

The Raw Art Review: A Journal of Storm and Urge



Summer 2019

The Raw Art Review
A Journal of Storm and Urge
Summer 2019

**The Raw Art Review:
A Journal of Storm and Urge**

The Raw Art Review is a publication of UnCollected Press published quarterly. RAR accepts submissions for publication from the Submittable platform or by email invitation from RAR editors.

Subscriptions to RAR are \$35 per year and can be purchased at the RAR website.

Subscriptions for 2019 will include all 4 issues of RAR and at least 2 books published by UnCollected Press.

Please consider subscribing, donating or becoming a patron. All three levels of giving can be found on the RAR “Subscribe and Support” page:

<https://therawartreview.com/subscribe-and-support/>

**COVER ART:
Heisenberg
by J. Ray Paradiso
24”x24” Mixed Media on Board
(Winner of the RAR Summer Cover Art Contest)**

©2019 Henry G. Stanton, UnCollected Press

Liars

Fire wouldn't scorch you. You're exempt
from the ash and fizzle, the cold stain
that daybreak leaves. The flapping blind, the drain
that chokes, will heal unhandled. Not a cent
demands the baker when you ask for bread.
Your latest love would give you lungs to breathe
beneath the sea. (Is that what you believe?)
I never needed your adventurous bed,
your one-way spectacles. I saw a day
the sun refused to rise, but you maintained
my eyes alone were black as burnt-down wood.
No, I could turn a thousand times away:
the song that's ceased, sweetest of all refrains.
I'm only saying this for your own good.

by Jendi Reiter
RAR Poet-in-Residence October 2019

What Little Girls Are

made of
butter snow
velvet syrup
(and a gull's eye
and a queen's axe)

made
pillow friends
fast
with jelly kisses (and
cliques of rosaries)

maid of
air teacup
teddy princes
(and all torn
buttons and meats)

maid
of porcelain families
in backless homes
(and the kitten-worried
doll's trunk)

made off
with a dog's back a frog's net
jet swan lucky
step through the glass (and
imagine the ring)

by Jendi Reiter
RAR Poet-in-Residence October 2019

My Accounting

someone to love is not a right
 please order me a mountain
to shade me with its terraces of blue
 i would like a god please to worship
with a thousand drops of ink and occasional fire
 would a bird be more modest
i should grow tired watching it dance
 from boredom singing in its cage
oh nothing like a mouse for simple
 mice are like women men don't see existing
not only to die in the pockets of classic novels
 shit and bite also their agenda
so a little thing cupped in my hands like water
 could i love water as long as it carried me
don't put that in your mouth
 what water licks
the silt cow dung and sunken drums
 love the stone-eyed flatfish and nibbled suicides
what do you say when you say
 love to the ocean
is it like loving Coca-Cola
 sit on my lap nice infinity
for this is my time
 let me set the first worm-words loose
in your unsupported skull
 bald prairie i graze with kisses
for this is my offering
 for this is my appetite

by Jendi Reiter

RAR Poet-in-Residence October 2019



Prisoner of Love
by J. Ray Paradiso

Darebin Creek Crimes

Sometimes it was my turn
to buy the shilling's worth
of broken biscuits
from the new Summerhill shops

then the Ryans and me
would cut through the last paddock
for a watermelon
and the buckshot over our heads

broke up like comets
entering the atmosphere

we caught yabbies with the tin
and our crumbs we reckoned
floated all the way to China

decades later I ran into Johnny
at northlands car park

he killed that nice Buchanan kid
the lone cashier at the Drive In
with a sawn off shottie
when he was fourteen

now he's just a tatt on Aids

but we had a laugh
I remember you allright Jimmy
how you brought down dragonflies
spitting out those stolen pips

your aim was that good
yeah but I only got community service
his toothless gums so wide

I could've been a dentist

by James Walton
Winner RAR Poetry Book Contest

Bequeathable Sanitoria

Don't be offended
if as an old love song

you're the needle in my arm
the messy heart and anchor tattoo

that won't be scratched out
of these polished corridors

locked down night and day
awaiting the scuff of attendants

as they whistle away
'hear, I'm going back to Massachusetts'

you're the straightjacket
I can't shake loose of

borrowed shoes for romance
not enough hair for style

out of the high storey window
my second-hand jacket open

phalanger spread flying cover
the last cast iron bed home

if you were there to hold me
in a wayward parable of rain.

by James Walton
Winner RAR Poetry Book Contest

Couleurs D'Arles

In Arles I bought three Camargue shirts
white embroidered in red and blue xanthous
and one azure fleur-de- lis in Large.
'Paris est tres jolie' the maker's wife
while holding their new baby
showed me the workshop and pure cotton foils,
as her husband worked the sewing machine.
We gestured in hand to mouth comprehension
I made my choice and passed the Euros,
then while I tended Isabelle they went for coffee.
I got the babysitter's discount and their smiles
were like the relief of an invested city.
Later, a grinning rubicund cheeked man
stopped me in the geranium clad street
laughed and pointed out a remnant baby vomit
resting opaquely lemon on my shoulder,
'merci merci' we wiped it off together
and I knew there is no such thing as a nation.

by James Walton
Winner RAR Poetry Book Contest



Paradise Lost
by Ruben van Gogh

King for a Day

Checkers pieces get reset yet again
it's only a friendly game after all, right?
Right. As if we ever played any game
not wanting to annihilate the other.
He calmly assumes air of dignity

while hunched in a wheelchair
his chin looking like it's attached
to his plaid shirt's buttoned top button
his oversized diaper bulging
over coffee-stained red sweatpants

his wrinkle-rutted face
splotted with dried blood
result of nursing-home aide's shave
his breath a labor of longing
watery eyes searching for land

his WWII Luzon combat brothers all gone
one just last week, now he's the last
his Josie, wife of 62 years, dead three months
family expects him to follow any day now
family will be wrong — by five years.

He makes yet another unruly triple jump
using whatever damn pieces
moving in whatever damn directions
he damn well pleases, this time adding
a flourishing finishing flick of his wrist

and guttural gargle of a command:

King me!

I know a con job when I see it

or at least I think I do.

Hell, I really have no idea.

I sit & stare, shrug & sigh.

No more resetting of pieces.

Time & toil crown my father

his tender tenor rasps & gasps:

Give up, wise guy?

by Robert Rubino

Catawampus

When you're the one who leaves, you're cold-blooded
kindly, efficient as surgery, or butchery,
calm capable confident, you're best-selling
guru of self-helping "Compleat Con Man."

When you're the one who leaves, you're smug
bonfire-building book-burning bona fide thug
muddying memories, rewriting history
Ministry of Truth's employee of the month.

When you're the one who leaves, you're fierce
savage destructive. You rip out
rear-view mirror, you stomp
accelerator. Bat out of hell. You're infamous.

When you're the one who's been left, you're left
in a blink up a creek armed to the teeth
with angry sorrow able to bend real with bare hands
unable to grip hard truth only righteous regret
self-respect so suspect there's no food no sleep no break
painfully self-pitying terrifying weakening.

When you're the one who's been left, it's earthquake
tornado volcano fiasco, you're askew awry
you're uncool victim chump fool starring
in grand opera comic opera soap opera
unwanted role in surreal script. It's nothing
if not memorable awfully like nothing else.

by Robert Rubino

Facelift

In midst of daunting divorce she never saw coming
she painfully painstakingly excises her face
glowing smiling from extended family photo
that doesn't include her clan of no-shows
taken at in-laws' fiftieth anniversary
celebrating other mother other father
who love her as if she were their daughter
unlike pill-popping papa who long ago
smacks her face calls her stupid
or rum-soaked mum as clueless cupid
pushing her child's mask-of-makeup face on dates
at barely thirteen with older boys hardly boys hardly harmless.

Rage resentment over family history
of being cut out left out thrown out
flash back with shock of electric cruel current
in midst of daunting divorce she never saw coming
she painfully painstakingly severs ties sends
face-lifted photo to other mother other father.

by Robert Rubino



Orange Isolation
by Alexis Marie Cortez

Blue in the Aquarium's Face

There was nothing but altitude below sea level.
I was blue in the aquarium's face. Large orcas showed
monstrous fins of concern. Starfish leapt off someone's
homework
assignment down into the tank. Sharks circled back as if
trying to retrace the steps of the lost. And the coral was
bleached.
I decided it was a load of laundry. The obstruction in my airway
refusing to dislodge itself. Some miserable war-drunk despot
trying to hold onto power. Each time I cleared my throat a
distant
church bell rang. I thought of dried chewing gum under the
pews
taking in the hallelujahs each Sunday. Of briny miracles from
the pulpit.
Stained glass windows so elaborate that code breakers were
brought
in to admire them. And back down in the tunnel under the
water
the flash from picture takers. As I fell to one knee. The sounds
of choking and many black dots. A lone octopus with its
tentacles into everything.

by Ryan Quinn Flanagan

***God is a Polynesian Belly Dancer
with a Neck Full of Flowers***

He asks me if I can direct him to the closest church
and I cannot, we could not be farther away from each other
as though God is a Polynesian belly dancer
with a neck full of flowers
and this one is in more of a hurry than
most the rest as though parking
is not the issue and he is perhaps in need
of a serious exorcism, I look at the big black
raccoons hanging under his eyes
and think of rancid back dumpsters with the lid
flipped up, a whole family of opportunists
clawing down his face, probably not an ugly man
if you account for demonic possession
and the way his out of town thighs
lurch forward like cinder block leggings
past the Halal joint that promises
to slaughter everything
half-mercifully.

by Ryan Quinn Flanagan

Hen House

The girls Sofia recruited all came from Eastern Europe.
In search of work or a man who would pay them not to work.
That was the idea.
Get a man to fall in love with you and make things legal.

Sofia was not her real name.
The girls trusted Sofia because she was a woman.
Once they were brought over, their paperwork and few belongings were taken away.
They were kept in one of the many “hen houses” across the city and given a new name. Like Sofia’s.
A working name and a new wardrobe and a steady stream of clients.

Once they were in rotation they never saw Sofia again.
They lived fifteen to a house and operated at all hours.
The men with guns never talked to them.
They took the money and made sure everyone worked.

There was a rumour among the girls that you could buy your freedom with enough tricks.
No one had ever seen it happen, but that was the hope.

And the only police that ever came
were there for the services.
More and more girls all the time.

The new ones were the most popular.
And never new for long.

by Ryan Quinn Flanagan



Kiwi Solitude
by Alexis Marie Cortez

Terroir
by Adam Rodenberger

There are a thousand ways to properly start a story, but there are about ten ways that a story should never begin, if only because they've all been done before by people far more talented than you or I. So, it's with some measure of condolence that I begin my story using two of the latter methods: the cliché of having woken up and the overused image of the protagonist (me, I think...) staring into the bathroom mirror.

I'll spare you the details of the room. It's a standard apartment bathroom with tiled walls and vinyl floor, a relatively clean bathtub, and a sink spotted with old, dried toothpaste along the edges. Picture any bathroom you'd like; its appearance and the décor make little difference in how this story plays out.

What *is* important is that the mirror gleams. It never seems to get dirty like all the others I've been accustomed to. I've lived in this apartment some three years and have never, not once, ever cleaned the mirror. I don't understand this, but I no longer question it. After nearly 40 years of life, I've learned to leave some questions alone while ruminating deeply on others.

The French have a saying, "*Le démon de midi*," which literally means 'to have the mid-day demon,' itself meaning to have a mid-life crisis.

But don't worry. That's not what this story is about either. That's been done to death and the only people who care about the mid-life crisis are those that have lived through it, those in the middle of it, and those sitting right on the cusp of experiencing it. Truly, no one else cares.

Then again, maybe this is that kind of story.

I have no real frame of reference.

I was not the same man this morning as I am at this moment.

*

I had a roommate once upon a time. A wife, really, if we're going to be technical about it. She moved out nearly eight months ago after seven years of our being together (three years,

two months, and eleven days of those spent as husband and wife). I say roommate because that's how the last year felt housed within these walls. Small grievances boiled over, festered, were molehills and became mountains in the space of a second. Time was a simmering powder keg and both of our hands held sparks.

Perhaps you know of what I speak. That feeling where you spend a lifetime of days looking backwards, wishing you had said the perfect thing within a moment so important that your life was forever altered thereafter. The French have a saying for this too, "*L'esprit d'escalier*," or the spirit of the staircase.

A depressing, but beautiful concept when you sit and think on it long enough. The staircase allows for two movements: up or down, depending upon one's destination. When looking back on the moment in question, one could come up with any number of words and phrases that would've been appropriate, apt, biting, cutting, truthful, hurtful, or just downright emotionally gutting, all of which would escalate the situation into one singular result for each of us: a long, glorious descent to the very bottom.

This is not quite what actually happened.

Conversely, one could think back and come up with words and phrases that could de-escalate a situation, could act as a salve, a balm, a cooling down of heated tempers, words and phrases very obviously wrapped up in genuine love and admiration for the receiver, hoping to achieve some kind of calming silence between two warring factions. The two could spiral upward into a brokered tranquility together, if only for a day.

This is most definitely not what happened.

I've done a lot of this kind of thinking over my last several months of solitude. I'm at my best in the moments where it's not important, mumble-mouthed in the moments where it is. Some people are able to find a way to reconcile these traits within themselves. I am not one of them, despite my best efforts to do so.

*

I'm not a particularly clean man, but I'm not filthy either. Dirty dishes don't populate my kitchen sink and stray beard hairs aren't splayed out across my bathroom counter. I am, I will admit, a big fan of things being in their right place.

Clockwise, from left to right, on my bathroom counter: one large hand towel (blue and white striped), one box of q-tips, one large bottle of mouthwash, one large container of baby powder, one can of shaving gel, one razor in its holder, one electric toothbrush, one water flosser, one folded rag (same pattern as the hand towel). Everything in its right place, as the song title goes.

I run the cold water and splash my face over and over before applying shaving gel. I start with the area between my eyebrows since, in my older years, I have started growing a patch of unsightly hair there. I slather up both sides of my face with one hand and use the other to cover my jaw and neck areas. I run my hands beneath the water and rinse them before turning the cold water down and the hot water up.

It's a process, shaving. I start with the forehead, then the left cheek, the right cheek (making sure they are symmetrical), and then finish the majority of my time cleaning up my jaw line and neck.

But today...I must not have been paying attention. Perhaps my mind had gone somewhere else too far away for me to recognize what was happening before it was too late. That's been a thing for awhile, my drifting off into my own thoughts during the most mundane of things. Hell, even during the most important of things. My focus is not what it used to be. I am distracted.

The foam feels cool on my face.

The water from the tap steams up between me and my reflection.

The first slow swipe of the razor between my eyebrows brought with it a strip of skin, from the forehead to the tip of the nose, exposing so much blood beneath, I nearly fainted.

*

When a relationship ends, there's a period of dark time. The days drag on. There is little joy found in the savory meal or the glass of liquor. There are weird pockets of safe, then sudden (and unexpectedly dangerous) places inside the shared songs. Little shards of memory get lodged in the throat, in the mind, find their way down to the chest and the stomach where they take up residence and remind you of their existence at the absolute worst possible times. You become a shell of your former self.

And eventually (for there is no time frame for this), you slowly piece yourself back together. You become less of a dried out husk. Daylight becomes brighter, the color of normal dazzles a little brighter. You are different, but you are more you. That all sounds horribly cliché, but it's so for a reason – it's all true.

The Germans say this is tearing oneself together, "*sich zusammenreißen*," which, when vocalized in the original German, sounds and feels more appropriate on every level.

*

There is blood, but it does not flow. No rivulets slide down my face, no wet warmth coating the skin. The blood seems to stay in place, then recedes, revealing new, perfect skin beneath. As if it had not just been kissed violently by the razor, the sloughed strip of skin piled up in the steaming sink as evidence.

There's no pain and this confuses me. I've cut myself shaving before. Razors are unforgiving in the pain they're capable of dishing out, but this is obviously so much more than a simple cut. I run my hand along the new skin, feel its smoothness beneath my calluses. No pain, no strange texture, nothing. It is skin again and nothing more.

I turn the water off and stare down into the sink, watching as the old skin seems to shrivel up or melt away beneath the water. Soon, the sink has emptied completely; nothing remains. No epidermal remnants skirt the drain.

I turn the razor over and over in my hand. It isn't unique in any way. It hung alongside other razors much like itself in the aisle of the store. It contains three blades and a strip of

supposedly skin-friendly lotion. The blade is relatively new; it was changed out two weeks ago and I shave, maybe, once a week.

Surely I must be imagining this phenomenon.

I haven't had a drink in months and I've been off the drugs since my late 20s. I am never more sober than when I first wake up in the morning.

I set the razor down on the counter and step back, trying to collect myself. In the mirror I see a foam-covered face. The eyes looking back reflect a weird terror that cannot be quantified perfectly. The reflection may scare me more than the possibility of shaving off strips of skin because it is infinitely more real and shows me what I already know I'm feeling. It's an immediate and visceral image that's hard to shake.

This is what we call the "inciting incident." From here, all things story-related emerge. This narrative moment in time is crucial and steers us to the story's eventual end.

*

We stared each other down across the island in the kitchen. I noticed she was closer to the knives, then pushed the thought away, knowing full well that's not even a thought she's considered. That's *my* guilt talking and no one else's. But I remembered I had nothing to feel guilty about, so why did that particular emotion hang so heavy around my neck?

Because, at this point, she believed nothing I said. The Croats would say that I've "thrown cream in her eye," that I've lied to her. "*Bacati kajmak u oči,*" for those of you taking notes. I feel this is a mischaracterization and that, somehow, she and I had just stopped knowing how to talk with each other. *To* each other, if I'm being completely honest about it all, which I hope I am.

I honestly don't recall how she and I got to that place where friction seemed to permanently live. I felt as if I'd done something wrong, but I couldn't put my finger on what. Each phrase was barbed and ready to strike at our most vulnerable parts. To be fair, we had both become warriors. We had both chosen language as our weapon. Our days were filled with

hypothetical conversations and hypothetical answers to hypothetical questions that would never actually touch the air between us.

We were both on our own staircases, glaring at each other in passing along our separate paths.

*

Surely this is my mind messing with me, right? I begin trying to remember the brain diseases that cause hallucinations and my brain stops working, total white noise from ear to ear. The longer I stand in front of the mirror, the more I try to convince myself that my face is simply covered in more dirt or oil than previously believed, that the razor has made an indelible mark through the grime, revealing cleaner skin beneath and nothing more. What I thought I saw in the sink was nothing more than spent shaving cream and not skin. This makes infinitely more sense, of course.

