

Thimble Literary Magazine

Volume 2 • Number 4 • Spring 2020

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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 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.

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 art
Taylor Teachout, *Collage 1*,
mixed media, 2019.

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Editor's Note

It feels ridiculous and urgent to celebrate National Poetry Month this year. It's easy to see why it feels frivolous. A pandemic is happening. Our lives have shifted in the month or so in ways we did not see coming. To whom should I extol the virtues of poetry when so many of us are worried about our families, health, jobs, security, and sense of well-being? Who am I to tell you to read Creeley, Bishop, Crane, Dorsey, and Parker when you don't know if your job is going to be there tomorrow?

In a bit of playacting, and not knowing what to name this literary magazine, I have been talking largely about shelter for over a year. I did not think I ever would have to shelter in place.

It feels important to celebrate poetry this year. I was rereading Amy Hempel the other day, and in her latest story collection she writes when you feel the danger coming, try singing to it. I don't want to prattle on about poetry being a shelter anymore. I want to lay in blankets and blankets and get very fat on baked goods. But I will try to sing to it.

Can we sing together? It will feel urgent and ridiculous, but so does telling people you've known for years you love them.

So this is my love letter, in my own elliptical fashion. It's not where I thought this would end up, but, well, we have made it this far.

Best,
NADIA ARIOLI

Broken

by Kelly DuMar



Everything you love and lose
washes back to shore
on a freak wave, it is believed
from the seas which a poet says
are filled with dolls and all
her broken bones. Lucky today
I salvage an arm.

After Rosemary Picked Up the Baby

by Megan Mary Moore

She chose to bottle feed because of his full set of adult teeth.

It's breast milk. I pump, she assured anyone in earshot.

She used the “cry it out” method to get him to sleep.

Research shows it's better for mom and baby, she insisted, red-eyed.

She didn't use a sleep sack or swaddle.

He loves to thrash! she laughed.

His first word was *daddy*.

She didn't have anything to say about that.

every night after safia's death

by Korede Kakaaki

every night after safia's death,
mother's dialect turns a household of lunatics
& in the attic are memories hanging on cobwebs & father's
prison letters from that distant city i can't recall,

i heard that grief is hereditary
but mine is an anonymous donor from a sperm bank
so, each day the sun beams, i touch its skin hoping it is
contagious but it leaves me stranded because the night always
eavesdrops on our conversations

i carved my surname on the windowsill because i am
on the brink of falling out like pebbles hurled into
the waves & legacy can't just fade out,
i mean i am bitter like the tales mother won't tell me, i mean
silence hovers the house like a watch guard, the rooftop shares of
our turbulence, it bed wets on us anytime the sky's bladder
disagrees

one day after coming back from the White-owned mines that left
my eyes sunken & my skin rugged like a butcher's slab,
i learnt mother had a stroke but she said she
only went limp with memories too sweet, she can't hold:
three months later, she went somewhere & i packed my broken parts
in a luggage, flag down that cab going the seaport way,

here i am, a stowaway in dark corners of an abandoned ship
on a deserted island ...

MoonBlinde

by I. V. Kallin

Act I

There is a piano on the moon, and Ramona with expert hands is playing it.

There is a piano on the moon, and Ramona with her hair down is lounging on it.

There is a piano on the moon, and Ramona with a big bat is hitting it. There is a piano on the moon.

Ramona, old enough to be able to count her birthdays on both hands, has realized by this point that she has a life ahead of her, and she is revolting. The cheesy surface, cratered from toddlers taking little fistfuls of it, cradles Ramona as she cradles her bat.

But the music sounds like rubbing your finger pads on the tip of a wine glass. Ramona's fingers, producing the pulsing tones, slide from key to key, the vacuum blessing. There is a way to hear and it is this:

Is,

Is,

Is,

Is.

Ramona leans her weight on the wood of her bat following none of these and like a ballerina twirls around it, to come down slow as a feather gently leaping into the air. A shy pink feather, a shy little movement from tiptoe to tiptoe. The bat comes up—

And smacks into the ground. She's braced bent like a crooked tooth on both feet. A pillow of moondust rises and dissipates like sugar water. The piano is next. Splintering all three legs, splintering the side. As they

come off the keys scream and writhe. The guts broken spill out. The bat strikes discordant notes, and the piano howling like a beast comes apart.

Act II

The galaxies in your pocket have changed
You. If I were there I would reach inside, the hole in
The bottom, producing nothing but meteorites.
I put them in my mouth, roll them around
On my tongue, I spit them back out, pick them
Up with a pair of tongs, put them in the salad.
Word salad—

() () ()

Lacing our fingers
Together like ribbons
That will come undone when we
Dangle on strings in the night sky—
Man in the moon waving with a
Cupped hand—
Me in the moon killing deer for
Sport—
You in the moon, ripping apart the

Act III

Ramona's pet brother is a wolf named Dog.
Ramona's pet brother diligently sits as she, around herself,
destroys everything.
Ramona's pet brother diligently sits as she sets fire to the vacuum.
Ramona's pet brother has three eyes.
What does Beethoven sound like at twenty-one thousand feet?

Cluck Cluck Cluck Cluck
Cluck
Cluck
Cluck

Dog that anything is being played is unaware. Hearing Ramona bash in the piano, his ear twitches sideways. No way it's the fourth. The third one? The second one.

Dog is glad he invented his body. Dog is glad he has a sister, is able

to. Dog tilts his snout upward, has a few sniffs. The splinters of wood float nearby, caught in the orbit of the moon so very suddenly. Ramona regardless of this does not stop.

Act IV

Cow. It's a sweet
Meat. Pummeling it with
A baseball bat, just like a
Tender eye searching for the
Cure to our luna—
Cy. What makes a mad
Man mad? What turns fun from fun
And into screaming matches and
Saturn's choking rings?
() ()
I will say this, at least:
The babiestic of neptune's moons tastes like
Charcoal paste, the kind
They hand fed me when I overdosed

Cartoon Logic

by Tim J. Brennan

When we were children and Lydia
would come over in the morning,

she would cry and not want to talk
about her father's hands on her.

I simply turned on the television
to channel 11 and we watched

as Bugs Bunny eventually struck a match,
giving Elmer Fudd the hotfoot.

He danced around in circles, yelling
Oh, oh, oh—the sole of his boot bubbling

like pancake batter on a hot stove
as he geared up to chase you silly wabbit

consonants melding, the threads
of his boot melting & snapping him back

like a rubber band. Elmer would vibrate
back and forth in blinding speed.

Only then would I laugh and look over
at Lydia curled up like a small kitten.

She would be staring at Elmer
trying to run,

the threads of his sole stretched
into insane thin strips,

his cartoon mouth agape, opening so wide,
it seemed to swallow him whole.



Phil Rowan, *Barn Hinge*,
watercolor, 2013.

