

THIMBLE

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Thimble Literary Magazine

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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.

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Brief Guidelines for Submission

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

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

This issue is about constellations: drawing connections between stars. If you're looking for a table of contents, you will not find one.

Please, come in.

Editor's Note

by Nadia Arioli

Dear Thimble Readers,

I enjoy finding out what makers' hobbies are—besides creating art and being sad, of course. Those are givens. What is surprising to me was the amount of poets who play videogames. I am not one of them; my hand-eye coordination is laughable at best. But when I thought about it more, I realized, Of course, no, this makes perfect sense. Poetry and videogames are both interactive stories. They require participation. What good is a poem if the reader won't play along?

In any case, I found myself playing *Night in the Woods*. Anything with talking animals and existential dread has won me over completely. There's a possum! He wears little overalls and lives by the tracks! He's down on his luck, but he'll be alright! There's people animals and animal animals, and I don't understand it either, but I'm okay with that.

Without getting into the lore too much, I was struck by how poignant this game is, how effective it can be to play Mae (an anthropomorphic cat who returned to her hometown after dropping out of college) in a flat world. She mostly lopes about town and talks to her friends. Why does this work? This shouldn't work.

In one of the side-quests, Angus (an anthropomorphic bear with asthma and huge heart) tells Mae about stars:

We're good at drawing lines through the spaces between stars like we're pattern-finders, and we'll find patterns, and we like really put our hearts and minds into it, and even if we don't mean to. So I believe in a universe that doesn't care and people who do.

Not bad for a video game. And it's oddly meta; the game explains what it is. Find the patterns in the uncaring universe. Find what resonates in the nightmares.

We, too, are given something in which we can find patterns: a small collection of poetry, art, and prose. We have work about death, work about God, work about dogs, all three. But I'll let you draw the lines yourself.

Why does this work? This shouldn't work.

I'm glad this is the story you're participating in.

Best,
Nadia Arioli

Turtles at the Convention Center

by Emilie Lygren

I.

No one will have
ever so thoroughly
studied the ugly carpet.

They are unimpressed by
the automatic projector screen,
a hundred pitchers of iced tea.

They see the failing
of so many rows of chairs all
facing the same direction.

I worry for them,
stunned by cold
in unfamiliar waters,

*Where do we swim to
in this blinding ocean of
artificial light?
Where we come from,
you can always follow
the sun upwards to breathe.*

I feel that way too.
Not so far from an animal,
I get lost quickly anywhere indoors
without windows.

II.

I have heard them compare
Mitch McConnell to a turtle.

I firmly believe this is
an insult to turtles.

Their shelled bodies
mostly unchanged,
a resilient frame to ride through
a hundred million years.

Age and wrinkled skin
are no failing,
but greed is.

Maybe we'd be better off
if we each lived inside
a small domed house.

Need carried close to our body,
no space to take
anything that isn't ours.

Namaste

by Kimberly Ann Priest

I have thought about the monster—written him dark, sinister, sad.
Made his wounds larger than my own, then not visible.

Stolen his identity in poems where I suspect myself
capable of equitable shame. Equated my injury to the length and breadth

of his injury, then after prolonged investigation
and the reading of books to search his mental and physical states,

presumed that his suffering must be more exaggerated,
more real than my own and believably sustained.

The terror he endures day in and day out, shockwaves in the night
and the body lit up with cravings, desire folding its warm hand

around the abdomen and a pillow stuffed into my esophagus
so that I can't let out a scream—same scream that vibrates my bones

at any time of day for any reason, still unnamed.
I lay my tired body against the cold damp earth,

let my wings grow heavy with dew, veins swelling like fingers
tempering flight. This comforts the monster: we are both

helpless now. *See*, I soothe into his sleek sullen face, *god is not dead,*
god is now dying—and god won't arise to beat out their anger again.

Mary

by Jo Angela Edwins

In Renaissance paintings she holds the child
like a porcelain doll. She sits surrounded
by animals and men, having given birth
in a stable, and she isn't the least
afraid. Sometimes artists build strange worlds
of meticulous Technicolor order.

She did not ask for this. She did not demand
that her statue mark every cathedral door
like cartoon faces on neon signs
outside chain restaurants. She had
in youth a mind of her own, a face of her own,
until an angel tossed pebbles at her window.

Now her name means nothing more than "mother."
It has lost its ancient thunder, the roar of the seas.
She is the low lullaby that followed
the howl of parturition that, wondrous, followed
the veiled silence of virginity.
What is left but the slow moan of grief?

No, nothing more than a marbled pietà,
the pierced and broken body of the son
draped across her arms, because the need
to carry never ends. Underneath
his wilted flesh, her bloodied robe, there rises
the breath she gave him once. And will again.

Glioblastoma Facts

by Cameron Morse

Median survival after diagnosis is fifteen months

*

So finally accountable
for the clogged
toilet

even when the rubber
block or Matchbox
car obstructing water
flow wasn't yours

and the seizure came
out of nowhere

*

Five-year survival rate is just 5 percent

*

Throwing Grandpa
Bonnard's shaving brush
down the laundry

chute pinging
off the basket below

Sailing a cousin
across the condominium
on a TV tray

cherished childhood memories
pandemonium

✱

*Current standard of care consisting of surgery
radiation and chemotherapy
is not effective*

✱

Home Depot
stroller streaking
behind Theo's
dinosaur rain jacket
as I'm cradling the new
blinds in long boxes

The slats of those
at home snagged
in mouths around my bed
bleed polluted
light on cloudy nights

A Drunken Juanita

by Juanita Rey

It's tequila.
It should be like mother's milk to me.
But a teat never spun my head like this.
At least, not as I remember.

