

Thimble Literary Magazine

Volume 9 · Number 2 · Fall 2026

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Our staff consists of Nadia Arioli, Editor-in-Chief and Managing Editor; Agnes Vojta, Associate Poetry Editor; Richard Jordan, Associate Poetry Editor; Melissa McEver Huckabay, Associate Poetry Editor; 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 and Associate Poetry Editor.

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Cover Art: *Accumulation-Lindar Scanning* by Suyue Jin and Hoacin Zou (Joseph)

Back Cover: *Fearful Gossip The Masks We Wear* by Suyue Jin and Jinxin Xu

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

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Brief Guidelines for Submission

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

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

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

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

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

Table of Contents

Editor's Note by Nadia Arioli: 6

Contributors Biographies: 124

Art

Cover Art: *Accumulation-Lindar Scanning* by Suyue Jin and Hoacin Zou (Joseph)

Back Cover: *Fearful Gossip The Masks We Wear* by Suyue Jin and Jinxin Xu

Creation by Haley Jenkins: 12

Moonbeing by Kelly DuMar: 19

Mossed Roots by Kelly DuMar: 24

Patience by Kelly DuMar: 29

Effervesce by Kelly DuMar: 31

Sailing by Kelly DuMar: 43

Poetry by Lois Perch Villemaire: 51

Haleakala Valley-1 by Sonal Goorha: 57

Crimson Expanse by Sonal Goorha: 69

Accumulation-Transform by Suyue Jin and Haocun Zou (Joseph): 74

PP18A #9 Copy 5 by Leah Oates: 77

2263 #1C by Leah Oates: 93

Transitory Space, Cedarvale Ravine Toronto, Ontario #3 2022-2025 by Leah Oates: 103

The Lone Crow by Subhash Roy Choudhury: 107

Midseason by Charlie Swanson: 117

You May Call This Armor Foolish by Margeaux Templeton: 7
Sunflowers Address the Rain by Linda Cooper: 8
Awakening by Maureen Egan Riggi: 9
Cougar Puberty by Hali Sofala-Jones: 10
Light show by Sara Stegen: 12
The Crone Hunts by Beth Gordon: 13
Ambrosia: Why I Almost Never Left the Islands by John Dorroh: 17
In Lieu of a Travel Agent by Emily Patterson: 18
A Daughter's Poem by Yvette A. Schnoeker-Shorb: 20
The Forest of a Million Trees Goes Quiet as We Walk by Amorak Huey: 21
Daddy, daddy, daddy, wake up! wake up! wake up! by Abigail George: 22
On Reading Dean Young by John Newson: 24
Small Enough for Gnomes by Alejandro Escudé: 30
Winter Apples by Pam Crow: 32
i envy the family by Tanya Tuzeo: 33
Hello, Romance by Ariane Campbell: 34
untitled by Justin Hollis: 35
Portrait of the Young Woman as Artist by Margot Wizansky: 36
modeling for god by Mary Oishi: 37
Rehearsal by Joshua Zeitler: 38
A Villanelle's Villanelle by Kerry Trautman and Dustin Brookshire: 40
Late October by Pat Daneman: 41
Geophysical Density Contrast by AnnaLeah Lacoss: 42
color sings across the hillside by Laura Ann Reed: 43
Blood & Water by Yoda Olinyk: 47
Admission by Benedict Hangiriza: 48
Years Together by Elizabeth B. Morse: 50
Questions I Keep Asking by Kristin J. Kelley: 52
Like a Robot by Sameen Shakya: 55
A Walk by Alison Stone: 56
sex on accident!!!! by Jessica Thiru: 58
Our Mother Has Shit Herself by LaDonna Witmer: 60
Lights in Lillies by Holly Lola Peterson: 62
The Elephant Speaks by Matthew Sisson: 63
The Man Who Spoke Bird by Robin Woolman: 64
Dorchester Court by Marilyn Cavicchia: 65
A Recipe Using Quindilla Peppers by Kimberly Ann Priest: 66
Body Count by Megan Bresnahan: 67
How to Greet a Widow by Donna Spruijt-Metz: 68
Empty Nest by Lindsay McLeod: 75
The cry of the cicada / Gives us no sign / That presently it will die
—Matsuo Basho by Mara Gale Fein: 76

Aubergine, Aubergine by Regine Jackson: 81
Watching Strangers in Love, I think of Saint Rose by Madeline Allen: 82
Placeholder by Melissa Shepherd: 84
Interstitium by Jane Donohue: 86
August Plea by Merie Kirby: 87
Practicing by Angelique Zobitz: 88
Singing Sands by Fiona Perry: 89
A Manifestation of Dogs by Betsy Mars: 90
Hummingbird by Beck Reynolds: 91
Fishing the Creek by Robbin Farr: 92
Cape Cod, 1981 by Ian Golub: 96
My Father, Dreaming by Sharon Hashimoto: 98
As a Child I'd Sniff Expo Markers in Dad's Office by Dom Blanco: 99
Message from My Mother, Long Dead, Sent into the Ether by Susan Grimm: 100
The Oleaginous Bible by Elizabeth Lockman: 101
Para-Tender by Emily Tong: 102
Morphine by Benjamin Goodman: 104
The Paper Lady by Camille LeFevre: 105
What could not be kept by Laura Buxbaum: 106
In Remembrance by Micah Dela Cueva: 108
Loose Ends by M.J. Turner: 109
Exegesis in fauna by Brian Duran-fuentes: 110
Make believe by Paul Koniecki: 112
Persephone on Her Favored Underworld Initiates by Anne Champion: 115
Asthma Ghazal by Christine Klocek-Lim: 116
How to Read the News by Mary Lou Buschi: 121
Grace by Tammy Smith: 122

Prose

Snake in the Dog House by Natalie Naugle: 14
Boots by T.K. Howell: 26
I Came for an Existential Crisis and Left with Cinnamon Rolls by Bernadette Benda: 44
Yes, And...? by Nora Esme Wagner: 70
Echoes by Daniel Gordon: 78
An Orange Feeling by Breeze Navarro: 94
Passengers by Diane Hu: 118

Editor's Note

by Nadia Arioli

Dear Readers,

This is the third issue we've ended with a poem explicitly about grace. This was deliberate. Perhaps this is an odd choice for an editor of a magazine based on shelter, not faith. But, on the other hand, perhaps this makes all the sense in the world.

All that Catholic education, and no one could tell me what grace means. I am learning as I go.

The issue is long, with over 90 pieces chosen out of over 800 submissions (!), so I will keep my letter brief to help the page count.

Poet Tammy Smith writes: "like Grace / I am balanced on a blade." We all feel that way too, these days, I'd wager, between the destruction of civil rights, disease, wars, and unlivable wages, and the normalization of violence every day.

May Grace land a triple axel.

Best,
Nadia Arioli

You May Call This Armor Foolish

by Margeaux Templeton

Today, I placed silver
thimbles on each finger.
I licked your whetstone,
finding the finest edge
my tongue has ever known.
I let barnacles seal themselves
to the ship of my body,
shielding the curves of my flesh.
Grabbed knapsack and satchel
stuffed with rusty spoons and razor
blades, donned cobblestones for shoes—

so to face you.

Thus protected,
I made my mouth a spigot,
spoke my worst true words.
You may call this armor foolish,
but I am in your way;
eyes wide as grommets,
hands hard as trowels,
mouth open and open and open.

Sunflowers Address the Rain

by Linda Cooper

We reach toward blue: moonlight, Stellar's Jay,
naked sky. Our voices raised to sing waterfalls

and fleshy berries, but we croak
like frogs grasping leaf bottoms.

You have not come in two hundred days.

We roiled like waves in the moonlight.
We wailed. We wept. We held hands and prayed.

We wrote this poem to you.

Overhead, the sun grows hotter.
Under us, the dirt bakes.

Awakening

by Maureen Egan Riggi

Persephone strikes the match
on a smoldering femur
at her feet, lights a cigarette.
As she exhales
she remembers daylight,
can sometimes smell
the lilacs through the smog
of her husband's kingdom.
Hades is away again,
so she smokes in the open.
He says it's unbecoming
of such a beautiful woman.
Beauty, she scoffs, drops the cigarette.
She longs to rise through the earth,
a snowdrop waking after endless winter.

Cougar Puberty

by Hali Sofala-Jones

"Perimenopause got a rebrand and it's amazing AF."

-@radiant.rewind, Tik Tok user

They said it like a joke,
but my body heard it as a prophecy.
Cougar Puberty: the awkward reawakening.

The skin I thought I'd finished growing into grows restless again—
starts slipping, shedding, sprouting stray bristles like
antennae
for a world gone meaner and more fluorescent.

We are the unmothered mothers, night-sweating in silence,
learning again to pack an emergency pad just in case
the moon has one last trick left.

We wake at 3 a.m. to move the couch, weep, stretch, snack,
and Google symptoms we already know are just *us* now.
We keep fans in every room. We curse cardigans.

We say things like *this season of life* and gag a little.
We become deeply invested in magnesium.
We leave the thermostat at 65 and still sleep with
one leg out.

They call us cougars as if hunger were shameful.
As if wanting after 40 were something to be pitied,
or punished, or sold back to us in pink bottles
marked *Balance*.

But here we are: hormonal, holy, half-feral with desire for something
we don't have a word for. Not youth. Not sex.
Maybe: to be alive, and still ours.

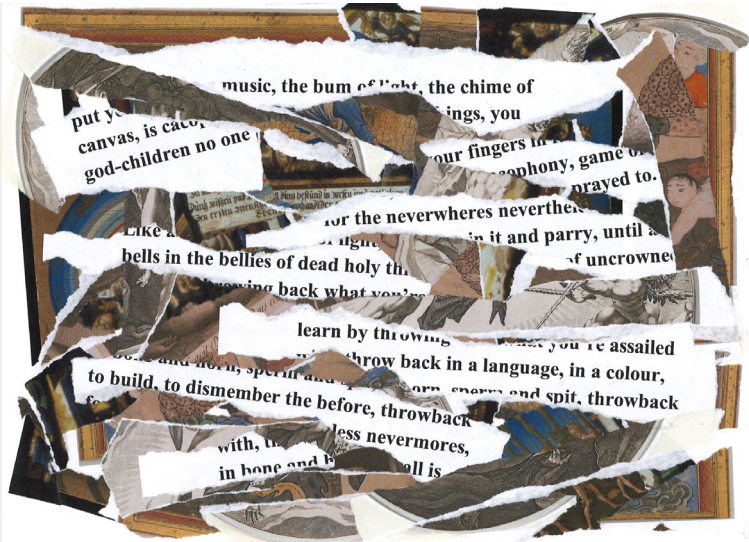
Sisters of the vanishing waistline, of the rogue bleed,
of the silent gynecologist nod that says normal but means
welcome to the club we do not name. We didn't
choose the hush—

but we can choose what to do with it. Let's meet at dusk, burn our
shapewear
and powdered peptides, pass flasks of electrolytes, laugh until
something leaks,
and scream like wild things, a puma pacing behind
every breastbone.

Light show

by Sara Stegen

Pink haze, purple
morning light.
The darkest month—
devoid of colour,
sometimes puts on
a light show.
December light, right.



Creation by Haley Jenkins

The Crone Hunts

by Beth Gordon

I can catch more flies with honey: now the jar is filled with maggots. Their soul-less bodies nothing but a blister of squirm. The hive is not yet buzzing. They are shedding their skin: trying to open their eyes. A susurrus of transubstantiation. A sprouting of legs & wings. I feel the haunting today: the singular decibel invading my inner ear: the powerful absence of an unsolved crime. I'm surprised to see a hummingbird at dusk: September oceans of plum: broken squares of oak & pine: fool's gold singing with the last light of day. The first question is whether the small blue moth on the mirror is my father. This is also the second question. I am in search of the invisible door: the corner of the universe where she is dressing for a school dance. I know that someone woke up under dirt today: someone somewhere stood over a grave. My need flutters like a new human's heartbeat: as hungry as the ocean at night. I know that I should answer your text & tell you that your friend will not die in two days: but I choose truth: I choose howling. Don't tell me where anyone is buried. I might dig.

Snake in the Dog House

by Natalie Naugle

Shading my eyes with my hand I saw, slithering into the old dog house, a green garden snake. It was so terrifyingly fast, so elusive that I thought I imagined it. But that skin, intensely green, was bright against the dull, clay-colored ground and withered, yellow grass. Its long, thin body roped past my sneakered feet, making brushing sounds in the dead grass, gliding, like it knew exactly where it was going, into the darkened corners of the dog house that had been empty for years.

My grandma, Nana used to keep dogs in that dog house, every now and then, when they'd show up on her doorstep in the middle of our West Texas summers, wrapped in a towel and put in a box, like an Amazon package someone had stolen and unceremoniously returned. Why her house, out in the country in Levelland, Texas, more than an hour from the city of Lubbock, had been subject to receiving abandoned dogs, I can't answer. She was a fragile woman in her later years, with short, curly, red hair and translucent, veiny skin. Soft-spoken and easily bruised, she loved my sister and me completely, as we were her only grandchildren. Her closest neighbors were several miles out, down unpaved dirt roads, dropped between cotton and peanut fields, shielded from tractors and irrigation pivots by clusters of pine trees. Nana's house was the same, resting in a similar cluster of pines that would litter the dirt with a mattress of their dried needles.

For all of my childhood summer visits, until Nana got sick and my grandpa got meaner, we were in a drought. The farmers would whisper about it to one another in the church pews like odd prayers, begging for rain, hiding from the heat. From 2010 to 2015, Levelland experienced the driest weather since the 50s. Really, though, they're always in a drought, because as soon as one is flooded out, another begins, parching the town and clouding it in dust. During grueling seven-

hour car rides with my little sister and my Dad, I always knew we were close to Nana's house by the way the car would fill up with the smells of oil, cow shit, and dust. Bluebonnets on the side of the road turned into tumbleweeds, and a sweetness layered with diesel and ammonia, minerals and sweat, crept into our noses. There's an egg smell too, did you know, that comes from all three? It reminds me of our breakfasts out in that country house, eating scrambled eggs with ketchup, the way my Dad ate them back home in Austin, foul-odored eggiess cut by cloying acidity. Still, they were too dry.

Everything was dry. It was always dry.

The dog house, too, was dry, blue paint cracked and peeling off the roof like dead skin, wooden boards caked with red dust, splitting around rusted nails. Pine needles had been swept into it by the wind, making homes for spiders and deer mice, but no one had ever bothered to clean it out. When I was little, my sister and I would visit for a few weeks during those dry summers, spending most of our time outside in the dry heat, riding horses, walking in cotton fields, playing pretend among the pine trees over the doghouse. I always wanted to crawl inside that decomposing shack, but I feared, like a lot of things, the dark corners, so I never did.

I squinted at the opening of the dog house and wondered whether to bend down and peek my head into those needle-packed corners. Wanting the snake to make the first move to be sure it was real, I became suddenly aware of the tall grass I was standing in, chest tightening in terror for a second, or even a third snake. Did snakes travel in packs? Would this snake bite me? Would they believe me when it did? I'd heard farmers' tales of rattlesnakes from my Grandpa, an intimidating, beer-bellied Texan who my sister and I called Pawpy. He told us to stay away and run if it started rattling. But this snake didn't look like a rattler. It was menacingly fast, thin, and so green, completely unlike the heavy-bodied rattlesnakes of West Texas. Would they believe how green it was?

Over dinner that day, while we chewed on country-fried chicken and boxed mashed potatoes, I told Nana and Pawpy of the snake. Pawpy always came back to the house covered in dirt, caked on by sweat, slamming the screen door even in the absence of wind. Dust would

stick in the folds of his skin, in the creases between his angry eyebrows. He'd never wash up before dinner, just plunked himself down at the little kitchen table, wrenched the lid off a lemon-lime Gatorade, and started our prayer.

"Don't you start lying now," Pawpy had said after I'd finished relay-ing the story, fearing all the while its green body would slither into the house while we ate, fearing it would bite me, taunting me with its invisibility.

"It's a sin to lie." He'd said.

How little I'd cared about sinning then.

If ever that snake were to shed its skin, it would be Pawpy's own underneath and beneath it, dust. Did no one else see the snake, slithering in the doghouse, through the front door? It was under my bed. It was in my closet. It was sitting right across the kitchen table, smelling like sweat and fear and boxed mashed potatoes. It was the thing telling me I was a liar, telling me I was a sinner at the kitchen table. It was the thing chanting to Nana that she was stupid and didn't she know that? It was the thing yelling at me in the truck for not believing in God. It was the thing screeching at me that I was going to hell. It was right there, and no one else believed in it but me.

It was the snake in the dog house that only I could see.

Ambrosia: Why I Almost Never Left the Islands

by John Dorroh

Oh, Nectarine!

You with your soft skin, the perfume-out-of-the-bottle gone wild,
spewing sweet fizz all over my arms
it drips like neutered honey, viscous
and deliriously free for the taking.

My 27 Jennifers, my discount coupon for Sweet Freedom
while summer squeezes You like some wild lover who can't wait
to get You home.

Oh, Papaya!

with Caribbean rubbed all over your tough exterior, your varied pair-
ings,

the possibilities limitless, your oils in my bath water,
how the exotic name rolls over my lips, across my tongue
making me wet with tremor, pureed in cold smoothies,
sold from stainless steel beachfront carts, frozen on a wooden stick.

I mount you in my kitchen next to lemons and limes, your Bourgeois
cousins,

as common as a Jamaican dollar bill, as colorful
as the plumage on the undercarriage of an island parrot.

Oh, Coconut!

with your hard stringy shell, whose stands are woven into sandals,
kissing the hot noon sands on the way to turquoise waters,
the pina coladas, the luxurious cakes, snapper encrusted filets
that crunch once bitten on a plate of rice, your sweet milk
basting each fluffy grain, the delicate soaps and candles
they make with your guts.

In Lieu of a Travel Agent

by Emily Patterson

At night from the tired grey couch,
or in the white chairs out back
when it was warm and clear,

we talked of other places: Scotland,
the Badlands, maybe Charleston.
For weeks we calculated mileage

and lodging costs, how many days
of care for the dogs, how many hours
in the car our five-year-old could tolerate.