Nopalitos

by Lidia Ortiz

The woman suddenly appears at the gate as I sit on the patio. I cannot hear what she is saying over the ad for the mystic *hermanos* on the radio announcing their modestly priced talents. They will cure you of your *mala suerte*, bring back that lover you lost, and maybe sell you success in the process. The tiny woman initially looks like a younger version of my aunt who is from a different rancho and therefore unlikely to be her. I wave at her to come in and like a panicked child run to the kitchen window where my grandmother is cooking. I tell her that a woman has arrived to please come greet her. The woman is still waiting at the gate, like some lovely *comadre*-vampire that cannot enter unless she is invited in. She has brought nopales she says and she uncovers the brilliant green portions already peeled for my grandmother who endlessly expresses a combination of modesty and gratitude. The woman has a face that is ageless, as is the way of the indigenous people of our region. Her olive skin looks velvet soft and she has the smiling eyes of the women from my father's side. I am a giant in comparison since I resemble my mother's family physically. I greet the woman in the custom of my upbringing, with a kiss to her cheek and a hug to her small frame. Although I do not recall having met this woman before, this is what you do when you have the sense to recognize that this is your grandmother's close friend or relative. You know that she probably knows everything about you, as grandmothers live to talk about their offspring. I introduce myself to the woman and she asks who I belong to. In this, the land of the patriarchy, at my maternal grandmother's house, I belong to my mother. The woman remarks that oh yes, *hija* de Morena, as if she can finally

see the resemblance. I smile and nod and walk with them towards the kitchen. I sit outside and listen to them catch up on the goings-on of their community. The thing about being a woman of faith like theirs is that gossip is not common. Not with your neighbors anyhow. Any point made that discusses someone's misfortune ends with a prayer said out loud to God asking for better things to come, if he so wills it. In that way, I am a woman of faith, always hoping for better things to come. Maybe I should start saying these tiny prayers out loud like my grandmother does. Maybe it will make others feel better the way it does for me to hear such kindnesses. Instead, I decide it is not necessary, because I know by now that God does not require words. The woman eventually leaves and I sit with my grandmother while she shows me the right way to slice and dice nopales. As I watch her, I keep thinking back to the cautious knife skills I learned on some TV chef's show but never applied. My grandmother needs no lessons and slices and dices midair while answering my questions. I ask her how she met my grandfather and she starts by telling me of her own father's story, followed by her own and through to the birth of her first child who is proclaimed by her to have been the most beautiful child ever. She beams with pride about her only male son and I believe what she says about his beauty because my grandmother is not one to shell out compliments without merit. Her face turns to sadness as we talk about his untimely death, the senselessness of losses she has lived through, but ultimately reminds me that our unending faith in the *santitos* and God himself carries us at all times. This faith, she says, is my God-issued birthright. I nod in agreement and occasionally interject with stories of my own tiny miracles. I do not tell her that I still pray the same short prayer over and over that I once overheard her say softly under her breath. I was fourteen and my aunts and cousins were all walking home in the dark with her. It always stuck with me even though I only heard it once. I don't think my grandmother ever stops praying, just like me.

Like me, she comes from a world of *novela*-worthy stories, stories of thwarted murders and resolved black magic spells. Like me, she has an unbroken faith. She has so many things to say and I don't know how much time passes while we deal with the nopales. I find myself distracted by something on the wall and try to decide if the cracks are real or a

daddy long leg. She lets me know there is only one way to know for sure and laughs.

This is the land of spiders that lazily hover, eavesdropping while families sit and reminisce over coffee. This is the land where lost granddaughters come after disappearing for years and years looking for history and renewal. This is the land of nopales readily converted into food out of necessity and sometimes just nostalgia. The old ways are not lost at all. Grandmothers will share them with you, all you have to do is dare to ask.



Taylor Teachout, *Collage 2*,
mixed media, 2019.

Unicorn

by Kelly DuMar



Scavenge for shells
find a trunkless hoofless
bleach-white and unburied
unicorn. Unblinking her purple
eye. Pointing her thrilling horn
flashing hot pink lipstick lips.

Looking for a Way Around (after the Breeders)

by E. Kristin Anderson

When the floor disappears I lie against it,
touch it cold, find a bass line to pull me along.

I wait for night, pray for the sound of a storm.
It's not that I need to take down the stars—

I'm not an astronaut or a saint. It's how I glow hot
behind my eyes, this spinning sunwise when

I'm feeling faint. This might demand divining rods
or demons or hawthorn but I need to find a place

where I'll never be this dizzy again. I want to know
the physics of it. The medicine. I need to stop

wondering at the coast. My blooming is vigilant
even in this heat. But I'd use any tool to take faith apart,

make it whole, strike God as she struck me—
with a garrote. My mouth curls around a slow breath,

I drink water as fast as I can, remind myself that
I only pass out sometimes, always come back whole.

I still ask God for the tools to stand and walk
while breathing. To know quiet in the back of a car.

With a bedroom this near to the road I hear
every emergency, every little whisper in the trees,

every drop of rain to hit the window and the dirt.
This faith is a pulse and like my pulse it is erratic—

I follow it anyway, just in case there's music there,
a rhythm to hammer into the floor at home.



Taylor Teachout, *Collage 4*,
mixed media, 2019.

Clapboard Houses in Late September Light

by Katie Clarke

I want to speak to you in shades of yellow in patterns filtering sunlight
through the street-facing window onto cotton sheets occasionally we
speak of precipitation armed with winter-proof boots our hair already
wet the yellow kind of rain that makes you comfortable & softens your
exposed skin

I am trying to separate you from preconceptions vulnerability gone stale
needles don't hurt if you look the other way I am always giving blood
that nobody wants

navy and coral seafoam green butter yellow
barn door red with faded window boxes; royal blue

there is lethargy in loving when you are out of practice when you're reluctant
when you've never given yourself over to it before

rusty orange saltwater blue warm brown butternut squash
plastic shovel blue sweet mustard yellow

I want to watch and not see the parts of you that I've made up in my head
listening to the chorus of homemade sounds from this rooftop pretend
that the city stops when the lights go out

I don't know if the past lives on the corner of Robie & Jubilee or if I'm
sleeping with it every night I don't know if scars fade or if I've forgotten
which are seams and which were tears

I have not stopped holding hands with stoicism or biting my nails how
can I show you this city in yellows painting in red and black I am not
looking at the canvas and this rain is hard and fast and terrifying it is
dark blue black, not yellow



Amy Oestreicher, *Dismember*,
mixed media and acrylic, 2017.

For Will, at four

by Beth Peterson

I remember a class I had in graduate school
where the professor made us stand there
in a large circle, the beginning of each session
we'd fold our hands together and bow
bow to each other
bow to the place
bow to whatever else, I don't know
I thought it was silly
but here he is now, four years old
not laughing at his own folded hands
bowing when he finishes reciting his first poem
I can't remember what poem he said
something about jack-o-lanterns,
something popping out of a pumpkin
it doesn't matter
all that matters is his striped red pajamas, his bare feet
his hair around his collar and that bowing
that no one told him to do
is this what it is to love?

Observations at an Obligatory Dinner Party

by Jenny Wong

The mackerel stare
from the shallows of their tin,
eyes wide beneath the olive oil gleam.

