



Last Leaves

Issue 5 | Fall 2022

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Last Leaves: Issue 5

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Edited and compiled by Cailey Thiessen, Kiera Baron, and Maina Chen

Cover design by Kiera Baron

Note from the Editors

What does growth mean to you?

“It is scary, it makes my heart pound, it makes me tremble. But there is nothing I can do about it. We grow old and leave our bodies.”

Kiera’s grandmother sent us these words after the close of submissions, and we thought they summed up a lot of the emotions we experience both for ourselves and others.

The idea of “growth” is synonymous with aging. Every day we’re getting older, we’re learning more, and we’re moving forward whether we want to or not. *Issue 4: ANCESTORS* took us back to where we came from, the roots we grew from. And we developed *Issue 5: GROWTH* to show where we are and where we’ve yet to go.

You’ll notice this issue is a bit different. The cover design is growing and changing, as are we, as are you. Each time we do this, we receive so many amazing pieces—and this time, there was an underlying theme: time of year. As writers ourselves, we were taught to let the writing carry us where it wants to go. When putting these pieces into layout, we realized that they could serve not only as a representation of growth but a metaphoric journey through an entire year and the seasons that come with it.

Every single piece we received for this issue, whether featured in this mag or not, provoked reflection, introspection, and emotion. Thank you to all of you who submitted and who shared your experiences with us. We hope this issue makes those of us afraid of growth and change a little more open, a little more understanding, and a little more okay with getting older.

~*Last Leaves Editors*

Kiera S. Baron, Maina Chen, & Cailey Johanna Thiessen



Content Warning

Some poems in this book contain content that may be sensitive to some readers. Each of these poems will be marked with the above symbol so you'll be able to tell which ones have potentially triggering content. Please read at your own discretion.

At *Last Leaves*, we understand how reading sensitive content can not only affect our daily lives but our mentality and overall state-of-being. Please take care of yourselves, and take breaks reading the content if you need.

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AUTUMN'S END



Growth
Andrew Feng

SPIDERWORT

Mat Wenzel

—*Tradescantia obiensis*

This is the easy time; there is nothing
to be assembled or taken apart. Each
neon leaf has fallen where it's fallen
& the day glo warms us, erranded &
errandless. Sit with me under the light, strong under
the eaves, to stare out at our evergreens.
If you press against my right side, I might
not think about how many winters I have
left in me, you,

Tender Spiderwort, so winterfree.
This is the easy time. Kneel with me
in the maples & take your sharp stone.
Cut a part of you & put it against a cut
part of me.

Lie down with me, in the easy time.
Press against my right side. I only have
one more winter left & it is for you.
Let's sleep in the mud, & however
unnatural

rise into endless spring & summer,
mudcaked & fluorescent.

I'm no poet.

Anthony

Trapped between two worlds,
Amber coasts of clouds twirled unfree,
Anchored threads left unseen
By rolling hills and trees under
Fraying haze & thunder,
Head sideways
I wonder,
Really?

It's not like I'm stealing
This is my own writing- I think?
If I can't work out these kinks,
Just ignore this story I bring you;
No right words, none new

I can't describe the clues those clouds
left me.

A Saturday in October

Claire Doll

No one tells you what growing up is until you drive home and see the way the sunlight hits scarlet and gold trees, illuminating the gravel road to the ranch house your mom and dad just bought, with five acres and a growing vegetable garden, and you walk through the front door, through the smell of brown sugar cookies baking, through the long, winding hallway, and you see your parents sitting, smiling, watching their favorite black-and-white film, and like an old, frayed cardigan, you don't fit; you walk to your bedroom and it looks perfect and unlived in, and you are too afraid to bury yourself in the warm, velvet comforter because tomorrow, you will pack right up again and drive back to university, to the cold, mountain air, to the single picture frame sitting on your windowsill of you and your sister when you were only four-years old.

solar eclipse

Corey J. Boren

the note was still bright white, creased
cleanly down its center—your refuse still
clings to the uncleaned drawers, behind the hamper.

i still find pieces of you i had swallowed.
just yesterday, i said a word you taught me,
proof that your bacteria still replicate on my tongue.

it makes sense, given how you dressed
me in your own god's image, your rocks
and dirt dancing before my brightness.

you still shine in my sky. i am not
rid of your orbit yet. you are a thing i carry.

Is Our World Grand Enough

W. Hans Miller

*The world breaks everyone, and afterward,
some are strong at the broken places.*

—Ernest Hemingway

With the rank of forest detritus,
waste of the world except for soil,
I, lacking love but maimed
by mercy, took them in: minuscule
and joined at the hip, twin empty
acorn shells. One brother
cracked and broke at the rim,
the other a perfect goblet
for five dewdrops, but too shallow
for a ladybug looking to swim.

They were a sight which made
even hungry sparrows turn away.
What happens to souls live or dead,
handicapped forever, if only
empty carapace lies ahead?
Is our world grand enough yet,
with waiting arms
for the meek and mangled?
Is there a wounded one
somewhere out there,
refusing to resign
with face still to the sun,
finding cheer
in whatever's left behind?

Now they're here on my desk,
on a slice of dinosaur bone,
on a book called Curiosity,
asking why. They learned early
to not ask the oaktree why.
There would be no acorns
scattered for succeeding time,
no children's tears or mother's groans.

Flashing

Douglas K Currier

Could be different for some,
that whole thing about one's
life flashing before the eyes
at the end. My father's life
seemed to flash by his lips,
over his palate. Asking
for different meals, foods
from his past, he was eating
memory and licking his fingers.
He remembered taste as time,
favorite dishes from restaurants
and kitchen tables – all gone
before the blandness of age.
We got him what he wanted
– no cost, no judgment levied
now on his appetite.

rolling love cries

Alan Bern

rolling love-cries
through two open windows

thirty years ago you died

ten years before

a half-open window
we stood beneath

holding hands listening



Autumn
Irina Novikova

parasite

So Asiddao

—1938-2021

Mom says the pesticides did it,
traveling from office to office
tending to richer people's plants
no mask, no gloves,
because she didn't know better
had no thought of the consequences
ahead.

My grandma
never retired. She just
stopped
stopped being able to clean, cook,
articulate conversation
by herself

that plucking away,
will she won't she
loves me loves me not

We're not quite there yet,
she still knows my face
and smiles when she can,

but she did ask me once
if she'll ever walk again

I didn't have the strength
to tell her she won't.

But mostly
we just sit together,
looking out into her
backyard,

my childhood playground,
a jungle
of all her passions,

passing the time
as the tumors eat away
at

her brain

leaving
h o l e s

like all the bugs
that decided to take

revenge
all at once
that killing to survive

that cycle of life.

Aftermath

Surette Danae

your leaving
was like a redwood falling;
the once immutable first creaking
then splintering, and with a mighty snap
crashing.

now light floods the understory -
soft mosses and curled ferns, black beetles
and whorled snails - stretching free
of the shadows, their celebration silent,
subdued.

Once More

Anda Marcu

Marble mountains harbour
Tuscan red elephants and
talking mushrooms
reading newspapers and
jotting down notes using
burgundy fountain pens
with fine gold nibs,
perfectly accessorized.
Polka dots on their caps.

Moonlight shapes gleaming
patches over distant gardens
bordered by tall heavy gates.
Ceramic flower pots, empty—
memories of plants that once
bloomed brightly,
vivacious chatter of
fragrance and color.

You mistook the alarm clock
for distant ships' sirens.

Once more.

Another Name for Singing

Carol R. Sunde

As Jane Doe would, Carol feels wrong.
I pin the identity problems on my name
like a tail on a paper donkey, and retreat
to Burroughs Mountain to summon

what I need from Mount Rainier,
ruling like a deity overall—or from whatever
deity dwells in me. *Send heat or cold or mean rain,
till a truer self/ name wells like a spring from my depths.*

*Let me be an empty bowl ready
to receive any true name that can guide—
Faith, Hope, Charity—
I'll try to be golden as the rule.*

Soon I tackle high trails, breathe glacier-fresh air,
identify with pussypass and pikas,
tan on sunny afternoons reading psalms—
share pungent verses with passing hikers.

After forty days, to every wind that whistles
through me as if I were nothing, I whistle in response
so well that marmots come to keep me company
and mountain goats graze nearby.

Carol, my name, my song, skips
back home true to me as I consider storms gifts
wander dun paths no longer seen as barren—
cache each rough blessing.

Body

Maryam Imogen Ghouth

*This is your body, your greatest gift, pregnant with wisdom
you do not bear, grief you thought
was forgotten, and joy you have never known.*

—Marion Woodman

I ask for groundedness to embody my body,
to close my eyes and diffuse throughout,
sense-check every curve, every tip,
visualize my heartbeat,

to feel into the limbs that convey me
from spring to spring,

to express thanks to the forces that attack
sundry invaders of lungs and skin;

not to disparage my creatureliness,
not to deny that I am a living organism that will one day die.

I tend to play
with the gods of the mind,
to dwell in the ethereal,

to dabble in the symbolic,
disregard the metabolic,
as if my sense of what is could be felt
without my flesh and bone.

Sometimes I forget that mind and body
are one, that my sense of I
is not the captain.

I forget that the mileage gained from a book
needn't replace that earned by foot,

that the dream-ladders I climb in my imagination
are housed in a physical organ,

that love isn't just an idea,
but is blood vessels constricting
and muscles contracting in the gut.

The palms sweat and the mouth dries
when danger is about;
the body knows before I've
had time to think.

From stimuli to senses
to nervous system and brain
to feeling and poetry weaving
to giving back in a looped ribbon,

the body is the gift.

My Life of Glamor & Squalor

Olivia Soule

Alright, sentimental elephant,
don't tether my blanket
to the vertical heavens.
Surprise: cockroaches
on shower curtains,
and paper take-out bags.

To wallow in your own squalor,
hear the sounds of Teslas
crashing, canines carousing and complaining
about the length of their leashes,
infants squawking, squeaking, and screaming,
ceiling fans whirring, sirens blaring,
and the vibrations from the planes
descending to LAX. To hear four
different layers of everyday dissonance
simultaneously. To make red
spaghetti, not purple. To ignore
the bang of brooms from below,

the stench of the trash cans,
and the cigarettes and bottles
and other treasures on the ground,
which I try, I try not to look at anymore.
It is possible to survive a day in the city,
but you really gotta bite down.



The Really Truly Deep Blue Iris

Phyllis Green

I was better off, in the end

Christina Bagni

I came home and all his things were gone.
the clothes, the instruments, the posters
the photographs , the magnets on the fridge

I fell to my knees
in the kitchen
And—

over the following days
I saw more and more things missing.
he took all the salt and pepper.
all the envelopes.
the steamer.
did he possibly—yes, that photo frame is gone, too.
he was, from my heart, untimely ripp'd.

some things remained, though.
while his books were slid from between mine, leaving gaps,
he forgot his melatonin capsules from the medicine cabinet.
while his chainpull was unwrapped from the ceiling fan
he forgot his nice shoes.

he forgot a souvenir I bought him and I dangled it over the trash
then over my suitcase.
a pocket watch. his name engraved, tarnished, not working.
I saved it for him in the end.
but I let the roses he gave me starve.

I'd confided in him my fear of abandonment
and he'd run away, thieving half our lives in his knapsack.

I pressed my nose against his pillow and smelled detergent.
he'd even stolen his scent from me.
I threw his pillow under the bed
and wept, alone,
surrounded by empty walls and thumbtacks.

Firestorm

Cameron Morse

Sunlight fades among the shadows
of clouds. No shelter
from the monster inside yourself.
The shower of artillery shells
sheds no light on
the ground. There is clearly an error
in the code, a monkey
wrench in the machine and no shelter.

Outside, the ones lie down
with the zeros,
puddling offspring: Brown-eyed
and curly, rambunctious.
Unkempt. The city bustles with ones
and zeros, the second-
born, middle children with bleeding teeth

Your Cheek

Riyad Carey

a dune, wisps of sand suspended in motion
hazy reds of a setting sun refracted through heat
a cloud of hair blown over an island decorated in gold
eyes that give hope to wanderers,
lead to your mouth, an oasis wet with life

I laid there until my body became fossil, became dust,
swept through the desert,
returned to the sand and the sun

This is the Culture We've All Inherited

Fin Ryals

My father speaks of searching for treasure in far away ghost towns as

our untied laces dance to the call of crows
upon sidewalks upended by tree roots and our
eyes waver in search of an old wooden home
born out of us by necessity and taken away by greed

His nails like wooden cross tombstones
dug into the earth behind homes abandoned
to decompose under a sky unfit for clouds and
condors alike and he cheered once he found

Jesus. It's gone.

They laugh as one atop a cedar fence guarding
the land my father once called home like
hounds of hades while we confront the modern
monstrosity responsible for our damnation

*Antique beer bottles. Thrown by drunken settlers from their back porch.
That was what I found.*

Sunrise, Sunset

Stacie Eirich

Golden light breaks over mountains of blue,
brilliant warmth sweeping over miles of grassy plains,
buds opening to drink in the sunlight of each passing day,
babes standing, walking, running —
growing with the turn of seasons and years.

Tangerine dreams settle over calm fields of green,
fine mists of stars weaving over waves of ocean waters,
warmth of day yielding to cool of evening,

Daughters, Mothers, Grandmothers, Sons, Fathers, Grandfathers —
holding fast to each other
with the passing of time.



untitled 3

Ollie Braden

i am not the first person to tell you about the way
that sunlight streams through my bedside
window, dances across crumpled leaves on my dying plants.

the way my toes dig into the back of my knees
as i try to get comfortable enough to fall back
asleep, forget, neglect responsibility.

all the same, i worry that i am “spent.” that i have nothing left to give.

i can barely move in the mornings, and i am a little afraid
that i may have already killed myself.

THE SEASONS

George Freck

—*After Mei Yao Chen*

My wife has died.
Billions of stars
have already yielded
to their inevitable fate.
Dead leaves
fall into the river
only to disintegrate.
Clouds like mountains
float by, then disappear
into a blue sky.
Where do last
summers flowers lie.
Our life is half pleasure
and half fear.
What is now so distant,
was once so near.



Casual

Noelle Hendrickson

just once more,
you whisper in my ear,
your hands finding mine.
it's only human of us,
isn't it? a cheap solution
to hunger, a pay-per-view
kind of love, like pulp fiction
or the verses of trashy pop.
perhaps, as it should only be.
still, somehow, when our shadows
merge, i distract myself by following
the poem in our contours,
and losing time considering it – this,
i think, is only human.

After

Ed Brickell

The patio fire leaps and snaps
The moon slips through pecan trees
Islay whiskey on the table
The whispers of crickets

A few days past the hard tears
I held her tightly
Feeling the sad violence
The gasping the shaking

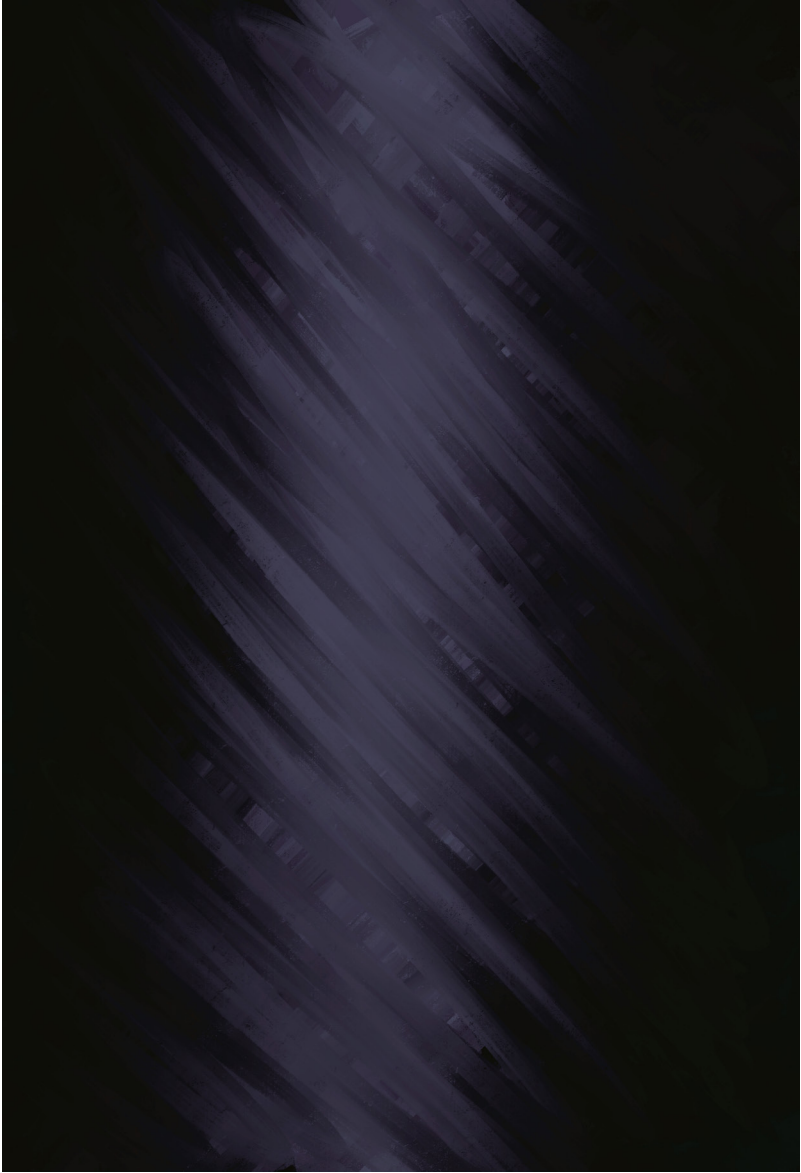
Now in cooling stillness
Tasting the smoke in our glasses
Together we follow the moon
Until it slides out of sight

Redwood Eulogy

Josephine Raye Kelly

The redwoods were the only thing that could hold all my jagged remains. I relished their growth from groves to forest. Let the seedlings soothe my sticky tears. The sobs cascaded, eyes becoming glue with the bark as I snuggled up to scratchy needles, embraced my fall into the earthen bed away from the canopy, and nestled in the roots. I sank into the dirt and we vined together like one whole endangered organism determined to survive.

