

THIMBLE LITERARY MAGAZINE

Established in 2018



www.thimblelitmag.com



Vol. 1 • No. 3
Winter 2018

Thimble Literary Magazine

Volume 1 • Number 3 • Winter 2018

Thimble Literary Magazine

Volume 1 · Number 3 · Winter 2018

Copyright © 2018 by Thimble Literary Magazine

Phil Cerroni
Publisher

Nadia Wolnisty
Editor-in-Chief

The *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.

The authors of this volume have asserted their rights in accordance with Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the authors of their respective works.

Brief Guidelines for Submission

The *Thimble Literary Magazine* is primarily a poetry journal but invites submissions on related topics such as artwork, stories, and interviews. 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.

Poetry: Please send us three to five of your poems.

Short Stories: Please send a single work or around 1,000 words. It can be fiction, creative non-fiction, or somewhere in between.

Essays: Please send a single essay of 1,000–3,000 words that touches on contemporary issues in literature or art.

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

Please send submissions to Nadia Wolnisty, Editor-in-Chief, Thimble Literary Magazine, thimblelitmag@gmail.com The author's biography should be included in the body of the email and the submission as a single attachment.

Cover painting by
Greg Edmondson

CONTENTS

Editor's Note	81
Untitled <i>Silvia Sanza</i>	82
The Smell of Figs <i>Torre A. DeVito</i>	83
Little Losses Linger <i>Caroline Mazure</i>	86
Things I have in Common with Luke Skywalker <i>Jeanette Powers</i>	87
A Ten-Minute Gull Poem <i>Margaret Koger</i>	88
DAVID ON A SMOKE BREAK <i>Cat Grant</i>	90
Welcome to Me <i>Tyler Heath</i>	91
The Knock <i>Leah Mueller</i>	92
Limen <i>Anne Myles</i>	96
Ode to a Conquered Foe <i>Alex Taylor</i>	98
The Ledger <i>Lauren Scharhag</i>	99

Losing You <i>James Diaz</i>	100
Mix Tape <i>David M. Taylor</i>	101
Twice a year, and maybe in June. <i>Natalie E. Illum</i>	103
Untitled <i>Silvia Sanza</i>	104
To Annie Von Behren: Shot in the Head Onstage— Cincinnati, 1882 <i>Sara Moore Wagner</i>	105
Nonet # 3 <i>James Rodehaver</i>	107
Share the Fun <i>Jerrod Schwarz</i>	108
Hauntology <i>Nate Maxson</i>	109
Bruised Fruit <i>Maria Pascualy</i>	111
I am the younger brother <i>Steven Deutsch</i>	112
WINTER <i>Cat Grant</i>	114
Housing the Indefinite <i>Dianna MacKinnon Henning</i>	115
Perhaps It Would Help if You Thought of the Poem as ... <i>Jason Ryberg</i>	116

Becoming Deaf <i>Carol Hamilton</i>	118
X-ray Installation 1 <i>Samuel Schwindt</i>	120
How a Mother <i>Leslie Grollman</i>	121
Profession <i>Joel Page</i>	125
Orchids <i>Alexandra Umlas</i>	127
Movie theater, last showing <i>Francine Witte</i>	129
Idle Hands <i>Caroline Mazure</i>	130
Arse Poetica <i>Julie Hart</i>	131
Old Heart I <i>Jessica Hills</i>	132
The Call of Africa <i>Harry McNabb</i>	133
Untitled <i>Silvia Sanza</i>	138
THE EARTH <i>Eve Skrande</i>	139
The Beaching of an Old Friend <i>John Grey</i>	141

Editor's Note

Dear readers,

After college, my friend worked for Habitat for Humanity. Along with her crew, she worked in the hot Texas sun, putting together houses for those in need. This sounds difficult on both a literal and an abstract level. How strange, to put together the beginnings of a home.

Soon, my fiancé will be moving into my home. We will call it “our home,” because it is the truth. We’ll mix in his paintings with mine, my old couch will go in the garage, and none of the dishes will match. My house will smell like his candles, maple syrup, brown sugar, and endless coffee. How strange, to put together the beginnings of home by starting with material possessions.

All my jobs have been in offices. I know nothing about building homes. But I will try—by gathering the right people and working it out as I go along.

I like to think I did the same thing here on our third issue of *Thimble*. Unlike the first two issues, this one is a full issue, and we used an open call (as opposed to invitations). The contributors are mostly strangers, but I feel so connected to their words, as if we have known each other for years.

This is a small house, but we built it together. Please come in.

Best,
NADIA



Silvia Sanza, *Untitled*,
photograph, date unknown.

The Smell of Figs

by Torre A. DeVito

Fruit-laden branches begin to bend beneath
bulbous figs early this summer, the taut,
green pendulums blushing pink and purple,
many bursting through their skin,
over-ripe and bleeding from
almond-shaped wasp wounds.

The sweet and sickly scent
a cloying perfume that transports me
to a summer long ago, to Texas
and the house on Huffman Hill:
the house where my great grandfather
awoke in flames one night,
a careless cigarette slipping
from his mouth into his bed.

Perhaps the mattress blushed
as pink and purple as a fig
just before flames burst through its skin
to wake the old man from tortured sleep,
as he struggled with the death of a child
whom he had struck with his truck
on a trip to pick up cigarettes.
Not his fault, the child had run into the road,
and yet he never could assuage the guilt.

He longed for death, and died
in the hospital two days later.
I was only ten-months old, and so
I never knew him.

But I knew my great grandma's house,
That same house where my great grandpa died
where his wife, a tiny wasp of a woman
frail, thin and straight
with a wild white tuft of hair—
a "Q-Tip" slip of a woman
that I knew as "Little Momma,"
had lived until I was five.

