

THIMBLE

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Thimble Literary Magazine

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

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Brief Guidelines for Submission

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

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

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

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

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

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

Cover art
Abiu Daniel Benavides, *The Giver*,
oil on canvas, 2015.

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Editor's Note

When the adults were gone, I used to eat on top of the refrigerator, as a kid. It was easy enough—climb on the counter, then take a big step to the top, skipping over the microwave because I knew, even then, that wouldn't support my weight. What a tall throne for a child in a game of make believe and sneaking.

I mentioned this odd habit to my husband the other day, and he told me sitting on top of fridges is a leading cause of death in children because fridges are top-heavy. Why he knows this, I can't say. Looking at the fridge I have now, this makes sense; it does not look perfectly rectangular, which is the sort of detail a child would miss. I suppose, then, I was lucky.

Some children had playhouses or made forts. I sat on top of fridges. There's probably a metaphor in there somewhere.

In any case, I guess what I'm saying is, in games of shelter making, there is always risk involved. Risk of playhouses getting soggy in the rain, risk of tree houses falling apart, or risk of being crushed by a massive Frigidaire. But wasn't the risk part of the reason for doing it, right? Children aren't trying to make the Colosseum. I didn't know why, but I knew the top of the fridge was forbidden.

So, then, why read poetry if poetry doesn't pay the bills, doesn't hold up on rainy days? Because it's what we can do when the world seems too big, when we know we're in danger but don't know why. I don't know if that makes sense. I am writing this in an easy chair like a normal human who does normal things.

I hope you enjoy this issue, and pick an odd spot to read it in, simply because you can.

NADIA ARIOLI



Harold Ackerman, *Onion Soup*,
digital photograph, 2018.

You're So Beautiful

by travis tate

for Leah

Water is cold, imagine the coils of black hair
freshly washed by the afternoon ray of light.

I keep telling you you're beautiful,
almost insane this way you keep tripping over

yourself. We feel free in the home of a more
established writer. & now I kiss you ten times

a day. Great courage it must take, unwed
& unkept are the small hearts we have.

I remember something wise you said to me,
as we're walking down a street named Cherrywood.

Gleeful, you whisper the words of Elton John.
Then I watch you spin diamonds around the people

on the dance floor. It's all angelic, our movement
around each other. Another time, laughing loudly

in a quiet coffee shop. See, time is irrelevant,
masculine. Most importantly, time is wrong.

Dorothy Sayers, Mystery Writer

by Renee Emerson

In the beginning, there was a loaded tree,
two bodies, romantic intrigue and a God.
Obedience is the catalyst. Satan
is the villain, but we are the who dunnit,
playing like orphan children in a garden.

It is true that all good stories involve orphans,
the early abandoned. We love their lack
of loneliness, their stalwart adaptability.

My daughters play that the mud is soup,
the treehouse a boxcar. They tell me how
they came to be here, growing wild
as if sprung up from the dust, or taken,
gently, from a bone.

Nightscape

by Joan McNerney

Fog horns sound through
air soaked in blackness.
All evening long listening
to hiss of trucks, cars.

Shadows brush across walls
as trees trace their branches.
Gathering and waving
together then swaying apart.

While I sleep, stars glide
through heaven making
their appointed rounds in
ancient sacred procession.

Dreams as smooth as rose
petals spill into my mind
growing wild patches in
this dark garden of night.



Linda Dimitroff, *Falling Down 3*,
mixed metals and acrylic on wood, 2019.

Red

by Eliza Swan

i.

red is lucky. it has to be
a red bike. dad spoke to mom in
mandarin, their secret code for
santa-claus surprises. a red
envelope of sound i did not
understand. january sidewalk-
scuffed knees, the bike frame was too big
my legs stretched past center, toes caught
pedals. wheels turned few times before
i fell. mother said, "it's okay,
go again. you will get it."
candy discs dad buys me souring
plumb, near-purple like scabs sealing
knees and elbows. dad did not see
me fall. friday evening pickups
he took pictures of me riding.
i half smiled, a front tooth missing.
red is lucky new year money, my silk
jacket, the band on my easter hat,
my grandma's swedish christmas boot,
carnations that ride ocean waves after
dad's ashes. we thought he would object
to white.

ii.

women played cards in
dim red light. i climbed
cafe's back stairs. my dad
never there inside
only I sat with bawd,

her workers, playing
13-card poker, i
was 13. two hands
of five, one of three
winner takes all. the

bawd's sister
chopped my hair
short like hers

worker women at
a low oval table
had long hair, short names
they liked to touch my
blonde stunted strands. dad

liked my long earlobes,
called them lucky. a
lighted corner sign
said Massage. i did
not ask, slept there when

told to. i
never did
learn poker.

iii.

shellac nails red talons picked apart crab's armor
revealed its brain she called a delicacy, "try it."
mouth: gold mush submission both viscous and mealy.
a jade bracelet slid up and down her wrist.
long-life lucky shackle, she squeezed one over
my soapy skin; wrist bones folded hurt. at recess
playing, swinging, I cracked it on the bars.
grown now i do not get my nails done. no shiny talons
on my fingers. will not make my hands into
ornaments less ready to play, to write, to fight.
lucky is what people call it when they touch,
use, or hurt others without blame
like a virgin or a scapegoat or a child with red hair.

Antivenin

by Liana Joy Christensen

I met Stalin's granddaughter once, on an island off the coast of Sardinia. I was there looking for an almost-extinct species of cone shell—the *Lapis lazuli*. Such an exquisite name; such potent venom.

I first saw her from a distance, an old woman, dressed in white, looking out to sea. I took her for one of the local *nonnas*, perhaps mourning a long-ago drowned husband or son. She wasn't there every day.

Mostly I kept to myself, retiring each night after an early dinner in the village tavern. I'd spend my evenings pouring over the current charts and writing reports. One night, after a month of fruitless work, I decided to stay on at the bar. That night I heard the story of how a young woman had turned up on the island alone, fifteen years after the end of the war. By the simple expedient of paying ample cash in advance, she'd rented an abandoned fisherman's shack. She did not hide who she was.

Money is money, said one of the old men raising a sardonic glass. Though no stranger could ever expect to be fully accepted in a Sardinian fishing village, somehow Stalin's granddaughter seemed to have found a way to be there and not be there at the same time. She did them no harm. They did not wish her ill. Not even when, after ten years, she took up the habit of dressing all in white. Sardinians are touchy. This might have been seen as an insult to the traditional black garb of most of the women over forty. But the teller of the tale simply grinned, revealing his missing front teeth, and made the expressive gesture for *macca*. Crazy.

She didn't strike me as crazy, the only time I talked to her. It was late one afternoon of my final week on the island. I'd carefully netted

through all the tidal pools west of the village, finding nothing but disappointment. As usual I'd picked up all manner of plastic garbage from the beaches, which I would put in the large bin behind the tavern. No doubt the people thought me *macca*, too.

