

Thimble Literary Magazine

Volume 3 • Number 3 • Winter 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
Jim McGowin, *The Dream Genie*,
digital art, 2017.

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Editor's Note

I have been thinking about rebellious acts, and there are so many to choose from. There are trivial ways of saying *no*, such as dying one's hair pink, which I aim to do soon. And of course, there are more profound acts of rebellion, such as taking to the streets.

Anger is a valid choice. Anger is a valid act when faced with oppressive systems and governments. But I believe there are other rebellious gestures available as well.

What I am trying to say is, although it may not look it, joy is a rebellious act. Joy is a way of saying no, of saying we live in a world that tries to grind us to nubs as if we were pencils, but I refuse. Joy is a way of saying you can take everything from me, but not this. These days, joy is hard to come by. These days, joy is no small thing. I urge you to find it where you can.

No victory is too small, no discovery too puny to be worth celebrating. We are not doing too much discovery outside of our living rooms these days, but every time we see work by an artist we did not know existed before and catch our breath a little, that is a discovery, that is joy.

When Miranda in *The Tempest* says, "O brave new world, that has such people in't," I believe it is to emphasize her naivety, having lived all her life on an island with her magician father. But I do not think it is naïve or childishly optimistic to believe there are things or people worthy of discovery. Knowing there is something out there worth reading or looking at that will bring joy is an act of rebellion. And that kind of rebellion is hope.

Here then, is a thimble-sized world. We must be very brave.

Best,
NADIA ARIOLI



courtney marie, *time [is imaginary]*,
collage, 2020.

Ekphrastic on Saint Sebastian

by Annie Schoonover

Is it so wrong, Saint Sebastian,
for me to claim you, just as the plague victims did
when they compared their open sores
to your arrow wounds?

The unnamed artist took care
to highlight your best features—
the curls, the artful trickle of blood, the shape
of your thighs—when carving you, patron saint
of erotic death, of sacrilege, of closet cases
of men and women who spent Mass
meditating on the removal of your holy loincloth

Oh martyr, it is not your lithe
and bleeding body that intrigues me
but your death-stark eyes
white with a love so powerful
it's burning you alive
from the inside

Procession

by Aaron Sandberg

We wound our way
through side streets—
a coffin caravan,
hazard lights parade.

A man planting trees in a
manicured lawn put down
his shovel, stopped digging
the hole as we

made our way to another,
stood up, and placed
his hand over his
heart as we passed.

Can you make a better eulogy
than this silent stranger whose wife
walked out and watched him
watching us?

Twice in my life
have I seen a god:
once in the airplane bathroom mirror
during the panic attack,

and once on a front lawn
next to a hole dug
for something
still living.



Sandra Feen, *A Mother's Skin*,
photography, 2020.

Blue Mammoth Hosta

by William Doeski

Last night I heard a long ripping sound but didn't realize that a plant was uprooting, preparing to relocate. At dawn I saw my blue mammoth creep across the yard with huge paddle leaves working the air. I ran out to grab it and return it to its plot, but it shrugged me off with ease. I hadn't realized hostas could get so hostile, that they could be so strong. It's big, a good six feet across, but I'm big, too, and have good hands. Not good enough, though. The blue mammoth sidles up to the house and splats against it. It's crushing a clutch of day lilies, but I guess that's something plants must settle among themselves. Now in the scalding heat of noon I see that the critter has moved along, down to the far, shady end of my property. It seems to be looking out at the view of Monadnock. I'm tired of wrestling with this thing. It's been uprooted so long it's probably weakening. I's only a plant isn't it? I grab a leaf and tug, and after a token struggle it consents to follow me back to the garden. To coax it back into the ground, I've renovated the location from which it uprooted. I've lined the hole with fresh loam and a dose of plant food. The hosta looks suspicious but circles like a dog about to lie down. At last it settles in place, and I tuck the soil around its roots. I'd swear that it's smirking, but I don't see how it can do that without a mouth.

the mosquitos

by Emily Ramser

i have never been a mother
but today i have given birth to a hundred mosquitos
from the belly of the firepit i'd left forgotten
in the backyard, letting it swell and rust
with stagnant summer stormwater
become bloated with unseen larvae
till i knocked it over while watering the plants
i keep buying from the nursery and murdering,
releasing these insects, these children, into the air,
where they descended upon me, angry



Tulasi Lawton, *Treeline in Winter*,
acrylic on canvas board, 2019.

A Reflection on Men

by Elana Rubin

On different days, I saw two different guys,
both built like football players, wearing sweat
suits, beards, and Nike sneakers. Both had small
pink backpacks strapped around their shoulders. One
was glittery, with Hello Kitty's face
and dotted hearts. The other one was plain.

It could just be their little sisters', plain
and simple, but I wonder if these guys
are in a cult, like where they draw a face
on eggs and keep them in their sticky sweat-
pant pockets for a week, like in that one
fraternity. They had to shove the small

shells up their rectums afterwards. A small
expense to shed off who you were, the plain,
sad boy in high school, and become "someone,"
I guess. My mother always said that guys
do stupid things, like going out in sweat-
drenched workout clothes or not wiping their face

when they eat ribs. My brother cut his face
cliff diving into jagged rocks, a small
stain on the shirt he never washed. Their sweat
pours from their pores, they like their cooking plain,

they date much younger girls; guys will be guys.
My own great uncle's wife is fifty-one,

and he is in his nineties. Once at one
event, I spoke with him and saw his face
cast downward, staring at my breasts. "All guys,"
my grandpa started telling me, "like small
girls. They're adorable." I wore a plain
blue dress and tried to hide my armpit sweat.

Some time ago, an older boyfriend's sweat
dripped down my shoulders as he pinned down one
arm at a time. A painting of a plane
with silver wings took flight above my face.
He asked me, "Do you know why guys like small
girls?" They do silly things, all of these guys.

On pale plain nights, I dream (and wake in sweat)
that guys throw Drink Me potions. One by one,
they hit my face till I am very small.

I Said I'm Sorry

by Sarah Walker Wilkins

with chicken I rubbed dark with pepper
juicy abundance better than words
I have made brittle and whisper thin
from overuse

my grandmother's black-and-whites
find themselves on the kitchen counter,
sheepishly doing what I cannot
possibly
do again

to say again what I have said is an insult
to everyone in the room
my house is aromatic with sincerity

grilled pineapple cloys in a way I cannot
plump raspberry scones round out
my apology

sugar crust and lemon peel and sauces of a thousand shades
believe me

I'm sorry
I'm sorry

Public Works

by Zach Czaia

We said “Streets” and they knew
what we meant, patching the cracks in the road,
pouring down fresh new tar, paving over
till the ground beneath us was smooth.

It is a public work—
what is more public than an avenue,
a street, a boulevard? But I always said
“Streets.” And I hated the work.

