

Thimble Literary Magazine

Volume 3 • Number 4 • Spring 2021

Thimble Literary Magazine

Volume 3 · Number 4 · Spring 2021

Copyright © 2021 by Thimble Literary Group

Nadia Wolnisty
Editor in Chief

Phil Cerroni
Managing Editor

Justice Ferguson
Associate Editor

Gabriel Mamola
Associate Editor

Emily Hart
Associate Editor

Colleen Ahern
Associate Editor

Haydee Fuentes
Editorial Assistant

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

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

Brief Guidelines for Submission

The *Thimble Literary Magazine* is primarily a poetry journal but invites submissions on related topics such as artwork, stories, and interviews. We are not looking for anything in particular in terms of form or style, but that it speaks to the reader or writer in some way. When selecting your poems or prose, please ask yourself, did this poem help me create shelter? Simultaneous submissions are accepted, but please notify us if the work is accepted elsewhere. All material must be original and cannot have appeared in another publication.

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

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

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
Maureen Paxton, *Walk Home*,
oil on canvas, 2015.

CONTENTS

Editor's Note	178
Love poem for Anthony Bourdain <i>Anhvu Buchanan</i>	180
To the Indian Woman at the Charles de Gaulle Airport <i>Leslie McIntyre</i>	182
Astronomically Speaking <i>Bruce McRae</i>	184
i swear to god i'll come home <i>Maitreyi Parakh</i>	185
Wolf Dream <i>Donna Pucciani</i>	186
Oracle—Carrier of Secrets <i>Cindy Rinne</i>	187
Titan Moving Out <i>Rikki Santer</i>	188
I Think Not <i>Dawn Corrigan</i>	190
I'm a Jesus Now <i>Maed Rill Monte</i>	191
Slough <i>Jude Brigley</i>	192
Heart: Verde <i>Jessica Hills</i>	193
Vox, Vocis <i>William Welch</i>	194

Autumn Switch	196
<i>Jacqueline Schaalje</i>	
The Biscuit Eater of Penn Hills	198
<i>John Dorsey</i>	
Romanian Hall	199
<i>Richard Lynch</i>	
Carried Away	200
<i>Melody Wang</i>	
Berry Pond	201
<i>Shannon Cuthbert</i>	
Ekphrasis on Botticelli's <i>Primavera</i>	202
<i>Kelly Scott Franklin</i>	
Leopardhouse	203
<i>Maureen Paxton</i>	
On the Day before We Don't Know What to Do	204
<i>Chloe N. Clark</i>	
Self-Portrait as the Pink Moon	206
<i>Stacy Nigliazzo</i>	
Madre 2020	207
<i>Jessica Hills</i>	
Anointing the Dead	208
<i>Deirdre Fagan</i>	
Here It's Okay	209
<i>Marc Dickerson</i>	
Poem after Bitter Dreams	215
<i>Meghan Sterling</i>	
Schrödinger's Cat	216
<i>George R. Kramer</i>	
Another Old Thing	218
<i>Mary Curtis</i>	
Inhabit the Elements	219
<i>Cindy Rinne</i>	

A Litany in which There Is No Room Tone	220
<i>MM James</i>	
Sacrifice	222
<i>Hana Jabr</i>	
Insomniac's Lament	224
<i>Ann Weil</i>	
Blood in the Walls	225
<i>Jessica Hills</i>	
At Elyse's Baby Shower	226
<i>Emily Patterson</i>	
Effluvia Drifts	227
<i>Melissa Eleftherion</i>	
The Somnambulist	228
<i>Judy Bolton-Fasman</i>	
Trust Issues	230
<i>Melissa Ridley Elmes</i>	
Heading Home	232
<i>Amit Shah</i>	
Selected Thoughts of a Pandemic Population	234
<i>Mandira Pattnaik</i>	
Red Bead No. 2	235
<i>Maureen Paxton</i>	
shrimp	236
<i>Rob Stone</i>	
Midwifing Loss	238
<i>Erica Manto-Paulson</i>	
Rocket Fuel, on the Pennsylvania Border	239
<i>Caleb Bromberg</i>	

Editor's Note

Dear Readers,

When asked where I live, I usually give the answer of “Dallas,” but—as with most one-word answers—that’s not quite true. I am about fifteen miles or so outside of that sprawling metropolis, in a small town, graced with trees and a lack of stuffiness.

This also entails wildlife. When I first moved out here, I saw the biggest raccoons I had seen in my life, all in a line, waddling past my porch—the biggest I had seen until I spotted their mom, who was somehow more huge and more round. Friendly spheres with human hands! I was glad to see them but a little afraid.

Yesterday, or perhaps the day before, a skunk sprayed my porch door off my bedroom. I didn’t see or hear the skunk, but I knew. This is a reminder to myself to reseal that door—it keeps the rain out well enough, but that’s apparently not going to cut it.

But what I really want to talk to you about are lizards, specifically one lizard, a green anole. Given the wildness of my backyard, I have some glue traps for flies in my garage. A month or so ago, an anole, no doubt seeking an easy meal, had sealed himself on top of one. Still breathing but stuck and helpless until its inevitable death.

My first instinct was to step on the poor thing or use a hammer. It is useless for creatures to suffer. My husband told me no, the glue traps were our fault; we have to try. And so I did a panicked Google search, and the solution appeared to be lubricant.

I brought the jug out to the lizard. I used my fingers to drip vegetable oil on it and lube up its underbelly. Bit by bit, it came up, minus a few toes. It let us hold it and pry it away from the stick. When we were done, we placed it in the sun.

It might just be the pandemic and the times we are going through, but I cried. I cried so much out on the porch, in the sun, jug of oil in hand. I felt enormous and stupid. But it just felt like not all kind acts are in vain. Here was something small we did together. Here was a lizard, unstuck at last.

This too is a kind act. Writers and artists do not have to create. Writers and artists do not have to submit their work to a small literary magazine that cannot pay. Writers and artists don't have to do shit.

But here we are anyways, patiently unsticking, carefully prying.

May we all find a spot of sun—even if we're down a toe or two.