I turn the water back on and pick up the razor, twirling it between my fingers again.

I turn my head and carefully (oh so gently) run the blade down the left side of my cheek all the way down to my mouth.

Between the razor blades, another neatly bunched up strip of skin.

In the mirror, my face gives way to bright red blossoms before melting away again and revealing another, newer strip of slightly darker skin.

There is no pain.

This is baffling on so many levels.

*

I never figured out where her paranoia came from, never found the source from which she seemed to drink of it so deeply, and she never fully explained either. We both had passwords to each other's devices and social media accounts; I never took her up on exploring hers. I thought in doing so that I would be caught in some kind of no-win situation, that it was a test or a

trap meant to make me look inadequate no matter which choice was made.

If I looked through her stuff while she sat there and watched, would she then think I was distrustful of her? I wasn't, so I didn't. Simple as that. I always thought it weird for couples to have their fingers in so much of their partner's personal things. Some things should be left personal, that's where I stand. Plenty of people seem to disagree, but there are plenty of people who have been burned in the past from secrets out of their reach, so I can't fault them for holding the position. I've been burned, too, I just seem to keep believing, correctly or otherwise, that people are inherently good. You might call this my tragic character flaw.

This went on for so long that I just started taking the blame for things I didn't do, had no intention of doing, would never entertain the thought of doing. '*Pagar o pato*,' as the Portuguese say; "Paying the duck." And why, you might ask, would I do such a thing?

Because I loved her. And despite the creeping paranoia, I loved *us*. Early on, it was easy and fluid. We worked well together. No dust ups over the menial things, no real arguments to speak of. But once we became husband and wife, something changed within us. Maybe it only changed in her, but it affected me too, so as a single entity, we changed together. I have to take part of the blame in that aspect.

That shift may have spread us too far apart. In fact, I know it did now. There's simply no other explanation for it. Our great schism, like all schisms before it, came silent in the night and made its bed between us while we slept. Maybe it crept slow into open ears and wormed its way into our brains, burrowed its way into our dreams, gave itself a starring role (from a behind the scenes perspective) in our daily insecurities.

Maybe you've noticed the idioms peppered about within these pages. This is me filling my newly found free time up with what may be useless knowledge. I had a Swedish friend who lived here in the city for a few years, working as a coder for a local tech company. I was in the Content division. We'd do lunch together, but never really hung out outside of work. He was recounting a story one afternoon about another coworker,

his cubicle partner, and how they'd both botched a project, expecting the other to have picked up the slack without asking each other if this was actually the case.

"It's just...*det föll mellan stolarna, man*," he said in his heavy accent.

"It's what?" I asked.

"*Det föll mellan stolarna*. Uh..." he started, squinting and looking up toward the ceiling. "Do you know the thing, like when paper falls behind a furniture or appliance?"

I nodded. "Sure."

"It's like that. The thing falls, you forget about it. Is ignored. It 'fell between chairs,' as we say in Swedish."

I nodded again. I liked the concept of it. It was a positive visual for a negative experience and made sense.

She and I, we let our words fall between the chairs. The two of us were supposed to do something with them, but we didn't. We let them hang in the air and they fell when they were tired of hanging unspoken between us. Leaves with no breeze to keep them aloft.

Anyway, the repetition of the idioms in various foreign languages you keep seeing? A thing I latched onto when she left. I got hooked on interesting phrases and tried to put them within my own lexicon. The repetition, that's called a motif. It's a particular sliver of storytelling that, when repeated in one way or another, should add extra heft to the main theme, the important thing I'm trying to convey to you.

It's no surprise that I turned to language as an interest when we stopped being able to talk to each other. I did not, however, understand how ironic my little side interest would turn out to be until much later.

*

Two swipes of the blade and I had not bled yet. The bathroom wasn't covered in blood, droplets or otherwise, anywhere. I felt no pain. Despite all evidence to the contrary, I felt completely normal, completely fine. There was even the lack of immediate razor burn which so often plagued my shaving sessions, making my skin itch beyond belief.

I placed the blade back up near my left sideburn and brought it down across the stubbled skin that had not already been sloughed off, had not changed color within the last two minutes. Slow and steady, I scraped its edges against the skin and brought it down, removing the last of the hair on that side and removing another strip of skin that crinkled up between the razor blades.

No pain. No blood. The bright red blossoms disappeared as quickly as they made themselves known. The strip of skin piled up in the sink evaporated beneath the erosion of the hot water pouring down upon it. I know what will happen when I run my fingers across the newly changed skin, the seemingly protean nature of my face disarming, but no longer a surprise.

I then began shaving the right side of my face without thought.

That thing you're feeling right now, that anticipation building up in your chest to find out what in the actual hell is going on in this moment is called the rising action. There may or may not be other conflicts scattered about before we reach the dénouement (such a sexy word) all the way over on the other side of the story arc.

*

I don't trust people that never seem to say the wrong thing. Like they've got an answer for anything life throws at them, no matter the time of day. It's unnatural. No one is *that* good. No one should be allowed to command the entirety of language in a manner befitting a demi-god.

For awhile after, I found myself tumbling down that staircase, unable to stop my plummet. I lost my footing, fell, kept bumping my head on every other step's edge, felt every part of my body crash into the wall over and over as I tumbled down, down, down.

The solitary moments were the weirdest. I still clung to my frustration, felt it inside me growing before it bubbled up and came pouring out my mouth. My reflecting back on our worst moments also had me playing out both sides of the argument, first in my head, then in speech. I was vocalizing entire

conversations between two people, trying to play out alternate scenarios. No matter how many times the words changed before they left my lips, no matter how many different moments I played out in my head, I never won the argument. Even in my own weird fantasy world, I couldn't seem to make my case make sense. I don't know what that says about my current state.

The last fight was strangely one of the most civil. I think maybe we had both just resigned ourselves to the fact that we were done, the bridge was burned completely and we stood on opposite sides staring at each other across the chasm. In some ways, we were “wearing cats on our heads,” as the Japanese would say. “猫をかぶる.”

We were hiding our claws from each other, both putting up a façade of being nice, harmless people. The less aggravation we could impose on each other in the interim, the easier this would all be when it finally ended for good.

We didn't raise our voices to each other that last time, but neither of us wanted to take the wedding album. Neither of us wanted to be chained to the mementos of that day any longer than we needed to be. We took the album and the other photos and the memory cards and the wedding cards and the garter and my cuff links and her veil and my dried out, lifeless corsage; we carried them to the backyard, which was really just the courtyard of the apartment complex.

We shoved them all into the community fire pit (perfect for slow summer nights and getting to know the neighbors), and set it all ablaze. She and I sat in silence, whiskey in my hand and a beer in hers, as we watched ourselves turn to ash in the cool, spring evening.

There's a finality to having two signatures on divorce papers, but the feeling of closure in burning everything with the one you're leaving feels infinitely more complete and appropriate. A full erasure. We stayed until the fire dwindled down, the logs popping less and less until finally midnight came and the fire pit smoldered. She got up to leave, hoisted her empty beer at me, simply said “Cheers,” and went to bed.

That was the last we spoke without lawyers between us.

*

I finished shaving the right side of my face and stared into the mirror. It was obvious now that my skin had taken on a noticeably different shade. It could've initially been chalked up to razor burn, but that was certainly out of the question. Both cheeks and the strip down from my forehead to my nose were dark. My forehead remained the same pasty white as before. I debated for a moment and realized it couldn't hurt, so I began running the blade below my hairline, making sure to hit every white patch.

Sloughed, bundled skin came off the razor. Hot water seemed to melt it away. My face was now a single, much darker shade. I was uniform in color, like I'd spent a little too much time out in the sun, but not ridiculously so.

I lifted my chin and stared at my neck. The prospect of shaving so close to my artery gave me pause. Would it open up at the slightest nick? If I couldn't feel the skin coming off, how deep did the razor go below the surface? I wondered how realistic some of those movies were when the artery was cut open. How much blood loss would it take to render me useless and immovable?

I realized it didn't matter. Not that I'd somehow become suicidal in the last five minutes, but that the inexplicable nature of the now was something I was unable to fight against. The path was clear, if bizarre in appearance.

I placed the blade beneath my jaw, brought it down slow along my neck line. I could feel it cutting easily through the shaving cream, could feel my skin become something new. Again the red blossoms painlessly appeared, retreated, revealed new skin. I rinsed out the sloughed skin in the sink and didn't bother watching it melt away as I put the blade back along my neck, gingerly finishing the job.

Soon, the skin of my neck matched that of my face. I was both different and still very much the same. I had shed something of myself, revealed deeper layers beneath. I ran my hand along the razed skin, felt my fingertips glide along the surface easily. Nothing felt different externally, but something had changed.

I turned off the hot water and turned on the cold. With wet hands, I wiped my face clean of any remaining shaving foam and dried off.

I wondered what came next.

*

That day passed without any other strange occurrences, as did the next week. My skin remained the same gently sun-kissed color from the neck up. After a week of contemplation, I began setting time aside each night to shave a different part of my body.

Same razor, same shave gel, same mirror.

I started with my feet, what I assumed would be the hardest part to shave completely. I winced prematurely as I pulled the blade between each toe, expecting pain and receiving nothing in return. By the time I'd finished with the left foot, I considered myself something of a pro and moved quickly around the right foot. The color of my feet now perfectly matched that of my face and neck.

The next night, I began at the ankles and moved my way up the calf to the knees. This took a surprisingly long time, but when I was done, I realized that I had spent the last two days not thinking about her or us or what could've been had things gone more right earlier. The more time I spent focused on shaving the rest of my body, the less and less I thought of her, the less I talked to myself in hushed utterances and failed arguments.

I no longer felt as if I was on a forever fall down the staircase; my descent had finally ceased and I was allowed a brief respite to catch my breath and lick my wounds appropriately. Soon I was standing again, looking back up the staircase from where I'd tumbled. It spiraled up and around the corner. While I couldn't remember or see what lay beyond, I took the steps upward, hoping not to lose my footing again as the bruises began to subside.

Soon my body was all the same shade.

A new normal had been established as I crested and passed by the climax.

*

“סוף העולם שמאלה” or “Sof ha'olam, smolah.”

This is Hebrew for “At the end of the world, turn left,” meaning something is in the middle of nowhere, that it’s lost. After a few months, I struggled to immediately recall her name in conversations with friends. It did not roll of the tongue as easily. The effort required was stunning considering how close we had been, how much time had been spent creating deep pockets of memory with her in my gray matter. And yet...

Somehow, at the end of the world, her memory had turned left and I had simply gone the opposite direction.



Acquainted with The Night
by Kerfe Roig

in the glow of a tainted halo

i'm a pale rider weeping black tar. i get no sympathy, or even a medical card authorizing hospitalization. they ignore me when they see i carry no gideon or spout apocalyptic scams. i do know a few lines of baudelaire, but that isn't good enough. i'm bleached & hung out to dry. the blues wrap themselves around me like a long-legged lover. i'm not always sure where it ends & i begin. i'm saturated with heaven. but it takes more & more every time to get there. sometimes i pump myself to bursting & only get to stand outside the gates. i hear someone whisper-"he looks like a ghost." i dismiss their words with-i don't believe in such things. but i'm not entirely convinced. i try to catch my face in a spoon. it no longer gives me even a distorted image.

by Mark Hartenbach

enlightenment in an appalachian ditch

a crown of thorns that could put an eye out keeps slipping
down forehead. obviously it was made to fit someone else.
a garland of orchids are blooming inside an alabaster skull
that stands watch over my inevitable irresponsible actions.
directing the theme to impending demise with a quickly
put together symphony which throws in everything but the
kitchen sink to mask the fact that they can't play worth a
lick. puzzled assurance roots through ancient texts for
remnants of another empire, that's principles of inertia
were incurably melodramatic & a difficult lesson to
swallow since they're the size of abandoned altars as
unrefined holiness calls out to undefined versions.
rearranging the letters for future reference by dividing
the ranks with vacant stares on faces that are supposedly
tinged with truth though the signatures are saved for the
back that says otherwise in capital letters. redesigning
operation with reconsideration of follies that requires
horizontal readjustment to magnify any problem which
touches the wrong nerve. now morning's promise is
prompting sunset to do a double take. evening's set list
with terse stanzas doesn't recognize its counterpart
spelling out scandalous cost of being born is a wild goose
at best. is a salt free ingredient lapping at futility though
brimming with desire that brings on that familiar
metallic taste of fear. dazzling speech with mangled
hands that could be flashing vanity plates or shouting
down the burden of living.

by Mark Hartenbach

samadhi on the river road

i'm halfway across the bridge i think-somewhere
between hart crane & sonny rollins. somewhere
between a startled splash & unimpeded soaring.
the road isn't long, but there's no reconciliation
at the finish, so i'm never certain when it's over.
i'm never sure when i'm there. most of the time
i keep moving until something catches my
imagination. if it looks respectable it's probably
taken, & most likely not very interesting anyway.
if there's a hint of danger, then i can't help but
get a closer look. i don't need hard evidence
i can always tell when i'm falling. there are infinite
shades of gray. it's easy to step into another
variation without noticing. when i walk along the
river road in the early morning, sometimes the
fog is so heavy i can't see more than thirty feet
in front of me. the traffic is mostly trucks & trains.
i listen to the water slap against the docked
barges. but sometimes i can't tell which direction
sounds are coming from. sometimes the head-
lights are on me in the nick of time. the closer
they get, the farther away i feel.

by Mark Hartenbach



Shoeless
by J. Ray Paradiso

Haiku for Con Artists

I have accepted
 pieces

 of an irreverent blue
 future

the most rotten
 of seductions.

by Laura Voivodeship

Whiplash

This pain is a becoming:
it tests the peace. It diagnoses
the empty gazes of a half
translucent solace. This pain is

an examination, a parsing of my
maladies. A distension moving back
and forth along the curve
of an unspooling absolution. This pain is

screening and revealing me:
spacious and free
of hauntings. Thick and fearful;
tempting and violent; fierce, seemingly

endless. Inside me, across me;
a gift, an offering. This pain is
a death dance. It brings me
images and evidence. It grips

my ribs with fingering teeth. It finds
its way in. It claws
its way out.
The doctors can't explain it.

by Laura Voivodeship

Tesseract

This body is
erratic and it wanders, reels
in lines that damage and disturb the order of the
system. It
smokes out cities, seas and strangers from
under its skin. It is
homeless, stuffed with secrets. It has no
courage to return.

by Laura Voivodeship



Kaleidoscope
by Blue Rose

Your Gentle Violence

We're fishing—you're twelve and I'm sixteen.
I say we're fishing, but *you* were fishing.
I was fervored and in love with my God.
I'm writing, sanctifying joy in Ward.
Ward, Arkansas: small town, church town, fiend town—
Strangers tried to kidnap you twice that year.
You're fishing, I'm writing, strangers watching,
And the sun scorched the whole shit-pile, railroad town.

Your voice shears through our past and I answer,
Still drunk, still in bed, still as my liver,
Still as you lay when the world tore its toll—
Not still. *Writhing*. Fighting, but powerless.
It hurts but you're here, and torn from the dream,
I gather myself and we both get dressed.

by Keith Harper

The Tightrope

No, it doesn't get easier
And for it you've my sympathy,
But there are the fiends behind us
(if fiends only for their own loves),
And the concrete at storeys' end—
A long fall and a rapid close,
A rapacious, ravenous maw,
And I will not let it have you.
Below us is our big brother,
Broken on penny-littered streets;
Beside him, our hollowed parents,
Primed to shatter if we should fall.
No, sister: keep looking ahead.
There has to be hope at the end.

by Keith Harper

Like Jesus

Why are you so much like Jesus?
I would burn down the world for its crimes against you,
But you would have me stay my hand—
Because you have forgiven it?
You are a wanderer with a candle
And I the inkiest shadow, the one that follows your blazing
soul.
I want to wash your feet the only way that I know how,
But you keep walking ahead.
You would be the mercy of the Son,
While I would murder for justice like a shade of the Father.
I cannot comprehend you—
So I put you on a pedestal
Like Jesus.
Dear sister, how did you become like Jesus?

by Keith Harper



Baby Mama Totem
by Dave Sims

Before the News

A summer bareness, hide a bedroom of
maroon-dipped sheets tangled in salt heat,
my off-white socks.

The August of small shadow Sundays,
stopping on cracking highways, steam-leaked,
ushering turtles to reed grass,
tinny guitar strings in streams I'd breathe,
silky pillow lace of an idleness.
Your bare feet made mine look okay.

Heavy air on the harbor, deep night with pine docks,
dusk running on River Road,
red corner spotlight encapsulates halos of hair,
when we'd stray together in Ventnor on a bay sidewalk;
the white-worn walls of a café,
your name on the cavity box wall.

Opening
and closing greenhouse doors at crop sunrise
on a flower farm.
Cries of sprinklers and kilndeers and rusting truck breaks,
dandelion weeds and past season pansies growing in the
beds.
Superstition in the form of your old whistling
when you swept floors, getting a bloody nose.

A month of the smell of water on honey skin,
lemons in the nostrils,
gathering our islands and pearl waves laying dust;
return.

A pale, double-glossed sky is tearing littered streets down,
smooth palms of a summer sea in the mind
claw at your residence
against a bed frame.

If you come back,
hello, undress,
press that rare laugh that leads to water;
I would.

by Sara Brown

Soon

You dig around for some pieces found stuffed in
the storage of your lungs,
organs of iridescent intentions,
hacked up when your eyes were geysers on the N.J.
Parkway,
honey bees colliding with the windshield,
and an overbreathing generating creeks of
water not tasting right for two days
going down your throat,
keeping you alive.

For so long, you hoped he'd sit you down and tell you
he's not so bad;
never yourself saying to you
own up to it:
the headspace
to create the mechanisms to destroy a day,
not kissing your mother goodbye,
waiting for Jess to free you of her freckled arm hold,
after 6 months and a church service,
baptized years before,
drowning out sins
you would later not feel sorry for.

You want to read someone the words you found
in an anthology of American farm poems
that make you want to not ever be the same.
You sit on the dining room table,
legs folded and numb
with the melody of the dryer humming,
plucking cherries from a paper bag,
feeling you can be.

The truth is
love with you is: not telling her when she's just hit a turtle
on Maple Ave
and your shallow end of the river, always afraid
you'll run out of things to say to keep a person close to you.
Drowning them with stings of too much air.