One summer was enough,
taking the shit of a Lifer who felt
it was his mission to grind down college
boys who came, hands open—

“How can I help?” a go-to—
and when the Lifer explained, I would say
“okay,” and try ... and do it wrong, the truck
too far to the right or

The left, crack not blown
out enough, too much or too little spray.
And he'd explain again, I'd say “okay”
and “Good to know” and then

Do it wrong again. And
again. The Lifer grew upset with me,
would alternate between silent treatment
and straight-up yelling. I

Took it. I took it. I
wanted to quit so many times. But no
I wouldn't let him win.

Summer: hell together,
the Lifer and me, patching roads up and
down the city, his shitty classic rock
blaring, him jerking thumb

This way and that way, him
losing patience with me, me learning how
to say fuck you without saying the words:
I stand by the truck, I

Watch him work. I don't make
a move to help. I am eighteen years old.
I know nothing of the world except the
inside of the Public

Works truck. Summer pays for
college. Summer gives meaning to shovel,
to pour, to blow, to patch. I don't listen,
though, to Lifer. I don't

See where he fits. Cosmic
faith requires his presence to have meaning;
I write these poems where he keeps showing up.
I can still see his eyes

Narrow in my rear view,
his hands raised in exasperation. He had

to survive me that summer, too, I know,
sheltered kid driving truck

For the first time, patching,
blowing, shoveling, letting the long hour
go without doing a damn thing, public
work or non-work while cars

Drove by and the world went
on. I never got used to working with
the Lifer and he never got used to
me, my last day a joy

For both of us. Lifer,
this poem is yours, a public work. I hope
it lasts longer than the streets we worked on,
my anger like a crack,

Blown out by the force of
time, twenty years of life telling me it
was meant to be, that summer you yelled and
yelled, and I took it; sealed

Over, this poem, sprayed,
beyond revision. I don't want to open
afresh though I know streets, words, grow old and
I will see you again.

Mementos

by Lori Cramer

You keep the small box well hidden but accessible. In case you're in the mood to sift through its contents. Which you often are. You always promise yourself it'll be the last time. One more look. Then you can let go. But each time you run your fingers over those items that used to belong to him—that technically still do—you think about how many baseball games are won in extra innings. How the score at the bottom of the ninth becomes meaningless once the tenth inning begins. What came before no longer matters—only what happens next.

Buddhist Mass Grave

by Max Levinson

Three thousand kneelers
downtown, found wrapped
in browning dust and mars mud,
still portraying their sanctions

for honor, calm, or worse:
for eternity—to last, in serenity,
until the last bead of destitute tissue
washes up on the pavement,

until passersby reach towards
chipping, cupped hands and feel
history, not infinity
as the clay men had wished for.

In 2012, Chinese archaeologists uncovered three thousand sculptures of the Buddha buried under a riverbed in the village of Bei Wuzhuang, Hebei Province.

The Life of Ivan Shidlovsky

by Tobias Freeman

Old men die in the snow
you once wrote
keening in the dead field
winter light sharpened by frost

we were young, then
just boys examined, serious
about Goethe and death in
the Fontanka, the tensile strength of ice

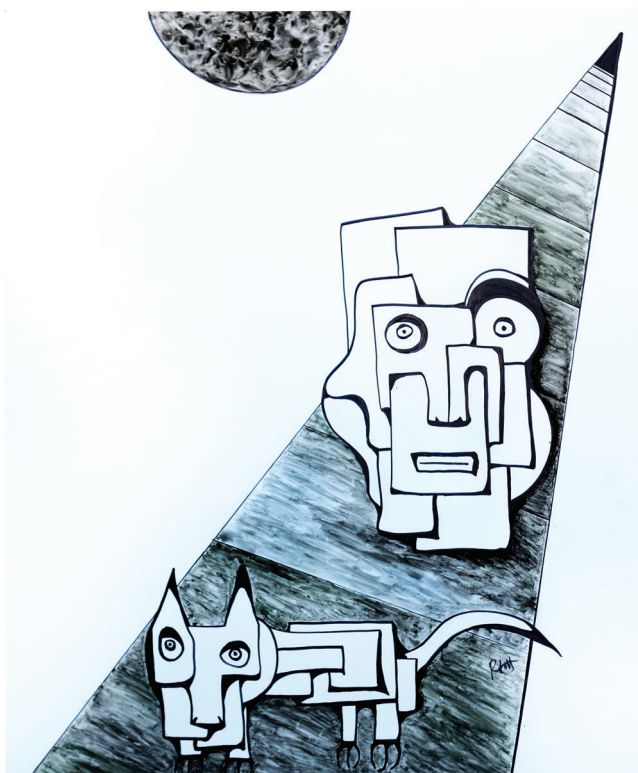
poets who died of gunshot
broken hearts left with debtor's slips
and tea, good for the constitution
on glacial days without sun

your poems were imitative
leaving no trace, the way
copies do, sodden in romanticism
that later critics could not retrieve

they say you assumed the cassock, and
wear it still, preaching to a tavern door
in a time of dry bread, in the distant regions
of Kharkov Province, where birches cry in pain

as if your audience heard you
things closed are no longer open, and
I think of you only as much

as the coal dust, fine
nights when the stove blazes
and your immolation is complete.



Richard Hanus, *Dog Walking*,
watercolor, 2019.

Cabin Fever

by Megan Lee

I want to be unbalanced.
I'm sick of sitting up straight,
pretending my head is attached
to an invisible string in the ceiling.
I've been wasting away for days now,
simmering in awareness of every blink.
When I complain, my mother tells me
that Americans invented self-esteem.
I don't need self-esteem, because my only self-esteem
should be from the Bible, from Jesus Christ, from
my good grades, from the safe little shelter of my bedroom.
I'm smothered by a safe blanket of snow,
so bad at living in the cold, my face
burning a shade of squashed-pigeon-on-the-road
red. When I first saw that squashed-pigeon-on-the-road red
someone turned my face away, but I wanted to see what had
happened to the pigeons I liked to feed in Central Park.
When I saw that dead one, I saved some bread in my
jacket for the others so they could feel better.
It's the little rules that frustrate me most. I can't say
"stupid" but my father still taught me how to curse,
how to look for a confrontation I'm not allowed
to fight. I won't seek it, but I won't fear it.
What's necessary is a larger dose of reality in my diet,
to shield my eyes from dead birds,
so I can avoid running outside screaming,
Stop stopping me from feeding the pigeons.