Best,

Nadia Arioli

Love poem for Anthony Bourdain

by Anhvu Buchanan

*Vietnam. It grabs you and doesn't let you go.
Once you love it, you love it forever*

—ANTHONY BOURDAIN

Anthony, can I tell you a secret?
When I was young there was a shame that boiled inside me.
Boiling, broiling, lingering, steaming, simmering from within.
Who can break free from the bruising words of the young?
There was shame and sham.
I was running from myself, my food, my people.
I tried to hide from the fish heads, the duck eggs, the sauce of fish,
the bowls of broth, the meats, the cold rice, the flavors, the aromas.
When can we outlast the history of smells?
I wanted nothing to do with it.
I wanted the burger, the bland, the just like them and him and her.
I wanted to eat like the wind.
Which way to begin again?
And there you were, Anthony, on the screen,
turning food into art into history into story.
My whole life, I pushed my food away
but you brought it closer to you for the world to see.
You embraced each noodle, each dish, each bite
as if they were your forgotten friends you found again.
Why couldn't I find refuge frothing at the brim?
Anthony, when you brought the president into that small Vietnamese

noodle shop and sat on plastic stools, beer between you, you helped
tell our story.

You showed the world how we lived, loved, ate
with our whole being.

You taught us that we are not bound to our past
that with each new meal comes a new way to live the day.

How can we go on when memory is without moment? You had so
many stories left to tell.

We wanted more of you but we had to surrender to time.

I wish we could've shared a meal together, one last bowl of clam rice
or bun cha.

Anthony, you are gone now but the food will always remain.

Now, I want to eat until there's nothing left but home.

To the Indian Woman at the Charles de Gaulle Airport

by Leslie McIntyre

You sat across from me in the terminal while we waited for our flight to board. I thought you looked a little like Kelly from *The Office* (American). I tried to be discreet as I studied your face to determine whether it was a true resemblance I saw and not a superficial ethnic parallel. You did not seem to notice my staring. I turned my attention to something else. At some point you changed seats, to accommodate a large family, I think, and I found you sitting beside me.

I fell asleep.

I awoke to someone telling me my flight was boarding. I was waiting for the flight to Toulouse, wasn't I?

I thanked you profusely as I stood and gathered my things. I suppose it was the title of the book I was reading or perhaps the general uncertainty that colored my movements, the wide-eyed stare with which I regarded my surroundings (it was only an airport, for God's sake), that prompted you to speak to me in English rather than French.

You were ahead of me in line to board the plane, but you seemed to be keeping an eye on me, for you noticed the panicked look that crossed my face as I realized I was no longer holding my passport. You stepped out of line and asked what was wrong as I frantically pawed at my purse. I told you I wasn't sure where my passport was.

"Look for it properly."

It was an instruction not a suggestion, patient but firm, as though you suspected the kind of person I was and am, the kind who is often

frightened by new surroundings and gets flustered easily and becomes too panicked at the first sign of something gone wrong to proceed rationally. Under other circumstances I might have resented your tone, but now I appreciated your level-headedness, your interest in my well-being, your use of the word *properly*. It was such a British turn of phrase, and so accurate, as though you'd seen this reaction before and knew I needed to be reminded to stay calm, to take things one step at a time.

I did as you instructed and retrieved my passport from the inner recesses of my purse, feeling immensely foolish and relieved as I held it up for you to see. Your nod of acknowledgment told me you knew it was there all along.

It was a message I would repeat over and over again as I wandered alone on an unfamiliar continent, when I lost track of my phone, my passport, my wallet, my pills, any the loss that might have amounted to a crisis. Look for it properly. Look for it properly.

Astronomically Speaking

by Bruce McRae

The Big Bang was simply a drawer
being slowly pulled open.
Space didn't expand, the rooms got smaller.
Quasars are actually restaurants on fire.
Galaxies, we've discovered, are really
bathroom lights left on all night long.
What you think of as vast distances
are an optical illusion, the vacuous void
in fact a church hall for hire.
Those aren't planets you're seeing either,
they're Christmas baubles,
the sun a cigarette end
glowing in an overfilled ashtray.
A friend says the stars are sticks burning,
but I have to disagree:
stars are pimples on the cheeks of God.
As for how the cosmos ends,
think of an adolescent sulk,
an initial enthusiasm petering out
like a fad or ardour.

i swear to god i'll come home

by Maitreyi Parakh

maybe icarus didn't fall at all / but was reaching down to hold his lover /
his lover who had the stars in her eyes / his lover who had roses bloom-
ing in her hair / his lover who had the map of the world tattooed onto
her arms / creeping up to where their hands are intertwined. / their trust
is without borders / they can walk upon the clouds / wherever she'd call
him, he'd go. / *i really want to fall in love with you, but i know i shouldn't /
because then you'd need to fall too.*

and everything feels natural / a dream gone right. he's no longer afraid /
of the world he's fallen into, or the accumulation of feelings that molded
him into the person he is today. / because each day is a new twenty four
hours / each day means everything's possible again. / he lives in the
moment / he dies in the moment / and he takes it all one day at a time. /
he tries to walk in the light. / *is your love too much to ask for?*

Wolf Dream

by Donna Pucciani

for Pavel, in *My Antonia*

The Cather classic tells
how the wolves follow the sleigh
carrying bride and groom
into a night of fleshly violence
under a darkened moon.

Strange how that image
of howling blood screams
in my memory above all else—
sod huts, scorching sun,
chilblain-cold, cradles and fiddles,
snakes and sparsely-settled prairies,
youth dreaming of the city—

but now, only clear blue orbs
dotting the fur-fringed dark
by the hundreds, the weight
of bristling heads and muscular bodies
set upon a wedding party and their felled horses,
silencing Russian songs, shouts, heartbeats,
all semblance of civilization
in white silk, black serge, wool blankets, bells.

We are never ready for the moment
when death chases the sled,
never sense the hot breath of the pack,
the crunch of snow and bones,
the lunar red floating behind a cloud of fear,
the hunger of beasts our own hunger,
no more, no less.



Cindy Rinne, *Oracle—Carrier of Secrets*,
fiber art, 2020.

Titan Moving Out

by Rikki Santer

Every elliptical orbit that binds sons
to fathers moves with the eccentrics
of time reckoning. Father Saturn
says you're moving out—
his favorite moon doesn't seem
to need his papa's ringlets anymore.
So far you're the only body
besides Earth with surfaces
that sire rivers, lakes, deep seas.
Cue your Titan brethren who launched
the ancient craft of stealing fire,
the vault of heavens pressing
down on rebellious shoulders.
You're big enough to bully
Mercury, and now you're pulling
away from home four inches a year.

Some say with wings strapped
to our arms we could fly
your cloud-filled skies
with no more effort than walking.
We aim our backyard telescopes
for haiku snapshots of you.

Dragonfly will visit—
the NASA drone calibrated
to probe your impact crater
slammed ten millennia ago,
to measure your frigid ways.
Free-range scientists yearn
to tilt impossible spheres
and find another place
where ingredients
for life may live.
But you are an old god,
a distant machine
stubborn and likely
to keep
your secrets
close.