I'm seated at the bar
while sipping this distillation
from the blue agave plant.
I feel as if the other patrons
are staring at me,
that the glimmer off the whiskey bottles
is stage lights.

No, really,
I'm no star.
I'm just lonely
on this evening,
not prominent enough to be anybody,
but accessible
if somebody wishes to be
my new best friend.

But then I had to order
this tequila,
and though my emotions, my senses,
are still functioning,
my brain's no longer in the loop.

From this moment on,
my memory has a lot to learn
but lacks a reliable teacher.
So, if you are my new best friend,
remind me sometime,
I beg you.



In Her Bones by Gale Rothstein

Salmon

by Royal W. Rhodes

The tired fisherman reported salmon
numbers doubled—far beyond predictions.
His nets had caught a thousand, just today.

The voice was weary, as he hesitated
to reveal the harvest for the radio
reporter—weary as much as elated.

His life at sea was theirs: unquiet motion,
anguished toil, uncertainty at play
that made at times a greater emptiness.

Changing colors as from salt to fresh they go,
silver scale that shifts to deepest red,
and at the end of action—little deaths.

Nearer to the final goal—surprise,
rising in the killing air and flopping
back, a drawing—dark and absolute,

obedient to go beyond the laws
by that great fish god that rebels at limits,
to give a vision of what lies beyond.

At some familiar spot of riverbed
with gravel pushed aside, the ready eggs
slip so easily outside the body,

so the waiting male can cloud with milt
the still, surrounding space, that starts again
the cycle in the lake and moving river.

In this last posture, male and female wait,
as flesh flakes from their bones once flexible
to countless muscles. Now that strength is spent.

Did they enjoy, at least a moment, something
kin to rapture, having just performed
what was needed, as their world was hushed?

Could they feel somehow, if creatures feel,
that something of themselves was drawn again
to face the open sea, our origin,

and where in time we long to rest at last?



The Duplicious Gate by Gale Rothstein

Poem for Hugo in His Second Year

by Dan Overgaard

and for Anh and Huan

Grandson of pilot and of diver, you
are barely learning how to stand and walk,
and testing how to stretch away from arms
that anchor you. And you are learning how
to pick up things, as well as picking up,
as graciously and quickly as you can,
the overwhelming signals every day
that fascinate, beguile and batter you.
So many people talking all the time
and looking for your feedback—tiring!
But you're doing great so far. Feel free to nap
wherever and whenever you want to—
there'll be lots of time to stay awake
much later on (you'll find out what I mean).

Godchild, the world has layers. You will learn
that there are ways of going up and down,
so many ways. Just running on the ground
you'll find some unexpected challenges—
so many things that want to trip you up
and send you flying, dump you into puddles.
You'll soon learn to make a game of it.

Your pilot and your diver have so much
to teach you, such as how to stay aloft
when buffeted by winds you cannot see—
the way the world can turn and slip away
or disappear in clouds that hide the light
you think will always be there, guide you through
so you can home in on the ground again—
and how to stay afloat through murky waves
when currents push and pull you every way—
a river or an ocean has the power
to take you where you may not want to go,
but you can learn to float by breathing in,
and kick through waves until you reach the shore.

In short, here's what I really want to say:
through air and water, love will carry you.

Night Swimming

by Lorette C. Luzajic

after Gertrude Abercrombie

A bottle to the sea, a ladder to the sky. Those slim rungs won't hold you, that sliver of moon will slice in two the hand it hooks. You can swim with the gulls and hide from the owls, you can tell all of your stories to the pale cat who follows. But you can't see yourself in the mirror in the dark or breathe under water. Your scroll won't be found until you have turned into seaweed and shells. You will return as a drowned horse or a woman who points at windows and doors. You will forget everything but the quickening branches, jittery, frail, shaking their fists at the moon.

Grief Brushes in a New Year

by Elizabeth Mercurio

Emptiness grabs hold of me
makes the coffee bitter, the jam less sweet.

Daddy, your shirts
are in the closet.

For months I could not hug you,
to protect you from the virus.

You died anyway.

I want to be a girl again—
perched at the top of the stairs

I'd wait for you to come home,
like a tired sentry trying not to nod off.

Upstairs I'd hear you thank the babysitter,
make scrambled eggs and sing—

Is that what you meant Daddy
when you said, *All the songs were for you—*

Sentry (for my Mike Nguyen)

by Timothy Robbins

Twelve steps, interventions, Oprah.
Christians, Muslims, Scientologists,
the neighborhood watch. An easy
alchemy turns fear into a superiority

complex. "He must love you this
way. You must love him thus."
As though you were discussing
the Filioque clause. He drives me

to beaches where he dreads both
sand and wind, to abandoned light-
houses he says ought to fall, to
antique malls so I can drag more

clutter home. He sits in the car
staring at legal pads choked with
equations. He harkens on his cell
to hardline astrologers. He looks up

and scans for me every minute or
so. Except when he waits outside the
ARCW—AIDS Resource Center
of Wisconsin. There, he stares at

the glass door, the blackened bricks,
the young women wobbling on sticks,
the inmates bright as traffic cones
guided by cops so they won't feel

astray or alone. He stares and sees
his twenty aunts turn to Boat People,
transformed by a prayer to Bo trees,
the gray and grainy evacuation

of former Saigon, the fences around
a Thai refugee camp, see-through
clothes that printed their pattern
delicately, indelibly on his skin.