She was sitting on a rock, still warm from the afternoon's sun. I clambered up and sat down—not too close. She spoke first, in clear English, with only the trace of an accent. She asked me about my bag, and I told her I'd come looking for a cone shell and found nothing but plastic. It's the tides, I explained, and the temperature. Pollution. Everything is out of place.

To my surprise, she knew quite a bit about ecology. She had come to Sardinia, she told me, because there had never been wolves on the island. The shell I'm looking for is highly venomous, I said, but it's not native here. Neither am I, she replied, turning to look at the sea. We were silent for a while.

As it grew darker, the cresting waves began to glow with phosphorescence. She looked down, speaking with an odd intensity, *Creatures migrate all the time*. We went back to looking at the countless sparks of greenish light. *Maybe even souls*, she added, more to herself than me.

I never saw her again. The last few days I was busy finishing up reports and writing a new grant proposal. I took the evening ferry back to the mainland. Watching the phosphorescence in its wake I thought of her. Perhaps I should have said I was researching cone shell toxin in search of better medicine for unbearable pain. I regret now that I didn't.



Brian Michael Barbeito, *Carnival Mosaic 3*,
digital photograph, 2019.

Dear Future

by Clara Bush Vadala

I watched a spider build a nest inside
my steering wheel. I'm sorry baby, try
to understand. Am I supposed to cry
because the spider's leg is quaking while

it tries to spin its web? The car is too
fast, it won't stick. I see a ramen box
unfold across the road. I don't want you
born of expired condoms. Here, the cost

outweighs the benefits of that. I once
believed my hands were strong enough to toss
you. But they're weak. Can't rip the uterus
from dogs in surgery how they were taught.

They were taught that pregnancy was not made
for the dogs unless it improves the breed.

Flowers for Maria

by Nathanael Stolte

I think you should know
she smiles in another language
like hibiscus

her spine is ornamental bamboo
hollowed out
filled to the brim with living water

Don't spill a drop

You don't get scars like hers by
reading the directions
or asking for forgiveness

Her anger is as silent as a Miami Lyft driver
She'll fold her arms & lower her head
so she can look up at me & down at me
at the same damn time

Her superpower is
waiting in airports & riding on planes
for whole days
without the appearance
of having slept
on the floor or a bench
or not having slept at all

She'll teach you that the distance
between comfort & safety
is as thin as the distance
between potential & promise

& that it takes two hands to catch a frog
the right way

I think you should know
I've never been skilled at putting how I feel into words
that haven't had time to ferment into memory
like dandelion wine on the first day of summer
It's cowardly & simpler to wait until
thoughts simmer for a few seasons
rather than tell someone
how you feel right now with a poem
It's cowardly & simple to wait
until they are tired of listing or have gone away

Everything is easier when it's already too late

I think you should know
I bring her flowers on Fridays
not for the alliteration
but because it makes her hibiscus blossom

& cost what it may

clabaza
mariposita
tienes mi corazon



Lorette C. Luzajic, *Goodbye Kitty*,
mixed media on canvas, 2019.

Bedminster Women circa 1930

by Pen Kease

sat in crumbling doorways,
wore sacking aprons
and men's flat caps.

Narrowed eyes watched
customers pick through
old linen, chipped china.

Sometimes, a market stall—
more often a tablecloth
on the damp pavement—

apples or eggs or trinkets,
field flowers, children's clothes,
mended pots and pans.

Each woman smoked
a clay pipe, the bowl turned
down in case it should rain.

Kilimanjaro

by Elizabeth Jaeger

Dinner at six. Bed at eight. Trek at midnight. I ate little, a mix of anxiety and adrenaline making digestion difficult. I didn't sleep much either. Dutifully, I slithered into my sleeping bag, curled up into a tight ball, and tucked my head inside, hoping my breath would warm me. It didn't. Frost covered the ground once the sun set and despite the layers I wore, I shivered. At some point, I must have slipped into a hazy half sleep, because when the guide's voice ripped through the air I suffered a moment of confusion. But the commotion outside my tent quickly summoned my consciousness. I was alone, traveling friendless, since Jessie had no interest in a brutal multiday hike. However, scores of other tour groups camped in the vicinity, and we'd all be making the ascent to the summit together. Yawning, I slipped my feet into my boots and unzipped my tent. The air was frigid. I could see my breath. But the sky, a canvas of flickering stars was stunning. I couldn't see more than a foot in front of me, but I had a flashlight. I clicked it on and the guide smile at me.

"Ready?"

"As ready as I'll ever be."

"Slow. Remember. Slow is very important. No race."

"No race," I shook my head. Already I could feel the pressure building. The dull throb behind my eyes. High altitudes were not my friend. I knew that well, having survived—just barely—my trek years prior in Nepal. For the last two days I had been sucking back Advil like Pez. It had worked. The pain had yet to erupt or cripple me. But luck would not hold out. After only a few steps my lungs tightened and breathing became

difficult as the oxygen levels thinned. Feeling my pulse in my temples I closed my eyes, pain ricocheted off my skull like a pinball.

But I wouldn't stop. I refused to even rest. Rhythm, momentum, that's what would keep me going. Slowly, steadily, one foot in front of the other. I tripped, stumbled, and swayed, feeling first drunk, then hungover. With less oxygen to my brain my thoughts became disconnected, my consciousness floating, hovering at times above my body. Keeping the flashlight poised on the path, I forced myself to follow it. It focused my attention, kept me moving. I was grateful for the darkness. The blazing sun would have burned my eyes, ignited a fuse and detonated a migraine. The cold also helped, like ice, it numbed the pain, shaved the edge off of it.

Others on the trail stopped periodically to rest. My guide continued to encourage me to do the same, but I feared stagnation. What if I sat down and couldn't get back up? What if I dared to break stride and couldn't recover it? No, I could slow down, I was already moving much more sluggishly, a sort of inverse relationship between my pulse and my feet, the quicker, more persistent my heartbeat, the more lackadaisical my steps became. I closed my eyes. Whether opened or closed, darkness enveloped me. Could I sleep and still walk? I yawned.

The path was steep. If only I could see the top, my destination. If only I had an inkling as to how much further I had to go. Willpower alone could propel me forward. But darkness robbed me of a marker. Soon I couldn't even stay upright. I tripped over each pebble, every divot, no matter how inconsequential. With roughly two hundred meters to go, my knees completely buckled. Collapsing in a heap on the dirt, pain seared my head. I winced, one hand on each temple, I pushed with what little strength remained. How hard would I have to push, to squeeze my brain through my nose? The mountain lurched. I keeled over again.

When the nausea subsided, I tried to stand, but my legs refused to support my weight. I'd get halfway up and tumble back to the earth. But it wasn't just strength I lacked. My sense of balance completely betrayed me. It was as if I were on a ship at sea in the midst of a great storm. The path swayed, the the trail rocked. Never before had I ever been so tired, so emotionally and physically spent. I wanted to lay down and force the

sky to stop spinning wildly above me. But I had to keep moving. Stopping would end in defeat.