WINTER



A Dream of Progress

Edward Lee

WINTER MAKES A HOME IN MY BODY

Kait Quinn

I wake to trees gone skeletal,
frosted chrysanthemums,
fits of ginger where the sky hangs,
death of things glaring
as sunbeam upon pupil.

Already, December dresses up
in her whites and golds—trades
her emeralds for silver when moon
swells full, sealing me inside
my shadow self for winter.

Clam shut in subnivean burrows,
I am opaline. Water makes a home
in my marbled body, solidifies,
and threatens to rip my heart's skin
open like a broiled peach.

What would escape if I let it? What spoiled memory
like a favorite dress, assault soiled, then buried,
would crawl from my joints? What nicotine poison,
what invisible, tongue-punched bruises would smoke
seep from my violet veins? What matters

is the net of stars that will catch them, spin
them into bronze lacquer that, come spring,
will rain from sky to fill canyons
cracked open in order to bloom. What matters
is that I will wear my scars burnished
like ornaments instead of wounds.

Family Secrets

Shannon Marzella

One

Not built on sand, but on bones. You, Tower-Keeper, carefully laid the stones, held by blood, and something metallic, like guilt. Did you hoist them unsteadily, one by one, yearning for relief

until the burden of holding
their memory became a tower

perched neatly on your rounded shoulders?

Two

I have become stone, layers
of unpacked stories embedded

in rock. Impossible to speak,
like culling one drop of water
from the ocean. Impossible

until it rains and I cup a drop
in a soft palm and listen to its whispering—

Hush

I hold it like an egg, passed
cautiously, balanced like
shells, fragile and necessary.

Closing Time

Clay Waters

sign the last paper
catch the last train
let your ideas from the shower
clog the drain

take down the smiling signs
unplug the clock
slide the sliding door
into permanent lock

turn off the apparatus,
pile corners with concrete dust
fill the bins up with the broom
until you've made a raided tomb

the latest little life to flare and blink;
is it a solace

that still the world rolls back around
to let in light
into a space left clean and bright
and empty as promise

We Grew Up There

Nicole Zdeb

And when She belted and raved, we

closed the doors to our rooms, but not
the belted one,

she who resisted by hiding
in plain sight. We held our breaths

until it was over, until her soft animal
footsteps on the plush staircase

until her door opened and closed, softly
and she was in her own place, her pink

room in a white house in a dull suburb
we grew up there and when She belted and raved

we closed the doors to our rooms (I'm sorry)

My Old Potted Money Tree

Zhihua Wang

I hope you can feel me
standing beneath
your high-rise balcony,
in dust and tears.

We were once a family,
being together for years.
One day I said goodbye
for good, to wander.

Years later, I feel lucky
to come back, alive,
looking up at you
through the dim moonlight.

Your greenness,
is just what I wanted.
When we're separated
by an ocean, each faces

an unpredictable fate,
the deepest hope
is no more than we both
in this world, breathe.

Winter Birch

paul Bluestein

The solitary birch, bending into the wind, stands
bone-white against a glacial December sky.

Skeletal limbs and thin fingers reach
for the golden-straw sun.

In the street beyond its knobby, arthritic feet,
an oil-slick aster blooms on the black asphalt.

Standing alone, clutching the curbstone,
the tree calls to mind an old man waiting for the bus,
or maybe April.

DETACHMENT

Toti O'Brien

The cut, as if made with silk
thread, instantaneous, treacherous.
The heart, horizontally halved
its bottom part falling, precipitous
as they say of some childbirth.
It's the end of love, irreversible
on a dull afternoon. Pain
is just a flash and then gone.

Just as when a ball of dense
mucus dropped from womb
to floor. At the clinic, they said
the fetus was fine, firmly nestled.
Almost all conceptions are double
they said. Almost always
a twin falls at an early stage
discreet, quiet, incognito.

poem excluding forgiveness

Corey J. Boren

i want my wikipedia page to be longer
than yours, my funeral more attended—

after heartbreak, some recover. kill
with kindness. others metastasize into

success. program your way out of this,
i dare you. solve for x_0 . convince yourself

that any of my fleeting joys are merely
chemical reactions, but i will always find

a better way to plath you, break the
binding, put hope in some other birdcage.

i can resurrect your agony and drag it
through a metaphor. you won't make it

out of this couplet alive.



Stage 2
Adriana Rocha

Mother SCOBY

Olivia Soule

I open the lid expecting consistency, instead to see the whole culture crawling. A fly got in the jar and multiplied. Maggots—we would burn to ashes to avoid being infested. I threw my mother Kombucha culture in the trash, and took the bag to the can outside the house, so the trash men would come and take her away.

If we can't see decomposition, it's not there. Like maggots, we are all miners, digging in and mixing and seeing what surfaces.

When my father's eyes turned to the side, a professionally detached man came within the hour to take his body away for cremation in a few days, and I did not have a father anymore. Cremation is a convenient way to skip the decay, but I'd rather let the maggots honor me. I hear my mother

ymbiotic culture of bacteria and yeast creaking like a hundred-year old door handle. When she ferments, she produces such a delightful tonic, ambrosia of the goddesses. A SCOBY that has turned funky, though, makes you turn away.

I have other mothers, and I will continue brewing in a few days.

Note: mother refers to the culture used to brew kombucha, which is called symbiotic culture of bacterial yeast, or SCOBY for short.

Dead Trees in the Woods

Ed Brickell

One falls into a Pieta in its neighbor's embrace,
Another sinks through the earth by years,
Broken twig fingers clutching grass.
Some are the lichened wombs of termites,
Folded limbs pointlessly praying.

But it is life and death that are dying here
Among their countless ways of continuing.
See how green stabs through the broken bark,
How the bugs ravage that rotting skin
To feed all their shiny young.

Witch Boy

Layla Lenhardt

When I was 23 I longed to escape
the silver cage, bars cold as a winter
eclipse. I'd flip the cards and pray
for the Hierophant, the Chariot, even
the goddamn Wheel of Fortune.
I'd always get the Tower.

Your hands were adorned with too many
rings when we had brunch. We talked
about my Freedom Kick, the bowing
of the steel bars I'd squeezed through.

Since then, I've slept with three people
with Wikipedia pages. I'm not sure
that means anything. But I'm always
in the passenger's seat of their car,
annoyingly aware of the position
of my legs.

REWRITE

Dylan Webster

I look at these familiar words,
no longer my loyal familiar;
an ancient enemy.

Prodigal, rebellious, arrogant;
you left the house breathless,
stomping grass into tile-like carpet —

What have I wrought?
I don't hate you; I don't know you,
face upturned, twisted in malice —

I cannot stop glaring now,
you must be remade, but I'm transfixed,
were you a reflection, I'd —

Well, I look at these familiar words,
no longer my parched leech;
ever ancient enemy.



City and nature, all this is in me and all this is me

Irina Novikova

burdens

Joseph A Farina

this is the time of our disaffection
waking in darkness to await darkness
finding beauty only in shadows
our eyes conquered by gloom
distracted by deprivation
truth accepted by twittering fingers
as we gather what warmth lingers
in our growing perpetual distancing
until we no longer hear the light call
in words, music and time passing
becoming viewers behind closed windows
streaked with dust and rain, opaque
our lives a line from darkness to darkness

my sister is not my daughter

Celine Pun (潘珠海)

when I was six,
 you dreamed for a son again
 but God gifted you a fourth daughter.

when I was eight,
if I scrunched my brows
with my face to a book
 you stopped asking me
 to change her diapers
 to spoon her Gerbers.

when I was ten, I watched
 you drive away, a quick errand
 her soul leaving her body
 arms slack, eyes frozen
 seizures still and silent.

when I was twelve, I heard
 your cacophonous prayers
 her thrashing arms,
 her fears wailing through the fluorescent halls,
 her spine carved with metal rods.
 flailed spoons became G-tube,
 cotton arms, and stomach scars.
 her first words came
 when her ear sliced open.

when I was eighteen, I was the only older sister home.
I flicked kitchen lights on, tied on apron
 you offered money
 if I babysat her an hour
 I left her on the toilet
 with Minecraft on the iPad
 like you did
boiled ramen, fried an egg
 you did not answer the phone
 walls smeared
 her face and fingers defecated
that day I learned
how to do laundry
that day I learned
how Cup Noodles taste fine
cold.



Autopsy

Audra Burwell

Pale blue spores of rot stare at you
From the broken and bloody tips of
My fingernails, white mildew kissing
The translucent shells of my eyelids
Gummed and crusted with dried fluids.

The reek of ammonia and embalming
Fluid assault your nasal passages,
Barely masking the rotten and putrid
Scent of death that lingers in the air of
The morgue, a blanket of decayed flesh.

You trace the constellation of scars that
Line my thighs, a map of brutality, a tale
Of survival, decades of memories
Preserved in the ink staining my skin,
Secrets housed in their black outlines.

You twine your fingers in the sea of spilled
Locks fanning across the surgical table,
My hair stiff and brittle between your
Fingertips, as you choke back the flood
Of tears brimming, poised to overflow.

Empty, hollow thoughts flit across your
Mind as you ponder what dark things I
Hid from you in life and what mysteries
I now carry to the grave, deep into the
Belly of the corpse-saturated Earth.

Your fingers claw desperately at my
Lifeless wooden flesh, as if you could
Peel away my exterior, piece by piece,
Releasing the truths only I knew, as if
Such an act could assuage your guilt.



Judgement Day

paul Bluestein

I wake up slowly,
feeling my fingers brush the bottle of vodka beside me,
in the place where you slept for forty-two years.
Court is once again in early morning session,
my life accused of meaninglessness in the first degree.
The .45 caliber judges are all waiting in their chambers,
each one holding an indictment with my name on it,
deliberating the merits of my closing arguments.
I'm not worried though. If convicted,
I don't plan on serving a long sentence.

January Morning

Ed Brickell

My feeble nightmares crumble,
Perceived only as discomfort.
The cats hover like birds of prey.
One side of the bed, empty now.

I am pulled upright by strings,
The bed barely needs making.
The blinds blink open,
The back yard assembles itself.

Skeletal sunshine smolders
In a gunmetal sky.
The galaxy grinds into operation.

“You don’t have to do anything,”
The minister said.

Portrait of a body

Adamu Yahuza Abdullahi

—*After Safia Elhilo*

Nowadays, I'm growing comfortable in loneliness. Today, I opened my mouth to speak & a strange voice told me I'm too beautiful for light. I hid love behind my knee each time I want to talk to my peers. A friend once looked at my brown face and saw grey. he said I have a ghost haunting my tongue & this chemistry seemed to be so true—I, too, wear blood as a voice. I once attended a gathering. everyone spoke. & I kept mute. I stayed mute. I am afraid of my mouth. I am afraid to speak because my mouth holds no good news. I believed I'm grown up. & fucked up. my birth certificate said I'm past 20. I placed my childhood photo in my arms & I saw a boy older than air. I saw a warm bruise & I didn't mean that I'm ugly. my mother told me how handsome I used to be in my childhood days. & how many were used to be my friends. now, I have a friend in each mo(u)rning headline. their heads—a sea. reason I don't read again: each time I open book to read the shadows of my friends keep shrouding my throat like a throng of dust. I didn't mean to tell you this; my veins had grown to be a channel where grief flows like fever. I filled my mouth with borrowed laughter & they didn't stay. sometimes I went around touching the dinning chairs—looking for who sat where during a dinner. laughing out loud on the silly jokes we cracked. but where I am from, home breaks us. I have been dead my whole life. i didn't mean to break you too—it's just that I'm a lost language, with no traces of origin. I, too, like you, want to laugh & show off my teeth. I want to answer without stammering when asked about my home. I want to be featured in a family portrait. i want to stop dangling on these ropes—these ropes of grief. I want to walk with a body that is mine. but my body said I'm two metres/seconds faster than light. light keeps leaking out of my body like fumes of air emitted from a punctured tube. I hold my breath as the requiem of this poem & I wilt. maybe, one day, I'd take a flight out of this shred covering me as a skin.

Growing into His Dreams

Douglas J. Lanzo

—Dedicated to my 13-year-old twin son, Alex

Our precious identical twin son,
only 6 months old,
bright-eyed, smiling,
beaming when the surgeon
held him gently and
examined his tiny back;

Oblivious to all
that was transpiring,
unflappable through x-rays,
basking in the attention,
seeming not to notice
that his mother was in tears
and his father was in shock;

Diagnosed with a hemi-vertebra
causing scoliosis and kyphosis,
the first surgeon recommending
immediate back surgery;

Seeking second, third, fourth and fifth opinions,
we canvassed top pediatric back surgeons
up and down the East Coast
to find the best to care for him,
each to our relief disagreeing
with the initial recommendation
for immediate surgery,
though to a person telling us
the curvature would worsen
and that no one could predict
when, or even whether,
Alex would need surgery,
but that he likely would
before he became a teen;

Almost thirteen years later,
our twin son, Alex, is a teen,
nearly as tall as his dad and healthy,

his curvature improving year by year,
seeming to always fit in
more than just fine —
an extroverted charmer,
mesmerizing audiences of
children and adults alike
with his humor and his wit;

Excelling as an athlete:
a talented swimmer,
leaping figure-skater, and
quick-reflexed tennis and
ping-pong player who,
outswims his parents,
beats adults at ping-pong and,
with only a few lessons under his belt,
is able to ski black diamonds
down 11,000-foot Colorado mountain peaks,
blazing by my brother,
who had skied the Appalachians and Rockies
his entire life;

Helicoptering down steep slopes,
deliberately veering off trail and back,
shrieking with delight
racing past his twin;

Beaming in the glow
of his unflinching courage
and unflagging spirit,
thankful to God
that I could witness
the fruits of crucial years
of his corrective growth,
sprouting up to be
an undaunted dreamer
reaching for the stars; and
knowing that,
if, by chance,
we were to race there,
he would await me...
with a smile.

Liturgy

Noelle Hendrickson

once, you brought me to church
for a judgement day of sorts;
two women placing their bets
on the distance of
god's love. when the
bishop glanced, you slipped
your hand into mine –
quietly, quickly,
eyes forward –
and your skin was warm.

*i wanted to be a dove –
you whispered that night,
your head low,
near your shoulders,
half-asleep on my chest.
the warmth of your skin
under blanket, on mine.
– a large white dove.
and when i had imagined today,
i was one.*

listening, i said,
and what was i to be?
but by the time i asked
you had fallen asleep



Parts

Noelle Hendrickson

perhaps the wedding night is meant for a tête-à-tête with yourself
while lying bare. she'll wait,
weighing him against his punishments, there, behind the church
or in the backseat of his truck,
her dress blossoming like a carnation, unfurling, exposing,
white in full bloom, soon to wilt.
she had imagined it once, near the beginning, when the bedroom door
had opened on him changing.
there had been no pull then, no awakening concupiscence,
merely a shrug, a "that's for later," a –
"give it time, my darling, these things come naturally."
as her mother had said before.
now is later. he'll beat her body that night, purple and blue,
staining her neck as a souvenir for tomorrow.
she'll wonder if this is love, ponder the meaning of give and take.
his sister – perhaps she would know.
they have a connection, an understanding of sorts, as young girls
often do. you know how it is.
she will wonder this the morning after, while eating
leftover wedding cake for breakfast;
thoughts will trail off mid-bite, plastic fork still on tongue,
and her mouth will savor the sweet.

Rearview

Arvilla Fee

I abandon the search for my ego
and pack bruises into a suitcase
beneath garments that witnessed
the descent into despair—

shirts now ripped and torn by one
who promised to be kind. He must
have winked at God, crossed devil
fingers behind his back.

Full tank of gas, the car rolls down
the driveway, swallowed whole by
a starless night. I won't look back.
I'm not Lot's wife.

For Chad

Timothy L. Rodriguez

And say what
To the friend who phones
To say his son has died?

Suggest harvesting the sunlight
Growing on the white tile floor
Hoping its glint will surprint
The life that reaped such grim effect
With the warp and woof of wonders?

And say what
Upon hearing how he's been waiting
Twenty-five years for the call?