the target

by Little Spiral

i had spare time and no agenda
and the most dangerous place to be
was at target

so i go
because you should do one thing a day
that scares you

and with the fine line
between middle class
and poverty
walking a tightrope
in my bank account
i also carried with me
the intentional exchange of goods and services
with the currency
the energy
of money

i got,
can you believe it,
groceries
and some office supplies
and being all practical and shit

but here's the thing

i wandered by the art supply aisle
where these brush pens
with cool instagram colors
were begging to be adopted
they were like puppies
with the biggest eyes
and the cutest little squeaky bark
at the spca

and my heart leapt
with compassion
and a yearning
to take proper care
of these pens

i'm trying this new thing
it's called nurturing your inner artist
and taking her out on dates
and letting her word vomit every goddamn morning

some of you know the thing

and some of these mind programs
the ones designed to make you feel more human
i swear
unlock your brain's desire
to just buy more shit
to feel like you're doing something
to fill the void of the soul

so of course i buy them
and i take the pens home
fully believing i'd put them on the shelf
and forget to feed them
take them out on walks
spay, neuter them
what have you

instead i put them right next to my bed

and in the morning
i discover something i had forgotten—
i really like the feeling of
effortless ink
soaking into nice paper
transforming the blank white pulp canvas
into anything but blank
doesn't matter with what
just fill it

and in the morning i doodled
and swirled
and spiraled
and colored
and wrote meaningless words
and signed my name a bunch of times
and learned the whole
“press lightly on upstroke,
press firmly on downstroke”
advice that the
neat little booklet
told me to do

i always read directions
which is sometimes a character flaw
but this morning
i didn't read the directions
that said i needed to adult

and look
i got shit to do
a laundry list of laundry
a task list of tasks

but whilst you're out there Doing the Thing,
remember what your true thing is

and my thing
is consistently
habitually
retraining
myself
how
to
be
human

and in the aimless ambling
through the target of life
i vow
to make that
the only thing i buy

Scratched Vinyl

by Elisa Subin

I resurrect dying plants, buy pot from the pizza delivery guy, “Medium mushroom pizza, please,” I say “please” to pot/pizza guy, an entrepreneur, tip him well, but don’t have sex with him, he’s a tough one, won’t give you free stuff, not even a discount, order flowers for my mom, same day delivery, why pay for same day to a cemetery, I do, be real, you wish you thought of it, lilies were her favorite, don’t judge, you probably don’t even know your mom’s favorite flower, or your dad, so ha

feed the cat, clean the litter box, talk to mirror me, you do it too, don’t lie, I once saw a woman pick her nose in the rear view mirror at a traffic light, when the light turned green, she ate it and smiled, smiled; I don’t do that, blow my nose and drop the tissue, that I do, I live alone, little tissue sculptures litter my floor, ephemeral art, nothing lasts

not even now, I used to play jacks, and pick up sticks, and mother may I, and flashlight tag, and ringolevio, look that one up, wasn’t so long ago time moved slowly, in fits and starts, if at all, like a scratched record on an old phonograph

if I thought about it, I’d remember being bored, but never scared, we used to jump off the roof of our garage just for fun, no fear, now I watch the empty streets through my window and cringe if someone knocks on the door, unless

It’s pot/pizza guy

Peel

by John Brantingham

The High Sierra moon lights up Jeff's tent, so he gets up to watch it rising over Cahoon Meadow and finds Lazarus, raised once again, sitting on a log already watching the shadows stretch across the field at night. Jeff's skin's been peeling all day, and now he sits next to Lazarus and starts tugging at the ends of pieces.

"Let me help you with that," Lazarus says, and pulls off a bit that's begun to feel like damp wool. Soon, the entire layer is gone, and Jeff is completely new. He'd do a two-step in the moonlight, but the wind already has the trees dancing for him.



The Measure of Success by Gale Rothstein

Message

by Hilary Sallick

A soft rain I told you
very fine with chill droplets
as I walked home past
the ballfields the traffic
the late roses and fruits dangling
here and there from branches
October rain I said to you
and all the parts
of the day come and gone
I wanted to tell you
including the old idea
the memory always there

Love

by Swati Agrawal

It was the fourteenth of February,
another Valentine's Day.

In Mumbai,
people from across the city
gathered at the Aseesa Old Age Home—
singing,
dancing,
bantering,
planting anthuriums in the front yard,
enjoying camaraderie.

Here a teenager helped a crippled woman to her chair
There a young man patiently heard an older woman rant
Here a housewife recited “Daffodils” to a disoriented crowd
There a child handed over a nosegay of peonies to an old, frail woman.

The myriad ways
in which
love manifests itself.

The Hummingbird Café

by Dave Barrett

I met her at the Hummingbird Café.

She smiled.

I smiled.

We laughed, we danced, our hearts sang and spun about the room

We shared our stories, our loves, our dreams.

Then her phone rang.

A pause.

Yes.

No.

And then—without warning, without any explanation—she flew
away from the

Hummingbird Café.

On Mary Oliver

by RC James

All night the meadowlarks mourned,
eased you away from the forest spirits
you nurtured so long.

The breeze at four in the morning
slowed in quiet dance to accompany
you on your way.

The steadfast other you addressed
in your poems took your acquiescence
to what you ceased to call horrible,

what you viewed as a mysterious venture,
as their final lesson, instructions
for the way beyond.

The snow geese, the rabbits, the deer,
all followed the same patterns you knew,
through the wilderness you made your studio;

you left quietly, not disturbing habits
and rituals that now named you a part.
No animal understood your words,

but readers by parlor lamp study them
as if from a curator of the light inside
every last creature you'd learned to love.

Fifty-Two Days of Darkness

by Anna Kirwin

When light reigned, humanity slid
languorously,
languidly,
from koti to kylä,
from järvi to joki.