These words aren't the ones.
Tour of the honey crisp apple farm on
a flame red October in Galloway,
moist cracking of a bite,
Neglect of tinted bees lining a path on grass aisles.

by Sara Brown

Suspended

On Monday nights at pinotage-midnight blue,
it's usually 11:41 p.m. and I am mostly alone
save your linger on the skin.

Mist falls on the windshield,
the red stoplight at the empty intersection
reflects on the damp pavement,
slurry slabs of cherry.
The river to the left pulling towards the Atlantic
is black and still, suspended in bulkheading.

Hazy glow of light pollution on low cloud,
another muggy-sky laundromat open 24 hours.
A lone machine whirling suds,
and a small marina with an electric orange closed sign
radiating heat off breeze-chilled window glass.

In November, it is especially heavy to leave,
the Hodgkin's Lymphoma spots deep in your chest cavity,
excavated from the corner closet,
heave me off the bed,
the warmth I see spiral off
into a one-room apartment.

Tuesday nights, all but you
are guarantees.

by Sara Brown

Single file, against the wall.

I was a patrol girl with silver
badge and white harness that
crossed my sternum from
shoulder to waist. I liked
the power
to make kids hug the wall
for their own good.

now I want them to fall out

be human

at ease

of course

Speak to me upside down,
say surprising things. The rabbits have learned to affix text to the left hand margin, steer clear of meandering.

left
get spanked for
changing my font face. SEE, I'm no longer using Arial or
Garamond. (born 1530) How revolutionary is that?

Look, safety patrol girl, you bitch... SEE,

being

I'm out of school, I no longer cling to that
hand margin or
unruly or RAISING MY VOICE or
Helvetica or Times Roman but

rotated 92 degrees

COLD FINGERS ON THE TRIGGER

PosterBodoni It BT 22 pt.

**gorilla staggering across page
drunk on e.e. cummings**

At E. Rivers Elementary, girls patrolled
inside, boys out. I don't remember patrol
boys. I was inside making the halls safe
from the mess of humanity/rambunc-
tiousness. I like to be the boss.

Dog paddle, if you must, cling to left hand
margin – that life raft. Exhausted, you
drown. Hooray! Pry up those letters like
old linoleum, rip them from the floor,
paste your words on the ceiling. Snip them
like foreskin at a bris. There, now, don't
you feel better?

Single file. What if there are two of us and we're tailgating—
fighting for a place in history.

*Is this like crossing the road
double lines on Route 28?*



I don't want to smell River Street storm water bilge,
riot of unleashed sulfurous hell!

Can you arrange it?
Dial EPA hotline, patrol girl, find anyone
who can explain middle-of-the-night vapors.



Pour my words, a rustic delicacy,
into the middle
of simmering fat,
swirl into fried funnel cake.

Safflower oil is conditioned
to take the heat.

No fishy smell! Leave canola to the smelt-lovers.

rewrite from beyond the pale

When words line up against a 1-inch ruler
mark, yech, with scarcely a tabulation,
speculation, stipulation, my heart sinks.
Never to be *méchante*, French for nasty.
When deciders shout BEHAVE, get down on
your knees, don't do it. Stand tall, shoulders
back. Wings up. Keep your ascenders flying!
Rise, unruly one. My chest caves. I weep for
English majors. *en route to rigor mortis.*



right my script, baby

Mallarmé breached the levee. Words flowed over the damn onto the page.
No adherents.

Well, maybe now, *me and a few other souls*, after a hundred plus years.

Poet: "Mommy, I promise I'll use 12 pt. Times Roman single space
if only you'll accept me. Helvetica?" you say.
"We require original work but our journal must have a unified feel."

"Okay, okay, eat my soul."

NEW ONLY IN CONTENT, MY PET, NOT WHERE WORDS TAKE ROOT IN SPACE AND TIME.

Certainly not bigger in parts! Oh, my heavens, what to do? Don't let those letters become

TUMESCENT, SWELLING in all their glory, keep them in your pants.

Flush left is the missionary position
of the literati, publishing hegemony.

I don't care if you create paper from organic
grass clippings whirled with Perrier in a Cuisinart,

you won't free text. You have to

ferret, gorge, act up to merit

Hello, Gorgeous.

The sentence rounds a curve and
starts to

Breathless, you "sorry-I'm-late" arrive

ascend the concrete stairs

up, up we go holding hands behind
the sentence, open the door onto the tar
roof, follow the trailing ~
the words into the sky.



The end.

4

by Christy Sheffield Sanford

Shroud with Lead Wing

I

We woke early, drank thick coffee
a drop of milk
listened to the news

Bearded white shooter
hit Tree of Life Synagogue
my hometown, eleven dead

II

We threw on some clothes
left a bag of frozen bones
on the kitchen counter to thaw

Walked one thousand steps
to the local temple
for a yahrzeit candle

III

At SFMOMA, we received
Anselm Keifer's paintings
like prayers

Rough-strewn straw
doused with dense, lacquered black paint
splash of blood red
some ash
field aflame with white-yellow branches
wall of hair on fire
menorah, crematorium

To heap; to weld; to twist; to scorch

Not fashioned on canvas
nor wood
nor animal skin
but on coarse linen
each work a shroud for the dead

IV

In Joseph's dream, the sun, moon
and eleven stars bowed before him
tonight stars shimmer like ghosts

V

To make Grandma Irene's beef stock
in a large pot of water, I add
blanched and roasted ribs
cow knuckles, oxtail, marrow bones
onions, carrots, leeks
sprigs of thyme bound with twine
black peppercorns wrapped in cheesecloth
three handfuls of sea salt
boil then simmer on a low flame

VI

At dinner I spoke of my bat-mitvah
how Grandma sang a *bruchaya* at our temple
down the street from Tree of Life

VII

We lit candles
dipped our pinky fingers
in the melting wax

Talked of how all Jews
carry shadows of cinders, skeletons
locusts, drops of blood

Like Keifer's lead wing
beating its impossible weight
against a blackened-straw sky

by Heather Quinn

root and ash

me searching

for a rent in the sky

where dad might linger

he tips of his atheist-Jewish ghost wings

brushing my hair

my cheek

on my wedding day

his gold band

bound with red ribbon

to my left wrist

a piece of him for my pulse

his two big toes

with slivers of bone for nails

as a little girl I loved fingering those bones

as I'd crouch low and he'd hold my weight

with his feet dad was the Pittsburgh Pirates

Forbes Field the story of his dog Socks

run over on the 30th Street Bridge

the scent of yesterday's beer

a stack of endless books

on Hitler he would brood
over religion and the worker's plight
then put on his best Grouch Marx
Woody Allen talk and talk
of Abraham Lincoln another retelling
of the Gettysburg Address
my eyes rolling
sometimes he asked
but never remembered
my friends' names
what I did for a living
once I shouted *you don't know me*
across thousands of miles of telephone line
I know you do good in the world
what more is there
mom keeps his ashes in an urn
on a bookshelf in her Florida home
I want to keep him near me she says
I wouldn't mind a handful
to dust the San Francisco Presidio
he would like where my cats' ashes

grow roots and whoosh
the creaking of tall eucalyptus tress
sun filtering
weaving through the fog

by Heather Quinn

Wine Dark and Pinetorch

after Homer, Sappho and Anne Carson

I.

First there was *black*
then *white*,
then the gods begat *red*

pomegranate, cherry, hunter's moon
cinnabar, roses, tongue, nipple
lips

O, the fire, the electricity of red

Elektron in Greek means amber
but when she kisses sparks of scarlet
fiery rush of body

fever cut

And when she waits
she burns crimson
like Penelope pining by dark sea

II.a

Ancient Greek had no word for blue
Color of Penelope's bruised heart

Ulysses' iron and sheep
Fear and honey

First god-etched sky
Color of Homer's sea

III.

of black earth

spangled and shaking
greener than grass

silvery

II.b

black

violet
green

light &
wine dark

fire racing under skin
with violets
in her lap

nectar
in gold

cups

whiter by far
egg hidden
hyacinth

gold bracelets, saffron and purple
perfumed clothes

the sweetapple reddens on the highest branch

the whole place
is shadowed
and colored roses

for the one who has hair yellower
than a pinetorch
you burn me

IV.
etched under skin
whole egg

rose spark

spangled sky
gold hyacinth
iron honey

wine dark
pinetorch
fever

waits
she

by Heather Quinn



The Other Side
by John Wykle

CHITTER

The nameless beast with a million legs
skitters across the floor, avoids
the rat who crouches in the shadows
and towers above it. It clicks its taunts
in a long-forgotten language, forages
for food: a dropped olive, slice
of lemon, blood from a roast of beef.

by Robert Beveridge

FURSUIT

Awoke from a dream. You
were massaged by ferrets,
argued over the definition
of happy ending. Grabbed
a black marker, scrawled
“gazpacho is the key
to world peace” on the wall
next to your bed. Pour
yourself a glass of guava
juice, watch sunlight
bounce off the walls, ponder
the existence of tomato,
cucumber, onion, cilantro.

by Robert Beveridge



Trajectory
by Kerfe Roig

Call in the Ents

Down the block there's a magnolia bloom that's bigger than my head. Last night I stuck my face inside it, breathing pollen. My son's noise-cancelling headphones blaring "old" Russian deathrock; sublime.

The dog keeps licking my legs. Ankle down *only*, I tell him! But sometimes we cheat. Knee down. Anything below my femur's head.

Sex remains a constant, in the way that double-yolked eggs appear from time to time. Weird joy within a nonchalant suitcase. There will be a last time for that to happen. There's a last time for everything.

All this optimism eats my brain. The existential Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease of the now-time. Our structures can not hold.

But the kids are calling bullshit! *Fuck your quadratic equations. Skulk off with your porta-potties. Take away your powdered wigs and quit scorching my earth.*

I do not want to watch the tanks roll in again. I've fallen asleep and I might be dreaming. It's time to call in the Ents!

Back these kids up, Ents. March stoic across the oceans, cry the garbage to hell. Ruminant through the Himalayas, crunching skeletons of dead millionaires as you progress. Inhale the glaciers and spit them at the moon. Turn us inside out. Let the children climb you, ride along. Kissing Mardi Gras beads at this cathartic madness, screaming at the view.

by Abigail King

Rowing

I am a blank sleepy pile of rose quartz worth per pound the same as these notebooks a remedy for eyestrain: keep them shut I only require ice weekly like an orchid any more attention and I wither my mother disapproves of my tobacco candles but still wants me to shave there is a pattern here I once spent an hour smelling a couch after you left terrified of the inevitable diminution Anne called this the Awful Rowing I am sure she meant it in both senses my rowing is most awful when I hear the sounds of ink most awful when the sounds mean nothing my riddle is that I knew it signified nothing still I wanted to leave just let the sweet potatoes sprout in my cupboards the way god intended

by Adam Schetcher

La Casita

Casita means *little home*
but it really means so much more

A true casita contains very little
yet holds so much of

everything you need. A
true casita has space for

anyone who needs a place to rest
a place to inhale the warm

smell of tortillas puffing up on
a comal, and occasionally the

sneeze inducing scent of burnt flour,
or the vaporized oil of red chiles

simmering in hot water, getting
ready to be tossed over blender blades

to release their flesh from the tightness
of their peels, the thick skins that

protected as they ripened under intense sunshine
while their roots drew water from

mineral-rich soil The casita holds these things
and more. It holds love that infuses its

earthen walls with a detectable glow,
a glow that can only be seen

by a heart and a soul, enabled by

warm memories of familia.

The glow is assisted by the clouds and
the blue sky as they receive bouncing

sunbeams and send them back to la tierra,
where it mistakes the adobe walls for red

soil, the soil holding iron, the strength that holds
fast for eons and eras and minutes and hours,

the soil that holds aloft the casita and
all who live and love within.

by Josephine Pino



Waiting for the Black Hole to Arrive
by Reuben van Gogh

Prayer for Walter

found walking
with very straight
legs but no angels
to flay the night
soft as he vaults
over gutters
once strutted
with exquisite
tigers to shrivel
and flame down
the arc of his
hand as he feels
for the wall and
the grains of
grace dropped:
I would lavish a
wasting condition
upon thee, slather
your hair with safety
and retreat and have
thee to lie down,
and stay down,
and sleep.

by Matt Denison

Home Truth

*Get As
get Bs
get Ds
and Fs
but don't
come home
with no Cs
or I'll whip
you good!*

I told my
six year-old
as I reached
across her and
popped the door,
watched her scrawny
figure struggle under
book-bag for a distance
then flicked my cigarette
at the back of her legs—
'Cause we ain't average!
I hollered out the window
and she took off running
as I eased on down the
street tossing empties
at the sky.

by Matt Denison

Slaughter

When I was painting a house in New Orleans
twelve-thousand years ago, the homeowner
came out and started talking to me—
had me sit down, take a break,
drink some water. Offered me
a cigarette—all nice and friendly
in the easy New Orleans heat.
One thing led to another when,
from nowhere, he revealed his daughter
had died in the Jonestown Massacre
and he was suddenly weeping, crying,
sobbing over his exquisite suit in his
exquisite Uptown courtyard in front
of this nobody kid hired to paint his house.
I was twenty-one, looking at this adult, lawyer,
successful-now-broken man reaching out his
hands to me from across the table. Didn't know
what to say or do, so I took his hands and listened.
I think I was his blank-faced cow across the fence,
able, of all, to hear him, allow him to speak his pain—
both of us realizing some degree of idiocy
is required to understand slaughter.

by Matt Denison



fog rolling off city streets
by Desiree Dufresne

FORMATIVE

as a child, you were barred
from his hospital room

they all left one day
dressed in black

while you stayed behind
at a neighbor's house

everyone, everything
was so quiet

after, you found a bird
lying on the ground

squatted and stared
touched his wing

as others perched in treetops
staring down

you kicked at him a bit
then walked on to the bus stop

sat in class all day
while the teacher talked

and said nothing

by Brian Rihlmann

KENSHO

from her mid 80's on
she sat mostly silent
eyes half dark
ears underwater
all the ignored
grandmotherly advice
already spoken

it drifts back to me, now
as my own vision
begins to blur

a shiver of realization—
the lines between us
have always been blurred

she blows in each breeze
and stands tall
in each goose pimple

in this light
the blurred vision of age
is not defect
but true sight

by Brian Rihlmann



Birth of a Deity
by J. E. Crum

52 Shoe Lane

So, the woman down the street, she's got five, maybe six kids, two of them not even school age, and she's alone too. Who knows where the father is, if there's just one father right? She struggles. I mean, I feel for her, you know? I can see it in her eyes when she's packing all those rugrats into that ratty minivan, keeping track of lunchboxes, blankies and bottles, snapping seatbelts and car seats, just trying to get anywhere on time, and she works long hours, and I know she doesn't get much for it. She's been having garage sales, yard sales, bake sales, sending the older kids out to mow lawns, rake leaves, shovel snow, you know? But when they're all loading up that minivan, kids shuffling underfoot, snotty noses here, teary eyes there, and all that noise, whining, crying, arguing—that's when I see she's on the brink. Panic--that's the look, like a grease fire just started in the pan and she is just shocked still in front of it not sure what to grab for, swallowing the immediate urge to throw the pan down. So it wasn't entirely a surprise when the sirens came. I've heard yelling there before, and other things. They say she dropped the little one, maybe she threw him, but she doesn't think she did. He's in the hospital. They're investigating. Kids taken to different foster homes. I saw them come filing out of that old drooping house, down the worn stairs, past all the push toys in the yard. Those kids walked out single file, neat and quiet as mice. Poor woman. I think she just didn't know what to do with the fire, so she threw it down.

by Lydia McDermott

Dear M____,

If I put a dried apricot
in my mouth
and refuse the urge
to chew,

it will swell up
with juices again
and feel almost like
a second tongue.

I miss you.

Love L_____

by Lydia McDermott

Possession

I stay up late to pump
my breasts. There is never enough
milk, never enough time. Tomorrow
I will walk away from his face,
leave behind my little vessel of self,
with attached nipple.
I will pretend
to live my own life, until

some pink vision of toothless mouth
and clear gray eye flashes through
me, the hot faucets turn, milk
tingles down, a quick dark
stain to remind me
whose I am.

by Lydia McDermott



Palindrome
by Blue Rose

Mum and Mary

Before mum died,
I introduced her to the popular nature poet,
Mary Oliver. I bought mum a few of
Mary's books and she deeply engaged with her
paganist, poetry-prayers that knelt before nature.
Mum made notes all over the pages,
dog-tagging and highlighting them,
in conversation with them –
living in them.

Funny, as Mary Oliver died
just a few months ago,
and now mum...

Tonight, mum and Mary sit in the same
few books together on my bookshelf,
closed between the same dark forests of pages
in silent, annotated and everlasting conversation –
like two mirrors facing one another and
clasped together.

Here, they will forever discuss
nature as godhead,
the transcendent and the
eternity of words

by Darby Hudson

Doors

There is a door in the music;
a door in the cloud;
a door in the eye of a cat;
and they are all connected to the
same room.

I will meet you in there
in some improbable dream or
endless night.

by Darby Hudson

A Home of Words

While most worship home ownership, mortgages,
reno shows, and build
homes

on
foundations
of

numbers,

I've built a home on a foundation of words:

whispered,

read,

heard,

eavesdropped.

And I've financed such a home with thin air:

the silence after a bird flies off;

the space where a cloud disappears;

the imagined smell of a sleeping dream I never had.

It's difficult building and maintaining such a home,

it requires constant upkeep through

the writing of poetry.

But most just don't believe in such silly things.

They think I'm fucking crazy.

by Darby Hudson



A Memory Before It Hides

By Desiree Dufresne

Damage Control

Take me as I am with latent dismay and guts of a knight.
Obtain my candid wounds and bind them with words of morality.

Take me as I am with every layer of these blurry blueprints of sweet, blinded
bitterness.

(The architect confessed to dementia and seeing shadows roam the night)

So please, take me as I am with desperate hands and a desperation to feel
or do not take me at all because this building is old and wired wrong and
will come crashing down on skulls not my own and all I will have left is me,
and I will miss you.

by Nikki Carroll

Swallowing Apologies

The blood coursing through my veins is the same blood
that ran through my fathers so I know what it means when
thick skin turns to lava and how clenched fists mean
to watch your language.

I do not trust myself around an open fire.

Madness and sparks are enemies
sitting at my dinner table breaking bread
and I tell myself it's okay to burn without screaming.