Most evenings, we don't see many
stars from our city backyard,
but we counted those too:

sometimes reaching the teens
in our slice of navy between
houses and power lines.

As spring settled into itself,
still our plans meandered, doubled back
like the way we walked the river:

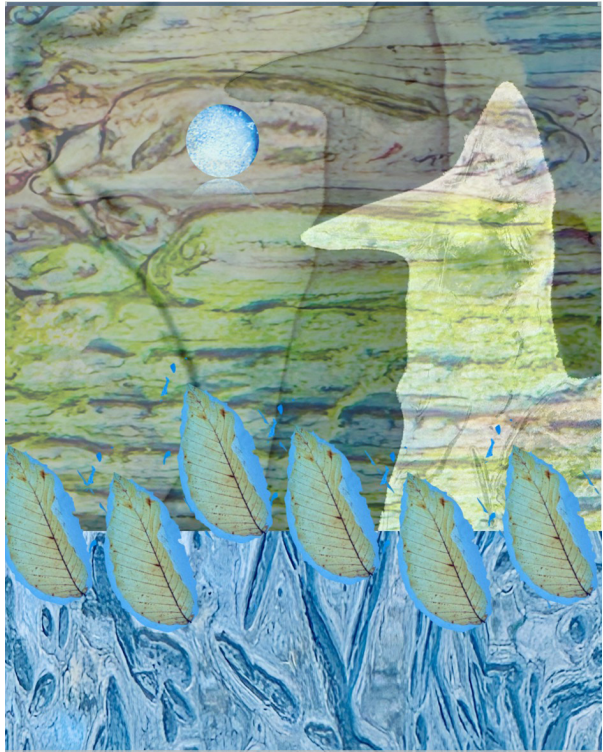
marsh marigolds awaking the forest
floor, Virginia bluebells lounging
beneath generations of buckeyes.

Our daughter hopping from rock to rock
across the shallows. Shards of shale
that snapped under our steps

as we followed the narrow paths,
as other people's off-leash dogs
sped along the bank,

worshipping a thousand scents
I'll never name or trace. I breathed
them in anyway. I thought,

What extravagance. Not to need
an escape from this life to feel free.



Moonbeing by Kelly DuMar

A Daughter's Poem

by Yvette A. Schnoeker-Shorb

Before he died, my father had a surprising request, insisting I must put the feet back in poetry—so it could run again. Stunned, I was certain he had to be jesting, of course, such a senseless plea coming from being on metered out morphine via an IV drip. I didn't trust anything he deemed as so necessary, especially when it concerned some weird tendency to confuse anatomy with poesy, until my mother mentioned he had written poems, love poems, sonnets, to be precise, when he first was smitten with her but never after. My dad, a man whose speech was concise, never expressed interest in any fine art, literally advanced the notion that poetry enhanced nothing but waste, was glad when I landed a "real" profession, demanded I fill my life with things that mattered. Still, I chased the muses in silence, quiet defiance—no rhyme, no meter, no feet, only free verse in disguise, and a daughter pushing it as prose.

The Forest of a Million Trees Goes Quiet as We Walk

by Amorak Huey

Our presence here silences
the sounds we came to hear.
Chases the animals
we set out to join
in our shared hunger.
What we thought the moon
is not the moon.
Our first night together;
already the end of us
written in spaces we don't know
how to fill: emptiness
where birdsong should be.

Daddy, daddy, daddy, wake up! wake up! wake up!

by Abigail George

in your bones. haiku in your bones
bipolar, bipolar, bipolar
bipolar in my haiku series
bipolar knit together in the nucleic acid like braille
of my mother's womb
they didn't know they were in
for a wild ride with me

in my bones, in my glass of milk
bipolar, bipolar, bipolar was it genetics
its in my polony/bolony sandwich
its the reason why i've experienced poverty

bipolar vibration, so pure
or the environment/genetics
tell me because you've read many books
you have textbook knowledge
of the mood disorder and psychosis
bipolar gull, made of salt&light

the nourishment of this seed of day&figurations,
combustion&material
bipolar what are you made of
look at what you have given me

beware! bipolar in the microwave
bipolar summertime, the sun is high
in a minute it will be hypomanic

daddy, daddy, daddy, daddy
I am half of you, half of ma
cancer cells, bad cells, poison
present in your body. At night, I worry.
at night, I can't sleep
white blood cells, red blood cells
how to destroy the cancer cells??
the doctor advised drinking green tea
the bladder cancer book says to eat your way
to health and recovery
cancer cells. there's an abnormality

I open a book and see a caged bird
It stares back at me, unmoving, unblinking
It has your eyes. Well, your eyes look like this these days
Obsidian. They have like an obsidian glare to them
I opened a book, the book that you wrote, daddy.
It's on the forced removals and the promulgation of the Group Areas
Act.
I open the book and see me, my ancestors rejoicing.
I open the book, daddy, and see you too. Your heart.

On Reading Dean Young

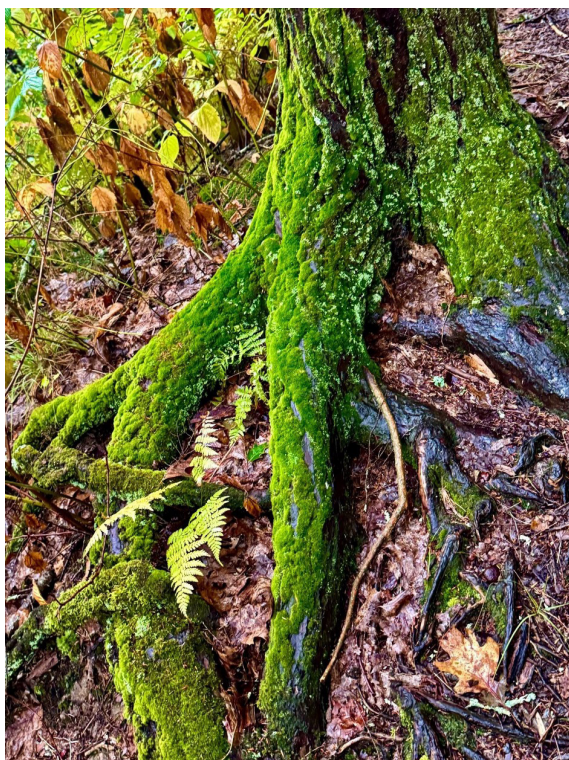
by John Newson

A paper cut through the print of my thumb the edge
of a Dean Young chapbook red the smell
of the air above a freshly ploughed furrow
after a heavy rain the tube train stops at Elephant
and Castle metal shrieking as the brakes squeeze
the taste of blood on my tongue licking the ridges.
From the platform a young man looks up
through black marker graffiti hair the undersides of branches,
and I try to work out if there are two of me
reflected in the double-glazed panel as we enter
another void. I envy your fullness,
despise the pull of the moon on my bones, my flesh
as it edges away from itself the silver-
green sheen of aged beef slapping
onto the butcher's block.

In the cemetery three days later I read him
a poem *The Comforts of No One*
Listening and a scent rises from the page,
old cloves in a tin box the vermilion of my blood
of his blood staining the long edge of the paper,
letters collecting like jackdaws over a newly sown field.
I run my cut thumb across the valleys of his name
and feel every angle a magpie's breath small eddies
as warm skin approaches cold granite and I tell him
about the faint pink line the infant quickly growing
in your womb your blood my blood his blood and yet—

From the foot of a marble angel a crow chatters to itself
about the weight of guilt stone feathers sharpens
its beak on a fold in the robe. On a radio Louis Armstrong
whispers of a wonderful world his voice blood orange
on my teeth corten steel and pith pink clouds
gathering at sunset conkers prised from the fruit
of my chest hollowing with the reverberation
of my lips pressed against her fontanelle counting.

She is you in every way that I wish I was not him lying
deep in the frozen earth preoccupied by the ice
expanding where marrow has long melted. I am
the corona of his eclipse the watermark
beneath the cut glass tumbler the bruise
edging beyond the tortoiseshell frame.



Mossed Roots by Kelly DuMar

Boots

by T.K. Howell

You jumped into the lake and while you were horsing around I broke into your truck and stole your crocodile skin cowboy boots. Out of sight, I lay on your back seat and imagined myself just another of those girls I'd watched you pumping away at on late summer evenings, doors open, legs flailing, pale flesh in the dash-light.

So undignified.

You always bring them down to the lake. You'll have to change someday. You'll have to grow up and see where you've gone wrong.

I coveted the boots from the moment I saw you wearing them, striding up and down Echo Square, peacocking outside Banana Republic for the teen Mall Rats. You're too old for them now and they laughed about you behind their hands. But it was enough for me. I was undone, broken under your feet again. Just like High School. At least this time I could have the boots, even if I'd never have the legs, the thighs, that backside and everything else.

I roll onto my front, the boots clasped to my chest and breathe in deeply. The upholstery isn't as musty as I expected. No stains, no worn patches. A pair of balled-up socks in the footwell. I know you get it detailed regular. It's not a working truck. I wonder when you last did a day's work.

And this isn't the weather for cowboy boots. The sweat on your ankles, sucking at your toes, clinging, clutching as you pulled them off, throwing them onto the back seat carelessly, whooping all the way down to the lake to grapple with girls eager to be grappled by something tall

and handsome.

But cracked, hardened reptilian plates are nothing like your skin. Their glisten and shine in the overbearing sun is nothing like your pastel-pink cheeks. They're much more my style: lurking just beneath the surface, for all appearances as harmless as driftwood, still and silent. So still you never noticed me in class, never noticed me in the lunch hall, never noticed me at the back of the party, watching you make out with the Prom Queen. Never noticed me on the ridge above the lake at gone midnight, watching your truck rock and listening to you grunt and her groan.

With no line of sight on you from the backseat, I retreat to my spot under the treeline with the boots in my clutches. My fingers for your toes, I push my hands deep into the damp warmth of them. You'll have to drive home in your socks and I think that might be illegal.

Hey, wouldn't it be a hoot if I came down from my lookout and offered you my trainers? You'd never know.

But that would mean talking. We don't talk. We spoke once—just the once—back in High School. You called me a freak in front of your girl, but it was all front. Talking to you again would ruin this, though. It feels like you knowing I was here would be about the worst thing in the world.

I try to slide my feet in, but the boots are too small. Who would have thought you'd have such dainty feet? I can't force my foot through the ankle of the boot, it gets stuck and it takes me five minutes to yank the thing off again, on my back, legs in the air, grunting and groaning.

I content myself with holding them against me, feeling the cooling hardness of dead reptile against my skin. Laying on my back, I stand them up on my stomach, the muddied heels leaving prints on my chest. I imagine you in them, slowly crushing the life out of me, ribs cracking like breadsticks under your weight as you look down into my eyes and smile.

Isn't this what you wanted?

Down by the lake, you splash onto the jetty, beaching like a mer-

an, hauling yourself up, back muscles tensing, arms locking. Some strawberry blonde dream makes to push you back in, but you grab at her foot and haul her towards you. She pushes you away, laughing and jumps back in as you slap at her thighs.

It does nothing for me, all this wet flesh and skin blushing under the sun. It's a song to which I don't know the words. Even the cling of your boxers and the way it shows off every inch of your junk flicks no switches. The lights stay dulled.

Still, when you fix on the blonde as a likely target, I want her dead. I visualise her slipping from the jetty and cracking her skull, reddening her perfect blonde hair as she falls below, no one fishing her out until she surfaces days later, blue and bloated, lips stripped away by catfish, wide eyes pried out by crabs. Touch her then, why don't you? Touch her then, if flesh is all you want.

You lead her back to where you're parked but you flinch and she instinctively steps away.

"Who's been in my damn truck?"

The blonde shrugs, not understanding, but you start yelling.

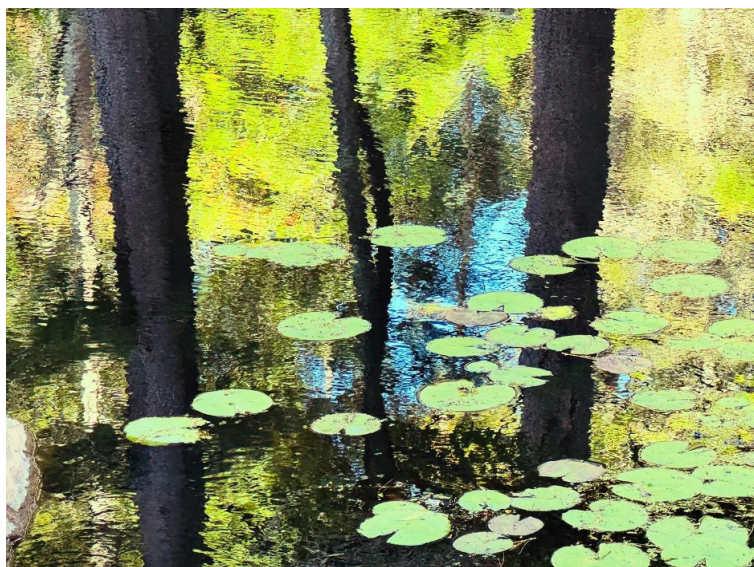
People are looking at you and a couple of guys walk over to ask what the trouble is. Jarheads, with short-cropped hair. The blonde looks like she wants out, doesn't want anything to do with your clean upholstery, the clinging wetness of your boxers, or your dainty little feet.

The Jarheads step in, and then... oh bless your heart, but you forgot yourself.

You start shoving and I guess they're just trying to help but maybe they're also looking for an excuse to start some shit and you shove and you're still just a kid (we're both still just kids) and these guys are big, beer-drinking, game-watching, rifle-shooting guys.

They don't beat on you much. Just knock you down, and, honestly, it's a thrill to see you unmanned, bloodied. I like you helpless, it should remind you how helpless you really are in all this.

On the ridge, I've laid still too long, tense and teetering. The sweat is prickling my thighs, the grass rubbing red. But I have to wait for you to be done with the lake, to drive home alone, barefoot, bruised. Tonight I will sneak down to the shore, scoop bloodstained sand into your boots and hold them close as you wonder about the lingering scent of me on your backseat.



Patience by Kelly DuMar

Small Enough for Gnomes

by Alejandro Escudé

Collapse is made of time-stitching and nostalgia.
The way the curtains rise with the breeze, in every goddamn century,
In every corner of the sea.

It starts with the Vincent Thomas Bridge. You can't cross that thing
Without feeling some kind of deep-seated regret. And it always
Makes you turn back around. Nobody crosses that bridge on purpose.

First, you put your laptop down and you open the classroom windows.
Then, you begin by looking at your lesson plan book, blank.
You brought your loneliness to work again, you asshole.
It's that chapter in the Outsiders when the boys burn the church down.
The church is the Pacific Palisades where I ran x-country as a kid
For no reason I can recall. I did things back then just to do them.

My unhappy home was my sanctuary.
When father returned in his pickup, he would race into our driveway
And from my room, I'd hear him slam his door closed.
He'd talk with my mother.
Mother would defend me as best she could.
He would open my door and say something to shame me,
Then I'd go back to my toys.

Sometime in the early 90's, Los Angeles turned into a warzone.
I watched a truck driver get pulled out of his semi.
Someone threw a can at his head, and with both hands he held his
bloody head.
There were grainy images of a black man being beaten.

I don't know why, but I loved cardboard and pieces of wood.
I'd make machine guns out of the wood.
Color them with markers, add walkie talkies, add scopes that were
toilet roll tubes.
One remembers—the unbreathing—of the hells.

At age fifty-one, I think of hell as not being able to think straight,
Or having a continued lack of foresight.
Maybe that's all it is, hell. Just a room on the edge of a million other
rooms,
And what one needs most is further inside the octagonal building,
An atrium with a view of the open sky, filled with birds and butterflies,
And a little waterway, and a bridge there, small enough for gnomes
To cross it, and to make it to the other side.



Effervesce by Kelly Dumar

Winter Apples

by Pam Crow

for Gaby

Night after night you stay awake
caring for your dying sister—
dipping washcloths into cool
basins of water, a drop or two
of Ativan in her Diet Coke.
I lean into your melody, you ask me
to hold down the harmony.
This is something I can do.

I always thought of death as light
dimming, going out, but your sister
glows, a gentle sun. Her body is
a lantern, lighting a path only
she can see. Our rabbi says
death came to Moses “like a kiss,”
that entering the next world will be
“a silken thread drawn through milk.”

Here. I picked the last apples
growing on the tree outside this window.
Winter apples are the sweetest.
Take this slice into your mouth.

i envy the family

by Tanya Tuzeo

the family is all there
intact the way a clam shell,
when found whole,
surprises one who often sifts
broken ones of childhood beaches.

the grandson asks if grandma is tired,
she swans upwards at his attention
and mom orders another drink,
a pink one this time. daughter,
safe in the mantle, is asked by dad
have you had enough?

i'm a terrible thing—sluiced off,
loitering near a family lunch,
my tongue slathering the rim
of this perfect, found artifact. then
the muscle clenches, returning the family
to its temporary fortress.
closing out my hunger—
the pearl of which is an awful gift.

Hello, Romance

by Ariane Campbell

Glittery pink force I've never met
who supposedly fires arrows
that lodge through the heart and dull
the mind with excitable hormones.
Who tiptoes into dating apps,
ogling at algorithms and asks,
"This is what they replaced me with?"
Who ventures for a partner,
someone to honor all forms of affection,
or just someone to share
a bowl of popcorn too big for one person.
Who values communication and tears
and does not disappear after one silly
argument about who misplaced the keys.
Who gives strength and courage
beyond what ought to be human
and supplies two people with fire
to melt past grievances and forge
an entire world of possibilities.
Hello, Romance. Nice to meet you.
Please change my life.

untitled

by Justin Hollis

As I boy I loved to watch the squirrels flatten their tiny bodies to squeeze underneath our backyard's wooden-slat fence. I wished to be able to make myself small like that, to compress my body to fit into even the tiniest of spaces, though the other boys and girls where playing at police officer and doctor, roles larger than their still growing bodies could inhabit. Now that I'm older, and larger, I still retain my adolescent desire to become small, but only in the ways that matter. Sure, it's nice to be tall enough to see over the pharmacy counter when I pick up the pills I need for living. But wouldn't it be wonderful to shrink my stomach to fit into the pants I bought last October, before my paunch had become so prominent. I'm old enough to know that being small is not all it's cracked up to be, that in time my aging body will shrivel and hunch so I can no longer reach the cans of baked beans stowed on the top shelf of the pantry. Maybe then I *will* fit into those pants, though they'll have long gone out of style. I'll probably have donated them, or packed them away in a cardboard box forgotten at the back of the closet. Then one day I'll remember. Those pants! And because it's raining outside, and I've nothing better to do, TV's a bore and I've read all the books on my bookshelf, I'll go in search of them. I'll run the boxcutter across the brittle packing tape, and when I lift back the folds, I'll find the box filled with acorns. Not a lion's share, not a king's treasure hoard, but enough I'll live another winter, growing smaller and smaller until, pop, I vanish.