It clung on as long as it could,
the weak, sickly daylight
which peered, on tiptoes,
over the horizon,
feeding on the movement of muurahaisia
as they scattered, ever more furiously.

With as much energy as it had left to muster,
the sun skated across the frozen lakes, reaching
long
thin
arms,
clawing for purchase
until it gave up the ghost,
accepted defeat ingloriously
with little more than a whimper
and hibernated,
hunkering down for winter.

Now the darkness has come.
Fifty-two days of darkness.
Darkness which stretches itself greedily
like an oil slick across the heavens;
thick, viscous, setting hard like concrete
tainting the pulses it touches.

Its confidence reeks of permanence
of never shifting, now that time has shifted
and under its vast weight, the muurahaisia
do not dance as they did.
They plan.
They strategise.
They maximise
to hide a little longer
to stay still and calm and silent
in the ever-lasting synkkyys,
in a world so small that fingertips can brush its walls.



It's Only Life by Gale Rothstein

Your Heart and Ocean Vuong in Cobble Hill

by Phil Eggers

In 2017 a friend will ask if you would like to accompany her to hear Ocean Vuong read from *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* at Local 61 on Bergen Street. But she isn't your friend. Not yet. Nights earlier the two of you went on a date, or you thought it was a date until your second beer when this not-yet-friend tells you she has a "forever roommate" and shows you the ring on her third finger to prove it, so when she invites you out you hesitate but go, and there your not-yet-friend introduces you to a woman who is long and beautiful, and you try to ignore her, but the woman who is long and beautiful comes on to you, and the next day the two of you take a walk through Central Park and give praise to the daffodils and pick a movie to see without care just to find somewhere dark to kiss each other's cheeks, and you fall in love, and you and the woman who is long and beautiful and your not-yet-friend and her forever roommate spend the summer at Rockaway Beach, and after five months the woman who is long and beautiful will leave a paper bag of all that you gave her under a picnic bench at Cobble Hill Park, and she'll hold your hand and tell you that it's over, but a year later you'll share one final kiss outside of Congress Bar on Court Street just to wish each other well, and that will be the end of that. Except that through it all your not-yet-friend and her forever roommate have become two you could not do without. One broken romance has given birth to two fast friendships, and now you know who Ocean Vuong is too.

In 2019 another friend will ask if you would like to accompany her to hear Ocean Vuong read from *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* at Books Are Magic on Smith Street. She is a friend even though you used to ask her out frequently, and you thought you might even be in love, and you write her bad love poems drunk at three in the morning, and after she acquiesces to one afternoon date walking through the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens and admiring the bonsai trees and sharing a small lunch on Lincoln Place she falls for someone else, and you decide to let it go, and time moves on, and you have instead learned to love without having to have.

In 2013 you are in the Community Bookstore on the corner of Warren Street, and you are in love, so much so that you decide to become a poet, and you bounce between Bukowski and Baudelaire looking for a roadmap, but the love you call a Tiger in every line you write shows you that Lisel Mueller has what soothes the soul, and the two of you eat acid at the Museum of Natural History and marvel at the life of blue whales, and you come down in their dad's basement on Douglass Street, and the Tiger calls you an artist, and you are in love, and the last time you make love is in the bathroom at Brooklyn Social across the street from Carroll Park, but you don't know it's the last time, and friendship is a thing far away, and you don't know who Ocean Vuong is either.

In 2023 I ask you to accompany me to hear Ocean Vuong read from *A Little Closer to the Edge* at 100 Bogart Street in Bushwick. Your not-yet-friend and her forever roommate have moved to Texas, and the friend you love without having to have has gone back to Connecticut, and the Tiger who called you an artist is in the wilds of Los Angeles, and the woman who is long and beautiful is beyond your sight, but I am here with you, and friendships last and are good, and heartbreaks last and are good too, and maybe poetry is better than both but probably not, and Cobble Hill is just a place, and I am here with you, and you know who Ocean Vuong is too.

*Jesus' Miracles Mystery
Scratch 'N Reveal Cards—\$9.49*

by Megan McDermott

In the place where the miracle
is supposed to be,
there is a hole.

You can see Jesus,
the crowds, water,
but you cannot see
the whole scene
until you become
a participant yourself—

scratching, violent, against surfaces
so something counterintuitive might be revealed,

otherwise known as praying.

Neighbor

by Lauren Tess

He steps onto his balcony with cigarette and mug
wearing a shirt that reads, "We can end gun violence."
His glasses always catch the eastern sun or the white
overcast sky and when I look at him he shifts away
feigning a reflective gaze into the middle distance.

I must appear entitled sitting on my couch at 11AM
while he, wiry and eyeless, half-propped on the
rotting railing, seems sketchy to me.
Accustomed to judgment, I've forgotten about curiosity.

Soon the hickory between us will leaf and by the end
of May I'll have moved up the street. Reading here
in the mornings I learn that the impact of our proto moon
likely knocked Earth into the tilt that gives us seasons.
All this time, and I never thought to ask.

The Procession

by Flora Field

What Flora remembered was
me lying with my legs
pressed up against the wall
and the cool wood floor
beneath my back
and the heavy book
I held inches from my face
she even remembered
an earlier time
when I bright-eyed
floated warm soapy water
tiny bubbles popping
wondering how to make
mother love me
or standing in the sun porch
flooded August light
mother lying broken body
down on old eiderdown
I sat my little body down
beside mother stared
at the cream ceiling
the whirs of my own breath
drowning out labored breathing
Flora too was there
and how strange
for her to not have told me
had I known I might have
said join me

The Field

by Robert Hamilton

You saw mist hanging low
as if morning were reluctant
to go. You saw the confused
muddle of grasses soaking wet
as autumn began to dominate
the field. There were yellows, yes;
but dusty lime, yes, lime and russet;
chalky dun halfway to white
and taupes; deep clay puce, yes,
borrowed from distant steppes;
pale orange; lenient waxy blue—
a pallor of drabs not yet abandoned
by the dew. It rained.

