garden,  
pretended not to see me—

and I ignored her too,  
sad that we looked so much alike  
she could have been a sister.

and it felt strange in my mouth,  
like practicing words  
in a foreign tongue,

on the scuffed surface,  
holding your cast-off self,  
a bundle of past time.

# *The Gender Roles of Cattle*

by T. R. Poulson

---

My world begins and ends with cows, bloody  
in estrous, labor. birth. From rooms beyond  
the gates, we name our good heifers. Study

them. Know them. Fence pastures and ponds  
for them. Deliver them of calves, of dollars.  
We sort bull calves into pens where brawn

matters. Strength of haunch and neck. The smaller  
bull calves, the meek, the strange, the non-preferred  
ninety-nine percent are cut—we knife their balls

and name them steers. Their short lives blurred  
by grain, by gain, by same. We keep bulls' bulls  
to own the fescue fields and serve the herd.

We praise their macho virile selves. They pull  
their workweight. Savor flesh beneath cows' tails—  
that's their career. We want our cow wombs full

of muscled genes. And if our herd sire fails?  
We find a younger bull to feed and water.  
He butts his head and bellows, paws the trails,

belches. His destiny: a ride to slaughter—  
but lust will keep him grazing longer. Grubby,  
alive. We name him Bando, Brutus, Buddy,  
not cow. Cows are all his working daughters.



*Feminine Mapping (But It's Not Her World)* by Phyllis Bramson

*Elegy for a Friend in Fibonacci  
Sequence*

by Hayley Clin

---

an  
arc  
reaches  
absolute  
golden ratio  
in pain's acute tessellation  
a falling body at the vertex of opiate  
dimension bound to x-axis  
accelerating  
towards the  
pulse of  
end  
point.

# *Revolutions*

by Carrie Kartman

---

Like a spider stealthily biding its time, the coronavirus finally snared me in its web. Having evaded it for two years, I imagined I might do so forever, even as others around me fell prey. In a breath, an instant, I was ill, infected, infectious. The world had spun out of control, and answers were scarce.

Isolating at home provided endless hours to ruminate on everything I was missing. Among my host of worries, was what Carlos would think of my sudden disappearance. There was nothing to be done. I had no way to contact him. We knew each other's first names, but were otherwise just fellow passengers who rode the BART train together. Did he think I had started taking the bus? That I'd been fired? Maybe that I was in the hospital, or had died? Would he feel abandoned that, without a word, I'd stopped showing up for the 8:07 train? Or worst of all, did he not even care?

Most likely, I reasoned in my reasonable moments, he had taken my absence in stride and had started reading a book to pass the time. This led to wondering what book he was reading, and how I might find out, because if I knew, then I could be reading it too, and then we might discuss it. However impractical, the thought cheered me. It gave me a problem to set my mind to, and though I did not succeed in solving it, I eventually concluded that not knowing the title was preferable, so that I could look forward to him telling me about it.

On the other hand, if he was not engrossed in reading, maybe he had been discovered by someone else looking for company on their morning commute. In fact, I predicted with gloomy certainty, this was doubtless what had occurred. Someone far more interesting, well-informed and witty, had broken the customary silence among passengers, and had now supplanted my role.

When Covid brought my life to this abrupt and unnerving halt, it was only two weeks after meeting Carlos. It had seemed that we might be taking a shine to one another, at least I imagined this to be true, but we were just getting acquainted, as travelers do, while passing the time enroute to their destinations. I could barely call us friends yet, and it was ridiculous to be concerned about him at all, so my being concerned was another reason for concern.

At some point I had realized that we were arriving at North Berkeley station at the same time each day, and I'd see him pacing, studying the tracks, the long tunnels that stretched into blackness, the steep staircase to the world above, and the route maps encased in glass. No seasoned commuter cares about the architecture of the station, or looks at those maps, so clearly he was new. One morning, as I noticed him noticing things, he must have become aware of my noticing.

He offered me a quiet, "Good morning," which I returned, and this struck us both as amusing. I started to laugh and before I had a chance to be as embarrassed as I might have been, he was laughing too, and suddenly it was as if we were co-conspirators. He had a disarming smile, that seemed devoid of motive or artifice, and our conversation flowed easily.

After that morning, we rode to San Francisco together each day, sitting side by side on the train, as if it were not unusual to do so with a veritable stranger. I soon felt that I'd encountered a long-lost friend, who wanted to catch up on the time we'd missed since last seeing each other. I learned about his job with an engineering firm that he felt lucky to have landed, his large family in São Paulo, how he'd managed the first months of the pandemic, alone at home with his two cats, and his worries about the demise of the planet.

My eleven days in isolation felt like eternity. Of course there was the sickness itself, that arrived like a flash flood on a desert landscape, sweeping me up without a second thought. It receded in its own time, as floods do, and by day six I felt I had nearly recovered. However, worries and scurrying thoughts only seemed to magnify as the days wore on. So I was jubilant with relief when at last I tested negative, and was cleared to return to work.

The next morning, arriving at the BART station, I was more apprehensive than I cared to admit. Would Carlos be there? And if so, what sort of reception would I get? Coming down the escalator, I spied him waiting for the train in his usual spot, hands in his pockets, sunk deep in thought. The book I'd imagined he'd be reading was nowhere to be seen, and the fascinating interloper I'd dreamed up was missing too. I approached unnoticed until right in front of him, when I shared a subdued, "Good morning," with a smile which I hoped conveyed, "I'm happy to see you," without appearing overly invested. At first he seemed off-kilter; surprise flickering across his features, as if he might prefer to be left alone with his thoughts, rather than having a woman he barely knew striking up a conversation. Aware that I might be overthinking things, a habit I was born with, and that I often think of putting an end to, but that requires more thinking about the overthinking, and well you see where that leads, it did occur to me, that he might just be preoccupied, wondering if he'd remembered to turn off the stove, or lock the front door when leaving the house.

After a few seconds his face lit up, smile spreading wide, "Hey, it's you!"

"Hey, it's me. Resurrected." So my absence had been felt. My spirits lifted.

"Is everything okay?"

"Yes. Everything is okay," which now seemed to be true. I had not yet found words for the sense of wonder that had overtaken me at being among people again, returning to my daily routine, and had I tried to explain, I supposed it would not make any sense.

“That’s good, really good,” he nodded, with what seemed a hint of relief, if I wasn’t reading too much into it.

“If I’m not intruding, where have you been?”

Before I could answer, overthinking kicked into high gear. Mine had been an undramatic illness, yet I’d been engulfed with a rattling, pervasive unease the entire time, for which I had no excuse. After all, I was one of the lucky ones—my case, though thoroughly unpleasant, was not serious, and I’d recovered without treatment. I had no idea how Carlos might respond to hearing of my illness, and I had somehow neglected to plan what I would say should it come up. Would he feel uncomfortable talking to me? Be afraid to sit nearby? Would he think me careless and foolish for having caught Covid in the first place? As I hesitated, he seemed to sense my discomfort, and dove in to rescue me; maybe believing I was reluctant to share something deeply personal, that had caused my absence.

“So, you were off planning a revolution, I suppose. You seem the type,” he suggested, a glint in his eye.

“How did you know? That’s it exactly.”

He leaned in, “I understand revolutions. I’m revolving all the time. Spinning in circles. Going nowhere.”

I had no clue if he meant to be humorous, or was sharing something of import, and he offered nothing more. His expression remained grave, so I disguised my puzzlement with a smile.

He was the only engineer I knew, and knowing nothing about engineering or the minds of engineers, put me at a disadvantage that I was now keenly aware of. Was this something another engineer would understand? Was he pulling back the curtain on his inner world, sharing a sense of vertigo, disconnection, being untethered, things I could certainly relate to? Or was he confessing a wish to revolt against the senseless loss of life taking place on the planet, but finding it impossible to do so? Should I worry about his mental health?

As I was weighing these possibilities, I was transported by the image in my mind's eye of a pinwheel, like those I held as a child, the blur of thin silver and blue blades mesmerizing, as they spun round and round. Spinning in circles. Going nowhere. Revolving all the time. A toy, operating on a puff of breath or a breeze, and spinning to delight those who cared to watch its twirling motion.

And then I blurted out, "Well that sounds like life: revolving, spinning in the wind, with no purpose but to keep twirling in space, till we die. Like a galaxy, a pinwheel, the earth." I twirled my finger around a few times in the air, as if he needed a demonstration of these words, then stopped myself. Was I really reminding him that we live on a planet that turns on its axis and orbits the sun? He probably designed mechanical gizmos I wouldn't even understand.

"I mean, of course—"

"I know, I know," he chimed in with a gentle wave of his hand, saving me from tripping over my words once more, "It's okay. You certainly don't owe me an explanation for taking a few days off. It is true isn't it, that we run in circles, like cats chasing our tails, round and round. Would you agree?"

The train swayed into view and came to a stop, while I pondered these words from my new old friend.

# *I was a seagull once*

by Ruth Bavetta

---

with stars on my wings,  
watching morning

toss its cloak over the moon  
as the brittle beauty of the sun  
clicked into place.

I was a seagull once,  
wings filled with fog

the lagoon below  
a mere handsweep  
of riffling water.

How random and fragile  
is the passage of light.

Nothing is strange in this world.  
There is still time.

# *Girlhood*

by Sara Quinn Rivara

---

It's easier to think that we did something to deserve it. That it wasn't as bad as we thought it was. We're just crazy. We wore mascara, pushup bras, dyed our hair. We had big tits. Etcetera. Whatever woman means is something invented. We were young but not naïve. We knew we weren't worth our minds. I was kicked out of choir because I would not be quiet. Acorn shaved her head, ran out of the school. Someone told us we were wild animals. We ate as little as possible. We drove around Evanston and wandered near the Lake to imagine ourselves out of our lives. If I tell you we chose what we could—each a violent man—See? you'll say. You chose. We wanted to know what it felt like to be wanted. To be the thing they said we were. This went on for years, with different men, different brown-carpet apartments, broken-down cars, dive bars and rum and cokes, dirty sheets, dirty bathrooms with hair in the sink. Our lives diverged. We both divorced. We woke up in our own lives with a drawer full of knives. We have always been difficult women. I know we had the same dream: something heavy moving in the underbrush, something clawed and hungry, something that screamed like a woman.

## *Hospice*

by Edie Popper

---

You take the call.  
We take the curry off the heat.  
Keys are on the sill.  
A bright hill of cubed carrot  
spills across the chopping board.  
Quench the blue-fingered flame  
to the sound of lungs as they empty.  
The burner's a clenched metal fist.  
Stilled heart, still hot.  
We leave before it cools.

*on hearing Luke Comb's cover of "Fast  
Car" for the first time, over the P.A., as  
students walked into my class*

by Matthew E. Henry

---

*oh it's...wait. no, it's... what the fuck is this?  
who the fuck is this? who? no. fuck that. fuck  
him. this is Tracy Chapman's song! TRACY  
CHAPMAN! what...!?! Google her right now. get out  
your phones and play her shit right damn now! hear  
that? you feel that? that's rhythm and tension  
and passion and soul and vibrato and  
what y'all should mean when you say vibes. fuck him  
with the frayed edges of broken guitar  
strings coiled around sandpaper picks. all this  
I said in my heart, curled up in a ball  
between the trash can and door, while slowly  
rocking—a thumb in my mouth—a forlorn,  
soulful, twang-less tune, sobbing in my head.*

*instructions for washing my mother's  
coat, after the funeral*

by Fawnia Winter Mountford

---

Unbutton her carefulness.

Slide your hands into the sleeves where her arms used to be.  
There may be a tissue  
still folded  
like a breath she forgot to exhale.

Take your time.

This is not laundry.  
This is elegy.

Use cold water

the kind that makes your fingers ache  
like memory.

Add soap.

Nothing scented.  
She hated lavender.

Submerge the coat slowly.

Do not wring.  
Grief does not like to be twisted.  
Press gently, like closing a door  
without slamming.

Hang it somewhere quiet.

It will weep for days.

Allow it.

Let it remember  
how to be empty.

When dry

fold it.

Place it in a box you won't label.

Store it beside the others.

# *“Today I am full of birds”*

by Annie Stenzel

---

(from the title of a poem by Lyz Soto)

But not the birds I love, although of those there are plenty. Rather, today  
it is filthy pigeons whose mess renders outdoor statues a travesty.  
I am full of dusty, inconsequential sparrows, darting around  
the table legs of outdoor cafes, harvesting the fallen crumbs of a croissant.

I am full of gulls that wheel and scream over the offal flung  
from the fishing vessel rumbling back to harbor after a day at sea.  
I am full of grackles, raspy as the rusty hinge on a gate while they  
bully smaller birds at the feeder, even preying on sparkling hummingbirds.

To be full of crows might be better, their caws a cacophony, their sharp  
eyes and vaunted intelligence, even if they pillage eggs and chicks from nests.  
Instead, I am full of coots, or moor hens, if you prefer, that drift in groups  
along the shoreline, nothing to say for themselves beyond a squawk.

But to be full of birds—creatures millions of years older than humans—  
is to partake of infinite surprises. Of course I am full of birds. So are you.

# *Some Notes on the Present Moment*

by Alexandra van de Kamp

---

I could use more quiet—the kind  
that has me notice the feet-shuffling

sound the dry oak trees emit;  
their kale-green

flapping audience.

So much worry fist bumping  
other worries inside of me.

Are we ever settled enough  
into a moment

to assess its full contours and dimensions?  
How do I measure the exact loss I feel

when I call my mother, 1900 miles away,  
and listen as she brings up,

repeatedly and at well-timed intervals,  
the eight boats she sees racing

in the nearby harbor? Each boat  
a freshly charged image glistening

with her particular joy,

yet no history of what she's witnessed  
three minutes before. What *is* history?