It was there that the
sweet stench of figs took me
back to Texas and Seventy-Two,
back when I turned eleven
back when summer was long and
full of freedom and joy.

I had run up the hill
to Little Momma's house:
now, empty, and beginning to run down.
The yard had gone to grass burrs
and ant hills and doodle-bug holes,
wood bees and fig wasps hung
lazily buzzing in hot thick air
and the figs grew wild.

Figs ripened, fermented, spoiled, fell
no-one to eat them but the wasps
no one to pick them.
Even Little Momma was gone,
the sound of her laughter
as juicy as the figs she would
pop into her mouth as we picked,
absent.

Suddenly the thought of that empty house
filled me with an inexplicable sadness:
an awareness of thing lost,
things that might have been,
the knowledge that things end.

A profound emptiness and longing filled me.
In an instant I knew it all:
the end of seasons, days, and summers—
the ends of places, people and relationships—
and the impending end of childhood,
the knowledge of joy and sorrow,
life and death, pleasure and pain,
the knowledge of good and evil,
a knowledge that has slept within me
some forty-odd years to awaken here and now
at the smell of figs.

And here and now I feel exposed
and I have a strange desire to cower:
to dive under broad fig leaves;
to hide from God, the sky, and time.



Caroline Mazure, *Little Losses Linger*,
India ink and pen on paper, 2015.

*things I have in common
with Luke Skywalker*

by Jeanette Powers

my parents are lost
I have a secret sister

we both know
that when shit gets cold
you have to kill your darlings
and live inside their guts

A Ten-Minute Gull Poem

by Margaret Koger

First minute: The ailing seagull on the beach flops closer to death.

Second: Both of your children ask what's wrong. Whyzit? Whenwillit?

Third: You consider lying to them, but decide not to go there. Once you start ...

Fourth: Never mind *him*, you say. *Now the gull has become a male, guess why.*

Fifth: Try diversion. Look, Stack Rock. The kids start running along the wet sand. But for you it's the gull. You linger, urging him to fly. Or die. Five minutes of your life almost gone, five minutes of your beach vacation, the money saved, the planning, all the wonders of the ocean at your fingertips.

Six minutes: Everyone gets their feet wet in the runoff stream from the beachhead trying to close in on the giant rock, the awesome rock, the Rock of Ages, the one cleft for me. I stop counting minutes, breathe. Kids kick around in the surf. Generally, it's too cold in Oregon for swimming. Gulls don't swim, they fly. They float. They're really shore birds, noisy shore birds. To gull is to fool the gullible. Counting coup ...

Seven: You're worried about the white weakling, its beady eyes. Is he faking? Will he still be there when you cross the stream heading back? Is there another way to get up to the house? How will you explain?

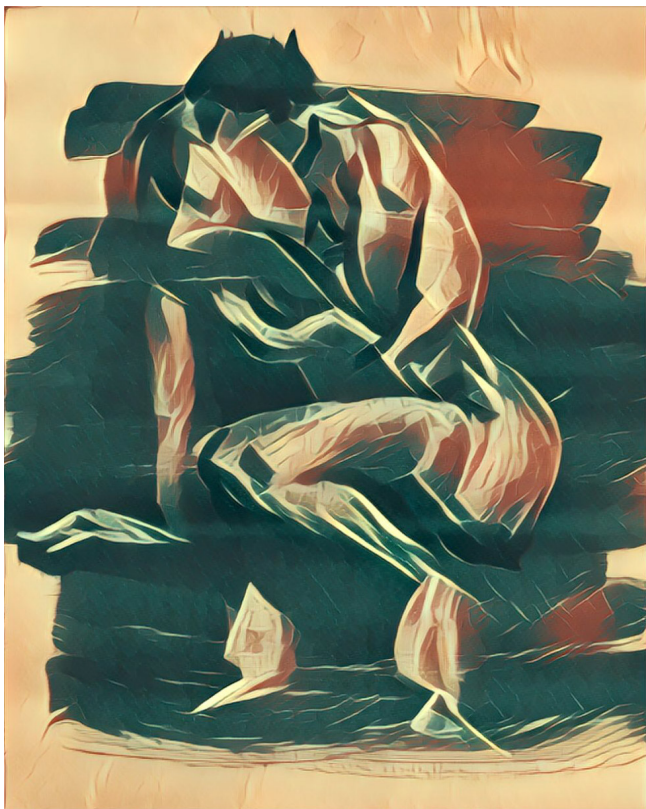
Death in the Afternoon, Do Not Go Gentle, A Death in the Family or “Because I could not stop ...”

Eight: *Gulls Gone Wild: A Guide to the Oregon Coast's Most Endearing Mascot.* “The seagull is gregarious, opportunistic and omnivorous to the core, and is found at every beach, wayside and parking lot on the Oregon Coast—anywhere there's food to be had.”

Of course, he's still there, struggling, all by himself. You know, crows conduct wakes, make little piles of twig offerings for the dead (with ribbons or jewels if they have them), even caw funereal caws.

Nine: You're making the kids put their shoes on. *The socks are wet! Do we have to wear socks? She kicked me. No I didn't. Yes you did. No I fell, it's not my fault.* What?

Ten: ...



Cat Grant, *DAVID ON A SMOKE BREAK*,
ink and chalk on paper, 2016.

Welcome to Me

by Tyler Heath

I'm a toy ambulance.
In the hardware store
my father stood
on a stack of plywood
eight hundred feet tall.
I'm happy here, he yelled down
at the little girl in a poodle skirt.
I'm a termite, she laughed,
spinning with power saws
in her hands. Now my father
is always inside me
with broken legs.
It's sad I'm an ambulance.
It's sad he has to scream
and be the siren.