I Think Not

by Dawn Corrigan

Since moving to the country
I have a limping squirrel
and a broken turtle
to my shame
but at least there's also
the memory of you,
opossum who entered the field
of my headlights at dusk,
both of us moving so slowly
I was able to watch
as you considered your fate
and then, *I think not*
written all over your pointy face,
turned and retreated
back from whence you came.

I'm a Jesus Now

by Maed Rill Monte

I'm a Jesus now
my teenage years are incognito
and I hated home
throughout youthhood

I'm a Jesus now
because someone calls out
my name in the wilderness of memory

I'm a Jesus now
wise verses casually flow from the
million buds of my tongue and out
of my mouth like a great brown beard

I'm a Jesus now
going head-to-head against the mighty

It was good while it lasted
but we had to cut filming after an expected kiss

I'm a Jesus now
since my friends sold me
disowned me
while I was silent like lambs when asked
about truth

Slough

by Jude Brigley

It is not our usual nurse who greets my mother
with the news that she can smell her wound

from the front door. My mother raises her brow
in admonishment that I have kept this secret.

She always worried about smelling like an old
woman, making me promise I would take care,

even if she dozed into oblivion, she would smell
of jasmine. The bandages unwrapped reveal the cause:

her leg encrusted with a slough so thick it grips
her skin, encircling her calf, turning to eschar

as the tissue blackens, oozing into the water bowl.
I pour away the vessel's tainted contents, noting

the tissue, curling skin. *Look up*, I say, when
legs are mummified, not wanting her to check.

She can't resist. And I must grow a crust and kill
customary aversion; to help her bear the indignity

of her body's dolorous failing; must offer hope, even
while noticing a spot of slough besmirch her other leg.

When the nurse is gone, and bandages gleam white,
I fetch her *Florentyna* and supervise her spraying.



Jessica Hills, *Heart: Verde*,
acrylic and flowers on canvas, 2020.

Vox, Vocis

by William Welch

The air hoards voices—and so many
sounds: distant sirens, the neighbor's children
chattering along with starlings and chickadees.
Old men outside bodegas, gawking, gossiping.
Underneath these, the paper-like crumpling
of dry leaves, as though the air was writing
everything down, compulsively taking notes—
*what did he say? Something about voices,
something about birds.*

The air ought to ripple when we speak
the way a pond does when it rains.
Water becomes saw-toothed, jagged,
just so the air is sharpened by a human voice.

To think, there are deserts of silence—
like the moon, that fishhook dangling from a tree.
There, in craters that never once ricocheted echoes
off their stones, we would die. We couldn't bear it.
There can be no more inhuman place.
Imagine yourself without a voice,
unable to say one word, unable to lean over
to someone you love and whisper in her ear.

Not here. Here, we are always talking—
almost too much—until the sky seems like a jar
of voices knocked over on the floor.
I'm on my hands and knees, trying to sort them,
trying to trace one back to you.

But why this noise?
Why do we feel incomplete until someone hears us?
Because part of each of us remains children,
and cannot live if we go unnoticed?
That is our first act: the cry,
the only thing we can do
to call the ones who know us:
Come from the other room!
Then who are we crying out for when we sing?

Here I am—this voice
is mine, no one else can use it.
Yours sounds sure, confident.
Our conversation continues—
our only fear the thought we might be stifled
and our voices left wilting
like cut flowers in the vase of our mouths.

Autumn Switch

by Jacqueline Schaalje

Autumn. Leaves are whirling from poplar borders
and my grandfather has shot a rabbit for dinner.
“Poor rabbit.” Nurse-like, my sister blushes over the shoebox
where the furry wretch sucks shot from its paw.
This one, soon to be pulled, cannot be saved
in her private clinic—will she keep pulling its leg
or its spirit, or just her own?
Gramps is old school. One’s shelter is the stomach.
Anything else they can take from you,
and rabbit is full of lean but warming nourishment.
He is my favorite grandparent, who kindly surfed
the same zone with me for marked time.
He rightfully assumed I would be on top of my rabbit portion.
A minor rite, while there are so many more egregious massacres.
My mother plays solitary Mikado with the bones.
Her own body would quite stiffen, become a dried-up drum,
at the southern dialect that my grandfather addressed me in,
cocking his head and saying *ey* for *what do you think*.
As the rabbit is being abducted through our digestive systems,
we pray for donations of nature. Renew
what you can, autumn, at least dart a few dandelions,
scoot fluff bunnies over the barren furrows.
Nature, we don’t mind if you make us toil, but nurture us.
Opa, I finished my shank. I don’t need to throw up, thanks.
Grandpa says *thou* for *you*, at ease and friendly with earth’s associates.

The weather is his home and in his orchard he grows his tongue;
wherever he travels he branches out in unfamiliar expressions,
chinks up vowels from the straight oral passage.
My mother, though taller by half a head, is a city mouse beside him.
She scolds me for grammar, and my father,
caught in this split, shuts up.
When the rifle has finished playing its part,
my father puts it away to rust in the garage,
I often eye it there, an alien tool lording it
over the abraded hammer, the dust-gathering sandpaper,
the guinea pig–chewed extension cords, and the emergency lights:
a relic not shedding any scrap of its meaning,
while it bites on its baby bullet like a voracious snake.
My father swears never to use it.
He never has, and I have no idea which tradition he consulted
when he beat the twirling leaves out of me
which would give rise to another story.
Since my opa has keeled over his shoebox, lots of silly bunnies
run wild in the dark days. I say thou and thanks.

The Biscuit Eater of Penn Hills

by John Dorsey

when my brother was three or four
he'd steal dog biscuits
from under our grandmother's
kitchen counter

and when those milk-bone boxes ran dry
from the dogs themselves
with their brittle bones
hardly able to put up a fight
against his white baby teeth and shiny coat

he would just crunch away in a dark corner
hoping for enough time
to lap up every loose crumb

sometimes he got lucky
others my mother would snatch them
a soggy half-eaten boneyard
from his hot little fingers

and he would sit there wailing
tears rolling down his cheeks

his first demons

he could feel them in his bones
wagging their tails
and nipping at his heels
from darker corners.



Richard Lynch, *Romanian Hall*,
photography with Photoshop variations, 2014.