Hiccupping ghosts, narratives torn loose  
from their moorings? The mind,

on the best of days,  
an unpredictable and shifting abacus.

These days, I watch CNN videos  
before breakfast— kaleidoscopes

blooming 60-second catastrophes  
in my hand. I learn people are being

cut out of rubble five days after  
a 7.8 magnitude earthquake.

A Yemeni mother gives birth ten hours  
after being saved: the daughter's name

in Arabic means *silver*. Then I switch  
to TikTok. All over the world

people are rescuing sloths.  
Those wide-eyed descendants

of the armadillo, who can starve  
on a full stomach since it takes them

three days to digest a leaf.

Video after video shows a man  
wrapping a sloth in his blue jacket.

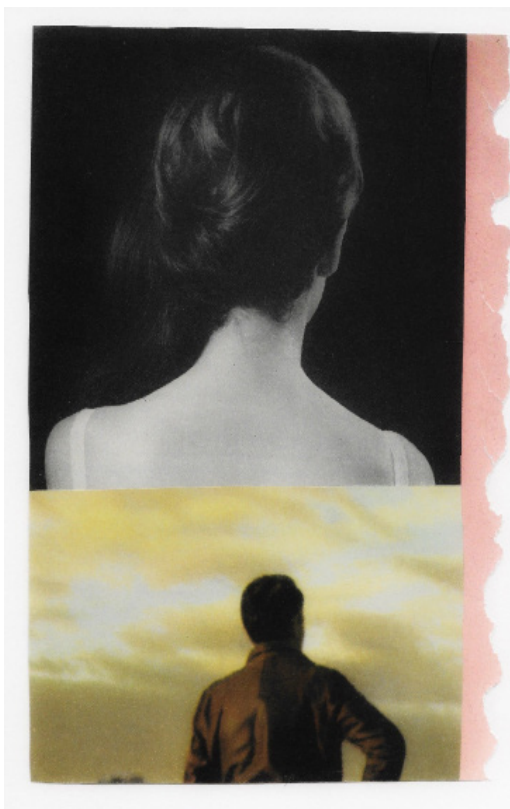
He's removing her from a rainy,  
Central American highway. I pause,

with this man, to pick up the sloth.  
He places her, matted with bugs—her baby

clinging to her fur—onto a tree by the road,  
and before he leaves, she lifts one arm:

in a gesture of thanks,  
or slow goodbye.

*The Light that Remains*  
by JC Alfier



# *Would You Like Us To Say A Prayer?*

by Brett Olsen

---

You did not consider  
that the nearest savior  
could be out-of-network.  
We'll soften the news for the kids.  
We now owe a billion hugs  
instead of a million—  
one hug per second nets  
11,574 days, 31.71 years  
of hugging, easily delivered  
if you do not sleep or eat or stray.  
They are not expected to live  
for another billion hugs.  
Every round of doctors  
is more efficient than the last  
when apologizing.  
Other people need care too.  
This does not make you feel better.  
Feel better. You were lucky  
to have kept such company.  
Hospital food has come a long way.  
Everyone in this ward is in this together.  
Would you like us to say a prayer?

# Metamorphosis

by G. W. Fox

---

*"I saw the angel in the marble, and carved until I set him free." - Michelangelo*

"Bullshit," said Bernini  
From beneath blistered hands,  
Stubborn eyes stinging with limestone grit.  
He muttered where he knelt  
& cut & cut & cut &  
Sent light scattering across all surfaces.  
He whispered fervently at start of surgery,  
Armed with chisel & scalpel,  
Praying not to strike a vein.  
He bit at stone & stone bit back,  
Blooming bruises on knees & shins  
As marble landed blow on blow.  
He sputtered as his aging hands  
Betrayed him with uncertain strikes;  
Rasp & file missed their usual target,  
Carving flesh in lieu of marble.  
Wasting in his bed, he cursed  
His fading frame, & peeling  
Plaster from his wounded hand, he  
Saw crystals where cuts had been.  
He lifted weary arm & heavy bone  
& through translucent flesh saw  
Veins of black coursing through ivory stone.

*They deemed it a stroke, and buried him under a slab of  
shapeless marble.*

# *Weather Report*

by Jane C. Miller

---

Dear Dad,

Here today, it will be in the 70s,  
dry and sunny, ideal fishing weather.  
In Lisbon where Bill is, rain.  
Where Barb lives, Vegas will be  
120 degrees in the shade. How is it  
where you are? I can't tell anymore.  
I can tell you it's a steady 80 degrees,  
the sunset on the beach still spectacular  
where we buried you far from Iowa,  
the family farm where weather ruled  
what froze, what died or rose, what  
washed away. Hurricane Floyd took  
yours and mom's ashes. I picture  
them drifting down like the fish flakes  
in our tank at home, empty now;  
our pygmy puffer fish sucked up  
by the too-strong filter I bought,  
vanishing overnight. How I miss  
your emails, every morning  
a weather report, as if knowing  
what the troposphere might send,  
kept us close despite distance,

the unknown. Did you ever cry so hard  
your lower lids folded down briefly as if  
pushed by tide, the whites of your eyes  
bloodshot from grief? We never talked  
about that weather system, only  
of what was possible and given,  
you who followed the shadow of fish  
on your fish finder, who knew  
all things come to pass.



*Through a Window Colombia* by Rachel Turney

# *Threshold*

by Wen Jing

---

1

Beyond the old boathouse of Mendota Bay,  
the women row.

The breast cancer survivor matches  
the rhythm of a postpartum depressed mother.

The core connects to the calm water.  
Euphoria of home.

2

The wise woman laughs at the mortal woman:  
If you think eros can solve all your problems  
you're deluding yourself.

Using eros as your fuel is to propel a boat on fire  
watch the straw woman light the first match  
watch fire spread onto your skirt.

3

Forms of “Be”

is: essential qualities

est: accidental qualities

She is a sculler, a scholar.

She est, sometimes, submissive.

She ought to be submissive.

4

Old habits are old itches. They don't go away, but one learns to scratch it less.

5

Idle talk.

Das Women.

Uproot.

Float.

Attach to.

6

What is authentic rebellion?

A woman running from a marriage to a cult.

Wittgenstein running from academics to the front line of the war.

7

Threshold is not this one gate you go through once. It's a wall you hit every day, multiple times, and with a bloody head, hit again the next day, asserting yourself.

Threshold is a place of resistance, the handle of a rowing machine: the harder you pull, the harder it pushes back.

If threshold is liquid, you do not become part of the river, part of the stream, you do not adapt to the water. You resist.

Threshold is not an open field of sunflowers that you walk through in the sunshine. It's the battlefield.

Because ultimately you're fighting the very steel grids that make up your world. But in this assertion, you find that metal grids are not made of steel, but something breakable, like gold.

8

Two faithful companions:

Ambition and insomnia.

When difficulty comes, the two pull me through.

It's now early morning  
I am still waiting for you.

9

In the gut of a dirty shed, a gorgeous  
ghost, who, for centuries, tricking women  
by removing their wills

10

It has been 3 years since you left  
I still think of you  
when I think of the last  
psychosis  
How are you  
now

# *Pigeonholing*

by Holly Taylor

---

They preached over tea and biscuits  
on the sofa, holding worship  
like a bone china handle;  
and sermonized with ease  
their condemnation of our being  
as though we were not made  
of the same rib, the same mind;  
and I knew it solemnly, between  
the warmth of palm-to-palm:  
if I sat one-sided at the table  
with a woman, if by morning  
I knelt and washed her feet  
and doubled the disgrace  
I would bring upon my shoulders;  
to take it to confession and  
be out with it, the wretched sin  
on that teetering edge  
of idol worship—I would be  
just as rotten as any crime  
committed, newly deemed  
too unholy to have tea with

# *The Unbreakable Silence*

by Michael T. Young

---

The only time I was stung by a bee  
I was running around the yard  
in bare feet. It was the summer of '78,  
I was nine and leaped from the porch  
in brief flight and tumbled in the grass.

Mom knew how to comfort me,  
remove the stinger, clean it, ice it,  
elevate the leg. There was a picture of me,  
smiling after, pointing at the swollen red toe,  
a picture lost in the discards of moving on.

Though, is that what we really do?  
Don't the various stings and losses  
cling to us like a dust we can never wash off?  
I choke on the silences of those who  
haven't talked to me in years, those who've  
walked away or I've walked away from.

In everything I say and do my mother's voice  
comforting me comforts others,  
or the bitterness of the last time we spoke  
catches in my throat because I'm trying  
to recover some hope before the silence  
that can't be broken takes hold of one of us.

## *3 AM Epiphanies*

by KB Ballentine

---

too early for birds to praise

my bladder throbs

the empty pillow sighs

I can find no pen

how can yesterday be the best

the moon sings an answer

am I still your daughter though you died?

*Wondering Why Laundry Keeps  
Showing Up in Students' Poems this  
Semester*

by Colette Tennant

---

Have my comments made them suspect their poems  
need a good scrub?  
When they were toddlers, did the surprise of the dryer buzzer  
traumatize them?  
Do they think their words are wrinkled as old apples,  
Eden's shadow over them all?  
And what about the womb of the washer tub—  
round and warm and pulsing?  
Did their mothers insist on cleanliness—check their lunchboxes  
after school for even one wary crumb?  
Did their fathers pick them up and toss them in the air,  
hands still dirty from the garden?  
Maybe they're worried they forgot to soften their words,  
so their poems feel scratchy on their reader's skin.  
Do edits from their peers seem like ink stains  
on their favorite coat?  
Perhaps they've floated their baby poems  
down a cleansing river, motherless poems,  
hoping for a pharaoh's daughter downstream.

# *Hard Plastic*

by Syd Brewster

---

My mama told me  
people pay for the lips  
I have  
with hard plastic  
Swiping away dollars  
For a wonderful alteration  
This god given gift  
has never done me  
any real favors  
Has it given me  
what every girl is told  
she should dream of?  
Or do I say, whatever happened  
happened. Love or not,  
I was once wanted. Should be  
enough

# *Inventory for a Small Loss*

by Veronica Tucker

---

One cup left on the counter.  
The plant watered twice.

Laundry folded, then unfolded,  
as if it might remember  
a different shape.

Outside, the hedge holds its line  
despite the wind.

The world is very good  
at pretending nothing happened.

This is how something leaves.  
Not all at once.

Just enough space  
to notice what remains.

# *Twenty Questions for My Son*

by Ann Orr Weil

---

*After Jim Moore, "Twenty Questions"*

Did I let my attention wander? Did I miss  
the turn toward home? Was I oblivious  
to the mauving sky? The barn owl's swoop and screech?  
Did I not feel your trembling as shadows crept?  
How is it that we only traveled deeper  
into the density, all its branches grasping?  
And what of the scattered corses where light  
briefly smiled? Why didn't we stay longer  
in the lap of respite, let its warmth thaw  
the stiffness between us? Would God have helped  
had we asked? And at the fork in the path, why  
did you turn to the steep? How is the view  
from ten thousand feet? Could you send me  
a sign from the cosmos? A song from the stars?  
Did you know I tied a tether from my left foot to yours?  
Can you feel its tug despite the distance? Can you imagine  
I've saved this shriveled cord of skin from the day  
you were born? That I somehow knew we would  
need it again? Might you feel its strength? Follow  
its lifeline? Come back to me?



is this what christ died for?  
all empires must crumble,  
become rubble,  
until there is rebirth from the ashes.  
the golden age must always come to an end.  
in the end,  
will you cry out  
to god like lucifer after the fall?  
will you burn in the sun's golden rays  
and ask for it  
no longer witness your every slight?  
at your trial they will ask:  
how could god allow this?  
at your trial they will ask:  
why did we ever believe you to be christ?  
and you will say  
that you were acting as  
one of god's chosen people  
while the women  
and children cry:  
you have turned us  
into bait  
for a salivating dog.

# *Let me wash your hands*

by Ewen Glass

---

It feels almost too tender  
for a couple; parent-child  
close until there you go,  
all done!

Pores dotted with years  
of touch until we find  
family again, sitting on the  
edge of the bath,

rinsing soap from what's  
left of together. Their skin  
is obscure glass; here,  
let me wash your hands.

# *Our Hair*

by Alix Ahles

---

My twin sister Katie and I found ease with our hair. It was incredibly thick, mostly straight, and sometimes held a wave from a bun or ponytail that looked curated. A friend once asked “Why do you always look like a pantene pro-v commercial?” Dark brown, a bright sheen that danced off the surface with natural highlights that stood out in the sun. “Wow! You have highlights!” a surprised remark surfaced in just the right light. Dark brown twinkled with shades of red or caramel.

Katie’s hair held a curl. She sometimes had a caretaker who could braid it across the top half of her head or twist the bottom parts into tight winding tubes that turned into perfectly coiffed sausage curls as it dried. Her chin was often coated in a fine layer of drool, pooling just at the corners of her mouth as she spoke until her head tipped forward and it spilled forth from between her lips. I spent most of my tweens and adolescence pulling it back into a ponytail for her, my mom calling out “you’re so good at that!” Her hair would laminate itself to her cheeks, her saliva acting like a kind of glue, holding it into place. I kept my eye on those strands, tried to help her cheeks stay clear and dry.

Katie was a box dye red head for most of her teens. She had a bright blue chair made of mesh and hollow plastic pipes that she would sit in during her bathtime, holding her body comfortably upright. The dye gathered in the tub below her and she emerged fresh, a new color lighting up the bright creamy quality of her skin, undamaged by the

sun.