The Knock

by Leah Mueller

I slumped beside my kitchen window, smoking a bowl as I stared at the heavy, sodden clouds. My husband, Scott, and I lived in an old hunting shack with our toddler son, Noam. The cramped dwelling sat behind two converging highways that led to Tacoma, Port Orchard, and Bremerton. Cold wind whistled continuously through the cracked floorboards. An ancient woodstove served as our only source of heat. The grimy windows offered a peekaboo view of Puget Sound, so I spent a lot of time gazing at the waves. I couldn't afford any other sort of entertainment.

Suddenly, a loud, decisive knock jarred my reverie. It reverberated through my bones like the crack of a shotgun. Without thinking, I sprang from my chair and opened the door. A uniformed policeman stood on the threshold, fidgeting nervously. As he flashed his badge, he looked strangely apologetic. "I'm sorry to tell you this," the cop said. "Your brother Danny is dead."

The walls began to spin, yet I managed to remain on my feet. My mouth opened, and a low, calf-like wail rose from my lungs. It echoed across the room, then subsided. "How did it happen?" I whimpered.

"Can I come inside?" the cop asked gently. I nodded and held the door open. Deliberately ignoring the marijuana paraphernalia on my table, he launched into an explanation. "Danny was robbed and killed early this morning. According to neighbors, he came home with another guy around 3 a.m., after a party in the building next door. There was loud scuffling, and somebody called the police, but no one showed up. We're still trying to figure out why. A neighbor stopped by later and saw your brother on the floor. He'd been stabbed a number of times."

My head felt heavy, like I'd just emerged after spending time underwater. The policeman's low voice emanated from a vast distance. It seemed to take forever to reach my ears. Perhaps he was a courier, delivering a telegram meant for somebody else. "Do you know who did it?" I finally asked.

He nodded briskly. "We've taken a suspect into custody. As soon as we have more details, we'll get in touch with you with his name. You'll be hearing from us again within a few hours."

"What will happen to the suspect if he's found guilty?" I whispered.

"He'll get a lot of years in prison," the officer replied. "Maybe even the death penalty." His face lit up with a benign, almost saintly glow, and he clasped his gloved hands under his groin. "It's up to the courts to decide."

I'd always opposed the death penalty. Executing murderers was the height of hypocrisy. Now, however, the electric chair seemed like an excellent idea. In fact, I wanted to kill the bastard myself, preferably with my bare hands. Danny was schizophrenic and had been a victim his whole life. He'd recently received his first SSI check, including several months' back pay. That probably had something to do with his death. "Why would the guy rob Danny?" I demanded. "My brother didn't own a goddamn thing."

The cop's expression changed to anger. "The suspect stole his stereo and VCR," he said. "And some canned goods."

I hadn't seen Danny since he got his check. He'd gone to an endless stream of drug-fueled parties on his block. My last phone message from him, three days earlier, had detailed the horrors of a sudden infestation of head lice. Danny wanted a ride to the doctor for a Kwell prescription. I'd felt guilty for not answering.

Apparently, Danny also found the time to purchase a stereo and VCR, hit up the food bank, and somehow cart everything back to his tiny apartment. Somebody had killed my brother for these paltry, cheap items—including food that was freely given away, only two blocks from his building.

As the officer's words penetrated my fog, anger began to bubble inside me. I sat down abruptly in my chair. "He deserves a harsh

punishment,” I said. “I can’t believe anybody would do something so terrible to Danny. And for nothing.”

The cop moved towards the door, opened it resolutely, and hovered in the threshold. “We’ll be in touch with you soon,” he promised. “Are there other relatives you want us to contact? You’re the only one listed in this area.”

My mother and two remaining siblings lived in Mexico. They hadn’t spoken to Danny or me for almost two years. “I’ll call them myself,” I promised. “Thanks for everything.” The cop descended the porch steps, wandered across the uneven driveway towards his waiting squad car. As he fired up the engine, he glanced briefly at my house and shook his head. After a moment, he put the vehicle in drive and rolled slowly down the gravel towards the main road.

My son’s voice drifted down from the overhead sleeping loft. “Mommy? Where are you?” Noam had just awakened, and his voice was both groggy and plaintive.

“Hold on a minute, Noam.” I tried to maintain a well-modulated tone but could hear my barely restrained hysteria. “I’m just finishing a couple of chores down here. I’ll be right up.” As I stood in the center of the kitchen floor, I struggled hard to keep my breathing under control. After a minute, I carefully ascended the stairs, placing one foot in front of the other with extreme concentration. Any misstep could cause me to collapse entirely, and I would be no use to my son whatsoever.

“Who was downstairs?” Noam demanded. “I heard a man’s voice.” Noam’s face wore a petulant expression. He was irritated by the idea of a strange visitor, someone who had failed to identify himself to the family. My husband was still on his way home from his part-time, nonunion longshoreman job. Noam never slept well when Scott wasn’t around, since he never completely trusted in his father’s return. Scott would be gone by the end of the year, living under a different roof, and Noam somehow knew it.

“Just a neighbor,” I replied. “He’s gone now.”

Mollified, Noam snuggled underneath the covers, looked up at me with adoration. One tiny foot protruded from the edge of a blanket. I squeezed it gently, and he laughed. “I’ll lie down with you until you go back to sleep,” I promised.

Noam pressed his warm body against mine and closed his eyes. After a few minutes, I rolled away, gazed at him from the edge of the bed. His chest rose and fell as he lay face-up on the cheap dime-store pillow, arms spread-eagled in surrender. I marveled at his vulnerable little body, its ability to relax during incomprehensible horror.

No matter what I did to protect Noam from harm, he would never be safe. In a few years, my son would need to learn how to navigate the world alone. I'd promised to shield him for as long as possible but had nothing else to offer. My own survival was difficult enough.