Advise him not to count on words
To hallmark his sorrow.
They're only devices to convey,
Unable to rethread the worn fabric of a soul
Holding its lament in dried bouquet?

And say what
When told there is nothing
You can do to help?

Warn him Death, the shape-shifter,
Will disfigure his jumpstarted heart.
Tell him not to imagine life
A free wheel spinning;
But a gleam coming, a dream going.

And then say what,
Offer condolence knowing
It to be paraplegic?

Count stars from the bottom of the well
He's digging and recount the next day
Because there will be one more;
Light previously thought lost
Is in an elsewhere that we all have an appointment with.

Skin

Madhurima Sen

Bad skin runs in our family.
My mom never wears knee-length clothes.
No, not because of tradition.
She has terrible eczema
all along her calf and ankles.
I admit I've been revolted
at times with the itchy red bumps.
She says it started from the sea-
from the dirty Bay of Bengal.
She dipped her toes in wrong waters.
My dida, as an infant, had
life-threatening eczema or
so she says. You know old people
and their strange exaggerations!

Tinea versicolor. Spots.
White spots on my dark skin. Patterns
all over my neck, upper back
which appear like magic during
the hot, humid, sultry monsoons.
Once a boy running his young hands
over my teenage breasts observed
that my skin looks like some artwork.
I thought he must love me a lot
if he could find art in my skin.
He loved the long monsoons in our
city and my monsoon skin too.
Traced the patterns with his fingers
in our many young escapades.

I am still uncomfortable
in my patterned, spotted, marked skin
-running down my back, down my chest
-closing the door to backless clothes.
From dear Kolkata to England,
the incessant rain and the spots
have kept me constant company.
I thought I should consult someone.
Perhaps there is a solution
in the first world country, who knows?
The middle-aged, British nurse
was friendly. With a smile, she said,
“Everything looks so much worse on dark skin, doesn’t it?”

THIS COLOR GROWS ON ME

Daniel Waydon

this color grows on me
brown, tan, black, white
they call me “light-skinned”
and they have already judged me:
before i have opened my mouth
they have filled it with their expectations

but still, this color grows on me
years spent learning to accept and love
a self, so different from this appearance
hair that does not straighten, lips full
of corny jokes to share with discerning ears
that listen selectively for their expectations

this color continues to grow on me
a constant through the years despite
this ever-changing interior, unseen
an advancing world hides its eyes
as my skin shines bright, tempered and true
and if you try, this color begins to grow on you

HOW TO REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE

Kait Quinn

Erupt into ash. Burrow with moles,
earthworms, percussionist sidewinder.
Who says you can't build a woman
out of sacrum shards and clay?

You are mosaic.

Shake grave dirt from your hair.
Learn to walk again. Fall. Again.
Again. *AGAIN.*

Come to terms with a broken heart.
What you call flaws, someone will fill
with gold. One gaze

can part the storm of your soul.
Love is an ocean. Hurricanes
inevitable. Life will tear us

to pieces in the end.

But aren't we, so briefly, lightning
bugs at midnight, the faithful
swallow coming home, Monarch
chitin turned stained glass,
depthless brined body
bowing only to lunar pull?

You are so deep in death now,
might as well keep going.

Success

Jim Krosschell

We used to think
providing shield
and sustenance
to daughters' lives
would be enough.
Seemingly, it's
not.

Yes, they choose to
live away, one
by mileage, one
in self-defense.
Millions do so
in this phone-strewn
world.

No, we are not
estranged. Sharing
memories, poems,
dread of climate
change and evil
virus keeps us
close.

Yet we want more
than being pals
or parents. Does
not success in
part demand some
tighter, fiercer
bond?

“Wrong question, Dad.
Re-name success.
Remember what
you felt when you
left home and church
beside the road:
freed.”

I Wrote a Magnet Poem on the Green Room Fridge

Sarah Bratt

perchance from winter we make villain s
and
torment the moon above dead harvest ,
people can bloom where snow has melt ed

greening



barely touching
the warm handrail
all the way up
the gray stone steps



growing

Greening

Alan Bern

things i am not saying

Ollie Braden

his jaw pops out and his voice deepens, cracks.
i laugh, he towers over me.

i eat cereal after dinner and you raise your eyebrows
you gonna eat all that?

he's growing.

i am walking down the street and must be home before sunset.
you throw him a football in the yard and talk
about sneaker collections, sports, politics,
the economy, cryptocurrency, algebra. i know too. i know more.

i am screaming in the mirror at the reflection of a tired little girl,
yelling at her, *you're a boy! you're a boy you're a boy!*

and when you put him to bed,
not tucking him in, but clapping him on the back to send him upstairs,
you whisper *that's my boy*,
as if he is the only one.

Dove Talk

*G*Timothy Gordon

Dark, dawn, all day, every day,
Mourning dove loud laments, plaints,
pleas, public love talk, like us, we just close,
feelings filtered, on-adult-hold, not from these parts,
butte, gulch, naked dry wash, nor born for flight,
or throats that carry desert everywhere every chronic cry.

Synthesis

Alex Richardson

My father left closets of coats behind,
Slumped on felt hangers,
Dust sprinkling the shoulders in rows
Like lawns thawing slowly after snow.
I eventually grew into the arms,
Wore them one after another for spells,
Finding in various pockets
Whistles, buckeyes, Teaberry
And on a folded note scrawled
In left-handed cursive,
My first name and phone number
When I'd gone off to college.
That's around when he died
From the third heart attack
So when I returned for the funeral
I plucked a white tee from his dirty clothes
And wore it under one of his suits that day
And then for days and days,
Carefully folding the V-neck,
Placing it in a different dresser drawer each night
As my own scent mingled with his
Until finally I couldn't tell
What either one of us smelled like.

The Fragility in Nurturing

Shelby Lynn Lanaro

The amaryllises aren't blooming
and I don't know why
my thumb isn't green,
but in a past life, I think I was
a weeping willow tree,
or the flowers growing wild
in a meadow—
the snow's bitter bite striking
me anytime I held on
for too long to cold shoulders,
but I'd always thaw
in the sun's warm forgiveness
blooming, again, with the crocuses.
The fresh green leaves remind
me now that when I fall
growth, again, is on its way, so
some days I just want to lie
on the ground and let the earth
take me in her embrace,
let moss grow over my hands
and feet, flowers
grow out of my mouth
because then the rain, pattering
on my petaled face,
will tell me of the fragility
in nurturing, and the amaryllis
will bloom, again, in its season.

Self-Portrait in Yearning

Pat Phillips West

Outside, the storm wails like a lonesome
Hank Williams heartbreak tune—
aching the air. No words to explain
the hollowness moving through me.

This is a winter to shake your head over.
I peel, core, quarter and thinly slice
Granny Smith apples for my mother's
Iron Skillet Apple Pie—

for the effort of it, for the old way of it.
Outside the kitchen window, the raised beds
outsized coffins. The smell knocks
on the oven door—cinnamon, nutmeg,

three crusts, and brown sugar on the bottom.
Flavors fill the house, but only digging
in dirt and planting sustain me. There should be
a simple recipe to cure this craving.

Out by the garden shed, I spot daffodils—
little green periscopes popping up.
Right there in the kitchen it comes to me
that word dor—

untranslatable Romanian—meaning to ache.
Not intended to be gloomy, but give significance
to life, something you miss and embrace,
rather than overcome. What else can I do

except celebrate the first sign of spring?

SPRING



century
allison anne

Fuck Spring

David Banach

—*After Edna St. Vincent Millay*

Fuck Spring with its thaws and cheerful birds
with its chipmunks and squirrels all reproducing
like there is no tomorrow, and fuck the soft rains
slowly filling the mud trails the dogs have made
on either side of the trampoline this winter, the way
they saturate the grass, spongy with the first green
shoots of grass, fuzzy like a boys first beard, and
fuck, especially, the tiny green apple leaves bursting
from the buds so small all winter, you thought they
must be dead, and the pussy willow fuzzy and soft,
and the daffodil sprouts already jutting big with flower
heads inside the green ready to burst like little pricks,
the pricks. Maybe they know a little more than me,
but how dare Spring flower like a fool, when I know
that I will never flower again.

Cryptanthus sp. Bromeliaceae

Celine Pun (潘珠海)

they called you earth star and
when I held you for the first time,
I saw the scars from your supernova—
the pandemic hurt you too.

You were the color of death,
so papery, you fell like wet ash.
I found the shriveled ghost of your children
and your ruby heartbeat
in your children's children you left behind.
They clung your body so tightly
they started turning white.

I wondered what monster guards
their dead mother so loyally
or did they fear what would happen
if they leave you behind?

why do you hide your history beneath husks?
who will tell your story if they run from prickly spines?
I peel them back because I want to honor you,
gift you back to your namesake,
a ceremony every mother deserves.

The years advance

Donna Pucciani

more quickly now. How long
have we been married?
Too long, he replies,
the old-fashioned humor
getting as tired as we are.

Forty-seven years are lost
somewhere between ruby and gold,
with no distinguishing gemstone,
although one website says amethyst.
Should I buy him an amethyst ring?
lavender pajamas? A book with
purple prose?

Plants are the suggested theme.
As if we need a theme, after all this time!
I have always done the gardening,
he the dishes. For nearly five decades
I have presented him with acer,
viburnum, Korean pear and the ill-fated ash.
Some years the hydrangeas do well.
One year we lost the lilacs.

We are themeless, timeless, slipperful.
We breathe in huffs, snore in the chair,
shuffle our feet, feel the cold now.
Our chores become rituals, wordless
prayers to the ubiquitous routines
that tie us together like vines on a trellis.

We are violets, curled among the forget-me-nots.
We have bloomed. We prepare
to nod off, once and for all,
dead-heading each other and ourselves,
our wrinkled skin sagging
like the petals of a finished iris
set against an amethyst sky.

Reclining Nude

Fin Ryals

Tell me, why must I be placed atop a concrete slab like
A park bench planted for your own leisure, your own pleasure?
Ceaseless bodies swarm with an intense fascination—please,
Go saunter amongst the other statues. I hide myself
For a reason and your salivating eyes weigh more than
The bronze I was born out of, the bronze that traps me here.

Forgive me, my creator intended not for your pity
And I know you approach my coy body with good intent
But I was not meant to be seen as roadkill or worse like
A prude. I am simple is all and you corrupt my days
With your interpretative gaze—there are plenty more figures
Fit for your voyeurism. They beg for it, fulfill their need.

Leave me, I promise you will never find what I conceal
Beneath my slug-like arms. And, what if I were to tell you?
Your disappointment would further tarnish my form. I'm sick
And restless from your prods and probes like an object of autopsy.
I place no blame upon you yet you feel no shame yourself;
My stagnancy must not be taken as docility, my dear onlooker—

Let me recline and catch falling
flowers on my back like I was meant to.

Here, there is Joy

Stacie Eirich

How does a flower speak of
Life, bursting forth from a tiny bud of spring?

She is nature's bright beauty, her colorful confidante and keeper of bees.

She is small but mighty, with care and attention
her blooms break open, delighted in
dawn of day.

Here, there is Joy.

She gives freely of her sweet nectar, lets her petals seep
in light, then return, exhausted
into Earth.

To be born again into something else, somewhere else — on some distant
plain, hill, or mountain.

Here, there is Joy.

A deep and present bliss, the peace of a field spread wide
golden hollyhocks dancing, burnished and bountiful as the sun
that sustains them.

Delicious and dazzling as the rain
that feeds them.

Here, there is Joy.

In the Kitchen Window

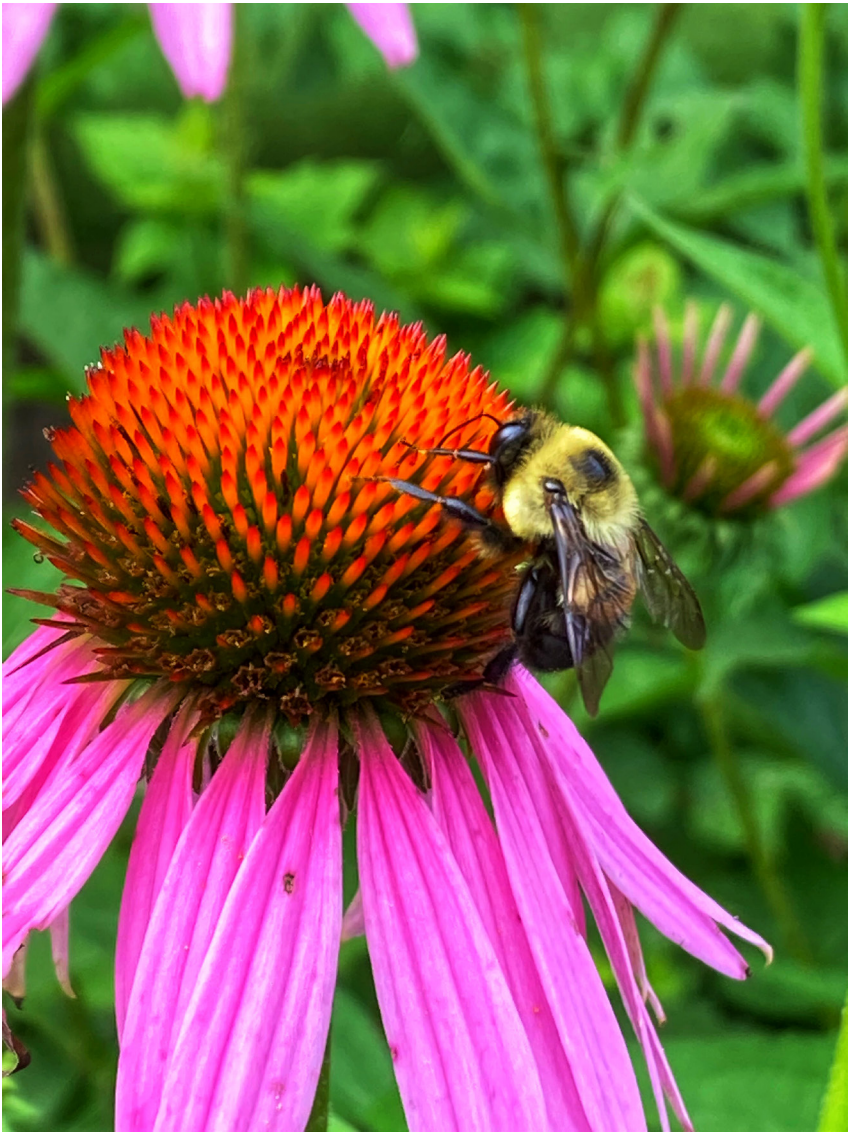
Lois Perch Villemaire

Plants are growing
or in limbo
appearing healthy
in the kitchen window,

spiders fan out
succulents love water
violets rooting
soon planted in soil,

this sunny spot,
an ideal place to thrive
I water and prune
to keep them alive.

I sit by that window
taking my meals
no different than the plants
— that's how it feels.



Respite
Liz Whiteacre

Davy Brown

Celine Pun (潘珠海)

before crossing the creek
the mule deer paused
look through us
at the propane smoke curling
from a pound of spinach withering,
at the tents clustered
by bare branches of poison oak,
at their pandemic-exploded forbs
freshly trampled

the ranger told us black bears
have yet to develop
the palette for our sugar.

we wonder if we should invite
the mule deer over for dinner

Spring-cleaning

Arshia Batra

At least let me have fairytale books, their spines severed;
the paper crane folded from golden candy wrapper—
though it attracts ants, I'll name those too;
rose corpses, newborns shriveled in their throat;
inky brain matter exploded in notebooks: "I saw a fairy," maybe
"the stuffed animal family-tree," maybe "this is how
a mermaid looks," maybe "I miss her so much."

They stare from the bookshelf, eyes popped out,
dulled, glittering, beady. Collectively: *Don't forget me.*

I won't.

Come play with me.

I can't.

Youth on display, now relics of time. Fingers caress
their matted fur. Blanketed in dust, they sleep.

Toss them in the bag—you blink, and it's gone.

The rescued pig's ode to his earth

Barabara Usher

My early days I prefer to forget,
rooting, rooted in the herbaceous earth.
Strong in meadowsweet mud, till sunset,
creating areas for new plants to birth.

Hog wallows, like bowls, hold muddy rain-water
thrumming with goodness for me and my brother.
Earth tastes especially sweet around plant roots.
Clay soil absorbs toxins, kind to our digestion
while the slippery, cool texture is balm to our resting,
washed down with spring rain, and native green shoots.

Perennial

Claire Doll

If I were to have a daughter,
I would teach her how to plant flowers.
I would teach her to have faith
in the earth from when it is
frozen in the fringes of March
and quilted with the first leaves of fall.
I would teach her to fall in love
with the way the wind bends
the tips of her plant stems
only slightly, making the petals flutter.

During her first heartbreak,
she'll weep over her garden;
The earth will absorb her tears,
and pink carnations will sprout
to comfort her, showing
that they need the most raging storms
to blossom. She'll find safety
in the sun's golden rays as they bloom
from clouds and blanket her flowers
in light.