My oldest daughter Wynnie is 6 right now. She has our hair, mine and Katie's. It's not just the color, the sheen or the texture but it has the weight of Katie's hair. It's the kind of thick and lush hair that feels like that of a grown woman but it emerged by the time she was 3.

Her little sister is blonde, and the light fluff of her bright tussle, stretching down her back in straight paths, dragging towards her feet, is nothing like Wynnie's. I am sitting on a seafoam blue couch over looking our kitchen with the warm morning light seeping through the forest adjacent to our property. Wynnie, her face just a few inches from my nose, asks "Mama, will you do my hair?" and every day I remind her to bring me the hair thing and the brush. We've perfected the process, which creates a look that draws remarks and attention often. "Wow! I had one of those ponytails in the 80's!" She wants a very high pony tail, daily. We don't stray from this style. Not since halfway through kindergarten. She sometimes attempts to brush the thick tangles but mostly she swings the brush, again, right up to my face, and has me brush the whole thing from root to tip. This hair of hers, it amazes me, decorating the frame of her spindly limbs and fine features. I watch her spring by in a pair of purple pajamas with snow flakes, she wears them year round even as the snow whites have faded to gray slush from too many washes. If I squint, she's a teenager and her hair moves through space with the power and presence of a woman.

It's not the kind of power or presence she wants. Wynnie tosses her head towards the floor in front of me and I gather her big bouquet of hair until she brings her head upright. She whines in frustration, "it needs to be higher!"

I hold the bundle right atop her head while she takes her tiny fingertips, her nails chewed down, and winds them through the roots, pulling a few strands out from right above her ears. She takes the tiny fuzz of her baby hairs and gathers it in a curated swirl right at her hairline. Finally, she takes the big bundle which reaches past her shoulders when it's down, and divides the ponytail in half, framing her face,

"or else I look like I don't have any hair," she tells me.

When I'm running my hands through her hair, I'm a mother but I'm also a sister and a daughter. I think of my fingers gliding through my mother's thick and silver-streaked. I think of the ways I attended to my sister, pulled her hair too tight until she growled at me or adjusted it gently atop her forehead. I remember the ways it made me feel connected to Katie through touch. I think of the heavy smell of Herbal Essences chamomile shampoo. Katie's focus was on the itch on her cheek, the strands gathered across her field of vision, a special kind of hell she faced each and every day, her hands unable to move towards her face with grace or finesse —a joystick directing a jerky and unyielding claw, often reaching down for a plush prize, just unable to grasp it.

Sometimes as I'm pulling together Wynnie's ponytail I try to connect this piece of history to this present moment.

"I used to do Katie's hair all the time" I say or "Do you know who had hair exactly like you?"

It's in these moments where the fragmented painful parts of our history resurface. They remind me of the puzzle pieces or plastic bits of toys we find in every corner of the house. They belong somewhere, with a thing, we've seen it somewhere else in the house but it's not here now. We can't throw away the puzzle piece but it has nowhere to live, we can't find the box where it once belonged. I watch it for weeks on the corner of a kitchen island, unmoved. The kitchen table. On the carpet next to the couch. Sometimes I pick it up, move it onto their dresser or unto a basket of other items belonging to the girls: rocks, strings, 3 blue sequins, the half dried play dough pressed into a mold. I try to find containers for these things, places for them to inhabit. They mostly live in clear plastic bins and containers.

Sometimes I'm deep in a dream when a shrill whine or a sharp giggle startles me awake. I was in France, in an old relationship, there's a place I need to get to but I can't get there. I'm lost somewhere and trying to resolve something but peel open my heavy eyelids and remember the life my husband and I have built together. The dog is curled next to me in bed, Ben has started a pot of coffee. I feel dropped into this new life, the one I'm in right now. The old things have vanished,

there's no way to recover them. I'm here now with my own hair swept across my forehead, tinkering with the tension in Wynnie's high ponytail, thinking about Katie and the 29 years we had and can never return to.

I try not to go down the path my mind sometimes travels to; what if she could stand up from her wheelchair, come right into my arms, embrace me in all the ways her body never could inside the hard edges of her wheelchair. *No, no, no* I tell myself again and again *don't go there. Stay right here.* And sometimes that feels wrong, too.

# Sonnet for Gen X

by Darcy Shargo

---

“Sandwiched between 80 million baby boomers and 78 million millennials, Generation X—roughly defined as anyone born between 1965 and 1980—has just 46 million members, making it a dark-horse demographic.”—*Time Magazine*, April 2008

Riding the wave of the dark horse demographic,  
latch-keyed and keyed up on Kool-Aid and MTV.  
Summers, we read (in secret) heavy stuff like *Lolita*,  
flirting with disaster at keggers—wondering  
if older boys would bite. It is true  
that anything we got our hands on was inclined to  
become extinct: many of us walking around  
with a bell stuck in our throats as soundtracks to youth amassed—  
from MJ’s sparkly glove to punk rock’s rebel calls. Worlds away,  
Mr. Gorbachev tore down the Wall, the terror of Soviet invasion  
gone from our dreams. On to big hair! Big ballads! BMX bikes, flannels,  
indie films with kids who understood our fight: remain  
undefined, uncaged. Touching a bit of it all, knowing  
the answer to what we want: *everything that could burn*.

Feral kids risking the scorn of stars,  
always heading home past dark.

# *Terminal*

by Sumit Parikh

---

Other than the sheet's faint  
rise and fall,  
the room stayed still enough  
to frighten them.

Each night they leaned  
in, brushed the soft collapse  
of his cheeks, grazed  
the creases in his bruised palm.  
Was this the last time,  
they'd see his fingers curl  
at 2 a.m.  
for his Bluey cup,  
his eyes glassy  
like the animals  
in his bed.

Each morning, they waited  
for a shift of his eyelids,  
to feel the day return,  
the bed still cloaked  
in a slender box of moonlight.

# *Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough*

by A. M. Hayden

---

We know dog paws smell like corn chips  
Vin's look like chocolate chip cookie dough  
brown sugar, rich yolk, unbaked chocolate chunks  
swirled into the vanilla cream of his feet's soft fur

We used to put our daughters' baby soft silk feet  
that smooth and intoxicating infant scent  
into our post-partum, dog-tired mouths  
delirious desire to consume this concentrated joy

We remind ourselves while our dog's sweet beans  
may entice us to imagine similar delight, dew claws  
and coarse carpal pads are a bit gross, but still,  
chocolate chip cookie dough, *yum*

# Shedding

by Mary Beth Hines

---

Daughter, fourteen, and every weekday morning  
soap-scummed strands of long, copper hair gum  
the drain. Five-minute showers for the rest of us.

Mucky water mauls our ankles. Saturday,  
I forgo yoga to auger the pipe. A satisfying grind  
for a bustling fixer of fixable things.

She wakes late. Mussy. Dragging.  
Even so, the dog leaps to greet her. Tumbleweeds  
of shepherd hair bound behind him.

They two-step through the kitchen. He, tippy  
on hind legs—adolescent, as gawky as she,  
tongues her sleep-crusts face, last night's

surreptitious, post-dance tears. Her bare feet  
evade his huge, thick-clawed paws, racketing  
like hailstones, gouging my lacquered floors.

I stand by, armed with broom, breakfast, advice  
on shared-bathroom etiquette. Pounce when  
they pause and my opening arrives. *Slow down.*

*Clean up. Talk. Please. Help.* She outstares me through messy bun tresses—so witheringly cool even the dog retreats. She stabs a runny yolk.

Eats and eats. I tiptoe about. Eventually breathe when she lets me slip behind to boar-bristle-brush her lustrous, changeling hair.

*The Year the Planet-Eaters Came* by Marc S. Cohen

**The year the planet-eaters came, we ran for the hills. It's easier to prepare yourself there, we were told. Now in the shadow of their advent I tremble like lakewater. I tremble like burning dead leaves. I tremble like I couldn't care less. We were supposed to be more than this. We were supposed to conquer the moon, but it looks like we missed our chance. People ask if this can be verified. People are like this. They want better outcomes. A real future. Irrelevance is a difficult thing to metabolize. They want to understand the reason for all this fear.**



*Sestina before a high school reunion you  
won't attend*

by Anna Drasko

---

Back when they were just girls  
they liked to pretend they took drugs  
as they popped candy like pills in the closet.  
They heard a rumor that their guy friends  
would chop and snort the ones they'd stolen  
from the gas station, there'd never be a trial.

High school began the real trial.  
Young, dumb, eager. Still just girls.  
No more candy had been stolen  
but her first purchase of drugs  
happened at 11th and Spruce among friends.  
She hid the weed and alcohol in her closet.

Nobody knew she also hid in the closet.  
Queer kid facing an internal trial.  
She would never tell her friends  
that she crushed on guys... and girls.  
Instead, she escaped through drugs.  
Some say her childhood was stolen.

But it wasn't the drugs that had stolen  
her childhood, it was the closet.  
She was glad for the drinks and the drugs.  
But if they knew she wanted to try all  
the flirting and the kissing with girls  
too, she would lose her family and friends.

She would rather be high with friends  
eating grocery store doughnuts they'd stolen  
than dating, adoring, loving girls  
if it meant losing home, at least it had a closet.  
She would play the mock trial  
in her head when she was taking drugs.

One night when they were on drugs:  
We think you're gay, said her friends.  
She'd given herself away; time to face the trial.  
They didn't know it, but they had stolen  
anonymity, performing kept her safe in the closet.  
But how could they know, they were still just girls.

Let's win this trial, said the drugs.  
I don't like girls, she told the friends.  
Softness of being known stolen, staying in the closet.

**There is a man in this town who keeps a void in a box in his top drawer.  
He only takes it out on special occasions. Those rare times when friends  
are over, the cheeseboard overflowing, glasses clinking all around.  
Laughter and cheer, for he's a jolly good fellow. That's when he'll pull out  
the box and present it to his guests. Here, he'll say, my gift to you. My life  
is full, full—I owe you nothing.**



*A Man Who Keeps a Void* by Marc S. Cohen

## *Lifetimes*

by Joe Cottonwood

---

Glue fails. Wood ages.  
Children slam and crash.  
Yesterday a tea cabinet dropped its door.  
Nobody was near it.  
The door simply fell  
from its hinges to the floor  
like a sudden heart attack.

I built with sound wood,  
with brass hardware.  
Figured it would last.  
How far ahead can you see when you're 32?  
I'm 77 now.  
No—wait—78. I lose track.

Still got some glue, some screws  
in the basement. Be right back.

## *To Be Here*

by Jane Attanucci

---

after Linda Gregg

The June trail through Cold Spring Park is dry,  
save for a lone, shallow puddle and spongy  
patches of ground where moisture lingers.  
I am alone and yet utterly surrounded.  
Love is the chirps and jeers of bluejays aloft and  
the chirring of red-winged blackbirds over the marsh.  
Fear is always about what we may lose or have  
already lost. I'm happy to cross an occasional bridge.  
The trees sustain each other even as broken limbs  
lean into younger, stronger trunks. Planks laid  
by volunteers are beginning to crack under the weight  
of weather and use. Withered weeds edge the path.  
My dead rarely speak to me now as summer's heat  
approaches—bird sounds subside, leaves shroud  
and water dries up in the winding creek bed.

# *Poem for a Fairy Godmother*

by Meia Geddes

---

*for "Pat Pat" Davidson*

A fairy godmother offers her acre or two of land full of flowers and fruit trees freely to the nomadic beekeepers, whistles a song to the geese to put them in for the night, keeps a treasure chest of gifts for children to dig through.

A fairy godmother doesn't announce she's a fairy godmother. She plants and waters and harvests, hosts city gals and critters, adopts all creatures, human and nonhuman, under her wing. She cares like an otherworldly animal mother, ever alert.

A fairy godmother reports on the ratio of cats to mice, spends her sunny days addressing fallen trees and weeds, protects chickens from hawks. She ferries a burro, goats, sheep, geese, ducks, dogs, and cats through life.

With someone always birthing and dying, an owl's flight a breath away, a fairy godmother keeps on, a beloved spell. Even here, you can see her holding a found feather or a small white egg in her careful hands, such earthly offerings.

## *praying in a florida airport*

by Casper Orr

---

I'm wondering if there's a difference between spring in the mid-atlantic and southeast until I'm leaving. Until I'm leaving and I see a sign in the line for TSA; *no guns past this point*. It's absurd until it isn't. Until it's petrifying. I'm not past *point*, stuck like fish in a barrel. I pray out loud. I pray no one can tell how long it's been since I last prayed.

I think of the saying *there's no atheist in the foxhole* and maybe it's true. Or maybe that would make me a missionary, creating makeshift altars in every grocery store, movie theatre, mall, elementary school, middle school, high school, lecture hall—every *foxhole* that any god has ever been absent from. I pray that praying will make a difference.

I'm wondering if there's a difference between spring in the mid-atlantic and southeast until I'm leaving and I see *no guns past this point*. And I'm trapped. And I know the difference now because it's eighty degrees and I can't feel my hands, frozen stiff like it's still January. So I pray that praying will make a difference. It won't.

# Quick Fix

by Fiona Pearson

---

Lemonade, so tart that it makes your eyes water. Just like your mom used to make. It's in one of those plastic cups that always tastes like the cupboard in which it was sitting. The ones that everyone had in the early 2000's, the edges a bit torn and sharp from being gnawed on by hundreds of little teeth. Your favourite was always the blue one, and it feels like home in your hand.

