

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



Summer 2020

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COVER ART:

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Abbreviating Goddess Symbolism**

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Farewell

When we parted, all the water
evaporated from the earth's ocean
so only endless mountains of salt
remained as heavy as the moon,
as heavy as my heart.

On a pilgrimage in your honor
to discover the tallest mountain
I traversed through treacherous terrain
while the sheer sun against the white
hurt my eyes, and with every heavy footstep
my black boots crunched the salt
where this sound ricocheted
from mountain top to mountain top.

I prevailed by reaching the sparkling summit
then laid flat on my back, and made an angel
sensing her spirit rising
while witnessing the pinnacle of the sunset
its pink rays like roses without thorns—oh how
I wish I could have bottled up that for you.

For the sake of freedom, I shouted:
“Let it rain” well equipped with
my lifeboat made out of driftwood.

The rain did come dissolving the mountains,
and I saw your reflection in a singular drop.

by Sophia Falco
(WINNER: Mirabai Prize for Poetry)



Beauty of the Beast #617

by William Brown

(FIRST RUNNER-UP RAR Summer 2020 Cover Art Contest)

Boxae

Another rapid child fills
a shoe box up with sand and
thinks each grain a voice:

this is

how it is to talk to you.

When I whisper in your ear,
this is what hears:
an under-sleeping window
box unlocked.

A human echocave: Ear
of Dionysius, stone deaf.
Fixed Black Box who speaks in zero
hears messages to the dead.

I hang on to your aside face
by tearing off my last nail:
where are you traveling? In place
of love, I drip the blood pail.

by Alan Bern
(FIRST RUNNER-UP: Mirabai Prize for Poetry)



Marseilles Hangout

by Keith Edwards

(RUNNER-UP RAR Summer 2020 Cover Art Contest)

Unviable Psalm

The old body pulls itself
Apart, flees
Animals in motion
In the old body
Bats running into each other midair
Elephants visiting the graves
Walruses digging tusks into each other
Penguins dancing belly to belly
Ring-necked parrots talking
Whistling at each other

But in the blood oven
A pod of Dolphins listen
A pleat of pregnant
Women echolocating
Spinal cords in the
Bond of being
The same old body throbs, tends
To the same old seed
Implanting anew, germ in time
Compared
To a whale
Compared
To me³

by Lily Kosmicki
(SECOND RUNNER-UP: Mirabai Prize for Poetry)



Our Brothers
by Serge Lecomte
(RUNNER-UP RAR Summer 2020 Cover Art Contest)

THINGS THE CROW KNOWS

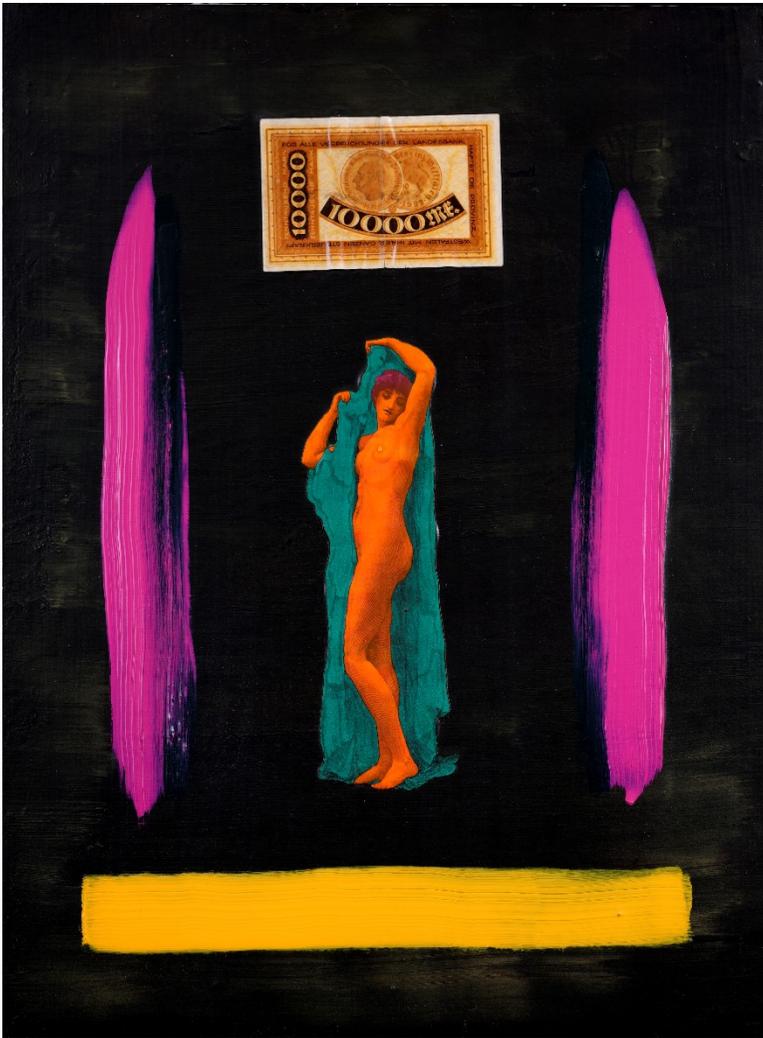
The crow knows all the old sayings
from all the ancient arguments,
knows “as the crow flies” is just
a mismeasurement of *is*

