

# *Thimble Literary Magazine*

*Volume 6 · Number 4 · Spring 2024*



*Birdhouse* by Sophia Maggio

*Thimble Literary Magazine*

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*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

*Thimble Literary Magazine* is primarily a poetry journal but invites submissions on related topics such as artwork, stories, and creative nonfiction. 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, including social media.

*Poetry*: Please send us two to four of your poems.

*Short Stories*: Please send a single work of around 1,200 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.

All work goes to [ThimbleLitMagSubmissions@gmail.com](mailto:ThimbleLitMagSubmissions@gmail.com).

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## *Editor's Note*

by Nadia Arioli

---

Dear Readers,

It is spring again, and the world is making itself new. In New England, the snow is starting to melt, the days are getting longer once more. The birds at the feeder have turned from cardinals to nuthatches. The world is turning in that great cycle.

It feels fitting that this issue of *Thimble* is particularly ripe with animals. We have dog poems, bird stories, fish poems, and bird pictures. We have butterflies, blackbirds, and chickens and hope—that other winged creature.

And yet all is not rosey. You might say that this is not the thrill we were promised. Underneath all the fecundity is death, gnawing at the roots.

I was watching “The Last of Us” over Christmas break, and one scene that struck me is when a pastor explains to a little girl that they must wait until the ground thaws to bury her father.

Spring is the time of life, yes, but more so tending. Tending garden, house, the dead.

In “The Last of Us,” of course, death and life get jumbled in unholy

ways, because, well, zombies. What a catastrophe.

I don't know where this is going, but I'm shambling on. I'm making damn good time.

I hope the animals come back. I hope the blackbirds are singing in the dead of night. I hope the opossums' eyes shine brightly yellow in your backyard. I hope the pianos keep in tune. They will if we tend them.

Thank you for cultivating a greener world in the country of the imagination.

Best,  
Nadia Arioli

# *Anniversary*

by Courtney Bambrick

---

I've found a way into evening again. Despite attempts towards  
forgetting,  
what I had considered important this morning. Here: my skin is white  
&

soft, in that deep soft way. Deep soft tasting salty. Chemical. Salt is  
chemical.

To lick sweat from under my breasts. To dream-fuck a wizard at a  
beach motel.

Dream-fuck a stranger in a shoelace factory. You are a man I know,  
thank god,  
but the corridors & stairwells of this building echo a light that pulls  
your face

into shadow and greens your skin. Your skin is also politically white,  
though more the color of very milky tea. I want to lick the smooth  
line

along your hip to your armpit. In spite of love & all the forgetting I  
attempt.

I forget anonymity. I've forgotten exploration. You are a man I have  
known.



Under these lights, you are old. Under these lights, I am fat. Under these lights, under our bank accounts & the car we share & the room & bed

and I mean, but please, these are the lights we are under. And I mean,

but please, don't waste a paper lantern on me. And I mean, but

come on, do you remember the dog noise of your breathing into me?

Into my deep soft? Sex used to surprise me. Surprise me.



*Pigeon Slay* by Sophia Maggio

# *Borrowed Dream*

by Diana Dinverno

---

My daughter visited a Karine Giboulo exhibit, a re-creation of the artist's life-size home with over 500 miniature clay figures populating furniture, appliances, delivery boxes, rugs. I think *The Borrowers*, but our girl describes an open dresser drawer with rows of workers hunched over industrial sewing machines, a gardener harvesting produce from a strainer in a sink, people queued on the kitchen counter waiting for the food bank to open.

The next morning, in the small hours, my father, the one who raised me, appears. I haven't dreamt of him in years, yet now discover boxes he's left for me to find, open them one by one. They're filled with objects I recognize from childhood:

twists of used string, canning lids and rings, worn kitchen towels, tools —wrenches, standard and metric, screwdrivers, pliers—most in working order, some corroded by rust. My father appears. I gesture toward the boxes, ask *Why?*

*In case you need them*, he says,  
and I notice his eyes still carry the sky.

I have something for you.

From the top of the refrigerator, he retrieves a piece of sturdy cardboard, the base for the diorama he's built of colorful buildings, like those found in Mediterranean port towns. The scene conjures a seaside visit on a bright summer day, although we never made such a trip when I was a child.

I wake, try to re-enter the dream; find it's gone, yet hasn't vanished. It must have been summoned by what my daughter described: a shag rug tinted colors of the ocean, clay families—fathers frolicking in faux waves with their children—wonderous and somehow real.

# *I Bring You Home*

by Cecil Morris

---

When I am alone on the verge of sleep  
and covered in dark no longer cozy  
or comforting, I think of the dictionary locked in you,  
the words you would play to tease or teach,  
to engender pride or shame.  
I remember your weight on the edge of my bed,  
sinking, bending the mattress, pulling me toward you,  
a great gravity sink, like our sun  
keeping the earth in its circle,  
your voice the slow song of whales  
calling to me, floating me to sleep,  
meaningless at last but pleasant.

Some nights now your snoring rises through my home  
and hangs in the air, not deep or mournful  
but more the intermittent growl  
of the biplane you pointed out once at the beach.  
By day you keep your recliner in its place,  
your face blankly impassive, vacant,  
a silent man in my noisy world,  
a spectator not a speaker, a witness  
who must keep your secrets to yourself  
while my words flutter around you,  
songs of finches and sparrows,  
meaningless but, I hope, pleasant  
and not the shrill screams of seagulls.

*Nunu's Dream* by Uzomah Ugwu



## *Flicker*

by C.C. Apap

---

in the moment, it is soft and warm  
and dead, its head lolling forward  
like the hydrangeas weighed down  
by rainwater in front of the house.

my wife calls me gently from her  
office. she heard it strike the glass  
and looked out to see it try to lift  
its head twice before it stilled.

bird strikes happen all the time—  
I'll watch them, stunned, stumbling  
like children just coming of age  
conjuring the confidence to leave.

this one, my wife said, struggled  
to lift a wing, blinking in the shade.  
by the time I arrive its eyes are glass  
and its long tongue licks lifelessly

at air. I wrap it gently, small thing,  
in papers, and hide it so my daughter,  
at home recovering, won't be haunted  
by a ghostly echo, the scars it evokes.

I cannot name it, and spend a day  
searching for it: a northern flicker,  
it hints, brightly, fitfully at the light,  
swiftly fading in the late afternoon.



*Pigeon Face* by Sophia Maggio

# *At Dan's Wake*

by Frances Boyle

---

A shadow meanders across the lawn.  
Inside, a murmur of mourners cram  
into the condo dining room. Family  
  
sit solemn on hard chairs that ring  
the room, Ellen's the bud in the crowd's  
flower, high-coloured from the company  
  
and the plastic glass of wine her grand-  
daughters refill for her. I see her catch  
on gusts of remembrances. The rising  
  
chatter buoys her, carries her beyond  
this scene. The past week, surreal, lifts  
like dream drapery. As she reminisces  
  
her head tilts back. Just the way his  
used to do. Her mouth opens to laugh  
long and loud. She seeks his smile to share  
  
this brief joy. A quick jerky scan round  
the cluster of well-wishers yields no shape  
to fill the shadow; her eyes become chasms.



# *For All the Ways We Do Not Touch*

by Kristin Gifford

---

For crown shyness sleep, bodies curled close, breath moving  
the hairs on my neck, cool white sheet between.

For blue bath loofahs blooming like dew dripped flowers, petals  
reaching towards each other against the white tile.

For your soft t-shirts and my smooth pants, clean and folded  
in separate and leaning stacks.

For individually wrapped dark chocolates and their empty wrappers,  
shining purple cairns crumpled on nightstands.

For two kinds of coffee and two types of creamers, for two sets  
of hands pouring steaming liquid, cupped around their own  
hot ceramic. For four eyes looking across the newness  
of the morning quiet at a familiar body again and again.

## *Ode to Orange*

by Carrie Purcell Kahler

---

Color of quick flame  
and creeping destruction.  
Color of arched monarch wings under  
a bright flare of bird throat flashing  
through green leaves as color curls around  
a rim of sky when the closest star breaks.

Tiger stripe blazing as forests' roots  
thrust into loam lumping along underfoot.  
The salamander eating its own sloughed skin slow,  
ripening like a squash from spring green to spice strut.  
Strutting across ice, knee-less king and the brilliant billed  
macaroni, whose tufts glare over glaciers in Chile,  
where the conure and cock-of-the-rock moult flames  
onto a bridge of marigolds pom-pomming over the River Styx.

Color of theory, revolution, poison, and warning.  
Color of duck feet flapping past traffic cones.  
Sherbet dripping drips before licks can capture them  
in sun hotter these days than history.  
Color of cheetahs' tail flicks, clown fish crackers  
and robins' puffed chests.  
Color of California poppies waving bravely  
at birds of paradise flying over truckloads of carrots  
belching diesel sunsets on their way to Canada.  
Color of male golden toads,  
probiscus monkey,  
false coralsnakes,  
reefs lost  
and gone forever  
dreadful sorry,  
clementine.

# *The Boat*

by Eva Skrande

---

Sometimes a paper boat goes down river  
carried by small winds

because rivers love innocence,  
pink clouds, and yellow mountains

because it is impossible, then, to speak  
of debt and hunger,

because the trees along the riverbank understand  
the tricks of life

and wish that nothing made of paper,  
nothing vulnerable

will sink on this honey and milk-filled night.

It's possible, from time to time,  
to believe in the foghorn of goodness

in this life, it's possible for boats to be hurt free  
even if it's just for one second

it's possible for the wind to love life.

In a church far away, a poor parishioner  
lights a candle

that illuminates the large mouth of hope.

Then the earth forgets it only has one arm,  
one eye, one leg,

and all is good.

*A Three-Legged Dog on a Christmas  
Card*

by John Dorsey

---

you only see what's missing  
one less paw print in the snow.

*About as Close as My Husband's Ever  
Going to Get to a Love Poem*

by Jennifer Schomburg Kanke

---

May the sound of my breakfast dishes being placed in the sink  
be louder than memories of your father telling you  
he'd love you even *when*, not *if*, you fail.  
May it drown out the sounds of him rewrapping  
your Christmas presents each year so you can  
open them again and again, feigning surprise  
under the tree at each grandparent's house.  
May you not hear your mother arguing  
with the social worker or your older brother.  
May you be allowed the focus of the protected  
as you scour the job postings before lunch,  
even if you must create that protection yourself  
like a parrotfish safe inside  
a sleeping bag of its own design.

# *The Tree Guy*

by Genevieve Creedon

---

He doesn't do the work himself,  
he explains on the phone—  
it's just become too much.

So, he comes out for a flat fee of \$150  
to assess the arboreal situation  
and advise on future action

or inaction. This big one has some  
dead limbs that could use pruning,  
that one is underwatered

and would do best with less competition—  
consider clearing out this bed  
of vines and mulching it over.

How worried should we be  
about the big one falling?  
About our house, our neighbors'?