You sit down on the swing set—the side meant for younger kids that looks like an adapted porch swing. The metal squeaks beneath your weight. You haven't sat down here in a while, your knees are hugged against your chest and red paint chips away against your fingers.

There is a home movie you saw once; your mom was recording you through the open kitchen window, and you were swinging on that same swing set. A little white cap was shielding you from the sun, your velcro shoes pumping back and forth to gain altitude. Old enough to be on the real swing, not the porch swing. The border collie that licked your toes to claim you as an infant is slowly running laps around you, trying to protect you. Her name was Misty.

The paint is shiny and new in the video, crisp apple red, and the cedar tree by the garage is not yet tilting wildly to the left. From the grainy footage, you can see that you are scowling in concentration. Five years old and you look furious at something. The world. The junior-league soccer jersey slumped on the grass within frame. The gravity that keeps

you from swinging 360 degrees around the bar above you.

That's why you have the start of frown lines at age twenty-six. Because you have never known how to keep your emotions in check, and away from your face. Your mom used to chide, "Not everyone needs to know what you are thinking." Why not though? You think interesting thoughts.

You remember that when especially upset, your mom would practice calming, anxiety reducing exercises with you. Silly things that actually sometimes helped, like quick-fix aura cleanses. She would have you close your eyes while she traced outlines with her fingers just centimeters from your scalp, your shoulders, your face, brushing away all the fear and negativity. The scent of satsuma hand cream would be ripe in your nostrils, you becoming Pavlov's dog to that smell, even now.

Such techniques took away some, but not all of the troubles you used to scowl over. It didn't help the worry that Misty was getting older, her paws no longer stained green from running too fast through freshly cut grass. Or the worry that the new house your parents moved you into isn't as nice as the old house. That your toys, some still in boxes, won't all fit into your new room. Or that your fresh, still pink little brother won't like it either. He was swaddled just out of the camera's frame with your mom, blue eyes like glaciers, and a little mess of peach fuzz on his head.

It was all there in that home-movie, grainy and muted as the old film had become. You could see the worry in your eyes, or at least the shadow of it. Hidden behind scraped knees and milky sunscreen. Panicked, but not exactly knowing why. You remember sobbing over half-time orange slices that night, your emotions getting the best of you, again.

But it all tastes the same out of that blue plastic cup, twenty years later. It all comes out in the wash. No point crying over spilt milk, as they say. The only thing to worry about now is who will trim the cedar tree, now dangerously lopsided. Or who might want to buy an old, paint-chipped and rusting swing set. It still works ok, even if it squeaks a bit, and it's as safe as ever. Just remember to teach the new owner about quick-fix aura cleanses. They'll have to figure it out on their own, from there.

# *In Wormholes*

by Robert Carr

---

So she won't forget,  
Mother stamps a metal  
tag with 29, her age

when she delivered the sky.  
Carefully, she hooks  
a triangle of lead

to a wooden five-point star.  
Seamstress, she rocks  
on a celestial porch,

sips tea with lemon,  
counts wormholes  
in decking and constellations.

Tying secret knots,  
she cross-stitches  
aurora borealis,

capricious beryl of day,  
embroidered night.  
She untangles the yarn

of how to count  
lost children.  
A swarm of boys

hides behind  
a waxing moon.  
Her tools are many.

Mars, an orange croquet ball,  
is nailed to the orbit  
of a plywood hoop.

Black keys  
of whispering pianos,  
strips of skin

peeled from hands  
that touched her  
without asking.

Sewn with catgut twine,  
whipstitched, yowling,  
the youngest fears

are silenced. Her heavenly  
objects are needed  
for divinations.

Vengeance stitches  
her taboret together.  
She's lost daughters too,

in firmaments of hair,  
wreaths of every shade  
except her gray.

# *Carta di Sangue*

by Tanja Lau

---

The lemon trees tilt toward the sea, their fruit split open  
as if the salt wind could sweeten them. Some mornings  
the hills step closer, the terraces folding in so she can smell  
the rosemary threaded through their stonework.

The sea has been singing all morning, throwing up  
flashes of anchovy scales, silver and gone  
before the gulls can see them. The same fish, she swears,  
have been circling here for a hundred years.

The alley is a vein through the city, walls bleeding bougainvillea.  
*Carta di sangue*—though yesterday they were the color of milk.  
The street narrows until it's only a skirt brushing stone,  
gone in an instant, god knows how long.

There she is, dumping her rod into a fountain. It once belonged,  
she says, to the fisherman who taught her how to read the wind  
and lose her will. She knows she shouldn't be splashing, does it anyway.  
*Sposa bagnata, sposa fortunata*. The aisle is waiting, the veil torn like a wave.

Weaving oleander into her hair, her steps spiral upward  
into the crown of an olive tree, her favorite spot.  
Up here, the sea is the color of kitchen tiles. Hurry up!  
Do you hear the bells ringing? You don't want to be late

for school. On your bike over glass beads  
licked clean by the ocean, find your way  
back home. Look for the blue door, let her  
rock you to sleep in her apron.

Salt air slips through the window to nowhere.  
The rail of a bed a mirror for paperwhite hands  
freckled by life. There's no point to change the sheets,  
they say. I just hope the ocean tucks you in tonight.

*He Lives on the Mountain and She Does Not* by Marc S. Cohen

**He lives on a mountain and she does not live on a mountain. So they never meet. And they never find out if they are socially or romantically compatible. He probably spends his days coping with his pain by solving complex equations. She opens her door to delivery boys bearing flowers meant for the women next door. Nobody questions any of this.**



# *Untitled 1*

by Ursula Carroll

---

1.

She sees me as a piece of paper [do you remember flat stanley]  
breathes on a mirror and says: I think it is broken  
stuffs them both into a zippered pouch and puts it in the linen closet  
for winter, when there is time for projects

2.

The seaweed around my ankles makes dancing harder but I spin  
around and around and it's doo-wop on the stereo; hereditary music  
for hereditary movements I am compelled to make; the bruise I inherit  
is the same as my mother's and my mother's mother's. Is anything  
original? Scrape the residue from under my redlacquered nails, apply  
to tongue.

3.

Heavy head on the bottom of the stairs painted puddle  
it's primer, primed white ready to take shape morph into a skylight or  
a cave can you ever know  
something to crawl out of or into for light or dark  
I rented a belt sander from home depot and buffed out the skylight/  
cave from the hardwoods  
I sanded straight through to the joists and  
saw the basement full of other ways to crawl out/in  
must sand

4.

I dug up a rabbit from the yard and she kicked and screamed at me. She was so small and so delicate and I don't know why she was buried under the lamb's ear in the garden but she turned and bit my hand before I could set her down. She was grey and dirty and beautiful and I felt like a mother.

5.

And we are running a race  
in the center of the track is a little white cabin (no running water [first prize])

I could really win this thing I trained real hard  
she is gaining on me sunscreen sweat stings my eyes as we take  
last  
lap

photo finish my hand on the doorknob first and she clenched her jaw  
said:

how could you do this to me

When it's flying saucer season we climb to the high places and rooftops and watch them drop, drop, drop, majestically into the sea. You can see them best at night, their vertiginous lights winking red, then blue, then red-blue-green. Then nothing. That's when you know they've hit bottom. Still we cannot help but wonder if something is eluding us. No one's ever seen the occupants, everything disintegrates like a snowball on impact—hopes, dreams, memory. And yet we assume them to be extremely sad. Imagine the tragic expressions clinging to their faces as they speed toward certain annihilation. Speeding here across incalculable distances just so they can attain a final and lasting peace.



*Flying Saucer Season* by Marc S. Cohen

# *Midnight Waltz*

by Alicia Elkort

---

~ If a violin string could ache, I would be that string.  
Nabokov

Mother whirls as we dance in our pink-  
flowered jammies waltzing to a  $\frac{3}{4}$  beat

across the living room. The violinist  
wears a white dress, her black hair wild

with moonlight that willows her long  
arms—her eyes speak of edges

with no words on her tongue, only music,  
only summer on skin, her glorious sound

naming a kind of shelter, or a palpable madness—  
but O how she handles that bow,

the glide across catgut; her notes honeysuckle  
the evening's clouds, the shadows soften

into something milky & fine. Mother  
must be hungry, the two of us cutting the rug,

our flannel jammies wet with our sweat—  
mother glistens, throws back her head,

her hair reddish brown again, her skin  
so youthful even the distant stars

want to begin anew, so I  $\frac{3}{4}$  time my way  
to the kitchen humming, flip an omelet

with butter, mushrooms & parsley. Only,  
when I plate the eggs, I remember mother

has been dead these six years. I juice three oranges—  
the mother, the body, & the memory.

I sip the juice and eat alone, why I awoke  
in the first place—I had felt the absence

of her body's press, only liminal lines  
where the quiet light reminds me

of the night mother & I watched old movies,  
the television's sheen caressing our foreheads.

At midnight, she cradled my arm, said,  
*This is nice, you & me here, together.*

# *The House When I'm Away*

by Sara Mullen

---

I'm prone to a spell of anxiety after pulling the door behind me. I lock it, push against it to see if it's properly secure. I walk down the path, then turn back to make doubly, trebly sure. Further away, I pester myself about things I might have left on. Did I unplug the iron? Should I have left the ultrasonic pest repeller bleeping? Were the gas hobs really and truly fully closed off? Should I have shut the gas off at the mains? The water too? What about the tank in the attic: I'd returned one time to find it had overflowed. Its water had leaked through the floor and down the walls of the bathroom and spare room, leaving long steeling stains I had to paint over. Should I have checked the front door one more finally-final time?

Flooding, fire, explosion, collapse: I consider each befalling the house in my absence and how I might have prevented it.

I reach a point eventually—usually on clearing city limits or crossing into a different county or country—where I put my faith in my smoke alarms, in my neighbours contacting emergency services, and in the likelihood that I've attended to all the things I fear I've left undone. Then I relax and settle down to the business of Being Away.

But I wonder about my house when I'm gone from it. Does it pine for me like a dog left disconsolate behind a door? Does it fret that I might not return?

It's probably not bothered. Just shy of its second centenary, my house is an old hand at being alone. It has seen people come and go. Previous residents each left for a final time and never came back. Some day I'll do the same.

I presume to know some of what my house does when it's alone because I'm aware of some of its habits. The front door will rattle in the vibrations of passing traffic. The immersion timer, if left on, will clack avidly upstairs, outpacing the tick-tock from my jewelery box of the Swatch watch I no longer wear. Breezes, if they blow, will 'haw' deeply down the chimneys and may dislodge tiny sprinklings of debris within the walls, spilling them like beans through a rainstick.

It is likely that the kitchen sink will drip, that the fridge will whirr and shiver. I don't like to think of it but should a mouse decide to avail of the pest repeller amnesty, there will be flurries behind the skirting board and fluttering in the cupboard under the sink.

There will be footfall up and down the neighbours' stairs on either side, and their clocks chiming and doors opening and closing. Junk mail will be shoved through the letterbox of my house and glide to the Yoda doormat: Welcome, You Are. Shreds of conversation will fly in from passers-by and, if it's a Sunday, the thumping techno of the running group doing warm-ups outside. The sparrows in the garden hedge are sure to be squabbling, and the clop of horses drawing carriages, carts and sulkies will embellish the dull rush of cars and buses.

There will be movements, stirrings, happenings: tiny ones. The hands of my watch on their clockwise course, dust floating, landing and settling on surfaces, on the little Mr Pickwick figurine on the mantelpiece, on the paper model of the Sacre Coeur beside him, on the bottle of plum nail varnish by the framed photo of my mother, black and white in the late Sixties.

The plants in the kitchen will stretch towards daylight filtering in through the French doors. The tender baby leaves of the spotted begonia may unfurl a fraction and sunshine, if it catches them, will light their red undersides as brightly as tomatoes. The monsteras will minutely test their leaf-spans, fenestrations and ropes of aerial roots.

In the bowl on the kitchen table the banana I left will start to freckle. Spiders will stir in their webs in the window-corners. The semi-feral tabby that roams the back gardens will look through the glass door to see if any human is about that might be amenable to serving a small dish of food. She won't linger long. If nobody appears she'll scoot up the fire escape two doors down and try her luck at their door.

With the blinds down, the rooms will be dark and introspective, but light will enter through the pebbly glass panels in the front door. Sudden blocks of radiance will be cast by the daylight bouncing off buses outside, and shunted down the hallway to create a dynamic light show across ceilings, walls and floors.

Darkness will fall and the street light outside will come on. Its orange radiance will make a screen of the blind on the front window. The plants in the window-box will appear enlarged in silhouette, as will the snails trailing up and down the glass.

Depending on the night, there will be music from the bar across the road: '70s and '80s disco favourites. Or karaoke. Drunk and emotional conversations will take place on the benches outside. Traffic will lull to almost nothing. Empty buses still lit up like lanterns will hurtle by, dashing home to the depot.

In the depths of night, perhaps my house will dream. I don't flatter myself that I'll feature much, but I might well be glimpsed moving through rooms among ghosts from before, all our personalities and quirks whirled together, all of us contained within these walls. All going about our business through two centuries, our daily lives, innermost thoughts and secret selves known to this house and feeding its dreams.

Maybe it dreams of its architects and builders, all the hands that brought it into being, who hammered the floorboards, plastered the walls, fitted the dado rail and built the stairs; those who pointed its brickwork and slathered its pebbledash; the handyman who painted the bannister and spindles last summer, the electrician who fitted the Tole chandelier in the spare room.

Does it dream of forests where its wood came from, the lakeshore or

river shore that birthed its bricks? All the far-flung paces that have provided pigments for its paint, metal for its pipes, sand for its glass, components for all the electrics that light and heat it?

