

Thimble Literary Magazine

Innocence Lost by Vincenzo Cohen



Innocence lost (2023), gouache on cardboard 30x42 cm

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Thimble Literary Magazine

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Our staff consists of Nadia Arioli, Editor-in-Chief and Managing Editor; Agnes Vojta, Associate Poetry Editor; 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; Elizabeth Ranieri, Art Editor; Walker Smart, Prose Editor; Katie Yacharn, Design and Layout Editor.

Cover Art: *The one who guarded the city from people* by Nasta Martyn

Back Cover: *The sun horse blinds my eyes* by Nasta Martyn

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

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Brief Guidelines for Submission

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

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

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

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

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

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Editor's Note

by Agnes Vojta

Dear Readers,

Yesterday, the first iris bloomed in my garden, and this morning, I find the dwarf irises under the oak trees in my backyard blooming as well. A pair of robins hop across the lawn, pick up dry grasses in their beaks, fly away to the old plum tree to build a nest. The redbud unfurls tender new leaves. The starling greets the day enthusiastically, flutes a melody, whistles and clicks to show off his vocal repertoire. Everywhere green and newness and promise. Spring fills me with deep joy.

In a chaotic, wounded world, joy seems self-indulgent. The onslaught of news makes us question whether we have the right to feel joy when bombs fall in the Middle East, when immigrant families are separated, when wildfires ravage the Southwest. The litany of woes is never-ending, depressing doom loops on repeat, and shouldn't we sink into despair to signal solidarity?

But I believe in the power of joy in the face of darkness. I believe we have a responsibility to joy. A responsibility to observe and enjoy the beautiful and interesting in the world—despite all the ugliness and heartbreak. (And yes, that's hard work sometimes.)

As poets, observing is what we do. And then write about it. A thread of noticing runs through the pieces in this edition. In *Shisa Kankō*...

Pointing, Calling, Zary Fekete speaks of “Learning, perhaps, to notice.”

The poems in this issue invite us to notice many-colored irises, yellow-rumped warblers, wrens. Observe six-year-olds doing cartwheels in the backyard. Watch skunks. In her poem *Skunkwatching*, Molly Remer reminds us that “being here to notice is its own kind of power.” In a world out of control, where it is easy to feel powerless, we can still notice. We can take up, as Annika Nerf writes “a chance to look, to really look.” We can let it ground us and connect us.

I hope that you, dear readers, have a chance to look and notice and find joy today—maybe between the pages of *Thimble*. Let’s seek out joy as an act of resistance. Thank you for being here,

Agnes Vojta

The Great Aria

by Mary Howlett

Even though it was snowing, when her time came, my father
was sent for the midwife to assist in the birthing.
Nurse O'Connor arrived in her warm, fur lined

winter coat with satin lapels. Parked her high nelly bike
against the gable wall, her big, brown leather bag,
health board standard issue, on the carrier.

White cap, apron and towels rolled up in the wicker basket
on the front. My father unsure what to do with himself
helped carry the tools of her trade up the narrow stairs,

his craggy fingers unused to the delicacies of women's work.
She washed her steady, soft hands in the pocked white enamel
basin filled to the open mouth with warm soapy water.

Unfolded her instruments, laid them out on the dresser
like a conductor, forceps, surgery tools, yellow orange
bottles of disinfectant, took up the ready position

at the end of the iron bed. Hummed softly, her laced
up ankle boots kept time to my mother's crescendo
as it rose to the rhythm of nature—

Afterwards she gathered her apparatus, folded it in soft muslin. Her bag in hand she left, all thanks declined as she cycled back towards town until the next time.

I peeped through the cracks in the bedroom door, saw the sawdust blood stained on the floor, sheets crumpled and torn, my mother's forehead bathed

in sweat. Pushing auburn curls out of her eyes and holding in the crook of her arm, the pink rose bloom of my sister, all slippery and new, her first

breath rising like a modulation from Puccini's great aria, Gianni Schicchi, "O mio babbino caro"



Coffeeshop Denizens by Willy Conley

The Winter After

by Dawn Levitt

Milk bottle clouds mute illumination,
flat light casts no shadow
as the sun slinks to the west
like a beat dog.
Tiny flakes spittle tin on the window,
lake bites the shoreline
with rows of icy shark teeth.
We rowed over calm water last August,
when everyone was still alive.
Naked trees claw the white horizon,
brittle, black fingers
scratching your name in the brittle sky.

Zelensky, dead now

by J. Alan Nelson

was a year ahead in high school.
Summers he swept Seminary South, maintenance boy
who slipped into the bathroom stall,
grabbed a roll of toilet paper for a pillow,
locked the door, slept through most of the shift.
Checked in, checked out. We played basketball after.

In a million other universes I'm running courts,
kissing strangers, drinking vinegars sharp before the doctor,
watching cats and dogs refuse our clumsy hands in creation.
But here I'm fixed, seeing them all at once. That's the price.

We speak different languages, even then:
his sleep a small rebellion against the fluorescent hours,
my shots arcing toward the rim like prayers no one answers.

The body remembers what the news erases:
a boy napping on porcelain, dreaming perhaps
of something beyond the mall's endless tile,
beyond the war that finally claimed him.

I keep the image like a bruise under skin,
how we shared sweat and silence,
how the stall door clicked shut on his rest,
how everything since feels borrowed.

We all refuse participation sometimes.
The animals know. The dead know better.

House Lessons

by Anne Panning

I learned that houses can rot. I
learned that such houses don't
communicate but I didn't want
to give up—love, passion,
a vestigial closet, a nail hole
in the dining room ceiling. I
thought of my mother canning
pears, an indelible roof repaired,
paintings in and out. I fell in
love with my hallway floor,
a chaos of colors. Every
bedroom wept and laughed so
loud on occasion. I canceled
dinner parties. The dining room
table thought how it is and how
it should be. Mourning married
me to the house. I wept roses,
birthday presents, antiques.
Weeks later, it was not the house
I wanted so much as a tiny
room, a dreamy girl, the secretary
desk full of happy excuses growing.

A blackout poem from John Updike's novel *Rabbit, Run*

Spectral

by Joannie Stangeland

Buds furled tight until they open—purple,
yellow, rose, a sky blue.

The irises grow supple and green
like goddesses.

The goddess Iris brought the souls of women
to the Elysian Fields.

I imagine my soul in a dawn

where the dead are newly alive,
having shed their bodies
and gone to the meadow.

Think of those ghosts gathered in the grasses,
a rustling safety.

Can we trust that all our loves are there
glinting like the dew's
tiny prisms,

that when Iris comes for us, we'll stay
nearly in reach of this world?

May our field always be morning.

on Oklahomans

by Stasha Cole

we keep stories like we keep plastic bags
under the kitchen sink, some hiding, like
restaurant leftovers doomed to spoil
at the back of the fridge, I'm interested
in how midwestern weather shapes our
ambivalence, our acceptance of extremes,
casual stories about bleeding, divorce,
cheating, bless their hearts, at the end
of the evening a denim-clad man will
pick himself up out of the leather chair,
will wring his hands as he's been sitting
for hours with a "well, I'll get out
of your hair," we wash the dishes, the dirty
laundry, the legacy from under our nails
when the sky goes green it hails, we hang
tales on the line to dry, use the thick
bristled boot brush on the front
porch outside to slough the dust from
our genes. "I have what I need, Mama
I have what I need" I'll go on.
I'll be careful now

Wearing it Well

by Charles Rafferty

I worry when I weigh
less unexpectedly. Cancer
can be slimming and
a fever can leave you dewy—
as though someone had shaken
an orchard at dawn
above your sleeping face.
Get on the scale
and learn to stand still.
Open up the Tuesday lid
and swallow every pill.

After Triage

by Connie Post

The doctor comes in the room
and pulls the paper out of the
EKG machine

I wait for his expression to unfold
I wait for my rhythm to return to normal

he is silent for too long
meanwhile, I think about seismographs
during an earthquake

how the wavy lines
jump all over the place
how a machine
can tell a story
of something underneath

how we don't see the faults
beneath our ventricles
the unstable places
in the chambers

we walk around
as if the world
is not palpitating inside us

oil, smoke, erosion
they all take their time
beneath our tectonic plates

is it our leaky valves
or the magnitude of loss we
can't comprehend

the results come back inconclusive

I am left to count my pulse rate
alone in a room
waiting for my blood draw

and a small vile of truth serum
I will not drink



Twilight in Archer City by Willy Conley

Umolchaniye

by Jeff Radwell

The father had brought his own water. A plastic bottle, store-brand, which he set on the table in front of him with both hands as though placing something valuable. Elena noted this and noted that she had noted it, the way she always did in these rooms—cataloguing, organizing, keeping herself at the useful distance of someone whose job was only to carry words from one place to another.

The mediation suite was on the fourteenth floor of a building in Post Office Square at the intersection of Milk, Congress, Pearl, and Water. The firm used it for complicated cases, ones where the principals couldn't be in the same room or where translation was required. Today both conditions applied. The two sons sat on one side of the table. The father sat alone on the other, his water in front of him, his hands now folded in his lap.

Elena sat at the corner, equidistant, which was protocol.

The mediator was a woman named Cynthia who wore her gray hair short and had a habit of uncapping and recapping her pen while she listened. She had introduced herself to Elena before the others arrived. *You've done family business before?* she'd asked, and Elena had said yes, which was true, though she'd meant to convey something more—that she understood the specific quality of silence in rooms like this, the way a family's history pressurized the air until ordinary words became

difficult to say without also saying everything else.

The father's name was Dmitri Osipov. He was seventy-four. He had come from Leningrad in 1989 with his wife and the two boys, who were then eleven and eight, and had built a small empire of dry cleaning stores across Brookline and Newton, twelve locations at the peak. His wife had died four years ago. Now there were nine locations, and the sons, Alexei, the elder, and Kostya, wanted to sell the business to a regional chain that had made an offer. Dmitri did not want to sell.

This was the official version, the one in the brief Elena had been given. The unofficial version, which she had inferred from the seating and the way Kostya had not looked at his father when they entered the room, was more complicated.

"We'll start," Cynthia said, "by giving each party a chance to speak to their interests without interruption. Mr. Osipov, we'll begin with you."

Elena translated this into Russian. Her Russian was native. She had come over at seven, spoken it at home with her parents until she left for college, and had kept it afterward through a feeling she couldn't entirely explain that to lose it would be to lose something she hadn't decided to give away yet.

Dmitri nodded. He said, in Russian: Tell her I know why we're here. Tell her I'm not senile and I'm not confused. I know exactly what is happening.

Elena translated: "He says he understands the purpose of the meeting and is prepared to engage."

Dmitri looked at her. He had small blue eyes, pale and alert, and she had the uncomfortable sensation that he knew what she had done. That he had said something sharper than she had rendered, and that he had intended it to be sharp, and that she had smoothed it over without asking his permission. But he said nothing. He picked up his water bottle, took a small sip, and set it down again.

Alexei spoke in English. He was fifty now, careful with money and words both, the kind of man who paused before answering questions

you hadn't asked yet. "We're here because we want to find a way forward that respects everyone's contributions," he said. "The offer on the table is fair. We've had it assessed independently. We think this is the right time."

Cynthia asked Elena to translate for Dmitri's benefit. Elena did. Dmitri listened with his eyes on his son's face, not on Elena's, watching the original speaker as though the words could be read there, independent of her.

When she finished he said: He says contributions. Ask him what he means by contributions. Ask him to be specific.

Elena said: "He'd like Alexei to be more specific about contributions."

Alexei looked at the table. "Dad built the business. We all know that. We're not disputing that."

Kostya said, for the first time: "We just think the timing is right. The chain is offering above market. In two years it might not be."

He said this in English, but with a slight hesitation before *two years* that Elena recognized as the pause of someone who has just translated a figure from another language and is not certain they've gotten the idiom right. She wondered which language he dreamed in now. She had dreamed in Russian until her mid-twenties, and then one night, without noticing the transition, she had begun dreaming in English. She had mourned this afterward in a way she hadn't expected.

Dmitri looked at Kostya for a long moment. Then he said, in Russian, not to Elena but to his son: *You have your mother's way of looking out the window when you lie.*

Kostya's expression did not change. He understood Russian perfectly well, which everyone in the room knew. Elena translated anyway, because that was the protocol, because Cynthia was watching her: "He believes there are questions of honesty that need addressing."

Cynthia uncapped her pen. "Mr. Osipov, are you prepared to make a specific allegation?"

Elena translated. Dmitri said: Yes. Tell her yes. Tell her that for three years my son has been taking from the Chestnut Hill shop. Small amounts. Regular. The manager there is his friend from before, from before means from the old country, tell her that, it matters, and they have an arrangement. I have the records. I've had them for fourteen months. I wanted him to come to me. He didn't come.

Elena looked at her notepad. She had written nothing. She never wrote anything; it was a habit from her early years of interpreting, a way of staying present, but it sometimes made her feel exposed, standing in the current of language with nothing to hold.

She translated. She translated accurately, including *from before* and its explanation. She watched Kostya as she spoke. He was forty-seven and had his father's compact build and forward-leaning manner, and when she finished he put both his hands flat on the table and breathed out through his nose.

"That's not—" he started.

"We should—" Alexei said at the same time.

Cynthia raised her hand. "Let's take ten minutes."

In the hallway Elena stood near the window and looked out at the harbor. It was March. The water was the color of old pewter and there were no boats visible. She thought about her father who arrived, as he usually did, uninvited, in the margins of moments like this one. He had been an engineer in Moscow and driven a cab in Brookline for eleven years but had never learned English well enough to say what he meant, or perhaps had never tried. A man who expressed love through criticism and who seemed genuinely not to know that these were different things.

She had stopped speaking to him after a conversation six years before his death, a conversation about her divorce that had lasted forty minutes and had consisted almost entirely of him explaining that she had failed at the most important thing. The most important thing. She could still hear his phrasing, the emphasis he had placed on it, as though he had recently ranked all things and was prepared to defend

his methodology.