Carried Away

by Melody Wang

In a vivid dream I beheld (held) you, as I had for weeks.
Your solemn eyes peered at me, perpetually seeking
answers that elude me still. No goodbyes were uttered, or
perhaps they drowned in the fair company of regret

One year prior, a false fatherly figure had towered over me
gleefully binding me with honeyed words and a dark
fortuneteller's bemused smile, haughty in his prophecy
that the little bump below my palm meant nothing, really

The light in my eyes is already fading; even now
I tread lightly, shrinking from cold condemnation
seeking out half-truths in the cavity left behind
by you, quiet fawn, unable to witness the morning dew

Berry Pond

by Shannon Cuthbert

There in the woods
We dreamed of forgiveness for our small sins,
Hair pulled and dolls thrown from moving cars
On the long joyless ride.
Ascending the mountain at the end
We began to breathe for the first time each summer,
Inhaling pheromones
Released by pines and weasels in heat.
At night the pond
Looked right through us, backlit by flashlight
As we ran to the outhouse,
Pocketing salamanders,
Orange and ghost, in a bucket on the walk back.
In the end, we saw the bullfrogs who sang
To us most nights squashed flat
On the curve of the road, leaving us contemplating
What kind of room the world had in mind
For those whose voices
Are held and hurled in a pocket of the throat,
Flung at the unsuspecting,
Turning a place at once boundless and small.

Ekphrasis on Botticelli's Primavera

by Kelly Scott Franklin

Spring is a bitch to the barren,
a stone-cold pastoral to the lucky few with an empty womb.
It's hard enough, when the world blooms,
but then that asshole Botticelli unloads his palette
like only a maniac under the Medici could,
cramming his canvas with five hundred
kinds of plants. The fecundity of it!
That's not a painting, just a
golden-age greenhouse full of half-naked girls:
oranges swell like bellies and breasts,
while a pregnant goddess in maternity dress
offers only a rose and a knowing smile.
It's like somebody got the whole damned world with child.

It's a Renaissance riddle full of unanswered questions:
Why does Hermes stare off in some other direction?
Why is Cupid obese? Why do bad things happen?
You see

spring is only a myth to the barren,
for we cannot let ourselves believe
in tales where every ravished nymph conceives,
where Jove himself has a fetus sewn up in his thigh,
where the semen of gods showers down from the sky.
We grow to resent the very thing we desire—
dream of setting that bastard's allegorical woods on fire.

Yes, the other nine months of the year
brush by without pain;
but April comes, with the smell of rain,
and the barren remember our annual reason
for grieving the winter we carry
into every season.



Maureen Paxton, *Leopardhouse*,
oil on canvas, 2013.

On the Day before We Don't Know What to Do

by Chloe N. Clark

In the morning, we do
laundry, grab up piles
of clothes into heaps, into
the water, the soap suds

Once you had told me how
the block you lived on in college
used to always smell of cheap
detergent, like SweetTarts and
the soap your grandmother used

Scent brings us back so easily
the smell of catalpa on a street
in San Antonio twists me to a child
hood under heart-shaped leaves

Now we use scent-free detergent,
pull in only the smell of clean,
fresh from the dryer, the heat
against our hands

You tell me about the memory
of slime molds, as we fold
clothes, how scientists have
used the way the mold spreads
to predict the shape of galaxies

This is our cosmic web
how the planets and stars and
life spiral out,
how we long to trace it

those distances between
shown to us through
a mold inching across
a simulation of space

The mold memorizes where
food might be, like we memorize
the shape of everyone
we think we might belong to

the space between us, collapsing
a sheet we folded
pressed close together
just to spread out later
pull across the bed
the distance suddenly
there again

Self-Portrait as the Pink Moon

by Stacy Nigliazzo

It's 1973,

she cannot sleep,

worries her fingers across her billowing belly,

finds my foot.

I whisper through the black cord.

She wonders what my name will be,

carries me

like a knot of sky,

skein of silver tightly in its seam.

The sun, a knot of yellow yarn tucked tightly in a seam of sky.
The sun, tucked tightly in a seam of sky.
The sun, a tightly curled (orb) of gold thread tucked in a seam of sky
She carried me like a crown.



Jessica Hills, *Madre* 2020,
acrylic on canvas, 2020.

Anointing the Dead

by Deirdre Fagan

I leaned into her body, just beginning to cool, and brought
my lips to her forehead. I brushed her hair as she once had
mine. I, now, the matriarch of the remaining men.

I had previously brought my mouth to his
closed casket. Brother older by six years;
I hadn't seen him in one.

Other brother, you died lonely, unshaven,
unclean, of too much drink. Red hair greased,
face sallow; not the man I knew.

Father, your forehead already grown cold,
I pressed my lips to your familiar face,
scenting only memory; some can't kiss back.

Love, you parted your lips for me often
during the end, but having lost muscle strength,
could no longer pucker: mouth open, as when learning to kiss.

When we are born, we are covered in kisses,
long before we can kiss back. Later, we kiss for two—
mouths open, ready to receive the anointing with hallowed breath.

Here It's Okay

by Marc Dickerson

Waking up is familiar, something he knows.

He pets the dog. Enjoys the feeling, the repeated motion. Finds immense pleasure in the concentration.

The dog bends, scratches. Growls in satisfaction.

They are both satisfied.

The man rises, moves into the adjoining bathroom. Small, like the rest of the cabin. *Cozy*, the man thinks as he looks at his face in the mirror. The mirror is small but clean.

He shaves. He doesn't know why.

Showers. Dries. Goes now to the bedroom window. Stands there for a while gazing out at trees, mountain range in the distance. Dresses himself. Moves into the main room. At the far end is a fireplace. Iron spit, empty pail hanging. Next to this is a stool, an icebox and a cabinet.

He puts on his coat, opens the door. Hears the dog follow him outside.

There is no trail. This is okay. The man is familiar. Has become familiar with the lay of the land.

He moves down the slope, grunting until he is again on steady ground. Dog at his heels, he walks through a dense sea of greens and browns. Walking, looking. Peering through the trees. Crunches beneath his boots. He stops.

"Here," he says, catching his breath. "This is where I saw her."

The dog sniffs toward the clearing.

Another dog, all white, emerges from the trees, into the clearing. A woman follows behind. Dark hair, slender. Yes, he remembers.

"It's her." The man bites his lip. "See. I told you."

The dog growls.

"Come on."

The man moves toward them. The dog follows reluctantly at first, then quickens, takes the lead. Stops, sniffs the white dog.

"Sorry," says the man. "Can't help himself."

The woman laughs, brushes hair from her eyes.

"It happens," she says.

"Paul," he says.

"Alena."

"Nice to meet you, Alena."

She smiles and nods before looking away.

"Don't bump into many others."

The woman glances around, doesn't respond.

"What were you doing?"

She looks at him now.

"Hmm?"

"Before this. What were you doing?"

"Oh." She thinks. "I forget."

The man nods. "Me too."

"I'm . . . I'm forgetting a lot."

"That's okay."

The woman looks down at her dog, says, "I used to have something, I think. A life."