So I crawled, like a baby unable to walk. I forced my hands forward, my fingernails digging into the dirt. I shuffled my knees. Finding a new rhythm was a challenge, but a shoddy, slow, and ugly rhythm was better than stagnation.

As I paused, lifting my head, opening my mouth, and gulping air, a faint blaze burned in the distance. The first light of dawn ripped open the horizon. A jolt of panic struck me like a lightning bolt. Faster. I had to go faster or I'd miss the sunrise. On all fours I scrambled and somehow reached the summit. Laying down, I stared at sky, at the stars which were starting to fade. I thanked God for not letting me fail. And then I stood up.

The early morning sunlight glinted off of the glacier. A pink and orange glow illuminated the night. In silence and reverence, I watched the earth wake up. Pain had never been so worth the reward.

Of Salt Caves and Ultrasounds

by Adina Kopinsky

White-gloved hands thread a camera through my insides,
mansplain my secrets—

I dream of headlights and kneepads, spelunking
salt caves that whorl around me like a fourth dimension,
circles of brown and grey, air damp and flavorful,
I scour my innermost tubes for a lost and future self—

My uterus is a mandolin the doctor can play
like wildfire, his fingers quick against the strings
of my spine, the fourteen lines of my heart,
the seven true bars of my rib cage.

I am lying in a bed of salt, white sheets and strange sounds,
asking questions of the earth and air; thinned to gossamer,
effaced into a fossil of my former self—

the wind whispers *mother* as though it was a prelude.



Christopher Jon VanWyck, *Be Still* (1),
sculpture, 2012.



Christopher Jon VanWyck, *Be Still (2)*,
sculpture, 2012.

Don't Repeat This

by Katie Manning

The first time I went to a slumber party
was the first time I tried to tell a joke.
I'd heard it at school. I didn't get it,
but I laughed. I didn't want to seem
stupid. This joke was on my mind:
"How can you tell if you're in Mexico?"
The twins ran to tell their mom.
I apologized and confessed that I had
no idea what it meant. She explained
and kindly suggested that I not
repeat what I didn't understand.

The first time I went to a slumber party
was the first time a group of girls
rejected me, but not because I told
a bad joke. The girls wanted to make
a dance routine. I played video games
with the twins' older brother instead.
Later the girls said I couldn't join them
because I didn't know their dance,
so I returned to the older brother
and the video games and eventually
curled to sleep away from the crowd.

The first time I went to a slumber party,
I called home for a ride early the next
morning. My aunt picked me up. My
family had been in an accident, our
minivan slammed on the passenger
side, right at the seat where my body
would've been if I were not at the party
instead. One sister had knee surgery
and had to be carried upstairs each
Sunday at church; the other sister
sobbed each time her back went out.
My mom said God must have been
looking out for me. I didn't repeat this.

The Sweet Potato

by Bebe Carlson

Carved from the seed, you were
Vexed and misshapen.
Woody imprints on a solid frame,
Sprouting limbs and jagged, forlorn dimples,
A sheet of pollen dusted away to reveal some freckles and
 outstretched veins.
Your cockles intertwined—
Fleshy, taut arteries pulsing beneath milky skin.
Rough.
Stretched.
Canvased in the dirt, your beginning.

I never yet thought much of yams.
Now, as I peel away your exterior, I know that yams aren't soft until you
 teach them to survive unbearable elements.
Your roots continue; they're outstretched, awaiting sun and
 water's embrace. Neglected, the infected core spreads its rot.

My daughter learns to squeeze my hand
And what it means to reach out.
She doesn't know she'll be reaching forever, like the yam,
Intent on surviving outside of the ground, continuing to grow in
 unfit places,
Awkwardly burgeoning malleable twigs that are grasping for
 something to hold; such beautiful organics that are blossoming for
 a world it doesn't know.

Here, all of your complexities are showing:
The ones that belong, and the ones that do not. I can't neglect
things growing
But I can delightfully watch the unfolding.



Dan Collins; *Untitled Moth 1*;
gel pen, ink, colored pencil, and watercolor on patterned paper;
2019.

The Harvest Is Late

by Travis Lovin

Coffee

Years before cancer spread in the marrow of his bones and he sat quiet at first and he told me to drink it black, I sat with him for his morning coffee for the first time and I could tell his curiosities were sitting just under the surface of words. I lit a cigarette and he didn't lecture, and he didn't lecture when his son came to him and said, Dad, I'm gay and I'm HIV positive. He took a sip from his mug and started in now, and his response to his son then was, Why didn't you tell me sooner?

"I sure do wish they'd get this corn knocked down. I can't see a thing." He smiles. "I remember my mother saying that every year around this time. She hated not being able to see across the fields from her garden in the mornings. She said she felt like she couldn't see God."

"Memory is a funny thing, ain't it? I was reading the other day about the molecular mechanism of memory formation and how each memory is a literal act of creation. A literal act of creation! What a phrase, huh? The color of the trees for example. Our eyes take in that particular color, the rods and cones and what not, and our brain creates a particular molecular structure to reflect that color, that shade of that color. Fascinating stuff! Now, where it really gets good is in the recalling of that memory, that shade of that color. Each time we recall it, we attempt to rebuild that initial structure as true to the original memory as we can. But, we can't do it perfectly. Time and mood and how much sleep we've had the night before and are we feeling insecure or sad or ecstatic. It all plays a part. So, each time it gets rebuilt a little differently and the more we recall it the more imperfect it becomes. They was saying that if you met a young lady

at a party and hit it off and at the end of the night you walked her home and said goodbye and kissed her and never thought about that moment for thirty years, you'd remember it more true to how it really happened than if you had thought about the kiss every day. Whatcha think about that? I tell ya, there are folks in this world that have made us all more enlightened because of their pursuits and I am thankful for them."

The train rolled through after a while and I wondered if my recollection of the dream I had about my mother—his daughter—was less true to how the events unfolded those many nights leading up to her death, the dream where we sat in the dark in the grass near the tracks and she was silent until the train came upon us and she began to speak but I couldn't hear.

The last time I joined him for his morning coffee I brought it to him so he didn't have to walk too much and I brought him a blanket because the cancer had taken the mass of him that used to make me think him immortal. I told him, "I was reading the other day that there are three deaths, not one. The first death is when your biological processes cease. The second is when your organic matter, your body or your ashes, is laid in the ground. And, the third is when someone says your name out loud for the last time. Whatcha think about that? I tell ya, Papaw, there are folks in this world that have made us all more enlightened because of their pursuits and I am thankful for them and I don't think you have to worry about death because I'll say your name out loud every morning and I'll teach my children to do the same and I sure do wish they'd knock this corn down. I can't see god."