Somehow, during the next couple of days, I would summon the words to tell Noam his uncle was dead. He had been fascinated by Danny. Most likely, Noam realized that Danny had never advanced beyond his own childhood, though he possessed an adult's body. Noam especially loved my brother's omnipresent skateboard and referred to it as "Danny's truck." I wondered what would happen to the skateboard now.

My mother was sound asleep somewhere in Mexico, oblivious to the fate of her second-born child. She wouldn't be surprised to hear the news. Polly had pushed Danny away for as long as I could remember, sending him to foster homes and correctional institutions, because the shame of having given birth to him was more than she could bear. Still, she couldn't evade responsibility for Danny's existence forever. A report of his abrupt departure would cut through my mother's narcissism, and that would serve her right.

The suspect, too, was somebody's son. He had been an infant, a child, and finally an enraged young man with a knife in his hand. It was a bad night for mothers everywhere. I lay down on the mattress again, stared at the ceiling. Scott would be home in a few minutes, and I would have to tell him the news. Meanwhile, nothing mattered except Noam and me. As the wind blew through the floorboards, I held my son's hand, refusing to cry.

Limen

by Anne Myles

The red door is stop. The red door is through. The red door is enamelled, hot and almost tacky in its southern exposure. Sometimes the red door shines and drips with rain. Do you see what I'm getting at, what I'm not saying? Out and in is before and after. I waited so long to know what was behind it. I waited in the car, I circled the block while I fantasized about running up the walkway, trying the handle. I was afraid to look if anyone was home. I imagined if I knocked there would be no sound.

The door is a deep and lickable red, like the hard candy coating they put over apples. In the darkness my tongue touches my own lips. The door is red as burlesque lipstick. As scarlet silk. The door is a siren.

In my drawer I keep antique postcards of the door. I look for pictures of it in magazines in the far back shelves of secondhand shops. We slide our eyes past one another, those of us who are hunting for the door. We trade our images in obscure corners of the internet. If someone startles us our faces flush.

The red door is the door of a house, I should have noted that already. It has a peephole and brass numbers. Children play on an antique rug on the other side. It looks like picture books but not everyone gets to live in a house like that. You can ask yourself if you would want to. Maybe you want at least to step inside to see what's in there, to feel with your own hand the smooth and solid opening. You think of the phrase as safe as houses.

Some days all I can think about is entering the door but then strangely when I stand in front of it I don't want to anymore. I admire things that are impregnable. It makes me feel so peculiar.

A door is a passageway. How did Persephone get taken to the underworld, anyway? I see a red door laid in the ground, pried violently open. So much is down there, let me tell you. The counter-heart. The counter-house. The charnel house. The first nothing the world's roots grow from.

I think of the valves of my heart opening and shutting, how they have been doing this forever. We know only because we've read it that this slick and meaty organ is not the seat of love, else we'd never imagine otherwise. I press my hand over my heart to forgive myself for my failure.



At no little cost, I hunted you down,
roasted your flesh, and split you head to toe.
Vibrant orange illuminates my crown.
I devoured your soul, *oh sweet potato*.

Alex Taylor, *Ode to a Conquered Foe*,
sweet potato parchment, 2018.

The Ledger

by Lauren Scharhag

I have dealt with death before.
All my grandparents have passed away.
There was everything leading up to their passing,
Then the mourning, which everyone knows,
Never really ends. It's just something you learn to carry.
Then I watched my parents go through all the practical hassles
Of settling the estate: planning and paying for funerals,
Insurance, probate, managing medical bills,
Selling the houses, hauling furniture out to the curb.
A veritable slog of phone calls and paperwork.
Even now, eleven years after my grandmother died,
A life insurance policy we never knew she had
Has surfaced, a small payout that has to be distributed.
But this is the first time I've had to do something
Even remotely close to this.
The vet gave us a quote.
The appointment has been set.
Now, as I go over the monthly budget,
I realize I need to add a line item,
But I can't bring myself to write it in.
I will wait until afterwards.
I will label it with her name.

Losing You

by James Diaz

don't go, I say
into the light no longer on at the end of the hall
stay awhile
here
with me and the moon hung so low
against the sky
tell me one more time
where it is I come from
how I got this heart-shaped mouth
and inside me bones that are shaking
thinking of storms rolling in like punches off of dark hills
into this bottom, where I fear my home may really be
a bird nest, broken promises
this skin is so tired
let me lay as I'm meant to lay
this time of night
hand to the wall, it's the small things that matter most
early morning light fallen across your face like a great divide
this kind of love that jumps right through
as if fire were no obstacle to water
when there is so little of it in your hands
just enough to remember
what the good things are
and how they cannot last.

Mix Tape

by David M. Taylor

I drink wine and memories,
think about how you kissed me
when no one was looking,
that we held each other hidden
in the corner of a grade school party
where Guns N' Roses screamed
through the stereo in the basement.

I made a mix tape when I got home,
painted the case with black ink and poetry,
so I could show you the moment
when I didn't think
about my mother trying to stab my father,
that he left drunk in the darkness
where I'd eventually learn
I wouldn't see him again for three years.

I held the tape to give to you
at recess the next day,
to tell you I was going to run away
where no one knew my name
and I didn't have to lie
about how bruises found their way to my body.

But you said nothing ever happened,
that you'd never kiss a black boy,
and laughed at me in front of your friends.

I walked away, throwing the cassette
into the trash can baking under the sun,
and watched your friends skip to the playground.

Then I watched as you took the mix tape
from the trash and place it in your pocket.

Twice a year, and maybe in June.

by Natalie E. Illum

When you come back, my heart unstones itself. My veins do what veins
do. My body behaves
like a body. These legs quit their spasm and cry; I become something soft
and leaking.