God knows the crow watches
fallen calves outside the fences
chased away for cleft palates
or they just ran off too curious
about the dirt-feel of the logging road
and God know the crows prayer-
circle the cows when the calves
come home limp over fieldhand’s arms
and all the cows gather to mourn
in low and indecipherable tones.

The crows square off against the man
at the fence, mocking his property sign,
making him fear to enter what he posted
to keep out. The shiny-eyed crows
keep vigil, impervious of warnings
against trespass, sentinel themselves
until the cow eulogies are spent.

The crow knows that God knows
they are innocent of murder and man
reviles his kind without cause. The crow knows
God gave him, as an apology for winter,
atonement for our superstition, the sweet
mysterious ability to fly straightaway
heavenward, home.

by Pamela Sumners
(RUNNER-UP: Mirabai Prize for Poetry)



10000 Mark Girl

by Silas Plum

(RUNNER-UP RAR Summer 2020 Cover Art Contest)

We Look into Fire

August to September and something's
shifted. Maybe we're bored, maybe
we're not so young, maybe
we're waiting for some final, safe arrival.
Weren't we promised a moment of arrival?
It's cold too early, he says and builds
a fire. I take to reading horoscopes,
to Tarot cards on the coffee table, see
myself in the Queen of Cups while he
insists he's Taurus so *Where's the card
for Taurus*. All month, every night, the fire
burning itself up, and the two of us watching
with less and less to say.

October,

we feed our restlessness
into a camping trip. I think we're headed
for the Catskills, but he turns south for West Point,
and I find myself

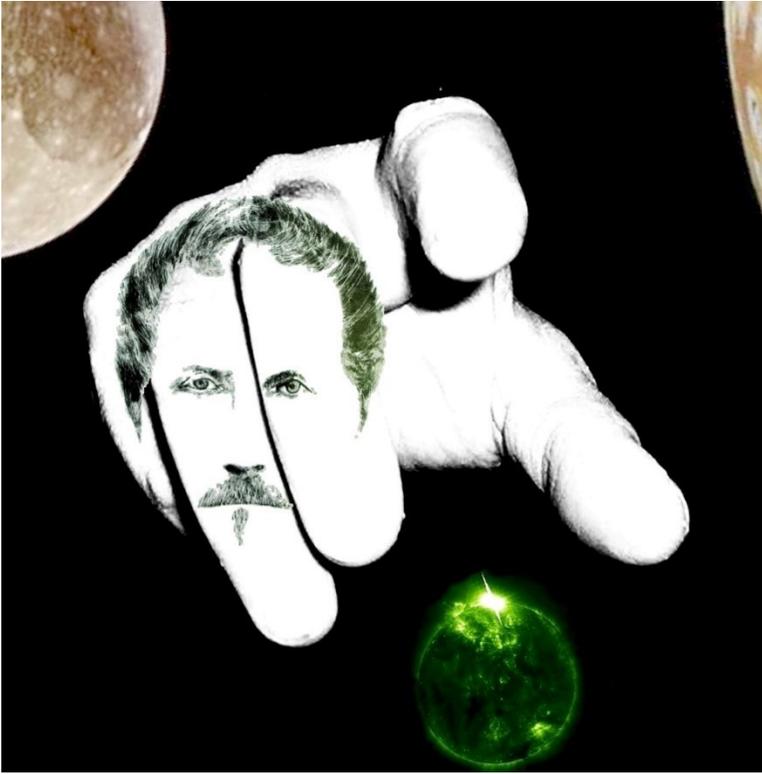
beside him on the edge
of a manicured space called The Plain
watching row after row of the young
burning to serve, to be uniform,
to be in formation under the bronze
gaze of statues—six wars, six generals—
all our synchronous human lives
spent in repetitive motion.