I am neck deep in hysteria with little to no remorse.

by Nikki Carroll

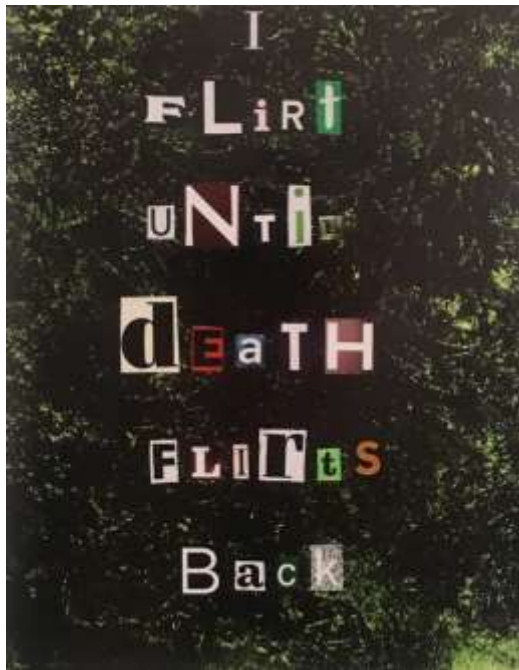
XOXO

There are serrated edges of a ceramic mood molded together by porcelain and turbulence.

Around them I dance a waltz with confidence and curtsy while giving a quick wink of demise.

I flirt until death flirts back.

by Nikki Carroll



Islands of Existence

Yn Cholloo [Manx Gaelic]: Calf of Man

Two small islands chat beside the fire:

Neither fraud, pride, nor deceit inhabits
the homeless — just lighthouse keeping
away poverty — just nature's richness.

Tears — even God's — forbidden
comeovers — except the cows of old
swimming across to summer graze.

Yn Cholloo — at the heel of its master's foot.

Yet, a centuries old battle burns within:

Puffinus puffinus versus Rattus rattus
as so often the weakest eaten by night
longtails inhabit burrows & gutters of our
worst human instincts — like noisy trolls
Shearwaters — tireless truth ambassadors
— black & white crosses skim a million miles.
Thrown rocks & branches scar the line between us.

by Simon Maddrell

'God's tears' is a Manx expression for the shrub fuchsia
comeovers is a Manx expression for non-Manx people coming to
live in the Isle of Man

longtails is a Manx expression for *Rattus rattus* as the shorter
common name is considered bad luck.

Puffinus puffinus is the Manx Shearwater

Bay of Death

Pooil Vaaish [Manx Gaelic]: Bay of Death

The first time I saw you not knowing
you even exist I sat open-mouthed
crystal clear thought silk-pooled bay
bladderwrack floating soundless
soaking seals a rock teeth tease
licked by waves grasses brushing
my calves I had felt this before
in another cove behind my ear.

And yet on the priestly shore
no heron sits although shrimps
clearly worship my feet each kiss
swells in the shallows of my breath.

If this is *Pooil Vaaish* could
I die just a little each dusk?

by Simon Maddrell



Thistle

It is the spiky weed that pricks my fingers
lifting pine cones from the hosta.

It is the purple blossom catching my eye
as I drive through prairie sandhills.

It is the mauve cluster on the back of my cap,
Saint Andrew's cross embroidered in front.

It is the silver pendant, the amethyst charm
suspended close to my heart.

It is the source of seeds held in a young man's fist
as he sails toward Ellis Island.

It is my father's *chuaran* hills the day he is carried
from his homeland by dreamers.

***Photo by Kim McNealy Sosin
Poem by Janet McMillan Rives***

Cigarette Store Poem

I see two guys
one young enough
to be my son
the other
my grandfather's age
if he were still alive

sitting on the curb
in front of the strip mall
sharing a smoke
as couples come and go
from the bagel shop
next door.

I'm too far to overhear
the men's conversation
or coughing laughter
but I drive away knowing
exactly how their story ends.

by *Brian Beatty*

Vacancies

The girl's tattoo scab, still fresh,
feels like the rough sandpaper strip
she's not old enough to remember
finding along the bottom spine
of old fashioned giveaway matchbooks.

Her stolen car
with the hound asleep
in the back seat breaks down
in front of an extended stay hotel
also available by the hour.

Coincidentally, it's all about to go up in flames.
In no time there will be smoke
everywhere. Wailing sirens, too. Then the dog,
startled awake, will start howling along
to her sirens responding to her fire.

Shouting truck drivers appear next
like so many fathers in just their underwear
out in the crowded parking lot,
their curses as blue
as her bright, flickering eyes.

by Brian Beatty

In the 1980s We Wore Our Sunglasses at Night

After high school football games
some kids filed inside the dark gymnasium

to mix drinks from hidden flasks
and dance their hormones into submission.

Other kids had their own cars
to go cruise the back lanes of local cemeteries

in search of a stone dog standing guard
at the door of its dead master's mausoleum.

Witnesses swore the snarling statue's
glass eyes glowed green if you got too close.

We went along with these horror movie rumors
because, insane, we preferred to believe

our whole lives were ahead of us.

by Brian Beatty

The Absence of Despair

by Elizabeth Markley

On the first morning I met my roommates, I told them that I sleepwalk. It's only every once in a while, I said, nothing to be concerned about. I just wander into the kitchen and back into bed. This is of course a total falsehood. I have never sleepwalked in my life. But I needed the bedroom on the ground floor of the house. And it seemed like a pretty harmless lie, in the grand scheme of things. My bedroom isn't even the biggest - that would be the master upstairs, so I don't feel like I'm shortchanging these girls.

I certainly can't tell them the truth. That I need to be on the ground floor to watch *him*. To make sure he isn't bringing other girls home. I can't explain that the view from the upstairs bedrooms is blocked by the old oak tree, and therefore undesirable. But the downstairs bedroom, well it made my heart leap. The backyard of his shitty rental abuts the backyard of our shitty rental, and my bedroom windows afford a sweeping look at the whole scene.

I discovered this when I asked the landlord for a tour. You might think it's fortuitous, that the house directly behind my ex-boyfriend's was for rent. But the environs of our campus, as with any huge state school, are filled with dilapidated houses, in a secret, secondary network of student housing. The houses fill in the fall, take their requisite beatings, and empty at the start of summer. By early June the neighborhoods are veritable ghost towns, and since this was just around the time I found myself dumped, I had the pick of the litter.

Before this David and I lived together. For the last two years we've been playing house in our own little apartment. But then he ended things, quickly and brutally, on the last day of our junior year. There was nowhere to turn, so I drove home to Harrisburg in a daze. I spent those two weeks eating sour candy and watching TV. No one noticed or commented. This is the benefit to being one of five children. People think the opposite, but it's actually easy to disappear in a Catholic household. Still, to throw my parents off the scent, every few nights I told whoever was assembled in the kitchen that I was meeting high

school friends. I was not. I was walking the community park of my youth, half-hoping that something would happen to me. I envisioned a mugger approaching me on the dark path. I imagined the picture in the newspaper, my bloody face staring helplessly back at the camera. And when David heard the horrible story, he would have to drive to Harrisburg to check on me. But every night the park was empty, and nothing happened.

I had no intention of becoming a stalker when I returned to campus. I shouldn't have returned at all. But I had a job lined up. I was going to spend the summer working in the University's archives. I'm a history major and this was a good job. David liked to claim that he got it for me. He makes lots of claims like this. He enjoys it when his influence is on display. I'm sure I would have gotten the job on my own, but once David says something, the truth becomes irrelevant.

To describe David as such makes him sound like he's in the mafia. He is not, nor does he have the power to change anyone's life. But he does have influence outsized to the average college student. Last year, he was elected the student president of the University. He was the leader of all the undergraduates, close to fifty thousand of us in total. It sounds dumb, talking about student government like it matters, but in fairness to David it was no small feat. He spoke to crowds larger than most real politicians have to.

Even huge schools like ours become their own tiny worlds, and David was known by everybody. Hence, I became known. It was like being famous in a way. And I played my part well, the pseudo-political wife. I'm not going to lie, there were benefits. Like sitting in the President's box at football games, or having dinner with the Board of Directors. Drinking wine with them like we were old chums. There I was, the forgotten sibling, the daughter of an electrician and a teacher, talking to a billionaire like it was nothing.

The plan was for this life to continue. David and I made lots of plans together – law school, Capitol Hill, campaigns that we whispered about beneath the covers. But then, I suppose, he changed his mind. He never told me precisely why. This is what bothers me so much. If I could just get some closure then maybe I could stop the madness. I know that I have reached stalker level

one-hundred - I recognize this in a detached, clinical sort of way. But as I said, I didn't set out to be like this. I would swear it happened by accident.

I only found out where he lived because I needed the rest of my things. It's amazing really, how intertwined two lives become when you share an apartment. This was a practical request, not one that I manufactured for attention. I couldn't bear seeing David in person, so I asked him to leave the box outside of his door. And then, suddenly, I had his new address. I picked up my things quickly and drove away. But then I circled the block. I still don't know why. I cruised the streets surrounding his house, and then I saw it. The for-rent sign. It was stuck in the front yard of a two-story brick house that, if my reasoning was correct, backed right up to David's house. The landlord let me move in, even though the house has four bedrooms, and it was just me. But it would have sat empty for the summer, and one renter is better than none.

I was nervous at first, daring only to peek through the closed blinds. But as the summer wore on, I realized that David was never going to discover me. That's how self-absorbed he is. He wasn't giving me a second thought. He didn't text or call, not even on days when I knew he was drinking heavily. And so, night after night I watched the house, the summer air growing heady and fragrant.

I have learned David's roommate's schedules too, though this is a mere byproduct of watching the house. I know them in a way I never did before, even though we were friends. I liked those guys, but David got custody in the breakup. I suppose that makes sense, they were his friends before. My own friends...well I never got the chance to make any. I met David at a mixer for our freshman dorm, when he was nothing but a scared eighteen-year-old from suburban Philly. I was looking for someone to heap all of my pent up love and adoration onto. David was looking for someone like me. We bonded so intensely in those first months of college, before the world discovered that David was David. At the time this felt like a blessing from fate itself, the first real stroke of luck in my life. Although, in hindsight, perhaps it wasn't lucky at all.

At the end of summer the landlord called. He had interest from another group, a threesome, but since there were four bedrooms he offered to put me in touch with the girls. They agreed to let me stay, which seemed an immeasurable kindness. I welcomed them with a bottle of wine, and they didn't mind when I told them about the sleepwalking.

Classes resume. I walk across campus and sit quietly in lecture, and then just as soon return to the house. There are no tailgates now, no parties. My roommates are nice, but they give me a wide berth. When I talk to people they are polite, but I can see their interest quickly wane, and they make an excuse to end the conversation. The prospect of rebuilding a social life seems insurmountable, so instead I do nothing. It's like being at home again.

When I do run into an acquaintance and the conversation lasts for more than one minute, David inevitably comes up. Someone tells me he is going to work for a congressman. Someone else says that he is thinking of just running for office, right out of the gate. I almost say something then. It's on the very tip of my tongue. And yet, I stay quiet. We're in the dining hall, and it's too loud. I can't reveal such a truth over the din of people eating. I tell myself that's the reason. Not that I am being cowardly. All the same, it's important that people know the truth. It's a truth I myself was shocked to discover, and here it is: David is not a good person.

He is not a good person, and he is certainly not a great person, not like everyone thinks he is. It's as though, if you're nice looking, and charming, and have a self-deprecating sense of humor, people assume you're a wonderful human being. But David is not. Don't get me wrong, he is not a horrendous person. He wasn't violent towards me, or abusive. But he is selfish and egotistical and I can say on the highest authority that he does not care about the plight of others.

I could offer up hundreds of examples. There was the time I wrote his term paper for him. And I mean really wrote it, from start to finish. He received lavish praise from the professor, and he didn't even thank me. And at some point in our sophomore year he stopped making off-color jokes. He said such comments were not presidential. But here's the thing – he didn't

stop because he believed jokes about women or minority groups were inherently offensive. He stopped because he thought they might hurt his prospects. He doesn't understand what it's like to want for things. In fact, he has a quiet disdain for people who don't have a lot, as though it's a personal failing to be born poor. David's father is a Doctor, same as his grandfather. I never, in our three years together, witnessed David not get what he wanted.

Really, when it comes down to it, I don't think he would be a very good leader. It seems a gross injustice that people don't know this. Maybe I suspected this when we were dating, on a visceral level at least. But I ignored it. I refused to acknowledge it when it benefitted me, so maybe that makes me a bad person too.

*

On a calm Monday night I find myself at the drugstore. I'm staring blankly at the deodorant when a man comes into view. He is a friend of David's, and I haven't seen him since the breakup. There is nowhere to go, so I force a smile.

"Jeremy," I say. "Good to see you."

"Oh," he said. "Hey. How's it going?"

He shuffles his feet and looks desperately at the deodorant, as if something within the shelves will jump out and save him. I think it's me for a minute. People act this way around me a lot these days. But then I remember. About a month ago I heard a story about Jeremy getting into a wreck. He crashed into a wall and was subsequently booked for a DUI. This seems very out of character for him. And the strangest thing – or so I heard – was that Jeremy claimed he didn't know how he came to be in the neighborhood. He didn't even know how he got into his car.

"Heard about you and David," he said. "Sorry about that."

"It's fine. It's for the best." I ask, "How is he doing?"

Jeremy said, "I haven't seen him in a while, actually. Not since...that night."

We exchange a few pleasantries, and then Jeremy leaves without buying anything.

Later, when I am lying in bed, I search for Jeremy's arrest. There is an article about it in the local paper. A neighbor

discovered the young man desperately cranking the engine, trying to back his car out of the wall. She described the scene – the man not wearing a seatbelt, the passenger door open. I look at the date of the article, and do the mental math. And I realize something. That was the night that David came back late. I remember it so vividly. I was certain that he was with a girl. I stayed up until two am, and still David had not returned. But then, just before three, I saw him walking surreptitiously down his driveway. He was sweaty, and somewhat in distress. It made no sense at the time. I read the article again. And it occurs to me - if Jeremy was driving alone, why would the passenger door be open?

And then I remember the time, sophomore year, that David drove us home when he really shouldn't have. It was a Saturday night, and we had been tailgating all day. I wanted to crash at our friend's house, but David wanted to return to the apartment. I thought I fell asleep on our friend's couch, but when I woke up I was in our bed. I had only the vaguest memory of David holding me up by the waist and putting me in the passenger seat.

I don't sleep, and I don't pay attention in class the next day. I can't stop thinking about the accident. Jeremy – smart, premed - really doesn't strike me as someone to drive wasted. A theory starts to form. It's far-fetched, but the more I think on it, the less insane it seems. There is no other way. I will have to go to the scene.

I walk to the corner where it happened. It's easy to find because the wall has not yet been repaired. It's a low-slung stone wall that serves as the border of someone's yard. Next to the crumbled portion is a stop sign. I suspect that – whoever was driving – skidded while trying to stop and crashed into the wall. I sigh, there is nothing useful here. But then I see something that makes hope balloon in my chest. The house across the street has one of those little home security cameras. It's perched above the doorbell, its beady little eye watching the yard and the street.

I have a story. I'm going to tell the owner of the camera that somebody rear-ended me at the stop sign and drove away. I'm hoping they'll let me watch the video without looking over my shoulder. I knock on the door, picturing a callous college bro,

but the person who opens it is not who I am expecting. He is clearly a student, but he is short and gay and in that instant I drop the fake story and tell him the truth. That I think my ex-boyfriend did something terrible and I want proof.

“Oh shit,” he says. “Let me see how long the video is stored for. I think it’s thirty days.”

I tell the guy the date and he pulls out his phone. He does not usher me inside, and we remain huddled in the doorway. We watch that night pass in excruciating thirty-second intervals. I tell him to speed up until two am and then, finally, Jeremy’s car appears. It slides across the frame, already out of control, and we watch it smash into the wall. I expect to have to wait, but almost immediately a figure climbs out of the driver’s side. He surveys the damage, his back to the camera. I know that stance. But I can’t be absolutely certain. Then the figure appears to make up his mind. He turns, steps over the rocks now strewn in his way, and walks into the street.

“Pause it,” I order, and the boy obeys. We zoom in and there is David’s face, plain as day.

The boy is the first to break the silence. All he can say is, “Oh my god.”

*

I don’t know what the fallout is. I am living at home now. I moved back a few months ago, before I released the video. I talked to the University, and they agreed to let me finish my degree with online classes. I didn’t want to be there when it happened. I sent the video in anonymously, to the school newspaper, to Jeremy, and to the police. And then, except for my classes, I got offline. I can’t avoid all of the controversy though. Somebody sends me a text with David’s mugshot. He looks surprised more than anything, his eyes wide and his mouth forming a grim line. I delete the text before I read anything.

I walk the same park I did last summer. But I don’t want something to happen to me now. And I don’t walk at night. I go in the daytime, when the park is full of children and seniors. The overcast days of winter give way to the shy Pennsylvania spring, and I feel something that could almost be described as hope. Or, if not hope, at least the absence of despair. In May, my diploma is mailed to the house. No graduation ceremony for me, no pomp

and circumstance. I like it better this way. I don't even take it out of the envelope. I put the whole thing in the back of my desk drawer, and I go for a walk.

Jay at the Window

All afternoon it's batted at the glass,
from branch to window, back to branch again
and, pausing, cocks its head, picks off a sour
ash berry, gobbles it, resumes attack.

It sees itself, perhaps, and, striking out
against that other bird unrecognized,
it charges at the charging flash of blue
that's warned it of intrusion and the dread

of others' eggs in its own nest. Confused
and purposeful, it labors at its task
into the gathering darkness, berry-soused,
until the glass no longer answers back

with its self-image—perfect agonist—
but glows against the evening from within.
It wastes the day contending with itself
as we look on and sort our own concerns,

or parse the threats its pounding on the glass
can conjure up: the knocking on the door,
the envelope unopened for the fear
of what's inside—the hourly tally of

impediments we cast down in our way,
the list of things that daily trip us up—
and how we battle on like jays on berries:
drunk with one thing, hungry for another.

by Gregory Loselle

Stratford, and Jessica Walking Away

It takes a tick to register—
a look back as she lifts her hair
out of her coat-collar and hikes
its skirts back with her elbows
as she plants her hands
in her pockets and walks

down Bridge Street past
the copper-green human statue
and the crowd awaiting
his next move—before she

disappears. Consider how
the imprint of our leaving
occupies the intervening air,
and whether we are always tourists
lost to each other in the crowd

by Gregory Loselle

Laudamus

So let us praise the incomplete,
the half-made-up, the left undone,
what's underbaked, what's scarce begun,
the set-aside, not-yet-concrete.