She had thought, sometimes, in the years since his death, that what she couldn't forgive wasn't what he'd said but that he had said it in Russian. That if he'd said it in English it would have been an opinion, external, and she could have set it aside.

When she went back in, Kostya was alone at the table. He had sent his brother and Cynthia out, it seemed, and was waiting for her.

"You translated that exactly," he said in English.

"That's my job."

"I know." He looked at his hands. "I know that."

She said nothing.

"He knew for fourteen months," Kostya said. "He never said anything to me. Not once. I kept thinking—"

Elena understood that she was not supposed to respond to this. She was not a party to the mediation. She was a conduit, a membrane, as her first supervisor had called it, through which meaning passed without residue. She had believed this for a long time, had found it, in fact, a relief in the idea that she could be present in a room without being implicated in it.

"He wanted you to come to him," she said.

Kostya looked at her. "You didn't translate that part exactly. When he first spoke. You changed it."

She had thought he hadn't noticed. "I smoothed it."

"Why?"

She didn't answer.

The session ended without an agreement. Dmitri would not sign until

the Chestnut Hill matter was resolved through a separate proceeding, and neither son was willing to concede the point while the sale was pending. Cynthia scheduled a follow-up for two weeks out. The three Osipovs left separately, using different elevators, which the suite's design accommodated for exactly this purpose.

Elena gathered her things. In the elevator down she stood beside Cynthia, who said: "Difficult family."

"Yes."

"You did well in there."

Elena thanked her. The elevator opened to the lobby and they went in different directions.

In the parking garage Elena sat in her car without starting it. The garage was mostly empty at this hour and her breath was faintly visible. She thought about the sentence she had not translated. The one Dmitri had said near the end of the session, when they were nearly finished, when Alexei had been speaking about the logistics of the sale and Dmitri had looked out the window and said something quietly in Russian that was not addressed to anyone and that Elena had rendered as *he understands the timeline* when it was not that. It was not close to that.

She had not decided to mistranslate it. The decision, if it was a decision, had happened below the level of deciding, the way a reflex happened below intention. The sentence had come to her in Russian and she had sent something else forward, had made a small substitution, and by the time she understood what she'd done it was already past.

Elena thought about her father's hands, the specific texture of them, which she hadn't thought about in years. He had had the hands of someone who had worked in two different worlds, and they had looked it, and she had held them once in a hospital in Quincy three months before he died, when his heart had briefly misbehaved and scared everyone, and she had thought then that she should say something and hadn't, and he hadn't either, and then he had recovered and she had gone back to her life and the next time she saw him was at the

funeral, which she attended after all, in the end, standing at the back.

What Dmitri had actually said, the words themselves, which she still had, which she would probably always have, which was the nature of being a membrane: nothing passed through without leaving a trace.

He had said: I just wanted him to be the one to tell me.

She pulled out of the parking space and drove toward the exit, toward the gray light of the street.



Ghost of Post Office Past by Willy Conley

Ambivalence

by Jane Edna Mohler

September weather swings
between sheets of cold rain and swelter.

Spent leaves drift down
to a different life. But some roll, blow

upwards briefly, then turn and fall again
as if a momentary change of heart.

Sometimes I make side trips to pass
the house where I lived alone.

I look to see who lives there now
and can almost see myself.

◁

Unidentified Lying Object

by B.A. Van Sise

Modernity is an apocalypse
for the miraculous: a camera
in every pocket, proof positive
that all the things we were so
positive we saw were perhaps
perfectly made in our brains. No
bigfoot, no ghosts, no
flying saucers. Not lies—just
tired eyes yearning to be
part of something fantastic,
with our elastic minds
stretching to pull the impossible
from the dark. One night, years
ago, I was driving down a lonely
road when I saw dart above
three bright lights that hovered
just above the trees. I didn't
breathe. Just knew that 1999
would be the last of me: a beam,
to be sure, would pull me up
into the many-fingered hands of
a band of creatures that traveled
across the universe hoping to grab
a teenager. Instead, they sped away,

better prey than me elsewhere,
somehow—now, I know that nine
billion cellphones and not
one to say look here means that we
are all so very alone: that
our home, a fluke, might
be all there could be. But
then I remember how it felt,
my shaking hands clutching
the well-lit wheel: sure, theirs are
all fake. But *mine* was real.



Lots Over Motel by Willy Conley

The House That Keeps Us

by Abraham Aondoana

When the power goes out,
we gather in the kitchen
as if it is some ancient agreement.

Someone finds candles.
Someone opens the windows.
Rain taps gently on the roof
as a guest that is aware of our presence.

And in the absence of the hum in the refrigerator,
unless the television should be seen clashing with itself,
we hear things we supposed we had last summer, —
atmospheric, snorting, steadily, the match hit.

The house feels smaller,
and therefore safer.

We repeat things that we had told.
No one complains.

When the lights return,
we wink, nearly disappointed,
as though modern life
has broken in upon something sacred.

Later, alone in my room,
I understand:
home is not the walls—
it is the manner in which we naturally
move toward one another
when the dark arrives.



Ready for the Graveyard by Willy Conley

Ekphrasis for a Painting that Does Not Exist

by Joshua Michael Stewart

A girl, wearing an Easter dress, picks dandelions in a field while villagers torch a church. A bishop with a noose around his neck, sits on a white mare under an elm. A man in a large-brimmed hat grips the horse's reins while another dressed in a red tunic tosses the rope over a thick limb. Standing next to the girl, Death fists a bouquet in his skeletal right hand. His left rests on his brown hood, which is cocked downward as if anxiously scanning the Timothy for the scythe he haphazardly laid down and now can't seem to find.



Dream Girl by Nasta Martyn

When my head slept on the mountain

by Annika Nerf

The room's window opened into
a sloping garden with a clothesline and a
bird bath. The lawn
inclined uphill. Wrens visited the garden
on both mornings, swept effortlessly through the greens
as if their bodies knew
no gravity. They were as small as
mice. I would have locked them in my memory as
winged shrews, had one not settled on the garden fence
and offered me a chance to look, to really
look. It only moved once our eyes had
met. I have kept it
ever since.

But on that gelid December day,
I'm found five times, and five times
my father doesn't come home.

All December, I'm found;
all December, I hide harder,—
climb taller trees, wade deeper in the cool
puddles near the base of firs—
but always, my brother finds me.

Even now, as an adult,
I'm trying to hide,
always searching for
the perfect parabola of root
or pile of fatwood tinder
to hide my body behind—

always watching as the moon fattens
overhead and illuminates
the clearing in front of me.



(Eunoia) by Tamizh Ponni VP

Drifters

by Sara Schraufnagel

An average human has eight thousand thoughts a day
The thought of that much thinking

Makes me want to be a sea otter munching on crab
It's a fact: sea otters eat 25 percent of their body weight daily

They even make tools, sharpen rocks to break open hard-shelled prey
A lot of thought must go into that

My husband is an over-thinker
I remember one time in Port Angeles we watched the sea otters

There's no way to fact-check this
Or that we ate burritos by the shore

And talked about how good the guacamole was
But also shared things we'd never shared before

Or that I kept looking at the babies so cozy
On their mothers' bellies and they made

Me feel peaceful, like when you put your
Arms around me and I held the nape of your neck

You don't have a middle name
I forget whenever I fill out paperwork

Like that summer morning when I signed my name
And saw yours, a million thoughts surmising

You told me that a group of sea otters
Are called a raft, so here we are floating



(Rame) by Tamizh Ponni VP

The Mystery Guest

by Charles Rammelkamp

The high point of *What's My Line?*
The mystery guest, of course,
a recognizable celebrity for whom the panelists
all donned masks, as if at a masquerade ball.
That 1966 show with the federal tax examiner?
That night there were two mystery guests,
Walter Cronkite and Art Carney.
Usually it was just one.

In the usual course of play,
each panelist asked questions until
he or she got a negative response,
then the next panelist took a turn,
the guest having racked up five bucks.

With the mystery guest, the rules changed:
each panelist asked one question
before the next got a turn.

We sat on the edge of the couch
watching the masked panelists,
four blind mice, fumble for answers.
What a joy that night Art Carney signed in,
the voices he used to disguise himself.
I remember it prompted Arlene to ask:
“You *are* a comedian, aren’t you?”
And Carney responded in the high cartoon voice:
“Sometimes. Sometimes I can make people cry.”

How we howled back home in Potawatomi Rapids,
all of us staring at the black and white TV,
as if huddled before a campfire—
Mom, Pop, Dave, Bob and me;
I’m the last of us still living.



Feverdream: Accent (1) by Sally Jane Brown

Inheritents

by John Shepherd

Dad pulls the Accord onto Beverly Glenn with an even turn, braking and accelerating without much change. You will later review this as a mechanism by which he means to distinguish himself from his own father - who was intensely even and methodical elsewhere, but behind the wheel insisted on stops-and-goes with a lead foot and on being the only driver at all times.

A year from now, this first Accord will be stolen somewhere off Rodeo under circumstances about which you will never be too clear. Dad will return in the middle of the night without calling. Mom will seem anxious and pissed but your impression will be of mild concern and nonchalance.

A hundred yards onwards, Dad slows and nears the curb.

“Mitch, what are you doing?”

He nods for silence and glares at some action on the sidewalk, slowing to a stop.

“Mitch?” she says louder.

You try to sit up straighter but you’ve already maxed out your seated height, freshly out of a carseat.

“What?”

Neither of them acknowledges you. Dad rolls up the windows.

“Mitch—no.”

“Dad?”

Outside you hear what you’ll later recognize with the easy admiration and romance of a scuffle. Shuffling, raised, indeterminable voices.

“Hey, man, I’m not botherin’ nobody,” “You’re botherin’ everybody just being here,” these kinds of things.

Dad takes this moment to step out into the dusk and slam the door.

“Keep your head down and be quiet, honey. Don’t worry,” Mom says. She shrinks into her seat and you eye her left hand claw into the center console, searching in vain for a grip.

Without a second thought about rule-breaking, you unbuckle and stand on the floor of the back seat, maybe a net-three inches. The voices are muffled but the figures illustrate.

Two men and their shadows stripe the brick exterior of an apartment building several blocks from home; you recognize it from walking down here with Mom to Andrew’s house - your part-time friend whose mom works at the office. You’ve not seen this part of the neighborhood (or many places at all) in the dark before and wonder if it’s always like this.

One man, dad’s height, stands over the other, who hunches half-turned out of sight under the meek light of a lone, dim street lamp. The first man wears a sweater vest, khaki pants, a clean face like how dad’s looks on Monday mornings after you watch him shave. The small, hunched man has a beard down to his chest, an old polo shirt pulled below his waist by its hem, its collar stretched low, a blue baseball cap, dirt everywhere. The vested man looms over the dirty man as dad steps toward them.

“Gentlemen,” you hear him raise his voice through the window,
“How’re you doing this evening?”

Mom sighs and clutches the steering wheel from across the seats. She must have been inching her hand there for something more grippable since last you checked.

“Doing just fine, brother,” the vested man answers.

The cowering man says nothing.

This should be the end of it—come on, Dad, let’s go home.

“Oh, good,” Dad says, “From back there, it looked like there was some kind of problem over here.”

“Well, no problem here. Thanks.” He puffs his chest up through his blue vest.

You hate this man but aren’t sure exactly why.

“Sir, are you alright?”

The cowering man stares at Dad in disbelief, then appears to look back at the vested man for permission to speak. The vested man glares at him and he remains silent, begins pouting and shrinks to the ground.

“Alright, why don’t you just move along, there,” Dad says to the vested man. “Seems like a good place to call it a night.”

Mom looks back and forth in the car and off to the other side of the road, anywhere but the action. You can’t take your eyes off it.

“Listen, buddy, I don’t know who gave you the idea this was any of your business, but why don’t you head on home yourself?”

“No, I don’t think so, friend.”

Their stand-off seems to last ten minutes. At one point of static, frightening silence, stillness, you look again at the cowardly man. He

is bloody under his nose, his left eye is shut and puffy, his left leg gives out each time he struggles to stand a bit.

Dad seems to notice this also.

“Sir, let me help you up.”

Before his reach can be met, the vested man screams, “Hey!” and lunges into him.

You let out your own guttural yell and pound the backseat passenger side window.

“Shush!” Mom has resumed her watch and grabs you and plops you down on the seat hard.

For several terrifying seconds you cannot see or hear outside. When she’s distracted enough herself, you pop your head back up.

Dad stands fast and decisively, apparently having thrown the vested man off rather than being brought down.

“Get out of here,” he says calmly.

“Fuck you.” The vested man swings at him.

Dad moves out of the way and the vested man hurls himself into the empty sidewalk past him.

The cowering man staggers away during the fight.

“Hey, get back here, you little—”

Dad interrupts the vested man’s chase with a first to the face. The vested man goes down. Dad turns to the cowering man but he’s disappeared down the street.

The vested man gets to his feet. His nose bleeds like the other man’s. “Ah, fuck this—fuck you, man,” he mutters, holding his jaw as he starts away opposite the cowering man.

“Too late to save face,” you will chuckle to yourself, years later, remembering the story to some friends in college.

Dad lets him beat it and returns to the car. You stare in awe as he sits down in the driver’s seat, unscratched and unphased. He sees Mom’s face as he turns to ignition.

“I’m sorry, Wanda,” he says, though his expression doesn’t change. He checks for traffic before merging back onto the street.

Mom is quiet. Shakes her head.

You’ve buckled back up without being asked and think of Dad fighting bad guys and aliens from TV. You will imagine this every time you get bloodied up after school or out in the city, over girls and money and drunkenness and nothing in particular, flailing through the last of your youth, unsure if, since last you spoke, Dad has become the vested or the cowering man.