Window

The way the rows of it ran along with them like some creature striding with legs infinite and his forehead against the window watching the race was his favorite part. He didn't mind the smell of his father's cigarette or the warm breeze through the window let down a little up front. He wouldn't know until years later that they divorced because his father didn't love himself and because he never had a concept of home and went looking for it everywhere. He wouldn't be mad when he found out, he would get to know the feeling too.

"A lot of rain lately, I reckon. The harvest is late. We'll stop at the store when we get into town and pick up a few things.

"Son, what do you think it is to be a man in this world?"

He's ten and he shrugs his shoulders.

"Well, I'm not sure either, but I'll tell you what my old man told me. He said, a man should be strong, simple, and quiet." He smiles. "He didn't mean strong of body. He meant strong of mind. He didn't mean simple as in plain. He meant simple as in requiring little outside of yourself for sustenance. He didn't mean quiet as in volume. He meant quiet as in listening more than one speaks. Whatcha think about that?" His father swung between quiet all day in bed and dancing around his apartment listening to records with bourbon in hand.

"You know, Son. I was reading the other day about space and time and I have to say, phew, a lot of it makes my head spin in a way I can't control."

He's ten and he shrugs his shoulders.

"And, they was saying that even if the likelihood of life arising on one of these space rocks we call planets was one in a billion, the vastness of our perceivable universe is such that them odds would predict at least a hundred thousand earths." He slaps his forehead. He smiles.

He sees his dad's mouth form the word *wow*.

Escape

Bare feet hard on the soil between the rows of corn motionless in late summer Louisiana dark and his breaths increase and deep, come and go bouncing between the stalks like humming into the fan blades. He remembers his mother's voice doing the same calling from the house and how he felt like the child king of some forest kingdom, as free as he hoped the months of planning would make him. He didn't plan on the harvest being late. It would slow him down but he would still be miles away before anyone noticed. He had been preparing his speech during the hourless days behind the bars and how he would lean his face against them at night when the only sounds were far off wailing of mad men and think about being in the car with his dad.

They hadn't come to visit and the kids were crying and she wasn't when they led him out of the courtroom.

"Listen, people make mistakes and we have to take responsibility for them and learn from them and move on and ensure we don't make them again, right? Well, look, I made mistakes and I sat everyday in that cell and took responsibility and I went looking for the feeling of home everywhere when y'all were right there in front of me. I ain't asking for forgiveness. I'm just telling you that I'm here and I'll show you every day that a man is not beyond redemption in this world."

That's what he'd say and when he did the kids would cry and she wouldn't.

Awe

His neighbor asked him to keep the trunk in his garage while he was away and not to look in it and not to ask questions.

"My buddy will be dropping by tonight to get it, his name is Los. He just got out and he's gonna be staying with us for a while until he gets reacquainted with everything on the outside."

When he opened the door the largest man he'd ever seen was there silhouetted by the only street light for miles.

"You must be Los."

He watched him easily drag the trunk across the street and then reappear.

"You got time to burn one?"

The two men sat in chairs rocking and overlooking the field of corn and the floor was scribbles of sidewalk chalk pictures of cats and the children's names with backwards facing letters.

"A lot of rain lately. My great grandmother used to hate not being able to see out. She said she couldn't see god."

They sat in silence for a while. He didn't want to push him to talk if he didn't want to. His neighbor said it had been fifteen years he'd been in there. He supposed that changed a man and sitting there with it terrified and fascinated him.

They passed the orange glow back and forth.

He could see his curiosities were sitting just under the surface of words.

Listen more than you speak.

The large man said, “Ya know, man. When you live out years in a ten-by-ten and get a few hours in a space a little bigger, surrounded by fence, you get to thinking about the vastness of time and space. How much time has existed and will exist? How much space is out there? It’s wild. A man has a lot of time to think when confined and I’ve come to the conclusion that redemption has a lot to do with the staying in awe of things, having that childlike appreciation of everything big and small that is beautiful around us and in us. Think about it. Out of all the space that’s ever existed and all of the time that’s ever existed you and I are sitting in the same space right now in the exact same time. Ain’t that something?”

The Sayings of the Desert Fathers

by Paula Puolakka

In the book *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* it is said
that one can bear all the difficulties of one's environment
—the limited food and water supplies and the lack of communication—
but what one has to truly fight against
is the urge to masturbate, day and night and night and day.

These are the words of the holiest and the wisest
and obviously, the best topic to joke about when the monks happened
to meet
random people on a random basis.

It's the final test in everyone's life, to overcome the animal inside and
to turn yourself into the desert the monks saw, heard, tasted,
and felt around them:
to become the home of no desire.

The *dry* is needed to balance out the *moist* in your core:
water is the pool of life and the component that drives us towards
the creation of new forms and is connected to both sex and love
that are the concepts made to describe the silent oasis inside
by the apparatus which decided to call itself the brain and which is
the machine of subjective illusions and hallucinations, the home of
the private games.

To surround yourself with the dryness is to become one with the divine
that has no material form and this way does not work as a mirror
for anyone's subjective views but instead,
seeks to get the balance right,
to diminish the water animal inside of you until Death is all that
there is to face
and it's, in fact, a path to a broader world and life,
beyond the concepts and everything
we can see, heart, taste, and feel around us.



Brian Michael Barbeito, *Carnival Mosaic 6*,
digital photograph, 2019.

Wild

by Christen Noel

I.

A black bear breaches the school fence, its lopsided gallop trailing mulch behind paws.

Every man with a pitchfork: gunpowder grey.

Every kid playing hopscotch: corralled to screen doors.

This is how we know they are safe. This is how we know the distance of binary stars.

The sun carves half-moons into chests, hats tilted back. A man spreads his hands into prints in the mud, each claw mark a pressed punctuation near the swings.

Remember when little legs pumped against sky. Legends of the chains wrapping all the way around, a spark smoldering somewhere below the diaphragm if only to say *it's been done before*. Even now, when summer pulls them out before noon, they kick against clouds—their soft bodies rise and fall in a metronomic *tick*.

The bear disappears into sycamore bark. All black into white, stripped and left in the grass. The men scratch their heads and climb into trucks, a dent in one the shape of Clingman's Dome. I wonder if he remembers

how it happened. How the world can break into calibrated points, each one a disfigurement of bees.

II.

I am raising a wild thing. The wings of her ribs beat against cave walls, and every day I work to set them free. Each morning, a system of opening doors, her pudgy arms locked around my neck. I ask her, *Has there ever been more than this?*

When she was born—her feet the shape of claws, her mouth a cup of soft fur—I watched her run through the halls, doctors extending to catch her long limbs before dark. She escaped them all, tumbling into my breasts, her tiny spine a rooted tree. *So often this is not how it goes*, she says. So often mothers work their fingers to brittle tips, afraid someone will ask why they crafted the bars too wide, left the door unhinged or without a latch.

I watch her tame crocodiles with her bare teeth. Once, a goat's hoof hanging from her lips.