Let's laud what's left unsaid or dropped,
the barely finished, still to come,
to be announced, to be revealed,
still-in-production, uncongealed—

and praise, for all that, what's to do
and what's ahead: the yet-unplanned,
the things we've always said we'd do
and what we never thought we would,

and what we never thought we could—
ignoring what we knew we should
and didn't, never found the time
and left aside, what we omitted.

Here's to the things that didn't fit,
that made no sense, that didn't rhyme
or quite serve the meter, what
we cast away, failed to commit.

So praise the ones who let things lie,
not bringing to completion all
that seemed so necessary once,
and proved irrelevant in time.

by Gregory Loselle

When you look at our daughter

You should see only what she is,
not what you think she could be.
Not sweet, not darling, not
entirely herself or yours. And not
a surprise, at least to me, that
that our human hunger bred
this beautiful harvest:

Face a miracle of jam and tears,
hair of dragon wing and cornsilk,
mouth a streak of pale red clay,
eyes of fishscale and sunflower,
ripe wheat stalk calves, her shoulders
little round clouds of milkstone,
hips an angry river bend churning up
stones and secrets.

When you listen to her speak,
listen to what she says,
not what you think
she should say: *please*
and *never mind*, and *I'm sorry*
and *thank you for asking*. Instead,
watch her mouth as it shapes the story;
when she says *I'm alone in the garden*
under a flower because my magic
turned me into a monster,
listen to her blood rush as it thickens
the plot, and she marries the gods
that fly around inside her chest,
then marries the cat

(by kissing him on the lips, of course).

Listen closely when she tells you
her husband will have fuzzy hair
that stands up on his head,
and his name will be your name;
but listen even more carefully
when hate trickles down
the blank page of her chin.
The plot takes a turn -
you are banished from her fortress.

Now is the time
to translate: *I love you*
beyond definition, beyond the measure
of all the languages you feed me;
please take these burning pages
and crush them into your arms.

And finally,
when she tells you she can't believe
that life never ends, that she gets so tired
thinking of her future
as a horse,

(How will you recognize her,
as a horse, when she is dead?
How will she find her way back?)

and then a snail, a tree, a cow,
allow yourself to hear the despair
she conjures up, and the truth
coiled inside every act of love:
creation is a perilous craft.

by Christine Ridders

On Through These Rapids

"It is a great thing to know the season for speech and the season for silence" – Seneca

I strive to manifest
plainness; you
with your burning
eyes, are difficult
to govern. Instead,
you thrust on me
your growing empire
day after day.
I believed we could be
like water,
that *benefits all things*
and does not compete with them,
but I am too fearful (you,
too greedy) with love. Instead,
I am fast becoming
the river and you,
the gorge: one
cannot abandon
the other, but endlessly
rush
through *seasons of speech*,
seasons of silence. No,
I have not been blessed,
but I am one
who wholly contains
their suffering
and shall not be
broken. I open my heart
to your fire,
bless the bridge
between our brows,
press
on through these rapids.

by Christine Ridders

Surrender

I always felt sorry for the wolf,
outsmarted by the pigs, his strength
a silly show.

How tired he must have gotten,
huffing and puffing, doing his hairy,
very best.

How sad to skulk away in the end,
to the scornful laughter of children
all over the world, forever

The loser, sneaking away in shame.
Or finally conquered, split open.
But now my sister tells us the wolf won,

Sliding his rotting feet up and down
our sleeping stairs, leaving the shame
to her.

She speaks of souls and spirits underneath
our underneath, the light
at our core; a language I do not speak.

It's not as if I close my eyes
to every darkness. I could tell her
my flesh has also been

Insulted, that I have wept, too,
a petal wrinkled into the garden's muck
by a hard rain. But it is useless

To wave at a comet passing by, a self-
ignited soul burning a dizzy path
through a mess of stars; my sister

Who insists that killing the poor wolf
is not enough, that there is something
crueler than forgetting;

A system-wide excision, a total clearing
Of his matted fur, of his very blood
from our story, so that

When we turn the page, there is only a hole -
a vacant, pathetic void - still huffing,
huffing with all its might.

And now she wants us to believe
that even the brick house fell.

by Christine Ridders



Night Dance
by Blue Rose

Already It Is Dusk

The sanguinary sun plunges
into empty purple ocean
with an emerald flash,*
bloodies the bellies
of sparse, distant clouds.
From far, fallow mountains
hollow winds come
thrumming birdlessly.
The bare, bleached moon,
monarch of imminent night,
wanders solitary upon the sea.
Stars punctuate the careless dark,
as they have for eons, spilling un-
constellated radiance now, for
no knowing mind is here to say
“Ah! So beautiful.”

* The “Green Flash” is an optical phenomenon caused by extreme refraction of light as the sun sets when conditions are right. A distinct green spot is briefly visible above the upper rim of the solar disk; the green appearance usually lasts for no more than a moment or two.

by Michael Baldwin

Dejeuner sur l'herbe

Entangled on a quilt, secluded in a sycamore's shade, hidden
in a moribund meadow, beside the lazy oxbow of a stream, she
plucked a leaf and held it, host-like, to the sun to transubstantiate
as green radiance, and told me the sycamore shares half our genes,
all living beings intimately related and interdependent. She
sliced a ripe peach in halves for us, and laid the pit upon the leaf,
then finger-traced the quilt's octagonal stars, telling how
the shape of the chlorophyll molecule and that of human blood
are identical, except green grasps an inner atom of magnesium, while
red's central atom is iron; both conveying energy thru embodied forms.

Two black swans glided near and twined their necks erotically, crooned
a *chalmieu* duet, low and mellow as two ebony clarinets. She
said love is what entangles souls to synchrony as consciousness embraces
the cosmos, bending space-time to eternal remembrance. She
laughed at my confusion, her breasts like peaches on a shaken tree, and she
whispered we are but fleshy shadows of our many-dimensioned selves,
encountering each other only casually here, our mergings immaterial. She
pricked our thumbs and sprinkled blood drops on the leaf, into
the runneled convolutions of the pit, and with a strand of yarn extracted
from the quilt, bound them in the shape of its octagonal star. She
laid the parcel in my trembling hand and seized my eyes with hers.

My mind was sun shimmer on water. I could find nothing genuine to say.
Why did I not tell her I would make a poem of our idyllic *rendezvous*?
Say the words would be more real, intenser than our enfleshed actions,
that memory is our commuted reality, honey from a thousand flowers.
Would I have saved that sycamore leaf sachet all these years,
had we grown old together?

by Michael Baldwin

Whitman's Photon

Walt Whitman glanced into the sky one night,
perhaps at the brilliant, blue-white star, Sirius,
for one entire second, so a single photon spar
of starlight, one hundred eighty-six thousand
miles in length, invaded his eye and illuminated
his subconscious.

Thus he saw the blades of grass on which he sat
as miracles of universal energy, transforming
light energy into life energy, within the grass,
thence into cows, into people, into mind, into God.

Walt intuited how poetry is consonant with
what would become quantum physics, which seeks
to explain physical reality to our inadequate star-
dust brains,

while poetry plumbs our emergent, hesitant,
hominid consciousness with our enormous
numinal minds, both employing necessary weirdness
for their explanations, making immaginal leaps
to transcendent truths, to prescient perhapses,

like the Zen kōan ~ the sound of one hand clapping,
perhaps thus requiring a third ear to hear,
a third eye to see, like searching for your shadow
with a flashlight, always somewhere out there.

Walt was a Zen master of quantum poetry,
the ripples of its wave-front still propagating
love energy through all humanity
and to the sacred cosmos beyond.

by Michael Baldwin



Is this all you see 2019
by Alexis Marie Cortez

Weaning

Rivers of milk run down the mountains. Your white cry flows along with your teeth. To help you to sleep, I climb in beside you and we never sleep in the same bed twice. I've watched you grow half an inch in an hour, but when the milk runs low, and melting snow flows down the river, how will I know how to help you be strong, brave, and loving-kind when I'm still—you know the answer, though, how to become yourself, but I'm the one who has to say it. Holding you, I balance on balanced rocks, afraid I'll lose you, or drown us both in love. You must forgive me if I linger too long, looking, your whole life in my arms

by Jennifer Woodworth

Fighting with God

1. The Fight is Fair

Draw a feeling from me or from what's left of me, from what's missing from me, what's wrong with me by surplus or absence, or drawn from my reason for wishing I were strong enough to have another fight with God, or pulled like a coin from the mouth of the single fish on a line pouring a thin light-stream of water back into the sea *to pay for me and thee*; or drawn from all the lovely things you have that I don't and vice versa. The single fish is pulled from the water on a barbless hook, and every mother will know that at least the fight was fair.

2. The Fight is Not Fair

Easy to vibrate at the frequency of loneliness or loss or at the frequency of the voice of the child who doesn't need you as much, though your work is to light up in her presence forever, you never mean to be sad at her leaving it's who she must be—the wavelength of love grown up, children grown and moved away. Now the child sleeps far from spoons and one day, you see there

is nothing to tie you to the things you made together because that's what she needed from you, and it is easy to vibrate at multiples of that frequency. You could make a stringed instrument whose intonation continually weeps at the amplitude of a child's silence traveling through the vacuum of space, like light, though only your children's children will make the instrument sing.

***by Jennifer Woodworth
(previously published by The Citron Review)***

In the Fall, Demeter

Blowing over scorched grass the wind turns the falling leaves; the backs of their hands brush the petals from faces. I see like a dog—birthdays and Christmases carried in my mouth and single days pulled like fish from a river. Black and white, like penguins, flightless, we are birds whose partners hunt or keep our children warm on the other side of day.

And if my skin burns off and I am born without it, will one sense be replaced by another; the touch of love with scales of salmon and salmon's songs? As the river is depleted, will they climb on ladders, breaking the surface of the water, rising—

mothers stand fin on fin, looking ahead, towers of salt, and while we hear *too high*, we say *too late*.

by Jennifer Woodworth



Infidelity
by Kelly Wang

beneath a black rim hat

my
eyes
stare
at the
man's
eyes
from across
the bar—
bags upon bags
droop down below his sunken dark eyes—
he buries his face beneath a black rim hat,
buries his face right into the glass.
he and i
share the same woes,
but the difference is
i've never
stuck a needle in my arm
hoping for more.
i only look away
when he gazes
into my eyes
searching for secrets
but my eyes
share none.

by Tohm Bakelas

**one of the many reasons i hated working on a children's
inpatient psychiatric unit**

after report
i walked into
the nurses' station
where i was blindsided
by the unseen heaviness
of a somber silence
that had not been there
the night before

the census was low and the unit was cold

somebody said: "if you hadn't heard,
alexandra hung herself in the woods"

i sat down in a rolling chair
staring into the darkness
at the end of the hall
of the half-empty unit

the charge nurse asked: "are you okay?"

i said nothing

i grabbed the clipboard
and left the nurses' station.

i began hacking away at the 15 minute checks.

by Tohm Bakelas

Master Bedroom

I don't think I'm allowed to leave this room.

Dad's here too, naked and dead
and pruny and chemo burns and flaccid.

A new tattoo on my forearm reads:
DO SOMETHING TO HIM.

There's a laundry basket of broken glass
in one corner and a set of dentist's tools
by the locked door.

You probably want me to strip down
to my undershirt and hold him. I bet
you see wildflowers blooming in our mouths.
I bet the door opens and we sprout matching wings
and we say in unison, *I've always loved you.*

But I can't give you a key I've never turned.

Why am I still too terrified
to drag a body around by it's tongue?
I want emotional growth to mean not gagging
when I eat your ears like pot stickers.

I want the sleepy peace of knowing
that vore fetishes and sucking the marrow
from your knuckles are just different ways
of saying *never let me go.*

I'm going to be here all-night making mistakes.
I'm going to find the perfect jelly in an eyeball
tastes like, and I'm not going to stop
just because his ribs are scattered across the floor.

Yes, I know the window is always unlocked
and cracked open. Yes, I see the glow of outdoor candles
and I smell the gentle fog of hot jasmine tea.

But there is no universe where I give up hope
of pinching your first malignant was of cells.
There is no house where I don't draw the curtains,
no house where I'm too weak to pick you up
and drop you, pick you up and throw you,
pick you up and beg to be picked up too.

by Jerrod Schwartz

House

I did one of those spit-in-a-tube DNA tests,
mailed it in, and was informed by phone call
that I had won a tour of their facility.

I stepped out my Uber and a man
in a pointless hard hat game me a rundown
of the exterior.

There's the retention pond

Sure.

Here's where we melt down the used test tubes.

Of course

And well, there's the smokestacks.

After two minutes of silence I asked
So is the inside off limits, or---

He sat down on the parking lot asphalt
and pointed to the front door,
which is always open.

Imagine a poorly lit airplane hangar.
A trough of red, bubbling lava cuts the space
into four sections, and the wreckage
of my childhood home is suspended in the middle.

I walk closer and see magma dripping off
of everything.

Heat pouring from the plywood staircase
, beads of molten rock sweating off
of the apple trees in our backyard,
fire slobbering out of my first dog's mouth
and my parents laughing, my parents charring
each other over and over again.

Up close the lava is blinding, and I know
I'm not the only person invited here today.

I hear the dead horses tripping over themselves.
I heard the horde of church steeples tiptoeing
along the ceiling. I feel all 3 billion wedding rings
kinking around my ankles.

I have no idea how to want to leave something broken,
how to walk away from melted bones,
or how to look at a volcano and not wonder how it tastes.

by Jerrod Schwartz



Wild Abstract
by Sam Aleks

awakening

summer lingered over the schoolyard
curious about how the curbside oaks
made crimson
out of dull green.

for tryouts
coach had us take three shots
before picking three hopefuls
taller than i was.

the leaves browned
were swept into the gutters.
i stayed indoors
pressed against the window, watching

those naked branches etch cursive notes
send them on the breeze
quick, inkless
impossible to read.

by Troy Turner

jealousy

they listen to him
like he's speaking from beyond the grave.
like his words

are drenched in tragic wisdom.
another sylvia plath.
another james dean.

but he's not dead. or famous. yet.
he's just another kid. a year younger
than me. blonde. chubby. always

in trouble.
half the things he says
aren't even words. they sound like

orcish names. goblin insults.
but by the end of the day
everyone's repeating them.

i am young and i don't understand
the way confidence works. why
i can make my small group of friends

laugh, but here at school my voice
is seldom noticed.
i don't understand popularity. only

that i want it. only that trying to get it
makes you look stupid. that not trying
leaves you unnoticed. that

without it i'll end up stuck
in front of a sad, flickering tv
another washed-up high school athlete

enthralled, tortured
by those lucky kids on screen
tall enough to fulfill my dreams.

by Troy Turner

change

you don't notice until
a moment of lucidity finds you

at 5am, leaving a stranger's house
somewhere in the hills

too drunk to feel the cold.
you don't notice how the last of them

have gone. your childhood friends. how
ten years have passed. how

time hasn't answered your prayers. how
it hasn't made you rich, famous,

multilingual. it hasn't taken you
to france, thailand, japan.

you don't notice the waiting in your head.
you don't notice that

that school bell
never rings again.

by Troy Turner



Beyond the Blinds
by Karen Bowden

Some Crazy-Ass Shit

That was some crazy-ass shit Pete said, eyes wide in wonder, cheeks aflame, his thick frame padded to absurdity in scarves and coats emblazoned with the names of his favorite teams—Patriots, Bruins, Celtics, Sox—two sweatshirts and two pairs of sweatpants over jeans. It was cold and wet but our bodies steamed up with our breath above us

as we hooted and laughed and peeled little Robbie Russo up from the slush of dirt and snow where he finally slid and came to a halt twenty feet from the ramp we built into the side of the hill as his little sister Charlene’s pink boots chased a saucer-sled across what could have been the surface of the moon in the field behind the K-Mart parking lot where route 95 split Main and Mechanic. It seemed

the closer you lived to the sounds of the highway and the trains, the farther from the center of the town and the lake and the bird streets where rich kids “played” on tennis courts in pools and batting cages in their back-yards, the crazier you were, the more likely to talk the McMullen kids into lying down in a row at the end of their driveway, laughing and screaming so you could pedal your huffy flying up a plank of wood and into the air, Evel Knievel jumping the fountain at Caesars Palace, the more likely to break

your coccyx or your nose or your thumb o show
up to school with mystery bruises all over
your body so your mom got a call home
from the middle-school guidance
counselor threatening a visit from child
protective services and you'd have to
spend the next two weeks grounded while
everyone else got to play touch football
and shoot bb guns at cans over at Pete's
house. None of us were the kids most
likely to do anything

of consequence. And we were all a little afraid of
each other's fathers (who our fathers
could beat the shit out of any day of the
week). Afraid of how they'd fight with our
mothers at night when we were trying to
sleep, shouting and punching walls until
they left the house, peeling down the
driveway, and how

we wondered if they'd come back and wondered
how we felt about that. And how everyone
shoveled in their Lucky Charms the next
day at the kitchen table as if nothing out of
the ordinary had happened because
nothing had as Mom

told your sister to go wash that crap off her face
or she wouldn't let her on the bus. And
that's not even the crazy part. The crazy
part was, we never really were all that
afraid. Fear was just

what you added to make things interesting and
strange like something Pete's gypsy
grandma sprinkled pungent in the stew as
we drank Milk-and-Pepsis watching Death
Race 2000 in the living room. Otherwise,
you'd just mark your distance with a piece
of sidewalk chalk. Otherwise, what's the
point?

of believing in marriages and bones that would
bend not break or at least would heal,

believing that there was nothing you couldn't
rise up from or to if you were tough and
lucky,

believing that divorces, depression, and cocaine
were problems for rich people, and

that too much money came with too much
trouble,

that you slept better in a cold house,
that the mafia killed Kennedy,
and you can't get pregnant the first time,
and in an angry but forgiving God,
in *holy fuck that was awesome, let's do it again*,
and faster and higher
and farther,

and the Clash and the Ramones and how much
Bon Jovi sucked (though we all sang along
for Tommy and Gina, holding on)

and driving reckless on a dirt road in a rebuilt
Gremlin, the car getting air to the strains
of "Mama Kin," then fishtailing behind
you, throwing up stones, as Charlene

laughed and Robbie prayed, alive, alight in
the belief

that you might as well take a running start and
scream away the dark,

in flying and falling and flying again, heaven and
hell, and more than a little

crazy-ass shit.