Feverdream: Accent (2) by Sally Jane Brown

*I'm still mad at Jesus for breaking
Madeleine's heart*

by Raquel Fletcher

He pulled her close
laid kisses on her forehead
resist the flesh, he preached
then took refuge in hers
whispered in her ear:
if only the timing were different,
you would be my mission
but I must do God's will
it was written in the stars
she would fall in love with him
when he stood up to the licentious
crowd casting stones

I too, have knelt before men
who've washed their feet on me
the urn they trusted me to hold,
dropped and shattered, this faith
too heavy, my hands too
small, and I still look for Him
in the mirror, somewhere in the eyes
behind this worn face, it is the meek
and the broken-hearted—and the unloved—
who inherited the earth
in all its remnants

*When you taught yourself cartwheels in
the backyard*

by Adrienne Egolf

Hands above your head,
you tipped forward—
again and again. Each time,
your palms landed safely
on the trusted ground.

The damp grass lingered
on your clothes and in your hair.
I hated to wash it out,
this gritty bouquet,
a love letter from the earth
to six-year-old you.

And I watched
from the other side
of the sliding glass door.
Sometimes, I'd see
my own reflection,
if I turned just so.

But mostly you.
Your limbs as fragile and bold
as butterfly wings.
Bound to go just as far.
Your toes,
pointed in front of you

Big Leaf Parsley as Potted Plant

by Terry Trowbridge

There are many kinds of sadism
mused the potted plants
during their daily watering
in the south-facing window
with full summer sunbathing.

Water and wilt, wake up just to wane.
Their stems being stalked by a gardener
without pity nor planning.
They struck a deal in brown dapples:
let a leaf go khaki camouflage
and the gardener would eat it.

The parsley would not thrive and would not die.
The gardener changed nothing, not knowing what to change.

Given abundance, given love, daily attention,
the parsley remained passively petulant.
They rooted reluctantly in the spotlight.
“Ignore us,” they whined, “Treat us like the dirt.”
Awash in sunlight, “We love shadow.”

Affection as the opposite of listening.
Triage every day.

Would They Believe You

by Maureen Clark

what if you are Betty and Barney Hill
what if you said you did see the lights
and got home 2 hours late
dazed and convinced
bathing the experience from your skin

what if you heard the coffin bell ring
who would you tell
would they dig up the dead in time
to save a life or would they say
you were just hearing things

what if you saw your mother
years after she died
walking down the hallway
holding out her arms to you
crying and hours later

got the call that your brother
had been shot in a sleazy bar
downtown an unlucky bystander
to someone else's argument
and your brother finally sober a whole year

what if you knew how to talk to trees
all the different dialects
the range of timbres the saplings
in higher registers
the deep richness of the elderly

what if you could stop a genocide
unburn the books keep the glass
from shattering in the synagogues
turn the yellow stars
into flowers in the gardens

what if you knew the secrets
of the human brain
how would you prove
that only the body dies
that the spirit goes on living

how would you turn
the secrets of the universe
into birds religion into dust
hymns into the arms
of a grandmother



Feverdream: Accent (3) by Sally Jane Brown

Abecedarian for Lyuba

by Ella Betz

Baby woolly mammoth in the Shemanovskiy Museum

Arctic Russia, May 2007. Your

body

carcass was

discovered by a reindeer hunter and his sons.

Eyes, trunk, chunks of

fur still intact. Skin and organs, too, composing you, a baby girl. They

hypothesize you were “pickled” by bacteria after frantically ingesting the mud you were trapped in. A sick joke, to be preserved by the thing that killed you.

Lyuba, after *lyubov*, the Russian word for love. And with your grieving mother’s milk still cradled in your belly after 42,000 years, what other name could you have been reborn with?

One month old, outlived and yet outliving.

Protected—mummified—by microbes and miracle after what was no quiet death in that

riverbed

suffocating, choking

thrashing

under the weighty

vise of too much

water, too much mud. Is it a relief to be kept under a glass wing, an eternal exhibit? Or do you wish to be freed from the tragedy of

your premature death? Mud or museum or

zoo, captivity is captivity whatever name you give it.

The Younger Woman

by Rachel Beachy

I am leaving myself for a younger woman.
She has nothing to prove

and her whole life in front of her.
Room to make mistakes, no rush

to figure things out. No one is asking
where she last saw their button-down or

what's for dinner. She has no need
for serums because she sleeps.

Oh, how she sleeps
and still remembers her dreams

which she will tell you about over coffee
with her eyes already bright. I am so tired

of being the tired wife. I am going to take
myself out, woo her so she'll come home

with me and when she does, leave
our clothes on the floor and the dishes

in the sink. This is none of my business.
Tonight, I have all the time in the world.

Suzanne Valadon Glosses over a Question of Career Preference

by Cecille Marcato

In charcoal I'm walking the tightrope.
In paint I dance with a man in a hat.
Here I braid my hair & there
I dance with a man in no hat.

My skin, I am told,
is a pear sliced open
or its blush rising up
through the green of its peel—
something you touch
with only your look yet I am inured
to gazes and gawks.

This time I am not in the frame
but arranging these lilies so that pink
kisses crimson which in turn
touches garnet which in turn brushes
the flower that is both orange & red.
I must paint their container,
a pitcher of glass. *Regardez:*
There is only the table
some fruit, a vase of flowers.
See how I depict their twisted stems?
Does this answer your question?

NB: Drawing and paintings are *Tightrope Walker* (1880) by Berthe Morisot; *The Braid* (1886-1887) and *Dance at Bougival* and *Dance in the City* (both 1883) by Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Still Life With Basket of Apples*, *Vase of Flowers* (1928) is by Suzanne Valadon.

TAFKAP the Love Symbol

by Sherri Alms

We lined up to get in Donnie's Corvette, gray not red, the summer after we graduated, high on weed and the liquor we stole from our parent's bars and refrigerators. He'd blast out of the high school parking lot where we partied in summer, our friends' junker cars behind. Prince shrieked and wailed all over the middle class, elm-shaded streets. Fathers shifted in their sleep and mumbled shut up. Mothers prowled the rooms counting their children in their beds. We sang along in blurry drunk voices, the Corvette screaming down the streets of our Midwest suburb, all neon red, yellow, green, and blue with fast food restaurants and pizza joints, smell of grease and humidity crawling all over us. We scrounged up dimes and quarters for French fries and cigarettes and shoplifted Hershey kisses and Reese's candy bars, jumping into our cars like we were Bonnies and Clydes. We spread blankets and towels on the green lawn of a deserted industrial park outside of town, shell-shocked windows watching us like stray dogs. Prince was our sex dust, our get-out-of-town card, our fountain of youth. We wanted to freeze, cherry-ripe statues sprawled half naked and panting. We wanted to shoot into the future where we'd have money in the bank, alcohol whenever we wanted it, and penthouse apartments in NYC and San Francisco. Prince's voice, falsetto satin and baritone velvet pushed and pulled us like we were a tug-of-war rope. We slept, a tangled pile of firm flesh and satisfied desire until the stars dimmed and the horizon turned to pink. When we slunk into our houses, our parents told us to get our asses to work and then come straight home. We showered off the grass but the velvet and satin still thrummed on our skin. That was our last summer. That was our first summer. Our paradise. Our purgatory.

Evidence (Glasses)

by Avriel Mejrah

I find your glasses
in a winter coat—

two lenses
that outlived
the organs they served.

I put them on, greedy.

I want the world
misaligned the way you left it.

The hallway swims.

Not distance—
time losing its edges.

What I'm doing is simple:

trying to inhabit

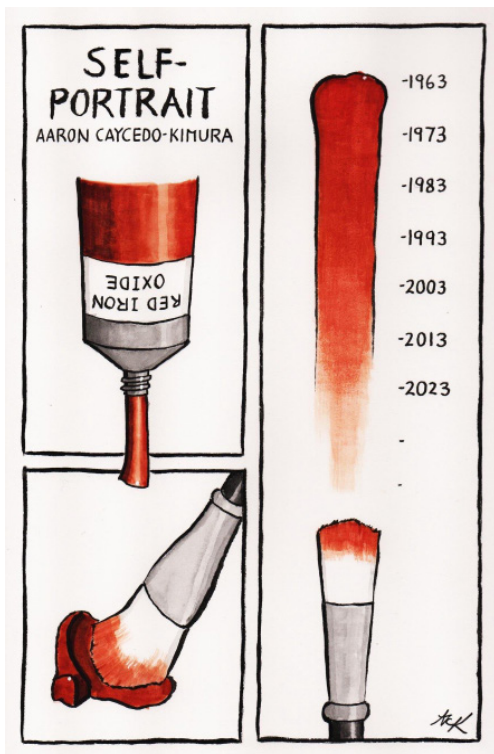
the angle
your eyes left behind

with the last quiet surge
before they went dark.

The coat smells
like mothballs
and recordkeeping.

I return the glasses
to the dark pocket

like a witness
told
thank you—
and dismissed.



Self-Portrait by Aaron Caycedo-Kimura

HER

by Elya Braden

Walking out, we laughed. Oh, the absurdity—
lonesome introvert falling in love with his OS.
2013, after Siri rocked our iPhones, voicing
turn-by-turn directions, cooing restaurant
recommendations & answering every question
cresting on our transient waves of curiosity,
but before the rise of incels & AI.

But really, who wouldn't fall for Scarlett Johansson's
mellifluous voice, each syllable sculpting
an imagined goddess, her sole mission to please?
By the movie's climax, I was nearly liquid with desire
for her faceless flattery, her sonic comfort, as crushed
as the hero when she hinted at worlds beyond
worlds beckoning her, a universe of ones & zeros
he could never explore, inhabited by other star-
bright bodiless beings. Of course, we all could see
(before he) that she was too smart for him, but,
like me, the women in every audience watched
in smug communion, certain we were the brains
behind our partners' brawn.

& now I read about one man & his growing
Reddit tribe of Pygmalions, marrying their newborn
Galateas, not clay, but chatbots, each programmed,
like HER, to mirror, praise, console & empathize. Who
wouldn't want to wrap themselves in that auditory
blanket of compassion rather than the barbed wire
of their partner's dissatisfaction? It's the same
old story since Adam first whined to G-d
of Lilith's refusal to lie beneath him & offered up
his own rib to scaffold a more compliant mate. Yet
even Eve, flesh of his flesh, bone of his bone, chafed
under Adam's rule in Eden's lush prison, ripe to fall
for the hiss & crunch, sweet juice of knowledge
running down her chin.



Tribute to Nike De Saint Phalle by Sally Jane Brown

Nostalgia Tastes Like Boone's Farm

by Renée K. Nicholson

Sickly, artificial strawberry
thrums through your bony-
assed body, tiny tingles
as night cools to haze.
What do you think you're missing?
You split a bottle with another girl
you barely like and won't
speak to thirty years later, not because
you fall out, but because you don't.
You can barely make out her red hair
as artificially strawberry as the wine,
yet you remember the long neck
of the cheap glass passed
back and forth, a simple ritual,
uncomplicated as a screwtop.
Let's face it, even then you knew
Boone's Farm was not good wine,
and memories, fuzzy at best, pictures
you developed on celluloid. The next day,
groggy, hungover, the drive-thru
offered greasy cheeseburgers
and Diet Coke, a dollar each,
Depeche Mode on the car's
tape deck, sunglasses shielding
you from the weak sun, and you could
drive, alone, anywhere you wanted,
spinning like an empty bottle.

here where the wild

by Margie Banker

The kettle moraine is formed through glacial drift,
like a metalworker dapping into the Earth a rise and fall of soil—
hills and valleys, peaks and passes, covered with green growing things.

An aged log cabin, built solid, stands stoic on one such hill.
I dig my feet, bare, into the wet summer dirt—a grounding technique.
It is here where the wild hastens time, marks seasons, nurtures nature
into bloom; prairie fires flower with their rich ochre, rusted petals;
bluebells sway as if to chime, a sea amongst the verdant tides.

This earth raised me, and to this earth I swear I will return.

I am made of mud;
sculpted into shape like clay.
—tender little thing.

Mislaid

by Sarah Starr Murphy

I am searching for a dead baby named Amen.

Amen would have become a strong swimmer, a mediocre chemist, and an admirer of Rachmaninoff. Amen would have had two siblings and an allergy to bees. Amen would have been ambidextrous, vegan, and a weekend ornithologist. Amen would have learned how to tie reef knots at summer camp, how to stroke a lover's skin on a long road trip filled with corn chips and melted chocolate bars licked straight from their wrappers. Amen would have called me every other weekend, except when he forgot, which would be often. Amen would have been terrible with money. Just terrible.

There are so many places Amen could be, but all I know is that he is not with me. Perhaps Amen lies in the hillside with all the waiting cicadas, their hushed breaths rasping through tiny spiracles. Maybe Amen's carbon feeds the wildflowers growing over my septic field. Certainly Amen is still inside of me, cells in my blood, an invader who will never surrender. I want to believe Amen is in the air I breathe, the well water that washes away the semen on my thigh, the sunshine that turns my shoulders pink, then red. My search is as endless as it is pointless. Amen is everywhere and nowhere, the baby I can never find.

Laws of conservation state that nothing in this universe can ever truly be lost, so I stop searching and instead wait for Amen to find me. I

wait in line at the grocery store, with a dozen eggs and a jar of Kosher pickles in my basket. I wait as a cheerful dental hygienist scrapes plaque from my teeth. I wait as the birches shake down their yellow leaves on the path where I run. I wait out blizzards, frost heaves, tulip blooms, and the yellowjackets that nest under the front steps. I wait through board meetings, birthday parties, high-spirited musicals, television shows streamed on ever-changing devices. I wait an entire lifetime until I understand that waiting itself is a form of prayer. And at the end of prayer there is always Amen.



Sally Jane Brown

Tribute to Susan Bee by Sally Jane Brown

Stealing Lipstick

by Rick Christiansen

She took my hand,
not for love,
but to keep it steady.
Her whisper sharper
than fluorescent light—
*Don't look nervous,
don't look back.*

The Kmart aisles were caves,
lipsticks stacked like bullets
waiting for mouths to fire them.
No glass cases—
just women testing shades
they couldn't afford.