A year after her birth she came to me at night. Her hair the sweet gold of barley. Her ribcage the circumference of a sequoia limb. She perched on the edge of my bed in silence until I could no longer stand the compression of my skin. I knew this was the beginning of the end of things. The way she looked out the window for new moons to touch. The way her eyes became a language I hadn't learned to speak.

III.

The men search for days. Maybe years. They lift up every rock into the air and call, *Do you see her here?*

At the end of a two-step, some song the men play at the end of cold war, they find the bear clinging to a poplar tree.

They pull her down and extract her snarl, remove words like *phloem* and *cambium cell*. Nothing left but her wet snout and the absence of incisors. Maybe the hind leg of a deer.

I wonder if her mother knows she is there. If her mother is tucked away in some blackberry bush, the thorns pricked deep in the soft pad of her paw. Or perhaps feeding other cubs from her body, their mouths pulling pint after pint from the break of her chest. Will she let them go the same way? If she could, would she eat them up one by one, let them grow and play in the warmth of her gut.

We hear the trucks pull away, bear-full.

The children return to swings and rusty slides. Mothers tie leashes around their babies' waists, mostly girls, strong ropes that tether tiny hip bones to hands. In the evening, they march them in parallel lines, hair pulled back into obedient shapes.

This is how we keep them safe, they say, as a blue sun teeters on rooftops, almost afraid to fall.

Einstein's Brain

by Michael Steffen

One jar contained a conch-shaped mass
the color of clay after firing, a fist-sized chunk

wedged beside a pouch of pinkish-white
strings, like bloated dental floss.

Another held fragments of luminous,
rectangular tissue roughly the size

of granola bars. The pathologist on duty
at Princeton Hospital the day that Einstein died

stole the contents of his celebrated cranium,
and for most of his professional life,

Thomas Harvey diligently sliced,
photographed and studied the brain,

hoping to find some key behind
 $E = mc^2$ —some prefrontal, occipital reason

for Einstein's extraordinary skills.
When he found no markers, he ferried

slivers of Einstein across the country
to an august body of peers, hoping

for a discovery. No one found anything
remotely odd with Einstein's brain.

Twenty-five years, and nothing to show for it. Eventually,
Harvey's obsession cost him

his job, his marriage, his career at Princeton.
He kept the brain in a cooler in his lab,

tucked behind a box labeled *Costa Cider*.
Should someone stop by to seek a memento,

Harvey would casually plop the brain
on a wooden cheese board, shave off a piece

then shove what was left of it back in its jar.
Why covet the brain of that mild-mannered genius

only to give random pieces away?
Harvey gradually got rid of the organ,

perhaps because his dogged interest
and fixation turned into wasted years,

and the source of Einstein's brilliance
passed over him like the shadow of a condor.

As for the brain that worked out theories
of relativity, fission, the law of photoelectric effect,

quantum mechanics, Avogadro's number, the size
of molecules, dual nature of quanta and why

the sky is blue—it survives as shavings
between glass slides carefully placed

in keepsake boxes in cartons brimming,
in bare-beamed, cobwebbed attics.



Abiu Daniel Benavides, *Convolutud*,
oil on canvas, 2015.

Georgia O'Keeffe's
Series I, No. 8, 1919

by Karen L. George

I

Green apple split top to bottom
encapsulated in a blue severed heart

hugged by rhythmic pink pulmonary vessels
clasping lung sacs—twin bellows

Will the halved mirror images
stitch the fissures whole?

II

My parents, first husband,
all emphysema.

Second one,
lung cancer.

Me as a child, asthma,
inhaler hidden—my secret defect.

My mother is an aviary . . .

by Sarah Wallis

My mother is an aviary
as full of light
as full of shadow.

Turquoise in summer takes rooms
by the sea to watch herring gulls, star-
billed soarers glide thermals. Riding
waves below Arcadia, Aurora, Andalusian
Dream, and Tamar Belle, the St Mawes Ferry,
workaday bones for the open ocean.

Allusions to a literary lunch
long ago, sat on a bench with Bloom's
glass of claret and a gorgonzola sandwich.

Shouts love at the world, sees what comes
back. Friend to obdurate felines, dislikes
buttons. Likes both scones, and puffins,
enormous bills their due.

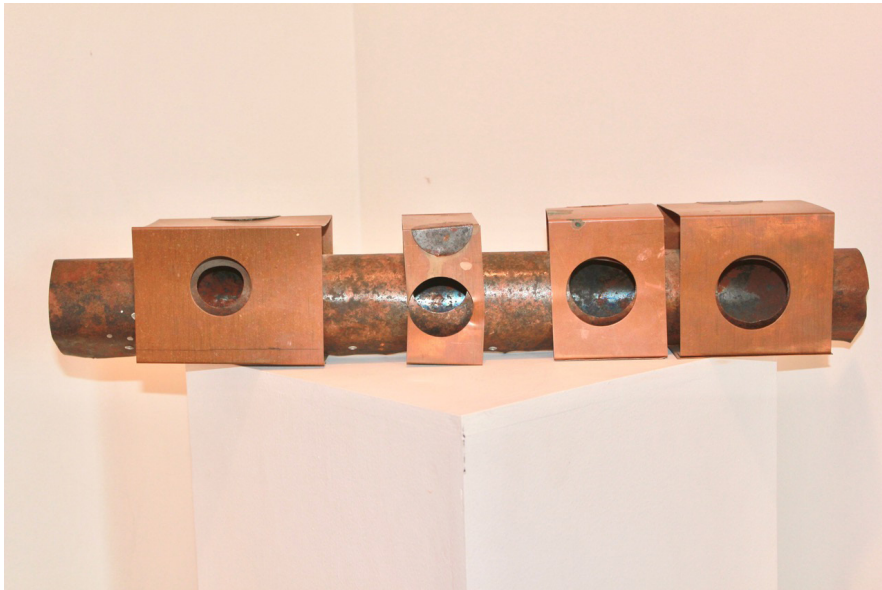
Amber in winter takes acupuncture
a fairy tap of magic to pierce the French
skin-care regimen with tiny sparking spears
and—zap—fuchsia and blue silk
and—zap—a memory

the indigo violence of falcons
tearing each other to pieces over dinner

and—zap—tears for a blithe peacock
named Percy, run over, his train of tail
stopped sailing.

My mother is an aviary
all lapis lazuli
all kingfisher blue

the feline and the feathered
find an all-weather ark. And she is my mother,
an ear on the phone and a beacon in the dark.



Linda Dimitroff, *Round We Go*,
copper and tin, 2018.