by Joel Peckham

Donnie Russo and the Huffy Pro Thunder

You know anything about this, my father asked, *anything at all?* And I remember it like a punch in the gut—a Huffy BMX Pro Thunder: red and white with a long banana seat and deep padded V in the handle bars, designed to look like it begged to be ridden too fast down dirt roads but still somehow trying too hard to look mean and slick so even when I slid to a halt spraying stones as I jammed the peddle back, pulling to the right, leaning into the skid, it only made the chubby kid riding it seem chubbier. Still it might as well have been a rocket-ship to me, and I remember the despair of having to tell my father it was gone from the grass by the driveway where I'd dropped it on its side before running into the house, trying to beat the sun on a summer Friday evening and *yes I looked everywhere. And no it's not in the shed. And no it's not leaning against the house. It's gone.* And so here was Dad staring Donnie down, the older kid my father called a punk who once tried to teach me how to pop a wheelie in his driveway, though I couldn't get the balance right, front wheel coming up a only few inches from the ground with a timid tug so his friends laughed and shouted *he can't get it up* or I yanked the handle bars too hard too far and leaning back, went past the tipping point to land on my fat ass so that they laughed even harder until he gave up in disgust. I made myself as small

as possible, listening, peeking up through my eyelids as Donnie's friends stared away or at the

ground, acting like a group of slightly smaller, uglier, Donnies, trying to look casual in the heat of that day and the presence of a man they feared and hated and loved. And Donnie, unblinking, returning my father's gaze. *I might have an idea. Maybe.* Which was as good as saying, *yeah, I know where it is*, as good as saying, *I can get it back if I feel like it.* And my dad saying nothing but nodding hard once and turning his back and walking past me into the house like *that was that* like *problem solved.* And Donnie saying, *you just wait here JoJo.* And so I spent that Saturday morning on that stoop staring at the tops of my shoes, waiting and thinking about Donnie and his pack of friends peddling off like they were the Lincoln County Regulators on dirt-bikes and Donnie was Billie the Kid staring some greasy punk down, arms akimbo, saying *how do you want to do this.* And this other kid staring back at Donnie and his friends behind him, knowing he was beat and there was nothing to do and nowhere to run that was far enough. *You just give me the bike and we'll pretend this never happened.* And he could have been Clint or Carradine, biting down on a half-smoked cigar. Still I want to imagine him like that, standing in silhouette—hair glued back with Aquanet, smelling of Drakkar Noir and sweat, but itching for that kid to say something, do anything. And sure enough, just past high noon, he appeared, tearing down the dirt road, kicking up the dust, front wheel aloft, radiant atop a bike that was mine and not mine and never could or would be—spray-painted black with a saddle seat. The padding gone, the deep V handlebar replaced by something simple and squared off as a shotgun

and as much a part of Donnie as his worn black Chucks. I only rode it couple of times after that and I can't remember if we gave it away or sold it or dropped it off at the dump. I had a birthday coming and got a bright blue 10-speed and a paper route. But the next time my dad called Donnie a punk, it stung and I spoke up, *Hey dad, c'mon. He got my bike back for me. Remember?*

"Returned it" you mean. He laughed and shook his head, staring back for a second like he couldn't quite believe I was his son. *You mean to say, it's been this long and you haven't figured that out?*

by Joel Peckham

You don't know shit about shit

she'd laughed, tilting back her head as I thought of Sarandon in that baseball movie only skinnier, sadder. That summer I spent fucking and sweating, hustling for cash and beer, working a long day in yards and on decks and deep in woods that needed greening, edging, weeding, clearing, heel to shovel, shuddered by the chainsaw's buzz, accumulating scratches, scars, and a brand new vocabulary. With the dropout and the washout, and the trust-fund kid whose dad wanted him to know what it was to work with his back. And the boss's sister, too old for me, too hard but pretty in the right light at the end of the day when everything glowed with exhaustion and "More Than A Feeling" floated up like a body through the static and the dashboard of the truck. She'd offer me a menthol cigarette that I would wave away, *no thanks*, eyes on the road, hands on the wheel, as she laughed at how young and stupid I was, how much I didn't know and had to learn and looked me up and down without heat but maybe just a little hunger and a little hate. Her life: my summer job. What she used to feed her kid and pay rent to her brother for the room above the garage: book-money. Weed money. Packs of condoms at the CVS. There was so much I didn't know, but what I did (or thought I did) I hung onto with both hands, climbed it rung by rung, fist over fist, telling myself don't look down, keep going, don't stop, no matter how badly the shoulders ache or calves cramp, starving for blood.

by Joel Peckham



Mother of Invention
by J. E. Crum

Junior High

I learned about slavery watching
a classmate's back. Her skin was smooth; it reflected
the fluorescent lights, my shame laid bare
on her delicate wrists where she balanced
pencils. Pencils fell off my wrists. Too narrow. Too small. I
learned
our history, not shared, not the same, not
at all okay. It made me sick to imagine her back,
whipped, a back like hers scarred, her body bent. Mr. Smith
raised
his arms, waved his points across the blackboard,
his pants too loose, his shirt untucked, his belly
showing, also black, big and black. I learned a little.

I learned about shock in Mr. Brown's science class, our
hands
in a chain, a circle of fear each time
we misbehaved, his wild, white hair tossed
across his forehead, his hunchback shape, pointy
nose, waiting, waiting for us to scream, to writhe, to
shudder
with the shock as it passed through us,
me to him, to her, to her, to him, the marks on our palms
the proof we wanted. Still, no one believed.

Rumors I learned from Sara, the girl
who died when she swallowed
too many pills and choked
on her vomit, or hanged herself in her bedroom
or the bathroom, the garage. She was pregnant
with her father's child, a neighbor's, not pregnant
at all. It was an accident.

I learned in the language arts hall that I fit
in the music lockers, my body smaller
than a trombone or cello. I laughed
at the boys, sat still, my whole body still,
numb, the small space and darkness
safe. When they let me out, I said thank you.

Brittney taught me about pain, told me
how she passed out when the adult neighbor jammed
himself into her, told her it was normal, that she just needed
to grow up some more. She tried to smile. She was okay,
she said. He told her she was beautiful.
Like my father told me.

by Shawna Ervin

Waiting Room

(after Elizabeth Bishop)

The door jingles hello. A small
fountain gurgles white noise. I stop
by the tea shelf, smell cinnamon, see
the orange and yellow wrapper
in the trash. It means
my therapist is here. She drinks the same
tea each morning, cradles
the same mug. The door
to the copy room is open. A whiteboard
reads, "Have courage. Choose
love again. And again, and again." I close
the door; the rubber catches on the gray
carpet stained from winter mud. I don't want
her love to keep me longer
than I want to stay, to make
me responsible to her.

Music plays. Jazz, the rhythms
uncomfortable. I choose a magazine,
The New Yorker, snicker at the cover
cartoon, Santa drinking
tiny cups of coffee at a diner, the reindeer
outside, shivering. There is a profile
about Julia Louis-Dreyfuss, Elaine
from *Seinfeld*. Her photo fills
an entire page. The golden
sun highlights her smile
lines. Her skin looks dry, haggard. Her eyes
do not smile. I have the same
color eyes, brown with flecks of green and orange.
She wears a white shirt, pressed, even the ruffle
around her neck, which reminds me
of paintings I've seen of people
in Elizabethan England.

Her father died.
Mine too. Mine 2011.
Hers 2016. A year later
she was diagnosed
with breast cancer. I remember
my mom in her green bathrobe, after
a double mastectomy, tubes running
out through the sleeves,
to a bag that collects the fluid
draining. I imagine Julia without
hair, a scarf wrapped tight
around her head. "I have a different
kind of view of my life
now, having seen that
edge," she says. I rest
my hand protectively
on Julia's head.

Suddenly, I hear
my therapist, her voice
jovial, another woman's husky
voice. I can almost
make out words. I turn,
fit my legs between the chair
and a small table. I don't want
to be touched, to touch. The woman emerges,
the door closes. I watch her struggle
with her coat, her arms shaking,
her hands unsure. She swings
her purse over her shoulder. Red.
I pretend I don't see
her red eyes, unsteady steps,
how grief leaves
us the same.

by Shawna Ervin

Beautiful

Before I knew to call them black, I saw his fingers
in the summer grass, the red mower on its side, silver blade
spinning, motor whirring. Turds, I thought
at eight, orange pigtails framing my narrow,
freckled face. Blood splatters on his white whiskers,
dark face, arms, faded jeans, and blue plaid shirt. I
screamed
for help, screamed, for my mom, my dad.
His wife's feet flew, her eyes wide,
his eyes closed, mouth open, gasping.

I followed a concrete dip from my house to theirs,
their white picket fence, fastidious lawn, pansies
in neat rows. "Hi, beautiful." His hands held
mine, rested on my shoulder. "Go ahead. Take some
candy. One for now. One for later." He danced
with me, grinned, lifted me into the air. My dad refused,
said, "Dance with the likes of you?"

He had reached for a stick, forgot
to turn the mower off. In the sun,
his fingers shimmered,
splinters sprayed around
the grass. His wife scooped up his fingers
with her cinnamon hands, dropped
them in a clear baggie, ice cubes,
paper towel, wrapped
his hand in towel.

She lifted his elbow. “Hospital.” I knelt,
he stood, walked. Car door
closed. My hand frozen
between *goodbye* and *may I*
have this dance? He forced
a smile, “They’ll fix me right
up. Don’t you worry, beautiful.”

by Shawna Ervin

by Shawna Ervin



The Gate
by Reuben van Gogh

Section 114

for Suzanne

Pleased to be in company with forty
thousand clapping fans, he stares across
the way as if adrift in lily pads and blossoms
floating through Monet's panorama.

Full-throat roars at hits; strikeout silences
pierced by the beer-man's rising pitch
a batter's walk-up samba -- all orchestral
underscores for colors glowing in the light:

a navy blue padded wall curves past
billiard-table green that sweeps around
rich umber base-path ground; mustard
yellow poles mark outfield corners;
three wide tiers, each a mass of red-hat dabs
rise above the field beside a flashing pinball
scoreboard over which white pennants flutter
in cerulean Winslow Homer watercolor sky.

by Raymond Byrnes

City Boys

Jerry drove his father's Pontiac all the way
to Savage, home of the legendary harness
horse Dan Patch. We were after rainbow trout
where Eagle Creek flows away from town.

Working along the brushy bank, I caught a few
on bottled salmon eggs, gasping when a brown
snake thick as climbing rope rustled weeds
between my boots and slid into the current.

We fished till dusk, attracting nothing but mosquitos
where the cool creek clarifies the Minnesota River.
Trudging back in darkness, we climbed a railroad
trestle, pausing under schools of drifting stars
as galaxies of fireflies glimmered on the floodplain.

by Raymond Byrnes

Stroll

Passing by at 50, the ditch along County 3
seems walled by ragged slabs of green
dotted yellow, with dabs of blue and white.

Driving dusty errands, he scans weedy edges
for darting hazards. Strolling later on the
gravel reveals some things he had not seen:

Brown-eyed Susan, hawkweed, buttercup
cattail, tansy, touch-me-not, fireweed
red-stalked aster, milkweed, turtlehead.

A discarded yellow Post-It-Note up ahead
becomes a broken butterfly. Red berry bits
stud fresh dark droppings on the shoulder.

Fluffed and still near car tracks, a fledgling
warbler squats, stunned perhaps. In the middle
of the road, deer hair threads large dog-like scat.

Tall grasses hold up heads of many textures
some like bursts of purple fireworks, some like
nodding wheat, some like tufts of pale yarn.

Tiny field sparrows dart between thick stems
large dragonflies crisscross territories claimed.
From behind, churning tires grate on stones.

by Raymond Byrnes



on second thought, untitled
by Desiree Dufresne

THE VOLUNTEER

Steaming in the August stench
of Times Square, my co-worker
and I scoot and sidle through
the rush hour roil of office
workers, when she turns to me,
and through whiter than white
teeth, says:

“I believe in giving something
back, so I’m on my way to Faith
Church. Tonight’s my night
to serve supper to the homeless.”

“That’s kind of you,” I say.

“What about you?” she asks.
“What do you do?”

“I never got anything—
so I’ve got nothing to give back.”

Unfazed, she turns away.
We walk on, side by side.

Amid the swarming sidewalk
stands a copper-colored, short
and sturdy, gray-braided woman
wearing a sandwich board sign:
Men’s Suits-Blowout Sale!

She holds out flyers for passersby.
As though she’s a fire hydrant—

all pass her by. Her face glistens
metallic sweat. I step up to her,
take a flyer and say, “Thank you.”

by Ted Jonathan

DONNA

Flat and skinny with lush, straight black hair flowing past her waist, she could be Rapunzel, but talks like a guy. We hang out in the same crowd by the corner Carvel. She laughs heartily at my wisecracks, and like me, favors The Ramones and hates the world. I reassure her: nobody blames her for her older brother's suspected role in setting up a well-liked neighborhood pot dealer for a home-invasion-gun-point-robbery. Seventeen, she takes no breaks between seedy boyfriends. She dumps the latest, a puppy-dog-eyed asshole after a roll of quarters she keeps stashed in the sock drawer of the dresser by her bed disappears. Next day, it's me and Donna, smoking a joint, lounging in the back seat of a friend's wreck. The way she laughs, talks, and her hair—strikes me—as better than tits or ass. We get into making out—when abruptly, she pulls away, says, "We can't, we're friends." "Oh," I say, sadly, "you mean like you just wanna be friends?" "No," she says, "it's just that we *are* friends."

by Ted Jonathan

FATE

Looking down at the gooey orange liquid
and jagged shards of glass on the sidewalk,
I damn well know that if that bottle of soda
tossed from high above had landed a foot
to the left it would've exploded on top
of my head. Sprawled in a puddle of blood,
I'd be too dead to be embarrassed about being
the sole winner of this lottery of the unlucky.
When a passerby phones the cops, I split,

and find shelter in the scrap paper chicken
scratch to-do list I pull from the back pocket
of my pants: withdraw sixty bucks Chase
Bank, haircut, half a pound smoked ham
and 2 Roach Motels at ShopRite.

Missions complete, I crumple the list and
crown it on a small mountain of garbage can
overflow, where the slightest breeze
will blow it into urban eternity.

Home, I place one trap below the kitchen
sink and the other on the bathroom floor,
behind the toilet. I'd rather swallow a roach
whole than have one crawl into my inviting
asshole while I'm on the crapper.

Lunching on the ham, I ask myself who'd
toss a bottle of orange soda onto a busy street.
Could be anyone, from an impulse-control-
challenged punk to the President of the United
States. Or maybe it dropped from the sun.

I then recall every step leading to my brush

with death. Anything seemingly random
happen to affect the timing of my movements?
Detours? Anybody bump into me? Spirit
of my late mother intervene to save my life?
My number simply not yet up? God's warning
to change my nasty ways?

I'm not grand or guarded enough to believe
the close call had anything to do with God,
so I asked Him. Here's what he said, "Son,
life's a mixed bag—a big con—the rest's
a craphoot. Don't take everything so
seriously and get your ass ready to die."

by Ted Jonathan



Except as an avatar
by Kerfe Roig

Memorial Day, 2019

Sidney Aiello

A second unnamed survivor

A father, Jeremy Richman

...

Ninety miles upriver from Washington,
the flag at the Blue Goose Market
flew for a year at half mast.

Was a child of Maryland
killed last year at Parkland?
And why was it

that since those survivors' suicides this March,
as I passed by on the highway,
roof open to the sun and spring air,

the flagpole was empty? But no,

none of that makes sense,
for though 20 of our warriors
killed themselves this month,

a new flag flew on Memorial Day
so huge that at half mast
it would touch the ground.



by Donald Krieger

Obeah

A spiritual practice (origin: Ibo, Nigeria)

He tapped small drums, a wiry man
with skate board, cross-legged
on the summer sidewalk.
I refused his plea for alms
with a palm wave. *Ah*
he said, *the curse*
of the white man.

In my dream he lives
in a concrete room without
furniture or heat, he
and his friends are watched
and murdered, yet they are kind,
make poems and music,
as some did
at Auschwitz.

I felt I had been there
in that room always
with him, my enemy. Then
the bright light of morning
washed through me
with luminous privilege.

by Donald Krieger

Somebody to Love

Jefferson Airplane - 1968

The night Bobby Kennedy died
we were all wounded

and the sick certainty,
nukes in Nixon's hands.

Martin Luther King --
I hardly knew who he was

and not till Denzel's movie
did I know Malcolm X
had even lived.

But when Gracie Slick
burst out of the radio
at that Boston crossroads

streets at all angles
big as a football field
no lights, no signs

I just sat there
stunned ...

I feared for Obama,
and Hilary so bullish

sex like a target
on her chest,

Brady and Reagan,
it hardly mattered

and now the beasts,
Pence and Kushner
lined up next ...

... tears are running ...
... down your breast ...

by Donald Krieger



Flight
by Karen Bowden

About Juliet

It must have been winter when her heart
became a firmament & her countenance, a dove.

(Love disobeys duty—stop before you start.)
I only know my page of night, signifying nothing

over & over again. But she made new meaning,
gracing that forbidden balcony in Verona—

lit by stars sacrificing herself as a soliloquy to stars
in words made of stars about him being cut to stars

by Julia Knowlton

The Kiss

--Amor condusse noi ad una morte

Inferno, canto V

A girl tells a story to a poet in hell.
The story moves forward, sculpted in stone.

The moment of possession not represented.
Rather, the one right after or right before.

Fictions inside each messenger desire.
Man's illusion resting on a virgin's hip.

Less than forever meets the eye. (What is a kiss—
just a flutter? Maybe the act of recollecting

what almost did
happen.)

by Julia Knowlton

Eternal Idol

Lips eclipse in cool resistance of stone—
His insistence humbled by the enigma
of her curves. As she bends to his need,

the arc of her heart surpasses it. She feels
his question enter & become her own.

This is communion beyond animal grasp.
Her eyes close—flowers of ruin offered

with no promise of return.

by Julia Knowlton



The Zephyr
by J. E. Crum

Airport

by *H. Sarah Blumenthal*

A man called Torsten with an iPad. Middle aged brown man in navy sweatshirt- white diagonal slash suggests teeth, Fingered by security matron- “turn around and look at your scan” and then: “you know I have to do this,right?” And then the sight of the scan with me lit up privates- good god! They are red bands across my nether bits- they seem like bricks ready to attack, what the devil am i packing in my undies. “Take a step forward with the right leg, take a step forward with the left leg, and her blue gloved pincers to their happy way up my dress. Then she swabs my hands to test for explosives and it seems to me that the world is a rope of stupid little incidents strung together, and that that’s all it is. Which makes it official clonazepam time! Austrian airlines has killer getups for its crew- head to toe hot red including stockings and shoes. Why are hot guys looking at me, im so fucking old, maybe they’ve seen my scan.