And he tells us something it seems  
we should all have learned long ago—  
that trees die from the inside out,



the inner trunk of ours likely long  
past its prime, but the outer rings  
and bark still slurping up survival,

growing the glorious greens  
that turn an improbable gold  
in the sun's generous glow.

The mosaic of leaves above  
flashes the faces of the fallen—  
those who left after forty, fifty,

even ninety-five years of verticality,  
flesh uprooted with more or less warning,  
leaving their big absence in the sky...

The long-sleeved, khakied man,  
who once swung from the high  
branches himself but now keeps

his feet planted in the earth—  
the trees still surprise him  
with how long they can stand

against the wind and rain,  
the drought and drudgery  
of a planet peeled of its plenty.

*There are trees still standing  
that I thought would  
drop decades ago—*

layers of heartwood lingering  
so much longer than  
our own lifespans can absorb.

# *It's Winter Now, the Fish is Dead*

by Damian Rucci

---

Rebecca wanted a Japanese  
fighting fish, we found a female  
scarlet and captivating as sirens  
beckoning lost captains ashore

she named it Andromeda  
“Andy for short” and it  
brought her happiness to feed her  
a little extra life does a lot  
in the middle of a wasteland

then winter came like an icy giant  
wrapped our belongings in frost  
only one of the radiators breathed heat  
and the bathroom window couldn't be shut

at night we'd lay under piles of blankets  
sometimes wear our jackets to sleep  
pray that what they said about body heat  
was true and we'd awake in the morning

that morning came in February  
we shook the cold from our bones  
Rebecca went to feed Andy  
but the bowl was frozen solid

Andy's life ended in a glacier  
it's winter now, the fish is dead  
and we gave her a fish's funeral  
flick ashes into the toilet bowl

and flush her out of our concerns  
I heard freezing to death isn't so bad  
they say you become euphoric  
get really warm, and then just go to sleep

I hope we make it through this winter  
and we don't have to find out for ourselves

# *Apples*

by Kathryn Moll

---

Sounds of pawing through the larder  
Damp harumphs, the children

We transposed from San Francisco  
Blank as slates

Their mouths now burst  
With Halloween candy and balk

New England's polite processions  
The incandescent flush

Of deciduous hills and pretty  
Village orchards, so far from the Pacific

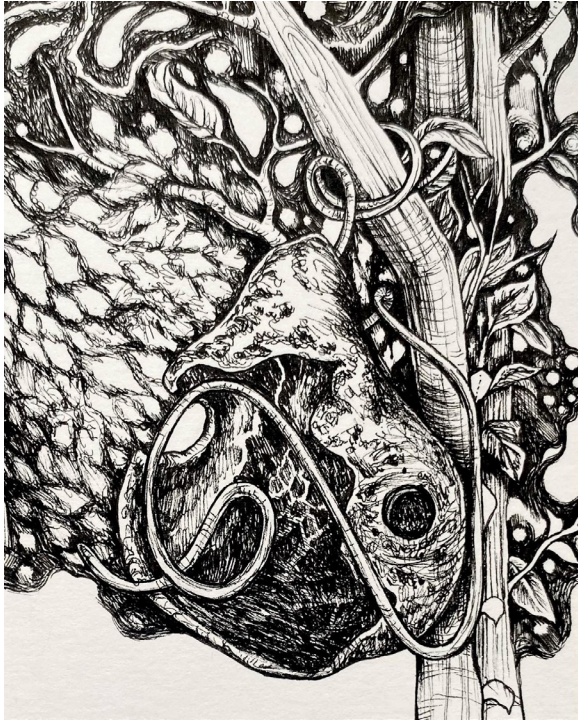
Their reproach is manifest  
In cups of cloudy cider

Untouched upon a sideboard  
The apples we drove to pick, uneaten

Uncontained by a wide, clay bowl  
We bought in Sausalito

Withering  
Un sliced, they keep

The secrets of their stars  
Under stern red cloaks



*Birdhouse in Light* by Sophia Maggio

## *Piñata Nights*

by Ann E. Wallace

---

Through my daughters' childhoods,  
late August meant birthdays and late nights—  
the house silent, the dining table cleared,  
I would slip on an old shirt, tear inch-wide strips  
of newspaper, mix a paste of flour and water,  
and begin—shaping a mermaid, a rose,  
a pufferfish where once there had been only an idea.

A decade later, in the still of another quiet night  
I slip into memory, travel out and through  
childhood scrapes and bursts of laughter.  
Looking for joy, I land on longing.  
But the joy, it is there too, in the looking.  
I check my watch—half past one.  
This mining has not come fast, or easy.

Each night was a step in a back-aching process.  
Yes, it was tedious, but have you ever seen  
a larger-than-life striped cat, a doppelganger  
of your child's adored and tattered stuffed animal,  
take shape in your kitchen? Have you ever seen  
such joy on a small face? Have you ever seen  
your child turn away as her friends take  
gleeful swings at the thing she loves most,  
waiting for the candy to fall, so the memory  
she can hold is of the moment  
when everything was just perfect?

These were the years when I looked  
forward to deepest night, when the house  
was still and the hours ran so long  
and beautiful, the only voice in my ear  
my own, buzzing me toward dawn  
and the noise that breaks in the morning.

# *Familiar*

by Tamara Yewchuk

---

Miriam, walking into the kitchen, sees the crow and freezes. Standing in relief, it blinks against the black backsplash of the kitchen counter. A week ago, during her usual nighttime routine she squinted from the hallway and dismissed it as a shadow because she wasn't wearing her glasses, having memorized every creaky floorboard and door jamb over the past forty years. Miriam is relieved when it flaps and caws as she inches closer, less worried her daughter's prediction—that she is losing her mind—is coming true.

Zoe wants to move her into assisted living. But how can she leave her home, her husband's shirts hanging in the closet, the finger paintings still on the wall? Miriam knows Zoe won't take her in, so she doesn't ask. Miriam always admired Zoe, for speaking her mind and not taking crap from anyone. But how she birthed someone so different is astounding. Zoe, an environmental lawyer, didn't seem to inherit either of their traits. Her introvert father preferred to get lost in endless galaxies and orbits of the planets while Miriam preferred the never ending spin of the pottery wheel. He had no problem finding work though while Miriam struggled to make a living at ceramic art. Her sister would remark that no one will pay \$300; you can buy mass produced bowls for \$3.

Zoe is a different bird, navigating life effortlessly. And while Miriam is proud, Zoe is constantly frustrated with her mother's eccentricities



and mess. Sifting through the magazines, clothes and art piled up like decorative pyres, Zoe would query how she could live in such chaos? Miriam would retort with her favorite Szyborska quote: *preferring the hell of chaos to the hell of order.*

Now, as she stares into that circle within a circle in the crow's eye she is mesmerized as he or she watches her drink tea. She tries to look up sexing a crow but it only brings up disturbing results and what did it matter? She calls it Crow Jane, admiring the sheen glinting off the soft black feathers. When she returns from the dentist, the crow is gone. Slightly disappointed but also somewhat relieved, she orders Greek food, closing the windows before falling into bed fully clothed.

A crow cacophony wakens her early, as two crows fight over her leftover dinner. The next day there are three. One defecates in the sink. Out, she screams. Then there are five, then eight. They no longer ruffle when she enters the room. The full moon brings thirteen and at twenty-one she becomes uneasy. At least they stay quiet at night and often leave for hours. Only Crow Jane alights on her shoulder, she strokes her soft head.

She spends her days researching crows and waylaying her daughter with short texts of **I'm good** or **good night**. Zoe will be enraged by her new found hobby. She learns how crows memorize faces and can complete eight step puzzles. Then the gifting begins. She is overjoyed to find small shiny pebbles, pieces of metal, round washers, buttons and broken pieces of jewelry on her counter. Her favourite, a small silver square broken locket.

Day twenty-eight, thirty-four crows fill the house, some nest on top of the cupboards. She uses them in her new black and white video project until furious doorbell ringing and yelling interrupt her recording. It takes a while to try and shoo the crows into the back rooms and though most comply she can still hear the squawking. Three remain. She slips onto the porch pulling the door behind her.

Mom...finally.

Zoe balks at Miriam's appearance. She's revived the uniform of her youth- black leggings, tunic, Robert Smith hair and eyeliner. I have

been calling and texting all day.

I guess I didn't hear, she attempts feebly. Want to go for lunch, my treat? How about that cool place with comfy couches?

I want to come in, Zoe insists.

Miriam relents knowing her daughter won't. It isn't in her nature. The kitchen's clear. Zoe might have ignored the back rooms if it wasn't for the caw, CAW. Six crows lurch from the darkness chasing her screaming to the front step.

Miriam's explanations are drowned out by the screeching.

Mom, what is happening, Zoe is wide eyed.

I have acquired a new hobby.

Being a crazy crow-lady?

I'm not a crow lady. I am a crow enthusiast and many share my passion.

This is ridiculous. I don't want to find you murdered by crows.

Good pun.

Zoe stares angrily but then softens her tone.

I'll find a good place for you. You know Grandad loved it and Aunt Patty is thriving. Why would you rather live like a crazy bird-lady?!

I know you are different but you have to trust me. My crows will never hurt me.

Zoe blinks rapidly, displaying her anxiety.

Did you know, crows blink more often when agitated?

Don't deflect.

I'm not deflecting. Don't you want me to be happy?

This is weird, even for you.

I won't go to old people prison. It's like night of the living dead in there.

Did you know the kids at school used to call you Edward Scissorhands!?"

Isn't that a compliment? German expressionism is art and if you read more instead of working so much you'd know.

I'm calling the exterminator!

Okay, okay. Maybe it is a bit unusual but I'm handling it. Let's have dinner tomorrow at the place down by the harbour, the reviews are good, even for picky eaters.

I'm not picky, just not as adventurous as you.

And I promise to dress normal, like a cereal commercial Mother.

Zoe eyes Miriam warily and Miriam feels Zoe's tension as they hug goodbye. Watching her drive away Miriam promises herself that she will find a way to keep her crows- maybe in the backyard studio if they cooperate. Returning inside she's greeted with a symphony of screeching. She starts the Bauhaus record and resumes filming her dance to *Bela Lugosi's Dead* amidst the black feathers.

## *Holding On*

by Shannon Swearingen Gabriel

---

The other day I saw a swan  
bathing in solitude at the side  
of a quiet country road,  
in a stream edged with wild calla.

That same night, my husband pointed up  
at the crescent moon and said,  
*In Arabic, we call this hilal.*

My uneducated monolingual throat can never fully  
latch onto those alveolar trills, but for some reason  
the word felt good in my mouth, rolling around  
like a smooth marble of familiarity.

And to tell you the truth, the swan was just a goose,  
and the stream was a ditch, and the country road  
was a busy suburban thoroughfare,  
a KFC on one corner, gas station on the other.

But the wildflowers were real, and even  
in this merciless summer I know  
I can still find what I've been searching for.