The golden toffee pudding is the fan favorite,
followed by the sheen of naked shrimp
with their chilly curves,
then the dark chocolate, ready for warm mouths
to taste the glisten in their cherry centers.

Not all hints of light are holy,
perhaps that is why

streaking comets burn out their skulls,
swift rabbits scatter in the white of the moon,
and in the old Chevy truck, the cigarette lighter
still glows orange when pressed
by an underage finger.

Silver spoons don't pick
the tongues that lick them
or the hands that toss them
with the other dirty dishes,
flashes of lightning settling beneath the water.

Furious

by Kelly DuMar



I remember. How boys will
be boys fussed with our unlucky
dolls, snapped bodies off heads,
for a pleasure jolt.

Stippled

by M. Brett Gaffney

Sometimes I go online to google my name because I want to know someone out there has found me. And a little praise, yes. Of course praise. I have been practicing honesty: I like being told I am good. I do not like wearing bras on the weekends. That kind of honesty. Not the kind that admits to everything I've done wrong. I'm already fluent in that language of hurt. I can tell you my sins all day long if you let me. I can make guilt look like a lush winter coat, runway ready. I can make shame look like a matching handbag. I'm not afraid of questioning god or calling it other names like the guy at the library who said the electronics were talking to him, telling him to set the water free from its pipes so he did. And I believed him. Lately I've been listening to ASMR videos on YouTube. They whisper like they know me. I'm not lonely, but I like a voice I can replay over and over in my ears whenever I want. A voice I don't have to answer if I don't want to and it's not weird. People usually want you to answer them when they talk to you, even if they don't care what you have to say. They want to hear the echo. I spend most of my day offering echoes like flyers for a charity. On Google I find that M. Brett Gaffney fills up thirteen pages but not all of them are me. Some of them are strangers. Our name in their mouths like the man whispering *stipple stipple* to me, a trigger word I never knew I wanted. Like the smell of my grandmother's perfume long after she's forgotten exactly who I am. Please believe me when I say *I love you* and I can't remember your name. Believe me when I tell you, in the smallest kiss I can pack into this broken microphone, *I want you to love me back*.

Temporary Home

by Sea Stachura

I peeled the banana and took two bites. That stuck feeling was in my throat. The gelatin capsule had glued itself to my esophagus and no amount of water or juice or milk or coffee would send it on its way. I could not breathe. But two bites of banana worked. That was all I needed. I hadn't really been thinking about the room when I set this banana on the desk and went off to lace shoes, apply lip balm, assess purse. But no. That's not quite accurate. Not true. It was a borrowed dorm room. I had seen the leaky screen in the subterranean space, the tiny toad crouched in the shower stall, the wolf spider under the bed. Still, I left the banana on the desk. Yellow skin curtained its creamy flesh. Yellow, not mottled brown. Those were almost too mushy, too sweet, which, of course, this banana would become if I placed it in a sealed bag or a humid kitchen. No, make no mistake. I knew what I was doing, leaving this banana out. At evening, I returned: no ants. Relief: I sank into it. The banana was at the ready and the pills were in their bottle. I could relax. I had been meditating. I had been counting steps and stopping to watch—to notice—the blue morphos open and close their wings on the gravel path. I had been considering the round mouths of the Tancho koi, bendy straws seeking the sinking food. I had been reminded of the Five Precepts. Ahimsa: Do no harm. Sweep the path before your feet. All the way down, turtles: The teaming soil, a platform for the concrete foundation, the concrete, a platform for the tile, the tile, a platform for me to view this desk, to observe this banana before bed. I switched off the lamp, pulled up the covers. In the morning, the banana was asleep on the desk, undisturbed. A brown slick coated my teeth marks. I could

have broken off the film, sunk a new bite or admitted I was through. But no. At the window, I pocketed my pills, took them to breakfast—eggs, potatoes, coffee. By evening, only a few ants had found the banana. I considered them, swept them off the desk, rewrapped the banana's three arms around itself. I could have thrown this banana in the trash. But wasn't that closer to the ants? There, on the ground? Did a few ants on the browned end damn the whole thing? Couldn't I still eat some of the banana? I still needed to swallow that Prozac in the morning. But I didn't feel like eating the banana. It wasn't my favorite flavor or texture or color. The potatoes had worked fine. The Prozac had gone down easy as butter. Another morning. Another evening. Twenty, maybe thirty sweet ants visiting the banana under my lamp's yellow glow. Ants climbed the desk, scurried across the computer, headed in or out of the window screen. It wasn't their fault they were there. They were ants, miniature gatherers. Highly sensitized, communal workers. They hadn't held a million tiny knives to my throat, demanded I unpeel the banana. Given enough time and workers, they could have unpeeled this banana themselves. But they had not. No. This was my doing. I resolved to find an agreeable solution. Tools: One sheet of white paper, one red plastic cup, one pair human hands. I coaxed, gathered the ants on the paper, swept them into the cup. They didn't want to go in that direction: Ants are single-minded. Still I shook, flicked. Blew down the ants climbing out of the cup. Covered the cup with a book of poems. No, not poems, prose. Scooped ants, lifted prose, deposited. Herded these scuttlers. Brushed them from this book, from this paper, these computer keys. Black smears then dotted my white paper. It wasn't my fault: to scoop one was to smoosh another. They wanted to go where they wanted to go; I wanted this banana in the event that I wanted this banana. We all deserved compassion for this unfortunate encounter. This unpredictable circumstance involving me, these ants, this banana, that barren room. I rushed the ones still in the cup out into the night grass, shook, flicked them out, my big fist rubbing against the cup's sides. The next round garnered fewer ants, but fewer escapees, too. Again I brought them out, shook the red cup, reached my hand in. Only by this time, several had uncooperatively run up my sleeve. Oh! That terrible feeling: tiny, sticky legs tapping across me. I itched, rubbed the sleeve of my shirt. Let's be honest. They wouldn't be

getting out alive, no matter these intentions. Still they scurried across the desk. Where else would they get? My bed? My shoes? My grocery bag of otherwise sealed food? A few were headed that direction. No, not there. I wouldn't let them get there. I smooshed them with the toe of my shoe. I merengued their bodies across the floor. On the desk: a thumb, pointer, middle finger missile each one. A third a fourth a fifth a sixth. I scrape, smudge their bodies on the paper. Track them out the window. Hunt the drawers, the desk legs, the computer, books, bed until there are no more. Not one left. None at all in the subterranean room.

Only my breath.

Sorry, ants.



Fabrice Poussin, *Alone*,
digital photograph, 2016.

A Group of Whales Is Called a Pod

by Cameron Morse

Little pockets of light
in a hairy mass
overhead. Any point
I look at, the mass
is moving. It is moving
everywhere I look.
You cannot imagine
how much sky there is

above me. It's amazing
I'm not afraid.
The roof is alive.
It has little pockets
of light, spots,
and strips of orange
along the horizon grazing
dark junipers.

Look up again and the one
cloud's broken into lots, a herd,
a pod of gray, gray,
gray whales, and the sky between
is vaguely blue again, pastel,
interstitial, outlining the glacially
slow loss of my life.