Portrait of the Young Woman as Artist

by Margot Wizansky

I did a portrait of my first love—a German, with strong Aryan thighs, painted his name in Spanish down the side. He took his portrait, left me, and I went out into the grasping perverted world, drank it up, posed for an artist I'd just met. Like Carravaggio's boys with their long lashes, swollen lips, I wanted to stand in for piety, wanted a suggestion of halo, but he painted me monstrous, green-breasted. A jealous sailor slashed the canvas. On a schooner's top deck, an astronomer showed me the true Southern Cross and the imposter stars, tried to make science of it. I argued for nature, what it does without us. How careless I was, like a tree that fruits and fruits and needs no cultivation. After serial catastrophes, I met someone stalwart as bamboo you never root out, a man careful with joy, like a sun-hat with a chin strap. I made rules for him: Don't look at me. Turn out the light. Don't hold me so tight—your legs are like tongs, and I bought golden-haunched pears for him, left them on the kitchen sill to ripen, leaning into each other steadfast under their skins while softness makes its way to the core.

modeling for god

by Mary Oishi

small black bug zoomed into my dining room
I recoiled, my first impulse to stomp him—
as if he heard my thoughts, he froze so still
there he stayed, bracing for my sole of doom

as I looked down, I thought of my young friend
who messaged me to come pick up her books
she said the ER gave her shocking news:
it was aggressive, too late stage, too late

gently, I slid a paper under him
it was just a few steps to the back door
had to coax him, unsure, off the paper
felt so good to watch him seize his pardon

hoping that a god I don't believe in
looks down at my friend and sees her, frozen
gently slides her onto second chances
—surely with a heart at least as kind

Rehearsal

by Joshua Zeitler

—for Joanne

I'm acting in a play
about a workaholic writer
who visits a dying man every Tuesday.

I'm tying a double Windsor
without a mirror. Feeling the shape of it.
As I'm feeling the shape of it, repeating

the end of one sentence
with the beginning of the next
so that, when the time comes,

the words will flow—
thoughtless, seamless.
I threw it away the past;

I threw it away the past;
I threw it away the past
was the past, forget it. I'm remembering

your thumbnail scraping
the back of my hand,
feeling the shape of it

under the white sheet.
You're repeating yourself
more and more. Struggling

to see if the flowers need replacing.
 You're waiting for me to visit.
 I promised, but I'm staying home.

I'm sick. I wore a mask
 at work all day. I'm acting
 in a play. I'm tired

of slipping in and out of time.
 If another word leaves me
 I'll be alone.

I'm pulling the knot to my neck,
 imagining all the flowers
 going dark. *All of my being*, you said,

is wrapped up in all of your being.
 I'm repeating it because I'm afraid
 of the blinding light, that I'll open

my mouth and nothing will come out.

A Villanelle's Villanelle

by Kerry Trautman and Dustin Brookshire

A contoured villanelle using "For Her Villain" by Grace Bauer

Unused lines. Failed drafts. Writing can be hell—
like a heartbeat shivered to a stop in winter cold—
until I see the sweet repetition in a successful villanelle.

Tidy tercets twist over and under each other, and all is well,
building to the end with a quatrain finishing the mold.
Repeated lines. Rhythmic drafts. Writing my way out of hell.

Obsession. Love. Lust. Heartbreak—so much to tell,
and none of it feels real until my pen deems it told.
I crave the sweet catharsis of a successful villanelle.

We find ways to bail ourselves out of our holding cell.
Freedom is a finished draft that I can hold
up to sunlight. Out toward birdsong. Beyond the hell

of my own insecurity and diving into the deep well
of failed lines, awkward readings, and books unsold.
I'm centered after seeing the repetition in a villanelle.

Soothing duplication like a church's evening knell.
A sonnet—ugh!—a 14-line poem leaves me cold.
A show-off sestina can nag and nag itself straight to hell
I love the sweet repetition in a damn good villanelle.

Late October

by Pat Daneman

Not yet midnight and an owl calls
from the woods. Night is a room
that grows larger every hour.

Windows become doors
and walls dissolve into dawn.
Somewhere along the way

every flower dies. Rain stops
and starts. I walk outside
and let my shoulders darken,

my hair fill up with mist.
Late October is late life,
just enough desire.

Geophysical Density Contrast

by AnnaLeah Lacoss

or, approximately: $g_{\text{sphere}} = G4\pi R^3 P / 3r^2$

Who's to say, really, where the underground deposit
is located, if not for the geophysicists
with their equations, their measuring tools,
geophysicist from the Greek, *geo* meaning the earth,

our mother, health, life, land, and *physic*
meaning the way things are, physically,
above the ground and below, blind bodies,
pulling for the surface, begging for comfort, to be quantified,

to be pushed through the equation and out the other side,
like climbing through a cave, a *lemon squeezer*
they called it in New Hampshire, and when you were through,
you knew that though you might be impure in other ways,

unshowered and telling the occasional lie, at least you were skinny,
too small for the equation to work on you, for, though the numbers and letters
seem impressive, the equation's imperfect—it's impossible to isolate regional
from residual gradual anomalies, to poke the great lumps in the dark,

pin them like still-wriggling butterflies.

color sings across the hillside

by Laura Ann Reed

color sings across the hillside. retrofitted to the narrow cleft, a shadow that will last. my pocket is filled with striated stones. the river didn't report the theft. the wind exhorts the clouds to drag the moon over the juniper. we each come alone to these astonishments: the common grackle, conversation, the heart's peregrinations, carrying alone what is amiss. it can only be carried.



Sailing by Kelly Dumar

I Came for an Existential Crisis and Left with Cinnamon Rolls

by Bernadette Benda

Three banners flanked the front of the building. They snapped in the breeze with the amicable attitude of an embassy or neutral zone, electric blue and rubber-duck yellow walls signifying peace. The parking lot was big enough that there were advertisement signs over the cart returns, as if a discount on dull white bedsheets could be enough to sway a reluctant shopper's freewill. I had finally reached this near mythical destination after years and years of pointing it out on the highway and shouting its name like cows spotted on a road trip.

IKEA.

It's like Time Square. Everyone must go, at least once, just to *experience* it. There are Tik-Tok skits on it and entire households filled with IKEA pieces like the do-it-yourself furniture is the secret sauce to a happy home.

We headed inside, a pep in our step like we were children headed to see our favorite fossils at the museum. Despite the massive, labyrinth type structure, it was easy to follow with white arrows on the floor. If you stay on the path like Gandalf said, you'll get through just fine.

I shop for home decor as a pastime, whether it's thrift, vintage, or over-stuffed shelves at T. J. Maxx. I like strolling through aisles of pillows like I'm smelling the flowers, stroking each one to see if it has the right, satisfying texture I'm searching for. I like digging through rows and rows of picture frames like I'm searching through old archives, looking for an elusive round frame or a vintage owl print.

IKEA was supposed to be a maze that sent me into an existential crisis, the ultimate home decor shopping spot. I was supposed to emerge a different person having traversed through Wonderland. There's no place like it on earth.

Instead I left with only a box of cinnamon rolls to eat back at the hotel room. I received no revelation from the endless displays of dishware, duvets, or desks. Too many options. Too many stacks. Too much stuff. Always too much stuff.

I like stuff. Like books or little mushrooms to put above the door and tiny cats to put on my windowsill. But there's stuff and then there's stuff. There's stuff in cupboards and then there are cupboards that are stuffed.

When I clean out my closet I sometimes wonder what's the point if I throw away the unneeded clothes in the trash. The clothes still exist. They just don't exist in my closet anymore. I hesitate each time I throw away recyclable and unrecyclable food containers. Somehow it feels awful to feed myself from the earth and then give the earth trash back in exchange.

So I compost, veggies scraps to feed the bugs and pumpkins to feed the deer. So I buy everything I can secondhand and use the toothpaste till I've squeezed and scraped out every last bit of minty blue.

In the IKEA bedrooms I stood staring at *stuff*. Generic clothes on hangers I didn't need in a free standing closet I didn't need either. I stood in IKEA living rooms picking up cute vases that I knew I'd find one day at Goodwill. I stood in the IKEA kitchens with salt and pepper shakers I could buy secondhand and enough plates to not wash dishes for a month.

"We don't need anything," my mother said. At some point you reach maximum capacity in the kitchen and living room and bedroom. At some point you realize no gadget will actually make your life easier, it's just more stuff to clean.

I almost bought a plush animal, if only because I felt like I would be rescuing it from its sterile prison, as it looked at me with pleading,

plastic eyes. Like the plush animal was a victim of excess and commercialism. It didn't ask to be created and left in a white wire bin.

I saw a cute couch I liked, one I liked better than the one I have. But why would I buy a new one and give the earth a couch that it doesn't want either?

We came down that last colossal aisle where the furniture is stacked all the way to the ceiling in boxes held by giant wire shelves. It was all just stuff, stuff no different from all the other stores and all the other shelves, more stuff than anyone needs.

I left unfulfilled, a little blank like the concrete gray floor and the mostly empty checkout counters. The stuff didn't have anything to give me. Maybe that's why I bought the cinnamon rolls at the end of it all.

I didn't keep track of how many cinnamon rolls I ate that night. They were sticky and sweet and tasted ever so slightly wrong, like everything ever trapped too long in a plastic box. My mom and I had that existentialist crisis in the hotel room at midnight, but it wasn't about stuff.

Blood & Water

by Yoda Olinyk

The day after my abortion, I go to church for the first time in a decade. As a preacher spits a list of evils, I wait for him to name mine. It will be months before I can name you an abortion. Until then: *I was pregnant, and now I'm not*. I will let people name you a miscarriage, even though I named you the child I never wanted. I swallow the body and blood of Christ as the body and blood

of you stain my Sunday best. I kneel, ready for the preacher to name me a monster. Ripe with penance, I burst from the church—name myself a sinner. My hollow summons me to the sea—more certainty hatching with each step, that I will never be named a mother. My crowning achievement will never be you. Your baby blues, sun-heavy from a day at this beach, will never meet mine. I will never know the taste

of your knuckles, spotted in pistachio icecream after a wave bumps your cone to the sand. Will never read you Mary Oliver as a September sun pushes through dusk. The cluster of cells that was swimming inside me yesterday, gone. The ache of never wanting you ebbs, while the sting of knowing you for forty-two days capsizes me. Saltwater stretchmarks

my face as the bloodthirsty water breaks at my feet. I renounce my motherhood and plunge into a sapphire swell. The last of you blooms into an ocean. My pious hands hold you for the first time, for the last time and I repeat your name to the sagging moon. Name you a loss. Name you my daughter. Name you holy. Name myself forgiven.

Admission

by Benedict Hangiriza

The aquarium charges twelve dollars
to watch the jellyfish drift
in their blue cylinders, lit
from below, the way a glass
of milk looks holy on a dark counter—
and I pay it, my broad thumb
smudging the receipt, already
thinking of the gift shop's
plush translucent things
I'll buy for no one.

My niece once said beautiful
about a bruise on her shin, the purple
spreading like a continent
nobody named yet,
and I thought: yes, that's it,
that's the whole problem,
how we were taught to call
damage *gorgeous* when it holds
still long enough.

The docent explains
Chrysaora fuscescens has no brain,
no heart, is mostly water
and the urge to drift—
colonially simple, she says,
meaning no central self,
meaning every tendril
acts alone and together
and the sting is just
a body doing what it knows.

My niece is eleven now.
She has learned, already,
that certain rooms
will scan her at the door
before the art does.

Someone has mounted the largest specimen
behind glass the size of a church window,
its bell pale as the inside of a wrist,
and the tourists press toward it,
phones out, mouths open,
we are all so hungry
to be near something
that does not need us,
that opens and closes
by water alone,
that can fill a space
completely
without asking
whose space it was.

Years Together

by Elizabeth B. Morse

A white moon-stain marks the morning sky.
Yellow topaz light streams through the trees.

You never would have come with me
although you always brought coffee.

Back then, I held your fingers as we walked to your car,
you telling me about distant streets and mosques.

These are the fingers that cut, that healed,
after you told patients with gunshot wounds to hope.

You were astonished when I told you we would have
to live separately. Too many trips to Atlantic City.

You did the pro-bono work I asked you not to do
and the pandemic killed you. You were kinder than me,

more self-sacrificing. You gambled with everything:
light and dark, stars and moons. In love with excitement,

you were unfaithful to me. When you were young,
the streets of Istanbul enticed you to wander.

A trauma surgeon, you secured a residency in the States.
Had to leave, they said, because you partied

with the wrong party. As a medical student,
you spent way too much time at the Soviet embassy.

I held your fingers as we walked to your car.
For so many years, I've loved you.

Now I think of you here, on the path by the river:
ten years together and ten years apart.



Poetry by Lois Perch Villemaire

Questions I Keep Asking

by Kristin J. Kelley

*I want to know
how you contain your grief
or display it.*

Rainwater collected in Mason jars,
overflowing in the latest storm,
spilling onto flagstones and moss,
washing away
the ghost of a beech leaf
fallen in November.

A black umbrella
too large to open indoors.

Not all ghosts announce themselves.
Some just leave objects behind.

When was the last time
you found a feather?

A woman I worked with lost her daughter.
Now, heart-shaped stones
crowd all the windowsills in her house.

*If grief is the sadness they left us,
then haunting is the part of them
that stays.*

These simple legacies:
My friend—
she always touched the side of the plane for luck
before boarding.
She covered her teacup with the saucer—
“This helps with the brewing.”

My grandmother taught me how to move
through the world
without once revealing
that as a child
she picked up the phone
when the sanatorium called
to say her 13-year-old sister—
a sister she never knew existed—
had died of an epileptic seizure.
She was the one
who had to carry that news
about the daughter they had hidden.

*Why hasn't my dog haunted me
or even appeared in a dream?*

My hairstylist believes
it's because her death was unconflicted—
proof of the life we made—
loved more than I've loved most people.

We took turns sitting with my mother-in-law
while she was in hospice at home.
During my shift, she was silent for hours.
Then, suddenly, she shouted, “Snoopy!”—
a dog they'd had decades earlier
but I'd never heard his name before.

So now I think the Rainbow Bridge thing
might be real.
Or maybe we bury grief
so deep in the body
it stops asking to be seen.

I will haunt you:
I won't be a cardinal feather
landing at your feet—
have you ever even seen one?—
or a hummingbird—
but you will damn well know it's me.

Before I die,
I want to be worthy of haunting.

Like a Robot

by Sameen Shakya

I “sound like a robot” when I speak my native tongue,
my friends said this to me yesterday and laughed.
I, thinking nothing of it, laughed along—
the siren song of our joy causing nearby eyes to cast
their sights on us, and soon the whole restaurant
did the same, some smiling, while others were morose,
and towards the latter my heart left my body and sat.
I watched it leave. I wasn’t confused. I know
you think I shouldn’t be laughing. In fact, I should
be offended, right? Say something back, or disagree? But
the fact of the matter is they’re correct, you know.
My tongue feels fizzled when speaking Nepali,
or like an arm, all static, when slept on.
I can still move it, but feel it? I think not.

And English feels like a warm stranger picked up
at a bar or a club, when I was feeling most alone,
Who now stays at my place. But it isn’t love.
We use each other. I need voice, it needs songs.
But it isn’t love. And I know you know this. So
come back into my chest. And shut the fuck up.

A Walk

by Alison Stone

(after Hugo Williams)

Do we have free will, do you think? I thought we didn't
when I visited your studio
and saw your things arranged so primly,
stacked on shelves or tucked away under the bed.
Someone had draped a dress
over the shower rod
and written *Why? Why Not?* in lipstick
on the sleeves.
We left the flowers trying to climb
out the window and went
for a walk to the lake.

Piles of unkeepable promises
beckoned to us on the elm-lined path.
Alibis hid themselves under leaves.
Of course I was home alone last Friday.
Why did you wait so long to call?
Shadows hovered on the brink of disappearing
like a bashful lover masked by sheets.

I remembered a text I read once
which taught what to do each time
you're born into another form:
Stay calm, even welcome
what is happening. Allow yourself
to be pushed from the everythingness of unbeing
toward the limits of light.

Then we went for burgers in a diner
and talked about our lives before we met.
I kept moving closer to you,
shrinking until I fell into the cup
you lifted to your lips.



Haleakala Valley-1 by Sonal Goorha

sex on accident!!!!

by Jessica Thiru

first date. of course.
 you're on the roof of a mall with a girl that smells like
 your first girlfriend. summer's facing you both
in the wrong direction
 she pulls out weed from her pocket
 the way someone puts their hand to your ear
when whispering a secret
 and then lights it, placing it between your lips
 the smoke of it inside your lungs makes you feel
the way opening a can of coke sounds
 she winks at you and you can feel the city
 forgetting what came before it
can feel yourself becoming thread
 through the needle of her desire
 down in the food court
the voices of people scribble
 all around you. both of you share the same piece
 of fried chicken sitting across from each other
it makes you feel like
 giant wedded rodents. on your way out
 she vomits all over the marble tiles
you grab tissues from your purse
 and kneel to help her but she says
 no it's okay i'll do it out of embarrassment
a kind waitress offers to clean up the mess
 and you think about taking her home
 because that's what a decent person would do
so you do
 you arrive at your place and sit on the bed

half naked. she looks at you like something
to step into
and you can't help but kiss her shoulder
the smooth wet of it humming into
the haunted instrument of your mouth
the plush of her nipple on your belly
as you let her pass over you like a
breeze without hurry
your bodies fall in and out of
each other's tense
and you're so full of feeling
you almost have a name
she falls asleep as you
get up to pour her some water
looking back you watch her bruise
the faint light with her breathing
she becomes someone
you could love looking so
innocuous and undone
no, not love
something else. something big enough for
what girls do in the dark

Our Mother Has Shit Herself

by LaDonna Witmer

This time in the public bathroom at the county fair.
Our father sits outside worrying his knuckles
in his blue denim overalls.