# Cough

by Priscilla Atkins

---

I hate it when you cough,  
especially if it sounds like you are choking  
on something—  
it reminds me of my father,  
always in a rush, running  
through a hotdog, pot roast, turkey, choking  
on his hurry.  
(By “hate,” I mean I am irritated: *Why?*  
Because my easily-irritated father  
lives on in me.)  
On the other hand, when *I* cough,  
I expect you to come running; after all,  
my father and I may be dying.

## *Pearl*

by A.O'N. Romagnoli

---

Give me a knife, I'll give you an apple.  
Ours is a beautiful crisis, the being  
and not being, our presence  
in this moment while we dream

Pollywogs in the pond, our toes  
in the cold water and the sky pretending  
summer soon to come. She lies to me  
every day and still, still  
I believe. The little things

The whisper of you walking  
from one room to the other,  
the dog lying down, the purposeful  
clink of the dishes into the sink  
after dinner. Let me spend

All my days as this pearl.

# *I Wake up to My Dog Gnawing*

by Whitney Egstad

---

at the wishbone I had placed  
on my mother's altar and swallow

a knot in my throat. There are many  
ways to yearn:

my homesick offering  
to my long-dead mother

and the marrow  
sucked dry from a wildling

I won't let outside  
to rummage for scraps

for fear she will not come back.

# *Pathophysiology*

by Liz Irvin

---

Learning physiology and its softest  
derangements,  
the diseases are all faceless—  
alive only in the minds of the  
people who  
know.

A woman held out her hands with raised purpura,  
a blurred-out wedding band,  
and a wrist  
tattoo.

The thing that I find the strangest:  
heart keeps its beat

by waiting.

I'm weaving my way through the names and the figures:

doxycycline is a bicycle;  
flecainide, flood-tide

road-side



rock-slide.

I found an easy companion in *thrombotic*  
with its

drum-beat-click

and we walked beside each other  
in step.

*thrombotic*

There are other things I could have said about her hands.  
an unmarked grave to  
a throwaway day—  
the picture snapped on a busy afternoon;  
the ED humming like a church basement.

*thrombotic*

Dizzy with grief,  
friend of her sorrow,  
alive in her cage.

I touched a heart in its chest  
and felt it

raging,

raging,

raging.

# *The Water at Camp Lejeune*

by Bill Garvey

---

Was poisoned with benzene, vinyl chloride, diesel fuel  
and a bunch of stuff I can't pronounce which took  
twenty-five years to reduce my father to bed sores.

I drove him to Boston for chemotherapy when  
I was 22 and he was 47. We stopped at a rest area  
going home so he could lean out the passenger door

and puke. My mom rubbed his back which irritated him,  
his arm lashing out, and then he apologized, wiped  
spit from his mouth, looked at me behind the wheel

of his Oldsmobile, waved his hand to mean Go,  
too exhausted for words. It was 1977, before the Internet  
connected the deaths of so many Marines

the government had to fess up and send thousands  
of letters to widows like my mother offering to pay  
medical bills for her husband forty years dead.

He shut his eyes to savor a moment's peace,  
exhaled through pale, split lips as we drove away  
from the rest area, away from the puddle

he left drying in that warm October afternoon.

# *Boyhood*

by James King

---

My first punch-weak-boned, hateful little beast.  
Its ancestors—those fistfights erupting from the snow  
between the older boys in the after school program,  
T-shirts and shorts in twenty-four degrees,  
red faces, ruddy knuckles. My first punch  
born to a warmer climate—fifth-grade  
spring, my best buddy Jeff with a new iPod  
Touch I watched him play while we rode  
to school, sticky brown leather on Bus 109.  
Jack and Hunter, Back Road boys in the seat behind—  
my first punch's mother and father. Jack I think  
who cupped our ears and cracked my head  
against Jeff's. Temple to temple.  
My first punch crowned, squalling. I threw it  
backwards because I did not want to look at it—  
tossed a fist over my shoulder like dark clods of earth,  
like I was digging, a trowel in my hand.  
It must have looked so funny. I heard Hunter giggling.  
I don't know if I hit him. I don't know who I hit.  
I know this was the first tenderness a boy gave me—  
Jeff's skull and mine, ringing like a wedding bell.  
Jack's hands in the after, holding us in our pain.

# *I Dreamed Us in a Rocketship*

by Audrey T. Carroll

---

*red-winged blackbird*

I whisper to my daughter  
before Earth is dust

# *Duplex*

by Jonathan Chan

---

a home is a coming and returning  
i yearn for the sweetness of silence.

in the pangs of a secret silence,  
thoughts come of an edible fragility.

how male, some swells of fragility,  
confusion distending, descending.

awful light begins its descending,  
your palm traced by my fingertips.

the scent of jackfruit on my fingertips,  
the moonbeams commence in their rippling.

the camcorder makes grain of a rippling,  
glistening seas through a crevasse of sand.

hands clasp the migrations of sand.  
a home is a coming and returning.

*i dreamt i gave birth to the opossum in  
my backyard*

by Emily Ramser

---

when they're born, opossums are the size of a honeybee.  
when i was born, i was just five pounds.

my mom was never supposed to be able to have children.  
i never thought i would have a child, too scared of tiny things and  
heartbeats,  
but now he lives in the backyard, refusing to come inside.  
i've seen children do this at the park and on television,

but they always get hungry and go home eventually to their mothers  
and beds  
like my mom says i did when i was young.

he's not like the other children though.  
he has claws and dreams and large black marble like eyes  
that stare at me through the window all through the night.

he says he plans to leave me,  
sneak through the garden fence and run  
until he cannot remember me.

most opossums live to be three,  
but i have no memories before 23.

i'm not sure i even existed before then.

i only have my mom's stories and scrapbooks to prove i did,  
but in every photo, under just the right light,  
i swear i have shiny large black marble like eyes.

most opossums have up to three litters a year  
and up to thirteen babies each time,  
but i'd never had even one before him.

most opossums know how to play dead,  
allowing flies to land on their open eyes,  
but i am not sure i have ever even been alive.

when i woke up, my mom told me opossums do not live around here

mother opossums collect dried leaves, grasses, and mosses  
for their den to keep their children warm.

as my mom rakes the leaves in my backyard into large black trashbags,  
she asks me if i've considered getting back on depression medication.

# *What Comes to Hand*

by Liz Kendall

---

Plunging my hand into my bag,  
hoping for the right set of keys out of three,  
I find the shriveled conker.  
Puckered, unlovely, anal.  
When I stopped in the street to claim its shine  
it was the radiant sun and all autumn goodness.  
A charm against spiders.  
A childhood's gloating treasure.  
It was glossy, new born from its damp white grip.  
All the joys of October were alive in it.  
Then I forgot.  
And here it squats.  
What other jewels are so soon lost?  
Tell the heart of perfection, that longs to rot?

The seeds from a pomegranate's red leather fist,  
knifed open and prised out, juice squirting in mist.  
Their faceted garnets with white at the tip;  
a blood drop, or a tooth lost from white bitter pith.  
But the redcurrants, proud on their dangling strings;  
heavy, heaping and languorous, priced for a king:  
appetite loves extravagance; time becomes myth  
and an hour gives a day's light, when red lamps are lit.



# *Red Circles*

by Katie Kalisz

---

They arrive in red lipstick, hoop earrings,  
one wearing yellow pants on his head,

his father's large shoes. He is the clown,  
striped and dotted, introducing his older

brother and sister as they instruct him to do.  
Somersaults. Pyramids. Amateur magic tricks.

This sounds like a metaphor but it is  
not; my children are planning a circus

for this circus season, in the land of circuses  
and chaos, circles like citrus fruits,

ever overlapping on the New York Times  
digital map of the outbreak. The map

that is beautiful if you don't know  
what it means. It could be beautiful.

# *The Launch We Carry*

by Kathleen Calby

---

That day, I climb the long, shallow  
steps along with the procession of men  
incised in the wall, also moving upward.

They carry a barque, a narrow boat  
of no consequent depth, sometimes long,  
as this one appears to be. Empty now,

about to receive something rare, sacred  
and precious. I continue to approach the slant  
light at the top. There, unexpectedly,

I look onto a plaza. Perhaps a dock here once  
received and sent cargo. The exit now barred  
by a chainlink gate, so I stand and gaze out,

in another state from the dark climb; the sun  
pouring into me. *Lovely*, I whisper to no one  
that I can see, *isn't it?* Stay one beat more,

then turn, descend to gather with the group  
in a little chamber with a model barque.  
I only remember it was gold

and very small. All those men figured  
in the walls, as we rose, carrying  
the body of a boat.



*White Dragon* by Irina Tall

# *Butterflies*

by Kaitlyn Newbery

---

In the beginning, butterflies filled my stomach.  
As babies grew, they shifted and flew away,  
growing outside of me as I fed and released them.  
Their retreating wings filled my lungs,  
sustaining my body in their absence.  
Stomach empty, we settled into a new life together;

I can't say you still give me butterflies, but  
those butterflies left behind the silk I wove into  
the blanket we share each night.  
Cocooned in familiarity, I melt  
into you and find rest.

Early on, we were a tangle of limbs  
coming up for air infrequently. Now, children fill  
our limbs,

our air

our time.

Over a tangle of chaos,  
our eyes meet and communicate wordlessly—  
a nectar enough for now.

So no, I can't say you give me butterflies anymore.  
They are long gone but have left behind  
love. Love without flight  
-iness. Love that traded wings for roots and  
possibilities for promises.  
You wrap your arms around me  
and I press my ear to your  
chest to hear the same flutter  
that pulses through my own veins.  
Our shared rhythm encircles me, and I find  
something better than butterflies.



*Princess and Stars by Irina Tall*

## *Río Paraná*

by Grace Penry

---

This river is a mink stole draped and dragged across the earth. Sunlight pricks on edges dipped in white; highlights silted ochre. This river is a sweater. Mud wools the bottom, current spools the thread. But really, the river is a blanket, hemmed at the docks. In stillness all unravels. Time passes and shadows pocket waves, the river is a pair of suede cargo pants. Shadow pockets full of pejerrey. These fish are silver change. Men cross the pants in jet-skis, pleating them in their wake. Suddenly, it's a schoolgirl's uniform. The water disperses and tangles upon the shore in lacy translucence. It is a wedding dress.

# *A Teaspoon of Soil*

by Emma Wilkins

---

There are more organisms, living in a teaspoon of rich, healthy soil, than humans in this world, research has found. I can't tell you how "healthy" has been defined, or how rigorous the research was, but either way, I find it wonderful. Humble, not so humble, dirt.

.

And then there's dust. Since learning that it's made from cells of human skin—and, according to one study, also paint, pollen, fibres, minerals, mould; hair and viruses and ash and soot; insect body parts, bacteria, material, bits of soil—I see it differently. It contains traces of families, history, life. It's almost sacred when you think of it this way. And isn't it, poetically, from dust and dirt we came?

.