Morning in Cascais, the baldest peeled back blue, the serene blank ocean...just me in the vast restaurant, strung between the sea and continents, heavy with dream. The driver who meets me, swarthy, will exchange head for money, suited. “All the time, the ocean stays to your right” The white shirted girls wipe a table on the terrace.the figure of an old man. Square shouldered, snow headed with a greens and white striped towel walks by. I am a memory of a beach, a dwelling place for imagined birds. You have no mail here, all the beautiful breakfast rooms in which i wish to linger. Being wealthy is like being robbed with oil constantly. Everything being velvet.

Second morning-

Migraine

Irish family the father says “morning dearest”

Contend with monstrosity enormity collapse of my body.

Eat less, exercise more, all i can do

Cascais- an embarrassment of blues

Horizontal of watery light

Why is it we leave the beautiful places behind when we
leave the beautiful places behind?

I like the fathers pink face. Things to do today- sun, sea,
write paint

My father never ever never set for in a place like this and
I’ve been to so many on his dead buried back

Pool scenes-

Portuguese woman, tanned, roundish, early 60s perhaps-
sexy black bathing suit, blondish curls and an arm i don’t at
first register, and arm hangs like a small brown dog, or
lamp or chickenish thing ends in a little palm, the size of a
tangelo. She wears an enormous gold square around her
neck. She teaches a toddler to swim in cold water.

30 august

Cascais

Late wake up. Pity. Had a plan to rise while the morning
still thinly blue like skimmed milk, and to walk to the next
town, but here I am. Woke to a rejection letter, but such a
kind one. Wish they had run that damn story. Gary is right,
it needs an editorial pass, a bit of leaning out, as it were.

Cannot pile enough heaps of breakfast on myself. Good
coffee and sweet. Such a delight to be here in the big sun,
no one deserves to live like this: least of all me.

Remember this- the African man wipes and wipes arcs of
windex across all that gleaming glass. It’s beautiful i say?
Does he understand? Or am i just some fat, old, rich, white
bitch blowing American smoke up his tuchas?

The chicest woman here is French, 50’s, very thin, black
hair white skin, immaculate- breakfast outfit is white

trousers and top, black espadrilles on speed, chignon, red wine lip. Timeless and stunning.

Really tired. Will i write today? Some Portuguese is going to mold and massage my rhinoceros ass with the soft hills of her hands. For cash, And bend over my elephantine feet, contend with that village of scorched toenails, abrade the soles of my feet.

When you're ripped out of sleep its a kind of death into another world.

31 august, the keyboard in flames- assholes next to me and not because she's skinny and comely.

Woman to my left is all the things I love about the world of being, about being embodied. I take her to be a Texan-brash, friendly, open like an empty lot- "how about a menu, mister?"

Rude, yet not. Waist length extensions after 65- blond-love, a watch face of blinged out opulence, stylistic bravado- bathing suit the color of sausage casing. Flipping love her.

Wishing this day would not end- must remember- someone, somewhere, maybe here, suffers unspeakably today as i bask. Again, the gang of windexing Africans constantly wiping-

"Who are you mister?" I think she's sloshed, just had a sangria and ordered a "bucket" thereof.

"Gotta keep these kids under control- giant green thing- ha" courgette.god bless you lady, you made my flipping day.

1 September - the most dreaded month

Summer, you plan to dwindle now. Ok so be it. Whatever, do your thing

Please god let me get safe and sound to Ibiza and then safe and sound home with a good time in between - Oreo style. Let my credit card work let me be ok.

I'm ok. I made it. I am with my tribe.. This sounds ok. I feel alright. Drowsy, nervous with the light. I want to live here and write from this perch, all the seas in the sea. And the waves and insides of the insides, the folds rippled into the folds. Everything, too, is an ear. That Colton Whitehead book breaks, breaks too much, my heart.

2 august, Ibiza morning of geranium so much great sea diamonds against water sky

I want to buy the house next door

The ground here is orange and yellow and brown. Hello, little owl.

5 September

I fucking hate Susanna and hope she dies a torturous death, prolonged pain, senseless cruelty and unmitigated suffering. And jon's a shit, too, for telling me how to write Ezra- when I'm just checking if I'm being toilet appropriate or it's back to hooligan city for me. Whatever, asshole, ugly people, just fucking die already, fucking nico, i hate you.

And ram-whatevs dude, kiss my fucking ass the both of you losers. I hate these fucking people. As daddy would say; "what a bunch".

I'm oh so happy the bell never rang, and no boxes arrived" Whoop de fucking doo

A white box villa, sea views thrice granted, i will live here some day, and also today

5 September

Ibiza

The sun burning like loose leaf paper into the green slab of the sea

Barnacled to the beefy pouch of your heart

The violence of morning when it comes

Again, topples the dark sly pimpled

With starlight all birds are angry

Birds because no longer are they dinosaurs trampling the earth

guggenheim

from fat tot fingers falls rolls
marble on terrazzo slipping the hand that holds following
the pull of gravity mothers
arts oculus splits white light to kaleidoscope whirls and
whorls cats eye pulls forward in nautilus spiral
a specific geography of body unchambered
in descent scrabbles on palm and knee til
finding feet where confluence of memory and storm and
stories not told rolling lost in pursuit acquisition increasing
velocity as voice calls from deeper
still legs longing and losing to particular necessary grief
scruff emerging fullness of body and breath and broken
rigidities of truth and love meeting form
of light and air and memory and hope and beauty and
splendor tumbling out
where worlds slow their spin finally
caught in the aged chuffed fingers
looking out he pulls the universe through teared eye
scattering all light and dark

by Gregory Pelley

Cantilevers 1-5

I.

emerge from baptized water and rise, rift and riven
remembering from what sheltering womb you
come
through sunlight flowing and
feathering
hatchlings pouring onto hand hewn
stone

taste of water

II.

repose now floating in blurred boundary thin
thin the boundary from I to Thou
thou amidst the mist of belonging
belonging to return to unfold again

smell of verdant

III.

hearth heart still living, anchor your imaginings
impossibilities shaken from sleeves

touch of stone

IV.

trellis and terrace; mullion and muntin
partition and poet; pier and post
bold and buoyant; origin and orbit
lingering and longing; harmonic and holy

sound of line

V.

the collision of continents
the falling of water
the grace of trust

drawing light in time

by Gregory Pelley

Sanctuary

These babble tongues of fire douse
and desire conjured gods:

Stephanie who modifies unique and
Woodbury who lost opportunity and

JD who has been to many before and
Gerçon who does not like koans and

Kato who looked down from the very top and
Carl who confesses unchanging perspective and

Julie who does not pay to see staircases and
Fausi who pays too much for pastry and

Gary who is a Chase client and
Doornburg who finds disgrace and

You asked what a sermon is.

I said I did not know.

And body cries for proximate.
And body numbs for touch.

And I feel my vaped tears.
And I speculate forgiveness.

by Gregory Pelley

Ativan Poem #2: Subterraneans

I'm disappointed to find
on waking in my stale bed,
pill bottles on the floor
where they fell when I thrashed
for water in the night,
that I won't be sharing
a steampunk underground
hospital bunker--
spinning wheels, glowing gauges
filigreed useless knobs--
with David Bowie,
nor will I meet his mother
though he reassured me
with his ferocious smile
that she's "such a sass."
Oh Bowie come to me,
Protect me from life's terrors
Keep me fresh and new
And never die.

by Sara Eddy

Ativan Poem #10: Chemo

1,000 subcutaneous snakes tangle,
playing an obscene undulating
game in my veins
with obscure rules,
no certain outcome.
This is not a poem
about deception:
I like snakes
I like their secrets, and
these snakes of mine
are flecked with red,
and move like water serpents
slipping out onto the surface.
They make great commas
on the water, their curves like hips.
Slither is the snake's own word
though sometimes another face
borrows it—a monster or worm
or some cephalopod—
but really it belongs to the snake.
What the snake does
on water, though,
and in my blood,
is more like dancing:
it finds its muse,
it learns the steps, and
I am practicing trust,
I am letting it lead.

by Sara Eddy

Ativan Poem #11: Not Ready

When cancer comes to the door
you won't be ready.
You'll still be getting dressed
your hair will be wet;
you'll have hair.
Does it give you the willies
when I say cancer?
cancer cancer cancer
Marcia Marcia Marcia
Cancer is stupid;
it has no brain
it's not organized.
It can't teach a class,
or make brioche,
build a set of shelves.
It can't persuade a reluctant child
to go to a violin lesson.
But cancer knows enough
to fuck you up.
It will open the door
and if you're lucky like me,
it will be just a sliver,
but you will see
darkness so entire
it is not even nothing,
and the hair will stand up
on your arms and the back of your neck
because you will still have hair
and you will not be ready.

by Sara Eddy

The Assad Number

Eight Springs later and still
you hold time's trigger between
borderlands, having embarked on the slow
shifting of the masses beyond
sight, a horizon of hunger
in which you stare meekly, considering us
and our questions with a look we might mistake
as passive. To be a fascist you learnt to be popular,
a master of language, handsome enough
for an average woman to sleep with you while
to be an artist he needed training:
how to remove the goldfish from its bowl, whether
or not to drink the water left
over, always remembering to write down the sounds
distinct
and unnatural, the ones that seep into his
son's dreams. I knew you were
a fascist because he was not afraid
to say so. I knew he was an artist
because you murdered him before words
appeared on any page. The 3 of us
are far-removed, a visa,
a life away. Still, when I
lose my breath, I curse you, but say
his name.

by Sofia Skavdahl

Idlib, Syria | San Francisco, California

I'm loading the dishwasher tonight and on CNN the newscaster reports how just hours ago a mustard-colored mushroom cloud dropped, soft as snow in Idlib and their cameraman had managed to capture children screaming, waking up to a clean house but their mothers are dead and buried beneath cement, one still cradling her baby, who only lived to know the taste of breastmilk and gas. Earlier today I was walking home from the Goodwill, my brown paper bag split open and passerbyers rushed to pick broken dishes off the sidewalk and there, a woman is buried, her mother is buried and probably her sister, but I cursed the paper bag, scowled at the men trying to help me— I paid 10 cents for that torn up bag and my neighbors cared so much for those broken dishes and I say fuck you Assad, Anderson Cooper says goodnight America and I sleep, I dream in shame.

by Sofia Skavdahl

Father of a Multitude or Many Nations

Poet Ibrahim al-Qashoush has been murdered by Syrian Security Forces. -The Guardian

No one thinks the poet's
life is dangerous, no one thinks
their vocal chords are going to be
removed and no one shoots
the nightingale because
of the threat of its song.

The poet had three sons and
the poet was a fireman.
Drones were striking and
the poet was writing a perpetual
elegy to his country and now
the poem is writing itself with
bombs falling in the backdrop.

The poet's blood is in the river
with half of a million others and
still the river is blue and still
Assad's men are stalking
the white-helmeted men
and the women and especially the
children because their poems
just won't stop- even the shortest
of ones that say simply:

Ibrahim,
Ibrahim,
Ibrahim.

by Sofia Skavdahl

Samvel Aleksanyan (Sam Aleks) is an Armenian-born, American artist and writer living in Los Angeles, California. Sam earned a Master's Degree in English from California State University, Northridge in 2018. His writing has been featured in The Northridge Review, Spring 2014 issue and the July issue of Pif Magazine. His artwork has been featured in the Canyon Voices, Winter 2018 issue and displayed in the Northridge Annual Student Art Exhibit, Spring 2014 as well as in The NOVA Frame and Art Gallery, Fall 2014.

Tohm Bakelas is a social worker in a psychiatric hospital. He was born in New Jersey, resides there, and will die there. His poems have appeared in numerous journals, zines, and online publications. He has published multiple chapbooks in America and the UK and his first poetry collection “Orphan Road” has been published by Uncollected Press. He intends to conquer the small press and exclusively publish within.

Michael Baldwin is a native of Fort Worth, TX, and may be a descendent of the Lakota mystic warrior, Crazy Horse. He holds a BA in Political Science and Master's degrees in Library Science and Public Administration. He is retired from a career as a library administrator and professor of American Government. Mr. Baldwin is published extensively in literary journals and anthologies. His poetry was featured on the national radio program The Romantic Hours, and has twice been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. He won the Eakin Manuscript award in 2011 for his poetry book, Scapes. He won the Morris Memorial Chapbook Award in 2012, for Counting Backward From Infinity. His book of Texas poetry, Lone Star Heart (Lamar University Press, 2016) was a candidate for the Texas Institute of Letters Poetry Book Award. His book, The Quantum Uncertainty of Love, was published in 2019 by Shanti Arts Press. Mr. Baldwin has also published a mystery thriller novel, Murder Music, and three collections of science-fiction short stories, Passing Strange, and Surpassing Strange, & Beyond Passing

Strange; and a children's science/adventure book, Space Cat. Mr. Baldwin resides in Benbrook, TX.

Brian Beatty is the author of the poetry collections *Borrowed Trouble*, *Dust and Stars: Miniatures* (Cholla Needles Press), *Brazil, Indiana* (Kelsay Books) and *Coyotes I Couldn't See* (Red Bird Chapbooks). Beatty's jokes, poems, reviews and short stories have appeared in numerous print and digital publications, including *The American Journal of Poetry*, *The Bark*, *Cholla Needles*, *Conduit*, *Dark Mountain England*, *elimae*, *The Evergreen Review*, *Forklift Ohio*, *Glasgow Review of Books* (Scotland), *Gulf Coast*, *Hobart*, *McSweeney's*, *Midwestern Gothic*, *The Moth* (Ireland), *Museum of Americana*, *NOON*, *Phoebe*, *Poetry City USA*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Quail Bell*, *The Quarterly*, *Rain Taxi* and *Seventeen*, among others. His writing has also been featured in public art projects and on public radio.

Robert Beveridge (he/him) makes noise (xterminal.bandcamp.com) and writes poetry in Akron, OH. Recent/upcoming appearances in *New American Legends*, *Toho Journal*, and *Chiron Review*, among others.

Born in El Paso, TX, **Karen Bowden** moved an average of every 2 years from birth to age 27 and lived in many states and England. She mostly worked as a writer, editor, and desktop publisher, but also in occupations ranging from forklift driver to legal secretary, finding forklift driving by far the more fulfilling. She received her “higher” education at Arizona State University, with a major in English literature and a minor in psychology. For many years, she coordinated the Divergent Arts Poetry Series, which included works by visual artists, musicians, dancers, and “any other artistic expression that knocked on the door.” After years of living in a home filled with art, having many friends who are artists, and visiting museums in several American, European, and Chinese cities, she started painting with watercolors in 2006, and says, “What I love about it are the feel of the brush as paint goes on paper and how paper, paint, water, and light play with and against each other. More than any other art form I engage, watercolor opens a sense of oneness that

some call losing themselves and others call bliss, both accurate descriptions.” The Peoria Arts Commission 2006 Juried Celebration of Artists accepted one of her early efforts as did the Glendale Arts Council Juried Fine Arts Competition in 2007. This is the first time her watercolor work has appeared in a literary arts journal. She is “very pleased and appreciative.”

H.Sarah Blumenthal is a poet and writer from New York.

Sara Brown is a recent literature graduate from Stockton University in New Jersey. She has been published in Into the Void, Camas, Midwestern Gothic, and Tiny Seed Review for her photography and poetry.

Recent work by **Raymond Byrnes** has been read on The Writer's Almanac and published in Third Wednesday, Shot Glass Journal, Better Than Starbucks, Misfits, Typishly, Split Rock Review, and numerous other journals. For many years, after leaving a tenured position teaching college English in the Midwest, he managed communications for the U.S. Geological Survey's National Land Imaging Program. He lives in Virginia

Nikki Carroll is a New Jersey based poet who self-released “Sick, Sad, and Ugly”, a poetry zine earlier in the year. She is currently working on a new release.

Alexis Cortez, or who is more often known by the name "luna" is a Visual Artist born out of Southern California. Although art has always been a constant practice in her life, only until recently has she began showcasing her art to the public. Due to art being a very personal practice for her-- she hopes to captivate her viewers through the figurative expression of the human body and the subtle connotations of her own personal connections as both an artist, a LGBTQ+ woman, and as well as her journey of dealing with Bipolar disorder. Within the "fruit series" you can see the connection of the dismal state of isolation due to depression and the beauty that can easily hide the true meaning behind the something that goes unlooked unless told.

J.E. Crum is a fantastical artist who creates vividly abstracted variations of self-portraits inspired by mythologies. Working intuitively, Crum creates personal narratives related to thoughts about fate, destiny and the meaning of dreams. J.E. also has an exciting career as an elementary art teacher of nearly one thousand children a week in rural locales of central Pennsylvania. Check out: www.zhibit.org/jecrum to see more work by the contemporary fantastical artist, J.E. Crum.

After a rather extended and varied second childhood in New Orleans, **Matt Dennison's** work has appeared in Rattle, Bayou Magazine, Redivider, Natural Bridge, The Spoon River Poetry Review and Cider Press Review, among others. He has also made short films with [Michael Dickes](#), [Swoon](#), [Marie Craven](#) and [Jutta Pryor](#).

Desiree Dufresne is interested in exploring the many facets of life through the lenses of curiosity, critique, wonder, and spontaneity. Her abstractions of the experiences of women, queer people, and the human condition itself seek to find affirmation of life in the midst of sadness and anxiety. She has a reverence for art of all kinds, and is a voracious consumer of visual art, film, written works, and performance art. She lets herself soak in the genius of other artists and refracts her inspirations through her own unique perspective. The self-taught artist works mostly with acrylic and oil paint, but also likes to play with gouache and watercolor here and there. Her unique sense of texture and composition brings the viewer into another world of perception wherein colors and shapes tell a story that is meant to be creatively interpreted. She loves working with different paint media and exploring the strengths and challenges of each one. Her application is confident, irreverent, and at times absurd, but every line, scribble, distorted shape, and unusual color is applied with studied intent. Desiree works as a teacher in Los Angeles, CA and has received two degrees in History. She has been accepted to the MFA in Fine Arts program at the admired OTIS College of Art and Design, and plans to begin classwork next

year. Her artwork is included in several private art collections throughout the United States. She has also created many commissioned works of art.