Perhaps it dreams of this place where it stands, of the changing streetscape outside: the days of drovers herding cattle up the road to the market: the era of the watch house across the street and the gallows on the green; the twilight time of the Vikings settled in this area, their ways fading into the flux of the growing city.

Having slept, will the house wake, stretch its timbers, face into another day? Will it sense when I'm on my way back, listen for the whinge of the garden gate, my footsteps on the path outside and the jingle of my keys?

# *Walking Down the Mountain after Sunset*

by D. Dina Friedman

---

It's an act of faith to adjust the strobe  
click from dark, to blink, to steady beam.  
We listen for the growl of cars with full moon eyes.

Untrusting, I swing my flashlight arm to mark our path  
on the twisted road, where cones warn  
against the crevasse of buckled pavement.

Each storm spills more snapped branches,  
sprawled trunks, rocks loosened in the abundant rain.  
Tonight, fewer fireflies in the haze,

the red ball we climbed for,  
unbelievably quick in its sinking.  
At the bottom, a waiting truck

taunts with its flashing reds. I know the shadow  
of the snag by the side of the road is not a bear.  
Yet, I always imagine one there,

not aggressive or unfriendly—simply erect,  
watchful. Only you can prevent... Only you.

## *plan de fuga / escape plan*

by Lucy De Maio

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It is easy to hide in a trap. Walls built of mortar we stole and consonants I spit out angry. No doors between words. Windows stained by the hesitation to leave. We lie on rotting carpet we should have stripped years ago, and cough. Mold is easy to breathe in when you speak English. Nostrils cleared by nasal vowels. It is easy to forget who you are going to be when your language has no future tense. It is easy to hate being girl when girl's language has no gender. All we have are harsh nouns. "Woman" haunts you, approaches in small steps, encroaches as stiff as our stomachs staring down the ceiling. Before we can cough again, time offers an ultimatum. Chandeliers witch-laugh in every room. When they fall, we won't have to do this anymore. No more girl. Absorbed by light. That is all you and I have ever wanted, right? Here is my whisper to you: we are wrong. Wrong about something being wrong with girl. Our language has taught us to sew blame onto ourselves to cover our skin. At the very least, you must let the light back in. I'll tell you the only way out. Loving being girl begins at Abuela's coffee table. In your family's gendered language. En otra trampa. In another trap. Find solace in how every adjective calls you its sister. In how all your words share space with you, change how they end for you, bow to you like waxed windows letting light in. It is easier to love being girl with constant confirmation. It is easier to love being girl when you are the language, when you own the trap between your teeth, when you are alive to do so much more than breathe in mold. Girl has been girl as long as girl could speak. We forget this in English. We forget there is something stunning about being permanent, unerasable. Girl, leave. It is easier to love yourself with reminders. Let the vowels remind you. Let yourself lock the door behind you.

# Ode

by Ann Fisher-Wirth

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My zinnias are bursts  
of radiance bolts of joy magenta  
and orange and sunlight they never  
failed me all summer when I lived

in the beige and pain of rehab they  
kept alive in the big ignored pot on the  
driveway thank you zinnias thank you  
for giving me so much joy for

letting me know brilliance was not  
dead even in the heat and throes of  
suffering there you were growing  
longer leggier spilling out of the pot

to trail on the ground and even now  
in autumn the tight little buds  
continue to form at the leafy nodes  
may you celebrate all the way to winter

# *Ars Poetica in My Kitchen*

by Ellie White

---

My mother always measured ingredients  
precisely, leveling off each scoop  
of flour or sugar. I toss in extra  
vanilla, add nutmeg where none  
is written, set a timer if I remember.  
I jab a plastic knife into the center  
of the sticky, sweet sponge & hope  
it slips back out clean. Frosting  
covers a flurry of errors. Sprinkles,  
too, can be sacred. The cake  
doesn't know how it was supposed  
to turn out & neither will  
the ones who eat it.

# Railroad

by Jill Michelle

---

*n. The chief of many mechanical devices enabling us to get away from where we are to where we are no better off.*

—Ambrose Bierce

Sheltering at her place during Tropical Storm Fay  
my now-ex sister-in-law posits, *we girls have to*

*have our own cash*, calls it, *midnight train money*  
*for when things go bad* as she finishes folding

a fitted sheet, adds it to the basket and laments her  
current stash—*more like midnight scooter money*—

and I'm fixed on memory's twisted tracks, driven  
past the snarl of times I've been broke, broken and

trapped, landing last in Mom's 1992 living room  
knee fractured, red streaks still peppered through

a nest of hair that hasn't seen a shower since last  
week's car crash. In two days, I'll take a plane to

Orlando instead, and Mom keeps asking *why*  
*I want to leave*. Fluent in generational silence

I stare at the dotted chalkboard of night sky beyond  
the window while she vents, christens the accident

*omen—God telling me not to go. Her final fox-trap  
of logic: There's no geographical solution to a*

*problem, you know, because your feelings follow  
wherever you go. Stalled on her plaid couch now*

I swallow a sea of stones, forbid the ripples to  
show, don't mention Dad or brother who've

already flown from home, rendering me  
boxcar, waiting for the engine of eighteen.

# *How to Stalk Your Parents*

by Summer Hammond

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## *Bake Them A Pie*

When you finally receive a letter from your father, four months after you've eloped, and he tells you in the small, precise handwriting you've always loved, the one that whispers *dad*, that by leaving the way you did, with a garbage bag stuffed mostly with books, not clothes, because you were too terrified to think straight, when he tells you that you divorced them, and according to Jehovah God, divorce is a sin, worthy of extreme punishment, so they are cutting you off – bake them a pie. No matter what season, make it pumpkin, because pumpkin is your mother's favorite, pumpkin anything has always won her over, so scour the pantry until you find one dusty can of pumpkin pie filling, and in the middle of May bake a pie, the most golden, glowing pumpkin pie, worthy of the Thanksgiving you never celebrated because you were raised Jehovah's Witness, drive out to their house which only a few months ago was yours and where all your clothes, photos, journals, and cats still reside. Deposit pie in mailbox with a note that exclaims It's pumpkin! Surrounded by hearts.

## *Yell DAD! From Your Balcony*

When your father's carpet cleaning van, the one he painted bright pink to attract more customers, the one your mother thinks looks like a strip club, but you think looks like a Valentine's Day heart, even

though as a Jehovah's Witness you didn't celebrate Valentine's Day either, when his carpet cleaning van rumbles and clatters past your apartment like the sign you've been praying for even though you don't know who to pray to anymore now that you don't believe in Jehovah, so you pray to the dove couple nesting in the tree because they are gentle, and you trust them, depositing your prayers in their nest alongside their little freckled eggs, the moment you see your dad's carpet cleaning van, jump to your feet, spill your book off your lap, lean over the balcony—yell *DAD!* Like you did when you were five and the ocean knocked you on your butt and you needed him to come find you and pick you up, which he did, running barefoot down the sand, swooping you up, like you did when you were nine and he showed up in the stands, in his carpet cleaning uniform, sweat and dirt-stained after a long day, to watch you race, the fastest kid in fourth grade, and you needed him to know you saw he was there, and it meant something, *everything*, like you did when you were twelve and he started taking you on jobs with him and you got to carry the hoses up three flights of stairs because he knew you were strong and you called to him from the third floor with the hose swung around your shoulders like a feather boa because you wanted him to beam at you, be proud—call like that, call just like that, with the force of your lungs and your whole entire Valentine's heart, as pink as his van that turns the corner, rattles from view.

### *Send Them Pink Roses*

When their wedding anniversary arrives in June, the one thing you celebrated as Jehovah's Witnesses, the one thing not soiled by pagan tradition, your mother baking a vanilla cake with rose geranium leaves pressed into the batter, edible decorations, because one of the things you loved about her, still love, will always love, no matter how she raged behind closed doors, acting out her drunk father's patterns on her own family, though she was a Jehovah's Witness and never drank, but you never talked about all that, and still don't, about how in the end she scared you off, scared you right out the door with your book-stuffed garbage bag, though your dad-in-denial wants to make it about Jehovah, one thing you loved, still love, will always love, is how she used flowers and herbs from her garden in all her cookies and cakes, your first memory with her at two-years-old, she's teaching you how to eat violets in her garden, and on their anniversary all of you giving

gifts, the whole afternoon, all your pent up celebratory energy finally released in a dazzle of balloons, streamers, confetti, wrapping paper, and pink roses, their wedding flower, so when their anniversary arrives, five months estranged—send them pink roses. Not just a dozen, but two. Make that three. Heck, send them pink roses all damn day. Tell the florists to write, on every card, *Happy Anniversary, Mom and Dad!* Surrounded by hearts.

*Scream From a School Bus Window*

When you're on a field trip with the elementary schoolkids you work with as a teacher's assistant, six months after eloping, and you've prayed to the doves, now a dove family, every single day, and now you're on a yellow school bus, returning from the zoo, the kids bouncing in their seats, riotous, and the bus stops at a crosswalk to let a pedestrian cross and when you turn to look, you glimpse only a hat, moving across your line of sight, but you know that hat, that frayed straw cowboy hat with the tattered brown feather, his lawn mowing hat, his leaf raking hat, his fishing hat, his tomato growing hat, and in a flash you're up, on the other side of the bus—fling open the school bus window and scream. Lean halfway out and this time, go on, really put your guts into it: *DAD! DAD! DAD!* Until finally, finally, he turns, he sees you, he sees you, he does, he sees you, then wave, wave so hard, wave like the little kid you were on the school bus all the times he dropped you off and walked away down the long gravel lane and then, just like now, sink onto that sticky green vinyl and sob into your hands, *dad, dad, don't ever leave me dad*, until the kids, the kids you teach, are watching, watching, watching you, in silence, in a cloud of awe.

Surrounded by hearts.

# *Me and the Angels*

by C. Mikal Oness

---

The spider weaving  
her web in my sink,  
the bird stuck and  
fluttering in my stove  
pipe: the one depends  
on my slovenliness,  
the other on my  
compassion. Finally,  
I just want solitude  
and no distractions.

## *The Wild Hive*

by Susan Francino

---

It has again been the kind of day  
that was only made worth living  
by the scent of honey from the wild hive,  
blown into my face by the wind that stirs the branches.

Foolishly, I pace back and forth,  
staring into the dark, open tree,  
nostrils flared like an enraged beast—  
but cannot find it again.

# *Shark Teeth*

by Don Narkevic

---

At night  
on the beach  
the black teeth  
appear like meteorites  
against the white sand  
the untrained eye  
might consider  
a shell shard  
my flashlight scanning  
the beach  
back and forth  
like a mine detector  
and I find a diamond  
ring, perhaps a wedding  
promising love  
immortal as the sea  
where infinity  
maroons itself,  
how the angle of stars  
measure the passage  
of time, me too old  
for rings, my wife dead  
but sending me gifts  
the teeth of those  
who never sleep.

*One Night, When My Daughter Was  
Four Years Old, She Interrupted The  
Bedtime Story She Had Requested In  
Order To Tell Me*

by Fox Henry Frazier

---

*(For Célestine Nora-Lorraine, who has told me many stories and taught  
me many things.)*

We live inside a monster. I don't know her real name.  
I call her Music Box Creature because I met her when  
she was crying and she sang me the song of how  
she was born a long time ago men with dark  
masks shot arrows into a witch in the woods  
and she died.

One arrow broke her leg open an angry snake  
slithered out She swallowed all the men and arrows  
She grew larger She ate all their horses and cattle  
She became bigger than everything went into the sea  
grew to dragon made fire smoke reaching up  
past clouds until the king with his high crown  
came to the sea with men carrying metal crosses  
to kill her. It didn't work but she had to hide.  
He chased her back back down river to lake.  
She went deep found an underground

cave to hide her, but somehow      She is everywhere  
    around us now. Her eyes are outside in the garden.  
Her vulva is the volcano you hiked in Hawai'i. Her lungs  
are wrapped around your throat, Mommy like a necklace  
you wear forever. Sometimes she wants to take our eyes  
    and kill us      but her heart is still beating in our  
walls all the time. You can hear it if you're very quiet.  
    Listen      but be careful Mommy  
her lymph nodes are spread through oceans and under  
plates of land. If you press too hard or kick them  
because you didn't see or didn't care it can make her  
very sick for a long time      Yes, she is still hiding  
    her mind and will in watery caverns deep beneath  
her lake lined with red rocks yes She is getting  
stronger every day but I don't think she'll be  
    very happy with anyone when She comes back

# *Wild Botanica 1460*

by Subhaga Crystal Bacon

---

For Jenn Martelli

I wish you could see these new Docs—  
buttery tan nubuck harness boots—  
*Cute!* you'd proclaim them, burnished on top  
of the steel toe. I tried to buy the Wild  
Botanicas you yearned for in your poem  
of the same name, got scammed on a pair  
at the foolish price of £46. I still grieve  
the boots never meant to arrive, their night shades  
and spider webs. I have the classic black,  
and the pale pastel paisley suede I wore  
on our date to the Lammys, burst of color with my black  
pants and top. You in black sleeveless dress,  
black Doc sandals, it being June.  
I have those, too, but they hurt my bunions,  
make my feet sweat. Plus, they're too femme,  
comeuppance for my ignorant younger self  
who pooh-pooed the idea of gender  
dysphoric footwear. Late bloomer, me.  
The Wild Botanicas are vintage. Every real  
pair online—none, thankfully, my size—  
sell for hundreds. Still some friends bought  
you a pair the week before you died,

size nine, maybe your daughter now wears.  
I've not given up completely except maybe  
laces for a while. These I slip on  
with their welts and stitches, like a wound.