She has locked herself in a toilet stall so we see
only her white Walmart tennis shoes, the clouds
of soiled and crumpled paper. The smell
is a stalwart thing.

A stranger stands aghast by the sinks
forehead creased with *What Should I Do?*
She smooths when we arrive and
announce ourselves Daughters.

A rustling from our mother, a soft desperate
patter: *It's ok, ok, keep it quiet, keep it quiet.*
I knock on the barrier between us and feel her
freeze. *It's me, Mom*, I say before I remember
this means nothing to her anymore.

I have come to believe it is rude to call a person
Mother who no longer knows she is yours. My sister
gathers an armful of paper towels one by one
and I call our mother by her non-mother name.

I go gentle. I reframe her a lost child, a feral cat. I make my voice an open palm. Outside I hear our father saying *Thanks, we're ok now* to two men in blue because it's America so naturally someone has called the cops.

The lock falls open and our mother looks at me as if I am the alien. Her hands are covered in shit and her legs and her pants and the floor and the toilet. *I'm sorry* she says and she says *I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry*.

The sob that shakes my sister is twinned in my throat but I dig up a smile from the archives and keep pretending. I lead her to the sink where we strip her from the waist and soak the towels in warmish water. Her clothes go in the trash, her shoes perhaps can be saved. Her body we bathe as best we can.

I know you don't remember this, I tell her as we wipe and wipe, *but you used to clean our bottoms, both of us, when we were babies*. This makes her laugh her mouth a rounded O.

We squeeze our mother into a pair of jeans her youngest grandchild left in the car. We walk her barefoot through the door. Our father rises, eyes for only her. *Ready to go home?* he says as if we are all not staring down her never-ending end.

Later my sister says *You did good in there* and we laugh/weep/laugh. What else can we do? What can we do.

Lights in Lillies

by Holly Lola Peterson

Down a dew-dampened meadow
through seldom-trampled road
the pond waits behind the reeds.

Silky purls lap shallow and dimly
the waters: a womb, a home, a meal.
Silty toads go wrangling bugs.

Come by, Long-Legs,
Come you slinking ankle-deep.
Deal out your lilting call for the lightning sky
ragged, split, spark.
And while your feathers fold up tight against you
bright fireflies light
up that froggy, starry din
This hum, this shriek, this sigh.

The Elephant Speaks

by Matthew Sisson

—After Richard Avedon's photograph,
Dovima With Elephants, 1955

Setup, after setup. Shot, after
Shot- Lights flashing in my eyes.
Complaints of my smell. They
chained and staked me to the
ground. Used my body to
showcase Dovima's elegant
beauty. My wrinkled skin—
The silk of a Dior dress.
Was it Shakespeare who said:
*Hell is empty, all the devils are
here.* "The Tempest," I think.
Yes, my photo hangs at MoMa.
But at what price art?
Angry? I got over the whole thing
years ago —I practice forgiveness.
Forgive, but never forget.
In the end, it was nothing—I was
taken from my mother, whom I
loved—And shipped across the sea.

The Man Who Spoke Bird

by Robin Woolman

He was not an ornithologist,
but did enjoy watching birds.
He was looking while walking,
tripped, slammed his head,
and woke in a hospital bed
whistling.

Experts, both bird and brain,
examined him. To questions
of dates and presidents, he answered
in coos, caws, tweets, and shrieks.
When played the songs of meadow larks
and canyon wrens, he trilled back in kind.

The man who spoke bird was released
into the wilds of family, talk shows,
and neuroscience symposiums.
He endured the nick name of Bird Brain
and embraced communication on Twitter
for he could still write. Yet he grew despondent.

Eventually, he tried to end it all
by slamming into a window.
He awoke in a hospital bed
as a nurse adjusted his pillow.
He rolled over, growled,
and bit her.

Dorchester Court

by Marilyn Cavicchia

The hawthorn tree had one cardinal,
sharpening the sky like scissors when
I went out to get the morning paper.

On the walkway, there are always
stray rubber bands, clean enough
that a person picking them up could
be seen as only slightly cracked.

Everything is a gift if you choose
to receive it. I don't really believe that,
but never mind. The moth that flew up

to my window and died, its husk
still stuck there after all these months.
Clouds drift by. If you wait long enough,
there's that blue sky again. Remember?

A Recipe Using Quindilla Peppers

by Kimberly Ann Priest

The most popular are grown in and around the village of Ibarra, Spain. Tangy, bright, a verdant green, anywhere from two to six inches long, smooth, with tender skin. When her father explains she must not call him papá, he means *Quindilla Pepper*, *we need to work as a team*. By which he means the audience should perceive her as verdant green and tender, just a young Spanish wife married to a slightly older man. And he does mean *slightly*, of course, his muscles tone, his legs like the legs of an Adonis in his thirties: tangy, bright, lithe. Such a lucky woman, the audience will whisper, to possess a swooning Spaniard moving her body gracefully around the casino dance floor. The Dancing Cansinos. Two manzanilla olives pitted, one anchovy having no visible bones (shaped into an S), and four quindilla peppers run through with a four-inch toothpick, one end pointed, the other end flat. The skewered creation is laid on a plate, then drizzled in fresh extra-virgin olive oil. This is how you make a Gilda, a world famous pintxo. Father and daughter tangoing, man and wife tangoing—mother left at home.

Body Count

by Megan Bresnahan

Originally: a measure of military
success—count enough bodies, win
the war. Now: the number of people
who've been inside me.

A morgue-cold unit of measure
for the diminishing worth
of a woman. My anatomy
receives: I *give* it up, I *let* him in,

I *take* it. I am a threshold
to be crossed but not overly
trodden. Men prefer laying claim
to inviolate ground. But lovers

aren't round numbers. A filthy
kiss snuck in a nightclub bathroom
is not the slow press of lake-cold skin
in a tent. Leaving last call

with my worst ex, homesick,
is not the numinous heat
of my husband's mouth dragging
rapt over my hipbone.

How to Greet a Widow

by Donna Spruijt-Metz

Hello—
start there.

Look me over
kindly—does it seem

that I could bear
How are you?

Or is my posture more suited
to a comment about weather,

or dogs? Do you think you know me
well enough to ask *How are you doing?*

I will in turn look you over
kindly, if I can muster it,

and gauge your capacity
for listening—will you listen

if I tell you? I will calibrate
my answer. Maybe

just keep it to *I come and go—*
my current standard—

after using *fine* elicited reactions
of *you're so strong*, or worse—

Start with *Hello*—
once used to summon the ferryman—

take me across with your sweet hello.
Let us start over, oars at the ready, boat small
yet seaworthy.



Crimson Expanse by Sonal Goorha

Yes, And...?

by Nora Esme Wagner

Jeff and I are pretending he's a firefighter. Ex-members of an improv troupe, we know how to sell it. So when Jeff strides in wearing an electric-yellow domed helmet, smelling of char, ash on his cheeks like a priest's thumb had slipped, I keep my cool.

"Was there a big fire?" I ask.

"Huge," he says. "I barely made it out alive."

"How did it start?"

"A lit cigarette in the recycling bin."

"Did you carry anyone out of the building? A secretary, maybe?"

Jeff blinks, looking betrayed. His pupils are glistening nuggets of coal.

"I never said it was an office fire."

"You're right. I'm sorry for jumping to conclusions."

Now we're back to the therapy script. Jeff shuffles in the costume he got from who-knows-where, looking less like a firefighter and more like someone pretending to be one. Which he is, of course.

I soften. Touched by an urge to touch him. To wipe the eye black from his face with a soapy washcloth. "Let's get you cleaned up," I say, and lead him to the tub.

It started last week in infidelity counseling.

“Every time you leave for work I feel terrified, knowing you’ll be around *her*.”

I always say “*her*” that way—in vocal italics. The counselor, meanwhile, speaks about *her* in the blandest tone imaginable, the equivalent of Times New Roman or Arial, determinedly neutral. Jeff avoids names, identifying adjectives, even gendered pronouns.

“It also makes me scared. I hate being in the office. I hate seeing them.” I gulped down ginormous swallows of air. “I also hate talking about it. So much.”

“Is there a way? To acknowledge how difficult this is? For both of you?” the counselor asked, breaking the question into pieces the way a parent saws a vegetable into small, inoffensive bites for a child.

We both made nonverbal noises to show that we were processing. I could tell, though, that Jeff was really thinking. Making an effort for once. His hand stole closer to mine.

“How did you two first connect?” she asked.

“In an improv group,” Jeff said. “We were put in a two-person scene together where we were supposed to introduce every statement with ‘That’s right, Bob.’ Then add something else, something crazy.”

“That’s right, Bob.’ Then add something else, something crazy.”

“That’s right, Bob,” I said quietly.

The counselor’s eyes glistened like we’d just presented her with a key. “So you have practice with dismantling rigid mindsets.” Jeff and I exchanged glances. The “That’s right, Bob’ exercise had ended with me undermining Jeff’s idea, turning a doctor’s office into a hair salon, a mimed stethoscope into a beard trimmer. “I have something a little unorthodox to propose.”

The morning after, I wake to find Jeff lying next to me still wearing the

firefighter jacket, half-buttoned. It's the first night he hasn't slept on the couch since I discovered his secret credit card account, the hotel-room payments. I wait for him to stir, unsure if the Jeff with his legs scissoring the sheets is Jeff the firefighter or Jeff the atoning husband.

Eventually his eyelids jump open, as if he'd been feigning sleep. "Morning honey," he says, in a voice gruffer than usual.

"Good morning," I say cautiously.

As he sheds the firefighter gear, pulls on crisp office clothes, I study him. Scanning for evidence to decipher whether the charade is still on. There's something urgent, commanding, in the way he dresses, like a fire needs extinguishing. But then small mannerisms, how he wets his finger with his tongue to slick down a rebounding cowlick, assure me that it's him, my Jeff. Like a knife that's diced onions before slicing fruit, the two Jeffs become one, flavors transferring, bleeding.

After he kisses me goodbye, I watch his car peel off through the window. For once my thoughts drift from him and the secretary. The dark shimmer of a Tiffany's ruby in the hollow of her throat (because her name is Ruby, I know against my will, how cliché). The many, many Trojans in his desk drawer. The many, many emails I had to set to infinite scroll so I wouldn't keep clicking the next arrow. Instead I wonder which Jeff I'll meet tonight. That was the idea: replace real danger with staged danger, run our fear through a clean tap. Images hijack me—a burning building, hissing extinguishers, wooden beams collapsing, his face scarred and melted beyond recognition.

It's astronaut Jeff who sidles through the front door tonight. Waddling in a bulky space suit, bubble helmet tucked beneath his arm. I'm awed by his commitment: even his hair shows it, disheveled and sweaty, like he's been wearing the helmet for dozens of rotations around the sun. "The oxygen tank almost gave out on me. I thought I was going to die. It was the thought of you that kept me breathing," he says, over-emoting. That was always his weak area in improv, going too far.

I plaster on a microexpression that conveys both worry and relief. He kisses me with hammy passion. I can't wrap my arms fully around the

suit, it's too cumbersome.

"Tell me about Venus," I say as he lifts me up, totes me to the bedroom.

"Tell me about Mars."

Over the next month I meet a lot of Jeffs. One mauled by a lion, the SFX makeup on his thigh bunched like crushed velvet. A thrill-seeking F1 racer. A sword swallower, an aerialist, a tightrope walker. Jeff in a chiton, smelling of the sea, calling me Penelope. Jeff hauled up from a scuba diving lesson gone wrong, sinking deeper and deeper until his intrepid instructor rescued him (a detail that makes me feel funny). He says it's the thought of me, every time, that carries him from danger. Reminds him to kick his feet toward land.

There's a character I meet more than once: Jeff the pilot. Unlike the others, who tremble in my arms, demanding comfort, this Jeff seems to thrive on risk. Nosedive landings, blades snuck into carry-ons, he laughs when he tells me about his brushes with mortality.

The second time he comes home wearing a pilot cap, winged, golden insignia shining like a drop of hot oil, I almost break character.

"Back so soon?" I ask.

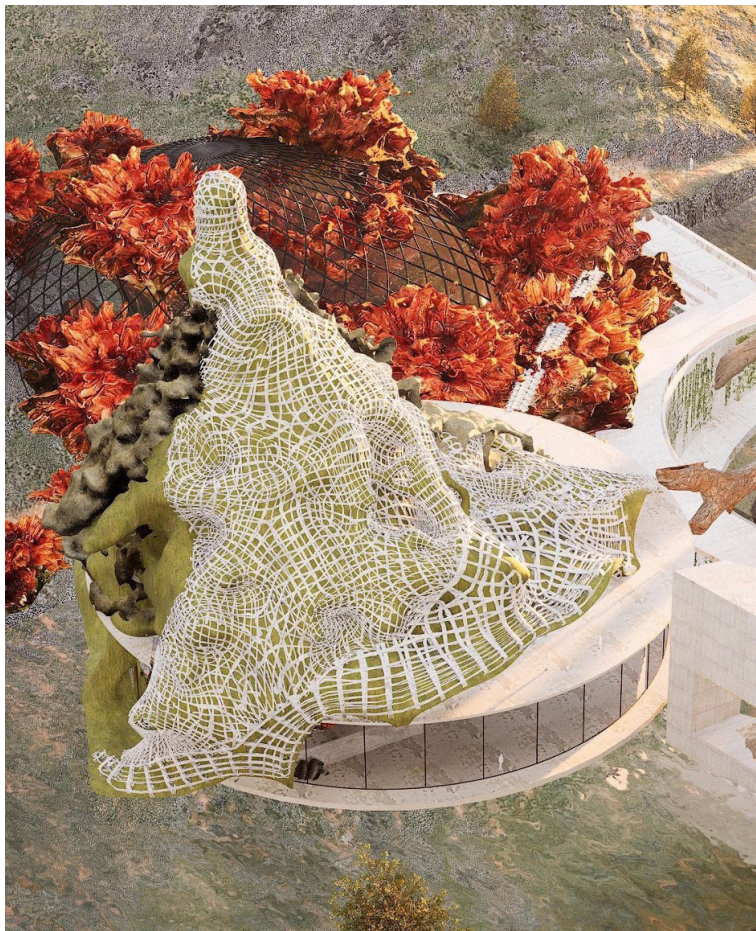
"I can't stay away," he says, then fixes me with a stare. The handle of a small roller bag is grasped in his hand, its wheels caught in the welcome mat's rough fibers. He looks over his shoulder, through the still open door, at something I can't see.

"What are you waiting for?"

The cap shades his eyes. He reaches for the doorknob and holds it, holds it for a long moment before shutting us in together.

One evening, no Jeff.

A week after his disappearance I get a letter from his “copilot.” It’s his sloppy cursive, I recognize it instantly, the l’s and t’s leaning toward each other like lovers who can’t bear to be parted. The letter tells me Jeff the pilot was a hero. That he saved every passenger on the plane but himself. I should remember: the last words out of his mouth were how much he’d miss his wife.



Accumulation-Transform by Suyue Jin and Haocun Zou (Joseph)

Empty Nest

by Lindsay McLeod

I believed in Death
unswervingly the moment
my son was born.

I had never before,
I suppose, had quite
so much to lose.

It was the immediate
raison d'être that
I'd forever sought.

Twenty years on
and I am again
admiring my sea view

from a worn
swaying tightrope,
quietly nonplussed

polishing reflections
and crocheting a new deal
from the hungry void

congratulating myself
on surviving yet another
casual departure.

The cry of the cicada
Gives us no sign
That presently it will die
—*Matsuo Basho*

by Mara Gale Fein

For him ordinary sounds were
such extraordinary things.
Umbrellas fluttered
and he heard wings flap.
Softly thrumming drums
offered faint heartbeats.
A shoe with no foot in it ...
its steps could be heard

And then cancer moaned.
Death -- -- -- on a white screen.
And he did it so well, so fast.
For him – such a pity
death was such a quiet and commonplace thing.
No to be's or not to be's.
Like Ripley said, *we're all gonna die.*
The only question is how you check out.

I can still hear him whenever I like.
I fry bacon to listen to his rain.
Starship Enterprise still buzzes the universe.
The Walking Dead still groan.
Only the Corleones fell silent.

PP18A #9 Copy 5 by Leah Oates



*In memory of Foley (sound effects) artist David Lee Fein (1948-2024).
He worked on the films referenced in this poem, among many others.*

Echoes

by Daniel Gordon

I die in a sunlit room. Far-off traffic hums through the open window. There is the rustling of leaves. I hear birds chirping. She holds my hand, but I do not have the strength to hold it back. In my final seconds, it feels like I am falling.

In the end, there is no tunnel and no light. I expect nothingness, but it does not come. Instead, I am back in that ward, a little blinded by the sun. Again, I feel the pressure of her hand on mine. She tries to reassure me with that fragile smile. Of what exactly? That it is okay. That she and our son will get by. That I am not abandoning them. This is what she wants me to believe, even if she does not. And again, the final sliver of life drains out of me.

This is not my last death.

Small details change each time: the texture of my sheets, the rhythm of my laboured breath, or the angle at which the morning light filters through the window. Everything is similar, but nothing is the same. I die and die again, and just when it seems that I will do so forever, I find myself not lying flat but upright in the hospital bed. Our son sits on his knees next to my outstretched legs. We haven't brushed his hair today. He asks me *does it hurt?* I say *only a little*. The bitter hint of cleaning agents in the air makes me nauseous.