Medusahead
(*Poaceae*)

by Charles Wyatt

Twisted beards
give me my snaky name

my rolled leaf blades
my tiny barbs

Hear the hissing of the wind
my bristly seeds

Crowds of myself
in May and June

You who look on me
shiver and die

Aggressive winter annual

six to twenty-four inches tall

essentially useless as forage
Under the thatch

hear only
the faint cries of stones

Islands

by Erica Henry

Your parents fell in love on the Central American islands, under ceiling fans and in rooms with no fans at all. On one strange island, off the unpopular coast of Honduras, the bed was a sagging pit, mysteriously dark in the middle, wetter there. So, they spent their time on the balcony, smoking cigarettes, drinking beer, until they were so tired and drunk that the dank bed and sweaty room, an ocean view in a colonial hotel on an island nobody visited anymore or maybe never had, didn't matter.

From the beginning, drink was part of the marrow. It was a kind of remembering or way of forgetting.

The first time they had sex—holy, immediate intercourse—was in a hut with no electricity. The walls were bamboo strapped together, and the breeze was whatever could make it through long slatted gaps after floating over sand from the sea. The porter was bringing their backpacks to the thatched bungalow—if you could call the barefoot son, or perhaps grandson or nephew, a porter—when they were making the first real attempt. The fellow opened the door, afternoon light spilling in and joining lines of yellow on the floor; dropped the bags; and closed it again. Could he see within the shadowy space?

Islands, how many? It was such a short time, weeks really, but each day was more than a day.

On his twenty-third birthday, he decided he would swim from the island, the ugly volcanic one, known by two different names, to the mainland, visible across a black channel. But they drank yellow beers with luring men in the dim bar beside the warm pool instead, and he

never began to swim. It would have been dangerous anyhow. They said there were sharks.

There were turtles, sea turtles, huge and bloody, spread along sand on the Big Corn Island. People surged, staring. No tourists there either. The crowd was excited about the carcasses, and there was nothing to be said for the lives of the giant creatures. Blood, thinned by water and mixed with shells and grit, slipped from the still-wet bodies toward the lapping shore.

On the other Corn Island, the little one, they ate lobster the hotel owner caught in a dinghy each afternoon, cooked over an open fire, with beans and rice. They explored the piece of land on foot, first tracing the edge of the surf, climbing over palm branches and ocean detritus, until they came to a small hostel, a magical place with subterranean rooms covered in grass. Surfboards stood as lookouts on the shore. From there, they chose a trail back through the center of the island's thick sandy jungle. As they walked, passing chickens, bungalows on stilts and a tiny shop with meager foodstuffs on the shelves, mosquitoes feasted on her back and legs.

You probably don't want to know about the first time your parents had sex or the fact that they drank a lot of beer or rum and Coke, Cuba Libres, while falling in love. It's kind of gross. But it's oddity that unites experience. Before you, there were two people wearing faded bathing suits, walking down hot strips of beachside road in Panama.

At Bocas del Toro, after a boat trip and a long taxi ride from the border with a driver who pointed out the windows describing the "osos, tigres and leonas," they listened to angry parents lacerating their child over dinner at an outdoor restaurant. The embarrassed adults did not appear to want the child on vacation; to your parents it seemed they didn't want the child at all. There they were, in paradise, the Caribbean tropics, far from home, being cruel. The child would probably have preferred to be at his grandmother's house in the Netherlands or Austria. So, your parents looked away, pretending they didn't notice as they nursed pale, sweating pilsners, hoping it would not rain the next day and thinking about how they would never be like that. They, if so blessed, would be happy to be with their child.

It was on another island you've never heard of, Utila, though you've probably never heard of any of these, since they're not what you're picturing when you imagine the Caribbean, that they first talked about children. They'd headed inland, down an unlit dirt road, to the island's only pizza place, a slab of concrete canopied in huge, flat leaves, for dinner. They were sunburned and early in love when he said, "I've been with other girls who would be good wives, but you'd make a good mother."

I know. I'm sorry it's so cheesy. But that's the first time you were discussed. Not to mention, sexist. It's somehow sexist, though it would take a while to figure out exactly how. But this is the stuff marriages are made of—mushy lines shared over homemade brick oven pizza on lesser-visited, tropical islands. Then you decide to keep staying with the person though life changes, becoming predictable, and you get old.

Do you want to know these memories, or should I take them with me to the grave so we don't have to remember? I will say there was a lot of infatuation, what many call love, to start off, and it was mutual in its surprising unexpectedness. I guess that should make you happy, but is any relationship different? This is every relationship.

She, your mother, recently asked if he remembered the empty house on the beach. She thought it was a made-up history, from a movie or book. But he surprised her, he of business suits and bank accounts, by saying he remembered too. They'd taken a walk on the beach after finding a room at a hostel, the same beach where days later they would come upon turtles, and come to a huge, old wooden house jutting onto the rocky shore, much closer to the ocean than any of the shacks nearby. Almost too close, it seemed. It was in their path as they walked along the evening beach, the building somehow resting above the place where sand met sea. The doors were either open or unlocked, so they entered. Inside it was dark, as every place outside the sun is, but soon their eyes adjusted. The spacious expanse was lit by late sun coming in huge windows open onto the ocean. Everything had been left beautiful, though messy. It was unclear when or how it had been left, or whether it was a house or a hotel. Would someone be returning at any moment or had the place been abandoned years ago? Were they welcome? Any possibility seemed plausible.

Someday you'll have your own stories. Maybe you won't marry, but you will almost certainly fall in love if you haven't already, and you'll remember in this same dark fog. There may be dingy rooms and strangers opening doors. There may not be dead sea creatures, but there will be conversations that make your heart drop. Then you'll decide if you want to create some timeless thing out of the sweat, beer, saliva and seawater. It won't seem as disturbing when it's you. There you'll be, lying under a ceiling fan in a room, windows flung open, mosquito bites and sunburnt chest, trying to decide what's real and what lasts. Or maybe there will be no ceiling fan or air conditioner, just the chill of a northern night sky in the woods.

The Ship Model

by Sally Zakariya

Granny took the waters at Berkeley Springs,
slipping slowly into a pool of sulfurous stuff
bubbling up beneath the West Virginia hills.

A row of women—mostly old, mostly large—clung
to the edge of the pool, held seemingly in stasis
by earth's vaporous exhalations.