I still recall, cannot forget, the moment I first saw a life beginning, beating in my body, just weeks after conception. You could call the sight "cardiac tissue with a pulse". Or beautiful, remarkable; beyond belief.

.

A more recent memory: cleaning out our washing machine's filters;

noticing within a felted mat of lint, an unexpected sight: seeds had somehow stuck to fabric, or been stowed in pockets by young boys. Which, I couldn't tell, but I could see they'd survived multiple cold washes—not because I saw them, nestled in the lint, but because they had begun to send out roots, to send up tiny sprouts of luminescent green. The machine's designers put a window in the lid; not with this intention, but enabling this result. It let light into the darkness—warm, nutrient-rich, life-giving light.

.

I was walking before dawn last week, along a country road. I was struck by how effectively the waning moon still lit my way—and by how quickly and completely I was blinded, when a car drove into view. I thought about the fact that light can make us see—and do the opposite. 'Too much of a good thing'... If you measured light in teaspoons, just one might, albeit softly, reach from a room's centre, to each wall.

.

Thinking about seeing got me thinking about glass—the kind we put on faces, inside frames. How can a substance made from something that is gritty and opaque be made so smooth? How can it let light stream straight through in such a way that what seemed soft can become sharp? Stars appear in sky; black marks become words. A limitation is forgotten, overcome. Then the magical contraption is removed and gently folded, set aside; as heavy lids descend to end the day.

.

We're so used to it we don't think twice when marks we make on paper, type on screens, evoke images and feelings, create meaning and make sense. The smallest of them all—a seed-like dot—is not the least. It ends sentences, paragraphs, pages, chapters, books. It makes us pause, it helps us think.

.



Sometimes that which seems too commonplace to be of note, or declare “beautiful”, is mighty in its way.

That teaspoon of dirt; this tiny dot.



*Dream-Inducing Dragon* by Irina Tall

## *Scissoring*

by Jennifer Martelli

---

The night the old mattress ruined my spine,  
I could hear its coils squeak a rhythm inside the ticking,  
could feel the tufts and buttons pressed into my back,  
thought, tomorrow I'll cut those rosettes off with the sharp  
scissors I keep for thread, for cloth, to mend. I rub  
its long blades opened like an angel, like a big letter V,  
on a strip of old leather, back and forth, hone it fine.  
I'll save the buttons (because they're hard as teeth)  
in a box for odd and loose things. Sometimes, pleasure  
has no name and is simply the lifting off of me, the lack  
of weight, of god, of touch.

## *Names of Black Birds (IV)*

by Deborah H. Doolittle

---

That we speak in different ways  
about different things says a lot.  
The Redwings in the mountain ash  
use asterisks to ask questions  
about where next to find berries  
or which star to follow on which  
night. Cowbirds pretend to join in.  
European starlings, Shakespeare's  
darlings, know that to sing or not  
to sing isn't an option. Crows  
know this. They croak and crawl across  
the sky to a rhythm their wings  
make. How Grackles first occupy  
the trees and why is not what I  
need to know but when the morning  
sun will come and break up the night  
in forms of black birds taking flight.

# *Plum Rain*

by Ray Zhang

---

Summer heat folds  
pungent plums into prunes  
returning the last drops  
of juice back to sky.

Lunar June full with desire,  
keeps me feral.

A drizzle off south waits to wash  
the Yangtze. My fingers grasp  
shriveled fruits with delight,  
careful not to bruise them like  
an unfulfilled promise.

/

Thorns eroding into palms—  
a last attempt  
before being pitted.  
It never hurts.  
I remember how easy  
the knife guides  
the hand. How my  
roots stain  
with red.

I'm simply returning  
flesh to earth.

Nostalgia blossoms from  
ripened seeds.

\

My mother minces pork with crushed plums,  
she says that salt brings out sugar. Perhaps  
the rain will douse this  
sour land sweet.



*Two Dragons* by Irina Tall

*Her therapist told her to write her dead  
father a letter*

by Manthipe Moila

---

*attempt 1:  
the words for apple and apology*

*sound the same in Korean – 사과 and 사과*

*attempt 2:  
twice i've stood in an apple orchard  
once as a girl visiting Lesotho  
there was no DSTV but come nighttime  
there were so many skies bursting through  
the darkness it almost made up  
for the silence*

*the second time I was just outside  
of Daegu i had payed to pick  
apples could have as many as i  
could fit in my basket spent most  
the day eyeing those out of reach*

*attempt 3:*

*what i mean to say is that sometimes i  
picture you as an apple orchard  
all those potential forgivenesses  
begging to be wrested from the branch*

**사과** and **사과** and **사과**

*sure the hanja*

*is different but in a poem what is the difference  
between an apple orchard and you closing  
the distance between the two of us*

# *A Request of My Lips*

by Juan Pablo Mobili

---

About sixty or so of us  
wearing our white *guardapolvos*,

stood on ascending steps  
facing the piano,

at our elementary school  
auditioning for choir.

The music teacher  
asked us to sing

our country's anthem first,  
then the song about the flag.

I knew then—God knows—  
that my voice rose angelically

above every singing boy's  
in the crowded school hall.

When the song ended, her hands  
rested like herons on the keys,



she looked at me, almost  
sweetly, and said

*sweetheart, for the next piece...  
only move your lips.*



*Bird by Irina Tall*

## *Post Mortem*

by Naana Eyikuma Hutchful

---

Tonight? she asks, lost in time. A different scene in this same room.

He nods. Don't ask, it doesn't make it any easier.

She asks anyway, they always do. How?

I don't know. I only have to reach you.

IKEA furniture still in boxes in the corner of the room, hovering in the liminal space of moving in and moving out. Her family says, moving on.

He always kissed her in all the wrong places. He was funny and/or she wasn't. He takes the diploma from the box they have just unpacked to give a shape to this life they're making.

There is no future in history. Only with you.

Only with you, she agrees. A kiss on the right corner of her lips.

At group counseling the man at the head of the oval, who smells like stale smoke and rotten apples, says it ends or it doesn't. It could take weeks, or months, or years, all her life.

Her mother brings snacks back from her Christmas trip to Ghana. They open the packages with a deliberate urgency like they did with all things these days, like fire, like lightning, like a heartbeat. Her favorite, a multi-fruit flavored lollipop on a ring. She tells him how she and her best friend growing up would go around their little village, bare feet grass stained and then yellowed in the mud trek after a particularly large haul from the tents at Doctors without Borders, handing them out to the boys they liked, sucking on them first, and then asking them to do it too, like a kiss.

What did you do with the rings, he asks. We asked them to marry us. Did they say yes? Always. He sucks on the lollipop nestled on his index finger, then brings them to the gap between her lips. She sucks on it.

I felt that, he says.

See, it's just like a kiss.

Those lucky boys, he shakes his head in mock disapproval.

He gets down on one knee, gripping the ring base of the lollipop. What if I asked? Like forever?

Aane, she says. The only Twi word he knows, yes.

Will it be quick?

He hovers around the room, like fear, like death.

On the first anniversary of their marriage, she finds an origami duck at the edge of her pillow. Paper.

Do you remember?

She remembers everything.

Their first not-date, feeding a paddling of ducks by a pond in a small town in the middle of nowhere, Denmark. He starts to dance, an uncoordinated jiggle of hands over feet, ducks pick their mates based on how well they dance. She says, I'm not a duck. In another life perhaps?

he asks, hopeful.

Maybe she could leave a note. Dear World – you’ve taken everything from me. She would explain it with words she didn’t have but they would understand an empty note. Dear World – I have nothing left to give.

She finds a note after a night out with friends. A diagnosis. Upstairs, his whole body under the duvet. A faint cry. She lays down behind him, holding his back tightly against her chest as he wails.

A hypothetical. What if I didn’t want to go?

I could hold your hand. His black cloak shimmers in the dim glow of the bedside lamp, scythe disappearing against a product of another dimension where he is hardly perceived, where nothing feels like anything else.

Widow at 25. The internet says she has her whole life ahead of her. She has lived all of it, all the parts she cares about living. You jump, I jump.

Does the pain disappear? Like foam? She wants to know if it will feel any different.

He takes her hand. It will feel like nothing.

# *Chanting Kaddish for My Estranged Father*

by Elya Braden

---

*after Franny Choi*

In sitting shiva we shone, we swam, we sang silence  
into silver, wove wave, warren, wilderness of loss,  
loaming gardens of grief, in grieving gave grace, gave  
grave, gave grove, forested faith, fawned, fasted, faded,  
not five but ten, ten men, meaning men, meaning  
matter, meaning count, meaning count out skirts.  
what hurts, hurts, but silence sharpens. does god  
not hear us girls? we women? woes woven, warped  
in silence, steaming, reaming, keening. keening curved,  
carved, cured into chanting, words wounded, worn,  
warmed, warmed over, weathered in parchment, parched,  
patterned, patinaed, pasted on, pasted over, wasted  
on breath, breadth of loss, oceans of losing, loosening,  
singing, no, chanting. these words given, scriven  
for grief, gray, grim: *yit gadol v'yit gadosh* we peat,  
repeat, day + day + day... a week, speak & speak,  
a month, a year, a yearning, a churning, a chanting.  
words a mist spreading, speeding. healing? or hurling  
feeling? what feeling? what is the taste of void?

## *Her Chickens*

by Carol Ellis

---

She likes all these chickens running  
around outside in the yard all dirt  
from their scratching with some shade  
trees where they rest come the heavy sun,  
although they slur their clucks before they  
sleep: when they wake she runs  
with the chickens to water to seed, later:  
to barbeque: she is no angel, she has no wings.

# *Living is a form of not being sure\**

by M. Ann Reed

---

High noon at Lewis & Clark College, and grass still  
holds onto dew, uncertain; dew still holds onto sunlight,  
uncertain, because *the moment they know how to separate,*  
*they will begin to die a little.*

Moreover, sunlight still holds onto grass and dew,  
enjoying uncertainty, never desiring  
to know what's next, never wanting to feel  
what it means to die a little.

Furthermore, dew's clarity could be holding  
together grass and sun and therefore earth and us,  
loving our eccentricities, our daily work  
of conscious evolving showing us we are born  
to be tender and uncertain, the not-knowers  
who discover            who will never begin to die a little.

*The artist never entirely knows,*  
*but takes leap after leap in the dark,\**  
never knowing dying, not even a little.

\*From Agnes De Mille's advice to her dancers.

# *My Best Friend in Kindergarten*

by Kuo Zhang

---

That Friday afternoon,  
we played tiao pi jin together  
before we waved goodbye,  
wished each other a happy weekend.

On Monday morning,  
our teacher, with red  
and swollen eyes, said  
*Yilin and her parents  
passed away  
on Saturday  
due to gas poisoning.*

Later I heard  
her dad died in bathtub,  
her mom in bed.  
Yilin crawled to the door,  
but lost the strength  
to open it.

Thirty years later,  
just last night, Yilin came  
to my dream.