Annabel Lee

by Jen Finstrom

*We ride the sky down,
our voices falling back behind us,
unraveling like smooth threads.*
—Anne Sexton, “Winter Colony”

When Anne Sexton died in 1974 you were five. You didn't know who she was, didn't know you would start writing poems in sixth grade and never stop. Your grandmother had two of Sexton's books, and though you never talked to her about poetry, you always gave her a copy of your publications, printing them out if they appeared online. You wonder what she would make of the poems you're writing now, what advice she would offer about men and dating, perhaps suggesting going back to how you were, intentionally single and happy that way. In 1974, your grandmother was only fifty-five, just a few years older than you are now. Her private life remains a secret to you, and maybe her advice would be to just stop

writing about it in such a public way.
Your favorite piece of art from
your grandmother's house is a print
of Whistler's *Annabel Lee*. The woman
is walking into water, shawl trailing
from her shoulders, a few blue flowers
in the sand by her bare feet. She is
letting herself unravel into the story,
doesn't care who is watching. This part
is about her, and if a viewer didn't know
the poem, the presence of a man
in the painting would be nowhere.



Phil Rowan, *Jekyll Island Driftwood*,
watercolor, 2014.

Pleasure

by DeAnna Beachley

is so hard to remember. It goes

like the pinfeathers that drop from the geese
roosting all day around the hot springs.

Or like the regurgitated owl pellets
that litter the ground under the tree

where the great horned owl
has roosted since six twenty-two this morning.

Cast off the plant matter, bones, fur, feathers,
bills, claws, and teeth from last night's meal.

Yes, like the owl pellet.

Purged from the gullet
to be shriven,

so that in an act of grace
it can return.

New Zealand Sister

by Shari Lawrence Pfleeger

Almost antipodean, in diametric movement along disjoint meridians, we
arced and swiveled, twisted and coiled, slowly spinning until life's
voyages conjoined.

Now our worlds rotate harmonically together as whānau: extended
family, sisters bound by
generosity, kindness, appreciation for each other and the natural world.

As pohutukawa bloom, she honors me with pounamu, prized stone of
Maori chiefs,
fashioned as koru, the unfolding silver fern, shape of perpetual movement.

Symbol of life's equilibrium and harmony, change and growth, whorls
inside coil and
roll toward their beginning, as outer leaves expand to create new fronds.

Softly shaped with sandstone and skill, the glistening green pendant,
helical, looping,
rests on my throat, reaching for my heart.

Catch and Release *(for Carl Kaucher)*

by Jason Baldinger

when I worked in a diaper factory
we would leave out hearts
hanging by the time clock
as we picked up our earplugs
sometimes after twelve hours
we'd forget it was still hanging there

standing in an abandoned factory
dandelions coming up
in seeds and yellows
through cracks in the pavement
I think about nightly nosebleeds
I think about machines
the sermons of humans
lost in the perfection of mass production

automation means there is no need
for this place, automation means
there is no need for us
still our hearts haunt
with time-clock ghosts

these streets vibrant once
in the afternoon rain
mourning mountain shadows
burned-out neon
the great american novel
is pages of for rent signs

this bar is a pill coated in wood paneling
ancient cigarette smoke
breathing out of the walls
a five-dollar old fashioned
heavily poured
burns all the way down
around here we don't have past lives
around here all that's left is decay

I ease into my second
quiet in the call of backless barstools
the light on my phone blinks
brings me back from
the noise of the line
the plastic bag stretched over metal
the velocity of diapers
catch and release
the smells of plastic-seared closed
cotton in the 3 a.m. air
is it a snow globe or a blizzard?

When my mother swelled up from her new medication

by Thomas Fucaloro

I could see poppa. His puffy nose. Your puffy cheeks.
I could see what we both lost. I could feel the wick
float away. Somewhere in my heart beats *bad mother*
but that is because I was being a *selfish son*.
Therapy has helped us pull each other apart
while reassembling your attacker and photos.
Sticky plastic sleeves. When you pull
the photo out, the shriek. The younger you
stares into me, before you even created me
you stare into a distance I have always held close



Jason Mayer, *Old International*,
photo sketch using Photoshop and
Surface Pen, 2019.

Oregon Winter

by Susan Mason Scott

Noble Fir cradle
the ridge like bowed armor
whisk forest floors
and hungry crows peck
wounded tissue clean.

Maples' blistered limbs
camouflage in chartreuse
fur a canopy of brows
to absorb the daily soak
muddy the root.

A Chestnut-backed chickadee
forages and rests in these trees
bereaved of energy
she survives in a blanket
lineage, a windbreak.

On rare occasions
bleached sun and sky
wear storm's crest
wind sharp as a blade
curls cloud to trough

serrated cap peeks
her mop of snowy fringe
dares the mist.

Mission

by Ruth Goring

1

Reclaim, reclaim, be fastened
to this corner.

Sprinkle water in each room.
Slow down your breath,
paint walls with praise.

Say home in each doorway.
The bell with the rough tongue
rings sweetest.
Reclaim refrigerator
shelves, space for a cat,
the mortgage, the ceilings.

Wash tears from your bedsheets.
Your mattress, fertile, receives you.

Never forget candles.

Your friends' voices, residual,
steep the hallway in earthly light.

2

Cut your own groove.
Plant a grove of interior
trees, name it Quiet.

Let your words fray
at their edges and move
into folds.

The lake offers you its sweep.
Receive.

3

You always
wanted hard things, rock
and oak and truth
from inside another's life.

Let no and yes braid
through your settled fingers,
knotting something you have never
seen before.

Upside Down, as if This Cup ...

by Simon Perchik

Upside down, as if this cup
was once a blossom
would overflow with the tears

mourners fill then row ashore—
it's empty, close to the grass
though her grave is still damp

from this hillside washing over it
scraping from these headstones
a lighthouse for each wooden boat

pulled from the sea—you heard
a trumpet when the cup capsized
is done, put down its sound

as if there was nothing to lower
that wasn't crushed on these rocks
still trying to lift, one after another.

The Names of the Lost

by George Stratigakis

1

My wife's name is Georgia. Early in our courtship I learned that she had been named after an uncle named George who had died from consumption. Coincidentally, I too was named after an uncle named George. Mine had died from a self-inflicted, though accidental, shotgun blast. Every day when leaving the house, I was met by the hill that towered to the east which the front door faced. I would look at the small vineyards that dotted the hillside, at the overgrowth that signaled the boundaries between them, and at the evergreens further up that culminated at the top in a tuft and hid the chapel of St. George. I felt the presence of my namesake uncle and the saint named George who, in one corner of the house in the icon next to that of the All Holy from atop his white horse, stabbed the dragon in the mouth. The family story was, Uncle George had put his shotgun inside a mound of thorn-bush to hide it from the German patrols. At the end of a day's work in the fields and while retrieving it, the shotgun got caught in a vine and went off in his chest. I wondered how true the story was, but the darkness under the brambles is still a mystery for me.