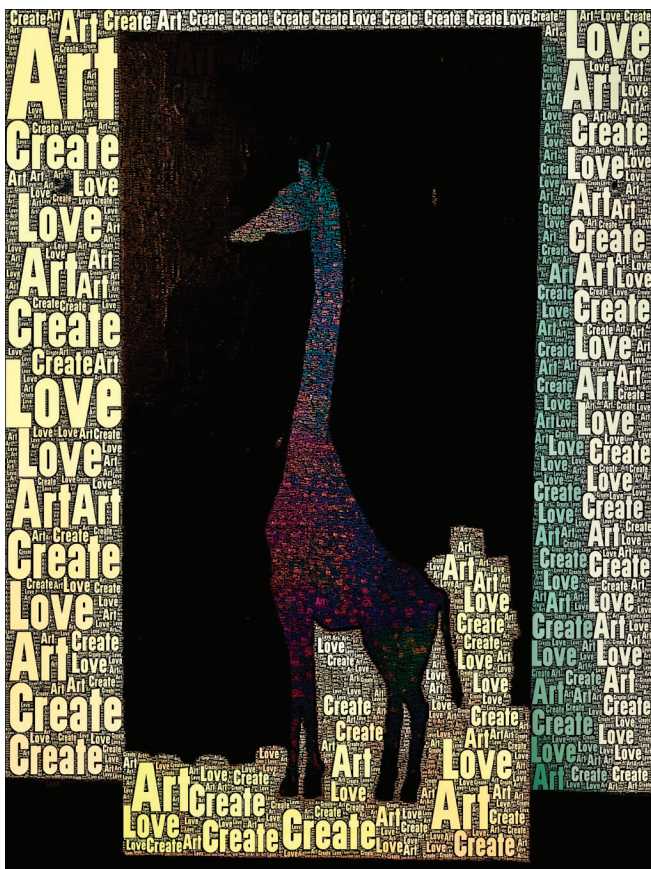
But what could we do in a hot pool all day, two
kids not yet ten? Bored, we'd sneak into the lobby
to gaze in awe at the dusty ship model in the corner.

Wonder of wonders! Purveyor of secret stories!
Herald of historic times! How I imagined unfurling
the stiff sails, setting off for faraway shores.

But no. Another day in the steamy mineral pool,
another night in the formal dining room. And yet
when it was time to leave, the manager

took pity on us and handed us the ship—all ours
to carry us on fantasy travels, to whisk us
from hot springs to a cool imagined sea.

The ship sits forlorn in the attic now, beached
on a trunk of Granny's things. Dusty, yes, but
in my mind still ready to set sail.



Misty A. Moore, *Keep Your Head High*,
digital with acrylic underlay, 2020.

A Brief Note of Sincerity

by Tyler V. Hayes

I try not to think of my childhood. Much in the way you shun shameful conversations from that one party, I efface my entire early life. It's not that some terrible abuse occurred, or that things have been repressed; in fact, I had a very okay upbringing. It wasn't *that* bad. Back then I was obsessed with objects, toys—they couldn't leave me. I suffer from a disease common to the lonely: crippling logorrhea. I was, am, a talker. These poor toys were forced by virtue of their lifelessness to listen to my nine-to-twelve hours per diem of nonsense. I brought Archer, Vegeta, and Teddy on every road trip and paid them more mind than just about anybody.

For my memory, life started at twenty-one. When my dad starts a question with, "Remember when you all ..." I shut down and tell him no, no matter what it is, but not because of the pain in those old times. Rather, I hurt so much *now* that fondly remembering a time when I didn't is too wishful, too contrary to how things turned out, and thus it is excruciating. When strips of you are falling into the spit, thoughts of water are unbearable.

My brother's birthday was last Wednesday. He would have been twenty-four. On a lot of those road trips, I ignored him for figurines, though we did have our own little language. It only worked one way. My diffident little brother, our only blonde, would whisper his wishes to me and only me ("I'm hungry!"), and I would relay them to mom or dad, annoyed by my own honesty. He trusted me with this vital dispatch because I was his big brother. He childishly thought I was capable of protecting him, of vouching for him. But I never really wanted to provide support, so caught up was I in my toys and the stories I told them.

I haven't really spoken since his car collided with another car, head on, at an intersection three miles from my home. Mine then became a sort of quarter life: most of my energy is now spent keeping certain feelings distant. From what I remember of the morgue dialogue, many of his long bones were instantly crushed. I think that's how it happened. But he was too still and parallel behind the glass on that cold slab. I'm not sure whether he was even a "he" anymore, by then. I remember blood on the tips of his lips, not dripping, dried. His eyes were sleeplessly closed. His jaw had been broken. They said he died instantly, no pain. My own would take another year. True grief crawls.

A few days later, I spoke to his body at the creepy funeral home. It was lit synthetically, and the profusion of flora was oppressive. You always get the sense at these places, despite how nice the employees seem, that they are desperately waiting for you to leave. But even with me squeezing his pale arm and all my quiet, choked supplication, he did not respond. He did not so much as flutter an eyelash. He was dead. The days following his wreck were met with hysterics from all involved, but my own tongue felt like an anvil. I vividly recall that I tried to say, over and over, over my torrential tears, over the unmoving object that was now his body, "We were supposed to grow old together." I don't really have any childhood memories without him.

What's so hideously fascinating about it is that, when he was broken physically, I broke in all other conceivable places. In my head, I suffered not a snap so much as a gradual weakening of elasticity. My emotions broke too: I would feel nothing but emphatic fear for many years after his passing. Drugs were always too disorderly for me, so to sleep even a wink, I had to regiment and endure arduous daily exercise—my natural trauma tranquilizer. This has, in turn, engendered many irritating injuries all over my body. So I suppose, in a strained-metaphor sort of way, I broke physically, too. Or maybe I am currently breaking.

Some things I guess you just don't get over. Time doesn't do a damn thing except tick, and it certainly didn't heal me; I just became better equipped to bury and hide. And what's worse is I miss him more today than I ever have, though mostly I regret his missed future for him. Admittedly, this feeling, this yen for his presence, is a nice break from the well-worn routines of morbid obsession, swirling paradox, am-I-weird

reflexivity, panicked hyper-vigilance, violent intrusive thought, and why-am-I-such-an-irreparably-bad-and-sad-person type of conundra that drench me nightly, still.

See, typically I would try to drown all this mental imbroglio and self-pitying sobby shit in irony or irreverent metaphor, but I figured, Fuck it. I'm too tired tonight. For one day a year, for him, maybe I can be real and upfront about my emotional state of affairs. To be terse, they're "not good." I never healed or moved on from. This whole piece is surely riddled with lazy cliches, so why not another: there hasn't been a single day since it happened in which I have not thought about my brother. Not one night sans suicidal terror—a sort of selfish, fatal desire to join him somewhere in a cloud.

In fact, that's where I'm heading now: I'm in yet another bed, in the penumbra of night, alone in and confused about the fact that everyone I know is always silent, including me as I shake and sweat with sorrow. If I had a backbone or a belly not so yellow, I'd have taken too many pills and ended this silly farce a while back.

And I wonder if I'll ever be able to think of childhood again. He circumscribes those scenes now—a phantom of every guilt I still bear. When I started this, I set out to write about his life, a sort of posthumous birthday gift for him. But the whole thing ended up being about *me*: *my* needs, *my* story, *my* corrigenda. Solipsism is as selfish as grief—each shrinks all life into objects of our own thinking. Yet I believe there's a way to obviate this: it's sincerity, transparency, connection, those things I could never offer my little brother. So, if I can't think, I'll speak.