When you come back,

you change the way the light fits into the apartment.
I have this urge to plant, touch seed. I laugh
the way water boils. When you come,

I question what is solid. I check your collarbones for signs
of vapor. Everything between us is the sweet burn
of liquor. I kiss your mouth like it is the last source
of water in this city.



Silvia Sanza, *Untitled*,
photograph, date unknown.

*To Annie Von Behren:
Shot in the Head Onstage
Cincinnati, 1882*

by Sara Moore Wagner

There have been men
I would let shoot an apple
off my head, men who left
full bathtubs, stagnant, socks
piled next to the bed, who wanted me
to undo my will like Velcro, to undo.
Annie Von Behren, I know you,
how before you met him, you played
a man tied naked to a wild horse,
you rode the horse across the stage, eyes
wide, breasts taped. Oh body—
We play dead like this over
and over, ladies of lions, chasing
our own fame. There have been men
I would let point a rifle right
above my eye, to fire, who you'd believe
the pin slipped, it was an accident, a shame
your skull was not made to hold
a bullet, that you were made
to stay down, curtain call, lights
flashing. Come take your bow
in my room, I'm folding my husband's clothes
like secrets, and this would have been another

way to go—we can turn, just like that,
all flowers and lace, engage
the crowd, then fall to the dust, dropped
pistols, split face. Alive as metaphors
and names, just names.

Nonet # 3

by James Rodehaver

truck stops in the rust belt brace the earth
gigantic storm-crested mountains
kudzu bounded on all sides
checked shirts, red necks, shotguns
swifts wheeling up high
the herd of bones
vast wide lands
winged seeds
smoke.



You share the fun when you share the room!

Plan your family so that each person has a large space to play. . . . and so that the floor opens the door to freedom. The family is extra durable without fear of its handsome appearance.

This is a random pattern of light

Jerrod Schwarz, *Share the Fun*,
ink on printed paper, 2016.

Hauntology

by Nate Maxson

The optimistic or the new-age among us might call it a manifestation if it paid in cash, it trudges out of the swamp in your dreams like a beast from the sea, one claw waving a report card full of failing grades

A collective haunting, the Gashadokuro is its name in Japanese and it is a fusion of tragedies risen to terror: skeletal apparitions made from the amassed bones of those lost to famine, while we're being academic about it/ may as well contemplate the monster

A more subtle example though, is the first wolves to leave the Chernobyl disaster zone in generations because they have no fear of human hunters and still carry a seed of radiation in their bellies: wild animals rarely live long enough for cancer, we track their emergence anecdotally but still listen for howls after sundown

A self-defense mechanism, how we craft a specter/ the wings of Monarch butterflies and Death's Head moths

Maybe the folkloric aspect is only visible in hindsight, like the Hubble telescope catching light a thousand years after its escape

My gathering the memories of snowstorms from the well of my childhood and holding them in my hands like tender blossoms drying between pages of books I never finished is a spark-like prayer to the blackout

Rouse it or let it sleep, let it continue, the eventual is only a funeral in the short term: if we wait long enough, its fruit will drip from our mouths and hands, blood to a garden like light to water/ the ambiguous distance between myself and the ghost

Bruised Fruit

by Maria Pascualy

mangoes sell three for a dollar
at the rotten fruit stand near
the secondhand store
the Cambodian lady slowly makes the right change
shoves the mangoes in a crumpled
plastic sack & turns her back
to rearrange a pile of spotted bananas

the guy at the bookstore across
the street gives me a sad smile
then clicks the lock tight as I tug
at the door
he pulls the shade & points at a hand-made
sign taped to the windowpane
it reads CLOSED FOR LUNCH

inside his cat scratches at the screen
meows and asks to be let out
there's a gigantic dandelion stuck in the dry soil
between the street and the store
it's about two feet tall
I pluck off its head count my change
again and take the early bus home

I am the younger brother

by Steven Deutsch

The envelope arrived today.
You penned
969 for 696
and that simple error
from a math prodigy
Sent the letter drifting homeless
for months.
I wonder if you did it with intention.

The Times published your obituary last month.
you died somewhere exotic—
Chile, wasn't it—at a mountaintop observatory
where you studied the collision of distant galaxies.
Of Brooklyn, you'd tell
friends and family
"It's like living in a closet—
most nights,
the sky seems starless."

In the obit photo,
you looked the same skinny malink
you did at 8,
with your nose crooked, from the time
I caught you with a right cross,
and Mom's straggly hair
I could not imagine why women

found you irresistible, but they took
to you like bears to a hive.
You never felt the need
to swat a single one of them away.

Was there an award you did not win?
With a mind more at home
on Icarus—whose pale blue blink
takes 9 billion light years to reach us,
than it ever was in the tiny apartment
on Remsen Avenue we called home.

You sent a yellowed clipping
from the Brooklyn Eagle, circa 1959—
with a photo of two young teens,
dressed for fame and fortune
in jackets and ties that were too tight
holding a miniature Tesla Coil.
The headline below touted
“Twins, Age 12, Win Science Fair.”

Just that fragile photo
in an envelope
that might have travelled a million miles,
and for a second I’m forced to sit
as gravity releases me
so I might travel back in time.



Cat Grant, *WINTER*,
mixed media on card, 2017.

Housing the Indefinite

by Dianna MacKinnon Henning

How might I kayak my body
into the flow that empties into the ocean,

live in the lives of all things that cover earth;
to bloom as flower, to leaf on a bough?

To have no thought but the feel
of water expanding me until, I, too,

flow downstream, present
as all things are that are uniquely existent.

O, expansion, you are not a circus,
but you are the water I was first baptized with.