Golden Field Guide

by Rebecca Beardsall

There is no pocket-size book
like my mother's *Golden Field Guide*
of North American Birds. I can't trace
her pencil marks—her penmanship precise,
calculated capital loops like her mother's.
1983, Boulder Woods neatly placed,
cornered, a sighting *fine singers; nesting in crotches*
of shrubs. My guide, a collection of notes, gathered
from letters, penned in my unperfect
cramped graphite scratches, marks my
lineage. Photos my mom shared
with me like crumbs scattered on frozen
Pennsylvania ground. We echo: chins,
little girl noses, and blue-green eyes.
Mary ~~begat~~ birthed Ruth; and Ruth ~~begat~~ birthed Marilyn;
and Marilyn ~~begat~~ birthed Rebecca and her siblings;
Ruth died of cancer spread so far they lost the start
three years before I arrived. Mary, awaiting a lunch date,
died of a heart attack a month beyond my birth.
But they knew me—I was in them all along. The world
was waiting. It couldn't contain us all. Each day
I witness their voices reverberating—where I gather
their stories in my own yellow book
with bright blue barn swallows.

Lesbian Shoes

by Caroline Earleywine

In college, my gay friend called my shoes
Lesbian shoes. They were Birkenstock
knockoffs, worn fake leather sandals.
Anytime I wore them, or anything
he deemed unfashionable: *Lesbian*.

One Friday night, he declared that maybe I was
a lesbian. Everyone laughed at this wild thought,
an idea as ridiculous as their boyfriends'
wearing stilettos. My roommate once called me
Obviously Pretty, meaning too blonde, too

cheerleader, too Cinderella not to decorate
a man's arm, hope he chases after me
at midnight. Me, a *lesbian*? Even more
far-fetched than any fairytale we grew
up reading, than any dream I dared

to dream. I played along, joked that maybe
this explained my questionable fashion
choices, why every time I found myself
in a man's arms, I wanted to crawl out
of my skin. And maybe his queerness

saw my queerness, maybe it was a truth
I could only face dressed in alcohol and laughter,
disguised as a joke, the glass slipper I tried on
in the glitter of night and took back
off again when morning came.

Inner Monologue with Hors d'Oeuvres

by Shawnte Orion



Jia Oak Baker,
photograph, 2016.

Laminating introductions
with my aversion
to eye contact. My desire
to disappear in plain sight.

Pathological disinterest
blends into every uncomfortable
silence.
Scratches the cellophane
of hermetically sealed opinions.

My penchant for euthanizing
pleasantries and instinct to recoil
from handshakes are reasons
I stand
out in a crowded room.

Doll's Eyes Could Kill

by Juliet Cook

My pockets were filled with eyeless dolls
waiting to be painted different colors,
brought to life and then dyed,
blow-dried and tied
to the bedpost until they learned

how to rip themselves apart,
plant and uproot,
create their own eyes,
and grow comfortable not fitting in
to anyone else's fairy tale
or carrying case. We are not all house pets
looking for an owner or a groom

or someone to wash our hair. We want to own ourselves.
To apply our own makeup in different colors.
To choose our own outfits that resemble small monsoons.
Then watch us grow and fly across the room,
until we break out of the window and rise up.



Dan Collins; *Untitled Moth 2*;
gel pen, ink, colored pencil, watercolor, and pastel on patterned paper;
2019.

Paper Airplanes

by Julie Martin

Fold an airplane in front of me
like you did when you were small.

In unison, with precision,
your mind and hands work.

Unfold, refold,
reinforce the creases with your thumbnail.

Test the aerodynamics,
fingers deft and wise.

Let these hands guide you through our world
that you often find too loud, bright, crushing.

Japanese legend promises anyone who folds
a thousand origami cranes will be granted a wish.

Let's fold a thousand airplanes—
and offer them to your well-being.

Rib

by Margaret Rozga

I have a hairline fracture in the sixth rib on my right side. Eve from Adam's rib: the Genesis writer must have had a great sense of humor.

Rib, v. To joke, tease, make fun with.

My friend Mae painted a clown, used clean rib bones for the ruffs of the clown's collar. She and Rob had barbecued baby back ribs for dinner. She wanted to remember the fun of that dinner. She turned its remnants into art. She and Rob married, had a son, a daughter, a high-strung dog named Guinness: a life, some high points and some downs.

Ribs, n. Body parts. Bones. Protection for the heart and lungs, except if they are broken and displaced.

The person taking x-rays needed to take several additional pictures before she was sure that what she saw was even a hairline fracture. I'd hate to find out what a displaced break felt like. The nurse practitioner in charge read me the results. She also told me she had been the nurse who attended the birth of my son. Thirty-five years earlier. She must have been very young.

My obstetrician at that time, she said, had recently died. I do not remember him at the birth itself. I remember him after I miscarried a subsequent pregnancy. During that examination, he said something about reassuring the nuns who ran this Catholic hospital that this miscarriage had not been an abortion.

The labor for Matthew's birth progressed rapidly. At 5:30 a.m., I was wide awake, picked up the book Chaim Potok's *My Name is Asher Lev* from next to the bed, read for less than a half hour, then threw the book

aside, unable to get engaged in the story, though it was a story I found engaging the night before and though at this early morning I was not having contractions. By 9:00 or shortly thereafter, we were at the hospital. By 10:00 a.m. the nurses decided I was too far along to move to a delivery room. An intern or resident asked me questions to complete a health history. I told him, "You're bothering me. Go away."

"Peggy," Jim said softly, trying to calm me.

One of the nurses, maybe this one who now reappeared in my life, said to both Jim and the intern, "We don't do health histories at this point."

This kindly nurse practitioner who gave me the results of the x-rays of my rib, who may or may not have been that nurse, refocused my attention on the present. "Don't lift anything heavy," she said.

Women lift heavy things, visible and invisible, all the time. Toddlers with no sense of danger; teens who court danger; housework; the family's social life; aging parents; commitments to immigrant rights groups, to fair housing, to good political candidates; not to mention for-pay type employment. Sometimes we have help. Sometimes an aching rib. Sometimes we give each other permission to lay our burdens down. Sometimes we lay them down, permission be damned.

Ribbed, adj. Having alternating raised and lowered lines, usually regularly spaced. Some cloth, like corduroy, is ribbed. Furrows in a farm field may have a ribbed effect. Even days can be ribbed. Or poetic style. Even a life.

Pioneer Day

by Dayna Patterson

Freak show, a classmate said. Watch them parade
down Main on July 24, singing *Come*,

Come Ye Saints, horse and wagon,
aproned women,
babies in gingham.

Toddlers in sunbonnets
on their fathers' shoulders,
men in cotton blouses with tin cups lashed to belts.

A freak show, she said, after a short
Utah residence. I told her

I'd marched in that parade,
sang loud *All is well, All
is well*, or sat curbside

on Logan's Center and 3rd
by the picturesque mansions
a polygamist built,

one for each of his three
families, ordinary
backdrop of my life, familiar as summer

sweat. I'd wave and clap
as the bishop rode by
with his pair of Clydesdales,

hooves heavy clomping. He'd toss
a fistful of saltwater
taffy at my feet. I'd scramble

to gather each piece,
wrapped in a twist
of wax paper, as if

it were my right, my inheritance to grab
what I could from hot asphalt,
a pinch of scorch.