At the edge of stillness, at the finite hour, it comes: the face of God,  
old, amorphous, peering out from under a heap of rubble.  
Shadow-words, darker than the deepest sea, a mouth murmurs.  
Imitating the green intonations of the sea, it whispers, breathless:  
Of course I am alone. Here I must learn to endure the absence of  
what I have become.



*At the Edge of Stillness* by Marc S. Cohen

## *More Than Forty Years*

by Tony Gloeggler

---

Someone posted a Tony Hoagland poem from his first book, *Sweet Ruin*, online today, saying she never loved his newer ones nearly as much. I nodded, thought about all the late night, French fry Diner conversations about musicians that blew me away when they first found my ears. A few, like The Rascals, the first band I called mine, turned me into a die-hard fan loving every album they put out. I followed others for years trying to maintain a kind of magical connection only to find their stuff started sounding too similar, formulas that quickly bored me. Some artists watered down their sound to chase a hit by polishing it with slick tinny production, think J Geils, Centerfold, Love Stinks. Occasionally groups moved from folk or rock to jazz, told themselves they were making better, more sophisticated music and ended up losing their way. Some

pretended to be happy being one hit wonders at oldies shows. Of course, there are the rare talents I genuflect, bow my head to: Dylan, Springsteen, Brian Wilson releasing material throughout lifetime-long careers, periodically reminding me why I fell in love with music, how wonderful it felt. Earlier today I ordered Josh Ritter's, James McMurtry's and Neko Case's new albums, and tonight I'm sitting at my desk writing. Ahmad Jamal, Sonny Rollins, Thelonious Monk are playing in the background, their gliding melodies moving around, grooving through me. No words to snag in my thoughts, tempt me to sing along. More than forty years and I'm still putting words down on paper.

# *Hard as Nails*

by Tobi Alfier

---

Thirty-one years she lived by the bay  
and never once did she swim,  
bare toes never felt the cool wet sand  
not once did the sun kiss her cheeks.

Now she has old-woman arms  
bruised and red-spotted  
never tanned, never burnt.  
She could say she was healthy

but oh, what a brindled and dim  
mother—wife—daughter—niece  
*not much to look at* they'd say  
as they always have

and now she can almost believe it.

But she's a grand slam of heartbreak,  
a hard wind laced with sleet,  
plumage of streetlights and insomnia,  
and the junk man. And it all just happened.

Over thirty-one years of every day.

# *Ghosts Who Don't Know They're Dead*

by Jason Ryberg

---

There's  
an  
old horse  
pulling an  
old wagon full of  
old mattresses down the foggy,  
early morning side-street of this gothic urban dream-  
scape (circa 1920-something, maybe),  
the street lamps like rows of gallows, slowly  
flickering off in succession, maybe a single  
crow poking at something in the gutter, and a cat  
watching what should have been the score  
of a lifetime, now flapping away, suddenly,  
before he can even process what's  
happening; and, all in all, it really hasn't been  
that bad of an afterlife, so  
far (as my only  
other real  
option  
was  
to  
be  
a  
deck hand  
on a lost,  
wandering ship of  
ghosts who didn't know they were dead).

# *Wonder Woman Joins a Postnatal Adjustment Programme*

by Lee Fraser

---

Musty hoodie over her eagle bodice  
(a nightmare to breastfeed in), she slumps;  
rubs dried spit-up off an Amazonium cuff.

The tiara now holds back a bob  
but it, too, has fallen into nappy changes  
often enough to be under review.

Picking at the handle of the lasso of truth  
with a chewed fingernail, she murmurs  
*I thought I'd be better at this.*

# *How to Seem Like a Normal Person*

by Sheila Wellehan

---

Don't talk about rehab and sobriety all the time.  
Don't talk about your cats too much.

No one wants to hear about your blackouts.  
No one wants to hear about  
the psychiatric hospital, either.

Take a shower every day.  
Every other day will probably do.

Don't cast spells in public.  
Drive your car. Don't use your broom.

Don't let people know you know things  
you have no rational way of knowing.

Get out during the day, feel the sun on your face.  
Or you could just stick with savoring  
the moonlight.

What is a normal person?  
Why do you want to seem normal, again?

## *Friend Shaped*

by Rebecca Brock

---

The rescue dog next door is a big boy  
with soft eyes whose brindled body  
goes all desperate when he sees me, or anyone  
he loves, like Jello, like anticipation, wiggling  
clear through. I have always wanted  
to be smaller, to take up less  
everything—space, mass, weight.  
I can name (or could) where it came from, why,  
but I won't do that here, born as we are  
to people we're wont to trust or try to,  
being, as they are, inexorably  
human, too. I suppose I am saying  
I have been uncomfortable here  
for a long time, maybe the whole time.  
Lately, I've been telling myself I am friend-shaped,  
like my neighbor's dog, I am soft skinned  
and big eyed. My brain faltering  
between beauty and distraction  
and how happy I am to see you, yes *you*,  
after all this time, or just since  
this morning. I mean, my arms open  
easy to take people in, my body  
is a soft thing that knows  
what hard is.

# *Things That Learn To Speak*

by Jane Medved

---

The failed tiramisu I poured into a bag, leftover supper  
that clings to its bowl, the leak that almost happened,  
the slow drip that continues, the sticky underside  
of a snail on the window, the gecko who disappeared  
from our cellar, he took our luck with him, my hand  
entering the safety of its pocket, Gulliver the fish  
in his green cage, his fear of me, a demi-god who gives  
light then takes it away, my panic at two a.m.  
when the thunder hasn't started yet, the glass after it breaks  
in the street, the long year of rust waiting to escape  
its pipe, time knocking and knocking, time leaving me  
behind, time stretched out beside me, trying to comfort,  
all this will pass and *this* and *this* and *this*.

## *Icarus*

by David Rogers

---

I thought you died, I said.  
He answered, Why is it so hard  
for people to believe I knew  
how to swim? The moral of my story  
is not to always follow orders  
and play it safe. Just make your wings  
out of something more durable  
than wax.  
But wood burns, canvas tears,  
and metal grows fatigued, I said.  
What fabric is safe  
to trust with your life?  
The fabric of dreams, he said.  
I don't know what that means,  
I answered. Are we talking about  
how to engineer good wings  
or playing with metaphors?  
What makes you think  
there's a difference? he asked.  
Metaphors can't fly, I said.  
Maybe yours don't,  
he answered, flapped his wings  
and leapt from the cliff.

## Contributor Biographies

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Alix Ahles has worked for over a decade as a trauma therapist and expert, facilitating presentations, workshops and interviews detailing her expertise in traumatic stress while cultivating her practice as a creative non fiction writer through workshops, residencies, and local readings. She entered into the field of psychotherapy, building a thriving business as a private practice practitioner while navigating the enormity of losing her twin sister and both of her parents in a period of nine years. As a writer and practicing therapist, she knew the transformative and healing power of narrative. As she stepped into motherhood, she continued to examine a complex and pained experience navigating the enormity of her ongoing losses. In her forthcoming memoir, she examines the shattering impact of her grief while recognizing the limited capacity of those around her hold and recognize the recursion of these losses. Her work can be found at: [alixahleswriter.com](http://alixahleswriter.com) or @alixahleswriter

JC Alfier's (they/them) artistic directions are informed by photo-artists Toshiko Okanou, Deborah Turbeville, Francesca Woodman, and Katrien De Blauwer. Their most recent poetry book, *The Shadow Field*, was published by Louisiana Literature Press. Journal credits include *Faultline*, *Fugue*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Penn Review*, *River Styx*, and *Vassar Review*.

Tobi Alfier's credits include *Arkansas Review*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Cholla Needles*, *Gargoyle*, *James Dickey Review*, *Jerry Jazz Musician*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Permafrost*, *Ragaire*, and *Washington Square Review*. She is co-editor of *San Pedro River Review* ([www.bluehorsepress.com](http://www.bluehorsepress.com)).

Jane Attanucci grew up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Author of *First Mud* (Finishing Line Press) and *A River Within Spills Light* (Turning Point), Jane has poems in *Common Ground Review*, *Pittsburgh Poetry Review*, *Thrush Poetry Journal*, and *Writer's Almanac* among others. She lives in Newton, Massachusetts.

Subhaga Crystal Bacon (they/them), is the author of five collections of poetry including *A Brief History of My Sex Life*, from Lily Poetry Review Books; the Lambda Literary finalist, *Transitory*, 2023, winner of the BOA Editions, Ltd. Isabella Gardner Award for Poetry; *Surrender of Water in Hidden Places*, winner of the Red Flag Poetry Chapbook Prize, 2023, released in an expanded second edition in the summer of 2024. A Pushcart and Best of the Net nominee, Subhaga is an AWP Writer to Writer mentor and teaching artist working in schools and libraries with youth and adults, as well as private students. Their work appears or is forthcoming in a variety of print and online journals including *Terrain*, *The Diode Poetry Journal*, *The Bellevue Literary Review*, *Indianapolis Review*, *Smartish Pace*, and others. A Queer elder, they live in rural northcentral Washington on unceded Methow land.

Sarah Banks is a nurse living in Mississippi. Her poetry appears in *Rust + Moth*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *Willows Wept*, *Gyroscope Review*, *Thimble*, *Autumn Sky Poetry*, and elsewhere. Her fiction has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and appears in *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *Bright Flash Literary Review*, and *Fiction on the Web*.

KB Ballentine's latest collection *All the Way Through* was published in November 2024 from Sheila-Na-Gig Inc. Current books can be found with Blue Light Press, Iris Press, Middle Creek Publishing, and Celtic Cat Publishing. Published in *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Atlanta Review* and *Haight-Ashbury Literary Journal*, and others, her work also appears in anthologies including *Women Speak* (2025) and *The Strategic Poet* (2021). Learn more at [www.kbballentine.com](http://www.kbballentine.com).

Ruth Bavetta's poems have appeared in *Rattle*, *Nimrod*, *North American Review*, *Slant*, *Nerve Cowboy*, and many other journals and anthologies. She likes the light on November afternoons, the music of Stravinsky, the smell of the ocean. She hates pretense, phoniness, and sauerkraut.

Phyllis Bramson is a significant painting voice of her generation, and is Professor Emerita in Drawing and Painting at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Her work has been exhibited in key exhibitions and surveys including the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Smithsonian Institution, and Corcoran Gallery of Art, among many institutions. She has had more than forty solo shows at venues such as New Museum, New York; Fort Wayne Museum of Art; Boulder Art Museum; University of West Virginia Museum, Renaissance Society Museum (mid career survey), the Chicago Cultural Center (10 year survey) and numerous galleries. Bramson has been covered widely and recognized with numerous awards, including grants from the John S. Guggenheim and Rockefeller foundation, and the Anonymous Was A Woman Award. A recipient of three National Endowments, a Senior Fulbright Scholar, Louis Comfort Tiffany Grant, Artadia: the fund for Art and Dialog Jury Award, Anonymous Was A Woman Award, and selected as one of the Women's Caucus for Art Lifetime Achievement Awardees for 2014.

Syd Brewster is a Black American writer based in the Hudson Valley. Her writing has been featured in *Sink Hollow*, *God's Cruel Joke*, *The Table Review*, and is forthcoming in *Discount Guillotine*. You can find her at [sydbrewster.com](http://sydbrewster.com) and on Instagram @sydbrews

Rebecca Brock is the author of *The Way Land Breaks* (Sheila-Na-Gig Editions 2023). Her work can be found in *The Threepenny Review*, *CALYX*, *Mom Egg Review*, *Radar Poetry*, *THRUSH* & elsewhere. Her awards include the 2025 *Lascaux Poetry Prize* and the 2022 Kelsay Book's Woman's Poetry Prize. She has been a flight attendant for most of her adult life and is still surprised by this fact. Find more at [www.rebeccabrock.org](http://www.rebeccabrock.org).

Lynne Burnett lives on Vancouver Island. Her poems have appeared in many magazines and anthologies in the US and Canada. A Best of the Net and Pushcart nominee, she won the 2016 Lauren K. Alleyne Difficult Fruit PP, the 2019 Jack Grapes PP, Kelsay Books' 2023 Women's Poetry Contest, and was a finalist for Arc's 2018 Poem of the Year, the 2022 Montreal International PP and CV2's 2024 Foster Prize. Finishing Line Press published her chapbook "Irresistible" in 2018. Visit her at <https://lynneburnett.ca/>

Brent Cantwell is a New Zealand-born poet who writes, teaches and lives with his familer in the hinterland of Queensland's Gold Coast. He has recently been published in *Jacaranda Journal*, *Westerly Magazine*, and *Takahe*. His first collection of poetry *tether* was published by Recent Work Press in October 2023.

Robert Carr is a Maine-based author of five collections of poetry, most recently, *Blue Memento* (Lily Poetry Review Books, 2025) and *Phallus Sprouting Leaves*, winner of the 2024 Rane Arroyo Chapbook Series (Seven Kitchens Press). Robert's work has appeared in many journals and magazines including *The Greensboro Review*, *The Massachusetts Review*, and *Shenandoah*.

Ursula Carroll is a writer and translator in St. Louis. Her work has appeared or will appear in *HAD*, *Michigan City Review of Books*, *Washington Square Review*, *Burial*, and elsewhere. She spends most of her time taking pictures of vanity plates and thinking up knuckle tattoos.

Hayley Clin (she/her) is a writer and graduate student living in Brantford, Ontario, Canada. She is currently researching eco-social work at Wilfrid Laurier University. Her writing is published or forthcoming in *This Magazine*, *Thread*, *Queen's Quarterly*, and *PRISM International*.