I'll write. Not to toys or bodies, but to people. I'll go beyond belated relay—I'll share. No matter how cowardly I feel, I'll let it loudly hurt. I can do this through him because he taught me; he's *my* big brother now.

Sometimes, I find the courage to dream of him. He's usually just in the abstractive background, in parade stance, waiting for me as I try not to notice him. Other times we're grown men, older. We walk this white roadblock together, and he places his pale hand on my shoulder. He always looks me in the eye, needlessly apologizes, and then says good-bye. All of this in our little language.

My now sad childhood was retroactively shattered at an intersection on US 60, January 14, 2015. These written thoughts and a couple of

photos are all I have of our life. Death always ripples out and rapaciously takes more than one with it, you know. I shouldn't be so scared—I am just one of those ripples. But it's gotten so late. Let's just dream and sing, okay? Just tell me what you want me to tell Mom. I'll tell her, I promise. Is it french fries again? You'll need to speak up. Okay, I'm coming back there. Hold on.

Depression Has This in Common with Climate Change

by Aron Wander

You can watch the water lap
at the coast of New York,
the tide coming in a little
higher month by month
and still buy your groceries,
pay your phone bill and even
when rain shrinks the shore
to a sliver, you can throw on
galoshes and muddle your way
through, which is to say that it all
goes on even as it doesn't,
and you can ask whether it's ethical
to have children in such a world,
whether it's worth investing in
stocks, planting a garden,
and the answer will always be
the same: move the manikin arms
of your body, your sock-puppet
mouth, and find higher ground.

Puppy Meets Pieter Bruegel (1525–1569)

by Nancy K. Jentsch

What scents linger
by the creek
where you stop and sniff
cataloging
skunks, toads, voles
whose ways crossed here
when darkness last crowded
this narrow valley?
Their traces make
your wet, jet-black nose
quiver even now.

Bruegel could capture
it all on one canvas
reducing night's saga
to a synchronous collage
dark's secrets forced
into two dimensions.

But your pleasure
blooms unbarred
the moonlit moments
mapped
by their bouquet.

Falling Stars

by Patricia Whiting

I never knew what total darkness was
until the night of the hurricane
with windows boarded up

Sadness comes in small increments

In the terrorist's apartment
eggshells and onion skins
were all that remained

How to describe music
to a deaf person?

Cobblestones mark the spot where
the Berlin Wall used to be

In the parking lot
an old man tells an old woman
"Get out of my life"

Reading the line
in an Anne Sexton poem

We are made of stardust

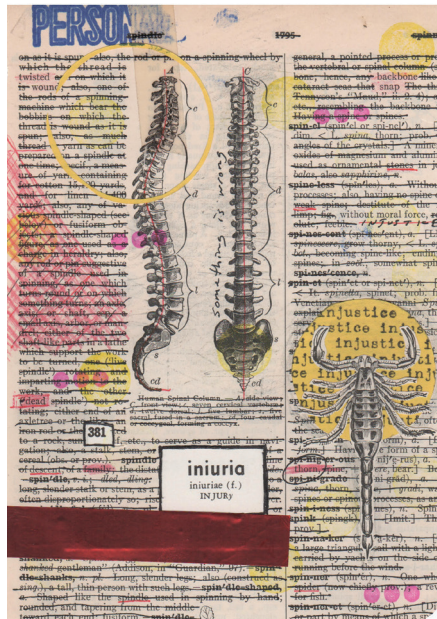
Sand is the excrement of sea creatures

Fishing with my father—

he scrapes the scales
with the sharp-edged knife,
gives me the bladder balloon

Filling the big freezer in the den
where the jigsaw puzzles
are piled in one corner

How did you learn to cook, my mother asked,
not remembering our times together
in the kitchen



courtney marie, *something [is wrong]*,
collage, 2020.

Pica

by Ellen Austin-Li

Baby bird in the bushes, I scooped
handfuls of dirt, the minerals the body

craved at my fingertips. Taste of metal,
the earth's iron, hand to mouth,

one gritty girl. I was
fed by the soil. Then, a proclivity

for paper captured on film, crawling
Christmas morning in heaven,

grazing the wasteland of wrapping
paper scraps. We eat what we need.

The ground and the seed:
a forest already growing inside me.

Joy

by Pauletta Hansel

When we finally sprung my father from the hospital
after days spent staring at the cardio unit's
cinderblock walls the color of nothing
good, his joy could not be contained.
Every meal he ate was the best he'd ever had.
I worried, at first, that my mother would feel slighted
by his ecumenical praise—the biscuits on the buffet line
at the Golden Corral no less holy than hers. But she knew
better than I did how to savor his delights.
As we traveled the back roads from doctor to home,
he asked at every turn,
Have you ever seen a spring as beautiful as this,
the red of that maple, the washed denim sky?
Will you ever see one again?

Georgia O'Keeffe's
At the Rodeo, New Mexico, 1929

by Karen George

I

Circles within circles:
red, brown, mustard, green, blue—
multiple eyelids—tiny pupil,
scarlet iris with feathered edges
radiates waves of pink,
yellow, aqua blood vessels
that triangulate the white.

II

A camera lens: interlocking
rings to adjust your view.

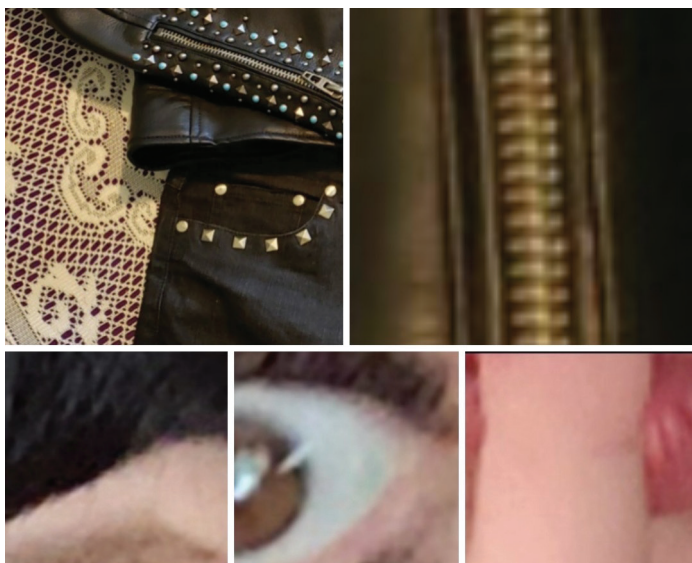
III

Hypnotic, dizzying.