I remember this moment. But this is not what I felt. This is not how I lived it. And yet there is nothing I can say or do that wasn't said or done. This is how my son remembers it, I realise. And I do not feel my own despair, but his, steeped in the knowledge that this is the last time he hears my voice.

And then I am back to dying. I do not get used to it.

As each friend, colleague, and acquaintance learns of my death, I die as they imagine me to have died. They recall my gradual decline and the shock of how thin my face has become. The agony and despair and the fading hope of it all colour every memory.

But then fragments of relief flare up. A burst of laughter echoes through the room. We watch the wind blow over a field of wheat from the balcony. An embrace that feels like there's some empty space in me that is being filled. Memories in which I am not consumed by sickness reach me like sunlight on a cold body.

It becomes rare for me to revisit the hospital. I am not remembered by the pain and discomfort of my death. There are Christmas dinners, birthdays, and big nights out, but mostly it's the small things people remember, like when we sit together at the kitchen table, and I sip tea from my red mug and notice that it is a little cracked at the edge. I become aware of details I did not see at the time. But others did.

Often, I relive no more than a flash of recollection: a word, a gesture, or a faint smile. I appear as a father, a friend, and sometimes just as an acquaintance. Those who disliked me do not think about me at all, it turns out.

It is my wife who misses me most. It seems, for a while, that I only spend time with her. She recounts a thousand little instances that I failed to appreciate in life. She thinks back to our first dates and to my clumsy nervousness. She falls in love with me anyway. There are also memories of our fights and struggles that I dread to revisit, in which we shout and cry and say hurtful words, but even these are remembered with affection. And then we are a family. And there are first steps and first words and sleepless months recalled too fondly. All of this happens in an unbroken string of reminiscence.

And then I am never remembered as a husband again.

The years I got to spend with my son were few. The years he remembers are fewer. He doesn't know how plagued with doubt I was. Instead, I get to be kind. I get to make him feel safe and at home, though

the ache of my absence never quite goes away.

I keep returning to this moment. He is sitting on my lap at the table. It is cold. Steam rises from the red mug in front of us. He opens his mouth and cups his hands, breathing into them. I uncurl his fingers with mine and guide them to the warm ceramic, feeling the back of his hands on my palms as I wrap them around the mug. He looks up at me and smiles, the tip of his tongue pointing through the gap between his front teeth.

There are memories that never happened, imagined by grandchildren who have only seen me in photographs and sometimes forget my name. It is not so much the past that is being recalled as the idea of it. Soon, I am only remembered in the vaguest sense, as a presence in a past life.

It is all about to end. I can feel it. But then one last moment comes to me with clarity.

It is a sunny day in March. The garden is peppered with blooming snowdrops, watered by the melting snow. My wife is here. I hold her close to me. Our son is barely tall enough to reach my hip. He leans against my knee and says something that makes us all laugh. We are huddled together so the three of us can fit into the frame of the photograph. This is the last time anybody remembers me.

It is not so bad, being forgotten. There are many of us here.

Aubergine, Aubergine

by Regine Jackson

Purple on my wrist and purple in the bowl,
bruise and bounty trading glances.

late-week persimmons in a paper sack,
flowers droop over the sink,
small harvests leaning toward spoilage,
rotting before I reach them;

the tongue's color louder than the mouth,
I call the shade by its house name:
aubergine, aubergine.

The hallway turns with the fruit in my palm.
memory takes the stairs ahead of me.
I walk them alone
and keep going.

Purple stains the fingertips after soap.
The day stains too,
but it leaves less evidence.

I place what I can on the sill,
a dark, slight abundance
ripening beside ache

Watching Strangers in Love, I think of Saint Rose

by Madeline Allen

Mortify my passions that I may be ever more pleasing and acceptable in the sight of my dear Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, Who lives and reigns world without end. Amen.

—Novena for Saint Rose of Lima

My neighbor is harvesting figs from the tree
beside her coral pink house. She'll probably take
them in to her husband, press them apart
with her thumbs, tongue the flesh. All around us
the neighborhood is fecund heat, cicadas calling
mates so they can hurry up and die, pears
and apples swelling, softening, falling
in the gutters along the street to feed the wasps
whose miasmic horde seems to double
each humid hour. The couple walks barefoot,
hand in hand after the sordid summer rains,
like their soles are savoring it, like all thunder
is just accompaniment to their own
absorbing fervor, like when they bloat
into the afterlife it will be an endless warmth
of each other's flesh. I watch. From my second story
window, from the porch, behind a screen. Finger
the rosary hanging from my headboard,
dangle my head off the side of my mattress
to see the couple hanging from the earth
before retreating into the mess of green life.
Is there any heavenly reward worth this stillness?
Mosquitoes fill even stagnant flower pots

with breeding. In the midst of her nightly vigils
Saint Rose—patron of gardeners, of details,
of blooming; from blood, blisters, silver;
blessed lace-guised starvation—must have spied
the candle in her parents' window guttering
with an unseen, easy breath, and known that nothing
could make her a stranger to her body
or the wants bodies share, to navels rising
and falling like hesitant flowers on the verge
of opening. All my attempted solitude
fills with donning secondhand tulle and practicing
poses, but even the fogged windows can't obscure
the light that settles into the trees' cradle
of branches. I can take all of it: The room;
the temple's sweat; the glint in the priest's eye
before he forgives us passionates each Wednesday;
the devotional flames, grinning their yellowed smile
in the back of the sanctuary; fruit
in cardboard boxes begging *Take us, free!*
Even the single rose hiding in the neighbor's bush,
praying to be chosen, I'll take her, too,
to be preserved like the stained glass morning glory
that threatens to shine from its coral pink wall forever.

Placeholder

by Melissa Shepherd

For weeks after we moved
into the new apartment
I pestered you
to fix the sign over my bed,
done in frilly pink and purple script
to look like the page of a fairy tale.

“Kimmy’s Special Place,” it said,
and, if you remember,
I was not Kimmy,
the previous tenant.
A fact I wanted known,
but not the way you did it:
scrawling my name over hers
in teal print
so loudly wrong it trumpeted,
not yours, not home, no happy ending.

I’m sympathetic, really.
You used the paint you had
on hand. You weren’t my father.
You didn’t owe me. Years later,
I can be grateful
for the small things,
like how you only hit my mother
when you thought I was sleeping.

But the way you blanked out Kimmy
was plain lazy. You could draw—
cartoons, animals, faces.
How many times
had I watched you?

Kimmy haunted me. I dreamed
I had stolen her life, her room,
the white colonial furniture
with the squeaky pulls
she left behind when she went
to the suburbs.
No, Kimmy is not an alias
to protect the innocent.
Her real name is lost. I subbed in
something close
to what you called me.

I want to write your name explicitly,
your age, your birthday,
where you went to high school,
the little I retain. Not a threat—
only the urge to decorate
a dim-lit wall.
For now, you're penciled there

under the names
of your daughters,
who call me older sister
in their sad stories, started where
you left off, abandoned
before they knew their colors
or how to read.

Interstitium

by Jane Donohue

God made the universe because he wanted to hide.

God made man because he needed something to hide from.

We have not yet found him, but we're getting closer. For example:

scientists have identified within the body a third circulatory system, all this time hidden just beneath the skin—a scaffolding of collagen and hyaluronic acid shepherding nutrients through the body's vast wilderness. Interstitium, they call it, this warp and weft quietly undergirding every organ, churning along industriously without name for all these many millennia, so all-encompassing to the body's composition it escaped notice. It's like the one about the fish who don't know it's water they're swimming in. Replace "fish" with "people," "water" with "God." There is nothing new to see, only new ways to see. The inert interstitium collapses beneath traditional microscopes; it hides until observed alive, a trick we only got the knack of recently. We build telescopes belowground and bombard the body with radiation, mortify the flesh and sew the eyes shut and map the thinnest cross-section of tissue—still, no aliens, no cure for cancer, no incontrovertible proof. We know dark matter is there for the way stars obey invisible centers of gravity. We know of the interstitium because tattoo ink moves unquestioningly along unseen pathways. We know God is there because there are so many good places to hide.

August Plea

by Merie Kirby

Let the ink drain from the calendar,
each little box emptying out its pockets.

Let doctor appointments and committee meetings
and car repairs fall to the floor.

Let the cat's teeth be uncleaned
one more month. Let the book club keep reading
the same coming of age novel into September.

Three dinners with friends, two faculty meetings,
a hair appointment, a community barbeque:

all can be pushed into September.
Reschedule all the Women's World Cup games.

Postpone errands to grocery stores, pharmacies,
gas stations, and even the library.

Leave me with a clean grid of lines,
no temporal reference points, no goals, no movement
forward or X's to clutter the past. Suspend me

here in the eighth month. Let me hover.
Let me tread water. Let me linger.

Practicing

by Angelique Zobitz

I never learned to cry the way television permits. Instead, I open a little window in my chest and let the air in and out until the wanting rolls itself small. This is one of the first tricks I learned. Another is to memorize the shape of the door from your pillow so if you need to run in a dream, you can run in the right direction. Another is to name the objects before sleep: lamp, book, sock, sock. Names keep things from leaving without goodbye.

Sometimes in the dark I talk to the ceiling, the walls. They are the oldest things in the room. The ceiling, especially, is wise. I tell them I am practicing being a person who is not surprised by kindness. The ceiling breathes and does not answer—probably because it does not believe me. But at least it does not call me on my lie. That is also kindness.

Singing Sands

by Fiona Perry

On the way home from the hospital
my father cried at the wheel
so, I looked away at the orange vapor
streetlights, a crow perched
on an overhead powerline,
the ghostly glide of a milk float.
A winter's morning swallowed
by a rear-view mirror.

This afternoon, I read of whale bones
discovered deep inland, everyday pottery
vessels cradling Dead Sea Scrolls,
scarab amulets for the dead.
But what became of the scuffed
brown box in the bottom
of the wardrobe where my mother
kept her own mother's mementoes?

Over time, my grief has become desert.
At some point, to navigate, I walked away
from the campfire chatter
and stepped into its hazy vastness
waited for the synchronised avalanche
of sand grains. Their monastic humming,
their shifting sighs, their slow crashing
waves of percussion.

A Manifestation of Dogs

by Betsy Mars

Last night I dreamt up some small dogs,
the kind I rarely *really* like, not that I don't like
all dogs, but I prefer my dogs on the large side,
not for protection but for substance, a dog I can get
my arms around, that I can wrestle with, not a dog
I might break, or that might escape under the gate
as one anxious Chihuahua that I sat did a decade ago
when I wasn't watching. Who would anticipate she could
slip through that gap, and then the guilt I felt
when I realized she was missing and had to face the neighbor
down the block who found her in his driveway. Did I tell
the owner of this close call? I don't remember. Probably not.
Anyway, these dream dogs followed at my heels, not tiny
but below the knee, like a little fleet of fleecy sheep,
and they seemed to love me, in their way. They were not the kind
I could carry in a purse, but in my dream, I said to someone,
*Maybe it's not so bad after all to have a couple of lap-sized dogs
around.* They weren't yappy dogs. They were just *there*
being themselves, nearby when needed. Small blank slates,
something to draw upon.

Hummingbird

by Beck Reynolds

I tell the doctor, *it's okay*.
I know there is a hummingbird
where my heart should be.
He looks horrified, but
I've found a way
to keep living, just as the bird
has found a way
to survive inside my chest.
She stretches out her wings,
flaps a few frantic beats
as if to evidence this.
After a pause, the doctor
interjects, *actually*
hummingbirds are migratory.
I reply *clearly nothing has nested*
in you for a long time. He falls
silent. Sends me back
to the waiting room
where I listen to the gentle echo
of chirps in my wrists,
silently apologise to the bird
for my lack of sky.

Fishing the Creek

by Robbin Farr

Holding his shape, a vest
of faded khaki hangs
in the hall closet. A fishing license
pinned to the breast pocket declares

1964 as its last season. In spring
I am drawn to slip it over my arms,
feel its weight settle on my shoulders,
know the ghost sense of my father

whose frame shaped the canvas.
A man whose love of nothing more
than to envision the creek reaching
always toward the river, the bay—

another watery way. Memories
of fishing glint like quick sparks
of sun flash off Tulpehocken ripples,
where deeper still the trout run in April.

We dismiss fishing rods, set aside
feathered lures, the picnic lunch
that waits beside the boulders,
inhale the tang of pine tar breeze.

Because it is enough, isn't it, to return
to creek's edge, winter water rushing,
while a chill of familiar visions
leaps to fill the scene?

Where a steadfast father, a daughter,
and all of time wait. Enough to witness
a trout arc its fierce body into the air
to snap a mayfly. Enough to see

its stippled form shudder back to icy water
that skims the sandy bed of the creek.
While we, fragile in our bodies,
pause in silent communion.



2263 #1C by Leah Oates

An Orange Feeling

by Breeze Navarro

I arrive to an empty driveway and linger on the doorstep to see if someone else pulls up. They don't. I'm unlucky enough to have arrived first and I berate myself for wanting to arrive on time, though I'm still ten minutes late. I knock and when my colleague, Eileen, answers, I step into her home as the door slams shut behind me.

Eileen, thrilled to play hostess, greets me and shows off her "freshly painted!" orange walls, her alpaca rug. I blink twice but on second glance, the walls are just as bright.

Eileen's chatter wanders as I look at her paintings. She does this at work too, speaks so long you have no choice but to listen. After two months, I know how young her ex-husband is, how old she is, how he left with their child in the night. She doesn't know anything about me. She doesn't ask. After our first week of working together she walked up to hug me, her head resting briefly on my chest as I froze with discomfort and surprise.

Vomit. That's what the walls remind me of. They are the precise color of Eileen's puke after she drank too many mimosas at the Christmas brunch last month. I held her hair, felt like I was ten years younger and back in University. Eileen had gripped my arm, tears speckling her cheeks, and confessed that she still loved her husband.

Eileen rubs her custom dining table and tells me the cost and how handsome the woodworker was and how she'd always wanted a nice dining table but didn't want to pay for it knowing a child could ruin it, but I'm not listening. I'm fixated on the pile of oranges sitting in a white bowl at the center of the table. One has a hole. Does she see it?

Dark as oblivion, round as the sun, it could fit a finger and as I watch, it moves.

Wiggles like a fly caught in a web and as Eileen twirls, Vanna White showing off her basil plant, which is impressive, it's alive, mine would be dead, an insect crawls out, body of interlocking squares snaking behind. Iridescent wings twitch twice, and it flies.

My gaze sharpens.

Eileen is in front of me, rose lipstick glinting beneath incandescent light. She holds up an orange. "Would you like one?"

I want to refuse her infested orange, but I grab and inspect it. This one is hole-less, complete.

"Thanks," I say.

It can't be easy living in a home so full of sudden quiet, sudden space.

Cape Cod, 1981

by Ian Golub

The pool didn't reek of chlorine—only light.
The grass was cut into perfect, manicured squares
along the pavement.
Twelve years old, I ate in silence,
a linen napkin folded in my lap.
Club sandwiches on china—
mini glass bottles of Heinz;
Grey Poupon.

Ceiling fans turned slowly.
Air-conditioning hummed in the lobby,
a breeze lifting my hair.
I wished my mother would speak less,
wished my father would speak more.
She spoke with her hands,
he with none.

My father had started making
real money, vacations upgraded
from condos on the boardwalk
to quieter, Waspier spaces—
straight from camp pickup
to the old, white-shingled resort.

At camp I'd caught a bug;
my mother feared whooping cough.
She raged no one had told her,
but found a goy doctor in a town
with a real lighthouse to see me.
I didn't like that she used those terms—
goy and WASP—
when I only wanted to fit in.
Bronchitis, he said, without much banter.
A few pills should shake it off.
She worried too much.
She worried the wrong things.

After tennis, my mother booked a massage.
My father and I walked to the beach.
No umbrellas, no lifeguard stand,
not one footprint.
Only dunes,
the ocean capped in white.

We raced to the surf and I touched first—
but the cold was a jolt in my lungs—
a sudden, doubling coughing fit.
He struck my back until I hacked

that club sandwich into the sand.
Then, silence. The coughing vanished.

He cupped the ocean in his hands
to rinse the bitter grit from my chin—

washing away those strands of my insides,
which were really his insides, too.

My Father, Dreaming

by Sharon Hashimoto

Sun surges through the pane
of the living room window, bearing
down on the white hair threaded

with black, a brow with fewer
lines in sleep. My father's head
tilts back, his nose pointing upward,

jaw slowly dropping with the weight
of the elapsing hour. His liquid body
seems to seep into the sofa, ear leaning

into a propped-up hand where the cuff
rides down his wrist. Spectacles rest,
settled on the sill of his cheeks. Behind

the lens, closed eyes glimpse some place
warm and golden as his dreams travel,
circling to a far gone past. Against

his neck nestles the tortoise-shell kitten
he didn't really want—a seamless fit
with nose on paws, tail tucked in tight.

As a Child I'd Sniff Expo Markers in Dad's Office

by Dom Blanco

Rows of cubicles under fluorescent panels,
long and narrow—less like fixtures
than pale bulbs bleaching the floor

like a tanning bed. I crawl the nylon carpet
to the boardroom, the gray table
anchored in the center like a tomb.

On the wall, the dry-erase board
a battlefield of decimals. My prize
waits in that tray: markers in every

neon hue. I yank the caps, the vinegar-
sting seizing the air. My hands tremble
to clutch a whole rainbow at once.

In the deadpan room, I hear the distant
clatter of dad's keyboard. I lie flat
on my back, gulping neon

until the room blurs. My brain vibrates
with static, hoisting me out of my skin.
Then, the high fades. My skull suddenly

too small for my brain. I do it again
and again. Before dad's voice pierces
the quiet, tethering me

back to my name.

Message from My Mother, Long Dead, Sent into the Ether

by Susan Grimm

I've been watching my long girls with their continuous
hair—not what I'd been expecting. Their heads like flowers

lolling on the thin stems of their necks. I did the best
I could. I knew what it was to be a woman. A little boy,

brash as my brothers, with a straw hat in the sketch
I made. What happened to that plan. Serve men a fried

steak or that cake with the berries and you can see
their shoulders ease down--foreheads loose, jaws

working--before they rise from the table, iron again.
Some time later, they're looking red as their meat,

my daughters taller across the room. You begin to feel
the world turning. Back on your heels, you've got to run.