"Our lives are all we know."

"Different moments, things."

The man's dog barks. The white dog cowers, whimpers.

"Ronnie! Stop."

"It's okay."

"Thought I taught him better manners."

"Paul, you said?"

"Yes. Paul sounds good. Close to what it was, probably."

"Solid name. Traditional. Like John, or Mike."

"Alena is pretty."

"Isn't it? Thanks. I like it."

"The memories."

"Hm?"

"They'll go. Soon. Go away completely."

She nods. "Oh."

"Don't concentrate on what we've lost. Think of what we've gained. We can name ourselves. It's good. Meaningful. Means something. Focus on the good. The now. The moment."

The woman kneels, pets the man's dog. "What do you do?"

"Do?"

"Yes. Every day. What do you do?" She focuses on the fur, the texture. Watches her hand moving, touching the fur.

"Mostly I walk. I like to walk. Concentrate on the walking."

"Mm."

"I have felt feelings. Moments of unbridled sincerity."

"Is that so?"

"Yesterday I saw a rainbow. And I just sat. And appreciated it."

The woman is staring at her hand as it rests on the animal's fur.

She says, "What if when we die we see the world through our dog's eyes?"

"Is this something you've thought about?"

"Since I've been here. Yes. All I do is think."

"It's much better," the man says, "to focus on survival."

"No need, really. Shelter is provided, food delivered."

"Would you prefer to hunt?"

"No. I love animals. I don't remember if I did before, but I do now."

"Animals. Yes. At least we have them. Look to the animals. Instinct. This we can learn from."

"Sometimes there are flashes. Dreams. Flashes in my dreams. Things half remembered. I know I used to be able to remember."

"Survival. That's the best thing. For the body, the brain."

"No longer wanting to remember. The last thing I remember, is wanting that." The woman furrows her brow, trying not to think. "What if that's all life is anyway?"

"What?"

"Remembering."

The man scratches the back of his neck, looks off. Trees and trees. In the distance is a mountain. Remember the mountain. The lay of the land.

She says, "Maybe there are clues. On how to get back. In my dreams."

"I really like to walk," the man says. "You ever walk through a tree tunnel? Found one the other day. It was like a vortex."

"To another world. Or the past."

"Or the future. Or right here, right now."

She stands, looks at him. Really looks at him. His face. Freshly shaven, bits of stubble. Lines, blemishes. She thinks, tries to recall. Has she met him? Does she know him? Is he from before? Pushing through the thoughts, trying to get to the real thoughts, to something that feels real, past a haze of things familiar and foreign at the same time.

"No. Dreams," she says. "I want to talk about dreams."

The man points. "That squirrel. Over there. Look at it." Points in the grass next to them. "Or that bug." He focuses on the act of pointing, on the bug.

The woman squishes the bug.

The man looks at her.

"Alena. Why did you do that?"

"Were you focusing?"

"Yes. It's dead, now."

The woman is crying.

"Whatever you do," the man says, nodding, "have focused energy."

The woman stops crying.

There are sounds. Sounds of nature. From the trees, from all around. Trying hard not to think, he thinks, *The trees are nice. This seems like a nice place, a good place. Especially this clearing, where there are no trees at all.*

"Please," she says.

"We can talk about dreams," says the man. "But I don't remember them."

"Yes." He sees her face change. Hopeful now, smiling. "People always say they don't want to hear about people's dreams. I think they used to say that, before. But I find them interesting. Always have. I think."

There were, of course, dreams. Subconscious memories. Segmented visions of a building, an agency, of people in suits. Signing a contract. Blurred words. Leaving somewhere. Arriving here. A long time ago, maybe yesterday.

The man looks at the woman, at her smile fading. Her dog sniffs his hand. He keeps looking at the woman.

The woman gazes off again and he notices her body stiffen. She must see them. He has seen them, is almost certain they're there. He tries not to think about them. But sometimes he feels them, watching. Some are in trees, others farther in the distance. Dark suits from his dreams, watching. He signed the contract. Now he is here. That must be it, but it doesn't matter. Because he is here now. He wanted to be here. The why does not matter.

The man breathes deeply, closes his eyes. Opens them.

"The air is good," he says. "Clean."

The woman says, "What are we doing here?"

"You need to think positively."

The woman is crying again. Wiping tears with the back of her hand.

"Alena," the man says. "Not remembering is better than having regrets. I probably used to have a lot of regrets. It's because I thought too much. Regretted every decision I made, or didn't make. Except for the one that brought me here. Here it's okay. Everything is okay."

"I just wanted to feel free. Inside my brain." She looks at the man. "Is that wrong? Bad?"

"You're thinking." The man frowns, shaking his head.

"I can't stop."

The man shrugs. "You get used to it."

The woman leans in, whispers. "If I leave tonight, would you come with me?"

The man takes a step back. "No." He pauses. "Where would we go?"

"Somewhere. Anywhere."

"But," the man says, "it's beautiful here. The scenery, the views. Nature. Animals. It's good. Food. Food is provided."

The woman stares off into the trees again. The man does as well. Shadows all around. One of them is closer, seems closer.

"There's not many of us here," says the man. "You should stay. We could be friends. I think."

"You think?"

"Yes. Well."

The man laughs, scratches the back of his neck again, looks down at his dog.

"Ronnie, be nice." He looks over at the woman's dog. "I never did get this cute little pooch's name," he says.

"Marlene."

"Marlene?"

"Sure."

"A very good name."

They stare off again, this time at the horizon.

"Beautiful," the man says.

"I'm going to go." The woman says to her dog, "Come on, Marlene."

"Oh," says the man. "Well. Maybe I'll see you back here tomorrow?"

"Yes," she says. "If I remember."

She smiles a little and then she is moving away, toward the trees. The forest where those blurs, those shadows, those figures stand and float and loom. He can see them. First there are thoughts and then there are none. He smiles. There is sweat on his brow. He knows it because he feels it. Feels the moisture emerge, trickle down. Tastes it. He even tastes it.

The man looks down at his dog, up again. The woman is almost gone. He's already forgotten her face as he watches her disappear, down the slope.

Poem after Bitter Dreams

by Meghan Sterling

There are places inside of each other we can't touch, don't want to,
all the years spent pretending you weren't comparing me to your first,
the one with the face and the rage, all the years pretending I wasn't
damaged goods. What's a little rape between friends? What's a little lie
matter? What I didn't know was how much we store up to serve to the next
contestant. Every time I see a waterfall, I know I don't measure up.