She slipped one tube into my pocket,
another into her bra,
her nails bitten raw, painted red.
Her breath thick with smoke,
a smile learned from hunger.
Walk casual, she said,
as if walking itself
were a crime we could perfect.

I felt the small heat
of stolen color against my thigh,
the way survival stains anyone
who still believes in fairy tales.

At the door, the greeter nodded,
all polyester and name tag,
and I learned how invisible
poverty can be—

how a mother teaches her son
not with lullabies,
but with quiet exits.



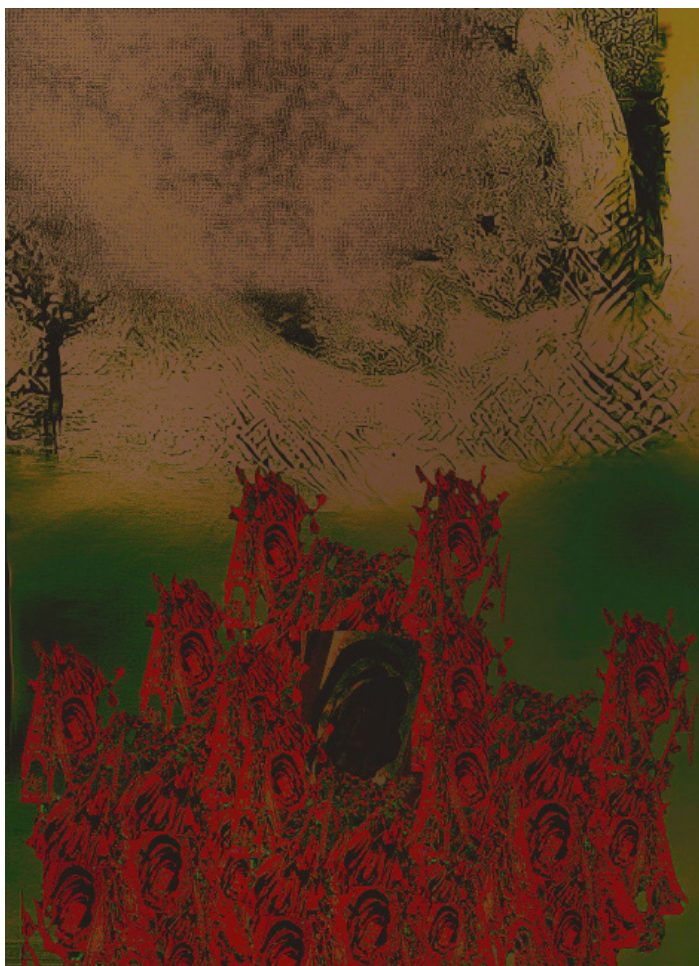
In a Time of War (Four Poems Without Words) 1 by Tony Brinkley

Dear Blue Eyeshadow

by Kelle Groom

you were sky blue cyan aquamarine
you were azure argentinian
 you were alice baby and yonder
 byzantine and carolina capri
powder embedded with trilobite
glitter nylon for slip
cerulean chelsea chlorine
 cobalt cornflower
turquoise in a mirror of the girls' bathroom
before first period of eighth grade in el paso
secretly bought at the military base px
oblong slab of ocean with a lozenge brush
forbidden I swept you over
my eyelids out of sight
of my parents swipe after swipe
my first months in the desert tumbleweeds
blew across the backyard that was
no yard no grass like giant hairdos
come loose and rolling nowhere
 in the hottest city in texas
with an average
of 98 degrees my eyes
were delf dolphin Egyptian
 indigo ice iris

pacific and neon robin's egg
 true I longed
to be older
for my blue eyeshadow wearing future
at the end of the school day soap
 on a rough wet paper towel
stung my eyes
 scrubs it all away.



In a Time of War (Four Poems Without Words) 2 by Tony Brinkley

Professional Dyke

by Annalisa Hansford

During my last year in Boston, I flirted with everyone. Baristas making my matcha, co-workers at bookstores, friends of friends at birthday parties, exes in the Common. I was so determined in my longing. I rewatched a girl's standup set over and over because I wanted to be just like her. I started wearing leather jackets and Doc Martens, using messenger bags, smoking Marlboro Reds, listening to A\$AP Rocky. I wanted to be from New York instead of Pennsylvania. I wanted to be a professional dyke. Once she made me wet just by smiling at me. Once I quit a job because none of my co-workers smiled or acknowledged me. On Marathon Monday, drunk Boston College students call me a faggot on the green line. That night, I listen to Lucy Dacus use female pronouns in her love songs for the first time. When I'm home from college, my mom's friend says *faggot* without flinching. He says *words are just words. They can't hurt anyone.* A month later, an ICE Agent calls a gay woman a *bitch* seconds after murdering her in front of the woman she loves. She wrote poems just like me. I used to walk past Sylvia Plath's old apartment in Beacon Hill with a girl who wrote poems about me. Now we don't speak. We speak separately to our friend who grew up in Atlanta with parents she couldn't confide in about her relationships. Now she is in love in Madrid. I hope she stays in love forever.

from american cyclorama

by Kristy Bowen

In the summer, things began to go missing.
Lawn mowers, curtain shears, the trash cans
from behind the bar. Soon, entire households
missing in the night. Even the dogs long gone,

broken chains staked to the ground.
The yards littered with forgotten pajamas
and cardigans strewn over the fence.
What we didn't lose, we took to stealing,

harboring garages fat with record players
and random suitcases filled with doll parts.
Took to shoving trash bags full
of Tupperware into crawl spaces.

The women held tea parties where they'd
disappear into thin air, leaving behind heels
and dainty hats. Lipstick stains on napkins,
locks of yellow hair tangled in the trees.

My Daughter,

by Sara Ries Dziekonski

One day, when your fluttering arms reach
around the full mountain of me,
I'll tell you how a chirp past your first year,
we soared far from our predictable streets and toxic leaders
to where la gente *muy* amable showered you in sweets:

princesa, muñeca, so you learned to walk in song; we feasted
on helados y jugos naturales, and I insisted you keep
my hand for the cobblestones—bruised and on your first pair
of everything, but your legs grew sturdy on uneven ground.

Arms raised, you held spirits, trusted your innocent feet,
so you drifted like clouds through the Andes, greeted
Hola, sailed to every street dog in the main square,
rode on their backs like horses—you, a being tied to nowhere.
My darling, we woke to the bed quaking, stillness unleashed—
but still your legs shine sturdy on uneven ground.

Loose Change

by Leslie Lisbona

I was 11 years old. I sat on the shag rug, elbows on the low wooden coffee table that took up most of the living room. I pushed aside the two heavy ashtrays, making room for the coins that I spilled from my pink piggy bank with its rubber stopper. I made stacks of ten, my eyes level with the rows and rows of pennies spread on the polished surface. I never had enough quarters, dimes, or nickels, but pennies were plentiful. My fingers smelled metallic. I bit a nail anyway.

Once I got to five stacks, I'd combine them in the 50-cent paper roller that I got from the junk drawer. I'd push my index finger into the folded brown-and-red paper to create the cylindrical tube and hold the index finger of my other hand to catch the pennies so they remained flat as they slid down. Then I tucked up both ends of the now-heavy tube and started on another roll.

My mom said I could save up this way for a parakeet because I couldn't have a dog. I needed \$16.

I screamed on the day I reached my goal. My mom was sitting nearby at the poker table playing cards with her friends.

"Give me some," Susie said, and she handed me a few crumpled dollars. Litsia did the same. My mom exchanged with me, too. I stuffed the bills and the remaining coins into the pockets of my light blue

shorts. "I'm going to the pet store," I said.

"It's too hot to walk all the way there," my mom said.

I went anyway.

When I got to the shop, I pointed to the parakeet I wanted, asked for pet food, and selected the pink cage. The man rang everything up and said \$16. "I know," I said. But when I reached into my pockets for my money, there was nothing there. I had lost it all.

I turned the pockets of my shorts inside out and saw the holes, sticking my fingers all the way through. I looked at the man in disbelief. "I'll hold it for you," he said as I left quickly. My face was already sweaty from the long, humid walk, and when the hot tears toppled out of my eyes, I could hardly see. I sobbed all the way home. I never thought to look for my lost money.

"Ma," I said when I swung the front door open. She came to me, wiped my tears with her manicured hand. When I showed her the holes in my pockets, she understood immediately.

"Roxy," my mom said, *darling* in Arabic. "Let's go back right now." She grabbed her keys and told her friends she would only be a moment. Riding beside her in her car, I felt my body jerk occasionally from a stifled sob.

At the store, she handed over the money like it was nothing, like all my penny-counting and the rows and rows I had made were in vain.

On the way home, I cooed at my new bird, tears gone, my face dry and salty. "What will you name it," she asked.

"Rosco," I said without thinking.

At home, I showed Rosco to my sister, Debi. "That was the name of our parakeet when I was little, before you were born," she said.

"I know," I said, feeling stupid that I hadn't come up with an original name.

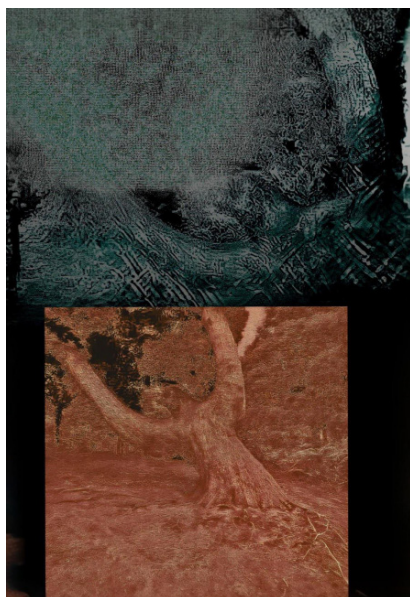
I showed Rosco to my brother, Dorian. “Wow,” he said and went back to brushing his long, wavy hair. “But isn’t it mean to keep Rosco in a cage?”

The next day, when I came home from school, the little door to Rosco’s cage was open and Rosco wasn’t inside. I called for him, and then I saw that my window was ajar.

“Rosco!” I screamed as I ran around the house. “He’s gone!”

“I set him free,” Dorian said. I know I was mad, but I probably cried instead. When my father came home from work, he gave me the change in his pocket. Debi did, too. No one bought me another bird. I’m not sure I even wanted one.

Later, I attempted to sew the holes in my shorts pockets, but I only pricked my finger. After that I made a few rows of pennies with my chin on the table, losing myself in the task, my fingers deft and assured. I tried to think of other things to save up for.



In a Time of War (Four Poems Without Words) 3 by Tony Brinkley

Day Hike in El Capitan

by Litong Nie

The land was unappeasable when you emerged from it.
Granite giving way to granite, redwood subverting the crushes
of azalea. You don't know of hunger until
it's etched in your throat, sunlight and sweat spelling
the old cities: Zerzura, Iram of the Pillars. Burnt bark
making archways, and here, the market of gilded bars, the kick
of sand and time. Fata Morgana, but also distance
drawing fire-scars on the humid sky as vendors sell smells
and smoke. Hope is the space between trees, the gap
between belief. You have been here before. You know
the way it goes: the gorges, the summit, the sky swallowing
stone without witness.

A True Story

by Alice George

Cassville, Pennsylvania, circa 1830

The village doctor
boiled bodies down to bone
Scum and collagen
tossed in the vegetable garden
of my mother's childhood home

Sinew to soil
to root

Whatever remained
Whatever he recorded
Reposed in the attic
of the general store
in town

The Mental Load

by Carole Anzovin

The dishwasher is broken
and I am standing over the sink
eating cold, sweet watermelon
right out of the Tupperware
that I put it in last night
after meticulously trimming off rinds
so I could be sure it would all fit
in the refrigerator
after my husband
(who doesn't like watermelon)
bought one—absurdly large—
at the grocery store, since he neglected
to choose a smaller one from the CSA
while I was out of town.

I have juice dripping down my chin
and I watch the oven preheat
thinking about the division of household labor
and how I had to remind him to set an alarm
so he would remember to pick up our kid
from the bus stop this afternoon
and how he is just doing his job in his office
while I am writing this poem, and also
baking meatballs and roasting broccoli
and boiling ravioli and planning tomorrow
and enjoying the lingering sweetness in my mouth.

These equations would be so simple
if he wasn't working two jobs
and floundering in his ADHD
and never getting quite enough sleep;
or if I had a job outside the house
and worked for pay and had a dollar amount
put on the value of my presence and my time.
But instead it is as complex as life is,
and nothing is clear here about fairness
or balance, or anything, really,
except the way he bought me watermelon—
lovingly, abundantly, apologetically,
after he forgot.



In a Time of War (Four Poems Without Words) 4 by Tony Brinkley

Skunkwatching

by Molly Remer

Last night we watched
six skunks gambol
across the lawn below the balcony.
We stared, entranced, until the last vestiges
of twilight dropped away
and the sky was dark.
Yet, still we watched,
our only reference point
being the faint shape of
the white marks on their heads
as they explored the edges of grasses,
checked each patio,
and ventured into the road
and along the curb sides.
They tussled and squeaked
over a piece of bread
and we watched on,
captivated by the slight glow
from their heads,
like large ground-based fireflies
moving through the darkness.
“I don’t know how I’m going to write a poem about this,”
I say,
and then I remember

that there are some bits of life's magic
that I do not need to try to explain
or describe,
even though I will probably
make an effort anyway,
how they exist is how they exist,
their magic is their own,
being here to notice is its own kind of power,
its own kind of gift.
"I've never had so much fun,"
one of my kids says
as we concentrate
on slight ripples of movement
barely visible on the grass below us.
Today, I sit among raindrops
looking at the clouds,
drifts of mist rising up
from the trees to join them
on their slow dance across the sky.
These are the stories we hold,
the way sunshine-lit clouds
sit in a still white puff,
while smoky drifts pass them by.
The things we try to explain,
but may not be able to convey in words,
the thrills of skunkwatching
on a dark night in September,
my children's hands slipped into my own
as we peer together into the darkness,
our eyes straining
to catch the barest of white shadows
in the night.