As kids we each had a little stool and sat around the fireplace's three sides for light and warmth. We snuggled close, squirmed, and often picked up the stools to move to a new spot when the heat burned our fronts and left our sides and backs cold. Dad would tell the story of how Gion the bird got his name. He'd tell of working by the river uprooting bamboo to clear the land for the orange groves they'd plant and of working so late that they'd head home by moonlight. Sometimes it was so

dark they'd trust the horses to bring them home, and other nights were as bright as pale daytime with the galaxy lighting a huge swath of sky and every rock on the goat path clearly visible

2

One such dark night, Gion and his twelve brothers were coming home. It was an important day for Gion because for the first time, he'd been deemed old enough to go work with his brothers. During the day some brothers cut wild grasses with the scythe, others uprooted bamboo roots with pickaxes, and one or two used the mules to drag the vines to Gion, who burned them in a blaze. Now at the end of a long day, the oldest led the caravan home. The others followed their pack-animals loaded with satchels, scythes, pickaxes, leafy branches for the goats, and wood for the stone bread oven and the fireplace in the common room. Last came Gion now exhausted but excited by the experiences of the day and by being one with his brothers.

They proceed single file on the narrow goat path winding through gaps in the wild acorn trees and other needle bushes. A hundred yards separate the lead brother from the twelfth, Gion. At a little gap in the path, one brother (whose name we do not say) asks Gion to count the brothers to ensure all are present. Now this brother may have been ornery or just having fun with young Gion, but Gion squeezes along the path, goes past each pack, each animal, and each brother counting as best he can.

Dad says, "Gion counts eleven brothers." Dad looks like he is revealing a secret, but I sense he has an ulterior motive. "Maybe he didn't pay attention in school and didn't learn his math, but he is confused and unsure if he counted correctly. He turns his horse around and reaches the back of the line. "There are eleven," he says to his brother with a stunned look on his face.

Like Gion my sister and I often counted my father's siblings. They were all married, had their own families, and some had moved to towns and cities. One had died at the hands of a drunk abusive husband. Between wives and cousins, some were seen once or twice a year; others lived far away. Uncles, aunts, and their children, Dad's side of the family numbered over sixty. They occasionally returned to the ancestral house to visit their father, our grandfather. We lived with Grandfather, caring

for him in his old age, and would inherit the family house.

We were ready with our count. “Dad, with you, there are only ten brothers and sisters.”

“I’m the twelfth and the youngest. There were twelve,” he said. “One died a baby before your grandmother’s forty days; the other died four–five years old.”

“What was the baby’s name, Dad? Why did it die?”

“Andrea. He was sickly. It was before I was born.” It had to be true. His oldest sister was an old lady and wore black for having lost her husband.

“Back to the story,” Dad said. “This brother, the one who tricked Gion, points down the goat-path and says to Gion, ‘Well, go look for your missing brother,’ and before the others figure out what’s happening and can stop Gion from leaving, he is down the narrow path and out of sight around the acorn trees and the overgrowth.

“The brothers scold and turn on the irresponsible brother for tricking Gion. They send this brother (whose has no name) after Gion to bring him back. He heads down the goat path calling, ‘Gion! Gion!’

“He searches for Gion, but Gion is gone. The brother searches and searches. The others start for home thinking that Gion is just down the path and will soon be brought home. The brother whose name we do not say does not find Gion and never comes home. How can he go home without his brother? Days, weeks, and eventually months pass, but Gion is never found, and the brother whose name we do not say never comes home. He’s ashamed and feels responsible for his brother, the Benjamin of the family as your grandpa says.

“To this day—but especially when the moonlight is bright and the wheat shimmers in the fields as if it’s day and the pale light reflects on the stones in the goat paths and travelling is not a problem—you can hear the brother, now turned into a bird, searching and calling in a voice full of woe for his brother, ‘Gion! Gion! Gion!’ You never kill this bird, because his fate is to forever search for his brother.”

“What happened to Gion, Dad. Where is he?”

Here dad looks away into the fire and his voice is far away. “When Gion counted his brothers,” Dad says, “he did not count himself. He was the twelfth; there was no brother missing.”

Mom had had a miscarriage a couple of years before, as the three-year gap between my sister and me always reminded. On the wall of my grandfather's, now my father's home, Uncle George, in his black-and-white portrait, hung and reminded of loss and what would never be. In my wife's family's home, too, a picture of her Uncle George hung in the same manner. The walls of the homes of villagers are lined with black-and-white photographs whose edges are yellowed. They are the dead children of grieving parents who will have them there as long as they are alive. The dead never lived long enough to have a "proper life"—marriage, family, old age. Many were buried wearing bridal crowns, since Death had now made them his own mates. All four grandparents and all four parents have now joined the two Uncle Georges. In my memory and on the wall, stoic and silent, they all watch.



Phil Rowan, *Gone Fishing*,
watercolor, 2016.

Lightning Welk

by Kelly DuMar



Clockwise I spiral
between the picker's thumb
& finger. *Here is your lightning,*
your whelk, she says.

Adaptation

by Tiffany Washington

Her file informs,
that at six,
she spent three days in a closet,
captive—with two younger brothers.

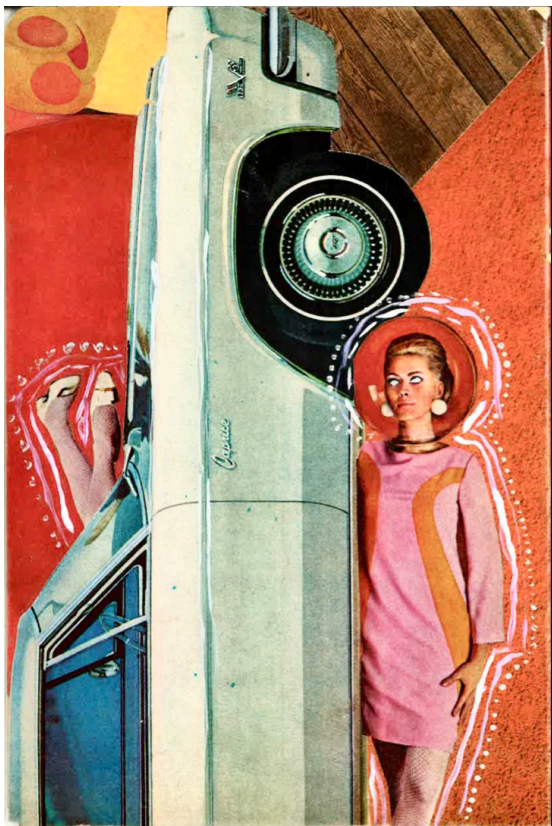
The file does not explain the cause,
only the rescue by police
(and recommended therapy).

But her eyes still tell of the darkness
her pupils adjusted to:
the human stench,
the pervasive fear,
the thin sliver of light,
from the hallway—left on, forgotten.

Even now,
nearly ten years after,
she will not sleep
with her door closed,
or the lights off.
Roommates hate sharing her room;
windows still open in February.