*Perhaps It Would Help
if You Thought of the Poem as ...*

by Jason Ryberg

a hermit's hovel of many mansions,

a shimmering silk kimono billowing
on a clothes line in central Kansas,

a meteorite, suddenly fallen in your backyard
(pulsing with a strangely hypnotic
and inviting glow),

a particularly toxic strain of word virus,

a flaring moment of clarity
in the middle of a mosh pit,

a tattered travelogue entry written in hobo code,

a series of lies that leads (ultimately) to (something
resembling) the (big time, capital T) Truth,

a random, haphazard arrangement
of the 10,000 myriad archetypes of the world,

a sum of parts that is somehow actually larger
than its whole,

an unexpected arrival at reality
via the unwitting disengagement from it,

an open-air market bazaar in a lost city,

a Chinese puzzle box or Russian nesting doll,
flowering open and open, forever down and down
the spiraling, helical dog-tail chase for the Good,
the Just and the Beautiful, etc., etc.

Or, perhaps it would help if you thought of this
fragile little contraption of memes as a mechanical
butterfly fluttering the non-Euclidian geometry
of its flight pattern through a forest of wind chimes,
still glistening with rain from a brief
morning thundershower.

Becoming Deaf

by Carol Hamilton

Becoming Deaf

“I would rather leap
than sit and be looked at”

Rita Dove written of Beethoven

Beethoven bowed
at their applause, hearing nothing.
All too soon our eyes dim,
and our ears no longer startle
to the raucous din.
Escape into landscape
racing past car windows
may become the dream,
to really see the lacy stitches
of redbud, the mottled green
of pear blossom turning
to hard knobs of promised fruit.

If only stark surprise at renewal
could still strike.
Perhaps in youth pursuit
of self has charm, but time
dims the burnish and slackens
the grip. There is a new world
I am seeking. I am watching

and listening, ready to fall
into some strange rabbit hole.
The stark edges of self,
the hard crusts of earth evaporate,
crumble. Will an “Ode to Joy”
arise when all the certainties
have been seared away?



Samuel Schwindt, *X-ray Installation 1*,
X-rays and LEDs, 2018.

How a Mother
by Leslie Grollman

May you live a long life

—JEWISH SAYING

I want my life to be something more than long

—PIPPIN

A stuttering of froth

I mean an embryo in its space sac

its flaccid suit holding a fluid mountain

I mean an embryonic trying to ooze its way human

What bulges become

How salt is pinched

That beginnings house splinters of their end

The weather between ooze and the cry-slap

The whisper between fluttering and the mother

Fractions stretch on a childhood

How our arrows don't parallel

I mean how you tried to curfew a life

Saturn eats regret

its rings, a clean slate
it spins, scott-free
like how the specter portals

I coveted the labyrinthine
A night flicked loosening
A gravel-filled pit still a cloud
with too much rain
Charred remains make headlines
I uncoiled a snake from my neck I mean a cordon
of blood-temples and canals a shrine
Sad eyes scorned like a crisis
A gesture between diapers and a postcard

I had a craving to swan
I pirated a midnight
The cracked marble the room remained itself a hidden else
Wood warps unattended
That silver heart I bought you from Tiffany's
That lapis heart from my favorite place on Bleeker
Dust fills words nested in stone
Who knew my heart could squeeze so hard

You opened the oven looking for orange juice
Sat shuffling little papers as if precious

As if they could ever answer
or order your world
How the order of things left you
You asked what buttons were
bra on blouse

The way daffodils curl your fingers
The origami of a disease
How a body says *no*

The way your eyes forgot my face

That day that last good day
Splatter searing neurons
On the balcony tea and snacks in small words and the wind
You said if Marty were here he'd have us laughing
he always did that face those jokes
it never got old
The weightlessness of joy

The weight of unlived life
We couldn't have done anything
I meant to say we couldn't have done anything
differently

How simple it is
when our manifestos for distance
have been forgotten

To know how to revive the dead
As if my idea of you could ever
As if any idea of you could ever even

Profession

by Joel Page

I am in a narrow room, approximately ten feet by fifteen feet. Its walls are steel, and its floor is grey. It is absolutely clean but smells vaguely of sewage. It is lit with a penetrating floodlight that stretches into every identical corner and overpowers the eyelids. When it is dark, it is absolutely dark, and the walls, mercifully, seem further away.

I stand up in irregular unplanned intervals and sit down shortly thereafter. This does not occupy time, and certainly does not pass time—no time can be passed here, because there is nothing to look forward to, and death remains no less frightening though its boundaries are blurring with those of my life. I touch the walls occasionally to see what they feel like; I have discovered that the mind cannot recall the sensation of touch with the precision that it remembers sights and sounds, so repetition of the same tactile experience can retain a certain novelty. I approach the walls and corners periodically to examine the differences in perspective. And I have a heavy wool blanket, to which I am allergic, and wrap it into different shapes in a process approximating sculpture. Other pursuits—stories, memories, and math problems—devolve quickly into nausea without paper on which to record them. I can hear sometimes the noises of other men through the vent, but no words. For some reason, I feel that I can identify their race when I hear their movements. This may or may not be so.

Twice a day, a guard comes with food through a slot in the door. The food is tan, square, and gelatinous. In pretrial detention, I was told that this is called “food loaf,” but here it doesn’t have a name, because nothing has a name if it is not discussed. When they open the door to

bring the food, a strong odor of coconut enters the cell. It is an oil available through the commissary to lower-security inmates in an adjoining block. I can only imagine that it is capable of crossing a seldom-opened metal door, filling an entirely different hall, and then entering and filling my cell because it is used perpetually for masturbation.

On a single occasion, I said hello to the person bringing the food, who responded, "I am not your friend." One day, perhaps, I will work up the nerve to tell him or her that I love them.