Abiu Daniel Benavides, *Spiral (Against the Flow)*,
oil on canvas, 2016.

No Appetite

by Jo Goren

A correction officer tells me to wear a longer skirt next time before we walk into the large fluorescent-lit room with colorful murals. I hesitate until we spot him seated by a door, dressed like all the inmates in a khaki shirt and pants, a hand on each knee. A guard releases him and he walks toward me. After an awkward hug, we sit opposite each other, a square table between our legs.

He's still shaving his head and has grown a brown bushy beard. No longer using alcohol and drugs, he has clear eyes and healthy skin. In this rough environment, I'm grateful he's over six feet and has a look that says, "Don't fuck with me." His facial expressions, the nodding of his head up and down in agreement with himself are habits that stuck.

With care, he eats the vending machine food, we bought, a salad, and a cheese burrito I heated in the microwave. During adolescence, he worried about having food on his face, or a hair out of place. Today he removes each crumb from his mouth using the corner of a paper napkin. My husband, not his father sits beside me inhaling a Kit-Kat. I've no appetite after funerals, in hospitals and now on jail visits.

This forty-year-old with high cheekbones and handsome smile was once a toddler who repeatedly snapped red, blue and yellow Lego's together followed by, "Look Mommy Jail." I feared then his play was prescient.

One hour feels like forever. I squirm in the chair when my son tells us, "Time goes fast in here. People don't age." On that magical note, I hug him good-bye and he whispers, "The COs give everyone a hard time. The one that hassled you about your clothing is a real dick."

Pretty Women

by Faith Neece

I come from a line of pretty women. Preserved in glossy photographs, the women in my family could easily be featured in vintage magazines. Some of them actually were. My great aunt was the perfect World War era wife, always keeping pretty while the boys were away. In her photos she is elegantly draped on couches, pearls and curls on full display. My aunt on my mother's side competed in beauty pageants. In her pictures she flashes an award-winning smile that won her trophies and scholarships. Her cherry lips and narrow waist put her straight through college.

My paternal grandmother modeled throughout her twenties and early thirties. She was stunning, with thick black hair and creamy white skin. In all her pictures she is young, except for one. In that picture she is holding me as a newborn. She died while I was a baby.

Her photo albums are a memorial to the pretty woman I will never know. Her smile is familiar, but I will never hear her voice. I will never laugh at her quiet wit. I will never experience her wisdom. I will never see her wrinkles.

A picture is supposed to say a thousand words, but the pretty women in my family are silent.

When I look in the mirror, I see their faces. I see my grandmother's celestial nose, her wide smile, her emerald eyes. I see my aunt's lips, my mother's rosy cheeks. They tell me I belong with them. But I want more than what I can see in the mirror. Did I inherit their intelligence? Their talents? Their strength?

A picture is supposed to say a thousand words, but the pretty women leave me with unanswered questions.

And I wonder if my legacy will be captured in a photograph. I want to leave behind more than my pictures, shoes, and pearls. But pretty women have a tendency to die too soon, before future generations can know them. And just as I have inherited their faces, perhaps I have inherited this tendency. And perhaps my face will be the next in a line of pretty women who are seen but not remembered.

I think I have already answered the question. At age eleven, I found a box of my grandmother's shoes, hidden in the closet. I put them on, and the pinch was strangely familiar. I adorned myself in her legacy along with my mother's pearls. My mother found me digging through her jewelry box, like a miner searching for gold. "You look so pretty!" she said and pulled out the camera. I smiled and took my place.

May Trip

by Kismet McIntyre

When I got in my car and adjusted the rearview mirror,
I saw a child,

a child who wanted to roll in the grass, get ladybugs in her hair,
hold handfuls of dirt, squish berries beneath bare feet

a child who wanted to tell the world to stop screaming its
insecurities in her ear,
stop snapping its fingertips in front of her face

I started my car and pulled onto the road

found myself in a school zone but refused to slow down,
drove in fifth with the windows down
blinded by
hair
wind
music
light

Then, the tickets:
speeding,
not signaling,
failure to yield

Slowing at a yellow light, I stopped at the red,
grabbed my unruly curls and put up my hair
snapped on my seatbelt, adjusted my mirror

The child was gone, and I sat in her place

The Emperor

by Jacob Butlett

a tribute to "Tour" by Carol Snow

As we stroll around the pond near
the vacant lot, we notice a
rotting mouse on a shrine
of tulips along the banks. In

another life, the mouse might've ruled Japan,
an emperor in tan sandals and red robes, clothes he'd
have cleaned twice a week, his temples swept
daily: cherry blossom petals floating on the
wings of brooms to form a path

to a family of gold statues. He'd have eaten mackerel and
practiced calligraphy in the rising sun. Then
he'd have his long hair brushed with a brush placed
in a bamboo box by his bed. We imagine Camellia,
his mistress, petting his head as her smile blossoms
like a field of orchids. He might've lived happily there,

on his sparkling throne, surrounded by loyalists or—
we fear—by the treacherous. His mouse face shivers as we
picture his emperor body sprawled, naked and lifeless. Had
he been less trusting, Camellia would've had no
opportunity to slash his throat on his way

to the window to gaze at the white kimono of
the moon. We hope he was a fast mouse, knowing—

although never seeing—how fast mice can be. If alive, perhaps he'd
impress us with his leaps into the underbrush, fronds swept
back by the swing of his tail. If so, in a future life, the
mouse may become a monk in a faraway temple, making a path

to a vacant shrine with the swing of a broom, a path between
gold statues of men long since fallen,
their names familiar to all like the sweet fingers of camellias.



Lorette C. Luzajic, *Awake and Dancing*,
mixed media on canvas, 2019.

Not Me

by Christina Veladota

I didn't see the car until the car
shrieked its driver's shock along the asphalt.
My mother screamed her body
out the kitchen door, the black poodle
a small comma on the centerline. The dog
lived on to bite us all, except
my mother. All our shadows cloaked
in a single blanket. Not me, but the dog
that was hit. Not me, but my mother thought
it was me & after that she was forever
a stifled panic, as if her body
were always halfway out to the street.

Burning Crimson

by Yvonne Higgins Leach

Tomatoes like plump buttons
sit amid the swollen lettuce leaves
and a splattery batch of colored peppers,
the salty whiff of blue-veined cheese—
Such abundance! I think

when my friend leans in
chin over her iced tea,
her eyes blue pearls, and insists
God should have taken her,
old and childless, and not her neighbor,

whose grandchildren dig in the dirt,
plant crimson tulips that now burn
along her fence line.
I want to say the right thing, but
instead I am a witness to her bargaining with God.

I want to say, *Behold the mysteries*
seize what you are given
go forth with a grateful heart
as if I know better.
Remember that the children replant, I add.