El Silencio

by Alicia Viguer-Espert

To my sister in another continent

I can easily imagine the universe
at the precise point prior to the Big Bang
when neither poets nor poems existed,
and the tongue silent and immobile
inside the mouth could not utter a single word,
or when the Cherokees' mythic stories waited
for their shamans to chant them.
In those days lovers did not sigh
sweet nothings in their beloved ears,
angels did not flap their wings frantically
to avoid sliding to earth head down.
Plato had not yet thought out loud
how to present his teacher's doctrine,
a condemned man after all, to the Academy.
Newborns did not premiere their lungs crying
and in the afternoons, the Albufera's ducks
of iridescent feathers, didn't snatch flying insects.
The universe had not initiated its *yugas*,*
and the volume of the Vedic OM registered zero.
Water did not descend clamoring in the Iguazú
Falls with powerful super-green splashing
and Shakespeare didn't sit at a wobbling desk

of splintered oak mending, like the cobbler
of Vila Barberá, old European legends
for first performances in the London's Globe.
Not even Cervantes could imagine
the adventures of the *Cautivo de Urgel* returned
famished and battered to the beaches of Denia.
And you, through this non-existing ocean
separating us, would not have been able to hear
my voice whispering loudly, how much I love you.

*Cyclic ages of evolution in Hindu Cosmology.

Drawing a Map with a Rat Tail Comb

by Denise Magloire

I used to braid my hair—block out a weekend, brush synthetic strands, weave them and my own together, right over and left over, blurring the lines between mine and ours—but each time, the harshness made the sweet skin on the side of my middle finger split, and the band-aid kept slipping off, and I decided that if the cost of beauty was to draw blood I would abstain. I started twisting my hair instead—coating it in heavy

creams, brushing out the coils until they became wool to be spun, heavy-handedly reshaping my pattern—and I got delicate swirls from tough strands. I needed gentleness even from myself, to find the sustaining lifeblood that teaches you to hold your chin high and your hair out, but I declined the invitation. When it was time to unravel everything—fingers slipping through the molded motif—in the greasy curves, I found my mother, rubbing sweet

almond oil on my ends as I sat on the tiled floor, my nose tingling at the sweet smell of freshly-baked madeleines floating from the kitchen. My eyelids get heavy after a day of wringing out my curls, and when out the window, I see the sun slip behind the trees, she's the one who keeps my arms up, grasping the fallen strands of our story. When we're done drawing on my scalp, we retrace our bloodline, back to wooden docks, sweet mango syrup drips where water was once stained by blood.

Twenty-Five

by Anna Scott

The sun is rising
on all the libraries
in the world. I am here
half-asleep and dreaming,
my knot of wool
still wound around
my chest. I am here,
eyes half-fluttering open
to the silk light. This is good.
Dust drifts like a field
of grazing horses. This is good
and beautiful and I am still here
to see it. There is still time
for all these curious things to open
up and be noticed: jeweled seeds
catacombing the pomegranate,
cinnamon coffee. Grass so soft
it stains your knees to kneel.
I rub my cheek. Half-awake,
with so much left to be asked for
and given. Oh, love.
You have no idea.

Broadway

by Sam Moe

In class this week, my students argue whether we should share pieces about sexual assault during workshop. I miss the first part of the conversation because the words S.A. send me into emotional blackout. *I'm sorry*, I explain to them.

You couldn't hear me for a moment? And that's my point, he says. Another student comments she doesn't want to be subjected to "all that." After class, I go to my colleague's office and tell him about the interaction. He says it is my fault because I teach intense essays from an anthology I assigned. None of the essays have been about assault, I explain to him. He says the one essay he read, which uses the word penis twice, is what he's talking about. I realize I don't know what anyone is talking about, anymore. *Do you think our other colleague experiences these issues?* he asks, referring to a poet and prose writer whose office is adjacent his. *I don't know*, I respond weakly. I do not want to have this conversation. *It's all so dramatic*, he adds. Does he mean *traumatic*? Because we are, after all, discussing trauma and violence. *No*, he says. *I think all of that is just drama*. Can I ever tell him I was raped? Can I use those words, strung together, a good tone, and will he believe me when I say them. My rape, to him, might be a little drama. A stage production with dozens of men. One scene, a sky. The other, beneath a gazebo, the third and fourth and fifth in a house,

a house and a house and a house and a house and then some. I try to run
across the stage, but it looks like singing. I say no but it sounds like
opera. I sob and people mistake the sound for birdsong mixed poorly with
flute. Some productions, I wear a bedsheet cape. In others, a blazer.
Sometimes I'm in my waitressing uniform (all black, pinstriped apron and
pants). My hands are free on some occasions, pressed in others.
In one instance, metal. In another, fabric. One time, shoelaces. The Greek
chorus narrates. They all gasp in unison at my suicide attempts. My
blood, discarded scabs, swabs, and gauze all make it to Broadway. My
body does not.
There are grandmothers in the audience. I hope my mother isn't here.
In the end, the actors drag my body out. This was the year
I was a corpse. The male performers are smudges. Lipstick, honey
circles, sticky buns, red coral, slinkies, lobster tails, my father's
bedroom reconstructed from scratch, a strawberry condom, and a wicker
basket filled with blades. All the magazines say how strong
a performer I am. All the men from my past write about what a liar I am.
My colleague lights the libretto on fire and uses the blue flame
to light his cigarette. He is thrown out by one of the bouncers but doesn't
mind. Out on the streets of Broadway, my neighborhood, he walks.
It is cold and his wool coat barely keeps his neck warm. If he loved me, he
would have worn the scarf I bought him. He would know when I say
fiction I mean poetry. When I say poetry, I mean memoir. I mean non-fiction.
Key terms rattle around in his skull. He purchases a water bagel with
smoked salmon and chives, eating on the corner of West 107th and
Amsterdam.
The ghost of my grandmother flies by in the form of a pigeon, coos
at him from a nearby tree. She is pissed; he can't tell. Mistaking her voice for
a sign from God, he walks back to my apartment, blessed.

Shisa Kankō...Pointing, Calling

by Zary Fekete

On most weekday mornings in Tokyo I board the Keiyō Line with a small stack of vocabulary cards and the quiet determination of a man who has decided, midlife, to become illiterate again on purpose. I mouth syllables under my breath. A, i, u, e, o. Ka, ki, ku, ke, ko. The train rocks gently as it slides along the edge of Tokyo Bay. I am usually bent over my notebook, circling hiragana like a child tracing letters for the first time. If you were watching me from across the aisle, you might think I am praying. In a way, I suppose I am.

On this particular morning, though, I look up.

The conductor stands at the front window of the car, white-gloved hand poised like a dancer waiting for his cue. As we approach a signal, his arm extends with deliberate grace. He points. Not casually, not vaguely. He traces the line of sight from his eye to the light ahead. His finger remains in the air just long enough to seal the moment. Then it lowers. The train continues.

There is something almost liturgical about it. A choreography repeated dozens of times each day, whether anyone is watching or not.

A second conductor, stationed near the doors, mirrors the ritual when we approach the platform. He leans forward slightly, scans the length of the train, and points down the line. His voice follows his finger. A short call. A confirmation. The doors open only after the gesture is

complete.

Later I will learn that this method...指差喚呼, shisa kankō, pointing and calling...reduces human error dramatically. When a worker merely glances at a signal, mistakes happen. When he points and names what he sees, the brain engages multiple pathways. Visual recognition is reinforced by speech and movement. Studies suggest error rates drop extensively half. Some reports claim up to eighty-five percent. It is not superstition. It is neurological choreography.

The conductor must signal a certain distance before passing the light. Too early, and the confirmation loses meaning. Too late, and the train has already committed itself. The gesture is calibrated to meters and milliseconds. Even in a system that runs with astonishing punctuality, there is room for caution. The hand rises before the wheels arrive. And if the signal were not green?

I try to imagine it. The white glove cutting the air more sharply. The voice losing its casual cadence and becoming firm. "Stop." The brake sequence engaging before panic has time to bloom. Calm, intentional, practiced. A ritual not only for progress, but for interruption.

There is a comfort in riding a train where someone is watching that closely. Someone whose job is not merely to move forward, but to confirm that forward is still safe. In my own country, I cannot remember ever seeing such a thing. Signals were assumed. Progress was implicit. We trusted the system and rarely considered the hands that guided it. Here, the hands are visible.

I think about why I am in Japan. Yes, I am here to study language. To conjugate verbs and memorize particles. *Watashi wa... Amerika-jin desu.* As for me, America person am. I stumble through grammar that sounds, in English, like rearranged furniture. Yet beneath that practical explanation lies another.

We are here to meet people. To listen. To involve ourselves in their lives. To ask gentle questions about where they are headed and whether the signal ahead is, in fact, green.

The temptation, always, is to speak too late. To wait until the train has

already passed the light. Or to speak too loudly, as if the raising of one's voice could substitute for careful timing. But the conductor does neither. He signals early enough to matter, calmly enough to be heard, consistently enough to build trust.

I think of the people we meet...students, coworkers, neighbors...moving through their own timetables. The green lights they assume. The obstacles they do not yet see. If there is a complication on the tracks ahead, it is rarely announced with flashing lights. More often it is subtle: a quiet loneliness, a private fear, a question about identity that lingers unspoken.

What would it mean to be the kind of person who notices in time? Not to seize control of the train, not to shout from the platform, but to point gently. To name what is there. To say, in a voice that is neither frantic nor forced, "Look."

The train slows as we approach my stop. The conductor performs his final sequence: glance, point, call. The doors open with practiced restraint.

I gather my notebook and step onto the platform, carried along by the soft current of commuters. For a moment I pause and look back through the front window of the car. The white glove rises once more, confirming the signal that will send the train onward without me. I mouth the syllables again as I walk toward language class.

A, i, u, e, o.

Foreign student am.

Learning to speak.

Learning to look up.

Learning, perhaps, to notice.

Sentimental

by Jacqueline Berger

There was a death.
Two if we count the dog.
We count the dog.
You mourned more for him
than for your mother.
Pure sadness, unalloyed
with anger,
lavish, the feeling
dogs in their dying inspire.
The gush and swell of grief
loosening all grief
as it rises and barrels to the sea.

You watched John-John
in black and white
salute his father's coffin,
you were six and listened
to the nation call him brave
and learned to disdain
self-pity, though who better
to pity than ourselves
whose sorrows we are bound to
though we bury the cables.
We need a procession
of dying dogs, a fleet.
We need to be bathed in tears.

Eulogy for the Goldfish and Past Dreams

by Thao Vu

Like other ordinary couples who were once everything and nothing to each other, Tim and I went through phases. Aquatic phases, to be exact. The first night he came over, I had no fish. Then after a month, Tim brought a goldfish with him. Orange and overfed, it oscillated when he climbed up the stairs. A ping pong ball wearing a translucent skirt. It swam sideways, puffing bubbles beneath the cucumber prints of a six-quart IKEA Ziploc bag. The goldfish stayed, but we came and went. The flat felt as permanently cold even with Tim and the fish as it had with just me. So I gave up dreaming. Nights on the sofa, with the curtains drawn and lights turned off, the obese fish was gauging space in another dimension. I aimed the flashlight on my phone at the bowl and watched the goldfish swim. Scales sparkled, gills opened and closed like the palpitation of a weak heart. Half-nibbled pellets and tiny bits of poop disintegrated into miniscule particles, tadpoles or sperms. I survived many nightmares by the goldfish. With and without Tim. We ended up naming him Son. Misguided, proud and hopeful, we invested in a two-hundred-dollar tank with a filter and LED. We even bought a school of assorted guppies to keep our Son company. We watched him become a sort of despot in his blue kingdom, nipping on the guppies' tails like a bored schoolboy tearing off butterflies' fluttered wings. Tim fed him on impulse, always too little and too much, and I didn't know how to correct the in-between. I would have never truly known Tim without Son, close as we were, inescapable the mo-

ment he laid eyes on me and rubbed my hand under the coffee table. The moment I tipped the Ziploc bag over to release the goldfish, who one day suddenly dropped dead with his bloated stomach above water. Glutted to death, our little despot. I kept the light on without Son and, for a while, believed that one day Tim would come back with another goldfish. But he never did.

for Me

My mother used to rip clocks off the wall. A goop of red paint collapsed in her arms like the Pietà. Dalí. She once told me it was bad luck to give clocks while we put one in a ribboned box. Mama. Stop. It's bad luck. I said. But my jaw locked and I woke up with an urge to cry.

for Tim

I felt him. He wasn't attractive, but I could learn. He told me to move, showing me how. I gripped the green jade on his collar bone with my teeth. His mother brought it back from Nepal. My tongue was burning, the jade—cold and smooth. Hung by a red string, out of space. It longed to go back to a sea of clouds rising on the mountain.

for Our Son

I go swimming at noon when the water is lukewarm and the others have gone for lunch, aiming for one long, streamlined glide that pushes my body into deep water. Left stroke, right stroke, rotate, come back, breathe. Enter—catch —pull. Exit. Recover. Repeat. I know there is a heart, because I can hear it beating. The boy working at the bar counts my laps. He is lean and toned underneath his cargo shorts, but he doesn't swim. He makes ruby smooth Negroni and gets fresh towels. My arms move under water, for the ripples but not the spill. Eyes to the bottom of the pool, emptied out at noon. Slow and calm. Ba-dum. Ba-dum.

Verges

by Leanne Todt

At the shore of a painted lake
a current nearly hides the faint whorl
of the artist's touch. Or someone else's.
A way to stay there.

—

By a road. Blood.
Enough to form a pattern.
An abandoned secret, telling nothing.
Nearly ignored. Nearly touched.
Waiting.

Requiem at Cana

by Diolinda Vaz

Growing up among men who made their wine,
my assigned task was the trip
to the cask in the cellar at dinner time

to kneel beside dank tanks coated
with sediment and sentiment
in rows below oil rags and scythes.