IV

My first and only time
at Florence Speedway,
car races on a dirt track:
stink of gas, oil, rubber,
metallic as the taste of blood,
air curdled with dust and smoke,

the contagion of excitement,
revved-up engines goose-bumped
my husband, but scalded my ears,
thwacked my chest—
the volume an intensity,
a dense weight
I couldn't contain.



Sandra Feen, *All for Nothing*,
digital photography, 2020.

Theseus Confessed at the top of the cliff.

by Ryan Cook

I didn't kill anyone.
I set them all free.
I killed the right ones.
I knew which ones were right.

I let it all roll down my spine.
I let them fill up my glass.
No, you aren't listening,
I let all of them go.
Even the Minotaur,

I sailed to Crete
I tried to replace myself—part by part—
I am no longer yours.

There is no story, no labors, no trials.
I know there is no way for this to exist.
One of us has to give.

Mojave

by J. Hirtle

“How long has it been?”

They sit on the hot asphalt, their backs against the car, an old army blanket she found in the old Chevy's trunk folded in half and then half again to prevent the blacktop from burning their bottoms. The fat car offers a fat shadow, the only shade for miles. The Mojave stretches for many miles.

“Maybe two hours, I think. Could be longer,” she answers, her eyes closed, hidden beneath the oversized booney hat the same color as the desert sand. It was his hat, but he is not here.

“It's been longer than two,” the boy informs her, wiping the sweat from his brow. He looks at his arm, the one used to wipe sweat. It is dirty with Mojave sand. Mojave sand and sweat mat down the fine blond hairs. He wants to write his initials in the sweat and dirt. He doesn't. It is too hot.

It had been too hot inside the old, fat Chevy, even with the windows and doors open, waiting for a breeze that would never come. . The back seat stuck to the back of his sweaty legs. When he moved his scrawny, sweaty legs, they made a noise like breaking wind. He thought it was funny. She told him it was too hot to be funny. She found the blanket in the trunk under the spare tire that was flat. Get out of the car, she told him; it's too hot.

“I'm bored. Hot and bored,” he told her.

“And you stink. A hot, bored and stinky boy,” she laughs. “Did you bring your book?”

"It is in the car."

"You should get it."

"No."

"Then be bored."

"And hot."

"You can't stop the hot," she tells him, lifting the booney hat to see his face. "You can stop the boredom."

He pushes himself up and off the itchy blanket. Not to get the book. To stretch. The boy stretches his arms to the colorless sky. He can smell his pits. He stinks. Across the Mojave, at the end of the endless asphalt, he can see the mountains. Brown and orange monsters. He wishes he were on the mountain.

"Are you getting your book?" she asks.

"No. I finished it," he lies.

"All of it?"

"The good parts."

"It is all good," she tells him.

"Not really."

"Then we can use it to start a fire tonight, when it gets cold."

He looks down at the woman in her oversized booney hat and long, tanned legs. "It won't be cold."

"It will," she replies without moving.

"How do you know?"

She doesn't answer him. He reaches into the fat car, picking up the book from the floorboard.

"He's not coming back," he tells her, returning to the hot asphalt and itchy blanket.

"Yes, he his. Read your book."

"How do you know?"

Opening the glass bottle, she sips the warm water, letting it sit on her parched tongue. She offers the bottle to the boy. He drinks too much.

"He told me he would be back with help." She places the cap on the almost empty bottle. They will have no more water when it's gone.

"He was lying."

"Don't talk like that about your father," she scolds.

"He is not my father."

"He said he would be back. He will be back. Now be quiet and read your book."

"He lied before."

She doesn't answer. She knows the truth.

Standing, he drops the book; it plops on the itchy blanket. "Maybe I will go get help."

"And leave me here?" she asks.

She waits for his answer. Her eyes are closed. The sun hurts her eyes more than her thirst hurts her throat. More than the sunburn on her long, tanned legs. More than the fat car pushing against her back. More than the hard ground protesting her boney backside. More than the truth.

The boy is quiet.

She opens her eyes. He looks at her, his finger pressed against his dry lips. The snake drifts slowly over the desert floor, moving like an old serpent, turning its diamond tattooed body, sketching S's across the sand. It's too hot for the desert serpent. He senses the shade beneath the old, fat Chevy. He moves closer to the boy and his mother.

The boy thinks he will throw the book at the snake. He will have to move to get the book. He doesn't want to move.

The glass bottle shatters on the hard desert ground, missing the snake. The snake forgets the shade. Crawling away, his belly on the hot asphalt, then on the hot sand, he is gone.

So is the water.

The boy sits, lying his head on her shoulder. He weeps.

"I won't leave you," he tells her after the tears dry up.

"I know."

"Why did we have to leave home?"

"No work. The war has been hard on everyone. He said there is work out west."

"He had work."

She says nothing.

He lifts his head. "He lied. He lost the job because he lied."

"That's not what happened."

"Now you will lie too?"

"I'm sorry."

Looking across the Mojave, he sees water shimmering under the sun's prickly arms. He knows it is a mirage. He learned of mirages in the book he was reading. His tongue explores the cracks in his too-skinny lips. Skinny lips under a fat nose set between dark green eyes. He looks at the broken glass. It shimmers like the mirage. But no water. The earth drank it all. For a moment he hates her.

"How long has it been?"

"Six hours. Maybe more. He will be back for us."

"He's not coming back."

She stares at the desert with its tanned sand and dying cacti. And cloudless sky. She is listening for the sounds of the Mojave. There are no sounds for her to hear.

"I know," she answers, closing her eyes.

Forgiveness

by K. T. Abram

When did water get so wet
so viscous and sure of itself?

Heavy, like a big loogie rattled, hocked,
from the back of your mother's throat and into the stiff flesh of your ear.

It's already rained today—all dew no sky.
Look up. All flower no tree.

Collected droplets pooling in the cupped hands of white magnolias to
fall like the
severed bulge of damp nerve dangling above the base of your tongue.

Rain gathered by a flower lands exactly where it intends
and you revel in the comfort of this knowing

The sky is too big, clouds too fickle.

You call this bloom mother, and in that name is good,
but what if I told you it was your father's throat?

My Patient Does Not Want to Live

by Scott Ferry

My job today is to sit with him for 12 hours
so he doesn't try to open the blood or close the air.
He has not wanted to eat, but this morning
he allows French toast and sugar free syrup
to nourish him. He even drinks his milk.

When the young doctors arrive he barely answers them.
The mid-20s man asks, "How does your body feel today?"
And my patient answers, "It lets me know it is still here."
He throws a few more answers onto the ground
and the doctors shrug at me and slink out perplexed.