She told me, once,
she was ashamed:
she squinted
when they finally
opened the door.

All I can tell her
is sometimes
our eyes adjust to the dark.



Taylor Teachout, *Collage 3*,
mixed media, 2019.

The Crying Librarian

by Harry McNabb

The books were chilled. The library's temperature was thirty-two degrees. The words made it more swiftly into people's eyes and brains when the pages and the covers were chilled to this temperature. This is, of course, the way all libraries are. A librarian sat at the information desk, crying. When Stan entered the library, he said, "Boy howdy, it's cold in here!" and went back outside to get a coat and some gloves. Stan did not go to libraries. He was more of a home improvement store kind of guy. He spent the time most people spend reading working with his hands on home-improvement projects.

Stan came back into the library and said to the librarian, "Can I please speak to the manager? Where is he?"

The crying woman at the information desk said, "I am the head librarian. How can I help you?"

She wiped the tears from her eyes.

"I'm a businessman," said Stan, "and this here—what do you call this place?"

"A library," said the librarian, sniffing.

"A liber-ee," he said, "like a jamboree, huh? This liber-ee must be the opposite of a jamboree, because it's really dreary in here. And, really cold." He rubbed his hands together. "Anyway, I'm here to buy this liber-ee. You probably don't know this, but your liber-ee is in a prime location for a fried chicken restaurant, and furthermore, dare I say it, a fried chicken *experience*."

"I did not know that," said the librarian.

"Yes, I aim to turn this place into Chicken Land. Imagine: a fried chicken experience that includes a waterslide and video games. Doesn't that sound like fun to you?"

"Um," said the librarian, "I'm afraid I can't help you with that. The city owns the library."

"Well, do you have the number for the city?" said Stan. "I'd like to talk to them."

The librarian pulled out a box from underneath the information desk.

"Can you sing?" she asked.

"A little bit," said Stan. "I used to sing in the choir at the Satanic temple I went to as a child."

"Well," said the librarian, "in order to open this box, you have to sing a high C note. I can't open it because I'm tone deaf."

"Well, why did they hire you?" said Stan irritably.

"I don't know why they hired me," the librarian sobbed. "I'm not good at anything. I just needed the job, and they gave it to me." The librarian sobbed very loudly for about a minute.

"Well, okay," said Stan, "no sense in beating yourself up, even though you might deserve it. I will attempt to sing a C note."

He cleared his throat.

"Do-re-me-fa-so-la-ti-do!" sang Stan, and with that second *do*, the box clicked open. In the box was a fortune cookie. Stan cracked it open. Inside was a tiny piece of paper with the words "Mayor's Office" and a telephone number written on it.

"Here's a phone," said the librarian, wiping the tears from her eyes.

"Thank you," said Stan. He set about dialing the number.

The librarian sat down in her swivel chair and retrieved a box of cookies from behind the information desk. The cookies were black on the outside with white frosting on the inside, and they were delicious. Most people know of these cookies. They have a name, but unfortunately I can't type the name, because if I did, it would be treason. The librarian ate the cookies and cried some more. She was a failure at life because she was bad at her job. She didn't know where any of the books in the library were. She had kept the job because no one had asked her where any of the books were. If a person asked her, she would not know, and

she would be found out as a fraud, and if she was found out as a fraud, the library police would come and take her to jail.

"Look here, mister Mayor," said Stan, "this liber-ee is the perfect place for this Chicken Land that I have described to you. I am at this liber-ee right now, and I tell you, it is cold and boring. My Chicken Land would upgrade this property considerably. Chicken Land is fun; Chicken Land is happy; Chicken Land is warm; and Chicken Land delivers a delicious product that the type of person who lives in this neighborhood loves."

"You have given me a lot to think about," said the mayor, who was drawing a picture of Darth Vader on his desk with a crayon. "Let me put you on hold, while I speak to my associates."

Stan turned towards the librarian, who was eating cookies and crying. Stan took a deep breath and released it. She was a very beautiful woman, and she looked especially beautiful when she cried. She was like the crying angel in a painting he had seen on the walls of the Satanic temple he used to go to. Also, there was a delicious smell coming off of her now that he had not noticed. He had a hunch, and he was going to act on that hunch, act on it right ... now.

"Say there, Honey," Stan said, "this is an odd request, but would it be alright if I tasted one of your tears?"

"Go right ahead," said the librarian, sniffing. "I've got plenty of them." She put a finger to her eye and then brought the finger to Stan's open mouth. Stan tasted the tear and smacked his lips with pleasure. What a glorious taste, he thought. It was like sunshine mixed with the zest of a gun battle in the Wild West.

"Honey," he said with a grin, "how would you like to be the coinventor of the greatest fried chicken recipe in the world?"

So, there you have it. That is how Stan and the librarian came together to found Chicken Land, which as we all know, went on to be an exponential success. The librarian was able to quit her job and have a new one crying tears for the chicken. She was not depressed about her job anymore, but she found other things to be depressed about. That's the way she was. Some people just always see the glass as half empty. Sometimes, they can be very frustrating!

Trimming the Tree Alone

by Diane Elayne Dees

I turn off the unholiness that is cable news
and cue the music, but it's all wrong—
endless notes strung like garlands
of wrecked memories, love songs, breakup
songs, dance songs. Silence is worse,
so I settle on the eternal balm of Laura Nyro.
Then "Lonely Women" comes on, and I rush
in to fast-forward to the next song.
I pick up the four cat stockings and hesitate:
Two have died, the others live with my ex.
I let the sadness pass, and hang the red
and green stockings in their honor.
My tree is small this year, it doesn't take long
to fill it with frosted cones and assorted
ornaments—some meaningful, some new,
a few heavy with the fake snow of my icy marriage.
At the top, I place an angel. She is simple
in form, made of straw, with no eyes, nose
or mouth. I, too, am a faceless angel,
trying to get high on a Stoned Cold Picnic
while I lean in to inhale the pure perfume
of balsam. It's just a Christmas tree. I know
that, but a ritual is a ritual, and I am trying,
against all odds, to be evergreen.

The Wedding Dance

by Mary Beth Hines

Nana hangs the gold-leaf frame in her kitchen.
Lifts me up, and hips me in to see it.

What strikes first is reeling, kissing, red—
then the bulging bagpipes and a flute.

Hats are helmets—black, brown, mostly white,
atop pale faces—gossips, lovers, watchers.

Elm trees rise and loom over tripping clogs.
Scarlet scarves and skirts wing, skip, and swirl.

Nana points—*see there*—to a moony child
about to be knocked over by a giant.

I gasp. Glop spills in curdles from a jug.
I feel a crone's firm arm steady at my back.

I squint and lean in closer. Where's the bride?
Nana's fingers brush a lady in black.

She's fat and smiling, waltzing with her father.
Curly hair springs out from her rose crown.

I fuss to hear the music—*play it, play it*.
But Nana presses *hush*, fingers to my lips.

Silence creeps like her bittersweet between us,
pricking at my belly, redding her wet eyes.