You heard through an open window
and touched its casement.

You should have shut the window
and you should not look so long
at the field. Turn away. Withdraw.

You see, the field wants nothing
to do with you. *Nothing at all.*

Davening Test

by Sarah Shapiro

glossy spill on the science lab countertop
sticks somewhere under the siddur
the davening proctor and I share
last in my class to sit for this test
the storm window
between my lack of Hebrew skills
and my grade-appropriate davening group
I read the davening aloud for her
press my right leg into the thick cherry hardwood
corner to ground my pretending
hope the sounds I make are close
to prayer
twenty years later in shul
singing a less-than-usual kabbalat shabbat tune I miss
some *chet* or *nun* at the end of a word and the note shifts
leaving my voice alone in the air
my cheeks flame and boil and my ears block sound

thud-thudding now like
then in my davening test

side by side in an empty lab with no voices to cover my false flow
but the next morning the proctor sent me to join my friends
not because I could read
Hebrew and I know I'm not that good
a liar in another language
but as the last in my class
it was time

Self-Portrait as Copyist

by Ann Keniston

Some who earn a living repainting
famous artworks

specialize in stems, some leaves
or buds, others the two-tone vase
in van Gogh's *Sunflowers*.

In online photos, they hang
outside a shop in the Chinese town
where they were made,
each a slightly
different hue, some
some yellower, some orange,
an effect
of the film for printing process
or of slight discolorations
in the photos the copyists used,

though Van gogh was also,
unsure or couldnt stop,
painting four versions
each colored differently

then three more copies

of the last, most famous one.

*In my dreams
all the characters are me,*

my waking job apparently
to peer repeatedly
at the same material
till finally I see.



Freshwater Mollusk Shell 1, 2, & 3 by Kimberly Ann Priest

Carnal

by Jonathan Rylander

We roll the windows down in June.

My uncle has come to visit from Atlanta, and such occurrences are rare. Which is why I want to make the best of our time here.

It's the summer of 2016, and we are on our way to the Eat Street Social. I picked it because he likes to eat at fancy places. I checked the reviews. Tried to get it all just right. But here, I let my guard down. Familiar tall, white apartments rise up over Loring Park. Beyond them, the skyscrapers of Minneapolis. As I see it all, I wonder what it felt like when he was my age.

In 1983, he would have been what I am now—thirty-five. This town would have felt much different. I want to him to tell me about that.

And we have the time. Our reservation is not until 8:30, so we head to the Gay 90s—that big building lined with old carpet and wood paneling. Upstairs: a drag show starts. In front of us: a long room with an empty dance floor. To our left: a quaint rectangular bar. We pull up stools. I order a Maker's on the rocks. He a Rum and Coke.

"Keep it open?" the bartender asks.

"Why not," I say.

He takes his first sip. Turns to me. Then says, "I would come here. It's like it hasn't changed a bit."

"I always sensed there was more of a history here," I say.

Then he pauses. Takes another drink. Continues.

"You know, one time I was home, and my mother kept asking me why I had to leave. She kept asking. Finally, I said, *I'm going out.*"

"I know that feeling," I tell him.

And I really do. But I also want to imagine what it was like after he left his mother. How *this* bar felt. The aroma of leather and cigarettes. Men with hairy chests and blue jeans. Men more natural. More carnal. He could tell me about all that. Maybe he will.

“There was a letter,” he goes on. “A letter my dad—your grandfather—wrote me. It told me how much he and my mother had come to love William. I should show it to you. I was in love with a man for forty years.”

Of course, I know that he and William met at Fort Gordon in Georgia for basic training. But tonight, he fills in the gaps.

“We met there,” he says. Many others did, too. It was like a mecca of gay men—some had sex for the first time. Before heading off to Vietnam. There were just so many. We kept in touch after we came back, and I wanted to stay in Georgia. Really, if it weren’t for William, I’d be dead in those later years. We didn’t know about HIV or AIDS. We didn’t know any of that.

We grab the check.

—

Back in his car, he turns on show tunes and takes the long way to dinner. Down into Loring, we go. We pass Rainbow Road, that old gift shop that still stands, an active relic of sorts. Then it’s “The 19,” and the park and pond with all its windy paths and bridges. Next it’s up over Lowry Hill, around lake Harriet full of men at sunset, shirts off. You hold on to summer here. Then we are back on Nicollet. Parked at the Social.

Inside, it’s even fancier than I could tell online. And though the staff tries to play off a relaxed, hipster-ish vibe, the place is anything but cheap. And I feel underdressed.

“Would you fellas prefer inside or out?”

“Outside?” I ask my uncle, seeking his permission.

“Sounds great,” he replies.

Outside, we pull up to a smallish two-topper, there on a quaint patio surrounded by other similarly small tables with plants and flower boxes. In the middle of us, the server places a single candle holder with translucent sides that glow dark yellow. A couple sits nearby.

We haven’t been this close in years. A freshness lingers in the air, as if we are getting to know each other for the first time—like we are

back in my grandmother's living room, in the early 90s. It was Christmas time. On an old orange couch, he gave me two things: a cassette tape of Disney's *The Lion King* and paper with a bunch of lines on it for writing sheet music. I lacked, back then, the ability to grasp the meaning of the gift—the way it gave a nine-year-old boy permission.