She's grown up. Her face  
beautiful and clean. Not like  
mine, full of moles.

She's also a mom now.  
When I'm nursing my little  
girl at 2 am, she's nursing hers.

We didn't say a single word.  
Only the babies' sucking,  
and the second hand  
of the old clock  
is heard.

## *Code-Switching, a sonnet*

by Lavinia Darr

---

I boiled and bit my language into place  
with cheap plastic teeth guards from C V S.  
I sucked in my cheeks like a fish's face,  
and pooled tap water spit in my mouth  
like blood so thermo-soft ridges filled  
in toothy gaps missing in my education,  
class, and background. I spit in the sink,  
and tried not to wonder too much if it  
was carcinogenic as I pressed on my jaw  
and realigned my mandible along  
the company line. I checked the mirror,  
ran a finger along my plasticized teeth  
and ordered myself not to bite through.  
They put down rabid animals, you know.

*Lately, certain months decline their  
customary duty*

by Annie Stenzel

---

Like this April, limping into May. You see me  
fallow, as though fixed rigid in the opposite season—  
leaves in decay, every blossom withered, chill descending  
deeper and deeper into the stiff ground. You see me

un-inked. You see me empty-handed, fingers slack  
even though tools strew the table. Normally, April's spring-fed  
rivulets pull richness forth. In bygone years abundance  
veered toward embarrassing even the most greedy

of April's ritual participants. What happened here?  
Fond of a mystery as I normally am, I worry this one harbors  
horror in its sharp corners. I will be forensic: I will glean  
via observation what traps were sprung. Time will not

muddle my investigation, brief as the window's opening  
may be. I must know more. Fear less. Tug every tiny tendril.

# *Olenka*

by Louise Wilford

---

When I was a girl,  
dreams filled my heart like air in a balloon,  
pressing taut against the edges till I rose  
into the clouds. A swoon of desire fizzed  
through my veins, the thirsty energy of youth.  
I would marry a man I loved, I thought,  
and love would spill down the line of unborn babes,  
the sap of a tree beating through its branches,  
filling the fruit with sweetness.

When I was a girl,  
I knew I wouldn't be an empress. I would guide  
the power towards the people. My beloved  
father didn't know how much they hated him.  
Cage-born, cage-bred, its brittle golden bars  
bound tight as iron shackles. No breaking free  
from that destiny. I saw the blood,  
saw it rage up to the palace gates, flood  
the world, already pulped by war.

When I was a girl,  
we floated, bland and blind, in a cauldron  
of the world's despair. I knew it before  
Father Grigori's funeral, just as I knew  
that tense-eyed mystic peasant was a mistake,  
an influence asking to be killed. They say,  
in the cold cities of later decades,  
that we lived in splendour, luxury—  
jewelled lives like Faberge eggs—

when I was a girl,  
but I slept on a soldier's camp-bed, took cold  
baths every morning, nursed the wounded  
when the world burned. We loved each other,  
and I—Cassandra—knew what our fate would be.  
Through our captivity, I couldn't eat.  
My bones rose through my flesh and sleep fled.  
Alexei, already ill, was carried to his bayoneted rest.  
They shot Tatiana through the back of her head.

When I was a girl,  
I was, finally, shot through the jaw, cowering  
with my sister against a wall. My father died first,  
died easiest. Anger and hatred smashed  
our world apart, fear that we would rise from exile,  
an eternal spark, re-seed some magic mark of monarchy  
in years to come. What was left was found,  
a century later, rotting in the forested ground,  
exposing the imposters. I blaze over wooded miles,

over silent snow, adrift in a haze of horror.  
I wish this land would let me go. I was still a child,  
my butterfly wings still wet and weak  
inside their chrysalis, when they switched me off,  
when they stamped on me, when they turned  
those childish days of games and prayer—  
the pink dress that I wore to my sixteenth birthday ball—  
into pointless, dusty, aimless memories  
of when I was a girl.



*No Pity for my Scorched Lips* by Matina Vossou

*[Grand Duchess Olga Nikolaevna of Russia was the eldest of the five children of Tzar Nicholas II of Russia and his wife Alexandra Feodorovna. She was executed by the Bolsheviks, by firing squad, along with the rest of her family and their servants, on July 17, 1918, at Ipatiev House, Yekaterinburg, Siberia. She was 22 when she died]*

# Jack O'Lantern

by Kylie Wang

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Start the process after the swelling heat dries, uncover me from the bed of shriveled leaves flailing in the rising wind, dig me out of the grassy field where I've hidden my budding body; Twist, pull my green umbilical cord until it snaps and I tumble out, bring me to the brick building with plaster peeling from the ceilings, set me on a desk; *Trap* me under your hands, take a cleaver straight to my skull, thrust through my skin, grind the blade slowly in a measured angle to cut out a hole in my head, so you can fix my insides; Yank out my cap, hear the crackling of my ripping veins, reach in with a cutting-edge metal spoon to scrape out the rest of the tangle of silky threads ensnared with hard, promising seeds, scoop out my sweet flesh, and stash it in a bowl so you can tip it into the bin; Remove from me everything that made me a pumpkin, remove me so I become a vessel to carry your countless purposes; Split into my front with a smaller knife for details, gouge out blank eyes and a hollow grin, etch crooked scars that mar my face to your liking; Carry me out to the patio one crisp night, where I will stare down the street at rows of pumpkins just like me, where I will witness their weighted gaze, and the weighted gaze of the thousands that have come before, and the thousands that will come after; Before you return into your cushioned home, light a candle and place it in my empty chest, so the warmth replaces what you have taken and I am full, briefly, thinking this is how things should be, before the wax melts and burns into my insides, before it shrinks into a congealed pool and the wick shivers once then extinguishes; Watch from your festive window as *the rats race* to devour me before the rot.

# *this is not the thrill i was promised*

by KM Bezner

---

you know, for a long time after you  
and after i told my therapist about you

i had to steady myself with several deep  
breaths whenever i saw a car like yours,

the interior so familiar that i felt the  
leather sucking my legs any time a

flash of muscled gold streaked down  
the highway. i remember how you

laughed and laughed when i said it  
was my first time, even though i was

only talking about riding with the top  
down, my hair whipping around my

face, into my eyes, into my mouth.  
i remember a winding wooded road,

a goldfinch pelting the windshield  
and rolling up over our heads. i



didn't believe in signs back then, but  
after that i don't think i have a choice.

*You Will Find No Place for Your Heart* by Matina Vossou



# *Hosed*

by Angela Townsend

---

When I start writing about writing, it is time to go to Walmart. I do not need dishwasher pods. I need to get back in front of the fire hydrant.

When I write about writing, it means I have curled too tight. I flatter myself that I am a nautilus, but I am a salad shrimp. I return to the larval state.

Remain here, and I will become a fist. All I'm holding is my own space. I roll dried lentils between my fingers and assure myself they are diamonds. I fancy myself clever. I need to be washed in the world.

A trembling man once stood outside a funeral home and asked me how anyone can be "a writer." I regretted answering his first question honestly. "What do you do for a living?" Talk is safest when it's smallest. No one needs to get naked when everyone is dressed in black.

I had given him the true answer. Now I had to give the only answer.

"You stand in front of the fire hose."

He knew more than I did, as proven by his trembling. I forget to quiver. I wake in the night, giddy to capture comets. I scribble them fast. I wake in the morning and read them, just terrible tidbits breaded

in ego. I clench my fists and crumple my scrawl.

I hide, and I dry like jerky. All my aloe plants have shriveled. The keyboard hisses like a manhole cover. I have no access. All I can write about is writing. Remain here long enough, and I cannot even write about writing. Semicolons slander me. I apply exclamation points like tourniquets. I sound like I am trying to talk myself out of being terrified, which is accurate.

I am not the creator. This is equally astonishing every time I read the headline, which confirms that I am the simpleton. This means there may be hope. This means I am still foolish enough to believe the world is wet and large. I can go spelunking in suburbia.

The first step is leaving the desk, rising from the chair whose buttons have all fallen off. I skulk the kitchen. I make the list of what I lack, the most honest words of the day. It is bullet points about iodized salt and speckled beans. It is my permission slip for a trip to the sea.

I summon the long-suffering hatchback with its stickers. Fins Up. Love God, Love People. The neon moon and the yellow troll would not peel off the bumper if I tried.

I ride and wonder how I have ever written. Where do full pages come from, stories that swim faster than I can keep up? How have I ever done it? I have never done it. I have never believed I control the flow, but I am child enough to trust that it will keep lapping me up. When I am reduced to writing about writing, I remember I am dust. There is no guarantee. There is only the appointment with the buttonless chair.

There is a time to break the appointment and my cross-eyed gaze. I ride and squint into the spray. Uncurling is no assurance of inspiration, but minnows laugh around my ankles. I put on the radio and wonder if the Beastie Boys safely avoided becoming Beastie Men. I drive past “Dunkard Church Road” and daydream about places holy enough to welcome dry bones and “dunkards.”

I amuse myself, which means I am not out of danger. I hurl myself between humans, and there is hope.

It doesn't matter if it's Walmart or a basilica, as long as they are here. They are coming from funerals and softball games. They are jaunty in plaid or astringent with excess, earrings stretching to their shoulders. They are stacking boxes of White Castle Sliders and reading their fortunes on the price tags of plastic pearls.

They are so sacred, I stagger. I remember I can breathe underwater.

If I am brave, I talk. I uncurl. I tell the prophet in jeggings that her earrings give me courage. She doesn't know how to respond, so she laughs, and I laugh. I ask the revelation in the frozen aisle if Jimmy Buffett was scientifically accurate. He gulps my bait. "Is it worth every damn bit of sacrifice to get a cheeseburger in paradise?" He laughs. He confirms.

If I am unfurled, I stop talking. I watch a woman kiss her daughter's head many times in rapid succession. I lean closer to the mystery pushing a mop. He is singing. I think it is "Thunder Road." He is extending a love offering. He is not looking at me, and he is not looking at himself. He is not waiting to be received.

A man in the cereal aisle woke this morning and determined to make his entire body a testament. He has even surrendered his pants to the Philadelphia Eagles. He is green and polyester and knit into a fellowship. He has something that makes him glad and angry every autumn. Today he is walking his two children – I assume they are his and not rentals of some sort – on telescoping elastic leashes. They are wearing hats with pom poms. I nearly fall to my knees.

I steady myself against an endcap of Honey Buns and Krimpets. They are sticky and steadfast. Treats are two for a dollar, one price for the just and the unjust. I do a flip turn for a world where all can taste the sweet. Shame has not conquered.

There are a hundred ways to dab sparkles on your eyelids. I can buy a blanket that hides my legs in a tail. I can assemble a congress of neon cats with splendid eyes. They cost six dollars. A boardroom of people decreed that they should be called Booda Boos.

Two women are discussing Fancy Feasts, their carts co-conspiratorial at a right angle. The tiny shrimps smell like sewage, but nothing else can coax old cats out of hunger strike. The women talk of dotage and the long goodbye. I want to tell them they are holy. I want to listen more.