The Oleaginous Bible

by Elizabeth Lockman

At first, it felt slick to the touch,
like a slab of raw bacon, she told me.
Then miniature bubbles frothed up
from what would have been pores
had the Bible been genuine leather.
Someone suggested they safeguard
the Good Book in Tupperware.
How else to contain both the Book
and its wondrous secretions?
Like honey from the lion's skull,
God's blessings pooled so abundantly
under the plastic lid, what could they do
but decant it to sell?
The woman I met was so earnest,
so tickled with her little vial
and the cloudy spurt of sanctity
contained within. "You know, miracles
happen all the time," she told me.
"Why couldn't this be a miracle, too?
If you can believe
in the resurrection, you can believe
in just about anything."

Para-Tender

by Emily Tong

In May the moon's barbed aftertaste climbs
out of my throat to grow poppies. My larynx
sore itself. The same month, Ma tells me about

everything she has never loved: the sea. *Your father.*
Oriental flowers. Introductions. Her crow's
feet proclaim themselves a thesis, fired

into prepubescent air like a bullet. Yes, this is another thing
we learn as daughters—how to perpetually be on the verge
of drawing a gun. To know the spine of it.

Once, I imagined un-plying someone open
opium red. Gentling myself. To beat miracles out
of sickle soil, this sham lunar cycle, to mouth

along the edge of a kiss & be not an anvil or the misshapen
sky or something locked
in a room. My mother says everyone I love is still

in this room. Listen: Pliny and Shakespeare are remembered
for metaphoring rooms & gardens,
mothers & daughters. If a room is a garden

then a gun is a garden a hello is a garden a father is
a garden the absence of a
father is a garden. What is a mouth if not a quiet red

peace. I dream of the street beside my childhood
home, blushing with perennials.
In this dream I hold a gun barrel-first. It goes off: out

magic-tricks a moon & its halo, stigma and
all. My mother reaches
for my hand; I do not ask for anything

more. Someday I will be twenty-eight* & love will come
to me bristling and diaphanous. Let us call this love
you, matching the beat of my open breath. *Here, here, and*

here, I point. This is where you are allowed to touch me.
You'll ask, breathless, about why I keep killing
all the roses & amaryllis & sunsets.

It's an old story. I should tell it again.



Transitory Space, Cedarvale Ravine Toronto, Ontario #3 2022-2025 by Leah Oates

Morphine

by Benjamin Goodman

Even though her eyes are closed
they are same as mine.

My father's mother
in her final bed
breathing one breath
per minute.

Like a flower that chose
not to open this year.

There is no noise
in the room and then
there is:
someone is weeping.

Day breaks through the falling snow,
turns it into rain.

They push the needle
into her tongue
like a hummingbird
in reverse.

The Paper Lady

by Camille LeFevre

is gone. She was never easy to find. In a former copper-mining town carved into a mountain, where the listing back porches of painted ladies dangle over valleys, where wine, ice cream, and tchotchke shops crowd the tangled narrows of zig-zagging streets, she was sandwiched between a vacant building and a bordello-turned-café, behind the rusted-metal façade, dusty windows, and book-skewed shelves of her gallery. She'd emerge from her mussed workshop quietly, to say, hello. Her slim figure wrapped in a spattered apron, hands speckled with medium, gray hair fraying around time's creases. I'd drop, breathless, onto the sagging couch. Pinned to the walls were her molded paper-pulp works: Women arrayed beneath robust trees, dogs walking invisible owners, faceless bicyclists pedaling across deserts. On mouse-chewed boards she'd painted ample nudes in blue-gray gouache leaning against ivory columns, or curving restfully above swathes of abstraction. There were monochromatic ink prints on flecked, handmade paper of wily coyotes peering around cactus. Today, though, instead, here is her daughter—with a shiny manner and smooth bob of faux-platinum hair. Here, instead, are t-shirts and mugs—like those down the street. The floor is clean. The space uncluttered. The workshop—empty. Distressed, I search for some sign, remnant, of the paper lady. There! On a worn shelf under the front window. I gently lift out a white paper mold. My fingers trace its textured surface, its raised details. I turn it over, reveling in the mold's depths, its inner contours. How art can still be found, amid artless anonymity.

What could not be kept

by Laura Buxbaum

1. The stone you found, perfectly smooth, with a ring around it, the unbroken ring signifying big magic, wishes granted (dangerous), living core.

2. A sofa, flowered, with mahogany legs, reupholstered once but finally abandoned when its springs rusted and seats sank. You and your son wept when he dragged it away.

3. A firefly in a jar.

4. Five dogs, lost to:

old age

old age (buried with beer and coffee, his favorites)

old age but not at the river where he'd gone to rest, rather alone in a

cold cage at the vet. For which you are still so sorry

a car hurtling around the corner, throwing her into the air like a pile of fluffy white rags

old age and a car (blind and deaf, oblivious, on his way back to his favorite trail in the woods).

5. So many lovers. What you carry of each of them: his poems; their hands; a smile; smell of cigarettes, of gin, of soap, of the body's particularities.

6. A monarch caterpillar.

7. Adobe walls. The room at the back of the house in Santa Fe where you lived for one summer. The dry sun and the rain clouds every evening over the far-away mountains. A man there who wore black socks to hide the holes in his leather boots. He held you and you lied to him about your plans. You hitchhiked home and trusted that no one would harm you. No one did.

8. That stone you found. Left on the beach for the breaking waves to carry and leave for some other searcher.



The Lone Crow by Subhash Roy Choudhury

In Remembrance

by Micah Dela Cueva

for Linda

In another world, I nap by your side.
My desire is that simple.
Our overpriced bonsai kits,
finally unwrapped.

Lately, my head has been a fog
of paper cranes. I fold
and fold, waiting
for the birds to bring me back
pruned lights in tiny hourglasses,
so that I can feel the days move.

Hey, I miss you.
Remember when your mom
called your hair embarrassing?
The tips, dyed blue
like lantern berries at night,
whisked the mist into relief.
You once told me some plants
bloom away from the light.

Loose Ends

by M.J. Turner

In the desk, little
gifts you left behind. Pearl studs—
pale green, like your face

after those treatments
you dismissed. Off-hand remarks,
tiny packages.

Exegesis in fauna

by Brian Duran-fuentes

I guard the gates to an invisible world,
gridlock of an invisible zoo,
every morning and sometimes evenings,
I make shadow words parade
for doctors as well as nurses,
words pachyderm and robust,
with sharp accent marks, Greek roots,
sometimes chimeras made with Latin.

I guard the gates to an invisible world,
flora and fauna of our body,
as seen only in sleep studies,
borborygmus, oligodendrocytes,
microbiota that prevail in books,
limerence for etymologies,
prophylaxis for oblivion.

Circulus for doctors during rounds
upon the refills of signifiers,
in the voiding cystourethrogram
that measures the reflux of languages,
bone age of hypermodernity.

The hospital, like the rainforest,
is a culture of nomenclature,
microarray of terminologies,
Rheumatology that studies silence,
the flow of every clinical metaphor,
variants of uncertain significance.
I guard the gate to an invisible world,
human experience vademecum,
snake, cerebrospinal fluid,
covers the planet in conversation.

You see,

the earthly panacea expires
if Apollo denies us the gift of poetry
and I am no one if I am not his servant.

I close the gates to an invisible world,
my alveoli and trachea are the temple
where birds rest to be conjugation
and as if I were the hidden stent,
I vanish between the tissues
for those who could never speak before.

Make believe

by Paul Koniecki

I was born in a cube of ice.
Timmy's nightlight
resembled a halo of dancing

rats. The top
of his lampshade was supposed to be
a cutout of horses prancing

and galloping. The first time
I slept over Timmy told me
it's the first time

it's ever been
plugged in. We laughed like rats or mice.
The Angel of Winter waited

tucked in a corner of ceiling shadow
to follow the light
down the hallway then left

around a small peninsula of counter
across the soft ridges
of the kitchen floor linoleum, staring

outside into the real dark.
Sometimes monsters follow lives
even more abominable than theirs,

waiting to be scared
again. The sound of hoarfrost and rime
cut across the iris

of God's looking glass
like truancy. The world was all mirror fog
and window pane.

I'd considered gravity
and carbon
but absence,

the willingness
to purposefully not notice anything
just might have been

the preferred currency of that
collective us. When I chose
to be alone, alone

was sublime, or hiding
small, buried, and occasionally
effective, even heavenly.

Timmy and I curled then
fetal and shirtless
connecting the dots

of each other's scratches
and bruises and burns
and stitches we called zippers

when they healed
and their hairs fell out.
Tracing Orions and Big Dippers

on each other's backs
with our fingernails we whispered
hero's tales in each other's ears.

People who write stories
always say
help is on the way.

Sneaking out after midnight
after Doritos and Pepsi and Late
Night with David Letterman

to go to climb the I-94 overpass,
our hideaway, our spaceship,
our church,

when I thought I saw
a statue in the park let go a breath,
I knew

the Angel of Winter
was still there, still there
waiting for me in the real dark with ice.

Persephone on Her Favored Underworld Initiates

by Anne Champion

I count them by pulse, by the heart's dull thump of *I am*.

Inanna descends naked, names peeled to bone.

Psyche learns the weight of sleep, the price of a coward's love.

Eurydice looks back, knowing the rule & breaking it anyway.

Hecate lifts her torches; the darkness is the only reply.

Sappho protects the leap like a rumor the sea remembers.

Mary Shelley stitches the outcast's grief until it walks.

Emily Dickinson folds her thunder politely into a drawer.

Sylvia Plath listens for bees in a bell jar, the poetry
chars & hexes—salt on the tongue, scripture in the lungs.

Frida Kahlo paints her spine gold; a true queen knows
to wear what shattered her completely as sovereignty.

When the red field opens, women learn how to carry fire like verdicts.

Asthma Ghazal

by Christine Kloeck-Lim

My new Purple Air monitor surveils pollution.
I bought it so I'd know when it's safe to breathe.

Wildfire smoke walks daily across our continent—
I wish I could live somewhere that's good to breathe.

I populate the house with an array of air purifiers
that should make indoors pleasant to breathe,

but nothing is simple. Mice keep dying in the walls:
the rooms are tainted with their last attempt to breathe.

Sometimes it rains. Mold blooms suffocate
the atmosphere just when I think I'll try to breathe.

And now it's ragweed season until the first frost.
Maybe in November it will be okay to breathe.

Fifty years ago I wondered why I felt so weak—
I had no idea that I couldn't breathe.

Secondhand smoke, coal dust, smog: all conspired
against the girl who only wanted to breathe

so she could run away from her childhood.
The irony is that the future is dangerous to breathe.

The world is warmer and I'm old. Our air dons a shroud
of PM2.5 and microplastics—always bad to breathe.

This new monitor can only tell me what is.
I know it will never be safe to breathe.



Midseason by Charlie Swanson

Passengers

by Diane Hu

Every Sunday afternoon, Leo pulls an empty suitcase behind him and insists on putting it himself into the trunk when the cab comes to send him to the airport, lest the weight (the lack thereof) arouse suspicion. The ride is almost always about half an hour as the sun sets, sometimes a little brighter or dimmer depending on the time of year. Sometimes the driver tries to talk with him, but mostly they're silent, the radio playing a tinny tune over stock speakers. Sometimes there's an ongoing call, Leo assumes from a friend or loved one, maybe even another cab driver, both spending their days and nights winding I-80 or 280 or otherwise the narrow interminable city streets, grinding their wheels down into shining pavement unmarred by rain or snow or salt, screeching to a halt every hundred feet at the endless stop lights that chop the 7 by 7 mile square into an infinity—can you divide a finite quantity enough times that it becomes infinite? Leo's not sure. The point of the Sunday exercise isn't the math.

He asks to get dropped off at departures, changing up the terminals each week. From there, it's a short walk to arrivals, and by now he has it memorized where the rideshare pickup locations are. For this airport, it's almost always in one of the parking garages on the roof—you have to find the right elevator, follow the signs, hit the button for the top floor, and then pick a zone. Your car will come to that zone. B1 - B6. Six options. All arranged neatly in the semicircular drive as the sun is just about hitting the horizon and the lights on the towers around the garage are coming on, casting brooding glances in the twilight.

From there, he waits. He's respectful—he only lets himself ask a woman occasionally, never one very young, never someone who would think too much of it. He always wears a ring on his fourth

finger left hand. His clothes are clean but nondescript, the suitcase not too shabby but also nothing expensive. He works hard to fade into the background. There's only a short window of time before it would become strange to be lingering in that dim lobby, but that's no issue—this is about the time when the first batch of evening flights lands. Inevitably, some fifteen, twenty people will come squeezing into the elevator and then disperse out into the lobby, and now is his chance.

“Excuse me,” he asks, making his selection quickly. “Is there any chance you're heading into the city and would be down to split a ride? This surge pricing is just so crazy.”

Sometimes, they refuse. Sometimes someone nearby hears and asks if they can join also, or offers in the place of the one who refused. But almost always, in the end someone accepts, and either Leo or that someone hails the ride, and shyly, Leo asks how best to charge them (in the case that he calls it), or how best to pay them (in the case that they do). It usually ends up being one of those apps you can send money through, and Leo opens the folder on his phone with all of them downloaded and selects the one Someone prefers to take down their contact information.

From there, it's just a matter of waiting for the ride. They make pleasant conversation, or stand in slightly awkward silence as the little car icon crawls around the screen, inching closer to its destination. Sooner or later, the headlights swing around the bend of the semicircle and the car crunches to a halt in front of them in their selected zone. Sooner or later, the two of them peer side by side at the license plate, matching it to the app, and someone opens the car door.

“For Leo?”

“For Someone?”

The man or woman will nod absentmindedly, and the trunk pops open, swinging its yawning jaw like a slow alligator, hinges well practiced. And then the suitcases and backpacks and purses and whatnot are swallowed, and Leo and Someone step into the backseat, and the car slowly starts up again and vacates the parking lot, returning to the winding highways and interminable streets, back to its natural habitat.

At home, Leo opens his journal and writes a one line entry. Name, approximate age, what they looked like. App contact info, price to expect to be charged or price he'll charge. He examines last week's note and if it was a to-charge memo, he sends the request in a leisurely fashion, savoring the moment, picturing Someone wherever they may be hearing the notification and turning to their phone, to him, invisible on the other line. Importantly, he doesn't note the address. He tries his absolute best to forget where they dropped off Someone, he averts his eyes when the car arrives, he never looks back at the actual route the tiny car draws. It would be deeply inappropriate for him to do so, and it gives him great relief to look back on prior entries and realize to his satisfaction that he truly has no inkling of where the ride ended up.

That night, he'll dream of Someone.

It's always the same dream despite the ever changing panel of faces. In the dream, they're sitting somewhere unknown, a vague cityscape that looks like this city but perhaps isn't. It could be, but there's never quite enough detail to know. Leo is facing this Someone, but they're looking away for the longest time, enough time for him to notice things like how the wind blows through their hair, or what clothes they're wearing, or how they hold themselves. And just as Leo thinks this is how it will be forever, sitting side by side as he cautiously examines their slack gaze, their faces turn, expressionless, and he can see them about to say something, their mouths forming around his name, and then he wakes, sweating, without a sound.

How to Read the News

by Mary Lou Buschi

I'm designated science teacher. I zoom out
on the NASA website to the other galaxies.
Then back to our milky way. One says, I hate that

candy. Another says, I can't eat snickers—nuts.
Which sends us down a path of likes, dislikes,
what we fear. Of course, the moon doesn't change.

It's our perception, depending on the sun,
the earth's tilt. In fact, we are always looking
at the same facet, the same unnerving eye.

They favor the waxing gibbous. They laugh,
saying *gibbous* again and again. When the moon
waned into a smart crescent, soon to vanish

is my preference. I zoom out again.
You see class. I point to the edge of blackness.
This is an event horizon.

Grace

by Tammy Smith

I envy people who can sleep
on a bus or a train, heads bowed
as if in prayer. Unafraid to
close their eyes in public.
I can't sleep on a hard bench
wrapped in a ratty blanket I stole
from the women's shelter without
unbuckling this pair of too-tight,
two sizes too small low-rise jeans
my caseworker, Gladys, bought
from the thrift store in downtown
San Francisco. I'm jealous
of the photograph she keeps
in a gold frame on her desk
while reviewing my paperwork—
a giggling girl in figure skates
gliding across glistening ice,
she never falls, maybe she's
named Grace and isn't afraid
like me in my worn-out boots
with a broken zipper tripping
over curbs. Grace's grin
follows me everywhere:
dangerous nights down Eddy Street,
dull mornings past
bodegas selling stale bread
(I bet Gladys buys fresh bagels)
caddy-corner to coin-operated
laundromats where I feed

quarters to a machine stuffed
with stained, secondhand clothes
I never outgrow—I can't imagine
Gladys letting Grace leave home
in pants that didn't fit, or shrinking her
favorite tops. My mother destroyed
my Van-Halen t-shirt, threatened
to chop off my hair, send me to
school naked. Grace wouldn't
look so cute, half-bald, whizzing
around the rink in a ripped blouse.
She wouldn't last a day in my house.
By freshman year, my mother glared
at my failing grades, warned if I ever dropped
out of Rutgers, she'd disown me;
two years later, I'm running
away from a man with a dirty
mustache who steals my ID, rips off
my scarlet dress—like Grace
I am balanced on a blade.

Contributor Biographies

Madeline Allen is an MFA student at Florida State University. When not terrorizing her neighborhood by trying to recite poems from memory during directionless walks, she can be found teaching freshman composition classes, creative writing at the county jail, or new tricks to her cat Dex. Right now, he can sit, spin, and recite poems from memory.

Bernadette Benda lives and writes in her hometown of Cleveland, Ohio. When she is not working on her novel, she is most often found at the gym, dance studio, or looking for inspiration along the shores of Lake Erie. Her nonfiction has been published in journals like *The Red Cedar Review*, *The Rappahannock Review*, *The Razor*, and *White Wall Review*.