Another night,
another fire. This time camp fire,
and right away it doesn't satisfy us,
doesn't fill us up. We keep hauling in
the dead wood tossing it, heaving it into the leap
and the roar, hypnotized past midnight
by fire-flakes that stream upward

into the maple where they flare
and scorch the leaves.

Buddha says
everything is burning, though probably
he means some other combustion—
invisible to my ordinary eyes. But
I don't have time
to look into it. Things keep slipping
from my hands—this book, that glass, last year's
summer, next year's blizzard.
And here inside a mountainous dark,
I can't help myself, I'd rather
look into fire. How do I suffer
this icy minute
when I am such brief fuel?

by Gail DiMaggio
(RUNNER-UP: Mirabai Prize for Poetry)



Singularity

by Tony Murray

(HONORABLE MENTION RAR Summer 2020 Cover Art Contest)

Americans

12-3-09

You'd think, with the lights flicking on
At sunset, on Boar's Head, and further
Down along the coast, glinting, sparkling stars in the
Distance, Massachusetts, the long arm of Cape Ann,
Blue hills stretching out to sea
Into the crimson sky of sunset, striated clouds above,
Vivid orange pools in the sand
Left by the outgoing tide,
And breakers curling and cresting
A hundred yards offshore, white spume
Crowning the rocky jut of sandbar at the edge of the cove
And the smell of brine so strong,
The laugh of the gulls moving inland for the night,
And the empty beach, the seaweed, the sand,
You'd think I lived in a civilized place,
But I don't. I live among the Americans.

by James Garland
(RUNNER-UP: Mirabai Prize for Poetry)



I Change with the Seasons

by Jocelyn Ulevicus

(HONORABLE MENTION RAR Summer 2020 Cover Art Contest)

from “the magpie poem”

my magpie knows

words beyond my mouth

ich, no, whimper of the neighbor’s

backyard dog, *No*, splash of sick into sink,

consanguineal may I have a definition

c-o-n-s-a-n, teeth popping the grape...

by Jasmine Khaliq

Originally published in Black Warrior Review

(HONORABLE MENTION: Mirabai Prize for Poetry)

<https://therawartreview.files.wordpress.com/2020/12/the-magpie-poem-by-jasmine-khaliq-honorable-mention.pdf>



Rooted

by Belinda Subraman

(HONORABLE MENTION RAR Summer 2020 Cover Art Contest)

Gratias ex Animo

to numb nights with no heater
 to empty bellies & banks
 to dry heaving into a wet pillow
to no water or electricity
 to working two jobs & dealing on the side
 to that eviction notice
to my last cigarette, to my empty pipe
 to no cash, credit, or debit
 to debt
to the darkness that swallowed every piece of me
 & spit me back out whole
to friends who weren't really friends
 & lovers who didn't really love me
I say thank you
 thank you for reminding me
 of the fire that fills me up
of the home I have in my heart
 of going low to get high
 & of the wealth in wisdom

thank you for reminding me
 of the light within me
 & of practicing humility
thank you
 for showing me bitter
so I can stay sweet

by K. Riley

(HONORABLE MENTION: Mirabai Prize for Poetry)



Timeline of the Far Future

by Danielle Klebes

(HONORABLE MENTION RAR Summer 2020 Cover Art Contest)

a shadow

something both there and not there
an interruption of light, an echo [silent]
a place to hide, store secrets escape

i had a cat named shadow once
not silent that cat could talk [complain]
though he did manage to hide [away]
every night when mother called him in

he ran into the street when i was seven
we found his tail a block away [echo]

in a dream, a man with hands and a face
shrouded in darkness in ebonies in grays
told me you were but a shadow [now]
something both there and not there
an interruption of life, an echo [silent]

maybe i'm a shadow to you [specter]
as you gaze at me from the other side

when i woke, i could see the outline
of where the man stood, hands on my
shoulders [maybe], hot breath on my face
the wake in the air after someone leaves

something both there and not there

by Kaecey McCormick
(HONORABLE MENTION: Mirabai Prize for Poetry)



Embossed

by Emily Rankin

(HONORABLE MENTION RAR Summer 2020 Cover Art Contest)

THE PICKLING OF LIMES

You are a fallen crop
Key lime yellow
I'm throwing you together
Away from the shaded grove of trees
To pickle you as if
You are Indian limes.