Even still, that moment stays with me. Here on this patio, my uncle intensifies it in the way he talks about Elton John and Atlanta.

"When Elton moved into his penthouse condo," he says, "he held out a single pink rose to the designer. *Make it beautiful*, he said. That was all he needed to say."

"What a life," I reply, shaking my head.

"You got that right."

Then my uncle says something about the social scene in Atlanta in the late 70s and early 80s. And I want to hear all about these years, because I'm making up for lost time. I want him to guide me. Help me understand that time. Or the 90s. I sense he must have much to say. Such visceral memories. Or so I imagine. The parks they'd cruise. The handkerchief codes. Light blue for oral, or grey for bondage.

I need it: the smell of it. And I get it, in a way.

Right now, he brings me back there.

"They'd throw the best parties," he says. "Our friends Greg and David. They lived in a bigger, modern home north of Atlanta, in Dunwoody."

"I bet it was nice," I say.

"Oh, it was. Tall ceilings. Trays full of crystal. Leather couches and glass end tables. Anyway, it was a festive party around the holidays. There were a number of people there, but it was intimate. Our core group, you know?"

I only nod. Yet, if I could go back, I'd tell him that the way he describes this party means something to me. That it enables me to see his world that shapes my world.

—

But I don't say any of that. Instead, I let him finish what he started. Perhaps, that's for the best. Because when I do, I'm there with him at Greg and David's party. Can see him and all their friends in this ornate house. It's early evening, and we are together in the dining room, me watching from the outside. Them dancing. Maybe singing Elton:

Hold me closer, tiny dancer
Count the headlights on the highway

As they do, Greg slips out. Heads to kitchen. Dinner ended not too long ago, so he's probably doing dishes. But no one can say for certain. And we are all too busy in *this moment*. But then again, the early 90s means something different to gay men. Means you cannot take these moments lightly.

Lay me down in sheets of linen
You had a busy day today

The music continues. My uncle and William hold one another. Until a sound: the loudest shot you want to hear because it's just a room away. A shot that brings me back to this moment, to the here and now. To my uncle finishing his scallops, gently. Carefully.

Until he raises his head to me, with a look that tells me I will need to figure this out on my own. Not just me, but all of us. He projects a world that I'm obligated not only to feel, but to understand. The obligation to answer a question not only for Greg, but for me:

"Why did he have to do it like that?"

Killing the Fish

by Ellen Stone

I don't suppose he thought
about it much—the silver fish

we caught dumped in the plastic pail,
their slip and curl and gasp

when he poured them in the sink.
But I looked on at his steadiness,

how he took pliers to the skin
after he cut a thin circle round the head

and yanked it off like you undress a doll
with clothes too tight.

Likewise, he gutted them,
a few quick strokes with his fish knife

that held the mirrored scales
in tiny patches on its shaft

until he washed them off.
The guts hauled to the garbage pile

or buried underneath the beans.
Later, tossed in flour and laid out

in a buttered pan for lunch,
the fish were mild in their death

and only spoke of pond and mud
and all that time held in their cold

green world. I ate them
like a tiny prayer, or maybe less

as if I knew such violence
was part of every day, what

I was given in my life.



Freshwater Oyster Shell & Freshwater Pea Clam Shell by Kimberly Ann Priest

Love Story № 1

by Mary Buchinger

the moth had very little time—
mere hours!

quickly it flew—
a spin of spirals!

drew itself
upon the walls of air

truly it had only
to find another

and to leave
of that union

something
of substance

yet
the dance!
the *dance!*

The Hare I Miss

by Judy Darley

An Arctic hare catches
in the edges of my vision.
The haunches are strong, wired
for leaps of gravity-defying logic.
That's how I know it isn't just any old
Lepus but the part of you we have somehow
mislaid. In it, I glimpse your semantic grace.
I touch my hand to your face, wishing I could cradle
your diminished temporal lobe. If I try to view
the hare straight on, to describe the quiver
of nose and light-dashed whiskers, my eyes sting
until it evaporates. When you first confessed
to the growing gap, I pictured icecaps shrinking.
Now I see your liquifying memories as elusive
and alive, but turning wild. It soothes me to imagine
them fleeting around your brain, thwarting attempts
to corral them into speech or recognition.
Sometimes, your lips draw back and you emit
an unexpected sound. Occasionally, you achieve
a soft, sibilant-tailed "Ye-ess."
I hold my breath as the hare halts, ears twitching
beneath the shelter of your palms.

Rainbow Seekers

by Phillip Shabazz

*Diamond in the back, sunroof top, digging the scene
with a gangster lean.*

— William Devaughn

Déjà vu, as when she hums hibiscus to our toe tap
weighed down by smoke, the cigar drowned like a spilled
drink licked from a wobbling table, stains

the piano's sugar pine over calypsos and daiquiris
of a watering hole struggling to outshine cigarette butts
floating in the toilets, and over the chitlin circuit leisure

sticky with sweat through blip-less blues, a beer garden
tinted indigo sparkles with her love oil, and the barbeque rib
grease on her mouth, the sauce confused for lipstick,

as when she crosses the aisle jazzed up with neon
filtered through the honkytonk, florescence, lime
and coconut rum clinked glasses, ice on the tongue

like a weather forecast hits wide of the mark, as when
a stranger kisses the waitress's hand, then draws his
eyes up to her face, smitten by dimples and Bacardi

,
our souls shimmering nostalgia as Joe solos
on the Fender Rhodes, Wilton: sax, Stix: green drums,