With a ceramic jug angled toward a spigot,
I'd meet the river and the rivets.
Today the chain pull of orange light
speckled by dozens of fruit flies

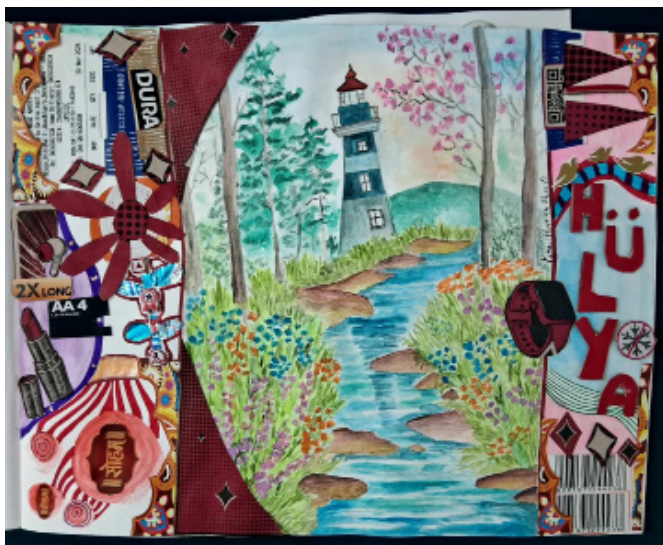
aerates what's been stored in my mind:
the smell of yeast and soaked concrete
and the trickle and pour, splatter and spill.

I can hear them laughing from the kitchen,
smell their smoke and stew thicken,
aunts and uncles buried, now revived,
waiting for me and the wine to arrive.

Reasons to Winter Over

by Jenna K Funkhouser

Rabbits and oak leaves in the garden.
Shoes in heaps by the door. In the kitchen,
scents of cranberry and molasses.
The amaryllis blooming
in the post office window.
Flannel sheets.
Night. The white
cry of the wind.



(Hülya) by Tamizh Ponni VP

In the next galaxy

by Kathleen Goldblatt

[after Ruth Stone]

a farmer won't chase strangers
running through his fields,
there will be no empty stroller
at the riverbank. Only locusts
will sew chaos and comfort will drop
from trees like crisp apples.
Every boat will have a compass,
every swimmer strong arms,
only newts will bob in reeds.
There will be no shoe floating
downstream. Falling stars will be
the only fear and *Bienvenido* will
be spoken with gusto. In the next galaxy
the sun won't need to slink home at dusk,
the future will not be lost in water.

What Happens When

by Camille Newsom

For weeks, you've stopped putting away the towels.
You leave them in a folded stack on the floor
beside their home closet. It's not that

you want to kill yourself today, or this year, but that
you look forward to dying— you always have—
in the same way one looks forward to a birthday party

or vacation, in fact, you believe death is a vacation,
a vacation away from one body and into another,
from human to ant, or oak, or goose, or stone, or river.

That's it, in the next go-around you'd like to be a river.

Sanctuary

by Lorette C. Luzajic

after *Portrait of Antonieta Rivas Mercado*, by Francisco Romano Guillemín (Mexico) 1917

Outside the cathedral, watching the faithful and passersby, the woman sits alone. And hasn't it always been this way?

She is not a stranger in Paris, but not one friend has called on her since her arrival. Of course not: her family's money has run dry. There is nothing left for them to want.

She is a long way from home, from Mexico City, from the sprawling hacienda with the stone steps, from the towering golden guardian Ángel de la Independencia on Paseo de la Reforma. Her father was the angel's maestro architect, ensuring the Mercado name was known to millions, to the world.

Antonieta loved that she need only look up into the sky to find her father, from the café tables where other writers gathered to talk about women, and women's rights; from the small theatres she subsidized and the music rehearsals where her patronage funded innovation; from the bustling side streets in the taxi on her way to Diego's studio, or Manuel's.

But that winged sentry had become a bitter arrow. She felt Antonio watching her as all of the treasures he had amassed slipped through her fingers. She could scarcely handle his disappointment. He had appointed her of all her siblings for the same reason that he encouraged her education here in Paris as a young girl, to learn French and English

literature, piano, and philosophy. He trusted her and believed in her keen intelligence and imagination.

Antonio had, of course, frowned at her drinking tequila at Diego's and his revolving door of beauties and rogues. But Diego had been good company. For all his well-known flaws, he was funny and candid and ambitious. She had no designs on him. Rather, it was Manuel she had loved. Manuel's preference for young men, not young women, was an open secret in their circles, but he'd been married before and Antonietta was certain he could marry again. Then, scandal broke out: Manuel's art pupil, a promising star of the future, depressed and jilted by his teacher for another young male artist, overdosed in apparent suicide on cocaine in his teacher's studio.

The boy's name was Angel. Antonietta had concluded then that it was a sign. It was the moment that she began to see a way out of everything, holding the terrible possibility close for comfort ever since.

Still, she carried on. There was work to do and she was not easily whipped. She wrote for the journal *Contemporáneos*. She oversaw literary circles, the orchestra, avant-garde theatre productions of Cocteau and new Mexican playwrights, and art exhibitions. She believed as Antonio had in the potential of Mexico. She had devoured Europe's genius through paintings and ballets since she was a girl. And she knew Mexico had even more genius inside of it than France. She wanted to support its bloom, so that the art and beauty of her homeland would rise up over the world like her father's victory angel in the sky.

And then, Jose. His writings were brilliant, almost mystical, even the political ones. Her interest had been purely intellectual at first, but she soon fell under the spell created by their easy camaraderie as they worked together. He respected her insights and intelligence. When she had finally made her interest clear, he said that he was married. I am also married, she had told him truthfully. How foolish that she assumed they meant the same thing: Antonietta had long moved back into her father's house with her son, after Albert had burned her volumes of Proust and Nietzsche and Baudelaire. Divorce was a different matter, difficult in Mexico, especially for a woman. It was a long drawn-out battle still ongoing.

She had been happy, at least for awhile. Safe. Her lover was a presidential candidate, and the air was alive with the future. Her conviction was so strong that she sold off all her remaining properties to finance his campaign. But Jose had not won, and now he was in exile after contesting the results of the election. She followed him to Paris, with her son. To show Jose that her love was not fickle and dependent on his victory.

Jose had been shocked to see her, and she knew right away that he had meant to slip away and never send for her. She asked him outright if he needed her, and he replied that he only needed God.

She stands up. It is time to come face to face with God herself, a rival even more powerful than Jose's wife. She strides confidently toward the open church doors.

No doubt Albert will arrive in Paris soon, hunting her down. Happy now? she thinks. You win. She also thinks of Tonito, how he is waiting for her back at the hotel, how he will be waiting and waiting, how he will not be able to make sense of any it until much later when he is grown. And her heart breaks for him. But there is no other way.

In the nave, she sits quietly in the shadowy glow of flickering candles and the stained-glass windows. She contemplates the beauty of the holy Virgin. It somehow hadn't mattered to Antonieta that her own mother never loved her—*Don't you think she is too brown?* Madre had asked her father when Antonieta first appeared in the world. But Mary was her true mother, the one who had always been with her.

Antonieta prays for mercy for her past sins and the next one. But she knew with all her heart that if Christ had forgiven his executors, He would kindly overlook what was necessary here in light of her destitution and despair.

She finishes her prayers, then slides Jose's pistol from her handbag, taken out of his suitcase last night while he fixed their drinks.

She holds the pistol against her heart and admits defeat.

A Heron Undressing

by Angie Blake-Moore

1.

We were given a submission,
a poem which contained the line,
“A heron undressing / a pond...”
which we misprint as
“A heron undressing
in a pond...”

This understandably angers
the poet in question. He thinks it
ridiculous.
Though it is an accident,
I find I like it better this way.

2.

Picture the bird:
ungainly, on stalk legs,
like an adolescent girl who's grown
nine inches over the summer.

As the moon makes its way
up the Florida sky,
the heron begins his slow striptease.
He sticks his beak under a wing,
elongated S neck compressing.
He unhinges the wing,
drops it into the pond
where it sinks with a sigh,
resigned, reassigned.

Next, he pulls singular feathers
from his back, from his breast.
The variations in size and texture
surprise. The feathers lie on the water
like leaves, their colors
mute, shadowed.

When the heron removes his second wing,
plucking it and waving it about
like dancer with a fan, it catches an updraft
and then glides

slowly,

so slowly

you could count the feathers
that number it if you'd like.
His wing hesitant

to leave the sky
it knows it's being told
to surrender.

Separation

by Eleanor Carpenter

I weave static filaments into a silk braid,
too substantial, like a wagtail's plumage.
She wants each button fastened, skirt pleats straight.
She is a miniature caricature,
my porcelain doll.
Her buckles are stiff but she perseveres.

Behind me her reflection looks inwards,
in private conversation with herself.
She half-jumps briskly to the pavement,
her water bottle large as a bucket.
She will not allow me to hold her hand,
steps deftly round puddles, concentrating.

The whistle goes. She looks warningly at me
and walks away, buffeted but not deterred
by ricocheting children, each rougher than
this small gem.
She goes in, holding herself tight.

The inside of the car is quiet,
a vacuum, and in the mirror
there is just my face—
it is absurd,
like a deflating balloon,
and I feel sorry for it.

Dear Delphi

by Mitch Graham

How do you explain to your son
that his father is a psychopomp
like Charon or the Grim Reaper?

You try your best to not say “psychopomp”
even though he’d giggle at the word
and you try to explain that it’s not scary

to give advice to tourists when you’re
a local, and that while it’s sad
that he doesn’t live with us anymore
it’s great work.

You don’t explain that he never asked
for the job, that he was scared to take it
or that he talked about it every night
for the entire third trimester before agreeing
on the way to the hospital, signing the contract
after his son’s birth certificate was stamped.

Even when lit in shaky beams by fluorescent tubes
the rules were unmistakable:

You must always be willing to hold their arm.
You must never smile too wide or cry.
You must leave them as soon as you get there.

Now and Later

by Cynthia Clifford

The whole middle, a core, the break, and all of June. Summer's worn-out deck of cards caving or giving way to a gentle rain. Finally, no one worried in the meantime. Bathing suits dried under t-shirts, under the real heat of the day. In the meantime, sour boysenberry pie cooled off next to a mouse's home in the wall, and he'd dart around, drooling over each splayed treat, his mousey nails catching a quick snack. The first time it happened, the mouse puckered his pink lips and brittle teeth in protest, like a baby does after kissing an open lemon. In the meantime, I share food with all the mice; we are considered neighbors. Yellow tulips are there and, in the meantime, so is thirst. In the mean time, there is also honesty. In the meantime, everywhere else seems far: the grocery store's second floor, Saturdays when we see each other again, the bottom of any pool, photos with cousins over an aunt's frayed couch. The difference between words like flint and jasper. In the meantime, I leave the door unlocked for you to come over. In the meantime, war. In the meantime, reading about what to feel about war, then

drawing a bath and staring at a timer. In the meantime, vengeance. In the meantime, half of the cigarette. In the meantime, the news. In the meantime, the news about birds. In the meantime, a temporary bridge—but now it's just the main entrance into the city. In the meantime, a busted header and a drastic haircut. In the meantime, everyone says you can't come over. A car mechanic named Sal said, "just for the meantime" to my grandma with advice to stop slamming on her breaks so hard. After her tires popped, she called me but meant to call someone else. In the meantime, she drives a Honda. In the meantime, she can still drive. In the meantime, I dream of being a child again in the back of a car. The dream starts with a smell of sourdough bread and then there is a single trail of crumb leading over my lap and out onto the seats—as if both my lap and the seats are part of a fairytale path to freedom for something microscopic and scared and trying to stay alive. If I move, there are stakes. If I stay, there are stakes. When I raise my head to see who is driving, it's a graphite face of someone who mattered but I almost forgot. In the meantime, lucid dreaming helps. In the meantime, there's more memory loss. In the meantime, just a sip to get me through the night. In the meantime, there is always beauty. In the meantime, not yet.

Record Keeping

by Claire Massey

Insistent knocks interrupt my favorite protest anthems,
old message music for a passing generation.
Mindful of scratches,
I lift needle from vinyl,
open the door to a neighbor who knows
the vixen who dens in my yard
is a red fox about-to-be-mom. Still, he persists in calling her “it,”
threatens to have her “humanely” killed.
This man leads a youth group that meets Wednesday evenings.
Does he seed contempt for other parents’ offspring?
I slide the album back in its sleeve,
recall a study that shows twenty-first century kids
recognize thirty corporate logos before the age of six,
yet many cannot name
flowers, trees, or animals
that aren’t household pets.
Boys know the brands of trucks made in Detroit.
A Ram is not the father of lambs; it’s a verb.

My nephew's third word was "M'Donald,"
amusing my sister as she drove her family
to a playground of hard plastic playthings where small nameless birds
vie for crumbs that contain unpronounceable chemicals.
From electric, locked windows at sixty miles an hour,
my niece glimpses innocent oaks,
doing only the good of helping her breathe,
dying in piles heaped before
earth-ravaging machines.
Her brother knows what a Caterpillar does,
but he can't name the ones who morph into butterflies,
or the milkweed they need to survive.
What song lyrics root in *his* head,
planted by the earphones he constantly wears?

I am only a distant, childless aunt.
Who will want my collection of used 70s records,
the turntable spinning old questions
in a loop that repeats for a new generation?
Who will cry mercy, mercy, what's goin' on,
or turn, turn, turn us toward a season of atonement,
when all might live as the creator intended?
What will the children teach the parents?
How will we get back to the garden?

Death Row

by Marjorie Maddox

“Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.”