Then, when she meets the one she loves
as much as the earth, I'll make sure
she walks down the aisle with a bouquet
of white roses we grew together,
her hair braided with their petals.
She'll smile and thank me for a childhood
of flower crowns, of dirt-stained hands,
and of vibrant gardens, and maybe
if she has a daughter of her own,
she'll do the same.



Three Tulips Starring Sharon's White
Phyllis Green

Second Birth

Cameron Morse

You will find where I fell I
sprouted, I laid down
my body one morning in the garden
before you were awake, I was
always rising early and when I stopped
it was as if struck by the invisible

rock of a new idea, a thought I could not
have had by myself, not in a million
years, which is the exact amount
of time it takes before you notice your
husband has sprouted, wondering how long
I had been awake before you were born.

Honesty

Sara Collie

I don't have quick
ready-made answers.

No flourish. No façade.

Very few well-established
edges.

No neat hedges. Just wildflowers
popping up wherever they see fit:
honesty, foxgloves, aquilegia, forget-
me-nots.

They flourish and fade and I
burrow around them sowing yet
more seeds.

There is dirt under my fingernails,
questions on the tip of my tongue,
though I might not bother you with either.
Who wants to hear about the details?
Who wants to worry about what
they don't yet understand?

I do. I do.

While Cleaning Out My Underwear Drawer I
Wondered When all my Underwear Became
Period Underwear

Tyler Hurula

Bundles of lace turned lunar
cycle are scattered in bright bunches
branded with all the times I thanked God

I was not pregnant.
Which isn't often because the number
of times I've had sex
with someone who could get me
pregnant is so low that my unopened

condoms are expired.
They're holy,
though not in the biblical sense.
The underwear, not the condoms—
but they may as well be because they're still expired.

And under all of this there's you.
Not actually you because it would be alarming
to have my ex stuffed in my underwear drawer,
and I'm not that kinky.

Your love letters— scribbled
onto cards covered in octopuses.
Scribbled so I had to squint
to read them like I have to squint to remember
I loved you. And now *squint*

looks more like a squiggle
and I'm just playing with words
because I don't know how to write
about you. We broke up

twice, a year apart. Spent
another year being friends.
You said you loved me *profoundly*
and I think I felt that, too.

I know I wanted to kiss the parts
of you that were empty, upside down.
I think I filled myself with your empty.

You scheduled a sit-down at the park
to tell me we couldn't be
friends anymore.
I said *maybe we should both walk
off into two different sunsets*

because it was so dramatic, a scene
I know you rehearsed. You didn't laugh,
told me there was only one
sunset— said we weren't understanding
each other, not communicating

on the same page. Yet this whole time
you insisted you knew the folds
in my spine, could anticipate each footnote.
But we've been writing two different books,
beginning with the love

notes now stuffed in my underwear drawer.
I almost threw them away, then thought
I should turn this into a poem, an erasure.

Uprooted

Sara Collie

My eyes showed me daffodils
blooming six feet in the air,
but I could only see us.

We didn't hear the crash,
the snapping of branches,
the old trunk heaving to the ground.
We came too late. Maybe
a month had passed since the storm.
The upturned roots had carved
a perfect circle of earth,
ripped the ground up, sent it skywards
with all the sprouting bulbs intact,
which were somehow flowering
up there in just a few inches of soil,
at strange, precarious angles.

I couldn't bear to look away.
My eyes showed me daffodils
but I could only see us.

We have weathered so many storms.
Can we still find a way to bloom,
no matter how we are flung about,
no matter how little ground remains
beneath our feet?

Signs of Spring

Jesse Curran

I spoon my naked daughter, her strong body pulsed
with her need to fight. After an hour of hair-pulling
little brother sparring and refusing to step down,
the tears swell, bleeding the blueberry juice
that circles her soft mouth. Finally, with me
she flees to the shelter of her lilac bedroom.
We hide under the down comforter and stare
out the window at the bright gray world below.
I ask her if she sees signs of spring. She says no.
And she's right. There's little to see here
at the end of this long winter, save dirty snow
in the shadowy ditches of stripped trees.
I squeeze her closer and tell her of bird song
I haven't heard and snow drops I haven't seen.
I tell her rumors of buds swelling, the hard earth
thawing. She smells of berries and bacon, her hair
self-trimmed by safety scissors, the lilac walls
marked and scarred with graphite rage.
How long this winter, how lonely.
How much this time away from others
has bruised her. How my year of worry
has seeped inside her until she spits it back out
as the mess I now work to breathe back into me.
I rub her smooth back and kiss her stained cheeks.
Winter hasn't left us bereft of lessons:
we're learning to change *defiant to principled;*
explosive to passionate; crazy to creative.
We're learning not to say good or bad.
We're learning not to blame her for this.
I tell her, this is March.
I make promises of purple shoes
and yellow hedgerows
I feel sure
April can keep.



Offspring
Lois Perch Villemaire

At the Mango Grove

Rahana K Ismail

You are mechanized
to walk into sun
and churn out sunsets.

A growth akin
to these thin-leaved treeclings
these laterite rocks
growing and growing.

She mistakes withering
for weathering.

We could sit anywhere,
on the benches, or walk or will
whatever has fallen to grow.

I take growling for growing.

Still the rusted gate opens,
the tree I pictured falling
mushrooms in birds
with tails like a schoolgirl would
hold her umbrella
on her first day of knowing
what it is to be

by being many as in many drops
in one rain.

We sit on an overturned bench
arrested in its fall
and talk about the woodpecker
we once saw.

To the three sleeping pie dogs
we gift a moon
brimful of setting.

We carry ourselves
in loosely wrapped packets
with a jute thread unspooling
from the mercurial night.

Lone Dandelion

Jessica Mattox

God makes a wish
and blows a dandelion
as he holds the whole world
by the stem in his hands.

The rain falls steadily—
roots preparing for birth
realize that their water has broken
through the fragile lining of dirt.
A tiny growth emerges
and its fight for survival
transfixes those who
would believe that the odds
can never turn even.

I see it stand alone,
reveling in its own domain.
Isolation is not the correct word—
'King of the Hill' is more like it.

Rumi Might Say

Pat Phillips West

Today, let the rain drum its hard tune
on the window. Don't try to break the bigger
world down, make sense of it, or think about
things so big they are unimaginable—
death, the national debt, why dandelions

can be plucked with ease when twisted
counterclockwise. This is a day to take
a chair at the kitchen table, and inhale
the scent of sliced lemon—
fresh as old remembrances.

March storms are meant for sipping tea
and sketching the layout for the garden:
a small labyrinth of sage and rosemary
along the path to the shed. In the middle,
a jungle of tomatoes crayon-bright—

yellow, red, orange, burgundy streaked
and striped. Yes, Rumi might say
a day like this is a reminder to begin, again.
Whatever it means to be alive, starts here
with the musky scent of leaf and soil.

I turn the pages of the Burpee Seed Catalog
over to a memory of my mother, kneeling
in the dirt under the sun, telling me thyme
was an herb loved by bees and honey
was loved by the gods

somehow,

suddenly,

I saw the violets.

Those little wildflowers blooming to show it was spring,

The leaves

I'd never seen

so...

green.

The white blossoms along the backstreets

I'd delayed my trip home by taking,

The yellow daffodils I'd stolen from the yards of my neighbors,

The skies from the pavement I'd treaded so lightly,

They became so

Vibrant.

When I saw the cherry blossoms again, for the first time in a year,

I realized they weren't the shade I'd thought they were.

They were brighter,

Far brighter,

than any scar I'd had.

Chamomile

Méabh McMahon

The TSA agent is glancing at the screen
Like a midwife with an ultrasound
Watching for the heartbeat.
And the sweat on your back is slick as blood.

Now the man on the aisle seat is asleep,
His limbs flailing like a body out at sea.
And you feel wetness between your thighs
Spreading slowly, like anxiety.

Red-faced, you push past passengers
And rush to the cramped cubicle to clean yourself,
But the tissues are too thick with brown paint
At last, you pull the chord for help.

The air hostess presses the sanitary pads,
Like communion, into your hands
And a paper cup filled up chamomile tea
for the cramps
But you are too tongue-tied to say thanks.

And that night, when you get home,
And your mom asks how have you been
Your tongue crawls out of your mouth
Like a maggot bursting out of skin

It stretches like a long wad of gum
Stretching, sticking to you like shrink-wrap
Tacky, and hardening, until you are stuck
Like a fly in your own trap.

So, it is only when you get upstairs
To your own bed,
Are you finally able to cry.

All that Sings

Stacie Eirich

Sunday morning hums,
the chirping of birdsong bright as sunshine,
the fluttering of soft yellow moths,
throaty crow calls above glistening green,
queepling of ducklings hung on the air like laundry in the breeze,
shimmering and thrumming alongside the drone of mowers,
melody of buzzing saws, dogs
barking, voices chattering, a trembling chorus of
human and animal activity.

Spring's soft shelter invites life, birthing and rebirthing us.

A glittering descends, feeding and floating
upon fuchsia blossoms burgeoning, drinking fast
of their wakened petals, wings dazzling.

A cloudless baby blue sky stretches wide in acceptance of this
glorious, dissonant mess —
of all that thrives, all that breathes and sings.

Turning Over

Beck Anson

—*After Theodore Roethke*

She digs deep into the soil with
tool, her hand, she toils, bent but
rising tall she cups in a crinkled
palm clusters of dewy petals.
Her annual ritual keeps
her well and strong.
To me, she hands her carpel —
I am the last disciple.
The sun beats her down
and she digs deeper still
until it settles under
mountain rows in waking hills.

these months with you might be the only ones

Jocelyn Olum

The mountain laurel behind your house
makes pentagons of pinkish blossoms
clustered in bunches of fifteen or twenty
just enough to fill to bursting the space between my cupped open palms.

I want to give them to you just like that.
offer you their sparse, momentary crispness
each one beautiful, multiplicitous, solitary—
like you they are transient, independent, uniquely particular.

Even new blossoms dissipate into fireworks when summer comes.
--Maybe our smooth caresses too will wither into hard black bud-heads--
seen from afar, flowers gone-by float silently
under the branches in smoky tendrils
a diffuse neuronal memory of their springtime explosion.

so before the heat deepens, I scoop up handfuls,
lowering palms like dippers into the untapped pool of foliage
but the thin creamy petals slide inevitably through my fingers--
I wonder if they take you with them as they seep untraceable into the soil
beneath my feet.

Serendipity Gardening

Carl "Papa" Palmer

*Serendipitous: Looking for something, finding something else,
realizing what you found is more suited than what you
thought you were looking for.*

We raised roses
relished by us
and by the loads of lovely ladybugs,
tended thyme
trimmed by us
and by our overabundance of bunnies,
weaved wisteria for us
and for the haven of one hundred bird nests.

We transplanted tulips
treasured by us
and by the Washington black tail deer,
dug in dahlias
delighted by us
and by our foraging backyard mason bees,
propagated periwinkle for us
and for the hovel of two hundred rabbit families.

We latticed lilacs
lavished by us
and by the reappearing Monarch butterflies,
laid in lavender
loved by us
and by our resurrected vigilant bumble bees,
hung honeysuckle for us
and for the homecoming of three hundred hummingbirds.



Resurrect

Shelby Lynn Lanaro

The New Dirt

Craig Sipe

The names of plants are whispered
to him in her voice as he roams
the perennial aisle, looking to

redeem a black thumb. Weigela
Astilbe, Euonymus, he sees her
with soil, peat and spades

planting in groups of three
by some sowing design
against the chaos

of weeds, something
always in bloom and hue
with the seasons,

He shops, needing to learn more now
than just how to dig a hole,
shops, amid murmuring

Potentilla, Callalily, and Hosta
searching for a root
in the new dirt.

April & October

Jesse Curran

What happens to the hydrangeas
is what happens to me.

What was once royal blue
is now a hue of tenderness

is now deep rose, a bruise
soaked in ruddy flesh.

What happened to them
is happening to me

with the words
congestive heart failure

with going about the day
with a phone call

with a beloved that much closer
to fixed absence.

The Montauk daisies are splattered
along the sidewalk edges.

Memory of forsythia is painted
along April's alleys

All my life there have been
these two months:

the beginning and the end,
April and October.

The flare of citron.
The mixed palate of mauve.

One softens to summer,
the other molds in the cold.

And then crumbles
back to dust.

What Else Could I Be But

Beck Anson

an unfurling
fern
frond in the
springtime,
tense and full
of potential energy.
I was only seventeen
the first time
I tried to leave —
looking
for
an
answer
to
stay,
I
found
none.
Now,
I trust
the shape
unfolding.
Leaf matter
in my hair,
I take root,
rhizomes spreading
into the soil.
Once I was
a spore
carried
on a breeze.
Now,
I am
open.

WHAT WE DO IN BED

Kayla Martell Feldman

—*After Susan Matasovska*

plan breakfast (waffles)
do today's wordle (SOLAR)
visit Stockport on Instagram
(where a fluffy dog with big ears
is looking for a forever home)

kiss each other's flowers
my oleander, her thistle
wander through the brambles
snared in the dagger
inked on her thigh
right where she needs it
(it's still not safe out there)

make eyes of the freckles above her navel
pull at the skin of her belly
smooth down its gaping mouth
give voice to its goofy expression
cradle its cheeks with hot palms
to scare away the demon
growling beneath
carving a jail-cell tally into her belly
on its way out
(another month gone)

tangle legs
tickle limbs
lick noses
plant kisses
reminding each other
not to mark our *us*
by their *them*
wondering aloud
how we ever went without it.

Memorial Day

Barbara A Meier

—*A waltz-like poem*

prowling the pasture on
a hill,
looking at graves buried in blown peony
petals,
faraway a chainsaw buzzes through evergreen
branches
a meadowlark tootles his sweet prairie song
surround
the turkey buzzards in warm thermal, above the
headstones

The Good Earth

Aeesha Abdullahi Alhaji

Lushness of the earth—green makes splashes of scenery,

Bold

And swaying with the singing wind—a win for nature's aura,

Roses growing on mushy grounds—awed by its bounties in seasons.

And Out the Other

Robert Okaji

I would like to be lifted by the cardinal's
bright chirp, and light weaving through
knee-high grass. Someone drags a trash can
to the curb. Cinders from Mexico
filter through the atmosphere, and I hear
the neighbor's rasping cough. But
every misery carries its own voice
no matter who listens. Regret lives
there, too, where a man kneels
in the garden, planting the past
in furrowed rows. As the hours
range farther, singing their grief.

Who's Calling?

paul Bluestein

The calico lioness stalking
through the grass of her backyard jungle
was, just minutes ago,
curled like a comma in the sun,
pretending sleep.
Opening one iridescent eye,
her attention was caught by a trapeze artist
circus squirrel, flying from branch to branch
at the top of a leafy green tent.
Unlike my admiration
for the agility of the bushy-tailed tree rat,
what Annabelle felt was the compelling
call of ancestral hunters.
She could no more defy that imperative
than I can disregard the seductive
serpent zizzing beside my hand.
We are, Annabelle and I,
creatures of imperfect evolution,
hostages to irresistible impulse.



Three Generations

Shelby Lynn Lanaro

AN EXPERIMENT IN REMEMBERING

Shae Krispinsky

Green morning light
cossets the Alleghenies,
a warm arm of waking.

We've been on the road
an hour already, a car
to catch a train.

Strangeness permeates,
along with the scent of spring
in through the cracked window.

The night before I picked
bits of jalapeno out of my cornbread,
the palate of a child, is the joke.

A child knows what she wants
but can't fathom such desire.
She runs to hide, unable

to comprehend freedom. It's
not the running but the choice
to remain tethered.

It's not my favorite road, I-79
but like Courtney Love's guitar playing,
it's serviceable. Rutted, but gets the job

done. We arrive. Hugless, we
say farewells, we say
again, sometime. We'll write.

And we did, for years,
and then we didn't, but I
never stopped wondering

where you keep your thoughts now.
I read Sophie Calle and remember
that green mossy light.

SUMMER



Building Zen

Arvilla Fee

By Summer

Anda Marcu

I ran into you one time in my dreams.
You were tending to your beautiful garden.

There were English violets and daffodils,
lilies of the valley and lilacs in bloom;
 and roses--which I thought was
the most peculiar occurrence, for a full-summer rose
to mingle with flowers of spring.

You said you'd rather tend to all of them now.
You were running out of time--you added--
to wait for each blossom to take its natural turn.

And you were right: your time was no more
 by summer.

LOOKING BACK

Askold Skalsky

The poplars waved their secrets
through the second-floor window,
we not even one year married,
with smiles on our faces fixed
for a decade, it seemed, quick
to get up in the night, attending
to clockwork whimpers from
the crib when the angers were
helpless, fumbling with a dark
that drew us closer than any
memory. Late afternoons meant
nothing yet. The gardens waited
in a backyard continent that we
would get around to eventually.
Everything was forgotten,
stayed forgotten, we thought.
The unthinkable was to waste
the moment on an ounce of
pensiveness. What resilience
we had then, you and the thirty
miles you drove each day in one
direction, I and the papers I
brought home, the batch on my
desk thickening for something
I thought was needed to make
the world move smoothly.
That we were young was no
accident in a time that stayed
the same on its way to ending.
Even today it lingers, unwanted
to change, to leave its burdens,
Disappearing.