I squeal when suddenly she bursts into singing.
Cheek to Cheek—she says—*an old wedding song*.

Then she tips me upside down and spins me,
and I spring wings so she'll never have to stop.



Shannon Elizabeth Gardner, *Gail the Snail*,
watercolor and ink on paper, 2019.

Nirvana Bourbon

by Elena Nola

The smell of the glue I used to repair my shattered self
Isn't the carcinogenic burn of polymers, but vanilla
Not the pods, but the extract, boozy and opaque
Sharply alcoholic but too thick to be a cocktail
A tarrish smear between broken edges
The scent pervasive because I used a lot of resin
Not from overapplication—there were just so many pieces

The drying fumes were many things to my mosaic soul
Warmth and beauty, the comfort of familiar
The solace of tradition and the escape from memory
Deliciousness, exoticness, expensiveness, permissiveness
I used them all to tether mind to body, heart to chest
For a time I was more glue than woman, more dead than living
The channels of adhesive no substitute for veins
I hovered in the cloud above my curing skin
Taking refuge in vanilla, and hiding in the lie
That if I could still find beauty, then I must be all right

To a Cardinal
by Elaine Wilburt

Still clutching
some unseen twig,
you lie on frozen ground,
matchstick legs seemingly
too delicate to have supported you,
brick tail feathers spread
and circling inward, tawny
head cocked back,
muscles curling your body
into a taut “Y.”

As I reach, longing
to stroke your soft
tufted crown, I start
at the mask
of opaque eyes blackly
open, for you now
see what I cannot
and are become
what I can
no longer
touch.

Six Annunciations

by David P. Miller

Simone Martini and Lippo Memmi, 1333

Mary and the angel on a shallow platform stage,
marble floored. Her thumb jammed between pages
of a red-backed book. Her torso curled concave, away
from the drill of his interruption. With index finger
he insists on a cluster of cherubim-faced owlets
glorying a dove angled toward her face.
Her slit-eyed repugnance ignores the parliament.
Her halo, already arrived, negates choice.

Jacopo Tintoretto, 1587

Mary, robust and mature, virgin by choice
and nobody's spinster, forced backwards
by a squadron of flying babies,
a murmuration burst across the transom.
Gabriel sails through a vaporized door.
Side wall ripped away for our benefit:
witnesses to this invasion, this miracle
by duress. Dawn or dusk of broken fire
floods the violated room A man outside
among carpentry debris notices nothing.

Pedro Núñez del Valle, 1630

Mary, crimson-robed, with a Magdalene's
heavy hair, once again obstructed from her book,
this time at a lectern. Now she follows
the angel's forefinger to the dove's belly
just above her head. That is, averts her eyes
from the horrid double- , triple- , quadruple-
conjoined cherub heads on plattered wings,
skittered across the floor. Escapes from
a medical museum's religion department.

Henry Ossawa Tanner, 1898

Mary's robe spills from the bed, melded
to a lava-rippled cotton blanket. Toes bare

on the wrinkled rug. She sits herself awake,
curious with an angled look at the faceless
shaft of electric white, room-tall brushstrokes
coronaed to pale yellow, gold. It casts shadows
behind her folded hands, her almost smile,
in her eyes a sideways glance across the brink.

John Collier, 2000

Mary, bony-elbowed at thirteen,
bobby sox and saddle shoes,
answers the doorbell, reading
in her little red book. Who put
this gardener's pot of lilies
near the welcome mat?
The priest—he's a new one—
where'd he find a costume

with realistic wings attached?
He must have the wrong house.
The wind stirs her dress, but
she doesn't close her book.

June Sira, 2012

Mary at summer camp. Leggy
middle-schooler, red hairband,
blue shorts, barefoot on the grass.
The boy again, black tights and leotard
after ballet lessons, and this skanky
wolf-head mask dug from the costume room.
He takes a knee before her, hands crossed
like pictures in religion class.
Is his crush cute, she wonders?
Or is he just silly? They could sneak
that head into the next Christmas pageant.
The Lord is with thee, uttered in growl.



Jackie Partridge, *Patched*,
photograph, 2018.

When She Was Good

by Michael Chin

When she was good, one of the first lessons Erica heard was that *good* meant submissive because no one wanted to cheer on a lady ass kicker; they wanted to see her *beaten and victimized*. Those were the words the West Texas wrestling promoter Lanny St. Germain used when he explained the psychology. Men could be ass kickers, and that was all right because that's why the male audience watched them, to escape in the fantasy of them jumping off the ropes like a super hero or forcing a submission out of their pip-squeak boss who wouldn't quit running his mouth. But lady wrestlers? *It's a man's darkest fantasy—that he's squeezed a pretty girl until she sweats and until she cries and until she screams.*

So Erica sweat and she cried and she screamed and she was beaten and she was victimized. She learned to arch her back while she crawled like she was broken and how to contort her face into a pretty pout that sold anguish. That part was easier than she thought because, for all the predetermined outcomes and for all the falls she'd been trained to take without getting hurt for real, there was no such thing as a painless fall or a painless match. Wrestling wasn't about living a peaceful life. A kidney punch was a kidney punch regardless of whether you braced yourself for it.

Then she met La Tigresse Numero Uno. She never saw her without the striped mask, even back in the locker room, even in the shower, even in the car to the next town. At the burger joint where they stopped because it was the last place open in a little town in Texas, the fat man behind the counter asked if she was trick or treating, and she locked him in a guillotine choke until he said he was sorry and agreed to give

the both of them free French fries. They came to share hotel rooms. Tigresse still wore the mask, even when they slept on opposite sides of the queen-sized bed in those hotel rooms with sheets that reeked of bleach, with the splotchy stains in the carpet and cigarette burns on the shower curtains. Even the night they closed the distance between them and held one another in sinewy, tangled, fatigued limbs.

Tigresse butted heads with St. Germain—the man, his philosophies. Every time Erica told her about selling submissive, about the fans wanting to see her defeated, Tigresse hissed.

Tigresse taught her how to dive between the top and middle ropes. She taught her how to springboard into a plancha and that it was easier than it looked to spin on a stable opponent's shoulders and transition to a hurricanrana. She'd trained with men back in Tijuana and San Diego who communicated the two central tools of the wrestling hero: *the sympathy to make them cry with you, you have this, yes but also the heat to make them catch your fire, to burn the arena to the ground.*

St. Germain didn't like Tigresse. He jobbed her out to lesser talents three weeks straight and sent her packing for her next territory.