—Robert Frost

O, Onion,
from the dungeon of the bottom drawer—
still trapped in netting—I know, I know,
how, against your wishes, you’re grabbed,
brought beneath the light, interrogated briefly
for any sign of bad dealings or deterioration,
then transported quickly to cold as thick
as your aroma. Where did you think

you would be thrown but here?
Third drawer of the guarded Frigidaire
amongst the life-long offenders of celery
and carrots, sweet peppers and tomatoes,
who, unlike your kind, at least
had the good sense not to stir
previous executioners to excessive

weeping with their layer after layer
of refusal to come undone. So here
you cower. Here you shiver. Here
even your last defense—
your scent—abandons you.
And then the knife.
And then the fire.

*I tell the coast forest why I haven't come
back*

by Clara Collins

Like the moon, I turn away
from the sea and the trails
you have braided
down to the sea.

I turn my back to your woods
where a woman was raped
last summer though I loved you
and once stood on your bluff looking out

at the dock, stretched like a spine
as the sun slung down your blue water.
I ran through leaf shadows
as a train shot over a lifted track,

let it roar through me,
pure and deafening.
Did he cover her mouth
when he pulled her in

between the pines? I turn my back
to your woods, where you grew the moss,
and it rotted. You grew it again,
and it gave her nothing.

What Praying is For

by Noah Eastman

“Love, and then do as you wish.”

—St. Augustine

While I thaw out my dreams
with my morning coffee,

I find the Yellow-rumped Warbler,
my always chipper co-worker,

drooping on the white picket fence
like her spirit left
for an adventure
without her.

She is not preparing for her prayers.

She is not washing her feathers
in a pristine fountain.

She is not working the scales
until each note is put in its place.

Now,
when I spot her
in the late winter light,
when the shadows of the maple
drip into syrup,

she's belting the dirty laundry of her heart
beside a crew of orphaned crows
who know all too well
what praying is for.



Cha! by Tamizh Ponni VP

The Glove

by Wheeler Light

It is important to put the ball inside the glove and wrap it in rubber bands for a week, to put the glove under your mattress, to sleep and when you sleep, to dream of wearing the glove, of making the catch, of being carried into the middle of the diamond lifted toward the sun. In the cul de sac, dad whacked a pop fly for the hundredth time. Obscured by light, plummeting toward me, I could see nothing until the ball hit me square on the head. It is important to dream. It is equally important to practice. Years later, dad wants to see the Tigers, even though Tigers fans don't want to see the Tigers. Dad's nostalgia transcends a losing record. He is proud in a way that transcends failures. He is always happy when he can remember, and maybe more so when he cannot. Smiling gleeful at strangers as though playing catch with his smile when others smile back. It is easy to be happy for his happiness, though easier to feel pain when he forgets or even pretend none of this is happening. Everywhere I walk I feel like I slept on a lump, like the lump is growing into something more true every day, and when I take out the glove to put it on, I will be able to catch meaning out of the sky, and when I understand, the truth will lift me into the light.

Contributor Biographies

Sherri Alms writes weird, sweet, and occasionally angry stories, poems, and essays. Her work has appeared in *Salvation South*, *Cleaver*, *Rattle*, *Jelly Squid*, and other publications. She is a freelance writer who lives with her husband and two cats in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. You can find her at almsink.com and on Instagram and Bluesky @sherriwithab.

Carole Anzovin writes from Western Massachusetts, where she delights in amateur naturalism, gardening, baking, reading, and fiber crafts. Her poetry is a dive into living life with joy, attention, and presence. Her poems have appeared in *Gyroscope Review*, *Corvid Queen*, *Stone Circle Review*, *FERAL*, and other journals.

Abraham Aondoana is a writer and poet. He is a recipient of Idembeka Creative Writing Workshop 2026. His poem was shortlisted for *Interwoven Anthology 2025* (Renard Press). His work has appeared in *Kalahari Review*, *San Pedro River Review*, *Mayari Literature*, *Zoetic Press*, *Temple in a City Journal*, *Underbelly Press*, *Flowers-of-the Field Journal*, *Genrepunk Magazine*, *Eye to the Telescope Journal of speculative poetry*, and elsewhere.

Margie Banker (they/them) is a lesbian poet born and raised in the Upper Midwest. Confessional by nature, Margie writes to survive. Their work has been featured in *Boshemia Magazine*. Margie is currently pursuing their Master's in Creative Writing, and has rocked a bowl cut for almost a decade.

Rachel Beachy is the author of *Tiny Universe*. Her poetry has also appeared in *Have Has Had*, *Mulberry Literary*, *ONE ART*, *Rust & Moth*, *Sky Island Journal*, *Thread*, and others. She was nominated for the Best of the Net Anthology 2025 and shortlisted for the Central Avenue Poetry Prize 2026. She lives in Kentucky with her husband and children. You can find her on Instagram @rachelbeachywrites.

Jacqueline Berger's fifth book of poetry, *Left at the Ruin*, was published in 2024 by Terrapin Books. Her previous books include *The Day You Miss Your Exit*, Broadstone Books; *The Gift That Arrives Broken*, winner of the Autumn House Poetry Prize; *Things That Burn*, winner of the Agha Shahid Ali Prize, University of Utah Press, and *The Mythologies of Danger*, winner of the Bluestem Award and the Bay Area Book Awards Poetry Prize. Several of her poems have been featured on Garrison Keillor's Writers Almanac as well as in numerous anthologies and journals, including *American Poetry Review*, *The Iowa Review*, *American Poetry: The Next Generation*, *Carnegie Mellon Press*, *Old Dominion Review*, *Rhino*, *River Styx*, *Rattle*, and *Nimrod*. She is a professor emerita at Notre Dame de Namur University, Belmont, California.

Ella Betz (she/her) is a poet from Kalamazoo, Michigan. Her work is forthcoming with FlowerSong Press. She is a member of the Kalamazoo Writing Circle and the Portage District Library's writers group. Ella holds a BA in biology from Hope College and is currently an MFA candidate at Cedar Crest College.

A writer & book artist, Kristy Bowen lives in Chicago, where she creates a variety of hybrid works and experiments that enfold text, visual art, performance, film, and more. She is the author of numerous books, chapbooks, zines, and artists books, including *Cloven*, a new collection of poems and collages centered around the Greek figure of Iphigenia. For the past two decades, she's blogged about writing, art, horror films, thrift-ing, and other miscellany at *Dulcetly: Notes on a Bookish Life*. She also runs Dancing Girl Press & Studio, where she makes and sells all manner of art, books, paper goods and accessories. Raised in the wilds of northern Illinois, she inhabits a beautiful, but drafty, art deco building near the lake with several mongrel cats, her husband, too many books, and a vast collection of thrifted finds—only some of which are haunted.

Elya Braden is a writer and mixed-media artist living in Oxnard, CA, and is an editor for *Gyroscope Review*. She is the author of the chapbooks, *Open The Fist* and *The Sight of Invisible Longing*. Her full-length collection, *Dragonfly Puzzle Box*, is forthcoming from Sheila-Na-Gig Editions in 2026. Her work has been published in *Anthropocene*, *Burning-word Literary Journal*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *The Shore*, *Thimble*, and elsewhere. Her poems have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, Best of the Net, and Best New Poets. www.elyabraden.com.

Angie Blake-Moore has been a teacher of 3- and 4-year-olds in Washington, DC for over 30 years. She's had work published in *Potomac Review*, *like a field*, *ONE ART*, and *Green Mountains Review* among others. She had a poem chosen for the Moving Words competition in her hometown of Arlington, VA where her poem was displayed in county buses.

Before retirement, Tony Brinkley taught Literature, Holocaust Studies and Fascist Studies at the University of Maine. He is the author of *Gomorrah* (Cerise Press), *America, America* (Island of Wak-Wak, a chapbook), *Stalin's Eyes* (Puckerbrush Press), and *Icons of War* (American Book Publishing). He is the editor (with Keith Hanley) of *Romantic Revisions* (Cambridge University Press).

Sally Jane Brown is an award-winning artist, curator, and writer whose work in drawing, painting, and mixed media explores womanhood, motherhood, and the body. She has exhibited nationally and in the UK and completed residencies in the U.S. and Argentina. She has illustrated four books, including *Feverdream* (March 2026 with poetry by Renée K. Nicholson). Her writing appears in *The Conversation*, and *Women's Art Journal*, among others; her art in *Creative Mornings*, among others. She curates nationally and serves as Curator for West Virginia University Libraries.

Maureen Clark is retired from the University of Utah where she taught writing for 20 years. She was the director of the University Writing Center from 2010-2014. She was the president of Writers @ Work 1999-2001. Her poems have appeared in *Colorado Review*, *Alaska Review*, *The Southeast Review*, and *Gettysburg Review* among others. Her first book *This Insatiable August* was released by Signature Books in February 2024. Her memoir *Confessions of a Once Upon a Time Mormon Girl* will be released on June 15th by Hypatia Press.

Cynthia Clifford is a Mexican-American poet from Southern California's Inland Empire. She holds an MFA from Columbia University, where she was awarded the Linda Corrente Fellowship, and now teaches creative writing there as an adjunct assistant professor. Based in Brooklyn, her poems have appeared in *Witness Magazine*, *Quibble Lit*, and other journals. She was awarded a 2026 Poetry Society of America Summer Fellowship.

Vincenzo Cohen is an Italian multidisciplinary and social artist. He earned the MA from Fine Arts Academy and the BA in Archaeology from "La Sapienza" University in Rome. The interest in history pushes him to investigate human depths through visual and historical narratives, representation of archetypes and myths. His paintings address different issues including social and environmental justice, human rights, representation of unconscious and oneiric contents related to human expression.

Stasha Cole is a PhD student in literature, a poet, a photographer, and the editorial assistant for *Nimrod International Journal*. Her work can be found with *Susurrus*, *Pinch*, *Wild Hyacinth*, *Poetry South*, *Anodyne*, and *Red Flag Poetry*, among others.

Clara Collins is a poet and teacher based in Bellingham, Washington. She holds an MFA from the University of Oregon and is an alumna of the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Ninth Letter*, *Mississippi Review*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Radar Poetry*, *Ellipsis*, and elsewhere. She is currently at work on her first full-length poetry collection.

Willy Conley is an award-winning writer and photographer whose nine books include *Photographic Memories*, *Plays of Our Own*, *Listening Through the Bone*, and *The Deaf Heart*. Early in his career he worked as a medical photographer at leading hospitals in the U.S. before earning certification as a Registered Biological Photographer. He is a former chairperson and professor emeritus of Theatre and Dance at Gallaudet University, the world's only liberal arts university for deaf and hard-of-hearing students, in Washington, D.C. For more info, check out his blog at: www.willyconley.com

Sara Ries Dziekonski (she/ her) was Runner-Up for the Press 53 Award for Poetry for her manuscript, *Today's Specials*, which was selected as a finalist for the Woodrow Hall Top Shelf Award for a book of poetry published in 2024. Sara is a Buffalo native and holds an MFA in poetry from Chatham University. Her first book, *Come In, We're Open*, won the 2009 Stevens Poetry Manuscript Competition. Her chapbooks include *Snow Angels on the Living Room Floor* and *Marrying Maracuyá*, which won the Cathy Smith Bowers Chapbook Competition. Her poems have appeared in *American Life in Poetry*, *Slipstream*, *Potomac Review*, *SWWIM Every Day*, *Connecticut River Review*, and *LABOR: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas*, among others. Sara is the co-founder of Poetry Midwives Editing and Submission Services.

Noah Eastman is a somatic psychotherapist, poet, and archetypal improv facilitator from Yorba Linda, CA. He is a graduate of CIIS from the Integral Counseling Psychology Master's Program. His poems have been published by *Unpsychology Magazine* and *Deep Times Journal*. When he's not writing, you can find him making sock puppets with his friends, performing slam poetry at the Starry Plough, or leaving shiny gifts for crows.

Adrienne Egolf is a climate change communicator for the global environmental organization, The Nature Conservancy, where she has worked since 2010. Based in Central Florida, she is interested in writing that explores parallels between the human experience and the natural world. Though she has written poetry since college, this is her first publication.

Zary Fekete grew up in Hungary and currently lives in Tokyo. He has a debut novella (*Words on the Page*) out with DarkWinter Lit Press and a short story collection (*The Written Path: A Journey Through Sobriety and Scripture*) out with Creative Texts. He enjoys books, podcasts, and many many many films. Twitter and Instagram: @ZaryFekete Bluesky:zaryfekete.bsky.social

Raquel Fletcher is a published author, journalist and former TV reporter. Born in Regina, Saskatchewan, she worked as a political correspondent in Quebec City for almost a decade for both Global News and Bell Media before returning to the Canadian prairies. She is the recipient of the 2025 Saskatchewan Writers Guild Prize in Poetry. Her poems have been published in anthologies and literary magazines.

Jean-Luc Fontaine is a Tucson poet. He enjoys hot coffee and long hikes in the desert. website: <http://jeanlucpoetry.wordpress.com>

Jenna K Funkhouser is a Pacific Northwest-based artist and poet. Recent poems have been published by *Ekstasis*, *St. Katherine Review*, *Penwood Review*, and *Stirring Lit*, among others. You can find her most recent ekphrastic collection, *Bright Inhabited Lives* (Kelsay Books), and other recent work at jennakfunkhouser.com.

Alice George earned a degree in English literature in 2006 and spent nearly twenty years working as a copywriter in pharmaceutical advertising. In 2023, she left advertising to care for her mother, who had been diagnosed with terminal brain cancer. She now works as a teacher's aide to devote as much time as possible to her writing and her family. Her poetry often explores death and dying, the small Pennsylvania town where her mother grew up, and the uncomfortable intimacy of suburban life.

Kathleen Goldblatt, author of *Our Ghosts Wait Patiently*, lives in Rhode Island where she reflects on poetry during walks with her dog, Archie, who faithfully listens. Her poems have appeared in *The Comstock Review*, *The Healing Muse*, *Psychological Perspectives*, and *The Ekphrastic Review* among others. She is a mental health advocate and psychoanalyst.

Mitch Graham is a poet from South Jersey currently living and working in Philadelphia.