It has so little to do with me, which means there may be hope. The desert monks claimed that sin is always *incurvatus in se*, turned in on oneself. When I hobble, gnarled and greedy, to a place where everything is affordable, perhaps I am reaching for the glory of God.

I am not the creator, but I am the simpleton, and I am soaked through my skin. I came selfish and dry. The waters are indulgent anyway. My hands are open as starfish. I cannot get back to the buttonless chair fast enough.

I want to go back to the funeral home and apologize for inaccurate reporting. It is not a fire hose. It is not mine. It's the ocean, and the only option is to peel off your shoes and walk in. You can't turn back to look at yourself. There are no guarantees. You are not the creator.

# *What Happened When They Returned to the House After the War*

by Priyanka Sacheti

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The only thing left in the plundered house was the piano: a whale  
beached upon an  
alien shore, light years away from the seas she once called home.  
When they sat  
down to play the piano, one numbed finger at a time, the strings still  
made music—  
only they had now become wings of a dying bird which knew it  
would never fly  
again. I think of the piano's loneliness, that desolate, dumb creature  
in a house from  
which the thieves stole everything, even its memories. Someone said  
that the thieves  
tried to steal the piano too but they broke their back doing so,  
the truth of art too  
crushing a weight to bear. And so they left, broken-spined, for a war  
that would  
ultimately give them nothing in return, for a war which they gave  
their all.

In that moment of theft, though, they did not know that; perhaps,  
they would never  
know.

# *Best Wishes for the Expectant Mother*

by Kelly Martineau

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for DP, after Raquel Salas Rivera

No one tells you a baby is forever. Even though you feel like you should know. No one tells you there are so many hours in the night. Or so many goddamn minutes in the day. No one admits you will feel moments of hate, that you will howl with gratitude when your friend refers to your child as an *unrelenting jerk*, or that you'll be so fucking lucky if you have a friend like that. No one tells you a child is both mirror and light, that you'll see reflected in vivid detail the deepest lesions of your being. Or that when things finally begin to ease, you'll realize you are raising them to leave.

# *The Anorexic Conservationist*

by Ellie Altman

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She brushes her teeth with the day's mop water.  
She burns the furniture legs in the barbecue grill.  
She mails last year's Christmas cards to the senders  
by return service this year. She drives there and  
walks back. She runs the neighbor's garden hose  
through the kitchen window to her sink. She stores  
perishables on top of the refrigerator for more  
refrigerator space. She launches a campaign to replace  
"Keeping Up with the Joneses" with "Serve Your Neighbor  
for Dessert." She bathes her babies in the tub with her  
on top of the soaking dirty bed linens. She turns the guest  
bathroom into a storage closet for paper supplies  
bought on sale, two-for-one. She feeds her digits—  
fingers and toes—to her dogs. She gives free condiments  
collected from the 7-Eleven's self-service coffee station  
as gifts for friends and family (when she remembers  
their birthdays). She checks out public library books  
to burn for heating the house. She eats later and later



until later never comes. She conserves daylight by sleeping most days. She signs her end-of-life directive, choosing to be buried alive. In her next life, she becomes Spanish moss—living in the trees, harvesting all her nourishment from the air.



*Duh* by Matina Vossou

# *When I enter a place I am to stay*

by Laura Donnelly

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a few days or a week or a month  
and it has been empty a day or a week  
or a month, I stalk through the rooms  
testing lights, opening windows,  
and I feel the house test me too, not yet  
ungrudging at the creak my feet make.

And this is how I understand my cat,  
who when we moved to a new house crouched low,  
sniffed the baseboards, then disappeared  
under the bed to hide and watch,

but instead I'm stacking books  
on the nightstand and arranging  
a toothbrush, a glasses case, a days-of-the-week  
pill organizer, thinking how

the body, too, is a house, and how  
I have at times gone days or weeks  
or years absent from it even as I answered  
email and buried my dead,

until pausing a minute to look under the bed  
I find two scared eyes staring back,  
and I call to it the way children and old women  
have for generations, standing  
in the empty light of open doors.



*Opaque Red Crystal Oxidized by Matina Vossou*

*A Premonition While Looking at  
'Ambulance Call' by Jacob Lawrence*

by Adele Evershed

---

Today on the street  
a crowd—all reds and blues—congealed around a body  
the egg white face uncovered  
yet something in the twist of her mouth  
suggesting she had already floated away  
like a teardrop balloon  
leaving me and the city far behind

I remembered this street  
filled with the jazz of gossip  
oohs and aahs and sudden bursts of surprise  
but today the only talking was done with shoulders  
and sirens as red and distant as a forgiving God

My hopscotch eyes landed on a cigarette  
caught between long fingers  
the smoke curling around like sorrow  
and then up above an emaciated cat making its get away  
a chaos of a mouse exploding in its jaws  
all splayed and sparkling in the late morning sun

A mother hugged herself tightly  
hair covering her right eye  
to protect her from seeing too much  
but still she unraveled  
as the body syncopated along the sidewalk  
between the two bulky blue figures  
carrying my stretcher



*Cavalier Sally* by Uzomah Ugwu

## *Contributor Biographies*

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Ellie Altman's chapbook, *Within Walking Distance*, was published in early 2023. Her poems have appeared most recently in *The Keeping Room*, *Gyroscope Review*, *The Shore*, and *The Broad River Review*. She is currently seeking publication for a second chapbook, *Thin as Air*, and her first full-length poetry collection, *Rites of the Late Season*. A finalist for Eastern Shore Writers' Association's 2021 Crossroads Writing Contest, she lives on Maryland's Eastern Shore with her husband and their beloved Vizsla pup.

C.C. Apap grew up in the kind of Detroit suburb that had a functioning farm just over the back fence. His poetry has been featured or is forthcoming in *Dunes Review*, *Genuine Gold*, *Eunomia Review*, and *Belt Magazine*.

Nadia Arioli is the editor in chief and managing editor of *Thimble Literary Magazine*.

Priscilla Atkins is the author of *The Café of Our Departure* (Sibling Rivalry Press) and *Drinking the Pink* (Seven Kitchens Press). Her poems and hybrids appear in *Marrow*, *PANK*, *Poetry London*, *The Los Angeles Review* and other journals.

Courtney Bambrick serves as poetry editor at Philadelphia Stories. Her poetry is forthcoming in *American Poetry Review*, *Pinhole Poetry*, and *SWWIM Everyday*. Poems have appeared in *New York Quarterly*, *Beyond Words*, *Invisible City*, *The Fanzine*, *Philadelphia Poets*, *Apiary*, *Schuylkill Valley Journal*, *Mad Poets Review*, and *Certain Circuits*. Her chapbooks have been semi finalists and finalists in contests for *Iron Horse* and *Pavement Saw*. She teaches writing at Thomas Jefferson University's East Falls campus in Philadelphia.

KM Bezner (she/they) is a queer librarian in Rhode Island. Their work has been published by *Ouch! Collective*, *Barzakh*, *coalitionworks*, *Acropolis Journal*, *Impostor*, and others. If she's not writing poetry, they're probably reading comics, making zines, or playing games. She can be found most online places @kmbezner.

Frances Boyle (she / her) is a Canadian author, with three books of poetry, most recently *Openwork* and *Limestone* (2022) as well as a novella, *Tower* (2018) and an award-winning short story collection, *Seeking Shade*. (2020). Her writing has appeared throughout Canada and internationally including work in or forthcoming with *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *The New Quarterly* and *Freefall*. For more, visit [www.francesboyle.com](http://www.francesboyle.com).

Elya Braden is a writer and mixed-media artist living in Ventura County, CA, and is an editor for *Gyroscope Review*. She is the author of the chapbooks, *Open The Fist* (2020) and *The Sight of Invisible Longing* (2023). Her work has been published in *Anti-Heroin Chic*, *Burningword Literary Journal*, *Rattle Poets Respond*, *Sequestrum*, *Sheila-Na-Gig Online*, *The Louisville Review* and elsewhere. Her poems have been nominated for the *Pushcart Prize*, *Best of the Net*, and *Best New Poets*. [www.elyabraden.com](http://www.elyabraden.com).

Kathleen Calby lives in the Blue Ridge Mountains and hosts writer events for the North Carolina Writers Network. Her work appears in *San Pedro River Review*, *New Plains Review* and *The Orchards Poetry Journal*. Named a 2022 *Rash Award Poetry Finalist*, Kathleen published *Flirting with Owls* (Kelsay Books) in 2023. Her Sufi background and other mystical associations contributed to a recent full-length manuscript she is completing about ancient and contemporary Egypt and the Pharaonic Era landmarks she was privileged to experience. Back home, Kathleen enjoys fried chicken and biscuits a bit too much and long, strenuous walks not enough.

Audrey T. Carroll is the author of *What Blooms in the Dark* (ELJ Editions, 2024), *Parts of Speech: A Disabled Dictionary* (Alien Buddha Press, 2023), and *In My Next Queer Life, I Want to Be* (kith books, 2023). Her writing has appeared in *Lost Balloon*, *CRAFT*, *JMWW*, *Bending Genres*, and others. She is a bi/queer/genderqueer and disabled/chronically ill writer. She serves as a Diversity & Inclusion Editor for the *Journal of Creative Writing Studies*, and as a Fiction Editor for *Chaotic Merge Magazine*. She can be found at <http://AudreyTCarrollWrites.weebly.com> and @AudreyTCarroll on Twitter/Instagram.

Jonathan Chan is a writer and editor. Born in New York to a Malaysian father and South Korean mother, he was raised in Singapore and educated at Cambridge and Yale Universities. He is the author of the poetry collection *going home* (Landmark, 2022) and Managing Editor of *poetry.sg*. More of his writing can be found at [jonbcy.wordpress.com](http://jonbcy.wordpress.com).

Genevieve Creedon is a scholar, poet, and essayist. She earned her M.F.A. in Creative Writing from the University of Southern Maine's Stonecoast MFA Program and her Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from the University of Michigan. Her writing across genres focuses on the wonders and mysteries of earthly life. Her work appears in *About Place*, *Big City Lit*, *Cider Press Review*, *Narrative Northeast*, *Plain-songs*, and *Westchester Review*, among others.

Lavinia Darr is the penname of a disabled queer graduate of Johns Hopkins University. They live in Baltimore with their parrot-cat and can probably be found in a museum.

Diana Dinverno is the author of *When Truth Comes Home to Roost*, a chapbook published in 2022. Her work has appeared in *The Gyroscope Review*, *The Westchester Review*, *Panoply Magazine*, *The MacGuffin*, and other publications. She is the recipient of the Michigan Poetry Society's 2019 Margo LaGatutta Memorial Award, the Barbara Sykes Memorial Humor Poem Prize, and the 2022 Chancellor's Prize. A Best of the Net and Pushcart Prize nominee, Diana writes and practices law in Michigan. For more information, visit [www.dianadinverno.com](http://www.dianadinverno.com).