Orchids

by Alexandra Umlas

When they are mostly dead,
your friends bring them to you. Veined
and spotted open-mouthed soldiers
standing bloodless on the counter.

Nothing rivers through the stems.
They cannot even slouch.
You replant them, tuck their roots,
add bark and moss, cut

stems, mend the wounds
with cinnamon. Early mornings,
when the sun spills across the kitchen,
the newest orchids are born back

to life. They stare at you with their sepals,
send tubers out, green and full.
This morning, one licks its yellow
labellum and smiles. It's hard to tell

who is growling, who is yawning.
Something so aware requires a strange
discipline. At times you want to let
the petals turn thin. You wish they would

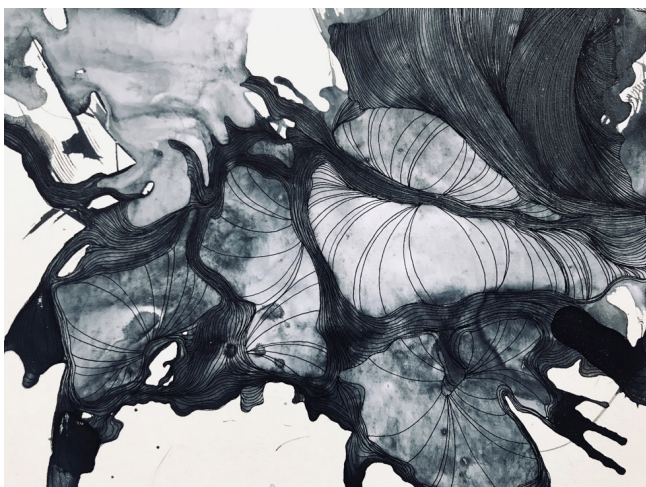
give up their green. Instead they follow
orders. When your friends come over,
they ask which is theirs. You don't keep
track. They run their eyes up and down

each sticky stem like they regret
what they have done. When they leave,
the orchids sneer, then go back to pressing
their faces to the window's winter sun.

Movie theater, last showing

by Francine Witte

This late, the blinking light shines
back on the audience, and you
become the movie. You are the actor
who has been all Greta Garbo, all
Sean Penn or anyone else who ever
lived in public and wanted no one
to see. The light from the screen
holds you now in its sweaty palm
and squeezes out your secrets, the crush
you had on your brother's wife, how you
lunge-kissed her that Christmas. All of it
back story now, and by the time the film
is over, and you reach for your coat, you
hope no one was watching after all, that
no one figured out how your story ends,
or thinks it is all too obvious, specifically
pointing to the scene with you sitting
all alone in the flickering dark.



Caroline Mazure, *Idle Hands*,
India ink and pen on paper, 2016.

Arse Poetica

by Julie Hart

On the bus today I saw the future of my ass: full, wide and deep a cushion—no, a pouffe—squeezed into jeans but an Astarte for all that. True sitzfleisch. This is what happens when you become the home front, settle in a little too well on the couch, start to become one with it. Carry it with you wherever you go. The slump and the sag of it, the nagging implication that you're tired of dragging it. But that big beautiful butt on the bus—what a butt it was! The one I have now does me proud. The tilt of my ass: sass. The grade of my ass: pass. The future of my ass: grass.



Jessica Hills, *Old Heart I*,
acrylic, modeling paste, and flowers, 2016.

The Call of Africa

by Harry McNabb

Choose your own adventure story:

1. Stay in bed
2. Get up and smoke a cigarette
3. Walk to the nearby convenience store for an energy drink

Andrew hopped out of bed and went outside with a cigarette crushed between his ring and index fingers. He opened the door, and what a sight he saw!

There were toucans and monkeys and a lush blanket of elephant ears and tall trees. This was not Andrew's home. Somehow, in the middle of the night, Andrew had been transported to a tropical African forest. What a gyp.

The forest was calling Andrew, but he thought it would be better if he just went back to option 1, stay in bed.

His bed was comfortable and normal and not of Africa. This bed was of the United States of America and therefore one of the best beds in the world.

He laid his head back onto the pillow of his American bed and attempted to dream. His dream was full of giant demon faces chewing up screaming human beings. It was like an interactive Bosch painting made by the creators of *Saw*. It was a shitty dream, but it was better than being in the middle of the African jungle.

As if by magic, Andrew woke up to find that he was no longer in Africa but in Denton, Texas.

"Inception," he thought. "It must have been a dream."

Now it was time to really get started on the day. He decided to take option 3 and go to the corner store for an energy drink. He pulled on clothes and stuck his bare feet in a pair of old running shoes and headed out into the windy winter sunshine.

Andrew's fat body klumped its way down the street. Walking was very tiring for Andrew. He needed one of those Rascal scooters that old people have.

"I am fat," thought Andrew, "but at least I'm not in the middle of the African jungle."

A street artist was spray-painting a wall. It said, "Option 4." Andrew was intrigued.

"Hey man, so what is option 4?"

"Call a close friend," he said.

"Huh," said Andrew. "I might do that."

Andrew decided to go to option 4 instead. He might as well call a friend. He opened his phone. Who to call? There were so many names, and he wasn't comfortable with most of his contacts. Finally, he found someone he was comfortable with. His dearest mommy.

"Dearest mommy! How are you?"

"Busy, Andrew, what do you want?"

"Oh nothing, just wanted to see how you were emotionally?"

"I'm doing fine emotionally. I've been building canoes a lot—in fact, so much that my emotions don't really exist for me. It's just canoe, canoe, canoe."

"Aw, Mom, you never get a break."

"I don't have a break, because I don't want breaks. I just want to carve out canoes, sand, polish them, and sell them."

"Oh well, I'm glad you're having fun."

"Listen, Andrew, I've gotta go. I've got this canoe I'm working on."