Wayne: trombone, bass bottoms

spellbinding on a Jelly Roll groove, as when
their harmonic matrix lifts our feet, cool like flamboyance,
turns the wall mirror upside down,

and flexes to blow the roof off,
make the restroom pipe leak as if each crescendo
infiltrating its crack puts the liquor license in jeopardy,

bring the funk to her fingertips as she unwinds
over a dish of deviled eggs and hot crab pinwheels,
her red blouse open at the neck in low houselights,

how I glance at an island flowering in a pot
while I'm sure the marijuana is missing by a mile,
as when booze burns our lips like salt,

not much we'd ask of another, not faulting
that little orange moon in the black towers,
tipsy, the shadows surpassed by twin stars,

standing room the night owl holds to, and after
too much to drink catch the connoisseur
hassling the bartender over out-of-stock-absinthe,

his teeth snatching the electric air, as when
the bouncer dashes him out the door, before
naked voices jump off the flaming carousel—

say gut bucket, say barefoot bunion, as when we
stomp grapes, swallow full bodies from a bottle,

coat our tongues with the wine to enjoy a chunk

of cheese, bread, olive oil, the way we plunge
this whiskey air into a joke, while the rhythm section
sweeps a frisk of wind through our laughter

wired to throw back our heads like the feathers
of two doves plumed on a branch as when we lean
into a tuneful phrase and the fire does not burn.



It's No Secret by Shantha Bunyan

No Middle

by Maggie Swofford

The waves only meet the edge
of the ocean in the middle
of the night in the still,
peaceless darkness. There is
death waiting, pushing
across the shoreline—

a dead bird, belly bloated, black-
and-white edge across its middle—

and only a dog has sniffed it
so far. It smells the notion
of our endings flying over
the open part of the sea and sky
where the land meets the other
craters and me. I watch the air
foam the water, even though
the pair seems to coexist in
the flat expanse beyond.

I might float for a little while,
imagining my toes leaving
the land, only to find my breath
as full of sand and salt as
the black-and-white bird's lungs.

In a Cartoon Backpack

by Denali Huff

time traveling cross country
hovering above
a skin of clouds
revealing valley's
clotted veins,
flying from a sinking sun
commiserating with the
dust on the window,
and I'm always boarding
never arriving—
pretending to be
from another city
engines melody,
my melancholic speculation
the sixth plane to the sixth state,

beginning to wonder
if I'm still that kid
who ran from home;
with a cartoon backpack
packed some T-shirts
a book for entertainment—
counts quarters, climbs steps:
“aren't you a little young to be traveling alone?”

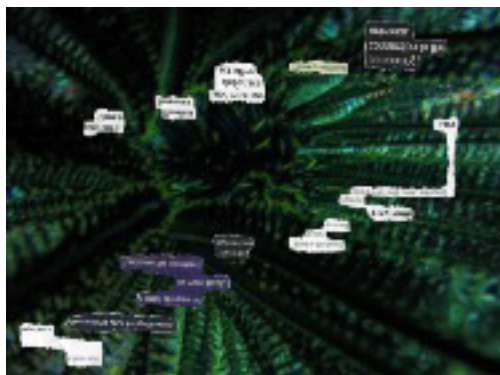
outgoings at a payphone
in Austin,
wants to go home,
but can't figure out
how to get past the operator,
then buying a ticket
for another train
catching a different plane
always boarding
never arriving

Emily as I Consider the Audience

by Darren C. Demaree

I stopped lying to Emily years ago.
I have no problem lying to you.

The wreckage is a statue if we cannot
move it. Can you lift this poem?



Discovering Your Insignificance by Shantha Bunyan

Middle America

by Tiffany Hsieh

That time I cried on the tarmac of LAX I thought the flight attendant was going to make me blow into a paper bag. She was a nice and pretty lady and I had an aisle seat. She thought I was afraid of flying and brought me water. Always it was the second leg of the fourteen-hour trip over the Pacific, when you knew you were back on North American soil, that made me feel like the world was not round. It was its own shadow chasing itself in circles. Always here, not there. Always there, not here. I looked into the flight attendant's perfectly made-up face knowing she must have seen it all. Ah, I see, she said, it's someone. Then as if deciding there was nothing more she could do, she gave me a squeeze on the shoulder and moved away to let the other passengers through. A fat man sat down next to me before takeoff, filling his seat and a portion of mine like Valium. I woke up later somewhere over Middle America. A mother with a colicky baby was pacing back and forth by the emergency exit.

Legs and Pits

by Tiffany Hsieh

I shouldn't be the one to tell you this but girls here shave their legs and pits. That's all I'm gonna say about that. If you wanna know about how girls here get those nice calves with toned muscles, I can show you some stair exercises. There's also a certain type of running shoe they wear to make their calves look like that. No, not Nike. They don't look as good on women and they're more expensive. I got my Air Jordans last year for like a hundred bucks. Don't go telling Ba and Ma now. They don't need to know everything. They call that *need-to-know* here. You'll pick up these things. Plus, I wear my Air Jordans a lot. There are guys here who have a pair of shoes for walking, another pair for jogging, and several pairs for playing sports, one for each sport they play. Speaking of which, my buddy's coming over to shoot some hoops. Yeah, the Jewish one. I met him in math on my first day here and we sort of became friends. I joke that he's my Jewish brother. The two cultures are very similar. Both Chinese and Jewish people are smart and cheap! No, he's not born there. He's born here. His parents were born here. I've had meals in their house. I went to the synagogue with them once. I call his grandmother Bubba. No, he doesn't have a girlfriend. He has a sister. She's younger, too, maybe a year younger than you. She's on the swim team. I shouldn't be the one to tell you this but girls here use tampons.