My patient is in his 60s, has bilateral
AKAs (above knee amputations),
doesn't feel like defecating more than
once a week. I ask him what he wants
to watch, he chooses a paranormal investigation

show. "Are you still here? How many of
you are still here?" the young researcher
asks into the dark, night-vision film
rolling blank blue and yellow.
A thunderous moan comes out of the corner

and they all spin around, monitors flickering.
I ask my patient, "Have you had any experiences
with ghosts?" He nods, "Oh, yes."
I inquire, "Did you grow up in a haunted
house or something?"

"Nope." And then he just looks at me
and when I look back he pretends
he is staring at something behind me,
the whiteboard with his food intake, his urine
output displayed in dry-erase. I want to hear

his stories, I want to release his ghosts
which spin opaque behind the glass,
which inhabit his body
still.

Body Ghazal

by Mary Paulson

If I cease to think, I think, I can feel my way to nothing, no body.
Out of this aspirated knot, out of my skin, shed my body.

Imagine instead I'm candlelit from within. This is what's left of
girlhood. OK.
Wondrous dirty cities, moonless frozen nights, from inside my body.

The thirty-one segments of your spinal column are rungs on a ladder I
can climb.
Because I can hear the aortic chambers of a heart like mine, I love
your body.

I'm searching for the mouth of a river that connects one mind to another;
I try to speak, speak from my insides, not my body.

I am as frightened in this body as I am when I take a step or two out of it.
A hard slap from God tells me, get back in your body.

I find myself again and again in a myriad of mundane circumstances:
washing a pot
choosing a shirt, riding the underground trains; a living body.

Your impassive face not loving me, is the least of my concerns, but
in terms of proximity, sleeping next to a grenade feels safer than
your body.

I decide I'll be barren. Inert, blameless, incapable of resurrection.
I'll be the door that doesn't lead to another door, a dead-end body.

Command the winter wait, snow stop. Isn't that love? Each
accelerating season stands still for a moment between our bodies.

I miss my mom. This is not the first time I've lost her but it will be
the last.

So thoughtless, Mary; will you forget her face? I look at my legs and see
her body.



Allison Emmaline Piercy, *The Paris of My Childhood, No. 1*,
watercolor, 2020.

The Suit

by Lauren Rheaume

My grandmother stands there in front of the church in her handmade yellow suit, next to my mother on the day of her First Communion, May 12, 1963. My mother is seven years old and my grandmother twenty-seven—a mother of four, smiling in the sun on that spring day, the tree behind them just starting to bloom. Her faux pearl earrings are huge, and she has a little color on her lip and a squint in her eyes behind her glasses. Inside her white gloves are the clutched hands which made the suit she's wearing. A straight yellow skirt, which falls just below the knee. A yellow top and a yellow blazer over it with seasonal three-quarter-length sleeves. Of all the photographs in the album, it's here my grandmother stops.

Like many mothers did in those days, my grandmother made her clothes and her children's clothes. When I was young, Mom used to bring me to Grammy's house to get my Catholic school uniforms tailored—I'd stand very still as she circled me on her knees, pulling pins out of her mouth and placing them in my plaid pleats. I never watched her work a sewing machine, never saw her sew a single stitch. But I believe her when she says she made this yellow suit, that she loved it dearly. When we came across this picture of her and my mother, she let out a short, wistful, "Oh," and said simply, "that suit," tracing the edge of the photograph. She smiled the same smile and told me the story.

The suit was one of her best outfits, taken out for all the important spring and summer occasions. It made her feel like herself, and as articles of clothing can do, it made her feel happy and light, and it fit her well because she made it that way. I marvel now at my inability to make

things as she did and at how I still attach meaning to the clothes I wear, but nothing comes close to having made them yourself.

Eventually, though, my grandmother felt like it was time to move on. When she came across the suit looking for clothes to donate, she added it to the heap. She brought it to her church drive, believed she was doing the right thing, donating it to charity. I imagine her giving it one last soothing touch, before placing it in the bag of clothes she brought. After that, every so often she'd think about it and feel a twinge, but mostly she tried to forget.

And then, months later, while out having breakfast with the family, she spotted the yellow suit on a mannequin in the window of a second-hand shop. She told me this story with the same shocked gasp I imagine her emitting that day, over fifty years in the past. It must have been like seeing a long-lost relative in a city where you never expected to cross them. "You," I imagine her thinking. It was a thing she created, out of thread and fabric and time. It was part of her, and here it was again, the main event for sale at the best consignment store in town.

*

I was at my grandmother's house to look at pictures of my mother growing up, a thing I'd never done in all my thirty years. While looking over pictures from the distant past, I learned many things: about my Irish great-great grandmother, who came from the island by herself to work as a domestic and slowly paid to bring over her siblings, one by one. That Grammy didn't know for sure she was pregnant with twins until she birthed them, that she only gained the weight of those boys her entire pregnancy, not a pound more. "We didn't have much, and now we needed double of everything." I've always been told my smile is reminiscent of hers, and I can see that now, looking at her younger face.

But what sticks with me most is this thing she made, this yellow suit that meant so much, and how she discovered it again unexpectedly. How much has changed between our generations, and how quickly we toss away things we have no use for anymore. I can't stop thinking of those hands clenched in white gloves—creator's hands. All the things she's made in life, her world and mine.

Piano Movers

by Joe Bisicchia

From the East Side a Knabe grand we labor over to the West Side.
Last delivery of day. Days come and go and the keys chord to this.

Stairwells bend the back, and the bicep. Some thumbnails go black
Tightening of legs. And here we are as this one is about to be played.

There is this little kid fresh to that Knabe, eyes big and ever so eager.
Our crew chief Noah soon rushes in with the final touch, the bench.

Little fingers run across the pearls. And now the weight of the world
is suddenly far more than only a box of cinderblocks as we listen.

We listen to the present now made, now unburdened as a bird to sky.
We listen as all the world is played by what we have put into position.

Cult

by Connor Fisher

We climbed but our hands rattled. His wife was absent for an era. Nuns rattled through hairshirts as penance for their phenotype. They're taking the boats out of water to grow their pyre. Everything is slightly hidden from me, all the time.

Charisma is a penance. We grow our own vegetables in a little plot.

Your arms will change. They grow bulky with rake and hoe. In another village, women shear off their boisterous hair. It's done to code.

We can relax at night. Monitor desert tones. Mesas getting darker. A part of the world cannot be visited.

Above Santa Fe, God's right thumb, smooth and sculpted, quivers. It's never been a sign.

the beggar's ride

by Rachael Gay

I have the urge to set fields of wildflowers,
museums full of masterpieces alight.
To be the only one to lay claim to seeing such beauty
an appetite to destroy the opposite side of the coin.

Passion is destruction poised over a well so deep
darkness swallows the bottom
I exist in the moment between dropping a handful of coins;
the eternity between them leaving my hand
and the sound of the splash at the bottom.