Every time
I dream we buy a house, it is infested with bugs, has hollow floors,
moldy carpets.
Last night, I dreamt we were thieves—breaking and entering our
former house
and a shop at the mall, stealing a seven-dollar purse. Our daughter was part
of our getaway, twisting with rage in her car seat as we circled a parking lot,
nowhere to go, no money for gas. She was one again, angry
she couldn't walk,
howled at sky, leaves, roads, the smooth palms we held out
to steady her—too proud to accept, too desperate to refuse. Last night,
I dreamt that my ex was eating at a dinner party in our former house—
we watched like ghosts on welfare, the orange carpeting bowing in spots,
brass chandeliers and spotty mirrors jutting out from every surface,
detritus in a pawn shop. There is a world where I can afford to live,
but I haven't found it yet. There is a world where I am loved the way a child
loves a butterfly that has landed on her wrist, delicate, delicate,
tenderness of rain on leaves, of things just arriving.

Schrödinger's Cat

by George R. Kramer

Critics, if I had them, would say
I should use fewer words
and say more.
Yes.

My greatest critic is my cat.
I don't have a cat.
But if I did she would approve
when I scratched her belly.

A poem is like Schrödinger's cat:
Sitting on paper
both dead and alive
until a reader decides which.

Erwin Schrödinger wrote a poem
about his cat. Like all poems,
it was a thought experiment,
meandering a bit like this poem,

but in the guise of a science paper
dealing with quantum superpositioning.
It was not received quite as he intended,
as with any successful poem.

He wrote in free verse
but chose not to show off,
resisting German rhymes
for “quantum superpositioning.”

What he meant as an absurdity (*a*)
folds on itself into something
in some deep sense true (*isdst*),
leaving a remainder of one stanza line.

The formula reduces to $a^2 = isdst$,
which might be the solution to all poetry.
The critics missed that trick
and should be criticized for that.

Another Old Thing

by Mary Curtis

A relic from the 50s like me solid and hard to move,
rounded corners on the cabinet and door metal shelves
that rotated out, eliminating food spoilage at the back of fixed racks

flimsy rails to hold bottles in the door jiggly metal ice trays
in a freezer that frosted over. It finally failed,
finally after more than a half century of service

I open the door one last time. In the dark kitchen.
its light has a warm glow. I rotate a shelf out and take a photo
metal gleaming like chrome on a vintage car, the vintage fridge!

The next day the Russian delivery guy arrives with the next refrigerator.
He's a big man, wraps and belts the old thing to his sturdy frame
to carry down the stairs. *Heavy*, he grunts.

Soon he is back with the new fridge, which he carries as easily
as a big white box of poufy tissues. *Not so heavy*, I say.

This won't last as long as the last one—they don't make them like that.
We talk a little more about old refrigerators versus new as he pushes
the new thing into its corner. We talk about Russia versus America—

living here, that is, about how he likes living here but goes back cause he likes his homeland every once in a while, and he likes the quality of the old American-made fridges versus the skimpy

imports that he can carry up a flight of stairs without effort and I think it's not a bad thing to be an icon of durability despite age, not bad for a machine entrusted with freshness and preservation.



Cindy Rinne, *Inhabit the Elements*,
fiber art, 2020.

A Litany in which There Is No Room Tone

by MM James

after Nat King Cole

My darling, love me*	; don't ever let me go.
My 3 a.m. hot leg sweat	; don't ever let me go.
My one-letter anagrams	; don't ever let me go.
My out-of-date pin code	; don't ever let me go.
My garage-door kid-ness	; don't ever let me go.
My poison guts of Jupiter	; don't ever let me go.
My odd-numbered organs	; don't ever let me go.
My prophetic magic stone	; don't ever let me go.
My dad and my silent drive	; don't ever let me go.
My eagle eating guts regret	; don't ever let me go.
My backdoor-grit-promises	; don't ever let me go.
My backed-off saxophones	; don't ever let me go.
My ER-birthday-skull-crack	; don't ever let me go.
My Jupiter convex telescope	; don't ever let me go.
My kindergarten reality grab	; don't ever let me go.
My split-oven-brother-pizzas	; don't ever let me go.
My convex pinhole smallness	; don't ever let me go.
My 3-way-split cinnamon roll	; don't ever let me go.
My moon looking like a mole	; don't ever let me go.
My known-fucking-unknowns	; don't ever let me go.
My belted-neck in a plastic bag	; don't ever let me go.

My body made of purple vitriol	; don't ever let me go.
My brother is watching the door	; don't ever let me go.
My trusting of my brother's friend	; don't ever let me go.
My three-hour drive to Paso Robles	; don't ever let me go.
My you-can't-get-these-in-America's	; don't ever let me go.
My prime-numbered-empty-product	; don't ever let me go.
My bladder truck-back lightning flash	; don't ever let me go.
My dad returning when his mum died	; don't ever let me go.
My forgiveness of every gift I left in a cab	; don't ever let me go.
My 3 a.m. Santa Cruz sky-ocean reality grab	; don't ever let me go.
and all, all, and all of My memories	; don't ever let me go.

Sacrifice

by Hana Jabr

I

The process is religious
like watching him unfurl a rug, wash, kneel, pray.
The kitchen is his temple.
He scourges his hands under scalding water
before snapping the too-tight latex gloves to shelter
the rawness hidden there.
Like a surgeon, he prepares the table.
Speaking each step without words, he unfurls leaf upon endless leaf,
 filling, rolling, tucking
until the mound on the plate begins to lean.
The tang of salt and acid thickens the air
but it will be hours before we eat.

II

Watch and learn, he tells me
while his gloved hands perform their miracle.
I watch but I never learn
because the act is sacred and my own hands are dirty
furled in my lap.
I am careful not to nudge the plate
or breathe in the direction of the *warak enab*.
I am worthy only to recover the stray leaf that escapes to the floor
as if trying to return to the musty earth
and finding only freshly scrubbed kitchen tiles.

III

His hands are bloody with tomato
as he kneads the mixture of rice, lamb and spices
in the speckled bowl we used for popcorn during movie nights.
Back when he would pour me only an inch of his Pepsi and tell me
to finish it before I could have more.
Fully expecting
he would sacrifice the entire can inch by inch.

IV

I am greedy for the eternity of this moment:
the brand it will leave like a scar
proudly worn.
I should take notes, blaspheming the secret of his method so I don't forget
like I've forgotten so many other times.
But something deep inside warns
once I learn the process
once it becomes mechanical
(the unfurling, mixing distinct roll and tuck that keeps
it all inside)
once I can do it in my sleep
I won't need him anymore.

Insomniac's Lament

by Ann Weil

I have become too familiar with the moon,
the man thinks, as he studies her 2 a.m. ensemble.
The veil of violet is a provocative touch
and those sidelong glances through its hazy lace
stir feelings he had buried deep.