Grandmother

Deidre Denise Matthee

she was waiting for me
her eyes have always been soft
that quiet blue
(somehow i've always noticed
the softness first, before the colour,
like the hydrangeas
on those long sunday afternoons
of my childhood)
she has been waiting for me,
both past and future,
her face a wrinkled smile,
her hands showing the years
(how they brushed and braided
my hair, peeled an orange perfectly,
that same soft knowing)
were you always soft, i ask her.
were you soft with her, i want to ask.
for why then, is she not, what
hardness was planted, and was it you?
but she answers me, about gardens:
you remember mine, and she has one too;
you remember, it's beautiful, no?
but one has to work hard at it,
cut with the shears, snap, break, pull,
it seems ruthless, no? dig, uproot,
toss out; prune, trim, bend, graft...
you don't garden, do you?
but you love flowers. so do we.
we just come to it, differently.

While Sitting In My Father's Chair

Peggy Heitmann

The day my father dies,
time unravels
with the music of cicadas.
I am a child again
wanting, wanting, wanting
him back. The air reeks
of the toast I burnt. My eyes leak
while my ears fill with a swarm, clicking.
If I open my mouth,
will the cicadas
strumming their legs
against my rib cage
take up permanent residence there,
or fly out singing his stories?



Untitled
Dia VanGuten

garden gazing

Joseph A Farina

I stand in wonderment at my garden
humbled by the splendor of each plant
growing daily in all their diversity
each leaf thrust upward to kiss sunlight
each blossom crafted by cellular magic
scented finer than perfume
their lives a dance of movement
to the breezes of their summer spectacle
rewarding we who wonder
with their offerings of joy and bounty
their alchemy of resurrection
a miracle annually restored

TODAY, STEP GENTLY

Laura Martens

with honeysuckle feet
light as spiderwebs
touch the soul of the world
with the very tip of your smallest finger
watch the gold-dust tremble
in the summer air
and know that somehow
you were lucky enough to be born
into this miracle of a world

with only our eyes closed
when we strolled the boardwalk at Zadar
witnessed the sea swallow up the sun
as Hitchcock saw it in '64.

The sea breeze made you shiver. The apple trees
tilted to the east like sails.

If a man's fingers are the bark

of a tree and the branches, his voice,
then a woman's sex
is the salt of the sea at sunset

where we waited for the tide to come in
for the moon to smooth over our wrinkles
for the heart to burst from our sagging chests

and we swam out naked far from the shoreline
until we lost all sight of land
neither wanting to return nor press on.

We became dolphins, two grey dolphins when we loved
buoyed on the surface by presence:
the presence of ghosts without form
the presence of waves that break.

It is only nature we pushed against and time, too.

The fluidity of truth plucked
like schools of fish from out of a moving sea,
and we cast our lines in to haul out
words for it by the bushel
that we traded in town for a coin.

Water

Alex Richardson

It used to excite me to see
The patterns in parks, the wear on statues,
The permanence in mountains. I looked
Long on these things and in the looking
Learned things I came to call
My own, myself.

Today I peak from a common
Drape, see sunlight and shade,
Notice the difference and look away;
Three seconds all told: concrete and dirt.

Now I get happy when I move
Into the kitchen for a drink
And see that someone else
Has emptied the ice cubes
Into the ice box and filled the trays
Back up with water.

THE BOTTOM

Korkut Onaran

—*Gündoğın, Turkey*

Swimming in the morning
these last few days
in various bays
I've noticed the absence of sea shells.
No sea cucumber, bristleworm,
starfish, or eel either.
The deep Mediterranean blue feels lonely
without her companions.

I see a bright reflection at the bottom
and dive in hoping that
it is a small abalone shell. No,
it's a metal bottle cap;
the saddest I've ever seen.

I go up and clean my goggles.
Now I can see the buildings across the bay:
Same exact building with same exact
glass curtain wall facing west
repeated in hundreds!
Such excess! Such consumption!

This is when it comes to me:
the idea of asking our students
to write brief essays
of dystopia.

My Tomato Vines

Zhihua Wang

I indulge myself in looking
at your every leaf, every bud,
and every branch. You'll never
refuse my gaze, never be shy,
impatient, or run away
like my child.

I'm shocked how tall
you shot up for a night. I ponder
how much water you need for a day.
I count how many flowers
are in bloom, and how many bear
signs of fruit.

I hope my rice-rinse water
will nourish you. I plant you
in pairs for you to feel each other
at your side. I remove suckers,
build tripods to guarantee
every branch has room to extend.

Sometimes you fail to change,
but still full of vigor, I figure
you're extending underneath.
Yellow blossoms keep emerging,
I must admit that not all
turn to a tomato.

You teach me that to bloom,
I need to keep climbing,
to fruit, I need a strong stalk.
When the little dome
is on the way, the flower
shrinks into a prelude.

Every day, I expect you
as much as you expect me.
My eyes caress you, my heart
talks to you. When the wind
passes, I see you answering me
in laughter and nods.



coplanar
allison anne

Six Months After the Mastectomy

Peggy Heitmann

I compose myself again
in watercolor illusion
of this tiny moment.

As I stroll the garden
with my husband
his presence converges with mine.

His unexpected kisses
rain down my hair, neck, then my lips.
He sighs. I taste his sensual passion

and breathe in night air
filled with the fragrance of gardenias
white lanterns spool flickers

of light across our veiled path.

Poppies

Sara Collie

Today the green buds
of the poppies have started
to pop
and all the fragile tissue
paper of their petals
is
unfurling
improbably
in the soft light of a June morning,
reminding me that I never know
what might be hidden
inside a hard
and heavy thing.

mixing

lettering



lost

loves

Mixing
Alan Bern

Backyard Crucibles

Lynn Tait

When it comes to beauty, everything's hurt in one way or another

—Anne Compton, “Larger Blue Flag: Irises”

Today, in our backyard the magnolia finally opens.
Two dark and pale blooms ride waves of breeze
surviving marauding squirrels, unexpected frost, wind and storms.
A single iris graces our corner garden
beside the dense woodland of quick-flowering twinleaf.
Chipmunk-pilfered, once tall jacks
replaced by smaller pulpits, preach
unnoticed beneath fast-spreading ligularia—
foliage strong enough to withstand summer slugs and snails.

The Eskimo Sunset maple endures
another cruel winter flaunting fresh leaves: green,
cream and pink, a standout in spite of life's setbacks.
Squirrels have torn its branches, chewed new shoots,
disregarding its planted purpose;
the Miss you rock below
holds no meaning for Nature's
continuations or completions.
Only the planters understand the planting.

Despite the hurting nature of delays,
tomorrow the rest of the iris will bloom
in brief shocks of purple-blue—by autumn, forgotten
in low green tangles. Sowed by visiting fauna,
boneset will rise, spitting out fuzzy
clusters, pink and white, mimicking
meadowsweet—its burgundy leaves,
a refuge for rabbits—their ravaging paths
changing the life-course of lilies.

Darlingtonia Californica

Barbara A Meier

bogs, green
soil, starving all
but the pitcher plants
thriving on the flesh of flies
they bow
to life

Another Night Lost in Thunder

Robert Okaji

Looking out, I see in,
and my bed tumbles
in the roar. Wind chimes
shiver when you close your
mouth. Silence is a bell,
a rusted hand on a crippled
clock in that glaring room
we'll never leave. I've waited
so long for this goodbye. Dry
sheets, lost laughter. A solitary
touch. Lamplight caresses
my cheek long after dawn.

Ghazal – Rest

M. Saad Yacoob

I want to drink a cup of tea
And sleep with books upon my chest;
This night of throbbing beat recedes -
Let's give my heart a little rest

Emerging from the fiery desert
With dusty, cracking, dirty feet -
I'll rest my head against this tree
And place its leaves upon my breast

If I had known that I could lie
Where tulip bulbs and roses grow,
I wouldn't have tarried long
And been a marsh's solemn guest

How strange the sigh which leaves my lips -
How different from the sigh before!
A sigh of one relieved of load -
A sigh of one in deep distress

The hands that lift in quiet prayer
Are steady now, unlike before -
When hands would shake, chest would heave,
And howling cries would be repressed

The sea is calm, the waves are still,
The birds are flying overhead;
As if, by wailing tempest winds,
The sea had never been possessed

So let me stay and breathe a while,
Relieved beneath this tender tree;
Perhaps here, Saad, you'll make a home -
Perhaps it's here you'll build your nest

From a Lover

Arshia Batra

They withered soft,
petals mottled to rotted-brown,
stench sweet—sickly honey that
clung to my sweat in the advent of June.

It tickled my spine, a caress like
a spider's carcass, pushed downward by the dead air—
beaten again, an animal tossed in the fan.

Some nights you kiss me, and I am
blinded by stars: warm to the tongue, smooth as
pearls. When I am wild, I lick them clean. Hard.
They fall out one by one, and I
chase after and catch them, palms welted, bile
rising in my throat. I count the drops—the wishes I've made that
sizzle in the dry earth, like the stars that finally burn into
release. I am a fool.

Now, they are shriveled corpses. They sway stiff and
fall like burnt hair. They powder in my fingertips, and I mold them
back with tears. Disfigured and familiar, the horror ten-fold. I am one
to eat the ashes rather than scatter them, to selfishly
cradle them in this stomach, swallow you like vomit, lest it
splatter this favorite dress.
The one I met you in. The one I keep meeting in.

My room is flooded in venom. Baby snakes:
the dizzying kind, hissing in spite,
harmless. A thorn-filed rose. But if I lay—

if I dare *breathe*,
I may wake up with you.

Thistle

Louise Wilford

At first I didn't recognize
you, thought you might be
agrimony, wormwood, hemp,

but then you grew thick-limbed,
your stout and juicy trunk
supporting strongman arms,

hands that held up ragged leaves,
the blue-white hedgehog
flowers Olympic torches

at my kitchen window,
welcoming the sun.
Your hot green barely ripples

in June's warmth. Tough guy,
tensed and tipped with barbs,
tight tendons of stem and frond,

a bouncer at my door, arms
crossed, denying entry. You
grow so fast, it's a wonder

we can't see you climb,
like bamboo, or the vigorous
stalk that lifted from Jack's

magic beans. Your roots
punch down into my soil,
your branches pierce the air,

fearless and immovable.
Your stubborn grin says
you'll fight me all the way.

HOW TO WRITE A POEM (#1)

Shae Krispinsky

Cry at the scent of bergamot,
a trigger for someone who
only exists in the stories you
write yourself. Remember
the night down by the creek
whose waters you've never
touched. A neverie
is the memory
of something that never
happened. You collect these;
you know them so well. Perfect
recall, as though you had been there
filming. You drink
from a tin can. You shove
twigs in your mouth. Go
mute, go blind. Source the body
by touch, even though you despise
haptics. Except when you feel
the drag of pen on page. Smooth,
smoother. Purple ink for
royal thoughts, thoughts
royally fucked. Done
is good, but of course
good is better.

Roller Skating, 1958

Donna Pucciani

When I was ten
and it was June forever,
I'd skate down the hill that was our street,
jumping the cracks in the sidewalk,
not knowing where or how I'd stop,

but landing with a leap in the grass
at the bottom of the hill, where the wheels
caught in the sod to halt my flight,
where my breath recovered itself
in the fresh sweat of childhood.

And then, again! the wind in my wild hair,
on my tanned summer cheeks,
the trek back up the hill worth the effort
to fly down again over the sloped pavements,
past the neighbors' sleepy houses, the maples
lining the curbs, and then

the stillness: lying on the green verges
thinking of nothing at all, free from speed
and the remembered feel of the skate key
turning in my hand, tightening the skates
to the soles of my scuffed saddle shoes.

I lived for the clatter of metallic wheels
on cement, the wind in my ears,
the soft landing on the lawn, and doing it,
without question or doubt,
over and over again.



Ripening
Liz Whiteacre

Disquiet for Solitary Walkers

Allan Lake

Come to a soft stop. Sit on earth by canal
without recording device. Absorbent self.
You've been here before but it's new.
Birds shy by nature but some approach,
demand to know your business.
Feel the sun, knowing there's nothing as even-
handed, as likely to ignore troubling news.
Water at a good level, which is almost any level
as far as eels are concerned, which they are.
Cirrus clouds appear as wing of owl.
Screaming, tarted-up parrots land,
knowing you are no thrill-kill cat.
Wattlebird shoots through line of vision
dispersing insects before your eyes.
What use long Latin names here?
Pigeon wings slap as they take to sky,
squeak upon landing, claws click
on corrugated roof. Reminders every-
where, noted or not. So interwoven,
many strange things. Egret so still
as passer-by sings.

July's gentle golden light

Ariela Herček

There is a stifled scream stored
in every flower petal July has ever made.
I know it by heart, the sort of desperation
that never ceases, a stubborn growth that
will not yield;
I pick strawberries for breakfast, and I am
cut open by the heat of the mourning sky,
all water and gasoline,
the backyard weeds shining their sharp tongues
in the afternoon sun,
my body half ache half sweat-stained longing,

my mouth stays shut like an egg that won't break.

There is a stifled grief that every drop of water carries,
born of peonies and oak wood,
a grief that won't let up,
a grief that weighs down my legs
as I cool them in the little creek,
all dust and meat,
all heavy green longing.

I pick flowers as the sun begins to set,
take some water from the creek,
set the entire sad thing on the kitchen table
in the golden light,
my fingers trembling from staying still
for so long,
trembling –

my mouth erupts like
a geyser,
all heat and chaos and desperation,

loud and all-consuming,
a firecracker begging to be held
even as it bursts apart,

even in the heat of the summer lull,
even in July's gentle golden light.



Unlocking the Sun

Arvilla Fee

Jujubes

Zhihua Wang

When I have a yard,
I'll not grow grass
then mow it to generate noise.

Nor will I raise chickens
for eggs – there are plenty
in the markets.

When I have a yard,
I'll plant jujube trees – cultivate
them around my house.

They're not afraid of cold,
nor drought, and fond
of sunshine and heat.

Yellow flowers bloom
in summer, clusters of jujubes
dangle in autumn.

Fruit the size of an OK gesture,
turns from green to brown
when ripe.

Skin smooth with luster,
pulp firm, juicy,
taste like maple syrup.

Even though very mellow
they never fall and rot,
but dry themselves

into soft, wrinkled dates,
luring people to pick
and preserve.

Concrete

Rahana K Ismail

We can't claim earth or sand to our pockets of feet.
Just air chiseled to keen cliff-angles for dwelling.

But when rain finally pours, compound walls burgeon
into botanical layering, tile-cracks blink open

to Purple Mazus. Basement patch bows down to
Cleome jungles, Stonebreakers take over the entry

ramp. Our car-park houses spiny Amaranths,
an unnamed vine mouses into nooks, curling hold

by the minute. The asbestos roof flowers 4 o'clock
plants as Snake grass riot in the Woodsorrel plains.

My daughter points at an earthworm bridging
the crack instead of slipping in. *See, she wants to stay.*

Every morning I give her a leaf at the bus stop.
Though none of this is ours. Though none of this

will survive the weeding shears of living through.
We walk among them as if they are, as if they would.

bring me the buzz of bees
riots of perennial flowers rows of runner beans
cherry tomatoes beetroot swiss chard
unruly squash marigolds lemon thyme

dishes cleared deck cleared water can in hand
I douse the garden at dusk so droplets have time to dive deep
into sub soil escaping the rough din that won't diminish 'til after dark
We are soil We are water We are warm summer air
We are caretaking porous borders
mycelium binding us

Resides Beside a Pear Tree

Katherine D. Perry

—for MaryEtta Perry

Fresh from the tree, I hold three
under water, a cleanse before blotting
dry. Using a knife, I peel their old lives
away, revealing the nearly white flesh
to fillet into bite-sized slivers.
Rivers of time have given me
a gentle ease with these trees' gifts,
and I lift the slices onto a dish,
wish for it to bring pleasure
to her mouth, for everything
she chooses to circumvent bruises.
I pray the muses will relay
their lessons, bring their blessings
and courage as she nourishes
her body with our family's namesake.

To the youngest

Louise Wilford

You are the palest ring, the one
that nests inside the others,
flawed with only one spilling knot-hole,
the youngest year, the eye of the wind.

You are the curve of the wave,
its shielded centre, water curling
over you with blue-green wings.
You are at the hub, the sheltered

pivot around which others spiral.
When you tantrum on the stairs,
head down over crossed arms,
we smile, indulgent. Stroke your hair.

When you demand our notice,
we slide onto the carpet ready to play.
Uncle Philip is a squid, hairy tentacles
rising out of a patchwork sea – and

Auntie Lou is a tree in which it is safe
to cling. Mummy is a grumpy giant
casting away your dummy, but letting
you watch YouTube on her phone.