Dom Blanco is the author of *Querencia: An Autoethnography*, winner of the 2026 Paul Nemser Prize (forthcoming from Lily Poetry Review Books in March 2027). He studied philosophy at DePaul University and holds an MFA from Randolph College—where he was selected as a Blackburn Fellow. His work has appeared in *MÁNOA Journal* (Architectures of FuturoPasados), *Huizache*, *Latin@ Literatures*, *The Brooklyn Review*, *Rise Up Review* and elsewhere. Originally from Miami, Florida, and now based in Bloomington, Illinois, on Potawatomi land, he likes to bask in the sun like a meerkat and embark on walks that lead nowhere through downtown Chicago.

Megan Bresnahan (she/her) is a poet from rural Virginia who now lives in Laguna Beach, CA. She earned a BA as part of the Area Program in Poetry Writing from the University of Virginia. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *electric pink*, *Rogue Agent*, *Beaver Magazine*, and others. You can find her at megan.bresnahan.co

Dustin Brookshire (he/him) is the author of five chapbooks, including the forthcoming *Contoured* (Lily Poetry Review Books, 2027). He edited the Lambda Literary Award finalist anthology *When I Was Straight: A Tribute to Maureen Seaton* (Harbor Editions, 2024) and co-edited *Let Me Say This: A Dolly Parton Poetry Anthology* (Madville Publishing, 2023). His work has appeared in *Five Points*, *South Carolina Review*, *Pleiades*, *Cherry Tree*, *Diode*, and other publications. Curator of the Zoom-based Wild & Precious Life Series, find Dustin online at dustinbrookshire.com

Mary Lou Buschi (she/her) authored 3 poetry collections. *Blue Physics*, 2024 (Lily Poetry Review) was a finalist for Contemporary Poetry in The International Book Awards and a distinguished favorite, Independent Press Award. *Paddock*, 2021 (LPR). Poems appear in *The Glacier*, *Ploughshares*, *Sixth Finch*, *Verse Daily*, among other literary magazines. Mary Lou is a graduate of The MFA Program For Writers at Warren Wilson College. She also holds a Master of Science in Urban Education. Mary Lou has received fellowships from The Santa Fe Writers Conference, Vermont Studio Center, and The New York City Teaching Fellows. Currently, she is a special education teacher in the Bronx.

Laura Buxbaum (she/her) lives and writes in Maine, where she also raises dairy goats, makes music, and runs on local trails. Her poems can be seen or are forthcoming in *Thimble Lit*, *Rat's Ass Review*, *Brawl*, *Verse-Virtual*, *Gyroscope*, *Writers Resist*, *Painted Pebble*, *La Rotonde*, and elsewhere. She was a finalist in the Maine Writers and Publishers Alliance 2026 Literary Awards in the Short Works in Poetry Competition. Her chapbook, *Roadkill and Other Encounters*, will be published by Kelsay Books in the fall. She can be found at <https://laurabuxbaum.com> or on social media: <https://www.facebook.com/laura.buxbaum>; <https://www.instagram.com/buxbaumlaura/>

Ariane Campbell is an award-winning author and poet currently pursuing a Master's of Arts in English at Clemson University. She recently helped start-up *Wandering Lights Literary Magazine* and functions as an editor and communications coordinator. Along with books, Ariane loves traveling, studying, and horseback riding.

Marilyn Cavicchia lives in Chicago and works as a freelance grant writer. She recently resumed submitting poems for publication after a lapse of a few years. From this most recent round, two of her poems appeared in the July 2026 issue of *The Lake*. Her chapbook, *Secret Rivers*, received the Helen Kay Chapbook Prize and was published by Evening Street Press in 2014.

Anne Champion is the author of *She Saints & Holy Profanities* (Quarterly West, 2019), *The Good Girl is Always a Ghost* (Black Lawrence Press, 2018), *Book of Levitations* (Trembling Pillow Press, 2019), *Reluctant Mistress* (Gold Wake Press, 2013), *The Dark Length Home* (Noctuary Press, 2017), *Hunted Carrion: Sonnets to a Stalker* (Bowker, 2024), and *This is a Story About Ghosts: A Memoir of Borderline Personality Disorder* (Bowker, 2024). Her work appears in *Verse Daily*, *diode*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Salamander*, *New South*, *Redivider*, *PANK Magazine*, and elsewhere. She was a 2009 Academy of American Poets Prize recipient, a 2016 Best of the Net winner, a Douglas Preston Travel Grant recipient, and a Barbara Deming Memorial Grant recipient. She received her MFA in poetry from Emerson College.

Subhash Roy Choudhury is an artist and award-winning traditional poet whose work pairs short-form verse with fine art illustration. He is a 6-time selection for the Asahi Haikuist Network, and his work has been featured in *DailyHaiga*, *Shadow Pond Journal*, *Five Fleas* (*Itchy Poetry*), and *Horror Senryu Journal*.

Linda Cooper lives in Ronald, Washington and teaches English Composition at Wenatchee Valley College and Nature Writing at Washington Outdoor School. She completed her MFA at Eastern Washington University and her poems have been published in *Verse Daily*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *West Branch*, *Many Mountains Moving*, *Willow Springs*, *Third Coast*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Los Angeles Review*, *Permafrost*, *Hubbub*, *Elixir*, *Diner*, *Pontoon*, and many more. She also won the 2015 Orlando Prize for Poetry and the 2022 Allied Arts Foundation Prize. Her chapbook, *Blue, a Waltz*, was published by Floating Bridge Press in 2023.

Pam Crow is an award-winning poet who lives in Portland, Oregon. Pam's work has been published in *Green Mountain Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Ploughshares*, and other national journals. She is the winner of the Astraea Emerging Lesbian Writers award and the Neil Shepard award for poetry. Her book *Inside This House* was published by Main Street Rag press in 2008.

Pat Daneman's work is widely published, notably in *Mid-American Review*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Naugatuck River Review*, and *Best of the Net*. Her collection, *After All*, was finalist for the Thorpe-Menn and Kansas Book awards. She is author of two chapbooks, *Find Me*, forthcoming from Charlotte Lit press, and *Where the World Begins*. She serves on the board of the New Hampshire Poetry Society and as an assistant editor for their journal *Touchstone*. She lives in Exeter, NH. patdaneman.com

Micah Dela Cueva is a Filipina writer residing in New Jersey. She has an MFA in Creative Writing and Publishing from LIU, Brooklyn. Her work has appeared in *Hunger Mountain*, *Defunct*, *Speculative Nonfiction*, and *The Bangalore Review*. She was a finalist for the 2026 Bellingham Review 49th Parallel Award in Poetry and for the 2022 Palette Poetry Emerging Poet Prize. She recently discovered the joy of papermaking from recycled paper.

Jane Donohue is a writer of poetry and prose and a master's student in theology. Her work has been most recently featured in *Salamander Magazine*. You may have heard her speaking on the radio.

John Dorroh travels as often as possible. He inevitably ends up in other peoples' kitchens exchanging culinary tidbits and telling tall tales. Once he baked bread with Austrian monks and drank a healthy portion of their beer. Six of his poems were nominated for Best of the Net. Others have appeared in over 100 journals, including *Feral*, *North of Oxford*, *River Heron*, *Wisconsin Review*, *Kissing Dynamite*, *El Portal*, and *Loch Raven Review*. He makes his home in Southwest Illinois not far from St. Louis. In his next life he wants to be a penguin.

Kelly DuMar is a poet, playwright and workshop facilitator. She's author of four poetry chapbooks. Her poems are published in *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Thrush* and more. Her digital images have been featured on the cover of *Josephine Quarterly*, *Brooklyn Review*, *About Place*, *Cool Beans Lit*, & more. Her images celebrate the habitat of her home on the rural Charles River in Sherborn. Kelly's digital collages are composed from her original digital images.

Brian Duran-fuentes was born and raised in Mexico City. He is a Medical Interpreter at a Pediatrics Hospital in Dallas, Texas. His work has appeared in several publications including *Oyez Review*, *Protean*, and *Poetries in English*. He has two volumes of poetry: *Thank You for Shopping at Secgens* (Alien Buddha Press) and *Sleep Studies at the Mercy of Kaiju* (Ukiyoto Press)

Alejandro Escudé's first book of poems, *My Earthbound Eye*, was published in 2013 upon winning the Sacramento Poetry Center Award. He received a master's degree in creative writing from UC Davis. A new collection, *The Book of the Unclaimed Dead*, was published by Main Street Rag Press in 2019.

Robbin Farr writes poetry and brief lyric nonfiction and is drawn to the places where attention, memory, and lived experience meet. She is the founding editor of *River Heron Review* and a retired high school English and creative writing teacher. Her work has appeared in *Cleaver*, *Citron Review*, *The MacGuffin*, *One Art*, *Radar Poetry*, and others. She is the author of *Become Echo* (2023) and *Transience* (2018), and publishes the Substack *10 poetry notebooks*. She finds both terror and joy in the work of writing.

Mara Gale Fein most often writes of loss. She has been anthologized in *Look Away Now*, a collection of poems on hope and despair. Her poetry also has appeared in the *Anacapa Review*, *California Quarterly*, and *Amethyst Review*. Other work has appeared in *Tahoma Literary Review*, *Wilderness House Literary Review*, and *Poor Yorick*. She has a doctorate in English from the University of Southern California.

Abigail George, winner of the Sol Plaatje EU Poetry Prize is a poet, short story writer, novelist and script consultant. She was shortlisted for the Writing Ukraine Prize and the Erbacce Prize. Her poetry has appeared in *Afrocritik*, *African Writer Magazine*, *Birds Piled Loosely*, *Synchronized Chaos*, *Ovi Magazine*, *Piker Press*, *Literary Orphans*, *Toad Suck Review*, anthologies, journals, magazines and elsewhere. Her blog is called African Renaissance. She is a recipient of a Pushcart Prize and two Best of the Net nominations. Her latest book is *Did You Get Married To Her When I Was In The Mental Hospital*. Find it now on Amazon and the Zamashort shop.

Ian Golub holds an MFA in poetry from Bennington College. His work has appeared or will soon appear in *Havik*, *Red River Review*, *Sky Island Journal*, *Small Orange*, and *Tethered Literary*. He lives in the Washington, D.C. area, where he splits his time between writing, working, and volunteering as a ski patroller.

Benjamin Goodman is a poet, counselor, and educator residing in the Hudson Valley. He regularly offers poetry classes at the Omega Institute, Princeton University, and online. His work appears in various literary journals including *Strange Matters*, *North of Oxford*, *Midway Journal*, *Vassar Review*, and *Berkeley Poetry Review*.

Sonal Goorha is a mixed media artist working in the Washington, DC region whose practice explores identity, survival, power, and repair through watercolor, photography, printmaking, and found materials. Influenced by experiences in mountaineering, engineering, and martial arts, her work examines trauma, resilience, vulnerability, and transformation through layered material processes rooted in both personal history and regional landscapes. By incorporating natural elements and community-sourced objects, she investigates fragility, endurance, connection, and the possibility of reassembly and renewal. Her work has appeared in *Wildscape Literary Journal* and on the cover of *Pergola Literary Magazine*, and has been exhibited several places including Maryland, Virginia, Washington, DC, and Texas. She received First Place in 2D Works at the 2025 Regional Art Show in Dallas, Texas.

Beth Gordon is a poet, mother and grandmother in Asheville, NC. She is the author of five chapbooks, including *The Water Cycle* (Variant Lit) and *The First Day* (Belle Point Press); and one full length collection, *This Small Machine of Prayer* (Kelsay Books). Her second full-length collection, *Alchemist or Arsonist*, is forthcoming from Acre Books in 2027. Beth is Managing Editor of *Feral: A Journal of Poetry and Art*, Assistant Editor of *Animal Heart Press*, and Grandma of *Femme Salve Books*. Instagram, Threads and BlueSky @bethgordonpoet.

Daniel Gordon is a writer based in Vienna, Austria. His work has featured in *Long River Review* and is forthcoming in *Apricity Press*. He works for a local newspaper and spends his free time writing short fiction and drinking more tea than water. Find him on Instagram @daniel_gordon_stories

Susan Grimm has been published in *Sugar House Review*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *South Dakota Review*, and *Field*. She has had two chapbooks published. In 2004, BkMk Press published *Lake Erie Blue*, a full-length collection. In 2022, she received her third Ohio Arts Council Individual Artist Grant.

Benedict Hangiriza is a Ugandan writer and poet. His work has been published in *The Kalahari Review*, *Writers Space Africa*, *Renard Press*, *Eunoia Review*, *Free the Verse*, *The Narratives Against Poverty in Africa Anthology*, and upcoming in *IHRAM Literary Magazine*.

Sharon Hashimoto's first book of poetry, *The Crane Wife* (co-winner of the 2003 Nicholas Roerich Prize and published by Story Line Press), was reprinted by Red Hen Press. Her second poetry book, *More American*, won the 2021 Off the Grid Poetry Prize and the 2022 Washington State Book Award in Poetry. Her collection of short stories, *Stealing Home*, was published in 2024 by Grid Books.

Justin Hollis has an MFA from Hofstra University and currently teaches language and literature at Palm Beach State College. His work has appeared previously in the *Querencia Press Quarterly Anthology*, *Action*, *Spectacle*, *Pioneer Town*, *The Orchards Poetry Journal*, *Eunoia Review*, *GAS: Poetry, Art and Music*, *ANTAE*, *Midcult**, and *The Chiron Review*, amongst others. His debut collection, *Ferrying the Stars*, is published by Half Inch Press.

T. K. Howell lives on the banks of the Thames and manages ancient oak woodlands, tending to trees that are older than most countries. His writing is often inspired by mythology and folklore and can be found at various genre and literary spaces including *The Mantelpiece*, *King Ludd's Rag*, and *The Brussels Review*.

Diane Hu is a writer based in San Francisco who hails from the Midwest. She loves the devastating and disturbing.

Amorak Huey is author of five books of poems including *Mouth*, out from Cornerstone Press in 2026. Co-founder with Han VanderHart of River River Books, Huey teaches at Bowling Green State University. He is co-author with W. Todd Kaneko of the textbook *Poetry: A Writer's Guide* and *Anthology* (Bloomsbury, 2024).

Regine Jackson is a poet and writer based in Northampton, Massachusetts. Her work spans poetry, memoir, and fiction. She was named the Straw Dog Writers Guild Emerging Writer Fellow in 2022, and her writing has appeared in the 2024 *Massachusetts Bards Poetry Anthology*, *Meat for Tea: The Valley Review*, the *Reimagining New England Histories Project*, *Pán•o•ply: Inaugural MultiCreative Anthology*, and other journals and anthologies. She leads The Flimsy Quill, an initiative offering workshops, literary events, and creative mentorship in Western Massachusetts and beyond. She can be found at reginejackson.com and [@theflimsyquill](https://www.instagram.com/theflimsyquill) on Instagram.

Haley Jenkins is an autistic poet and writer living in Surrey, UK. She has three poetry collections: *Nekorb* (Veer Books), *Colourbast Blues* (Ghost City Press) and *Nature Exists Laughing* (Stone Corpse Press). She has been published in *The Journal of Innovative British & Irish Poetry*, *Cutbow Quarterly*, *databled zine*, *Tears in the Fence* and many more. She has presented her work at The National Poetry Library, The University of Surrey, The University of Roehampton, Falmouth University and Mansfield College Oxford.

Suyue Jin is a Chinese artist and architectural designer based in Los Angeles. Her work explores identity, personal memory, concealment, and social pressure through architecture, visual art, and spatial expression. Shaped by her experience growing up in China while navigating gender expectations and hidden aspects of identity, she uses design as a way to translate emotion and social tension into visual form. She received her Master of Architecture degree from SCI-Arc and currently works on theatre, performing arts, and cultural architecture projects.

Kristin J. Kelley is a Boston-based poet and editor whose work explores grief, family inheritance, and the quiet imprints of loss and survival. She hosts and organizes a poetry reading series that raises funds for local charities. Her recent work has appeared in *Arnoldia*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *Sky Island Journal*, and elsewhere. You can find her on Instagram at [@violethammerslydetectiveagency](https://www.instagram.com/violethammerslydetectiveagency).

Merie Kirby teaches at the University of North Dakota. She is the author of two chapbooks, *The Dog Runs On* and *The Thumbelina Poems*, and has been published in several journals, including *Whale Road Review*, *SWWIM*, *West Trestle Review*, and *North Dakota Quarterly*, with work forthcoming in *The Prose Poem* and *Scientific American*. You can find her online at www.meriekirby.com.

Christine Klocek-Lim is a prize-winning Pennsylvania poet and novelist who received the 2009 Ellen La Forge Memorial Prize in poetry. Her poetry collection, *Dark Matter*, uses astronomy as a theme for human relationships. Her latest chapbook, *Nömenclätūra*, explores the reality and surreality of the human condition. She has four other chapbooks and has been nominated as a finalist for numerous prizes. Her poems and essays have appeared in *Nautilus—Cosmos*, *3 Quarks Daily*, *Terrain.org*, *The Comstock Review*, *Eclectica*, and elsewhere. She is the founder and editor of *Autumn Sky Poetry DAILY* (est. 2006).

Paul Koniecki lives and writes in Dallas, Texas. He was once chosen for the John Ashbery Home School Residency. His poems feature in Richard Bailey's movie "One of the Rough" distributed by AVIFF Cannes. *Cathexis Northwest Press*, *Blue Mountain Review*, *Wild Roof Journal*, *Chiron Review*, *As It Ought To Be Magazine*, *Henniker Review*, *Gasconade Review*, and *Thimble Literary Magazine* have published his work, as well as many other places. He received his MFA from VCFA in 2024.

AnnaLeah Lacoss is an emerging poet from Windsor, Connecticut. Her work has previously been published in *The Tiger Moth Review*, *Clade Song*, *Eratio*, and *Palette Poetry*.