Marc S. Cohen is an artist and writer born in the United States and residing in Toronto, Canada. His creative work explores existentially topical themes like alienation, dislocation and the search for meaning in a shifting semantic landscape.

Joe Cottonwood has repaired hundreds of houses to support his writing habit among the redwood trees in the Santa Cruz Mountains of California. His newest book of poetry is *buck naked is the opposite of hate* from Sheila-Na-Gig Press.

Lucy De Maio lives, writes, and takes the train in Chicago. She was named an All-Star Poet at the Rooted and Radical Youth Poetry Festival in 2024 and a recipient of the Randall Albers Young Writers Awards held by the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame in 2025. She is a current member of Collaboraction Theatre's Light Ensemble, where she has performed original spoken word at events like Kidzapalooza, the Utopian Ball, and the Light It Up series.

Anna Drasko grew up in Pennsylvania. They hold degrees from the University of Pennsylvania and Penn State. They now live and write in East Tennessee, where they spend their time in the Great Smoky Mountains. You can find them on Substack: [substack.com/@annadrasko](https://substack.com/@annadrasko).

Chris Dungey is a retired auto worker in MI. He rides a mountain bike and a Honda scooter for the planet; follows Detroit City FC and Flint City Bucks FC with religious fervor. More than 170 of his poems have been published online or in litmags, most recently in *Penmen Review*, *Macrame Literary Journal*, and *Argyle Literary Magazine*.

Alicia Elkort's second book of poetry won the Two Sylvias Press Wilder Book Prize and will be published in 2026. Her first book *A Map of Every Undoing* was published in 2022 by *Stillhouse Press* with George Mason University, after winning their book contest, and her chapbook *Disturb the Bones* was published December 2025 by Dancing Girl Press. Alicia's poetry has been nominated several times for the Pushcart, Best of the Net, and the Orison Anthology, and her work appears in numerous journals and anthologies. She reads for *Tinderbox Poetry Journal* where she also writes reviews. For more info or to watch her two video poems: <https://aliciaelkort.mystrikingly.com/>

Ann Fisher-Wirth is Mississippi Poet Laureate 2025-2029. She has published eight books of poems, most recently *Paradise Is Jagged* (Terrapin Books, 2023). With Laura-Gray Street, she coedited *Attached to the Living World: A New Eco-poetry Anthology* (Trinity UP, 2025), which updates the earlier, seminal *Eco-poetry Anthology* (Trinity UP, 2013, 2020) with poems written and/or published since 2010 by poets who are not in the first volume. Ann has had Fulbrights to Switzerland and Sweden, and residencies at Storyknife, Djerassi, Hedgebrook, and elsewhere. In 2023 she received the Mississippi Arts Commission Governor's Award for Excellence in Poetry. She is retired from the University of Mississippi, where she taught in the MFA program and directed the Interdisciplinary Minor in Environmental Studies.

Isabel Flick is a Mexican-American artist and poet based in Saint Louis, Missouri. Her work has been showcased in many national galleries and publications. She received an Associates of Education from Saint Louis Community College and a Bachelor's in Studio Art from the University of Missouri - Saint Louis. She has received and been nominated for numerous awards for both her art and poetry, such as a 2025 nomination for a Pushcart Prize.

G.W. Fox (she/her) is a PhD student in the Department of English and Creative Writing at Rice University in Houston, Texas. Her critical research currently focuses on Victorian poetry and women's writing, but creative writing has always been a part of her daily practice.

Susan Francino holds an MFA in Poetry from Seattle Pacific University and is currently a PhD student in Theology at the University of Notre Dame. Her poetry has previously appeared in *The American Journal of Poetry* and elsewhere.

Lee Fraser is from Aotearoa New Zealand and uses poetry for ogling life's details, emotional archaeology, and comic relief, sometimes all at once. Her full-time occupations have included field linguist and parent. In 2024-2025 she had 50 pieces published, and has work included or forthcoming in *Cordite, Ink Sweat & Tears, Micro Madness*, NZ Poetry Society anthologies, *ONE ART* and *Poetry Aotearoa Yearbooks*. [leefraserpoetry.com](http://leefraserpoetry.com)

Fox Henry Frazier's third full-length poetry collection, *Break Blow Burn*, is forthcoming from White Stag Publications in 2026. Her debut novel, *Francesca*, is forthcoming in 2027. She holds an MFA from Columbia University and a PhD in Literature and Creative Writing from University of Southern California.

D. Dina Friedman has published in many literary journals including *Salamander, Rattle, The Sun, Mass Poetry, Chautauqua Journal, Crab Orchard Review, Cider Press Review, Hawaii Pacific Review, Cold Mountain Review, Lilith, Negative Capability*, and *Rhino* and received six Pushcart Prize and two Best-of-the Net nominations. She is the author of two previous poetry chapbooks, *Wolf in the Suitcase* (Finishing Line Press) and *Here in Sanctuary, Whirling* (Querencia Press). Dina's fiction includes the short-story collection *Immigrants* (Creators Press) and two YA novels, *Escaping Into the Night* (Simon and Schuster) and *Playing Dad's Song* (Farrar Straus Giroux). To learn more about Dina, visit her website at [www.ddinafriedman.com](http://www.ddinafriedman.com). and subscribe to her blog on living a creative life in a creatively challenged universe at [ddinafriedman.substack.com](http://ddinafriedman.substack.com).

Robbie Gamble (he/him) is the author of the chapbook *A Can of Pinto Beans* (Lily Poetry Review Press, 2022). His poems have appeared in *On the Seawall, Post Road, Whale Road Review, Salamander*, and *The Sun*. He is the poetry editor for *Solstice: A Magazine of Diverse Voices*, and he divides his time between Boston and an apple orchard in Brattleboro, Vermont.

Meia Geddes lives in Boston as a writer, artist, and librarian at the Boston Public Library. She is the author of *The Little Queen* and *Love Letters to the World*. She holds a BA from Brown University and MS from Simmons University, and is an MFA candidate and Teaching Fellow at University of Massachusetts-Boston. A Fulbright scholar, she has also received funding from the American Library Association and Martha's Vineyard Institute of Creative Writing. She is a member of the New England Book Artists and founder of Poetose.

Ewen Glass is a screenwriter and poet from Northern Ireland who lives with two dogs, a tortoise and a body of self-doubt; his poetry has appeared in the likes of *Okay Donkey, Maudlin House, HAD, Poetry Scotland*, and *One Art Poetry*. Bluesky/X/IG: @ewenglass

Tony Gloggler is a life-long resident of NYC who managed group homes for the mentally challenged for over 40 years. Poems have appeared in *Rattle, New Ohio Review, Vox Populi, Chiron Review*. His collection, *What Kind Of Man* with NYQ Books, was a finalist for the 2021 Paterson Poetry Prize and his new book *Here On Earth* just came out 1/26 on NYQ Books.

Summer Hammond grew up in rural Iowa and Missouri, one of Jehovah's Witnesses. She earned her MFA from the University of North Carolina-Wilmington. Her writing appears in *New Letters*, *Moon City Review*, and *Tahoma Review*, among others. She won the 2023 *New Letters* Conger Beasley Jr. Award for Nonfiction and her essay "A Little Slice of the Moon" was included in Best American Essays 2025. Her debut novel, *The Impossible Why*, is forthcoming from Apprentice House Press in 2026.

A.M. Hayden served as Poet Laureate for Sinclair College from 2021-2025 and is a Tenured Professor of Humanities, Philosophy, and World Religions, receiving the League for Innovation Teaching Excellence Award (2020) and the Distinguished Faculty Scholars Award (2024). She has two full length poetry collections (*American Saunter: Poems of the U.S.* and *Old World Wings: Poems of Europe*) and one chapbook (*How to Tie Tobacco*), published by FlowerSong Press and Wild Ink Publishing. Twice nominated for the Pushcart Prize and a River Heron Editors' Choice Winner, she lives on a windy farm with her family and many rescues including a blind, three-legged dog named Vinny Valentine and a three-legged goat named Old Man Jenkins.

Matthew E. Henry (MEH) is an educator, essayist, and the author of seven poetry collections, including the forthcoming *Promises to Keep* (Wayfarer Books, 2026). He's editor-in-chief of *The Weight Journal* and nonfiction editor at *Porcupine Literary*. MEH's publications include *Barren Magazine*, *Had*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Mom Egg Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Stone Circle Review*, *Terrain*, *Whale Road Review*, *The Worcester Review*, and *Zone 3*. MEH earned an MFA yet continued to spend money he didn't have completing an MA in theology and a PhD in education. He writes about education, race, religion, and burning oppressive systems to the ground at [www.MEHPoeting.com](http://www.MEHPoeting.com).

Lauren Hilger is the author of *Morality Play* (Poetry NW Editions, 2022). Named a Nadya Aisenberg Fellow in poetry from MacDowell, she has also received fellowships from the Hambidge Center and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. Her work has appeared in *BOMB*, *Harvard Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *The Threepenny Review*, Poetry Foundation's online archive, NEA's *Poetry Out Loud*, and elsewhere. She serves as a poetry editor for *No Tokens*.

Mary Beth Hines is the author of *Winter at a Summer House* (Kelsay, 2021). Her writing is widely published, with recent work appearing, or soon to appear, in *Solstice Literary Magazine*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *Whale Road Review*, and elsewhere. Connect with her at <https://www.marybethhines.com>

Paul Ilechko is a British American poet and occasional songwriter who lives with his partner in Lambertville, NJ. His work has appeared in many journals, including *The Bennington Review*, *Bear Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Permafrost*, and *Laurel Review*. His book *Fragmentation and Volta* was published in 2025 by Gnashing Teeth Publishing. He reads for *Marrow Magazine*.

Susan Carroll Jewell lives and writes in Upstate New York. Her poetry, which is often informed by her blindness, can be found in many fine journals.

Wen Jing is a writer based in Wisconsin. Her fiction and poetry have appeared in *Narrative Magazine* and *Chiron Review*. She was the founder and CEO of Beijing Chinese Academy and China Success Institute until 2022. She is at work on poems and a novel. Visit her at [wenjingauthor.com](http://wenjingauthor.com).

Carrie Kartman is a writer, actor, and educator, with an MFA from San Francisco State University, where she also taught in the Creative Writing Department. Her writing has surfaced in multiple publications including: *The Crone's Words*, *Gambles and Balances*, *Wingless Dreamer*, *The San Francisco Review*, *Curves on a Sidewalk Street*, *Using Our Words*, *Twins Magazine*, and *CitySports Magazine*. Her plays have been seen on stage in the S.F. Bay Area and Michigan.

Jennifer Mills Kerr lives in Northern California. Her poetry has been recently published in *January House*, *Neologism*, & the *Inflectionist Review*. She leads art-inspired writing workshops online and curates poems on the Poetry-Inspired substack (@JenniferMillsKerr). Read more of her published poetry at [www.JenniferMillsKerrPoet.com](http://www.JenniferMillsKerrPoet.com).

Tanja Lau is a Swiss-based poet and writer with German-Italian roots. A highly sensitive observer and mother of two, she explores life's complexity with vulnerability and a hint of humor. She studied Comparative Literature before venturing into entrepreneurship. Her first children's book is scheduled for publication in 2026, and several of her poems have been published in international anthologies. Her writing can also be found on Instagram @tanias.butterflies and on Substack at [taniasbutterflies.substack.com](https://taniasbutterflies.substack.com).

Kim Malinowski (she/they) is a lover of words. She is the author of *Home*, *Phantom Reflection*, *Buffy's House of Mirrors*, *Clutching Narcissus*, *Reverberations*, and *Death: A Love Story*. She writes because the alternative is unthinkable.

Jane Medved is the author of *Wayfarers* (winner of the Off The Grid Prize, Grid Books 2024), *Deep Calls To Deep* (winner of the Many Voices Project, New Rivers Press 2017) and the chapbook *Olam, Shana, Nefesh* (Finishing Line Press). Her translation of *Wherever We Float, That's Home* (by Maya Tevet Dayan) won the Malinda A. Markham Translation Prize (published by Saturnalia Books 2024) Recent work can be seen in *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *Plume*, *Swim*, *River Heron Review* and *Bending Genres*. She alternates as poetry and cnf editor of *The Ilanot Review*. Visit her at [janemedved.net](http://janemedved.net)

Jill Michelle is the author of *Underwater* (Riot in Your Throat, 2025) and *Shuffle Play* (Bottlecap, 2024) and winner of the 2023 NORward Prize for Poetry from *New Ohio Review*. Her newest work is forthcoming in *The Meadow*, *RHINO Poetry*, *Salamander Magazine*, and *Scavengers*. She teaches at Valencia College in Orlando, Florida. Find more at [byjillmichelle.com](http://byjillmichelle.com).

Jane C. Miller is the author of *Canticle for Remnant Days* (2024) and coauthor of *Walking the Sunken Boards* (2019). Her poetry has appeared in *RHINO*, *Colorado Review*, and *Bear Review* among others. Honors include the *Naugatuck River Review* Narrative Poetry Contest and two state fellowships in poetry. She coedits the online poetry journal, *Quartet*. [www.janecmiller.com](http://www.janecmiller.com)

Fawnia Winter Mountford is a Scottish/ Australian poet whose work explores memory, folklore, grief and the uncanny. Their work has appeared in *Spinifex Press*, *Antithesis* and is forthcoming in *Poets Row*.