When you won't eat your lunch,
Nanny gives you chocolate when she thinks
no one can see. You are the heart,
embedded, duvet-tucked and pillow-plumped,

feathers folded back over your downy core.
We act on your merest glance,
My best, my darling, cherished, spoiled
you are our final, dearest chance



camphor
allison anne

Cool-Blue-Forever

*G*Timothy Gordon

Even before dawn
borderland fry-hot-dry,

scorch-time overdrive
rising up from desert grit

& fetid dead flora, cottonwood
stump, burnt-black-rot cacti,

brittlebush, all long-haul summer,
colluding with the Organs'

wavery, distant heat-haze,
unlike el cielo, heaven higher up,

believed by la gente cool-blue-forever

Reborn

Sarette Danae

In the wake of your wreckage,
He found me.

He of the scorching desert sun and prickly pear cactus,
The blanched blue sky and dusty red rock.

He of the tyrannous droughts followed by roaring monsoon rains,
Rivers that ran where dust devils had swirled.

He of the ragged coyote pack, howling in chorus,
And the wide-staring screech owl, swooping down on its prey.

He of the mesas that spread and mountains that rose,
Canyons that cut deep clefts in the earth.

He of the noble saguaro, reaching up its bent arms
In eternal supplication, silent and still.

bloom

Mark A. Fisher

brightly the sun	shining down
upon Mojave sand	warmly
creosote spotted	lazy lizard
bears witness	waiting
these empty months	patiently
before the rains	and a return
to the tenacity	of life
in the desert	bursting
past adversity	filling itself
	with wildflowers

El Segundo, California

Fin Ryals

As a child, my favorite summertime souvenir was
Not seashells or sand crabs but
The tar that stuck to my salty feet
Like a sailor's tattoos
And I'd dance upon the web-like shadow of
The water treatment plant
That I mistook as part of the refinery
In hopes of staining myself permanently

My efforts were no match for my mother who
Armed with a rusty can of acetone and a blue
Hand towel battle-scarred and fossilized from
Past summer ventures lifted my feet against my
Will and scrubbed away tar pits with the sharpness of
A stingray's barb my throat filled with fumes from the
Chemical concoction used to besmirch the beach's mark on me and
I'd cry not from the galvanic aroma of the acetone
But from my taunting, freshly cleaned flesh that
Lingered on where the tar once did.

All Summer Long

Shelby Lynn Lanaro

I wished we could
go home,
but there was no place
we called home
anymore.
The heat suffocated us,
and we still wore our masks
through the sweat.
The walls of my mother's
eleven hundred square foot
two-bedroom house
closed in on us.
I listened
to the neighbors'
rat-for-a-dog yap
every damn day
as I sent out
job applications
like life rafts.
I dreamed for
something else.
We said: this is
going to be our year
and picked blueberries,
drank coffee,
ate chocolate-filled croissants.
I read poetry
in the mornings
like daily devotionals,
and we watched
for the groundhog
scavenging
for food in the backyard.
He lived beneath an uprooted
tree that had fallen
in a storm and I hope
he still does, even now.
But all summer long we
tried like hell
to dig our way out.

Onion Duty

lone Singletary

Rock, Paper, Scissors, Shoot!

Rock, Paper, Scissors, Shoot!

Rock, Paper, Scissors, Shoot!

My oldest son loses and has to help.
I love to chat while we dice potatoes,
wait for the oven to heat, but he thinks
kitchen duty is one of the worst chores—
worse than scrubbing the bathroom, barely
better than scooping the litter box, so
I put him on onion duty.

He hacks the enemy in half with one clean whack,
then begins peeling. Dry, papery skin clings
to the orb, not ready to let go, layer tears
into layer. Stink stains his hands. Sweat
beads on his newly fuzzed upper lip.

He's slicing fast and thin, like a sous chef;
he's a natural. Standing there, cutting to a steady
beat, weight on one foot, the other curled on top,
sock-footed, skinny-jeaned, plaid button-down
untucked, he's a budding man-boy. Red-rimmed
and glossy, his eyes contradict his claim onions
don't make him cry, and lord, that boy is stubborn,
not one tear falls, and I can tell
what kind of man he'll be.

CONFESSION

Ken Poyner

This year, the garden
Finally came up. The
Tomatoes burdened themselves.
The snap beans appeared
To cluster. The corn shot
Straight so each stalk would
Not crowd its mate. When
The police came by, even they,
Hardened with sobriety as they were,
Commented on how this year my
Always promised garden was doing
As well as I fabled. Yes,
I told them, I should have been
Burying the neighbors here all along.

Transplants

Erin Olson

Around the house my mother placed flower arrangements,
dry as tissue paper.
Chinese lanterns, straw flowers, thistles, and milkweed - exhaling
tired memories
of pollen and sunlight.

We were new transplants on a narrow asphalt road,
artificial artery sprouting split-levels
from the tired, retired corn field, bursting in revenge with ragweed
and tangles of purple vetch.

She brushed on rough canvas in this new country –
“Too dry, too much sun for real flowers,” she said,
painting bouquets and barns at the kitchen table.

With dry, itchy eyes I went tripping through fields of pollen,
kicking up dust
from the playhouse floorboards, sneezing in the wild strawberry patch,
pulling out
sandburs that bunched in my socks and shoelaces.

Around the house my father planted white pine seedlings, wiry children
transplanted from Northern Wisconsin. He battled
gophers, drought, and sandy soil
for twenty years, until the horizon was swallowed.

On the brown shag carpet of the living room,
my parents pinned me down,
“Don’t be so sensitive,” they said, squeezing allergy drops, cold and wet,
into my swollen eyes.

Now, the towering immigrant pines cast long shadows
across the lawn, providing
cover for deer and turkeys cutting a path, like ancient nomads,
feasting on oak saplings
under sheets of pine pollen blown loose by August winds.

My aging parents sip coffee on the deck and admire their work,
a landscape transformed
through force to mimic childhood, and I have disappeared,
like the strawberries
and sandburs, transplanted into a new land.

AUTUMN'S BEGINNING



Understory

Liz Whiteacre

Pruning the Apple Tree

Jocelyn Olum

The groundskeeper shows me how to prune the apple tree
Says heartwood grows slow,
Grows tucked away among the brash new tendrils
which spring up in all directions.

He shows me how to tell the fruiting branches from the structural
To choose a bud pointed in the direction I want it growing
Branches-to-be hardly more than wishful thinking
from the sturdier older wood.

There is a science to it, of course.
Inches and numbers—
as if these are measurements a tree could learn.

Still, I think the groundskeeper understands.
He runs his hands along the new bark, palpating, reassuring.
The edge of his knife is sharp, and it leaves a clean uniform suggestion
on the young green wood.

I copy him as best I can.
The groundskeeper tells me that pruning is a conversation
That sometimes a person says something wrong.

He says it becomes all things to be forgiving.

The groundskeeper has a son. On Saturday
I see them walking in the orchard
Boy tugging on his father's hand and father gently tugging back.

They don't notice me;
I'm lying under the apple tree he helped me prune
Watching fresh bark close slowly over forgotten beginnings
New shoots growing into shapeliness
because of and despite our best efforts.

Love Poem #2

Layla Lenhardt

we are born
into a cacophony,
a chaos only dreamt of
after an argument
in your college dorm room.
arms flailing like grenades.
foot in mouth. a mural
of stars across the face
of a girl on the other side
of an ocean.
that's just to say
i miss you.
that's just to say
i hope you keep
coming back like the blood
between my legs.

I'm hiding in the kitchen from small voices

Shannon Marzella

brimming with words that spill and shatter
my silence, turn me to broken glass on the tile floor,
then demand I find the tiniest slivers: they threaten blood.

The kettle hisses like a snake,
alive like the tree outside my window
newly ripe with apples, not just one.

Reaching through the open pane I pluck one,
round and bright, then bite the blood red skin

sharply, the juice pouring down my chin,
gasping with surprise at its sweetness.

Footsteps pound down the stairs. I stare
at the tiny faces smiling at me. I hide
the red apple with one hand

wipe my chin with the other, ask
what do you need?

Hangover

Cora Schipa

In the bathroom mirror I am puffed up
and crystallized like a pastry in the yellow light.
I think I cried last night.
I lean in close to the mirror
and touch my freckles, barely visible,
like distant stars. It's been a long time
since I laid down in the light of the sun.
Something wells inside me. It's love
and sadness, those pure childish feelings.
I think of those perfect organs inside
me pumping all at once, flushing out
the poison. I hold my face like a lover would.
I take all my clothes off carefully,
like I'm handling myself as a child.

I'm myself. I'm a child.
At the bottom of the shower,
I let the hot water melt me like a candle.
It pours down my hair and back like
when my mother would pour
a cupful of soapy warm water over
my tiny head. I wrap my arms around
myself. I think of my body, which I've loved
and hated a thousand times over.
This isn't the start of anything new.
This isn't the last time I will do this.
But in this moment, I feel that love.



The Blue-Haired Lady on the Road Again
Phyllis Green

Making Risotto

Shelby Lynn Lanaro

I never think it's going to be
enough when I put the dried
grains of arborio to toast
in the pan. Even though I follow
the recipe, and even though
I've made it a hundred times,
it just never seems enough.
It looks impressive to others
because I add rosemary and fennel,
thyme and a bit of crushed red
pepper for pizzazz,
but I know the truth
is that I'm always scared
it won't be good enough.
And I really don't do much
at all—just pour in broth,
one ladleful at a time,
and each grain absorbs the liquid
like knowledge. I've learned
to walk away because
a watched pot never boils,
but I come back from time to time
to stir the progress around
until, finally, the rice
has doubled in size—how
quickly I forget that I am both
the watcher and the pot.
So, I guess I'll keep ladling
and stirring until I've made risotto
of my life.



Living in All

Edward Lee

Cleaning Wild Leeks

Pamela Murray Winters

Their burgundy stems hard like footbones but fragile,
essential; their butt-ends round and white, a trail
of kinked roots like hair from a grave; green flourishes

that, for beauty's sake, should flank an orange flower.
What's to be eaten here?

Someone has ripped these from alongside
the Rappahannock and sold them to us as a treasure.
Use before they wilt. I hold them

under the tap. stroke the leaves with my thumb,
and scrub the bulb with all fingers. That writer

at Bon Appetit says they're filthy things, but
delectable. I can't get every trace to disappear;
they remember the mud. I give. My grandmother,

a farmer, always said you have to eat
a peck of dirt before you die. She ate them raw.

“Grandmaster” Gregory’s Chess Odyssey

Douglas J. Lanzo

—Dedicated to my 13-year-old twin son, Gregory

Perhaps it is because I so treasure
the magic of its early moments
that I sometimes imagine
for brief interludes of time
that his journey has just begun:

Picturing, the day of his first chess lesson
with his twin brother,
their bobbing blond heads
barely reaching the height of the
table upon which a mounted chessboard
sits centered on a sturdy wooden table
perused by the intent eyes of
their instructor, a chess genius
who worked his way from extreme
poverty in Ukraine to become
an International Master,
his eyes burning with passion
to share with them his dreams
and inspire them to become
the best that they can be;

Recounting, their Ukrainian instructor
defeating their combined chess firepower
blindfolded, before he eagerly teaches
them chess puzzles of increasing
complexity;

Recalling 8-year-old Gregory’s
beaming smile when,
cheered on by a newfound friend,
he won his first tournament victory,
having patiently awaited
his day in the sun after
supportively basking in Alex’s earlier
tournament successes;

Gazing upon identical first place trophies
that my twin sons earned when
they matched up in the finals
of a local tournament where,
though Gregory had the higher rating,

he intentionally drew
with his more competitive brother
so that they each would claim a first-place trophy;

Reliving 10-year-old Gregory's vanquishing
of an undefeated 60-year old player
in a 3rd round match
at a prestigious Russian-American tournament
as he spots and parries
his opponent's last desperate trick;

Savoring 12-year-old Gregory's
gentleness of spirit
when he observed
the despondent look
in a younger boy's eyes and
instantly offered him a draw;

Nodding slowly
in joyful disbelief as Gregory
informs me that he defeated
two FIDE Masters in a row;

Glowing in watching a replay
of Gregory's perfect game,
a draw against a simulated
Magnus Carlsen playing
at World Champion level;

Realizing, that Gregory has arrived
at his first major chess destination
and, more importantly, has
acquitted himself with honor
and grace along the way...

I Become Old Woman

Dorothy Johnson-Laird

I become old woman
ancient tree hieroglyph

these my designs
a spiral three circles

these my words
used before, now still

see beauty in these withered lines
see beauty in this definite stance

I become old woman
a lake
a cumulous cloud
more beautiful than any fashion model

my heart is settled
no longer a willful dart

I am recollecting slow moving
gathering petals as I walk
gathering breath of life

PLANTING SEEDS

Kayla Martell Feldman

What is a legacy
if not the fruits
of a garden left untended?
Seeds scattered
between the cracks of the blacktop
so that the next time children play here,
they may not skin their knees so badly.
Falls softened
not by the flourishing of fauna
in the wake of careful minding
but the blinding brightness
of a weed, unwanted.
What is a legacy
if not a trail of wreckage
received unwillingly,
chilling the bones of those
stumbling in its wake?

Putting Up With Stuff

Jim Bohan

Polka dots, rattles, clicks, dings,
annoying recorded voices.
Squeals, lots of spinning things,
garish birds and animals.
Music snippets, good or bad,
played incessantly.

And tinny sounds? Repeated
till you get a dose of awfully bad
tinnitus, till what remains of your
addled brain, flooded out by baby
things, grasps for a preserver
like a clutching drowning man.

Roll and sway, bend and bounce,
turn and rock and roll away —
all of it attached to stuff you didn't
choose to tolerate . . . until today . . .

because the clatter, all the noise,
zeroes in on what you want:
a certain smile getting aimed
directly at your eager heart.



I Dreamed of a Girl

Irina Novikova

REBIRTH

Ken Poyner

No one gets buried in this cemetery anymore.
It has been fifty or sixty years
Since the last vacated body was placed here.
Every so many years someone notices the
Oblivion and brings flowers to a random grave,
Or a project is set up by Girl Scouts
Or Boy Scouts or concerned individuals,
Somehow collected, and repairs
Are made, ornamentation left
To wither and, like the bodies
Below, sit waiting its time of destruction.
Every time he cuts the grass, the volunteer
Groundskeeper – who is a neighbor looking
To his property value, the safety of neighborhood
Children – removes one more headstone. Over time
There is less to cut, and he puts atop the growing
Cleared space a vegetable garden. Some years
There is enough produce to take to market.

Competition

Adrienne Stevenson

wild creatures come here to frolic and play
here comes that rabbit again
the chipmunks dug into my garden today
where's that receipt for terrine?

here comes that rabbit again
my hope for fresh greens is now over
where's that receipt for terrine?
why don't the beasties eat clover?

my hope for fresh greens is now over
the garden a patchwork of holes
why don't the beasties eat clover?
first chipmunks, then rabbits, now moles

the garden a patchwork of holes
I thought I had sealed every gate
first chipmunks, then rabbits, now moles
next will come groundhogs, just wait

I thought I had sealed every gate
given up growing the things we like most
next will come groundhogs, just wait
then all the rest of our plants will be toast

given up growing the things we like most
broccoli, green beans, sweet peppers, cukes
now all the rest of our plants will be toast
time for a pre-emptive strike – get the nukes!

broccoli, green beans, sweet peppers, cukes
only potatoes and carrots for soup
time for a pre-emptive strike – get the nukes!
wait...maybe it's time to regroup

only potatoes and carrots for soup
lucky that anything grows here at all
so maybe it's time to regroup
plough up the garden; seed grass in the fall

lucky that anything grows here at all
the chipmunks dug into my garden today
plough up the garden; seed thyme in the fall
wild creatures come here to frolic and play

A Child's Metamorphosis

Chukwuma-Eke Pacella

When I still counted my teeth,
Adulthood had the shape
of a grammy,
& its name
 • wrapped growth in the flesh
of adventures
& love—everything good.

At eight,
I was already an expert at shape-shifting.
Sometimes I could shed my skin
into the role play
of mother nursing the child
no one dared to say
had the body of a sweater.

Sometimes I metamorphosed
into a disney princess,
or perhaps a goddess
who ruled her father's soil
by sucking her skin into mother's wears
& parading the neighborhood
with an iron fist—her toothbrush.

Eight aged into Eighteen

I am no longer an ally with aging.
Because the running years
murdered the scales
shielding our eyes.
& growth no longer hides
in the vessel of a plaque
but rather, a plague
housing grief & responsibilities
life & the end of metamorphosis
at its true phase. A child is *woman* now.

The Strangest Thing About Growing Up

Cora Schipa

is un-knowing people.
I draw him on the back of the menu
without looking down
so his eyes float above his skull, lips
a tangle of meaningless lines
I like him better that way
so he could be anyone and I could be anyone
sitting across from each other in the Saturday sun
I trust too much, collect all the pieces
and beg them to make sense
spend hours tugging
at the neat string of time
it will rain soon
and we'll have to go inside,
squealing cupping hands over eyes
the paper with his face on it will melt away
into mush, into earth
and we'll forget the day
and I'll forget the boy
but there'll be another one
and I'll feel like I've been here before
my next steps laid out
like horrible stepping stones
again, again, again
clapping I could still be a child
imagining, playing the same game
until I choose one to live.