Her last night, Tigresse caught Erica's last tear at seeing her go. She stopped the tear with her thumb and rubbed it back up to Erica's eye. *No sympathy now. Fire.*

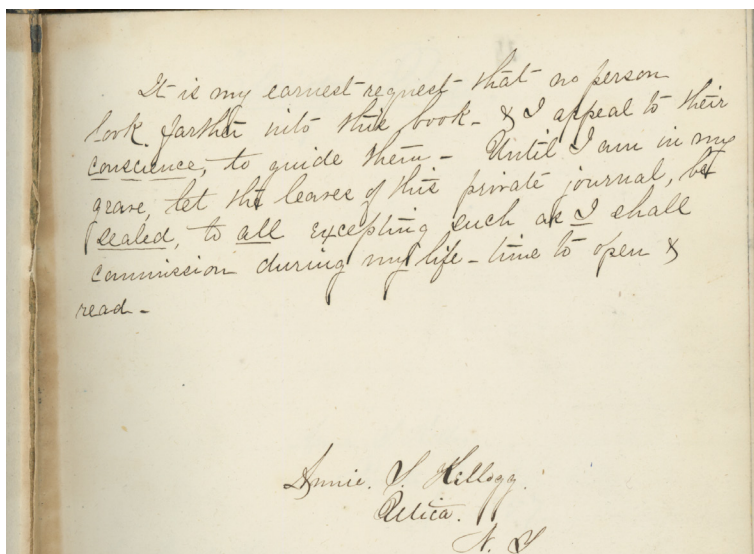
And that night, after Erica had been stretched in the Evil Evie's Boston Crab and Gory Special, after she'd feigned tears and let loose screams, she took matters into her own hands. She was supposed to win on a lucky roll up, a flash pin after which she'd take another beating.

But Erica called for the bulldog to the middle of the ring and then sped to the corner with a fury, up the turnbuckles to the top rope. She started with her back to Evie and took flight in a corkscrew backflip, torqueing her body the way human beings were never meant to. That night—that good night—she took flight.

A Resurrection

Poems Inspired by the Diaries of a Nineteenth-Century Schoolgirl, 1856–1857

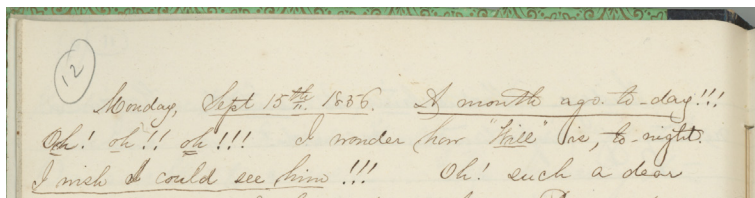
by Nancy Byrne Iannucci



Forgive me.
I should have kept
you buried, Anna.
163 years of silence—

Diary entries were taken from the diaries of Anna Shankland Kellogg, Troy Female Seminary student, 1856–1858, at the Emma Willard School Archives.

unearthed—
an Egyptian ossuary
exhaling red rot breath,
cursing cursive—
hieroglyphics
to girls your age now.
your warnings drag across
a brittle leaf. how
Botticelli fresh
it was and is to us now,
a resurrection.



August 15, asterisked
each year—she thought
we wouldn't know
the meaning
of celestial codes.
Erie Canal shipped
all sorts in packets—
boardinghouses filled
with single men, guys, bachelors
of alarming backgrounds,
sweaty necks stiff with wide silk ties,
eyeing daughters of established
families, ingratiating themselves
into Utica society.
mother referred to him as
that little dentist!
she made sure
Anna never saw
William Platt again.

(16)
 Thursday - Nov 4th Election Day! Oh! I
 hope Almon will be elected! 4 years from
 now the next Presidential Election, I wonder
 where I shall be! I shall think of the
 manner in which I spent this Election at
 the Bay State Ministry.

Four years from now,
 the next presidential election,
 I wonder where I shall be!
 In a house divided
 riding a skeletal horse
 without a saddle—
 a secession race
 toward the border.
 It won't be taken
 seriously at first,
 Anna, not until the
 Bull Runs over blankets,
 smashing picnic baskets
 of sweet cakes to the soil.

Selections

by Kelly DuMar



In blistery sunshine
the Shellpicker's gown
gleams white with black-
inked cowries and conches
trumpets and moons. She
guards her beach and checks
each shell to sort the living
from the lost.

Self-Portrait Dating Mid-Twenties

by Crystal Stone

I see my reflection on the sidewalk
as I walk to my car—the face of a fox
in a puddle of its melted body.
And then again in the electrical lines
as I drive to work—all tilted
after recent storms. There was a time
I stood taller—freshly built muscles
I sculpted, hair I straightened to match
expectations. I've grown bored of it all
& deflated: a balloon. Though superficially
loved, so easily and naturally let go. I've let
all my balloons go, too, to places
I've never aspired to reach. When I look
behind, autocorrect changes *back*
to *Bach*. Think of something else
instead, it urges, but when I get home,
the water in the toilet won't stop flushing.
I've still loved one man the whole time
I've desperately tried to love someone else.

To the Voice I Can't Break through

by Ifeoluwa Ayandele

There is a voice in my head & walking
through the voice is like breaking through
a strong door that holds grief of how home

becomes holes for rodents. & this voice is
a kind of recipe for living under the weight
of loss that throws my home into the cobweb

of colossal crumbs. & the loss is an island in
the middle of a place called: longings,
screaming of how grief is tattooed on my skin &

my body couldn't respond to the stimuli of home.
From afar, I watch dots of blood walking through
the rear door of despair & like a broken jar that

couldn't hold water, my home couldn't hold the thread
that tie history & future. & I couldn't serenade grief
with the piano lessons taught from the hymn blaring

in Grandpa's piano, for the voice in my head tiptoed
on barefoot, raking quietude to reach the crescendo
of how I can't break through the grief in my head.

*For the grandmother teaching
children how to plant seeds in
the community garden*

by Emilie Lygren

“Just a little bit, they only
need to go down an inch,
make a small hole, use your pinkie,
put the seeds in,
gently, gently.”

Elders pass on practice with invocation of earth under fingernails
*It doesn't matter so much if the rows are straight
so long as we remember ourselves.*

We can spend a day like this, or a life,
let afternoons pass under
shifting light and swollen clouds.

Plants need no permission, only our exhale,
sunbeams, a thin veil of rain.

How many more hopeful acts do we have left?

After a thousand tragedies,
sleepless nights staring up at the rafters,
the ground beneath
is waiting to begin again,
the seeds will still be true.

*Nothing is in its place.
Everything is where it belongs.*

by Dirtysacred

I walked by our old house yesterday.
The new tenants trampled the bright orange poppies
I let grow wild among the weeds
in front of the summer porch they are not using right.
The curtains were the wrong color.
The roses made no appearance, and
I missed the blooming of the magnolia tree.

Geography where I am known no longer exists,
and memories of me are slowly wearing away
like an old quilt exposed to the elements.
Only the neighborhood dogs remember. We lock eyes
and nod as creatures of the Earth do.
They—jealous of my roaming. I—of their full water bowls.

I no longer fear your reaction when I return
smelling of bourbon and misplaced rancor
but still pause on Pumpkin Hill before
turning the corner to check my steps and my breath.
My feet tell me *Keep walking*. Only ten or so miles
to the river, the Great Baptismal Western Boundary, and beyond

Iowa to contend with: fields of corn burned
before the harvest, farmers who can't remember a season
that wasn't plagued with either fire or flood.

When I meet them, may I be redeemed.



Phil Rowan, *Peppers and Onions*,
watercolor, 2011.