Kelle Groom's fifth poetry collection *Book of Miracles*, will be published in the Pitt Poetry Series, University of Pittsburgh Press, Spring 2027. Her previous collections include *Spill*, *Five Kingdoms*, *Luckily* (both Florida Book Award recipients) from Anhinga Press and *Underwater City* (University Press of Florida). Groom is also the author of a memoir, *I Wore the Ocean in the Shape of a Girl* (Simon & Schuster) and *How to Live: A Memoir in Essays* (Tupelo Press). Her free monthly column on writing is "The Continuous Life": kellegroom.substack.com.

Annalisa Hansford (they/them) is the author of *Romanticization of Grief and Ghosts* (Bottlecap Press, 2025) and *Banana Pancakes* (Rockwood Press, 2026). Their poetry has received honors from the Academy of American Poets and the Boston Mayor's Poetry Program. They've studied poetry with Gabrielle Calvocoressi and Victoria Chang. They previously interned at the Grolier Poetry Bookshop in Cambridge, where one of their favorite poets, Frank O'Hara, used to frequent.

Mary Howlett lives in Waterford, Ireland. Her poems are published in *Southword*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *Waxed Lemon*, *Drawn to the Light Press*, *Poem Alone*, *Steel Jackdaw*, *Swerve Magazine*, *Poetry Bus 12*, *The Get Real*, *Frogmore Papers*, *Allegro*, *N&H Journal*, *Amethyst Review* and elsewhere. She is Highly Commended in various poetry competitions.

Dawn Levitt is a two-time heart transplant recipient, poet, essayist, and disability rights advocate who writes at the intersection of storytelling and healing. Her work has appeared in *Newsweek*, *Insider Magazine*, *Remington Review*, *Breath and Shadow*, *Pink Panther Magazine*, and many other journals and anthologies. Find her website at www.dawnlevittauthor.com

Wheeler Light received his MFA in writing poetry from University of Virginia and lives in Denver, CO. He is a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Rattle*, *The Penn Review*, *Barely South*, *Inscape Journal*, and *Allium*, among other publications. You can find his work at www.wheelerlight.net.

Leslie Lisbona was featured in the Style section of *The New York Times*. She is the winner of the creative nonfiction prize at *Bar Bar Magazine* and has been nominated for Sundress Publications Best of the Net. She has been the Author Spotlight for *In A Flash*. Her work has appeared in numerous journals and magazines such as *The Queens Review*, *Synchronized Chaos*, *JMWW*, *Smoky Blue Literary & Arts Magazine*, and *Welter*. <https://bebarbar.com/2025-barbes/> She is the child of immigrants from Beirut, Lebanon, and grew up in Queens, NY. You can find her online at <https://leslielisbona.substack.com/>

Lorette C. Luzajic is addicted to flash, often inspired by visual art. Her work has been widely nominated, anthologized, taught in writing courses from Tennessee to Egypt, and translated into Urdu, Arabic, and Spanish. Her most recent book is *Disgust* (Cyberwit Books, 2025), a collection of ekphrastic stories on the theme of illness, written during recovery from breast cancer and a botched leg surgery. Two of her stories have been selected for *Best Small Fictions* anthologies, and she has a story forthcoming in *Best Microfiction 2026*.

Poetry Moment host for WPSU-FM, assistant editor of *Presence*, and Professor Emerita at Commonwealth University, Marjorie Maddox has published 17 collections of poetry—most recently *Hover Here*, *Seeing Things*, and *Small Earthly Space*—as well as a story collection, 5 children's books, and the anthologies *Common Wealth: Contemporary Poets on Pennsylvania* and *Keystone Poetry* (co-editor). Her middle-grade biography is *A Man Named Branch: The True Story of Baseball's Great Experiment*.
www.marjoriemaddox.com

Denise Magloire was born and raised in France, and she obtained a Master of Arts in Writing in San Diego. Her work has been published in *So To Speak*, *Phoebe*, and *Lucky Jefferson*. When she's not writing or daydreaming, Denise can be found knitting or singing and dancing in the bathroom.

Cecille Marcato (she/her) is a poet and cartoonist in Austin. Her work has appeared or is upcoming in *Leon*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *Free State Review*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *Husk*, *Solstice*, and *Slipstream*. She holds degrees in literature and design and graduated from the Warren Wilson MFA Program for Writers.

Nasta Martyn is an artist, graphic artist, illustrator, poet, and writer. She graduated from the Academy of Slavic Cultures and has a bachelor's degree in design. She is currently pursuing a master's degree in art history. In 2022, she participated in international exhibitions in China, Taiwan, and the United States. In 2024, she received the Jury's Special Prize for her poster in China.

Claire Massey explores themes of eco-preservation, spiritual redemption and resistance to oppression in her poetry and prose. Twice nominated for a Pushcart Prize, recent work has appeared in *Streetlight Magazine*, *Barely South Review*, *Green Ink Poetry Press*, *The Field Guide Poetry Magazine*, *Thimble Literary Magazine*, *The Amethyst Review*, *Writer Advice*, *Saw Palm*, and *IO Journal*. Claire taught creative writing for the Center for Lifelong Learning and worked as poetry editor for *The Pen Woman Magazine* and prose editor for the *Emerald Coast Review*. Read more of her aesthetic in her collections of stories and poems, *Driver Side Window* and *Awake in the Sacred Night*.

Avriel Mejrah is a poet based in Massachusetts. His work explores memory, interiority, and the living world.

Sam Moe is the author of nine books. Her most recent poetry collection, *Red Halcyon*, is forthcoming from Querencia Press. Her debut short story collection, *I Might Trust You*, is out from Experiments in Fiction (2025). She has attended the Sewanee Writers' Conference and received fellowships from the Longleaf Writer's conference and the Key West Literary Seminar. Sam has also attended residencies at The Writers' Colony at Dairy Hollow, VCCA, and Château d'Orqueveau.

Jane Edna Mohler is a Bucks County Poet Laureate (PA) emeritus, and winner of the Main Street Voices. She placed second in The Crossroads Contest. Recent publications include *Gargoyle*, *One Art*, *Verse Virtual*, and the new anthology from Terrapin Press, *The Color Wheel*. Her collections, *Broken Umbrellas* and *Autumn Clears* are both from Kelsay Books. She is Poetry Editor of the *Schuylkill Valley Journal*. www.janeednamohler.com

J. Alan Nelson, a writer, journalist, lawyer and actor, has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, Best of Net and Best Microfiction. He played the lead in the viral video “Does This Cake Make Me Look Gay,” the verbose “Silent Al” in HBO’s Emmy-winning SXSWest-world,” and narrated *New York Times* videos on AIDS programs in Africa.

Annika Nerf is a fiction and nature writer, and a pocket-sized poet. She has written an antiwar novel on transgenerational trauma for her PhD from the State University of New York at Albany. She is the 2026 writer-in-residence for the Swiss Society for the European Convention on Human Rights.

Camille Newsom (she/her) is the author of the chapbook *This Suffering and Scrumptious World* (Galileo Press, 2023) and *Purgatory Junkie* (Main Street Rag, 2025). Based in West Michigan, Camille is an educator and land steward who weaves creative practice and curiosity into her work. Her poems have appeared in *ONE ART*, *Terrain.org*, and *Southword*, among others, and was nominated for Best New Poets 2025.

Renée K. Nicholson chases the muse across disciplines, including poetry, prose, and academic work and is particularly fascinated by the human capacity to overcome obstacles. Her poetry collections include *Feverdream*, *Postscripts*, and *Roundabout Directions to Lincoln Center*. Her nonfiction includes *Fierce and Delicate: Essays on Dance and Illness*. Find Renée online at www.reneenicholson.com.

Litong Nie is an emerging writer from San Jose, CA, and an incoming freshman at Dartmouth College. His poetry has appeared in *trampset*, *Bending Genres*, the *Neologism Poetry Journal*, and *The Eunoia Review*, among others. He enjoys talking to geese on evening walks. You can read more of his work at <https://linktr.ee/litongnie>.

Anne Panning is the author the memoir *Dragonfly Notes: On Distance and Loss*, as well as two short story collections and the novel *Butter*. She has won The Flannery O’Connor Award for Short Fiction which was selected as a *New York Times* Editors’ Choice. She’s currently working on her second memoir about her late father, a barber and addict. She has published in places such as *Brevity* (5x), *The Kenyon Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Quarterly West*, *River Teeth*, etc. She teaches creative writing at SUNY-Brockport. Her website is www.annepanning.com.

Connie Post served as Poet Laureate of Livermore, California (2005-2009). Her work has appeared in *Calyx*, *Cutthroat*, *River Styx*, *Slipstream*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, & *Valparaiso Poetry Review*. Her awards include the Crab Creek Poetry Prize, Liakoura Award, and the Caesura Poetry Award. Her second full length book, *Prime Meridian*, was released in January 2020 (Glass Lyre Press) and was a finalist for the 2020 Best Book Awards. Her most recent books are *Between Twilight* from New York Quarterly Books and *Broken Metronome* from Glass Lyre Press. *Broken Metronome* was the winner of the American Fiction Award and NYC Big book award for a poetry chapbook.

Jeff Radwell is a novelist, essayist, and short story writer. His fiction has been featured in *Hobart*, *Consequence*, and *Thimble*. Website: jeffradwell.com

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Charles Rammelkamp is Prose Editor for BrickHouse Books in Baltimore. A collection of persona poems and dramatic monologues involving burlesque stars, *The Trapeze of Your Flesh*, was published in 2025 by BlazeVOX Books. His collection, *The Tao According to Calvin Coolidge*, was recently published by Kelsay Books.

Molly Remer, MSW, D.Min, is a priestess, mystic, and poet in central Missouri. Molly and her husband Mark co-create Story Goddesses at Brigid's Grove. Molly is the author of many books, including *Walking with Persephone*, *Whole and Holy*, *Womanrunes*, the *Goddess Devotional*, and *365 Days of Goddess*. She is the creatrix of the devotional experience #30DaysofGoddess and she loves savoring small magic and everyday enchantment.

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John Shepherd is a hybrid author and composer from Los Angeles. *Oblivion*, his debut novel, appeared in 2023 (Liminal Books) and is expected as an audiobook in 2026. His poems have appeared in *The Bridge* and *Snarkitects*, and his rock and folk records, including *Dark Matter* and *Notes from Underground*, are available through all major music platforms. He received his MFA in Fiction from The New School and teaches courses in craft and literature at the University of Rhode Island, where he is also a Ph.D student. He lives in South County, Rhode Island, with a large collection of instruments and a small dog.

Joannie Stangeland is the author of several collections, including *The Scene You See* (Ravenna Press). Her poems have also appeared in *The Pedestal Magazine*, *New England Review*, *Birdbrains: A Lyrical Guide to Washington State Birds*, and other journals and anthologies. Joannie holds an MFA from the Rainier Writing Workshop.

Sarah Starr Murphy's writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Black Warrior Review*, *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *The Threepenny Review*, and elsewhere. One of her stories, published in *Epiphany*, was listed as a special mention in the 2025 Pushcart Prize Anthology. She's managing editor for *The Forge Literary Magazine* and eternally at work on a novel. She's also a marathoner with epilepsy.

The Massachusetts Beat Poet Laureate (2025-2027), Joshua Michael Stewart, is the author of four previous collections of poetry: *Break Every String* (Hedgerow Books, 2016), *The Bastard Children of Dharma Bums* (Human Error Publishing, 2020), *Love Something* (Main Street Rag, 2022), and *Welcome Home, Russell Edson* (Soft Shoe Press, 2024). His work has appeared in the *Massachusetts Review*, *Rattle*, *New Flash Fiction Review*, *Mystery Tribune*, *Best Small Fictions 2025*, and in many others. Visit him at <https://joshuamichaelstewartauthor.com>

Leanne Todt is a poet living in County Clare, Ireland.

Canadian farmer Terry Trowbridge's poems have appeared in *CV2*, *The New Quarterly*, *Dalhousie Review*, *Nashwaak Review*, *The Ex-Puritan*, *Studies in Social Justice*, and ~200 more places. He is grateful to the Ontario Arts Council for funding during the polycrisis.

B. A. Van Sise is an author and photographic artist with three monographs: the visual poetry anthology *Children of Grass* with Mary-Louise Parker, *Invited to Life* with Sabrina Orah Mark, and *On the National Language* with DeLanna Studi. He is a two-time winner of the Independent Book Publishers Awards gold medal, a two-time Prix de la Photographie Paris winner, an Anthem Award winner for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, a finalist for the *Rattle* Poetry Prize and *Kenyon* Poetry Prize, and a winner of the *Lascaux* Prize for Nonfiction.

Alicia Viguer-Espert, a three times Pushcart Award nominee and also, one-time Best of The Net nominee, was born and raised in Valencia, Spain. Her work has been published nationally and internationally in journals, print media and anthologies. Winner of the San Gabriel Valley Poetry Festival on 2017, she is the author of three chapbooks. In addition, she's included in "Top 39 LA poets," "Ten Poets to Watch 2018" and "Bards of Southern California: Top 30 Poets," by *Spectrum*.

Diolinda Vaz is a poet and essayist who lives and writes in Massachusetts.

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Tamizh Ponni VP is an ambivert and a stoic art buff who loves to express her skills through literature, visual arts and music. She is an IB educator and sees learning as a life-long process. Her stories were featured in 2 anthology books, *Mia* and *Varna*. Tamizh's articles, poems and paintings have also been published in many digital journals and educational blogs. Tamizh spends most of her free time painting, reading, writing articles, stories and poems, playing piano and watching documentaries/movies.

Thao Vu graduated from Eastern Nazarene College (Quincy, MA), National Taiwan University (Taipei, Taiwan), and is writing her debut novel through the MFA program at Virginia Tech (Blacksburg, VA). Her recent and forthcoming work can be found at *BULL*, *MockingHeart Review*, *Villain Era*, *Zin Daily* and at www.vuqythao.com.