Laura Donnelly is the author of two collections of poetry, *Midwest Gothic* (Ashland Poetry Press 2020) and *Watershed* (Cider Press Review 2014). Originally from Michigan, she teaches and directs the creative writing program at SUNY Oswego.

Deborah H. Doolittle has lived in lots of different places (including the United Kingdom and Japan), but now calls North Carolina home. An AWP Intro Award winner and Pushcart Prize nominee, she is the author of *Floribunda* and three chapbooks, *No Crazy Notions*, *That Echo*, and *Bogbound*. When not writing or reading or editing *BRILLIG*: a micro lit mag, she is training for running road races, or practicing yoga, while sharing a house with her husband, six housecats, and a backyard full of birds.

John Dorsey is the former poet laureate of Belle, Missouri and the author of *Pocatello Wildflower*. He may be reached at [archerevans@yahoo.com](mailto:archerevans@yahoo.com).

Whitney Egstad is a writer, dancer, and educator in the Denver area. Her poems and essays have appeared in various publications including *The Best of the Net Anthology* and *The Rumpus*. Her research, professional, and personal projects are centered on the intersection of healing and the arts.

Carol Ellis lives in Portland, Oregon and is a two time nominee of the Pushcart Prize. Her books include the full length *Lost and Local* (Pacific Coast Poetry Series, 2019), *HELLO* (Two Plum Press, 2018), and *I Want A Job* (Finishing Line Press, 2014). Her publications include *JAMA*, *Comstock Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Trampoline*, *ZYZZYVA*, and *The Cincinnati Review*.

Adele Evershed is a Welsh writer who now lives in America. Her prose and poetry have been widely published in journals and anthologies such as *Every Day Fiction*, *Grey Sparrow Journal*, *Anti Heroin Chic*, *Gyroscope*, and *Janus Lit*. Adele has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize for poetry and short fiction and Best of the Net for poetry. Finishing Line Press published her first poetry chapbook, *Turbulence in Small Places*. Her second collection, *The Brink of Silence* is available from Bottlecap Press and her novella-in-flash, *Wannabe*, was published by Alien Buddha Press in May

Bill Garvey is a dual citizen of the USA and Canada. He currently resides in Toronto for six months and Nova Scotia the other (warmer) six with his wife, Jean. He received his MFA in poetry at New England College in 2005, working with Michael Waters, Alicia Ostriker and others. His poems have been published in Rattle, One Art, Concho River Review, Connecticut River Review, San Antonio Review and several more. Poems are forthcoming in Cimarron Review, The New Quarterly, Eunoia Review and a few more. His full length book of poems, *The basement on Biella*, was published this Fall by DarkWinter Press.

Kristin Gifford lives in Minneapolis, MN. She is completing her first poetry manuscript with The Loft Literary Center's Poetry Apprenticeship program. Her poetry has been published in The Briar Cliff Review, Oakwood Literary Journal, Sojourner's Magazine, the Heimat Review, and others.

Naana Eyikuma Hutchful is a Ghanaian writer with work appearing in Maudlin House, Unbroken Journal, Gone Lawn, 3Elements Review and forthcoming elsewhere. They like sunrises, baja blasts, and Wong Kar-Wai films.

Liz Irvin is a writer and medical student at the University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School. She holds a B.A. in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies from Barnard College. Her essay "Seasick: Lessons in Human Anatomy from Hyman Bloom's *The Hull*" appeared in Hektoen International. She lives in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Katie Kalisz is the recipient of a 2023 Elizabeth George Foundation Grant, and her poems have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. *Quiet Woman*, her first book, was a finalist for the 2018 Main Street Rag Poetry Book Award. Her second book, *Flu Season*, is forthcoming from Cornerstone Press. She lives in Michigan with her husband and their three children.

Liz Kendall lives in Surrey, England. Her poetry is published in the Almanac 2023 from Candlestick Press, two Stickleback micro-pamphlets and the anthologies *A Little Black Book of Short Poems* and *Poems in the Key of Hope* from The Hedgehog Poetry Press. Her forthcoming book *Meet Us and Eat Us: Food plants from around the world* is a collection of poetry, prose, and fine art photography co-authored with Vilma Bharatan. They plan to publish in 2024 following a Kickstarter in March, with an ongoing newsletter community via <https://meetuseatus.co.uk/>. They are on Twitter @meetuseatus. Liz's website is <https://theedgeofthewoods.uk/> and she is on Twitter and Facebook @rowansarered.

James King is a poet from New Hampshire, transplanted to the Carolinas. His poems have appeared in *Bear Review*, *Exposition Review*, *Chautauqua*, *Anti-Heroin Chic*, *Humana Obscura*, and others. James is the recipient of the 2020 Academy of American Poets Prize from Dartmouth College, a finalist in the 2023 NC State Poetry Competition, and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. He lives in Wilmington, NC, where he works as an editor and the coordinator for the UNCW Young Writers Workshop. He can be found on Instagram @jamn\_king and on his website [jamesedwardking.net](http://jamesedwardking.net).

Sophia Maggio is an artist and student in the Rhetoric and Writing graduate program at Michigan State University. She draws from her daily interactions, undergraduate studies in art and psychology, and meaningful conversations to inform her writing and artistic practices. She loves pigeons, funky places, and meandering walks through big cities.

Jennifer Martelli is the author of *The Queen of Queens*, winner of the Italian American Studies Association Book Award and named a "Must Read" by the Massachusetts Center for the Book, and *My Tarantella*, also a "Must Read," and finalist for the Housatonic Book Award. Her work has appeared in *Poetry*, *The Academy of American Poets Poem-a-Day*, *The Tahoma Literary Review*, *Folio*, *Jet Fuel Review*, *Tab: A Journal of Poetry*, and elsewhere. Jennifer Martelli has twice received grants for poetry from the Massachusetts Cultural Council and is co-poetry editor of MER.

Kelly Martineau is an essayist and poet. Her work has appeared in *Entropy*, *Little Patuxent Review*, *Sycamore Review*, and *The Florida Review*, among other journals. Honors include a Pushcart Prize nomination and selection of her prose chapbook, *Sirens|Silence*, as a finalist for the May Day Mountain Series, Newfound Prose Prize, and Tiny Fork Chapbook Contest. Her work has been supported by Artist Trust and Hypatia-in-the-Woods. She lives with her husband and two daughters in Seattle.

Juan Pablo Mobili was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and has been an adopted son of New York for many years. His poems have appeared in *Thimble Magazine*, *The Worcester Review*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, and *The Banyan Review*, among many others. His work has also received an Honorable Mention from the International Human Rights Art Festival, as well as Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominations. His chapbook, “*Contraband*,” will be published by The Poetry Box in April of 2022.

Manthipe Moila is a poet from Johannesburg, South Africa. She holds a BA Hons. in English Literature from Rhodes University. She has been published in *New Contrast*, *Stirring*, *Kalahari Review*, *Tupelo Quarterly* and *Agbowó*. Her upcoming publications will appear in *Hotazel Review* and *Hole in the Head Review*. She is currently based in Seoul, South Korea.

Kathryn Moll is an architect and California native. Her text-based drawings—collaborative works created under the name *modem*—have been shown at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco, and the Cooper Union in New York City. She lives with her family in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Cecil Morris retired after teaching high school English for 37 years and now tries to write what he used to teach his students to understand and (he hopes) to enjoy. He and his indulgent partner, mother of their children, divide their year between the arid Central Valley of California and the cool Oregon coast. He has poems appearing in or forthcoming from *Cimarron Review*, *Hole in the Head Review*, *New Verse News*, *Rust + Moth*, *Sugar House Review*, *Willawaw Journal*, and other literary magazines.

Kaitlyn Newbery is an adjunct English professor at University of the Cumberlands. She enjoys exploring questions about her faith through metaphors and storytelling. Her works have recently been published by Amethyst Review, Calla Press, Heart of Flesh Literary Journal, and Sunlight Press.

Grace Penry (she/her) is a MFA candidate at the University of Arkansas. She has been published in the Oakland Arts Review, Blackworks mag, and WestWind Journal among others. Her essay, "Gun and I" was nominated for Best of the Net 2023 by Kitchen Table Quarterly and translated into German by TRANS/LIT2. An excerpt from her novel-in-progress was awarded Honorable Mention in the Writer's Digest Annual Contest. This poem was inspired after reading Ashley McWaters's collection Whiteworks, and written while reflecting the movement of the river

Carrie Purcell Kahler's work has appeared or is forthcoming in Apogee, Bellevue Literary Review, Image, Denver Quarterly, Poetry Northwest, Postcard Poems and Prose, District Lit, HAD, and others. She received an MFA in creative writing from the University of Washington and lives in Seattle with her cat.

Emily Ramser is a poet and sometimes a teacher; though her time teaching is coming to an end after Christian Nationalists decided queer people shouldn't teach in Texas anymore and Emily accidentally ended up one of the stars of the NBC podcast Grapevine. Based out of Denton, Texas, Emily collaborates and co-creates with Spiderweb Salon as the editor of their zine WHAT NOW? and one of their regular performers. In her spare time, she works on documenting the ever-evolving history of blackout and found poetry at <https://www.thehistoryofblackoutpoetry.org/>.

M. Ann Reed, a former International Baccalaureate and Cambridge overseas educator, is now a private international educator. Her literary essays are remarked by literary, medical and psychology journals. Her co-authored book with Mabel S. Chu Tow, *Strange Kindness*, first published with University Press of America, is now curated by Rowman & Littlefield. Her published poems are included in the chapbooks, "making oxygen," FLP in 2020 and "ekphrastics & eccentricities," Kelsay Books, July 2023.

A.O'N. Romagnoli has been writing for a long time, through a great career in the wide world of food (from Chef to operator, to Lecturer and Lab Instructor at UNH), through motherhood, and through the transition of retiring. She lives on the coast of Tuscany and am learning how to be herself again. Her most recent publication was in the 2022 Oberon Review. Prior to that – UMass Amherst English Dept. Literary Journal, Northwest Poetry, Boston University Literary Journal, and others. After a long hiatus from submitting, She is at it again, with renewed determination. She wants others to recognize and share what she puts words to. Now free from the demands of work and home, she has the time to really focus on writing finer, more powerful poems.

Damian Rucci is a touring poet from New Jersey and the author of nine books of poetry. He is the founder of the NJ Poetry Renaissance and focus of the PBS documentary *Voices in The Garden*. A twice resident of the Osage Arts Community in Missouri, Damian has spent the last ten years bouncing around the country performing in universities, bookstores, dive bars, basements, and tattoo parlors. He is the founder of ten poetry series including Puff Puff Poems and Poems & Punchlines.