Her figure O body makes him want to kiss her,
if only his reach were longer. Size matters—
but just arm length. The sleeping shape
of his wife beside him offers nothing; he thinks
about using her as a ladder.

The man tries to pair his breath to his wife's
but fails, flails, bails out of bed and down
to the bottles, first the infomercial cures
that promise relief, then the scotch,
likewise a con but it tastes better.

A catnap only that, his bladder hums,
and he treks yet again to the toilet. Relieved,
the water vessel slips sheet-wise into the guest bed,
the venue change his last attempt at victory.
Lemmings are counted until they scamper off a cliff.

Sighing, the man flips on a light and imagines what would happen if he denied himself the moon, and sought his wife instead. He pads to their bedroom and watches her face as she sleeps. Like a ghost, he slips noiselessly back to the guest room.

Alone in the dark with his book of thoughts, he wanders through its pages wondering—
How wrecked will I be at the meeting tomorrow?
Is our therapy session this week or next? Are we out of milk? What is a life when love is out of reach?



Jessica Hills, *Blood in the Walls*,
acrylic and flowers on canvas, 2020.

At Elyse's Baby Shower

by Emily Patterson

You wake up hungry and hollering so we leave the other guests, wandering the church basement hallway to find an empty meeting room where I sit on a folding chair to feed you as sunlight dyes the room gold. The carpet is undeniably seventies, yarn like, a potpourri palette, and there's the smell of old books though the shelves are bare. I notice your hair growing lighter, catching the sun like water, and your eyes, too, have recently gone from navy to lake blue. It is our first October together. Last year I was five weeks pregnant and afraid. Now I hear Elyse in the other room, saying *thank you* again and again, crumpling tissue, tearing paper, unveiling the artifacts of new life. Now I rest in golden light, feeding my own child, saying silently, again and again: *Thank you thank you thank you.*

Effluvia Drifts

by Melissa Eleftherion

A film collects
The white lays over the grey lays over
the dusk of membrane
What scars the air of dark
What sweet gravity hangs the nipples

One teaspoon held over cracking
Golden swirling rust
The spill of yolk
on new legs unsteady
Crown of effluvia gathers quick

What lifts the eyes to liquid
Bowl of listening
What scatters the ash

The Somnambulist

by Judy Bolton-Fasman

There was a time when King Solomon, the wisest of men, could not tell day from night. The Queen of Sheba tricked him into believing that night went on forever by hanging above his bed a black tapestry woven with diamond stars and pearl planets. When Solomon awoke in the morning he thought it was still night, and slept on.

If I could have made a magical tapestry like Sheba's, I would have used it to soothe my father into believing all was as well: it would have depicted night on the Pacific Ocean—waves gently rolling, the moon offering guidance from the bridge of his supply ship.

I liked my father best in the deepest of night when he lulled me to sleep, narrating the weather or describing the constellations. But a few hours later I, his somnambulist child, suddenly appeared at the threshold of his bedroom. Once a somnambulist himself, he knew not to rouse me from my sleepwalker's twilight. He closely followed me, his flashlight pointed to the floor. My episodes of sleepwalking were always followed by bouts of amnesia. But if there was a recurring dream to attach to my somnambulism, it was likely the one where I jumped from the top of the basement stairs, waking up before I cracked my head open on the squares of yellow-beige-red flooring.

A form of sleepwalking continued for my father and me throughout my adolescence. We tiptoed around each other, careful not to startle one another. Afraid to rouse the other from our entrenched places. Afraid to disturb each other's dreams.

On blue-black nights when my asthmatic coughing shook the house, my father was a sentry at my bedroom window, gazing out into the expansive night. What did he see? All that was out there were the unmown fields that belonged to the local college. But he stood at attention

in his mismatched pajamas, a posture he affected so that he could still graze a chart at 5 foot, 7, the minimum height for an officer. I understood that he had never really left the bridge of his supply ship. The war was always with him.

On winter nights my father filled the glass bowl of my humidifier every hour to keep it whistling like a teakettle. My bedroom, smelling of Ben-Gay, was as humid as my mother's Havana. But with all my father's directions and warnings about staying warm and hydrated and still under my bedcovers, I was panicked that I would never catch the breath trapped in my mentholated chest.

My father the lieutenant commander said he fished dead bodies half eaten by sharks out of the Pacific. He saw General MacArthur wading ashore in the Philippines. The horizon was my father's blank screen, and it served as a gateway to adventure, to daydreaming, to peace. I felt that he missed his former life of excitement, of participating in something important like running guns and butter in the war. But there was always the adrenaline rush of tracking weather.

My father believed that sailors lived and died according to how well prepared they were for the weather, a belief that colored the seasons of my childhood. On summer nights, Dad stood on the porch to observe lightning and listen for thunder. He paced during storms like a distracted maestro, doing a somnambulist-like loop through the kitchen, living room and dining room, and shouting out emergency rules as lightning cracked the sky and lit the world the color of steel. "No telephone, no television. No one in the shower! If we have to, we go directly to the car. A car with its rubber tires is the safest place to be during an electrical storm. In the event of a tornado warning we shelter in the basement."

I was that little girl who worried. I lived in dread of lightning striking the house as Dad rushed us outside to sit inside the '65 Malibu. The car never moved an inch on the driveway. On those wind-howling nights, full of electricity, he belted us three kids together in the backseat; the silver buckle pressed against my belly, making it as hard to breathe as if I were having one of my asthma attacks.

But I was sure Solomon's imaginary tapestry would keep us safe in the eternal night. In the hours that contracted as I roamed the house entombed in sleep, the tapestry unfurled over my father and me, wielding its divine magic as he kept watch over me.

Trust Issues

by Melissa Ridley Elmes

I thought, I think, I am thinking
Of a number between one and ten—
A concrete point, invisible, I expect you to trust
Whether I tell you “right” or “wrong.”
Trust—fragile thread, spun by Time
Bred by Familiarity, out of Love,
Raised by Truth and fed by Experience:
By now, your trust in me should extend
Beyond this one-through-ten numbers game.

If I hit someone for you
If I hurt myself for you
If I took the hit for you
If I stepped in front of you
And the bullet hit, smack-dab
In the middle, just to the left
And I fell for you again, this time
In a swirl of red nothing like roses—
Would *that* be enough to prove,
For once and for all,
That the number was five?

But, like a child bursting into tears
As his Mother leaves him at the sitter's,
Promising: "I'll be back soon" —
So, you, each time, refuse to believe
Or to take at face value
That what I have said, is what I have thought,
The number I said was the one in my head.
Why, after all this time, is my word
Not sacrosanct to you?