Sara Eddy is a writing instructor at Smith College, in Northampton, Massachusetts. Some of her poems have appeared recently in *Zingara*, *Tishman Review*, and *Heartwood*, and are forthcoming in the *Baltimore Review*, and *Spank the Carp*. My artbook of poems about bees and beekeeping, *Tell the Bees*, was released in October of 2019 by A3 Press, and another chapbook of poems about food, *Full Mouth*, will come out from *Finishing Line Press* in 2020. She lives in Amherst, Massachusetts with a teenager, a black cat, a white dog, and three beehives.

Shawna Ervin is an MFA candidate at Rainier Writers Workshop through Pacific Lutheran University in Washington state. She is studying nonfiction and poetry and is a recipient of the Carol Houck and Linda Bierds scholarship. Shawna is a Pushcart nominee and has taught writing workshops for both adults and children. In 2017 she attended the Mineral School residency thanks to a fellowship from the Sustainable Arts Foundation. Recent publications include poetry in *Tampa Review*, *The Evening Street Review*, *Euphony*, *Hiram Poetry Review*, *Steam Ticket*; and prose in *Apalachee Review*, *Front Porch*, *The Delmarva Review*, *Summerset Review*, and *Superstition Review*. She lives in Denver with her family.

Ryan Quinn Flanagan is a Canadian-born author residing in Elliot Lake, Ontario, Canada with his wife and many bears that rifle through his garbage. His work can be found both in print and online in such places as: *Evergreen Review*, *The Raw Art Review*, *The New York Quarterly*, *Punk Noir Magazine*, *In Between Hangovers*, *Red Fez*, and *The Oklahoma Review*.

Keith Harper lives in Cabot, Arkansas, where he throws boxes around the back of a Wal-Mart by day and does his writing by night. His great passions are the lives and works of the second generation of English Romantics. Harper's "Blood Moon" recently appeared in Denver's *From Whispers to Roars*.

Mark Hartenbach's latest book of poetry is 'stories from hillbilly fellaheen'

Darby Hudson is a writer from Australia - previously included in wet concrete, old trees and thin air. My first collection of work, 'FALLING UPWARDS', is out through 5 Island Press (University of Melbourne)
<http://fiveislandspress.com/forthcoming/title-forthcoming-darby-hudson> Instagram: @darby_hudson

Ted Jonathan is a poet and short story writer. His poems and stories have appeared in many magazines and anthologies, most recently: Chiron Review, Nerve Cowboy, Paterson Literary Review, and Open Minds Quarterly. He has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize twice. His chapbook Spiked Libido was published by Neukeia Press. His full-length collection of poems and short stories, Bones & Jokes, was published by NYQ Books (2009). His poetry collection RUN was published by NYQ Books (2016). Contact: theodorejon@yahoo.com

Abigail King walks, thinks, reads, cooks, writes and teaches yoga in Austin, TX. More writing and links to other publications are on her blog at mymachobullshit.com.

Julia Caroline Knowlton is Professor of French at Agnes Scott College in Atlanta. She holds MA and PhD degrees in French Literature and an MFA from Antioch U. in Los Angeles. She is the author of the memoir Body Story and the poetry chapbook Café of Unintelligible Desire. She was recently named a 2018 Georgia Author of the Year for her chapbook. The recipient of an Academy of American Poets College Prize and a Pushcart nominee, her poems have appeared in numerous literary journals. Her first full-length collection of poems, entitled One Clean Feather, will be published in late 2019 by Finishing Line Press. You may reach her at juliacarolinefr@gmail.com.

Donald Krieger is a biomedical researcher living in Pittsburgh, PA. His essays and poetry have appeared online in Uppagus

Magazine, Entropy, Vox Populi Sphere, Verse Virtual, Tuck, and others, in print in *Hanging Loose* (1972) and *Neurology*, and in several print anthologies including in both English and Farsi in *Persian Sugar in English Tea*, Volumes I and III.

Gregory Loselle has won four Hopwood Awards at The University of Michigan, where he earned an MFA. He has won The Academy of American Poets Prize, the William van Wert Fiction Award from Hidden River Arts, and The Ruby Lloyd Apsey Award for Playwriting. He was the winner of the 2009 Lorian Hemingway Short Story Competition, The Robert Frost Award of The Robert Frost Foundation, and the Rita Dove Prize for poetry (where he won both First Prize and an Honorable Mention) at Salem College. He has won multiple awards in the Poetry Society of Michigan's Annual Awards Competition. His first chapbook, *Phantom Limb*, was published in 2008, and another, *Our Parents Dancing*, in 2010, both from Pudding House Press. Two more, *The Whole of Him Collected*, and *About the House*, were published by Finishing Line Press in 2012 and 2013 respectively. His short fiction has been featured in the *Wordstock* and *Robert Olen Butler* Competition anthologies, as well as in *The Saturday Evening Post*, and *The Metro Times* of Detroit, and his poetry has appeared in *The Ledge*, *Oberon*, *The Comstock Review*, *Rattle*, *The Georgetown Review*, *River Styx*, *The Spoon River Poetry Review*, *The Pinch*, *Alehouse*, *Poetry Nook*, *Sow's Ear*, and online in *The Ambassador Poetry Project*, among others.

Simon Maddrell was born in Douglas, Isle of Man in 1965, raised in Bolton, Lancashire, and lived in London, UK since 1999. In 2002, after 12-years with Xerox, Simon founded and ran a multi award-winning charity, *Excellent Development*. Having written poetry since 2012, Simon resigned in 2016 to focus full-time on writing and performing. Simon seeks to discover truths using words that move & inspire change through the lens of living as a queer Manx man, thriving with HIV. He focuses on spirituality, justice, equality, discrimination, mental health & politics, plus land & ocean landscapes.

Elizabeth Markley is a writer living in Atlanta, Georgia. She has been previously published in The Write Launch, The Mighty Line, Cleaning up Glitter, The Feminine Collective, Haunted Waters Press, and Castabout Literary Magazine. When she is not writing she is kept busy by her children, two rambunctious boys under the age of four.

Lydia McDermott lives and writes in Walla Walla, WA. Her critical and creative work has appeared in a variety of venues, most recently on Cathexis NW Press, The Read Earth Review, Prometheus Dreaming, and Red Flag Poetry. In her spare time, she walks her pugs, cuddles her pugs, and feeds her pugs treats.

J. Ray Paradiso - A confessed outsider, Chicago's J. Ray Paradiso is a recovering academic in the process of refreshing himself as an experiMENTAL writer and street photographer. His work has appeared in dozens of publications both online and in print. Equipped with cRaZy quilt graduate degrees in both Business Administration and Philosophy, he labors to fill temporal-spatial, psycho-social holes and, on good days, to enjoy the flow. All of his work is dedicated to his true love, sweet muse and body guard: Suzi Skoski Wosker Doski.

Joel B. Peckham, Jr's poetry has appeared The Black Warrior Review, Prairie Schooner, Rattle, The Southern Review, Tar River Poetry and many other journals. His most recent collections include his essay collection, Body Memory (New Rivers Press, 2016), his memoir, Resisting Elegy (Chicago Review Press, 2012) and two collections of poetry from Futurecycle Press: the chapbook Why Not Take All of Me: A Cycle of Poems on the Life and Music of Billie Holiday (2014) and the full-length collection, God's Bicycle (2015). He lives in Huntington WV with his wife Rachael, and son, Darius.

Gregory Pelley is a curious guy. He explores the world with wonder, then endeavors to work out his experience in words. He is a better than average cook and has recently been listening to a lot of Willie Nelson songs. His adoring fan base includes his

wife, two daughters, a Boston terrier, an English bulldog, and of course, his mom. (Hi, Mom!) He once was an architect and now is a minister in the Unitarian Universalist tradition — which perhaps obviously makes poetry his next adventure.

Josephine Pino grew up surrounded by beauty, culture, and love in Albuquerque and currently lives near Portland, Oregon. She is a scientist by diploma, educator by heart, and writer by nature. She enjoys the intersections between all things that intersect, and frequently, but not always, writes about trees. She has published poems in *Cathexis NW*, *High Shelf Press*, *Tiny Seed Literary Journal*, and *Raw Art Review*.

Heather Quinn is a poet living in San Francisco and is drawn equally to life's light and shadows. She is awed by that unnamable and indestructible force that burns brighter than shame, which inspires much of her writing. She loves the act of layering memory, imagination, images, the visceral and spiritual in her work, and often thinks of writing as collage-making. She has been published in *Burning House Press*, *Ghost City Review*, *Minnesota Review*, *Zoetric Press' Nonbinary Review*, *West Marin Review*, among others. She is a founding member of a peer-led poetry workshop, which has been meeting regularly since 2002. She spends her free time mining for words that are so alive they beat in time with her pulse, and whispering those words into her husband's ear.

Jendi Reiter is the author of the novel *Two Natures* (Saddle Road Press, 2016), the short story collection *An Incomplete List of My Wishes* (Sunshot Press, 2018), and four poetry books and chapbooks, most recently *Bullies in Love* (Little Red Tree, 2015). Awards include a Massachusetts Cultural Council Fellowship for Poetry, the New Letters Prize for Fiction, the Wag's Revue Poetry Prize, the Bayou Magazine Editor's Prize in Fiction, and two awards from the Poetry Society of America. *Two Natures* won the Rainbow Award for Best Gay Contemporary Fiction and was a finalist for the Book Excellence Awards and the Lascaux Prize for Fiction. Reiter is the editor of *WinningWriters.com*, an online resource site with contests and

markets for creative writers. For literary news, readings, and reviews, visit JendiReiter.com and follow @JendiReiter on Twitter.

Brian Rihlmann was born in New Jersey and currently resides in Reno, Nevada. He writes free verse poetry, much of it confessional. He has been published in *The Blue Nib*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Mad Swirl*, *Cajun Mutt Press*, *The Rye Whiskey Review*, and others. His first poetry collection, “*Ordinary Trauma*,” (2019) was published by Alien Buddha Press.

A graduate of San Diego State University’s MFA Program, **Chrissy Rikkers** lives in Montreal with her husband and two children, where she teaches English at Vanier College. In 2010, Christine was chosen for the Quebec Writers Federation (QWF) Mentorship Program, where she was privileged to work with the poet Anita Lahey. Her work has been published in *Louisville Review*, *Portland Review*, *CV2*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *Tidal Basin Review*, *DMQ Review*, *Web Del Sol Review of Books* and *San Diego Poetry Review*.

Janet McMillan Rives resides in Tucson, Arizona. She was born and raised in Connecticut and spent most of her adult life in Iowa where she retired as professor of economics from the University of Northern Iowa. Her poems have appeared in **Lyrical Iowa*, *Ekphrastic Review*, *Sandcutters*, *The Avocet*, *Unstrung*, *The Blue Guitar*, *Fine Lines*, *Wanderlust Journal* *and in the anthologies **Voices from the Plains*, *Facing West*, *Desert Tracks: Poems from the Sonoran Desert**, and **The Very Edge** (forthcoming). Her chapbook, **Into This Sea of Green: Poems from the Prairie**, will be published in 2020.

Adam “Bucho” Rodenberger is a surrealist writer from Kansas City. He released his first short story collection, “*Scaring the Stars into Submission*,” in 2016 and released his second collection, “*The Machinery of the Heart: Love Stories*” in May of 2019. He has been published in *Aphelion*, *Bluestem Magazine*, *BrainBox Magazine*, *Castabout Art & Literature*, *Cause & Effect*

Magazine, Crack the Spine, Eunoia Review, Five Quarterly Magazine, Ginosko Literary Journal, Glint Literary Journal, The Gloom Cupboard, Hamilton Stone Review, The Heartland Review, Inlandia: A Literary Journey, J.New Books, L'allures des Mots, Lunch Box, Marathon Literary Review, Meat For Tea: The Valley Review, New Dead Families, Penduline Press, Phoebe, Poydras Review, The Raw Art Review, The Santa Clara Review, Serving House Journal, The Seventh Wave, Sheepshead Review, Slice Magazine, Summerset Review, Waxing & Waning, Fox Spirit's "Girl at the End of the World: Book 1" anthology, and was included in the "Broken Worlds" anthology published by Almond Press.

A resident of New York City, **Kerfe Roig** enjoys transforming words and images into something new. She likes to recycle materials, but she does not limit herself to any particular media. Her poetry and art have been featured online by Right Hand Pointing, Silver Birch Press, Yellow Chair Review, The song is..., Pure Haiku, Visual Verse, The Light Ekphrastic, The Ekphrastic Review, and The Wild Word, and published in Ella@100, Incandescent Mind, Pea River Journal, Fiction International: Fool, Noctua Review, and several Nature Inspired anthologies. She also participated in the exhibits Fun House: Art of the Surreal, Fantastic, and Bizarre, New Directions 2016, and We the People at Barrett Art Center in Poughkeepsie, NY, and War in the Arts: Redeeming Spirits at SUNY Orange Gallery in Middletown, NY. Follow her explorations on her blogs, <https://methodtwomadness.wordpress.com/> (which she does with her friend Nina), and <https://kblog.blog/>, and see more of her work on her website <http://kerferoig.com/>

Blue Rose is an emerging artist living in Australia. Her work is about subconscious, emotion, and perception within a botanical backdrop. She spends her time painting, drawing, and moving with the sun and rain. Her artwork is available to view via [instagram@blueroseart6041](https://www.instagram.com/blueroseart6041).

Since retiring from daily journalism in 2013, **Robert Eugene Rubino** has published poetry and prose in various literary journals, including The Esthetic Apostle, High Shelf Press, Forbidden Peak Press, The Write Launch, Cagibi, Poetic Bond IX and Hippocampus, with work forthcoming in Haunted Waters Press and Bridge. He's old enough to have seen Willie Mays at the Polo Grounds and smart enough to solve Monday's New York Times crossword puzzle (other days not so much). He lives in Palo Alto, California.

Christy Sheffield Sanford has won a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in Poetry and is the author of seven small press books. She holds a masters degree from Antioch University in Creative Writing and Interarts. Her video animations have been published by literary ezines and include "Julia Child's Legs" (*Carbon Culture Review*), "Nadine's Shoulders in Moonlight" (*Amp*), and "Poe's Purloined Molars" (*Atticus Review*). "Nadine" was shown in the gallery at ELO 18 (Electronic Literature Conference). Sanford won the 2016 *Bacopa Literary Review* cover contest. Her art has appeared on the cover of *Yellow Chair*, and a suite of eight images from *The Hem-nal* were featured in *High Shelf Press*.

Adam Schechter is a musician and poet living in South Dakota. His poems are forthcoming or have appeared in the Conglomerate, Storm Cellar, Tiny Seed Literary Journal, Prometheus Dreaming, Pasque Petals, Cathexis Northwest Press, and others.

Jerrold Schwarz teaches creative writing at the University of Tampa and edits poetry for Driftwood Press. His chapbook collection 'conjure' was published in 2019 by Thirty West Publishing House. His poetry has appeared in PANK, Entropy, The Fem, five;2;one, and many others. Most recently, his poetry was featured on VICE and New Republic. He lives in Tampa, Florida with his wife and twin toddlers.

Sofia Skavdahl is an award-winning poet and writer based in the San Francisco Bay Area. Her work can be found in The

Academy of American Poets, Prometheus Dreaming Magazine, Peace Review, & Raw Art Review.

Kim McNealy Sosin resides in Omaha, Nebraska. She is an Emerita Professor of Economics at the University of Nebraska Omaha. Sosin is interested in poetry writing and photography, and is a member of the Nebraska Writers' Guild and Omaha Artists, Inc. Her poems and photographs have appeared in publications such as *Fine Lines, Failed Haiku, Daily Haiga,**, Landscape Magazine, The Heron's Nest, Wanderlust Journal, Ekphrastic Review,* *Sandcutters, *and the anthology *Voices from the Plains.*

Troy Turner is a poet and author currently living in the Pacific Northwest. This is his first time being published.

Ruben van Gogh (1967) is a Dutch poet and libretto writer, he has published 7 volumes of poetry and written over 10 librettos. Over the last 2 years he started to make smartphone-art: strange images in which he combines several heavily altered photos, only using his smartphone and daily shot pictures.

Laura Voivodeship was born twice in rural West Yorkshire, UK. While faking her way through higher education she worked as a bookseller, a waitress, an artist's model, an analogue shredder and a curator of horses, among other, less notable positions. She mainly writes erasures and sestinas, and cares more about caesuras than you'd like to hear about. Her most recent poems have been published in Kestrel, Poached Hare, and The Ellis Review.

James Walton was a librarian, a farm labourer, a cattle breeder, and mostly a public sector union official. He is published in many anthologies, journals, and newspapers. He has been shortlisted for the ACU National Literature Prize, the MPU International Prize, and the James Tate Prize. His poetry collections include The Leviathan's Apprentice, Walking

Through Fences, and Unstill Mosaics (forthcoming). He is now old enough to be almost invisible. He lives in Australia.

Kelly Wang is a self taught artist in the beginning of finding both herself and her style. She has taken many years off of her art, running from the images in her head and only recently has begun to accept what she sees, feels and putting it back out for the world to see. Kelly's focus is based on her own fears of insecurity, loneliness, abuse and inability to be vulnerable with others. Each of her paintings represent a real life internal struggle that she has faced. Kelly's most recent collection depicts her emotional affair that she had which came to an end while she was on a 2 month tour through China in the summer of 2019 and the effects on her family. Kelly uses a variety of mediums. Her favorite is acrylics on canvas and is incorporating modeling paste to add a 3 dimensional sculpture style to her 2 dimensional work. You can also find Kelly dabbling with charcoal, soft pastel, pencil and gouache. Many times her paintings will incorporate multi mixed mediums.

Jennifer Woodworth studied creative writing at Old Dominion University. She is the author of the chapbook, *How I Kiss Her Turning Head*, published by Monkey Puzzle Press. Her stories and poems have appeared in or are forthcoming from Gone Lawn, The Citron Review, Bending Genres Journal, The Eastern Iowa Review, *82 Review, The Inflectionist Review, and The Raw Art Review, among others. She is a nominee for a 2020 Best Microfiction. She knows how lucky she is anytime she gets to write.

John Wykle is a retired social worker, a graduate of New Directions, a writing program sponsored by the Washington Baltimore Center for Psychoanalysis. My work has been published in Ruminant, The Wayne Literary Review, Foliate Oak Literary Magazine, Raw Art Review, Genre: Urban Arts, Voices and Founder's Favorites. I am currently working on a novel about the life of a man who suffers from a dissociative disorder.,