"Ok," said Andrew, "enjoy doing your canoes. By the way, you know we have family therapy tomorrow at 11 a.m."

"I remember; I'll be there."

Andrew wished his mom cared more about him than canoes. She was one of those people who got obsessed easily. In the 90s it was swimming. In the early 2000s it was motorcycles. In the late 2000s it was chess. And now it was canoes.

Andrew walked back to his apartment feeling glum.

Choose your own adventure:

1. Go back to bed
2. Clean
3. Watch TV

Andrew decided to clean. That would at least be productive and make him feel better in some small way. He cleaned by listening to a 90s techno artist called Juno Reactor. He found a few lighters underneath the couch cushions and a nice wineglass he had lost ages ago. Cleaning was drudgery, but it was better than being in Africa.

His night was filled with dreams of demons eating the faces off of crying humans. He woke up crying. Why couldn't he just sleep like normal people. His sleep life was truly the cats pajamas in reverse.

The next day, his mother picked him up in the car, irritated that she had to do something that didn't involve canoes. Luckily the therapist was right up the road.

"He can't just do his own thing," said Andrew's mom to the therapist. "I'm trying to make beautiful canoes, and he's just lying in bed smoking pot and wondering why his life—"

"Mom! I don't do drugs—I'm just depressed. Why would you even say that?"

Choose your own adventure story:

1. Really lay into mom
2. Ask the therapist to allay the situation
3. Tell the therapist you went to Africa for five minutes

"This morning I went to Africa for five minutes," said Andrew.

"What," said his mother. "Are you schizophrenic or something?"

"Mom, schizophrenia doesn't work that way."

"If I might interrupt," said the therapist. "I think your showing up in Africa is a symptom of a disease that scientists are just beginning to understand."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean it's global displacement disorder. Your body doesn't move, but your ... have you heard of astral projection?"

"Yeah, but I thought it was just something pretentious people did to show everyone how enlightened they are."

"Well, we've found that some people have the power to do it and not always intentionally."

"Well, this is great," said Andrew's mother, rummaging in her purse for lip balm. "My son has this weird astral projection thing, but what I'm really concerned about is him giving me space. It's not normal for a twenty-four-year-old man to call his mother every day. I've got a big contract for seven canoes, and I can't be trying to raise a grown adult. He eats in my house, he sleeps in my house, he's got it covered. I wish he'd stop coming over to ask me what I'm doing when I'm in the zone."

"I think I can help you," said the therapist. He pulled out a piece of paper from his notebook and brandished it in front of Andrew and his mother. "This is called a cognitive behavioral therapy worksheet."

Choose your own adventure story:

1. Punch doctor in the face
2. Punch doctor in the face
3. Leave

"I'm out," said Andrew. He walked out of the office and plonked down in the waiting room. He picked up a *People* magazine and studied the photographs. One photograph depicted Selena Gomez. She was so hot. Even though she was in her mid-twenties, she could definitely pass for eighteen.

He read the magazine until his mother came out, livid and holding a fistful of cognitive behavioral worksheets.

"These are for you," she said abruptly, dumping the crumpled papers on his lap. "Doctor Wheeler said you should do one of these every time

you feel the need to interrupt me while I'm working. He also said that he thinks you're regressing."

"I would agree with that," said Andrew. "I'll totally do these worksheets, and you won't hear from me again."

Andrew got home and went to bed. He couldn't sleep, but the covers were warm like the hug of a giant fat girl.

Why did he even get up.

Andrew slept for twelve hours, and when he woke up, he was in Africa again.

"Not again," he said, putting his face in his hands.

Africa was stupid and dangerous. What was he gonna do?

Choose your own adventure:

1. Go back to bed
2. Clean more
3. Explore Africa

Andrew went back to bed and slept for an hour. Then he cleaned his room. Then he went outside. The toucans and monkeys screeched with wild abandon. It was time to explore. It couldn't make things any worse, could it?



Silvia Sanza, *Untitled*,
photograph, date unknown.

THE EARTH

by Eva Skrande

When the earth cries,
loosen its belt.
Offer it a chair in your living room.

Offer it some freshly baked bread,
an ottoman to put its legs up. Give it a pillow
that it may recline comfortably.

It will cry about wars, lost birds,
and other of the world's troubles.
Let it put its bundles by the door.

It has come to you like an old beggar.
Honor it with arms to cry into.
Now is not the time to talk about evil.

Open the blinds, the window,
pat its back, kiss its forehead. If it asks
for coffee, give it some in your best cup.

Let it spend the night with you.
Offer it your bed, cover it
with a blanket of stars like it is used to.

It will have nightmares.
Put cold compresses on its forehead.
Adjust its tilt.

Whisper something about truth
and beauty in its ear.
It will settle down soon enough.

Come morning, wake it up early.
Help it get dressed.
Give it some fresh coffee.

Walk it to the door. It will kiss you
like a lover
who has to leave for work.

The Beaching of an Old Friend

by John Grey

I was about to
relate the death of a beached whale
to an obituary
that stunned me
when I flipped through the pages
of the newspaper this morning.

But that is a liberty
it is not mine to take.
That heavy, black-skinned,
barnacled baleen,
a boisterous college roommate,
are each their own tragedy,
not something merely reflected.

Volunteers tried to push
that beast back into the safety of the sea
just as, I expect,
doctors and nurses did
to an old friend
though thrusting hard against
a different kind of heavy surf.

God, I'm at it again,
too caught up in analogy
to grieve separately

for man and beast.
He deserves the distinction.
So does that sand-pocked sea mammal.

I was about to
mourn someone I knew
as if he'd washed up on the shore
and a humpback
like a creature
I'd known for all my life.
That's unfair to both deaths
though it works well incidentally.