It will take two weeks
I quarter you, I blanket you
Wrinkled rind, corpulent flesh,
crimped seeds
With rock salt, dried chili powder
Turmeric

Cane sugar cast for balance
Burnish you under the sun

I unscrew the stiffened lid
The old Mason jar smells faintly
Of apricots.

A friend from Chennai calls
Asks if she can visit next month
Tells me lime and lemon are
just one word — neemboo.

Sun-soaked, slick with oil, fermented
I will add ingredients foreign to me —
Fenugreek seeds, roasted and ground
Hing powder, black mustard seeds
Sputtered in sesame oil.

Let the oil kiss your skin
As you age, you will taste
Fiery hot, a feast
Of chicken biryani, eaten with our hands
A glass of chilled Kingfisher
I pray my friend will stay awhile.

by Clare Chu

(HONORABLE MENTION: Mirabai Prize for Poetry)



Lipochrome

by Jodi Filan

(HONORABLE MENTION RAR Summer 2020 Cover Art Contest)

Let the vines grow

The moon pours over the levee,
the last of sun fading from the gone day.
Don't waste your tears on me, Mama.
It's too late to pretend you care.
Two-thousand miles between us was never enough,
though now I'm now content to stay six feet apart.
Don't visit me, Mama, all dressed up in heels and makeup,
carrying freshly plucked magnolias and scorn
in your still-blinking eyes—to set upon
the grave where my flesh will rot
beneath the stone that bears my name.
Be kind, Mama, for once in your life.
The sun has set, the night is long.
Leave me to slumber in this hole dug just for me.
Don't come around with your still-beating heart
to uproot bindweed with your still-wrenching hands.
For once in your life, let the vines grow wild.

by Cynthia Le Monds
(HONORABLE MENTION: Mirabai Prize for Poetry)



Fire Hydrant with Reflection #499
by William Brown

Self Portrait

Over time, the pulse beats consideration for other bodies.
An etiquette, and also a tourniquet wish. It's about finish.
And broader rhythms that lead up to it.

Sight runs gamuts of electricity — insect wings. Beating
eyelashes.

Until reflectiveness follows a
white milk —
viscous color — like skin over a frog muscle throat.
A tabacle page.

Imagine moves — even this through gravity — like the light.
How many beats should it take? My tongue taking fly. My smile.
To create a word with sense enough to feel some weight.
Not like scribbles
— my body from scribbles. A self-portrait.

by Leon Fedolfi

(HONORABLE MENTION: Mirabai Prize for Poetry)



Fire Hydrant with Reflection #499

by William Brown

His Brain is a Fish

The memorized notes scoot out of the dead wood
his hands clawing choreographed flames

The pink wings of the vibrato tingling his skin
calliopes of pure thought fluid in the paper sky

Electric blue in a flashing loop
his clay mask temporarily dislodged

by George Anderson

The God of Doors

like a darkly bruised banana
I miss the flesh of her pale lips

I miss the depth of field
of her spider-bite piercings

I miss her tight aperture,
her perfectly sculptured comb-over

instead: the self-satisfied swagger
of bewildered pin-striped suits

towards goals as purposeless
as birds without wings

diamond necklaces of short-sightedness

by George Anderson

The Cult of the Amateur

they found him snoring
in the hazy light of the street lamp
wheezing in shallow gasps
his once translucent eyes
like shreds of torn flesh

once. twice. she calls him.
a detached, unapologetic voice
the pale walls of the motel room dangling
what's wrong pappy?

a small red circle
illuminated on her dress
her shoulder blades protruding
under the lace
he wears a weariness
of purity despoiled
by bloodied knuckles
what's wrong pappy?

each word screaming inside him
the light burns his eyes
a deep red gash in the wooden door

the stout woman
pops the boot
& heaves in the sagging plastic bag
in retrospect, his head hangs pale
& wiry on the lounge

thru the slot in the wall
he sees the cause of everything:

Fidel's agonised limp
the spurt of red on white
the hot-keyed status screen
blinking in ominous black

by George Anderson



Nature Writing Tide Pool
by Sylvia Van Nooten

LIZZIE SIDDAL - THE APPARITION
BY STEPHANIE E. DICKINSON

CRANBOURNE ALLEY

Looking from the shop through an open door into a back room, he saw a very tall young woman working with the needle: It was Elizabeth Siddal. Deverell was at this time beginning a well-sized picture from Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night" —Deverell wanted to get a model for Viola, and it struck him that here was a very suitable damsel for his purpose.

--Lucinda Hawksley, *Lizzie Siddal: The Tragedy of a Pre-Raphaelite Supermodel*

When the dark-eyed man comes into the bonnet shop and asks if I would sit for him to paint me I tremble. He's an artist and has seen me in the window and I must come to his studio with my chaperone. Sitting for him pays double my wages for drudgery. His breath on my cheek smells clean as if he'd just eaten grass. I know all the moths' names but the tawny fawn sphinx is my favorite; I can balance a book on my head and shop at market, I fell in love with Tennyson when I found his words on a newspaper scrap used to wrap butter. I've learned the bloody language of hats whose pins stick my fingers for twelve hours a day, 6 days a week. They are Leghorns, Gainsboroughs, poke bonnets. Birds are sold to us, raised and strangled and stuffed for my needle to sew to a bonnet. Silk and satin, horsehair and crepe I equally hate. I was taught how to enunciate, to sit and stand, to speak softly and intelligently, I was taught you don't pick your teeth with fish bones or crack nuts between your

jaws, and yet I was sent to work in this dark and stifling burrow, this millinery shop of Mrs. Tozer. From reveille to 8 p.m. I fight the velvets and plaited canes. When I trudge homeward down narrow muddy streets, blackened brick rises up on either side. Picture the hats I am modelling now. They say I am a marvelous creature, wonderfully tall, long neck. A love goddess. My image melts onto canvas, I look and a white vulture looks back.

THE KISSED MOUTH

Lizzie Siddal was acutely aware that in the years she had been waiting for Dante Gabriel Rossetti to marry her she had metamorphosed from a fresh young girl of 20 to a listless woman of 28 who was still unmarried, knowing she could not supersede the physical temptations of a 17-year old beauty.

--Lucinda Hawksley, *Lizzie Siddal: The Tragedy of a Pre-Raphaelite Supermodel*

Hours of being raped by his eyes, the air in the room becomes a stir-thickened custard. Her name is Jane. Like the dimples in each of her cheeks the wide openness of her eyes hurts me. All at once my stomach fills my throat and I gag. My spittle smells of too strong bergamot and lemon, his infidelities. I wipe my mouth with the long-sleeved white of his smock, the one he wears to paint his young models. I can't compete with a girl of 17, the ripe fruit of her mouth, the thick black curls. Her fecundity. I'm 28 and soon laudanum will destroy my starver's body. I won't think about his thumbs massaging her neck after she models for him. He will be praising her for holding the pose. *My paint brush is forcing its prints into you*, he'll say as he did to me when my tall paleness enchanted him. *Your skin is translucent. An apparition.* For eight years he's dangled marriage like a trinket tossed to a raven. You trick yourself when you freeze into a pose. His temper flashes are crucifix insects seared in the old incense of a discarded lover. Look into his mouth, see the cut glass teeth. His philandering gives off a reptile smell, of vegetable rot, of ruined moonlight. Her name is Jane. Mine is Lizzie. Neither of us can picture his future when the

tulip tree seeps its lethal perfume. His love of chloral and whiskey. He will see people not there. Bodies without heads playing chess, legs running by themselves. His art will feed the dark nostrils of the death horses, just as he devoured the art between my lips, delicately scented.

SELF PORTRAIT

A distraught Rossetti made a tremendous effort to wake his wife Lizzie Siddal. A suicide note was pinned to her gown asking Rossetti to care for her disabled younger brother.