Priyanka Sacheti is a writer, poet, and photographer based in Bangalore, India. She grew up in the Sultanate of Oman and was educated at Universities of Oxford and Warwick, United Kingdom. She's published widely about art, gender, culture, and the environment in international digital and print publications over the years. Her literary work and art has appeared in numerous literary journals such as Barren, Dust Mag Poetry, Common, Parentheses Art, Popshot, The Lunchticket, and The Sunlight Press as well as various past and forthcoming anthologies. She's currently working on a poetry and short story collection. She can be found as @iamjustavisualperson on Instagram and @priyankasacheti on Twitter.

Jennifer Schomburg Kanke, originally from Ohio, currently lives in Florida. Her work has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *New Ohio Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Shenandoah* and *Salamander*. She is the winner of the Sheila-Na-Gig Editions Editor's Choice Award for Fiction. Her zine about her experiences undergoing chemotherapy for ovarian cancer, *Fine, Considering*, is available from Rinky Dink Press (2019). She serves as a reader for *The Dodge* and as a Meter Mentor in Annie Finch's Poetry Witch Community. She can be found on YouTube as Meter&Mayhem.

Eva Skrande's third book, *The Boat that Brought Sadness into the World*, is forthcoming in June from Finishing Line Press. Her publications include *My Mother's Cuba* (River City Publishing Poetry Series) and *Bone Argot* (Spuyten Duyvil). Her poems have appeared in *Agni*, *The Iowa Review*, *Smartish Pace*, *Thimble*, *The American Poetry Review*, *Ploughshares*, *The Cortland Review*, and elsewhere. In her current transfiguration, she teaches for Writers in the Schools and tutors at Houston Community College.

Annie Stenzel (she/her) is a lesbian poet who was born in Illinois, but did not stay put. Her second full-length collection, *Don't misplace the moon*, is forthcoming from Kelsay Books in July, 2024. Her earlier book was *The First Home Air After Absence* (Big Table Publishing, 2017). Her poems appear or are forthcoming in print and online journals in the U.S. and the U.K., including *Atlas and Alice*, *Chestnut Review*, *Galway Review*, *Kestrel*, *Night Heron Barks*, *On the Seawall*, *Rust + Moth*, *Saranac Review*, *SoFloPoJo*, *SWWIM*, *The Lake*, and *UCity Review*. A poetry editor for the online journals *Right Hand Pointing* and *West Trestle Review*, she lives on unceded Ohlone land within walking distance of the San Francisco Bay, and pays a voluntary monthly land tax to help restore Indigenous life.

Shannon Swearingen Gabriel is a professional copy editor by day, a mom 24-7, and a scribbler of poems whenever possible. She graduated from the University of Evansville, where she was a member of Phi Mu Fraternity, with a BFA in Creative Writing in 2013. Originally from the Nashville area, she spent four years in the city of Chicago before heading to the suburbs, where she enjoys checking out great restaurants, cute coffee shops, and vinyl record stores— and, of course, taking her toddler to the library. She currently has work forthcoming in *New Plains Review*.

Irina Tall (Novikova) is an artist, graphic artist, illustrator. She graduated from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures with a degree in art, and also has a bachelor's degree in design. The first personal exhibition "My soul is like a wild hawk" (2002) was held in the museum of Maxim Bagdanovich. In her works, she raises themes of ecology, in 2005 she devoted a series of works to the Chernobyl disaster, draws on anti-war topics. The first big series she drew was *The Red Book*, dedicated to rare and endangered species of animals and birds. Writes fairy tales and poems, illustrates short stories. She draws various fantastic creatures: unicorns, animals with human faces, she especially likes the image of a man – a bird – Siren. In 2020, she took part in Poznań Art Week. Her work has been published in magazines: *Gupsophila*, *Harpy Hybrid Review*, *Little Literary Living Room* and others. In 2022, her short story was included in the collection "The 50 Best Short Stories", and her poem was published in the collection of poetry "The wonders of winter".

Angela Townsend is Development Director at Tabby's Place: a Cat Sanctuary, where she bears witness to mercy for all beings. She graduated from Princeton Seminary and Vassar College. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *Cagibi*, *Chautauqua*, *Clockhouse*, *Glassworks Magazine*, *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *Invisible City*, *Lake Effect*, *The Penn Review*, and *The Razor*, among others. She is a 2023 Best Spiritual Literature nominee. Angie has lived with Type 1 diabetes for 33 years, laughs with her poet mother every morning, and loves life dearly.



Uzomah Ugwu is a poet/writer, curator, editor, and multi-disciplined artist. Her poetry, writing, and art have been featured internationally in various publications, galleries, art spaces, and museums. She is a political, social, and cultural activist. Her core focus is on human rights, mental health, animal rights, and the rights of LGBTQIA persons. She is also the managing editor and founder of Arte Realizzata.

Matina Vossou is a self-taught artist living in Athens, Greece. She uses acrylics and a toothpick, a technique she learnt from her father, a naïve painter. She paints faces like perfectly unfinished mosaics of emotions and ideas. The skin is cracked and seemingly illuminated from the inside. She believes that every face is a journey; looking at a face is one of the longest, most adventurous and knowledgeable trips one can have.

Ann E. Wallace is Poet Laureate of Jersey City, New Jersey and host of *The WildStory: A Podcast of Poetry and Plants*. She is the author of two poetry collections—*Days of Grace and Silence: A Chronicle of COVID's Long Haul*, newly released from Kelsay Books and *Counting by Sevens* (Main Street Rag, 2019). She has previously published work in *Thimble*, *One Art*, *Halfway Down the Stairs*, *Gyroscope Review*, *Wordgathering*, and many other journals. You can follow her online at [AnnWallacePhD.com](http://AnnWallacePhD.com) and on Instagram @AnnWallace409.

Kylie Wang is a Taiwanese writer who grew up in Hong Kong and now resides in California. Her short works have received 40+ awards and publications, including from *YoungArts*, the *Scholastics Arts and Writing Award*, *Paper Lanterns*, and *Bluefire*. Her debut novel, a co-authored Young Adult novel titled *Stuck in Her Head*, was published by *Earnshaw Books* in 2023. You can find her editing her latest short story or attending *California Writers' Club* meetings in her spare time; or alternatively, on Instagram @kyliewangwrites.

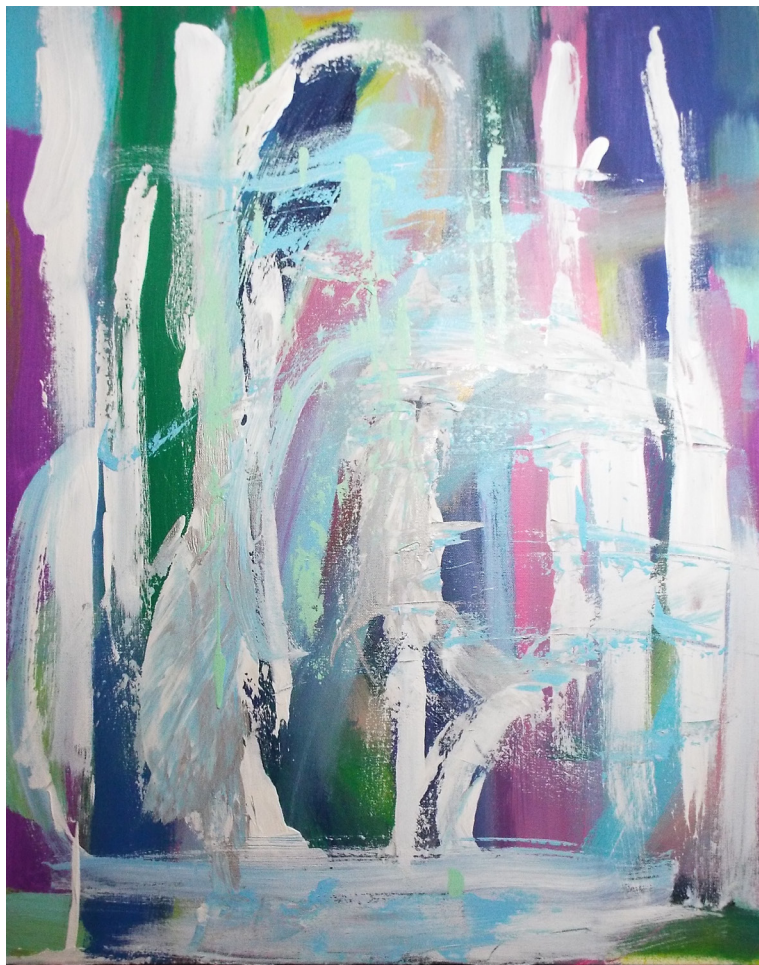
Louise Wilford lives and works in Yorkshire, UK, and has been writing poetry and prose since childhood. Her work has been widely published, most recently in *Allium*, *Epistemic Literary*, 805, *Heartland Review*, *Last Leaves*, *New Verse News*, *Ocotilo Review*, *Pine Cone Review*, *Punk Noir*, *River and South*, *Silver Blade*, *The Avenue*, *POTB*, *Balloons Lit*, *Parakeet*, *The Fieldstone Review*, and *Black Hare Press*. In 2020, she won First Prize in the Arts Quarterly Short Story Competition, and was awarded a Masters in Creative Writing (Distinction). She is working on a fantasy novel. You can read her blog here: <https://louviewsnewscues.blogspot.com/>

Emma Wilkins is a Tasmanian journalist whose freelance work has been published by mainstream news outlets, print magazines, and literary journals in Australia and beyond. She has a particular interest in relationships, literature, culture, ethics and belief. From short, silly reflections on cultural norms to long philosophical essays, you never know what she's going to write next, or where it will be published. Neither does she.

Tamara Yewchuk is a writer and single mother living on Vancouver Island, CA on the territory of the Lkwungen (Songhees & Esquimalt) WSÁNEĆ peoples. Her hobby is clouds. She has been published in *Blood Tree Lit* and the *Sociological Review*.

Kuo Zhang is an Assistant Professor in Education at Siena College. She has a bilingual book of poetry in Chinese and English, *Broadleaves* (Shenyang Press). Her poem "One Child Policy" was awarded second place in the 2012 Society for Humanistic Anthropology [SHA] Poetry Competition held by the American Anthropology Association. She served as poetry & arts editor for the *Journal of Language & Literacy Education* in 2016-2017 and also one of the judges for 2015 & 2016 SHA Poetry Competition. Her poems and translated poetry have appeared in numerous literary magazines, including *Rattle*, *Plume Magazine*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Anmly*, *The Rialto*, *New Note Poetry*, *Nine Mile*, *Gyroscope Review*, *Coffin Bell Journal*, *The Roadrunner Review*, *Lily Poetry Review*, *Mom Egg Review*, *Bone Bouquet*, and *North Dakota Quarterly*, etc.

Ray Zhang is currently a student at Columbia University who has studied under Ernest O. Ògúnyemí and Lisa Hiton. He has been recognized by the New Zealand Poetry Society, Albion Review, and the Alliance for Young Artists & Writers. In his free time, Ray enjoys hiking through the Michigan wilderness and fishing on the lake shores.



*Velma and Willie* by Uzomah Ugwu

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