Second Spring

R. P. Singletary

I never knew why in autumn
is it spring, you asked
Then I saw the light hit
the tree and bounce away

We Have Seen the Corn

Robert Okaji

You exhale joy, and the afternoon
blooms in certainty, little plumes
of purple and blue and specific
grays billowing before our eyes,
accentuating those yellows and greens
caught quivering in the between.
Oh, these little deaths fluttering by,
winking at us, saying *this is*
and always has been. I nod in
agreement, grab your hips, close
my eyes, feel the whispering stalks.
How do we laugh so, even in pain?

Night Communion

M. F. Charles

I stroll a corridor, a moonlit path of soft grey earth,
Through a meadow of grass, swollen heads
with dewy eyes nodding in the dim.

Move softly, match the path.
Share for an instant with a fox
rustling through the brittle brush.

Mark the leaves of an aspen, clattering softly
like hands of unseen Fae, perched in their branches
approving my sojourn.

Dodging, lurching side to side,
a careening long eared rabbit flees,
as a silent haunt glides across the moon.

A hunt signaling screech, attests to the pursuit.
An imminent, fatal conjunction unfolds,
lost now in the distant shadows.

Nearby, a cathedral of trees, its deacon discerned, glistening eyes,
dark nose on moon creamed muzzle, below an antlered crown.
A chuff in the cool air, a muted scuff, an echo of my own.

Furtively observing, perhaps mirroring my meditation,
free from the confusing cacophony sustained in sunlight.
Each a small agent of action, a prisoner to the forest of events.

Other woman

Megan Melody

i miss the possibility of us.
his bright blue eyes dilated as i hover above him, shaky breaths
making my body hungry.
phone calls, hugs, lingering hands.
“you look good in your swimsuit, better off though”
your girlfriend looks between us, anger painting the room red.
she warns us to stay away, yet your car pulls up
in front of my apartment, we head to the sand
dunes to smoke and bury each other, i hate sand now.
your girlfriend calls me, how she got my number is the least
of my worries. how do i tell her that
you’re between my thighs because hers are closed?
going to chapel together, his left hand in hers, right on my thigh.
new marks on me in the shape of hands that don’t belong to me.
bruises litter my body, summer sun amplifying our infidelity. *She knows.*
i kiss down his throat, marking him up the same way
he has done to me. pick him up as she
throws his Xbox out the window,
she flips me off and calls me a whore as we drive off.
we shoot the breeze, cigarettes and mary jane
muffling our excuses in our mouths.
september looms over us, i enter a frenzy, i forget to eat, sleep, read.
he moves in as much as byu lets us. we were never together,
so when i noticed new marks on
him i responded with my own, his eyes dark.
i miss the possibility of us, but we burned that bridge the moment
we crossed it.

NONE OF THIS WAS YOUR FAULT

Laura Martens

quietly plant an acorn
in the palm of your hand
if you stay still enough
it will become a tree
taller than you; shadow smothering
a cage of roots around your body
it will promise, you are safe
here, buried under autumn leaves
if you can stay still enough
if you can stay quiet
until your fingers become the earth
that they held

ACHENE

Mat Wenzel

And Lord, the way the tiniest leaf falls,
the way the tallest one turns, the way
blades of grass—the word blade
first used for plants & then knife—
cut nothing, just slip into fall & winter,
is not the way I want to
die. From the cold lobes of my ears
to the ridge where the sole meets
edge of foot I want to go this way,
gently in the warm
fuzz of his arms, the trees of our bodies
from similar soils,
ground in the root, chin
tucked where it's been for years,
halfway between his nipples.
But there's another way. Please. Please,
I want to be the spark of a dandelion head
seeding in the drying
joint of a log where people hold hands &
kiss their lovers as if that is all there is.
Let the achene of my fire from the pappus of
my spirit rest there in that knot till it becomes
a cavity in the mouth of a lion;
now oxygen picks up the phone & the

operator, pulling out cords & plugging others in,
 leans forward to say this
party line is on fire.

 Even things that are green and
quick are burned. The night wind tends the fire
 like my work-wearied father
rose to make his children french-toast &
 orange juice, drinking black coffee
so filtered by his beard. The earth becomes
 the oily ash in his cast iron pan.
The only thing left is the tip of the sage,
 the wet blossom buried in an earthen
uterus. The burned world black
 except for this un-flower &
violet-blue sky. When the rain comes
 it is creosote in the desert, like
water from the sea we've yet to discover—
 springing up like Gafsa Lake.
Xerox my words, Abba, Father, please. I'll die
 a thousand deaths if
you just let one of them catch. I'll sort
 uncountable seeds if you let one grow.
Zion, I'll leave for the refuge of hell,
 if you just let him live a happy life.

On finding my poetic voice at 68

Cynthia Bernard

When winter approaches,
once beflowered vines
will have endured summer's drought
and, desiccated, fallen to the earth below,
to be picked over by chattering birds
then trampled by sneakered feet
and an assortment of paws.

But there will have been a time, perhaps October,
an in-between, a twilight,
when the flowers have spent their loveliness
and their skeletons droop like deflated balloons,
when arthritic branches still trace their silhouettes
against tree trunks of weathered wood,
and weary roots, approaching their long hibernation,
still send sustenance up the xylem
and out to the branches.

Then, every so often,
a blossom will emerge
in solitary splendor –
penultimate offering,
the almost final verse.

Chimera Coming Home

Josephine Raye Kelly

I cannot tell you
 how it begins and ends.
I'm not sure
 if those are different things anymore.

I can tell you what it's like
 to abandon your body in pursuit of safety,
abducted by aliens and living in horror movies.

I can show you how
 grief leaves stones in your belly
and knives in your bones.
 What it's like to belong to a silent haunting
and one day realize you were not meant to be one thing.
 The truth screaming from your folded hands:
I want to feel alive even when it hurts.

Bathing in the life of precious chimera lost in continuum,
 I wait for your prayer to bring me home.



Late Snow

Irina Novikova

Contributor Bios

Douglas K Currier holds an MFA in Poetry from the University of Pittsburgh and writes poetry in English and Spanish. He has published in several journals: *The Café Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *Comstock Review*, and others. He lives with his wife in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and Corrientes, Argentina.

Cameron Morse (he, him) is Senior Reviews editor at Harbor Review and the author of eight collections of poetry. He holds an MFA from the University of Kansas City-Missouri and lives in Independence, Missouri, with his wife Lili and three children. For more information, check out his Facebook or website.

Joseph A Farina is a retired lawyer and award winning poet, in Sarnia, Ontario, Canada. His poems have appeared in Philadelphia Poets, Tower Poetry, The Windsor Review, and Tamaracks: Canadian Poetry for the 21st Century. He has two books of poetry published, *The Cancer Chronicles* and *The Ghosts of Water Street*.

Carl “Papa” Palmer of Old Mill Road in Ridgeway, Virginia, lives in University Place, Washington. He is retired from the military and Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) enjoying life as “Papa” to his grand descendants and being a Franciscan Hospice volunteer. Carl is president of the Puget Sound Poetry Connection in Tacoma. PAPA’s MOTTO: Long Weekends Forever!

Layla Lenhardt is a poet based in Indianapolis. She is Editor in Chief of *1932 Quarterly*. She has been most recently published in *The Light Ekphrastic*, *Quail Bell Magazine*, and others. She is a 2021 Best of the Net nominee and a 6th place finalist in Poetry Super Highway’s 2021 Poetry Contest. www.laylalenhardt.com.

Edward Lee is an artist and writer from Ireland. His paintings and photography have been exhibited widely, while his poetry, short stories, non-fiction have been published in magazines in Ireland, England, and America, including *The Stinging Fly*, *Skylight 47*, and others. His blog/website can be found at <https://edwardmlee.wordpress.com>

Allan Lake is a poet from Allover, Canada who now lives and writes in Allover, Australia. Some coincidence! His latest chapbook of poems, “My Photos of Sicily,” was published by Ginninderra Press (Aus) in 2020. It contains no photos, only poems.

Louise Wilford lives and works in Yorkshire, UK. Her work has been widely published, most recently in *Bandit*, *English Review*, *Failbetter*, and others. In 2020, she won First Prize in the Arts Quarterly Short Story Competition and the Merefest Poetry Competition, and she was awarded a Masters in Creative Writing (Distinction).

Dorothy Johnson-Laird is a poet and social worker who lives in New York City. She received an M.F.A in creative writing from Sarah Lawrence College. Dorothy has a passion for African music and has published journalism with www.afropop.org and www.worldmusiccentral.org. Recent poems were accepted for publication by *Evening Street Review*, *BeZine* and *Soul-Lit*, among others.

Robert Okaji lives in Indiana. He no longer owns a bookstore, and once won a goat-catching contest. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Great Lakes Review*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *Vox Populi*, *Wildness*, and elsewhere.

Alex Richardson teaches creative writing, literature, and film at Limestone University. His poems have appeared in over 50 magazines, journals, and anthologies. His first collection, *Porch Night on Walnut Street*, was published by Plainview Press.

Alan Bern is a retired children’s librarian and the author of three books of poetry. He has awards for his poems and stories and is an exhibited/published photographer. Alan performs with dancer Lucinda Weaver as *PACES* and with musicians from *Composing Together*.

Pat Phillips West’s work appears in various journals including: *Persimmon Tree*, *The Inquisitive Eater* *New School Food*, *Haunted Waters Press*, *San Pedro River Review*, *Slipstream*, and elsewhere. She has received multiple Best of the Net and Pushcart Prize nominations.

Toti O'Brien is the Italian Accordionist with the Irish last name. Born in Rome, living in Los Angeles, she is an artist, musician, and dancer. She is the author of *Other Maidens* (BlazeVOX, 2020), *An Alphabet of Birds* (Moonrise Press, 2020), *Alter Alter* (Elyssar Press, 2022), and more.

Barbara Usher began writing poetry about her four-acre sanctuary for pigs, sheep, and hens two years ago. She was inspired to provide refuge while teaching on animals and the environment as a secondary RE teacher, and currently teaches a variety of subjects to students with complex needs.

Ione Singletary graduated May 2019 with her MFA from The University of the South at the age of 50. She is a single mother of two boys, ages 17 and 13, and a servant of two queen cats. She lives in Nashville, Tennessee where she is an Associate Professor of English. Her work has recently appeared in *Ponder Review*.

Ken Poyner's four collections of flash and four of speculative poetry can be found at all the usual places. He is married to a world class female power lifter and lives with several rescue cats and betta fish. He is a thankfully retired information systems warrior.

Jim Krosschell divides his life into three parts: growing up for 29 years, working in science publishing for 29 years, and now writing in Northport, ME, and Newton, MA. His work is widely published in some 60 journals. His book *Owls Head Revisited* was published in 2015 by North Country Press.

So Asiddao is a queer, Jewish, and Filipino student who studies creative writing at Oberlin College. In 2021, Asiddao was a production intern for the Lunar Company, a new podcasting company. Find their work at <https://www.eartheclipsed.com/extras>. After graduating, Asiddao plans to continue writing speculative fiction and making music.

Craig Sipe is the author of the poetry collection *Lovely Dregs*. His work has appeared in journals including *The Maine Arts Journal*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Iconoclast*, and *The Café Review*. He lives on Orr's Island in Maine.

Zhihua Wang is a poetry candidate in the Arkansas Writers' MFA Program at the University of Central Arkansas. She worked as the Managing Editor of *Arkana* from 2019 – 2020. Now she works as a TA in creative writing and is working on her first poetry collection and a book of translation.

GTimothy Gordon's *DREAM WIND* was published in 2020. His work appears in *AGNI*, *American Literary R*, *Cincinnati PR*, *Kansas Q*, *Louisville R*, *Mississippi R*, *New York Q*, *Phoebe*, *RHINO*, *Sonora R*, and *Texas Observer*, among others. His recognitions include NEA and NEH Fellowships, residencies, and several Pushcart nominations. *EMPTY HEAVEN/EMPTY EARTH* will be published in 2022.

Phyllis Green is an author, playwright, and artist. Her paintings can be found at *Gulf Stream magazine*, *ArLiJo 123*, *Rip Rap*, *Ox Mag*, *Cinematic Codes Review*, and other journals.

Dylan Webster lives and writes in the sweltering heat of Phoenix, AZ. His poetry and fiction have appeared in anthologies by Quillkeeper's Press & Neon Sunrise; as well as the journals *The Dillydown Review* and *The Cannons Mouth* by Cannon Poets Quarterly. His debut collection of poetry, *Dislocated*, was published this year by Quillkeeper's Press.

Shelby Lynn Lanaro is a poet, amateur photographer and avid home chef who firmly believes that cooking is poetry. She is the author of *Yellowing Photographs* and an award-winning professor at Southern Connecticut State University. Follow Shelby on Instagram @shelbylynnlanaro or at www.shelbylynnlanaro.com to keep up with her work.

paul Bluestein is a physician (done practicing) and a blues musician (still practicing) living in Connecticut. In addition to poems and short stories that have appeared in a wide variety of online and print publications, he has had two full-length books of poetry published by Silver Bow Publishing: *TIME PASSAGES* and *FADE TO BLACK*.

Chukwuma-Eke Pacella is a seventeen-year-old Nigerian poet and short story writer. She has contributed to magazines like *the synchronized chaos magazine*, *Eunoia*, *IHRAF*, and others. She also have several works in poet-

ry anthologies. Pacella (pen name, the people) can be reached on twitter @dancing_poet and instagram @pacellachukwumaeke

Barbara A Meier started writing poetry again in her fifties after a hiatus of 33 years. Currently, she lives in Castle Rock, CO. She is the author of “Wildfire LAL 6,” published by Ghost City Press; “Getting through Gold Beach,” published by Writing Knights Press; and “Sylvan Grove,” published by The Poetry Box.

Beck Anson (he/they) is a queer and trans writer whose work appears in *Rattle*, *RHINO*, *Humana Obscura*, and others. His poem “I Admit Myself to the Psych Ward in a Pandemic” was a finalist for the 2020 Rattle Poetry Prize, and he is an editor at *The Flare Journal*. They live in Northampton, MA, and are pursuing a PhD in plant biology at UMass-Amherst.

Carol R. Sunde lives within walking distance of the Pacific Ocean in Westport, WA. A retired college counselor, Carol now delves into her lifelong interest in poetry. Her poems have appeared in *The Comstock Review*, *Passager*, *Shark Reef*, and elsewhere. Besides reading and writing poetry, Carol loves birding, walking the beach, and watching the sky’s new presentations each day.

Josephine Raye Kelly is a queer writer living among the redwoods on the Pacific Coast. They find inspiration in alien-shaped chihuahuas, the asexuality of succulents, and Dolly Parton. Josephine’s words are featured or forthcoming with *Pile Press*, *Gaia Lit*, and *Chinquapin Literary Magazine*. They hold a BA in Literature from UC Santa Cruz.

Sara Collie is a writer and language tutor living in Cambridge, England. Her writing explores the wild, uncertain spaces of nature, the complexities of mental health, and the mysteries of the creative process. Her poetry and prose have appeared in various online and print publications.

Ariela Herček comes from Slovenia and is currently finishing her English and General Linguistics Master’s program. Her work has been published in various Slovenian print and online poetry magazines, as well as the international summer 2021 poetry anthology of *Sunday Mornings at the River*. You can find her on IG @arielahpoe3.

Anthony is an aspiring young poet from Spokane, Washington, majoring in creative writing from Eastern Washington University. He started as a songwriter, moving into poetry after seeing the unique freedom of writing and the muscality of language itself. Overcoming severe depression and suicidal ideation, he prides himself on growth and change.

David Banach teaches philosophy in New Hampshire where he tends chickens, keeps bees, and watches the sky. He has published poems in *Symmetry Pebbles*, *Hare's Pan*, *Please See Me*, *Poets' Touchstone*, and other places. He also does the Poetrycast podcast for *Passengers Journal*, along with Andreea Ceplinski.

Audra Burwell is a creative writing major with a strong emphasis on fantasy-themed poetry and fiction that covers universal subject matter. Her work has been published by *Palaver Journal*, *Deep Overstock*, *Carcinogenic Poetry*, *Serpentine Zine Literary Magazine*, and *Superpresent Magazine*. She is currently employed by Fresno State's Kremen Department as a Communications Assistant.

W. Hans Miller published three books during a career practicing and teaching at UCLA's Department of Psychiatry: *Personal Stress Management for Medical Patients*, *Systematic Parent Training*, and a memoir, *Soothing: Lives of a Child Psychologist*. Their poems appear in or currently forthcoming in *Last Stanza* and the Moonstone Poetry Center's anthologies.

Olivia Soule has an MFA in poetry from the University of Nevada, Reno, and a BA in English and Italian from UCLA. She has published work in the *Haight Ashbury Literary Journal* and *Pudding Magazine*, and has participated in poetry readings in San Francisco.

Korkut Onaran's *The Book of Colors* has received the first prize in Cervena Barva Press 2007 Chapbook Contest. His poem "House" has received the second prize in 2006 Baltimore Review Poetry Competition. His first book of poetry, *The Trident Poems*, was published in February 2018. His poetry has been published in journals such as *Adelaide Literary Magazine*, *Penumbra*, *Rhino*, and more.