Hot Stuff

by Tiffany Hsieh

This Korean boyfriend I had took me to McDonald's and asked, Would you mind paying for yourself? He was poor, trying to be an artist, and I kind of thought this would be a good story to tell our kids when he's famous someday and calls me sweetie at a cocktail party. We went back to his room where he put one condom over the other and made me take a Graval afterwards in case one of the condoms broke. His housemates were philosophy majors who mocked each other all night long about Nietzsche, Kant, and Kierkegaard. I felt unintelligent around them. I wanted my Korean boyfriend, who was born here and knew who Nietzsche, Kant, and Kierkegaard were, to know how much I loved kimchi and pork bone soup. He didn't tell his friends I was a good pianist. He told them I was Chinese, to which someone cited *Tao Te Ching*. I smiled because they thought it was funny. I thought it was funny because my Korean boyfriend thought it was funny. I didn't think it was that funny when he broke up with me and said we didn't have much to talk about. I went to the bookstore and bought a book by Plato. I never read the whole thing or half of it but I became a journalist anyway after I stopped playing the piano. I interviewed my Korean ex-boyfriend on the phone about some hot stuff he was working on. He didn't recognize my name or voice and it was just as well. He didn't have anything to say that was of public interest so I ended the interview after ten minutes.

Turkey Bend (Is That the Big Dipper?)

by Sarah O'Malley Graham

I got caught on fishing line—
invisible, in the night.

But now we're sitting. When we get up
our butts will be damp. "If my butt is damp
then your butt is damp," I'll say.

But now we're sitting, and staring
up and out.

Down the strand are our friends. Raucous.
Down the strand is a light.

The light isn't our friends. The light is a fisherman,
out here for peace, perhaps.

We aren't disturbing the peace, you and I.
We're making some.

I notice the way the water sucks in light for meters
before it begins to reflect the stars.
You notice other things, I assume. You don't say them.

You do say you're thinking of Maryland. And I wonder,
Does Massachusetts look like this?
even though I've been to Massachusetts.

And I close my eyes and fill up with wind.
I'm walking down an Irish strand,
I'm by a water that whips.

But I am mostly with you. This peace wouldn't be the same
without you. Wouldn't be right.

I lean my head on your shoulder, and wonder,
Am I ruining things?
Would you rather I wouldn't?

You are so cautious with me.

On the way back, we'll both get stuck
in the fishing line
again.

And we'll help each other untangle ourselves
in the night.

Not all of the knots will be visible.

I wonder if there's any we undid
without knowing.

Complaints about God

by Brice Maiurro

God is dodgy, always has been,
he's looming down from the shining
lights of an empty baseball field at night
but I'm not a fan of baseball.

God is inattentive,
he's redefining himself every time he
comes out with a new record like he thinks he's
Prince or worse David Bowie.

God, I will say, is always there in Coltrane
between the notes but it is so hard to listen between
the notes, it's so hard to understand that
listening is hearing what we're not saying.

That's a weird choice that God made.

And these cells,
these cells here all over America
where we're detaining humans like we're God
but more so we're detaining God,

and God does nothing,
all he does is sit there and say how this is
our folly, and these men who make these choices
are full of fear and they think it's God.

It's a poor choice that God puts on his makeup
like he is trying to look like fear,
and again that is just simply not true,
it's us and God's not anywhere in any of this.

Meanwhile, people are unwell unseen
and it is more than just a lack of listening
that I cannot speak to them,
because I'm too busy wetting these rags,

trying to smear the fear off of God's face,
and I just seem to be taking everything off with it.



A Barefoot Child by Shantha Bunyan

Memory

by Manuela Williams

Italicized line from an Ellen Bass poem

sometimes I'm frightened
by how much memory
wants to get out
last month we locked
our orange tabby
in the pantry by mistake
when we found him
he had split
open a bag of rice
gouged long strips
of paint from the shelves
sometimes my body is like this
shutting away what it can't
or doesn't want to notice
I forget how silent
the remembering can be
I don't see the damage
until I open myself up
and look

Dead Dog Love Story

by E. B. Bartels

When Richie moved in, he brought his dead dog's leash with him. "This was Cocoa's," he said. "We have to hang it by the door. Then if there's a fire, I can grab it on my way out." I nodded. We hammered in a nail and hung up the green leash. A limp strip of dark forest, lonely on the cream wall, waiting for its ghostly companion.

"Wait," I said and went to my jewelry box where, mixed with my rings and earrings, were my own dead dogs' collars—Gus's thick blue one, and Gwen's, a thinner pink. I hooked them on the nail with Cocoa's leash. Richie nodded.

"Now if there's a fire, they're together."

The Beauty of Evacuated Form

by Alicia Hoffman

A daffodil's heavy bloom just fell
like a leaded weight into the cold earth.

Northeastern spring, one can expect
such a thing. The forecasters

all intuit snow. Mid-April, and I am alone
with my husband in our backyard.

I would like to suggest meaning
without moving into the saccharine.

Hard, these days, when the world
is an open wound and I am a stopgap

to someone with better words
than these. I want to say something true.

But this conflicts with the weird
way everything essential is lost

in transit. The space between
the dogs' bark and my hearing of it.

The smoke rising from the Weber grill.
In this air, I am quarantined from

leaning into what I love. To love what
I love into the very thingness of it. To rise

into the sky on the back of a mourning dove.
What I mean is: everything I have ever wanted.

Yes, even the blue sky breaking through
the cloud cover. Yes, even the pink moon.