I kiss each coin before wishing upon it,
run my tongue over the ridges and taste blood-like metal
the sweat of a thousand grasping hands before mine.

This is not the first I claim for myself
no longer human, never human.
A swirling void of jealousy
I hurl myself in front of every child about to
blow out their birthday candles
and do the snuffing myself.

I go back to the out-skirted fields in the summer decay and
take armfuls of seeded dandelions,
empty my lungs wishing on each one.

Let me clamber to the thatched rooftops
and grab the thrown baby teeth only to swallow them whole.
There are no words for what I wish for
as I ran out years ago
but I do not stop.

I pluck my eyelashes bare and put them
in the back of the bottommost drawer;
insurance for a day yet to come or exist.



Nathanael William Stolte, *Crop Circles*,
mixed media, 2020.

Building a Bridge to My Mother

by Claire Scott

Perhaps a simple beam bridge made of wood, one you might see
while walking in the country, easing you over a shallow creek.
But the creek isn't so shallow is it Mother, it is swirling with rapids
of slaps and lies and broken promises, roiling eddies of deceit.

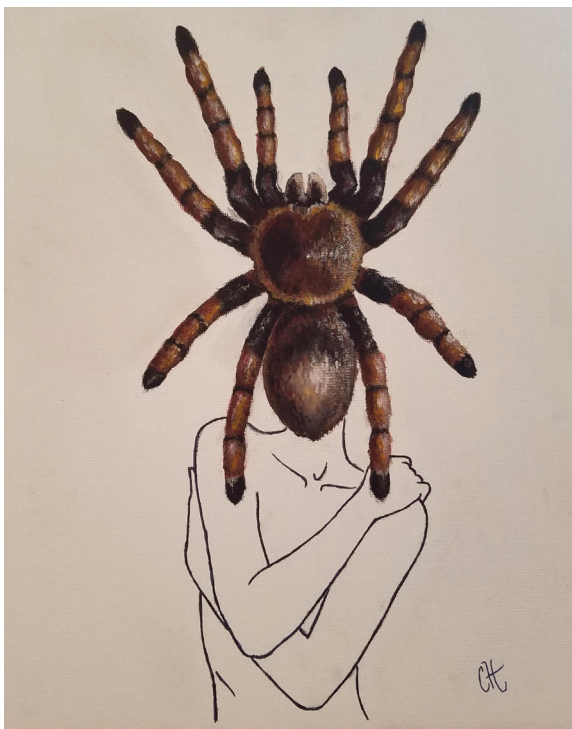
Maybe a suspension bridge more than a mile long with cables
and towers,
so there is plenty of time to stroll across before meeting in the middle.
Even time to stop for a sandwich, to watch red hawks circle overhead.
After all no hurry is there, it's been forty years.

Or a truss bridge made with triangles built to bear a load,
and Mother we have a load between us. Do you remember when
you stole
the money I saved for a Schwinn Tiger bike and then you accused me
of stealing the money from you, and the world spun and I wondered if

I really saw empty scotch bottles in the back of your closet, the
doctor leaving
your bedroom, buttoning his shirt. Did I really hear you call
the housekeeper
who ironed our dresses and made the best lemon meringue pie ever
an ignorant black bitch, did I?

The last piece of steel in place, the ribbon cut by the mayor's lackey.
A high school band plays a warbling "Bridge over Troubled Waters,"
while cheerleaders leap out of synch, tripping and toppling.
We step slowly across the span, moving toward each other.

I see your raised arm, is that a hairbrush, a wooden spoon, a belt?
I hear splintered cries wind-tossed, do I? *worthless, greedy, ungrateful*
Knots stone my stomach, black footsteps thrum closer.
The bridge shudders and shakes. I jump.



Chelsea Harrington, *Vulnerability Masquerade*,
acrylic on canvas, 2020.

Snapshots

by CJ Muchhala

She never wakes except by his touch. If he dies first
will she lie dreaming until ?

She scrambles two eggs, scrapes them out of the pan with a fork. Metal
on metal. The sound grates but if she asks, he will deny.
He is reading political commentaries printed on the inside back page of
the front section of the newspaper. A toast crumb dangles
from his lower lip, falls, missing the napkin spread across his thighs.
It will land on the floor when he stands.
A piece of egg shines yellow where sun slants across the counter. She
eats with care.

Home is wherever they are together maybe

sometimes

ever?

The sky described in the novels she reads is reminiscent of her life:
an upside-down bowl, a flat plate, a gray sheet and other domestic objects.
Pots into pans. A dish sliding across others of its kind. Everything returned,
each nestled in its proper place. At one time it was babies.

She surrounds herself with order, its satisfying sound.

He goes off into his day. It is like falling off the porch.

For him: two trips to the drug store, volunteer work and a meeting at church. He does not believe in god. Another day of sick for her: e-mails read or sent, coughing, watching the news, meditating. Nor does she.

Soup for lunch, soup for supper. Fat globules floating. Split peas. Table water crackers.

Decaf, CNN and raspberry pie. The state of the world is not to her liking, a complaint he has heard. Often.

And the state of their union?

A blue car turns into the neighbor's driveway, aligns with the snow bank. A young woman jumps out, swings up the stairs, long hair swinging.

She herself is no longer that woman.

He stands at the intersection waiting for a car to pass. The driver, female, looks at him and away. Each additional year he celebrates is a subtraction.

A river glints where cloud meets land, tributaries of sunlight running through one, but not the other. Trees darken.

She carries a smile on her lips. He doesn't ask.

He thinks of his mother, recently deceased. A spiteful woman. Only the newest in-law, brought into the story late, accords her a thought. As he does now: Do not call upon Mother's spirit. Resist her voice. He shares these words

with no one.

Outside the window, trees fidget under their gaze. Next door a man smokes a cigarette on his porch. Even in January they hear him coughing while he smokes, even with storm windows tight. The price of close quarters, of small homes.

Their bodies share a bed.

The wind rises to sweep the snow.
It knocks against the windows, holds treetops hostage.
The snow, shrinking in its own good time, resists clean.

She often awakens in deepest night, leafs through a magazine known
for its cartoons.
Her silent laughter shakes the bed.

There are a multitude of skies. Tonight, white islands of cloud against
the shining dark.
A puzzle encompassing, the pieces not quite fitting.

He stirs within his perfect sleep.

Feathers

by Frances Boyle

Perfect, precious girl,
ancient eyes a friend had said

My dancer child, my swan queen.
Tall wisp of wiry strength,
priestess shaking the cloud
of your dark hair.

When you first moved, you leapt.
Your dad let your tiny self
fall at (I thought) a frightening angle,
but you laughed for more.
We pushed you high on swings,
us low to the ground, an underduck.
We flew you, your arms linked with ours,
along the sidewalk.

The long thin strength of feathers in you.