When she says, *But from the moment*
we are born life is merely
a pattern of losses,

I am light growing dimmer
and then in deep shadow, like
a closed flower.



Dan Collins; *Untitled Moth 3*;
gel pen, ink, colored pencil, watercolor, and pastel on patterned paper;
2019.

The Pie in the Sky

by Rachael Lynn Nevins

is a pie you'll never have
like my grandmother's pies
lemon meringue and apple for Christmas
and in the summer blueberry
the least sweet my favorite

up at the lake I'd spend hours in the hot afternoon sun
filling cup after cup of small plump
dark blue almost purple berries

that my grandmother baked into a pie
she'd come with it to dinner
from her antique shop in the village

a crooked room filled with art glass and porcelain
I had to walk so carefully among those old things
gleaming and easily broken

all gone now
the Majolica Tiffany and Wedgwood
packed up in the back of my uncle's pickup truck

he drove it to Andalusia, Alabama
a place I expect never to see

its name like a name for heaven

Poem 1

by Laura Elizabeth DeCelles

I can't remember what I was going to write about.
Waking dreams and memories feel the same as reality now.
The joke was that I'm a narcoleptic,
You know, before I went to the hospital.
His dad would say it.
It's not like he's a doctor or anything.

Can't sleep. 5:15 am and I, smoke cigarettes like a little piece of
daytime, or sunshine,
Or a stick of nons ... incense on a burial pyre.
Which hand should I smoke the next one in?
Will I flip it first, or smoke the flipped one,

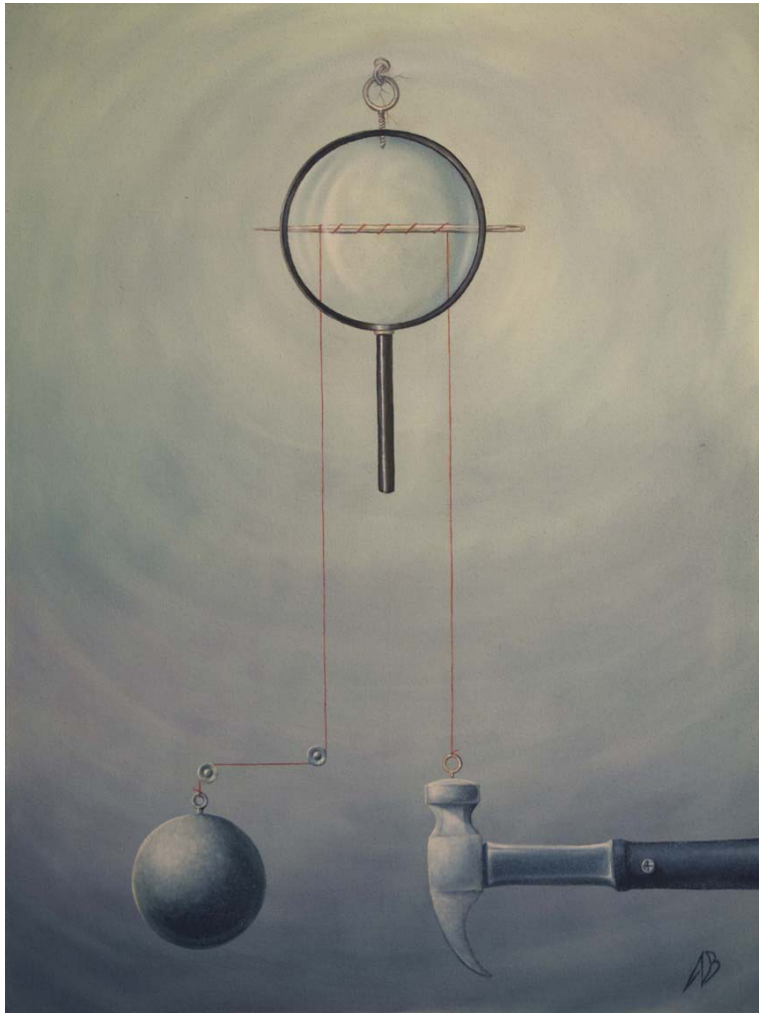
Or just pick one up at random even though it's so clearly! upside down?

So, see, if I'm feeling lucky, or maybe needin' some luck or
just plain down on it
I guess you could say I gotta do somethin'
Bout it.
I scratch where it itches right
I crack my neck
Loosen my jaw
Feel it all
Light the cigarette
Breathe

Want to crawl away back to bed now but this poem waits for
me there it's
neverending
it isn't over
it isn't over
it could've been

A long, long time ago and, many, well a few times since.
About a handful you might say?
Idk which hand though.

Survival of the fittest right?
Only I could be strong at 11 and fallen to my knees at noon so,
Who knows what time death will prey on me today?
I guess you could say I've been,
Lucky?
You know what I mean, man.
Right when, right where.
Always hits ya when ya need it.
So here ya go.



Abiu Daniel Benavides, *Under Scrutiny*,
oil on canvas, 2016.

Chestnuts

by Alyson Miller

They exploded, the oven contracting with that strange pop-whoosh of detonation. You're supposed to pierce the skin first, force a knife or skewer through the skull-thick husk. Breathing holes for living things. We didn't know, panic-threw the tray into the sink to cool the bursting fruit. The flesh was grooved like tiny cerebra or large thumbs, the bodies round like the curves of hearts and knuckles. You nestled one in your palm, caressed the splintered surface as though pacifying some small creature. It ruptured in a sudden exhalation of steam and shell and meat, a chest-leap moment. There was a small scald above your left eye, something charred and fibrous in your hair. For weeks we plucked the shrapnel from the rug, wiped clean walls and cupboards and floors. The belly of the stove remains choke-full of burnt skins, the kitchen ceiling star-speckled with a grainy constellation of hulls.

Steeplebush

by William Doreski

In the month of steeplebush
a few years after Frost's death
I'm browsing his Ripton cabin.

A sibilance flows through it,
rustling the yellowed pages
of Modern Library books

scattered like country gravestones.
When I lie on his smooth old daybed
with its blue cotton coverlet

I see myself white and wrinkled
in landscapes smutty with flowers.
Steeplebush flaunts among them,

along with Joe-Pye weed, tansy,
yarrow, Queen Anne's lace. At the foot
of Temple Mountain fifty years

after my only trip to Ripton
I slog along in my aches and pains,
still determined to hike myself

into a glory of fitness
unattainable in my eighth
decade, the fresh August sun

whetting shadows brisk as blades.
I still remember the feel
of Frost's mournful possessions—

sharpened pencils left on the desk,
an armchair sagging from use,
a shabby green sweater on a hook.

No one will bother preserving
the hole I leave in the atmosphere.
But maybe on this modest slope

my presence might invoke the pink
of steeplebush as if the light
were giving birth to itself.



Brian Michael Barbeito, *Carnival Mosaic 8*,
digital photograph, 2019.