Sara Mullen is a Dublin-based writer of poetry and creative non-fiction. Nature, the supernatural, houses, homes, family and familiars are recurring themes in her writing. Her work has featured in various anthologies and journals in Ireland and beyond. Her chapbook *Cassata* will be published in spring 2026 by Silver Locust Press, Dublin.

Don Narkevic: Buckhannon, WV. MFA National University. Poetry appears in *The Trillium*, *Agape*, *Blue Collar Review*, *Dappled Things*. In 2022, Main Street Rag published a novella of poetry, *After the Lynching*. In 2024, The Potomac Playmakers produced *From Birth*. In 2025, the author won the Ziolkowski Poetry Prize.

Brett Olsen is a writer and humorist from Cleveland, Ohio. His work has been featured in *McSweeney's*, *The Hard Times*, *ONE ART: A Journal of Poetry*, *Defenestration*, and *The Needling*.

C. Mikal Oness is the author of *Oracle Bones*, winner of the Lewis & Clark Poetry Prize, and *Water Becomes Bone* (New Issues Press). His poems have appeared in numerous journals throughout the U.S. "On the Sprocket Side of the Hayrake" was a finalist for the Ireland's Ballymaloe Poetry Prize and appeared in *The Moth*. He lives on a cottage farm in Southeastern Minnesota with his wife, Elizabeth Oness. He is the founding editor of Sutton Hoo Press, a literary fine press, as well as a new imprint The Last Press ([www.thelastpress.com](http://www.thelastpress.com)). A collection of tanka, *Notes from the Hermitage*, was just released as a fine press book from No Reply Press in Portland, OR, and a collection of essays on the craft of fine printing and publishing, and subsequently, life, is also forthcoming from No Reply Press. His latest collection, *Works and Days*, is forthcoming from Cornerstone Press.

Casper Orr (he/him) is a Trans\* and Disabled writer from the East Coast. A two-time Best of the Net nominated writer, he has work published in *The Ex-Puritan*, *Electric Literature*, *Hunger Mountain Review*, *Heavy Feather Review*, *The Bitchin' Kitsch*, and more. You can find him on instagram: @casper.orr

Sumit Parikh is a poet from Cleveland, Ohio, and a pediatric neurologist. His poems have appeared in *I-70 Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *The Marbled Sigh*, and *Intima*. Selected work is available at [sumitspoetry.com](http://sumitspoetry.com).

Fiona Pearson (she/her) is an emerging writer from Alberta, Canada. She has a Master's Degree in Creative Writing and Publishing from City St George's University of London, and is the publishing assistant with a small press in Edmonton. Her stories have been featured in *The London Reader* and *Five on the Fifth*.

Eddie Popper (they/them) is a critical care nurse and poet living and working on unceded Gadigal, Wangal and Burramattagal Lands. Eddie's writing often focuses on human and planetary justice, community, the earth as our kin, queerness, illness, interrogations of the medical system, memory and history. Their poetry won the 2025 Woorilla Poetry Prize, was shortlisted for the 2025 Robert Gray Poetry Prize, and has been published in *Australian Poetry Journal*, *Jacaranda Journal*, *Meniscus*, *Right Now Mag*, *Marrow Poetry*, *wildscape*, *Mississippi Review*, among others.

T. R. Poulson, a University of Nevada alum and proud Wolf Pack fan, supports her writing habit by delivering for UPS in Woodside, California. Her work has appeared in various publications, including *Best New Poets*, *Quarterly West*, *American Literary Review*, *Gulf Coast*, and *Booth*. She is currently seeking a publisher for her first manuscript, tentatively titled *At Starvation Falls*. Find her at [www.trpoulson.com](http://www.trpoulson.com).

Tracie Renee (she/her) is a librarian, a *Publishers Weekly* book reviewer, and a BOTN-nominated writer who lives and dreams in sort-of Chicago. Her poem, "Pre-Existing Conditions," recently earned second place in the 2025 Passionfruit Poetry Prize competition. Find Tracie in *HAD*, *Orange Blossom Review*, on Bluesky (@tracierennee.bsky.social) and at <https://linktr.ee/tracie.renee>.

Trinity Richardson is a poet raising an evil cat. They are a reader for *West Trade Review* and the social media manager for *The Adroit Journal*, and have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. Their poems can be found or are forthcoming in *Gulf Stream*, *Moon City Review*, *Funicular*, and more. Outside of writing, their interests include vintage clown dolls, Magic, magic, claw machines, stories with ambiguous endings, and the fly from *Breaking Bad*.

Sara Quinn Rivara is the author of three collections of poetry, most recently *LITTLE BEAST* (Riot in Your Throat Press, 2023) a finalist for the 2024 Oregon Book Awards. Work has appeared recently in *chestnut review*, *trampset*, *West Branch*, *Whale Road Review*, and elsewhere. Rivera lives in the PNW with many cats and family. |

David Rogers' work has appeared in various publications, including *Asimov's Science Fiction*, *Star\*Line*, and *Daily Science Fiction*. His poem "Stone" was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. His novels include *The Delphi* and *The Excalibur Incident*. More at [Davidrogersbooks.wordpress.com](http://Davidrogersbooks.wordpress.com) and on Bluesky @davidrogersbooks.bsky.social.

Jason Ryberg is the author of twenty-five books of poetry, six screenplays, a few short stories, a box full of folders, notebooks and scraps of paper that could one day be (loosely) construed as a novel, and countless love letters (never sent). He is currently an artist-in-residence at both The Prospero Institute of Disquieted P/o/e/t/i/c/s and the Osage Arts Community, and is an editor and designer at Spartan Books. His work has appeared in *As it Ought to Be*, *Up the Staircase Quarterly*, *Thimble Literary Magazine*, *I-70 Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *The Arkansas Review* and various other journals and anthologies. His latest collection of poems is *And When here Was No Crawfish, We Ate Sand* (co-authored with Abraham Smith, Justin Hamm and John Dorsey (OAC Press, 2025)). He lives part-time in Kansas City, MO with a rooster named Little Red and a Billy-goat named Giuseppe, and part-time somewhere in the Ozarks, near the Gasconade River, where there are also many strange and wonderful woodland critters.

Darcy Shargo is the mother of many things and is now working hard to take care of herself. She has returned to poetry at mid-life in order to keep from losing her mind. Her work has been published in various magazines (mostly years ago) and so she's delighted to have some work floating out in the world again. She's working on a manuscript in between a full time job, 5 kids, a small farm—and general, unending chaos. She lives in rural Maine.

Annie Stenzel (she/her) is a lesbian poet who was born in Illinois, but did not stay put. Her second full-length collection, *Don't misplace the moon*, was published in 2024 by Kelsay Books. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in print and online journals in Canada, the U.S., and the U.K., including *Action, Spectacle; Gavialidae; Pine Hills Review; Rust + Moth; Sheila-na-Gig; SoFloPoJo; SWWIM; St, Katherine's Review; Thimble Lit Mag*; and *Whale Road Review*. A poetry editor for the online journals *Right Hand Pointing* and *West Trestle Review*, she lives on unceded Ohlone land within walking distance of the San Francisco Bay.

Holly Taylor is an aspiring poet based in England, and this is the first time her work has been published. Find her at @holtaylorpoetry on Twitter.

Colette Tennant has three books of poetry: *Commotion of Wings, Eden and After*, and *Sweet Gothic*. Her book, *Religion in The Handmaid's Tale: a Brief Guide*, was published in 2019 to coincide with Atwood's publication of *The Testaments*. Her poems have won various awards and have been nominated for Pushcart Prizes along with being published in various journals, including *Prairie Schooner, Rattle, Southern Poetry Review*, and *Poetry Ireland Review*. Colette is an English and Humanities Professor who has also taught art in Great Britain, Germany, and Italy.

Veronica Tucker is an emergency medicine and addiction medicine physician, a mother of three, and a lifelong New Englander. Her writing explores the intersections of medicine, motherhood, memory, and the human experience. She is a Pushcart Prize nominee with work appearing in *ONE ART: a journal of poetry, The Berlin Literary Review*, and *Rust & Moth*, among others. Her debut chapbook is forthcoming this spring. She can be found at [www.veronicatuckerwrites.com](http://www.veronicatuckerwrites.com) and on Instagram @veronicatuckerwrites.

Rachel Turney, Ed.D. (she/her) is an educator and artist located in Denver. Her poems, research articles, reviews, and drawings can be found in a variety of publications. Rachel is passionate about immigrant rights, teacher support, and empowering other artists. She is a Writers' Hour prize winner and Best of the Net nominee. Her photography appears on a few magazine covers. Rachel runs the popular online reading series *Poetry (in Brief)*. She is on staff at *Bare Back Magazine* with her monthly column *Friday Night in the Suburbs*. She reads for *The Los Angeles Review*. Website: [turneytalks.com](http://turneytalks.com) Instagram: @turneytalks Bluesky: rachelturney

Alexandra van de Kamp is the Executive Director for Gemini Ink, San Antonio's Writing Arts Center ([www.geminiink.org](http://www.geminiink.org)). Her most recent book of poems is *Ricochet Script* (Next Page Press 2022). Previous collections of poems include: *Kiss/Hierarchy* (Rain Mountain Press 2016) and *The Park of Upside-Down Chairs* (CW Books 2010). She has also published several chapbooks, including *A Liquid Bird Inside the Night* (Red Glass Books 2015) and *Dear Jean Seberg* (2011), which won the 2010 *Burnside Review Chapbook Contest*. Her poems have been published in journals nationwide, such as *The Cincinnati Review*, *The Texas Observer*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Washington Square*, *Jet Fuel Review*, *32Poems*, and *Sweet: A Literary Confection*. Poems are forthcoming in *Moon City Review*. She has had her work featured in the anthology *PraiseSong: Poems from the Heart and Soul of Texas*, edited by Amanda Johnston (2025) and on *VerseDaily*. Her poetry has received Best of the Net and Pushcart Prize nominations. Find out more about her poetry here: [alexandravandekamppoet.com](http://alexandravandekamppoet.com).

Amelia Sage Van Donsel is pursuing her MFA in poetry at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Conjunctions*, *Bennington Review*, *FENCE*, the Academy of American Poets, *Little Mirror*, *Afternoon Visitor*, and elsewhere.

Laura DeHart Young is a queer poet and novelist whose work explores memory, resilience, and the emotional terrain of relationships. Her poems have appeared in *The Eunoia Review*, *Last Leaves Magazine*, *The Ravens Perch*, *The Bluebird Word*, *Does It Have Pockets?*, and elsewhere. Her chapbook *Burnt Toast and Benedictions* was published in October 2025. She is the author of seven novels from Bella Books. Laura enjoys road trips, especially through mountains and rural back routes—and family time.

Michael T. Young's fourth collection, *Mountain Climbing a River*, was published by Broadstone Books in January 2026. His third full-length collection, *The Infinite Doctrine of Water*, was longlisted for the Julie Suk Award. He received a Fellowship from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts and the Jean Pedrick Chapbook Award. His poetry has been featured on *Verse Daily* and *The Writer's Almanac*. It has also appeared in numerous journals including *I-70*, *The Journal of New Jersey Poets*, *Rattle*, and *Vox Populi*.

Jessica L. Walsh is the author of the forthcoming collection *Blowdown* (Small Harbor, 2026) as well as *Book of Gods and Grudges*, *The List of Last Tries*, and *How to Break My Neck*. Her work has appeared on the *Best American Poetry Blog* and journals like *RHINO*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Indianapolis Review*, *Crab Creek Review*, and many more. Poems have been nominated several times for the Pushcart Prize, Best New Poets, and Best of the Net. She received a BA from Kalamazoo College and a PhD from University of Iowa. Originally from small-town Michigan, she currently lives outside of Chicago and teaches at a community college.

Ann Orr Weil's poetry appears in *Best New Poets 2024*, *Pedestal Magazine*, *RHINO*, *Chestnut Review*, *3Elements Review*, *Thimble Literary Magazine*, and elsewhere. Author of *Lifecycle of a Beautiful Woman* (Yellow Arrow, 2023) and *Blue Dog Road Trip* (Gnashing Teeth, 2024), Weil is a former special education teacher, current kettle corn lover, and four-time Pushcart nominee who lives in Michigan and California. To read more of her work, visit [www.annweilpoetry.com](http://www.annweilpoetry.com).

Sheila Wellehan's poetry is featured in *On the Seawall*, Maine Public Radio's *Poems From Here*, *Psalter & Lyre*, *Rust & Moth*, *Whale Road Review*, and many other publications. She served as an assistant poetry editor for *The Night Heron Barks* and an associate editor for *Ran Off With the Star Bassoon*. Sheila lives in Cape Elizabeth, Maine. You can read her work at [www.sheilawellehan.com](http://www.sheilawellehan.com).

Ellie White holds an MFA from Old Dominion University. Her work has appeared in *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *The Indianapolis Review*, and many other journals. Ellie is the author of three chapbooks, *Requiem for a Doll* (ELJ Publications 2015), *Drift* (Dancing Girl Press 2019), *Vanishing Below the Waist* (Querencia Press 2024), and one full-length collection, *and for too long after* (Unsolicited Press 2019). She is a reader for *Muzzle Magazine*. To read more of her work, visit her website: [elliewhitewrites.com](http://elliewhitewrites.com).

Francine Witte is a flash fiction writer and poet, and the author of the flash collection *RADIO WATER*. Her newest poetry book, *Some Distant Pin of Light*, has just been published by Cervena Barva Press. Her work has been widely published, and she is a recent recipient of a Pushcart Prize. She lives in New York city. Please visit her website, [Francinewitte.com](http://Francinewitte.com). She can be found on social media @francinewitte.