Camille LeFevre writes poetry and creative nonfiction from the unceded lands of the Hisatsinom, Yavapai, and Apache in Northern Arizona. Her essay, "Body Topography," published in *The Dodge*, was selected for the 2026 Best of the Net Anthology. Her work has also appeared in *Wild Roof Journal*, *Bridge Eight*, *Poets for Science*, *wildscape.literary*, *Feral: A Journal of Poetry and Art*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Metphrastics*, *Fugue*, and other publications. Her work has been nominated for Best American Nature Writing and Best American Essays. Her first poetry collection, *Sandstone and Kin*, will be published in late September 2026 (FLP).

Elizabeth Lockman lives with her husband in the Appalachian Mountains of West Virginia. Their farm is in the National Radio Quiet Zone, where they go about their days disencumbered by cell phones and wireless internet. After a fifty-year hiatus during which she raised their children and wrote prose, she resumed writing poetry seriously again in 2024. A number of her poems were published in the 1970s and 1980s.

Betsy Mars is a poet, photographer, and an editor at *Gyroscope Review*. Betsy's poems are widely available online and in print, in journals such as *ONE ART*, *SWWIM*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *Autumn Sky*, *Book of Matches*, and the anthology *Signed, Sealed, Delivered: The Motown Poetry Review* (Madville Press). Betsy's two chapbooks are *Alinea*, and *In the Muddle of the Night*, co-authored with Alan Walowitz. Her full-length book, *Rue Obscure*, is forthcoming from Sheila-Na-Gig Editions in late 2026.

Much of Lindsay McLeod's poetry can be found online easily enough and appears most recently in *As It Ought to Be*, *Wailing and Gnashing*, *Backchannels*, and *Cacti Fur*. Lindsay lives by the Port in South Australia with his blue cattle dog, Mary.

Elizabeth B. Morse's work has appeared in literary magazines such as *Kestrel* and *Ginosko*, and anthologies such as *Help Yourself*. She won first prize for flash fiction in *Cardinal Sins*. Her full-length poetry collection, *Unreasonable Weather*, was published by Kelsay Books in 2025. A poem in this book was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She has an MFA from Brooklyn College. She is the poetry editor of *BigCityLit* and a co-editor of *Brownstone Poets Anthology*.

Natalie Naugle is a third-year student at Texas Tech University, born in Austin, Texas. She is currently studying architecture with a minor in English and will be an intern for Texas Tech's Studio E Audiobook initiative in the coming fall semester.

Breeze Navarro is a speculative writer from Florida. Their work has appeared in *Five on the Fifth* and *Twin Bird Review*. If they aren't reading or writing, they're hiking in search of birds, mushrooms, and stars. Find them on Bluesky @breezenavarro.bsky.social.

John Newson has had work published internationally, from haiku to prose poetry, in free verse and metrical, formal and informal. His poems have appeared in multiple journals, including *The Lyric*, *The Moth*, *Light*, *Modern Haiku*, and *BoomerLitMag*. John often edges towards the pastoral, leaning into the subjects of nature and faith.

Leah Oates has a B.F.A. from the Rhode Island School of Design and a M.F.A. from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and is a Fulbright Fellow for graduate study at Edinburgh College of Art in Scotland. Oates has had solo shows in the NYC area at Susan Eley Fine Art, The MTA Lightbox Project at 42nd Street, The Arsenal Gallery in Central Park, The Open Center, The Center for Book Arts and The Brooklyn Public Library Main Branch and had had solo show nationally and internationally at Black Cat Artspace in Toronto, Real Art Ways in Connecticut, Sara Nightingale Gallery in Long Island, Artemisia Gallery in Chicago and at Galerie Joella in Turku, Finland. Oates has been in group shows in the NYC area at Susan Eley Fine Art, Lichtundfire Gallery, Wave Hill, Edward Hopper House, Chashama, Williamsburg Art Center, Metaphor Projects Gallery, Usagi NYC, Denise Bibro Fine Art, Nurture Art Gallery and The Pen and Brush Gallery. Oates has been part of group shows in Toronto at John. Aird Gallery, Gallery 1313, Propeller Gallery, Gladstone Hotel, Remote Gallery, Arta Gallery and The Papermill Gallery. Oates has had press and been featured in numerous publications including Oates has had press in *Al-Tiba9 Contemporary Art Magazine*, *The Shanghai Literary Review*, *Mud Season Review*, *dArt Magazine*, *The Tulane Review*, *Vallum Journal*, *Calyx Journal*, *Blue Mesa Review*, *Friends of the Artist*, *GASHER Journal*, *Flumes Literary Journal*, and the *805 Lit + Art Journal*.

Mary Oishi, Albuquerque Poet Laureate (2020-2022), is the author of three poetry collections, most recently *Sidewalk Cruiseship* (University of New Mexico Press, 2024). She is also the Editor of the 2023 New Mexico/Arizona Book Award-winning *One Albuquerque*, *One Hundred Poets: Poets in the Libraries Anthology*. Her work appears in anthologies and journals in 15 countries and 7 languages. She is currently working on a bilingual poetry collection and a memoir.

Yoda Olinsky (she/her) is a writer, editor, and workshop guide from Canada. Her work has appeared in many beloved journals, including *Rattle* and *The Shore*. She has published a memoir called *Salt & Sour* and is working on her next book.

Emily Patterson (she/her) is the author of *The Birth of Undoing* (Sheila-Na-Gig Editions, 2025), as well as three chapbooks. Her poetry appears in *North American Review*, *SWWIM*, *Stirring*, *The Penn Review*, *CALYX*, *The Shore*, and elsewhere. Emily lives with her family in Columbus, Ohio and works as a curriculum designer with *Highlights for Children*. Read more at emilypattersonpoet.com.

Fiona Perry's first collection of poetry, *Alchemy* (Turas Press, 2020), won the Poetry Book Awards (2021) Silver Medal and was shortlisted for the Rubery Prize. Her poem "Fusion" was longlisted for the Fish Publishing prize. "Sea Change", a flash fiction piece, won first prize in the Bath Flash Fiction Awards (2020). Her most recent work is, "The Chemistry of Emotion", co-written with scientist and poet Stephen Paul Wren.

Holly Lola Peterson is studying creative writing and anthropology at Western Washington University. She loves playing outside, primates, and storytellers.

Kimberly Ann Priest is a writer and photographer whose book *Wolves in Shells* won the 2024 Backwaters Prize in Poetry from the University of Nebraska Press. She is the author of *tether & lung* (Texas Review Press) and *Slaughter the One Bird* (Sundress Publications). An assistant professor in the Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and Cultures at Michigan State University, her poetry has appeared in *Copper Nickel*, *Poetry Wales*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Birmingham Poetry Review*.

Laura Ann Reed is the author of the chapbook *Homage to Kafka* (Poetry Box, 2025). Her work has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and has appeared or is forthcoming in numerous journals, as well as in twelve anthologies including *Poetry of Presence II* (Grayson Books, 2023), *World Poetry Day Anthology*, (Moonstone Publishing, 2026) and *The Wonder of Small Things* (Storey Publishing 2023). Reed holds master's degrees in clinical psychology and performing arts. She lives with her husband, Grant Reed, in the Pacific Northwest. <https://lauraannreed.net/>

Beck Reynolds is a poet based in Oxford, UK. Her work has recently appeared in *Poetry Worth Hearing*, *Remington Review*, *Mouthful of Salt*, *The Poetry Lighthouse* and others. She enjoys leaving half drunk cups of coffee around the house and confidently misidentifying birds.

Maureen Egan Riggi lives and writes in Central New Jersey. Poems have appeared in the *Kelsey Review*, *US1 Worksheets*, *Journal of New Jersey Poets*, *Thimble Literary Magazine*, and *North of Oxford*. Maureen has received two Pushcart Prize nominations, and her latest manuscript, *Ordinary Women*, explores well-known mythological figures as modern women. Maureen received a BA in Literature/Creative Writing from Stockton University, and currently works at Princeton University. She shares her home with her husband, son, and two cats. When she is not writing she can be found singing, cooking, embroidering, or making jewelry.

Yvette A. Schnoeker-Shorb is the author of *Shapes That Stay* (Kelsay Books). Her poetry has appeared in *Slipstream Magazine*, *New York Quarterly*, *Camas: The Nature of the West*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, *About Place Journal*, *AJN: The American Journal of Nursing*, and other publications. She lives in the Central Highlands of Arizona.

Sameen Shakya's poems have been published in *Alternate Route*, *Cosmic Daffodil*, *Hearth and Coffin*, *Roi Faineant* and *Thin Veil Press*, and elsewhere. Born and raised in Kathmandu, Nepal, he moved to the USA in 2015 to pursue writing. He earned a BA in Creative Writing from St Cloud State University then traveled widely across the country, seeking an education outside the classroom. He returned to Kathmandu in 2022 and is currently based there.

Matthew Sisson's poetry has appeared in journals ranging from the *Harvard Review Online* to *JAMA* (The Journal of the American Medical Association). He has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and has read his work on NPR's *On Point*. His book, *Please, Call Me Moby*, was published by The Pecan Grove Press, of St. Mary's University, San Antonio, Texas.

Melissa Shepherd is a writer, editor, and arts advocate who lives in Hoboken, NJ. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Good River Review*, *Jurnal*, *Twin Bird Review*, and *The Dread Literary Review*. She holds an MFA in poetry from the Naslund-Mann School of Writing at Spalding University and recently completed her first full collection of poems, *Keys to the Emptying House*. www.melissashepherd.info

Tammy Smith is a poet and licensed clinical social worker from New Jersey. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *Paterson Literary Review*, *The New Verse News*, *ONE ART*, *Autumn Sky Poetry Daily*, *Grand Little Things*, and elsewhere. She received honorable mention in the *Journal of New Jersey Poets* 2026 Poets Prize.

Hali Sofala-Jones is a Samoan and Southern poet and the author of *AFAKASI | HALF-CASTE*. Her recent work appears or is forthcoming from *The Academy of American Poets*, *The Rumpus*, *Redivider*, *Main Street Rag*, *Slipstream*, and elsewhere. She loves Jesus, her 'aiga, Gulf-side beaches, live music, Disney World, and watching her daughter play softball. She holds a PhD from the University of Nebraska and an MFA from the University of Wisconsin–Madison and teaches her favorite poems, stories, and occasionally video games at Middle Georgia State University. Her greatest personal achievement remains the time Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson liked one of her Facebook comments. Find her on Instagram @sofalajones.

Donna Spruijt-Metz's books include *To Phrase a Prayer for Peace* (2025, Wildhouse Press), *General Release from the Beginning of the World*, *And Scuttle My Balloon* (with Flower Conroy), and *Wu Wei Eats an Egg* (Lucas Hirsch in translation). Her poems appear in *Poem-a-day*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *American Poetry Review*, and elsewhere. She's an emeritus psychology professor, MacDowell fellow, rabbinical school drop-out, former classical flutist, and briefly, a rock and roll bassist. She gets restless.

Sara Stegen is a Dutch poet and non-fiction author who writes about land, family, nature, and neurodivergence. Home is a boulder-clay ridge in the northern Netherlands where her bike shed contains 8 bicycles and where she is working on a memoir about apples and autism and her first poetry collection.

Alison Stone is the author of nine full-length collections, *Informed* (NYQ Books, 2024), *To See What Rises* (CW Books, 2023), *Zombies at the Disco* (Jacar Press, 2020), *Caught in the Myth* (NYQ Books, 2019), *Dazzle* (Jacar Press, 2017), *Masterplan*, a book of collaborative poems with Eric Greinke (Presa Press, 2018), *Ordinary Magic*, (NYQ Books, 2016), *Dangerous Enough* (Presa Press 2014), and *They Sing at Midnight*, which won the 2003 Many Mountains Moving Poetry Award; as well as three chapbooks. Her poems have appeared in *The Paris Review*, *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *Barrow Street*, *Poet Lore*, and many other journals and anthologies. She has been awarded *Poetry's* Frederick Bock Prize, *New York Quarterly's* Madeline Sadin Award, and *The Lyric's* Lyric Poetry Prize. She was Writer in Residence at LitSpace St. Pete. She is also a painter and the creator of The Stone Tarot. A licensed psychotherapist, she has private practices in NYC and Nyack. <https://alisonstone.info/> Youtube and TikTok – Alison Stone Poetry.

Charlie Swanson is an artistic symbolist, writer, a wandering Baltic spirit. Born in 1991 in ex-Tilsit (now Sovetsk), currently roaming around the Balkans. Insta: @m.c.swanson

Margeaux Templeton is a writer based in Milwaukee. She holds a BA in Writing from the University of Wisconsin-Superior and is at work on her first novel. She publishes poems, essays, and stories weekly at margeauxvitoria.substack.com.

Jessica Thiru is a Kenyan and South African poet and writer. She is the author of the chapbook *Burning of Absence* (Querencia Press, 2025). In 2023, she won the international category for Button Poetry's Video Contest. Her work has also appeared or is forthcoming in *SWWIM*, Querencia Press's anthology *Not Ghosts, But Spirits IV* and *Thimble*. When she's not writing she likes going out for drinks with friends and adding to her growing trinket collection. You can find her on Instagram and most places @leechteeth.

Emily Tong is an Asian-American poet from New Jersey. Her work has been recognized by or is forthcoming in *Augur Magazine*, *Palette Poetry*, *The Eunoia Review*, *Fugue*, *BRAWL Lit*, and elsewhere.

Ohio born and raised, Kerry Trautman's poetry and fiction have appeared previously in *Thimble*, as well as in numerous other journals and anthologies. Her books are *Things That Come in Boxes* (King Craft Press 2012,) *To Have Hoped* (Finishing Line Press 2015,) *Artifacts* (NightBallet Press 2017,) *To be Nonchalantly Alive* (Kelsay Books 2020,) *Marilyn: Self-Portrait, Oil on Canvas* (Gutter Snob Books 2022,) *Unknowable Things* (Roadside Press 2022,) *Irregulars* (Stanchion Books 2023,) *Things to Say When You Have Nothing to Say* (Roadside Press 2026,) and *Days of Bees* (Dancing Girl Press, 2026.)

M.J. Turner's poems have appeared in *Nixes Mate*, *Stoneboat*, *Feral*, the *Lily Poetry Review*, *SWWIM Every Day* and other publications. She lives in Massachusetts.

Tanya Tuzeo is a librarian at the College at Old Westbury and a mother of two. Her work, featured in various literary publications, explores themes of intergenerational trauma and societal conflict. A finalist in the 2022 *Atlanta Review* International Poetry Contest and longlisted in *Frontier Poetry's* Nature & Place prize, her poetry reflects resilience, love, and the complexities of family bonds in a deteriorating world.

Lois Perch Villemaire is a collage artist and poet from Annapolis, MD. She is the author of *My Eight Greats* and *Eyes at the Edge of the Woods*. Her poetry has appeared in *Spillwords Press*, *Verse-Virtual*, *Third Street Review*, and elsewhere. *Last Leaves* and *Anti Heroin Chic* have published her artwork. Lois is a contributing writer to *AARP The Ethel*. She is a Pushcart nominee, works at the library, and propagates African violets.

Nora Esme Wagner is a senior at Wellesley College. She lives in San Francisco, California. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Smokelong*, *Wigleaf*, *JMWW*, *Milk Candy Review*, *Flash Frog*, *Vestal Review*, and elsewhere. Her stories have been selected for *Wigleaf's* Top 50. She is an assistant fiction editor at *Pithead Chapel* and the Co-Editor-in-Chief for *The Wellesley Review*.

In previous lives, LaDonna Witmer was a newspaper journalist, advertising copywriter, brand voice expert, editorial director, public speaker, and poetry slammer. She now tends her dogs, dahlias, and daughter on a quinta in rural Portugal while writing essays, poems, and memoir. LaDonna is a Hedgebrook and Disquiet alum who's written three chapbooks and had poetry published in *SWWIM*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, and the poetry anthology *Ache: The Body's Experience of Religion*. She is writing a memoir about fundamentalism and fire.

Margot Wizansky's chapbook, *Wild for Life*, was published with Lily Poetry Review Books (2022). *The Yellow Sweater*, her full-length poetry collection, is available from Kelsay Books (2023). *Random Music in a Small Galaxy* was also published by Kelsay Books. Her poems have appeared online and in many journals: *The American Journal of Poetry*, *The Missouri Review*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Ruminate*, *River Styx*, *Cimarron*, and elsewhere. She edited anthologies: *Mercy of Tides: Poems for a Beach House*, and *Rough Places Plain: Poems of the Mountains*. She co-edited *What the Poem Knows*, a tribute to Barbara Helfgott Hyett, her teacher. She won residencies with Writers@Work in Salt Lake City and with Carlow University in Sligo, Ireland. Margot is retired from a career developing housing for adults with disabilities. She lives in Massachusetts.

Robin Woolman is a teacher of physical theater in Portland, Oregon. She loves backpacking the high country or strolling her neighborhood where experience finds surprising pathways into her poetry. Her works appear in *Cirque*, *Deep Wild*, *Westchester Review*, *Oregon Poetry Calendars*, *Ecotheo*, *Certain Age*, *Song of Eretz*, *Tiny Seed*, and *Flowers of the Field*.

Jinxin Xu is an artist and architectural designer based in New York. He received his Master of Architecture degree from SCI-Arc and currently works in the architecture field in New York. His work explores visual storytelling, identity, body, and spatial expression through design and artistic practice.

Joshua Zeitler is a queer, nonbinary writer based in rural Michigan. They are the author of the chapbook *Bliss Road* (Seven Kitchens Press, 2025), and their work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Poetry Daily*, *Ploughshares*, *Foglifter*, *Hypertext*, *Wildness*, and elsewhere.

Angelique Zobitz is the author of the full-length collection *Seraphim* and the chapbooks *Love Letters to The Revolution* and *Burn Down Your House*. Her work has appeared in *The Journal*, *Obsidian: Literature & Arts in the African Diaspora*, *The Penn Review*, *The Texas Review*, *Sugar House Review*, and *About Place Journal*, among others. She has been a finalist for the Jake Adam York Prize, the Berkshire Prize, the St. Lawrence Book Award, and the Georgia Poetry Prize.

Haocun Zou (Joseph) is a Chinese artist and architectural designer. He received his Master of Architecture degree from SCI-Arc. After gaining architectural practice experience in Los Angeles, he returned to China to continue his work in architectural design.