Heading Home

by Amit Shah

The lanes of cars are uniformly, methodically moving upstream alongside the Hudson River. It's still light and the air is fall-brisk, the clouds tinged with the showy colors of the setting sun. It's Friday evening. A weekend on the horizon. I'm headed out of New York City, aiming north toward Connecticut and then Massachusetts, finally Boston. In the seat behind me is my son, age two and a half, in a car seat, with a board book about dinosaurs and a couple of hard-plastic figures, the rage of the under-six crowd at that time—the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. My son's favorites are clutched in both his hands, Donatello, the tech nerd with a purple mask and a staff, and Michelangelo, the party dude with orange mask and nunchucks (kids aged two knew about nunchucks?!). A sippy cup with orange juice rests next to his left thigh on the car seat. He's content. I glance at him often in the rearview mirror. "We'll be at Danbury for dinner in one hour," I say enthusiastically, hoping that the Friday night commuters won't prove me wrong. I turn on the evening news. Always NPR. I roll down my window, rest my arm on the door and say, "I love you!" "Love you", he replies. He starts dreaming, I bet, of French fries, and Big Macs at Danbury and then frozen yogurt at the rest stop just as we enter the Mass Pike. We'll reach Boston by nine and I'll carry him from the car, where he's fallen asleep in his car seat, to his bed with bottom drawers, three floors walk-up in a triple-decker on the "Line," Beacon Street dividing Cambridge and Somerville.

I'd done the five-hour drive that morning, so I could pick him up from his playgroup and then drive the five to six hours back that same day. I'll repeat that on Sunday, Every other weekend. For nine years. We

came to know our favorite exits and the food we'd get and the many routes in and out of the enormous city on the East Coast and the significance of Framingham on the Mass Pike when I was gunning to get home to Boston.

The bobble-head boy, as he dozed on the Mass Pike, in the car seat at the back of my car, is a father today, of a just-beginning-boy-toddler, almost a year old. He sends photos and videos every day of my grandson, posting to a shared album on Google. In one my son is sitting on the grass in Brooklyn's Prospect Park and making faces over his shoulder at his own son, who is dissolving in giggles, his eyes sparkling with unre-fined joy. It's my favorite photo for now. We are all home.

Selected Thoughts of a Pandemic Population

by Mandira Pattnaik

All my dreams are scentless white flowers
all my yearnings
earnest, thriving, intimate.

They're
scattered volcanic islands on placid lakes. Cradled in plate tectonics
and mantle plumes, not
long enough to last. While a day is all I count *now*,
no more no less, I bring only small buns and smaller wants
to the modest table at our home.
It's a farmer's simple house, tiny attic, verdant hill slope,
petunias on windowsill, cane chairs,
smoke rising from the chimney, and you and me having tea.

If you're tempted so, a morning to wander too,
up the rocks, sun beams,
smiles for strangers
ending up being friends.

My dreams are
Stepping-stones,
evolving,
diverging,
sometimes drowning.
They're struggling, trying to fit, all-in-one, one-in-all,
staying put for this time to pass, shooting stars, random
scribbled thoughts.



Maureen Paxton, *Red Bead No. 2*,
oil on canvas, 2019.

shrimp

by Rob Stone

i want to be a mantis shrimp
simply so i can examine your eyes
because the color defies me.
a few more shades on the spectrum
and i'll easily define the hue.

nevermind the tears. i know, i know.
two and a half days is not enough.
i had to go, i had to go.
two and a half sandwiches,
two and a half dinners.

santa cruz is pretty,
but not as pretty as you.

i want to be a pistol shrimp,
so i can defy physics,
punch a hole through water
to relieve my suffering rage.
i picture us as a triptych,
me on the left hugging your waist,
you in the middle hiding your face,
nothing but blankness on the far-right page.

route 17 is winding and breathtaking,
but not as breathtaking as you.

i'm memorizing diminutives,
pet names and sweet talk.
never been a vocal man,
always been quick to balk.
i like the way your toes feel,
the shorts you sport, your little socks.

i want to curl up like a cooked shrimp,
bend my neck into your hair,
let you occupy the space between
my clavicle and bare chest,
the spot you nestle into perfectly.
not many things have worked with me,
not many at all.

nevermind my spoiling your guitar,
all my dark notes,
my minor chords.
i'm happy to feel natural,
not coarse, locked down, forced.
i've said a lot already;
forgive the rambling,
but here's one more:

i've held a lot of hands,
none as right as yours.

Midwifing Loss

by Erica Manto-Paulson

A pregnant mother lost a baby at fourteen weeks and buried the fetus behind a woodpile in her backyard. Before that, she asked if I would see his small body inside a blue ceramic bowl in her fridge and how the baby's arm moved at the elbow hinge when she touched him. He had a torso and legs and two palms that would have clenched into fists when he cried.

Who can bear the shape of loss delivered in a paralyzing gaze and all the ways it would have looked like you? From the small, cold mouth of survival, we hinge at the joint and move. Let us remember how we would have held on, where we would have loved.

Rocket Fuel, on the Pennsylvania Border

by Caleb Bromberg

i. corn

After enough corn fields I
start to get a sense for how
the folks who grow the corn to
feed the cows who fart out the
corn to be breathed in by the
birds of the sky and the beasts of the field
—America's rocket fuel—
learn to tell the difference
between one ear
and the next

ii. moon

My dad watched the space race
on the
wooded-in TV set on the beige carpet
and the
Star Trek pajamas and he still thinks
that the
moon landing was real for god's sake
and for
all we know it could be.

Then his dad died of lung cancer.
Must have been breathing something in.

iii. politicians

You ever notice those yard signs
for politicians?

Yea me neither well actually I guess
I have

Except I don't know at all what a
Commissioner does

And it never changed my vote
I just go

For the ones who seem like they've got the most
rocket fuel.

It's a metaphor, my dude
Just like how

The hilarious anachronous quaint
small town sits

In all its mayoral upheaval
it sits

Precisely a three-minute drive from the
highway rest stop

With the Hardees and the shitter and the
trail mix.

iv. pileups

My dad has this daydream about doing this cross-country trip where he never touches a highway—back roads only. I think that sounds cool but I also think if you want to “see America” you really gotta check out the whole family of road-killed deer right under the billboard that says You Are Now Entering Sovereign Seneca Land or the five-car pileup right under the one that says Fireworks King Of America Buy One Get Two Free just over the Pennsylvania border. It’s a metaphor, my dude. A fortuitous juxtaposition. I pulled over and bought one. It was shaped like a rocket.