Tyler Hurula (she/her) is a poet born and raised in Denver, Colorado. She is queer, polyamorous, and a pet parent to two cats. Her poems have

been published previously in *Anti-Heroin Chic*, *Aurum Journal*, *Rat's Ass Review*, *Quail Bell Magazine*, and *Gnashing Teeth Publishing*. She has an upcoming chapbook being published through Querencia Press.

Ollie Braden is seventeen and experiencing a lot of pretty classic teenage angst. They love mystery novels, oil paint, good arguments, Fiona Apple, and late-night walks. Their biggest fears include the passage of time and bumblebees. They can most reliably be found sleeping.

Clay Waters has had poems published in *Green Hills Literary Lantern*, *The Santa Clara Review*, *Roanoke Review*, as well as *Last Leaves*. His website is claywaters.org, featuring his self-published cozy mystery novel *Death in the Eye*.

Méabh McMahon is a writer living in Youghal, Ireland. She is the winner of the Cork Nature Network's Short Story Contest, and she has performed at Waterford's "Word in the City" festival. Méabh hosts the Irish-language show "Gaeilge Briste" on Community Radio Youghal, and you can follow her on Instagram at @meabhmcpoet.

Katherine D. Perry is a Professor of English at Perimeter College of Georgia State University. Her poetry is published in many journals, and her first volume, *Long Alabama Summer*, was released in December 2017. She also co-founded the GSU Prison Education Project, which teaches courses in prisons. Her website is www.katherinedperry.com.

allison anne is an artist based in Minneapolis, Minnesota (unceded Očhéthi Šakówiŋ land), working in collage, zinemaking and mail art. Their practice explores experience and emotion through the reconstitution and rearranging print. By recontextualizing images and materials, allison creates complex abstractions that prioritize that which is found and discarded.

Laura Martens is based in London, UK, where she writes things and sells books. She loves skyscrapers, busy train stations, and cafés with window seats. Her writing has appeared in *CP Quarterly*, *the Journal of Erato*, and others. Find her on twitter @laurarmartens.

Sarah Bratt is a new writer living on the North Shore of Massachusetts and studying music therapy. She finds joy in using words and music to help herself and others express themselves. Admittedly, she has a particular fondness for writing about birds, encounters with nature, and her experience as a disabled person.

Celine Pun (潘珠海) is a Chinese-Vietnamese American writer. Raised in Los Angeles, they live in Isla Vista where they graduated University of California, Santa Barbara, with a Bachelor's in Writing and Literature and in Environmental Studies. Their work has been published with *45 Magazine*, *Matchbox Magazine*, and *Spectrum Literary Journal*.

Megan Melody is a Costa Rican American poet and writer located in Spokane, WA. She is currently finishing her bachelors degree in creative writing at Eastern Washington University. She hopes to continue in the world of poetry and other arts.

Shannon Marzella is a poet and teacher from Connecticut. Her poetry has been published in *Cauldron Anthology*, *Glacial Hills Review*, and is forthcoming from *Evening Street Review*. She has also published a YA novel entitled *Girl in Shadows* (2021). She is pursuing an MFA in Creative and Professional Writing from Western Connecticut State University.

Deidre Denise Matthee is a South African-born, Portuguese citizen currently living and writing in Romania. Her most recent publication is *Penguin and Bear* (a children's book for people of all ages). In addition to writing, she makes art on and of paper (@deidrematthee on Instagram); and facilitates creative workshops.

Stacie Eirich is a poet, singer, and library associate. Her poems have appeared in *Art Times Journal*, *Avalon Literary Review*, *Grand Little Things*, and *The Bluebird Word*, among others. She lives near New Orleans, LA, with three cats, two kids, and one fish. www.stacieeirich.com

Donna Pucciani, a Chicago-based writer, has published poetry worldwide in *Shi Chao Poetry*, *Poetry Salzburg*, *Agenda*, *Journal of Italian Translation*, and others. Her seventh and most recent book of poetry is *EDGES*.

Ed Brickell is a Soto Zen practitioner living in Dallas, Texas. His poems have appeared in *Modern Haiku*, *Frogpond*, *Copperfield Review*, *Beatnik Cowboy*, *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*, and *Lothlorien Poetry Journal*.

Timothy L. Rodriguez has published in English and Spanish. His latest novel, *Never is Now*, will be published by Warren Publishing in September. His fiction and poems have appeared in over two dozen national and international publications including *Main Street Rag*, *Heyday Magazine*, and more. His essay “The Problem Now” appeared in the 5th edition of *New Theory*.

Maryam Imogen Ghouth makes poetry films that explore psychological themes such as shame. Her films have appeared in arthouse cinemas such as Akil in Dubai, and her poems in short films such as “Under the Sun,” which premiered worldwide, and in literary publications, including *The Poet Anthology* and *inScribe*.

Askold Skalsky has had poems in over 300 online and print periodicals in the United States, Canada, Europe, India, and elsewhere. A first collection, *The Ponies of Chuang Tzu*, was published in 2011. Originally from Ukraine, he resides in Frederick, Maryland, with his three cats and 3,000 books.

Claire Doll is a student at Mount St. Mary’s University in Emmitsburg, MD, studying English education and creative writing. Her short fiction and poetry have been recognized nationally, and she is published in *Otherwise Engaged Literature and Arts Magazine*, as well as her own university’s publication, *Lighted Corners*.

Jesse Curran is a poet, essayist, scholar, and teacher who lives in Northport, NY. Her essays and poems have appeared in a number of literary journals including *About Place*, *Spillway*, *Leaping Clear*, *Ruminate*, *Green Humanities*, *Blueline*, and *Still Point Arts Quarterly*. www.jesseleecurran.com

Jim Bohem is a poet/songwriter from St. Paul, MN. His poems have appeared in the *Minnesota Daily*, *Big City Lit*, *Talking Stick*, and elsewhere. He’s been short-listed three times for the international erbacce prize. Unsolicited Press published his poetry collection, “I travel in rusting burned-out sedans,” in 2018.

Anda Marcu (she/her) is a multidisciplinary artist living and working in London, Canada. Her work emerges from memories, dreams, and persistent mental imagery and has been featured in galleries and publications internationally. Her projects include painting, mixed media, film photography, poetry, and short stories.

Liz Whiteacre is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Indianapolis. Her poetry has appeared in *Last Leaves*, *Kaleidoscope*, *Wordgathering*, *Disability Studies Quarterly*, *Breath and Shadow*, and other literary magazines. She is the author of *Hit the Ground*.

George Freek's poetry has appeared in numerous Journals and Reviews. His poem "Written At Blue Lake" was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize. His collection "Melancholia" is published by Red Wolf Editions.

Sarette Danae is a teacher and writer hailing from Seattle. Her poetry has been included in both international and local publications; most recently her work appeared in *The Metaworker* and *Amsterdam Quarterly*. She was selected by Writing Texas as their Best in Poetry recipient for her piece "Migration."

Cynthia Bernard is a 68-year-old woman who is finding her voice as a poet after many decades of silence. She lives on a hill overlooking the ocean, about 20 miles south of San Francisco. Her work has recently been published in *Multiplicity Magazine*, *The MockingOwl Roost*, and *Vita Brevis Press Poetry Anthology*.

Kait Quinn is a legal assistant by day and poet by night. Her poetry has appeared in *Reed Magazine*, *Last Leaves Magazine*, *Chestnut Review*, and others. She lives in Minneapolis with her partner, their regal cat (Spart), and their very polite Aussie mix (Jesse). Kaitquinn.com

Arvilla Fee teaches English Composition for Clark State College and has been published in numerous presses. What she loves most about writing is its energy and passion. For Arvilla, poetry has always been about being down in the trenches with ordinary people who will say, "She gets me."

Rob Omura calls Calgary, Alberta, Canada, home where he lives with his common law wife and three too many cats. He has resigned himself to

finding cat fur in everything he eats. His fiction and poetry appear or is forthcoming in journals in the US, Canada, and abroad including the *New York Quarterly*, *34thParallel*, and many others.

Shae Krispinsky lives in Tampa, FL, where she fronts the band Navin Avenue. Her fiction, creative nonfiction, and poetry have appeared in *Connotation Press*, *Thought Catalog*, *The Dillydown Review*, *Vending Machine Press*, *Sybil Journal*, and more. She is currently working on her band's second album and a novel.

Rahana K Ismail is a poet and doctor from Kozhikode, Kerala. Her work has been featured or is forthcoming in *The Penn Review*, *Yearbook of Indian Poetry in English*, *nether Quarterly*, *Contemporary Haibun Online*, *Usawa Literary Review*, and elsewhere.

John Paul Caponigro is an internationally collected visual artist and published author. He leads unique adventures in the wildest places on earth to help participants creatively make deeper connections with nature and themselves. View his TEDx and Google talks at <https://www.johnpaulcaponigro.art/poetry/>.

Jocelyn Olum grew up in Boston, MA, and now lives in Portland, OR. Her poetry has been featured in *Red Eft Review*, *Blue Marble Review*, *Eunoia Review*, and *Poetic Sun*.

Jessica Mattox is a PhD student in English at Old Dominion University and an adjunct English instructor at Radford University. In addition to writing poetry, she is passionate about the teaching of technical/professional communication and first-year composition. Her work has been published in *The Album*, *Exit 109*, and the *Virginia English Journal*.

Lynn Tait is an award-winning poet/photographer residing in Sarnia, Ontario. Her poems have appeared in *FreeFall*, *Vallum*, *CV2*, *Literary Review of Canada*, *Trinity Review*, *High Shelf Press*, *The Quarantine Review*, and in over 100 anthologies. She is a member of the Ontario Poetry Society, the League of Canadian Poets, and the American Academy of Poets.

Erin Olson is a counselor, parenting coach, poet, and gardener. She lives in southeastern Wisconsin with her husband, son, cat, and an ever-growing collection of plant species.

Dia VanGunten explores overlaps between genres, between poetry & prose, between real & magical. Her current long fiction WIP is *Pink Zombie Rose* @pinkzombierose

Nicole Zdeb is a writer and astrologer based in Portland, OR. She holds a MFA in Creative Writing from University of Iowa. Recently, she's had work in *Bennington Review* and *interim journal*.

Adrienne Stevenson (she/her) lives in Ottawa, Ontario. A retired forensic scientist and Pushcart-nominated poet, she writes in many genres. Her poetry has appeared in more than forty print and online journals and anthologies in Canada, the USA, the UK, and Australia. When not writing, Adrienne tends a large garden, reads voraciously, and procrastinates playing several musical instruments.

Noelle Hendrickson is a Creative Writing and Autism Studies student at Utah Valley University. She also serves as Editor-in-Chief for the university's literary magazine *Touchstones*. Her writing reflects an intersection between sexuality and religion.

Lois Perch Villemaire resides in Annapolis, MD, where she is inspired by the charm of a colonial town and the glorious Chesapeake Bay. After retirement from a career in local government, she concentrated on her love of writing. Her prose and poetry have appeared in a number of journals. She enjoys yoga practice, amateur photography, and raising African violets.

Pamela Murray Winters is a writer, editor, quizzier, and feline personal assistant living in Maryland. Her work appears in *Gargoyle*, *the Gettysburg Review*, *Beltnay Poetry*, and other journals and anthologies, as well as *The Unbeckonable Bird* (FutureCycle Press, 2018). She has an MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts.

Corey J. Boren is a senior at Utah Valley University whose work has appeared in journals such as *The Allegheny Review*, *peculiar*, *Essais*, and *Last*

Leaves Magazine, among others. Corey was longlisted for the Button Poetry 2020 chapbook prize. He wants a time machine so he can meet Karen Carpenter. Or Gwendolyn Brooks. Or his fourteen year old self, who thought the haircut was a good idea.

M. Saad Yacoob was born in Karachi, Pakistan, and moved to the United States at the age of 8. His imagination was captured by the Urdu poetic tradition at an early age, and he works to bridge between the language of his poetic sensibilities and that of his daily life.

Irina 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. She writes fairy tales and poems, illustrates short stories, and draws various fantastic creatures. In 2020, she took part in Poznań Art Week.

Riyad Carey was born in New York City and grew up in London, Virginia, and New Jersey. He attended the University of Virginia and currently lives in Brooklyn, New York, with his dog Fargo. You can find him on Instagram at [@inweekstime](#).

Andrew Feng creates surreal, horror artwork and portraits. He would describe himself as a metal head, fashion enthusiast, and a lover of black who spends his time blasting metal music while drinking boba tea. Andrew hopes to spread awareness about mental health through his art. Follow him on [@kingfengart_](#) on instagram!

Douglas J. Lanzo is an award-winning poet and novelist. His poems have found homes in 51 literary journals and anthologies worldwide. Doug resides in Chevy Chase, Maryland with his wife and twin son poets, enjoying nature, tennis and chess. Doug's author website with novel pre-order signup is available at www.douglaslanzo.com.

Fin Ryals is a Californian. He graduated summa cum laude from UCLA this past summer where he studied English and film. Though this is his first published work, he has considered himself a writer and poet for many years. He hopes others enjoy his work for years to come.

Madhurima Sen is an amateur poet and an academic-in-making, currently studying for her doctoral degree in postcolonial literature at the University of Oxford. Her works have previously been published in *The Alipore Post* and *Potato Soup Journal*.

Kayla Martell Feldman is a founding member of Sovereign Writers Group and co-hosts Process, a monthly spoken word night. She's had work published by *Fifth Wheel Press* and *Popshot Quarterly*, among others, and has been featured on the Artists That Work and Dead Darlings podcasts. Last year she published her debut poetry collection, *Tikva*. www.kaylafeldman.com

Arshia Batra is a writer and photographer in Washington. She is fascinated by birds, people, and all things intangible. Her poetry has appeared in the *October Hill Magazine*. Her photos can be found on Instagram @arshibatra_photography. In the coming fall, she will attend the University of Washington to study psychology.

R. P. Singletary is a lifelong writer and a native of the southeastern United States. His work appears in *Bumble Jacket Miscellany*, *Iowa Summer Writing Festival Anthology*, *Ariel Chart*, *The Journal*, and elsewhere. He loves all but the last of leaves and can't wait to jump in a big pile of ochres, auburns, and starbursts again soon.

Daniel Waydon (he/him) is an emerging writer from Calgary, Alberta. He writes fiction and poetry, and plans to get a dog. His short story, "A Pleasure to Serve," was published in *The First Line Literary Journal* (2022). This is his first poetry publication. For more, visit @itsdanielwaydon on instagram.

Christina Bagni's creative work has been published in *Brigid's Gate Press*, *Lit202*, and *the Martello*, among others. She is the Chief Editor at *Wandering Words Media* and a writer on the *Captain Bitcoin* comic book series. Her first novel is forthcoming with Deep Hearts YA (2023). Find out more here: <https://linktr.ee/christinabagni>

Mark A. Fisher is a writer, poet, and playwright living in Tehachapi, CA. His poetry has appeared in *Reliquiae*, *Silver Blade*, *Young Ravens Literary Review*, and many other places. His first chapbook, "drifter," is available from Amazon. His poem "there are fossils" (originally published in *Silver Blade*) came in second in the 2020 Dwarf Stars Speculative Poetry Competition.

Mat Wenzel's work has appeared in places like *Hobart*, *Homology Lit*, *Crab Fat Magazine*, and more. Mat is an MFA graduate from Ashland University and a Lambda Literary Fellow (2015). Mat recently earned a PhD in Creative Writing from Florida State University.

Cora Schipa is a recent graduate in Creative Writing and Sociology from the College of Charleston. She received the 2020 Carrie McCray Nickens Prize in Poetry and the 2020 Elizabeth Boatwright Coker Prize in Fiction. Her poetry will be showcased in an exhibit hosted by Carolina Lowcountry and Atlantic World in August 2022.

M. F. Charles is new to writing poetry. He lives in Waverly, Iowa. His career has been in academia. Having taught conceptually challenging topics that relied upon telling stories; now he writes poems to tell stories.

Aeesha Abdullahi Alhaji is an essayist, poet, and a member of the hilltop creative arts foundation. She is one of the shortlisted writers for the Wakaso poetry prize, Her works have appeared on *Blank pages*, *Parrotbox*, *The daily reality*, *Wilishwash press*, *Spiritedmuse*, *The Open Culture Collective magazine*, etc.

Adamu Yahuza Abdullahi is a budding poet and a spoken word artist from Kwara State, Nigeria. His works have appeared or are forthcoming in journals/magazines, including *Synchronized chaos*, *Angel rust*, *Kalabari review*, *Ngiga review*, *Oneblackboylikethat review*, and more. He is a lover of books and flavored tea. When not writing, he reads other poets and creatives.

Adriana Rocha was born in Bolivia. She is a psychologist. Poetry, photography, and educational psychology are her passions. Her journey into the world of words has started in 2019. She has been participating in different literary events in Latin America, Spain, India, Canada, Nigeria, and the United States of America.

Peggy Heitmann's full-length book *Patchwork* was published by Mount Olive College Press. She has published poems in *Words & Whispers*, *The Curator*, and *Kakalak* among others. She considers herself both a word and visual artist. Peggy has worked in the human services field with mental health clients, homeless men, and adults with autism.