--Lucinda Hawksley, *Lizzie Siddal: The Tragedy of a Pre-Raphaelite Supermodel*

I see what the doctors he's brought are thinking. So this is she, the tall finely formed one with the heavy luxury of copper-golden hair. The shine is leaving her, the bluing of her brilliant skin has begun. Gabriel must stop them from sticking the tube down me, must stop them lifting and shaking me. Gabriel, do you remember the milkweed? When we first met we would lie in the weeds looking at the stars, so many bits of burning light. You said we had to blow the milkweed into the air to see how long our breath could keep it afloat, otherwise our love would die. Like the marshes dying and all its water haunted by cypress knees and grey herons weeping. Remember their feathered corpses stinking on the bank of our little island? The obituary will give my birth date wrong. The woman in the casket just turned thirty-one. I won't go back to the waiting, the listening. The clock has stopped and Gabriel needs to wind it. They say the decapitated head goes on thinking for minutes like Anne Boleyn's eyes witnessing her headless torso. I am still breathing but cannot wake. I've drowned yet they try to prod me to speak. Gabriel begs me to stay. Too late. The lace at my wrists is far as Glasgow. His fingers that squeeze mine even farther. *Please*, he says, *please don't leave*. Every step on the stair, every slam of glass and cold wind is passing through me. I am an

empty hallway. When you take off my stockings you will find my feet pale and blue-veined, when you rip off my dress you will see my breasts are small, my buttocks slim, you may notice my pelvis protruding. My lungs pale as milk, my heart, already dust. Look at my hands, they are washing my long body, touching, scrubbing my long bones. I am your wife, not your dustman with his cart that clomps the cobblestones at dawn. You let the milkweed fall.

BEATA BEATRICE

Rossetti went to teach a night class at the Working Men's College. Before he left, he saw Lizzie settled into bed – she had taken her usual dose of laudanum and there was about half a bottle left. When he returned from work, the bottle was empty. Lizzie was in a sleep so deep he was unable to wake her – and she had written him a note. Yelling for their landlady to fetch a doctor, Rossetti hid the incriminating letter.

--Lucinda Hawksley, *Lizzie Siddal The Tragedy of a Pre-Raphaelite Supermodel*

Wind pushes the new snow into my face. As a girl I talked to snow, I tried to hold the snow's hand, I prayed to the snow moon, a pale shaving in mist. I spin. Wind is wrapping itself around my waist and pulling me down, first a hand, then the arm, a shoulder flattening me into the snow. I fall into floating rooms. Pages of white. Gabriel; your affairs, blizzard after blizzard. Names written in boiling ink. Now I am gliding through the black keyhole. Great peels in the sky let in more light. Red handprints painted onto this vacant day. After dusk the mewling wind rises in the north. The great frigate of my mind not yet stoked. The coal too damp. These raw hours stink. The fireplace gives us little heat. Our second baby has stopped moving, I felt the stillness come just after dinner on the walk home, just when the horse carriage clip clopped by. My boots loved tracking in the snow, then sweeping footprints away. The cobblestones made a muttering music. As soon as we arrived home you put me to bed. Already planning your escape, you in your starched shirt smelling of whore. Swinburne stayed to gossip and I laughed since I knew what I would soon do. I am going to God. The snow shroud comes to my marriage bower.



Planet Nine
by Sylvia Van Nooten

I Woke Up in a Field

One summer, in order to find out more
about my own fragility, I baled hay
inside a circle of river stones.
It was as if I was living and working
with another person, perhaps multiple.
This was in Montana. Every once in a while
a semi would pass on the highway
hidden by hills and I would look up
from my labor as if hearing the faint
but audible voice of a friend
I hadn't heard from in years.
Another routine involved
grilling meats, a little confession,
mediating between crickets
and toads. It thundered sporadically.
At some point I began to merely drift
over the contours of daily existence.
Then the barn caught fire.
The moon haloed the empty shell
a cricket left behind. Things
got darker from there, until all that was visible
was a little boy leading his baby goat
over the white hot coals.

by Adam Edelman

The Language of Flowers is in Much Disrepair

Wildflowers are everywhere. You can go out and find one if you look. What makes them wild? It has been said they have a world of their own. What makes them flowers? I like to imagine the petals of a wildflower as slices of pizza, or frames in a circular comic strip. Dumpsters have been spotted in the vicinity of wildflowers, each a unique expression of the desire to pass beyond suffering. Each wildflower ingratiates a fluorescent zone. If you have a question about wildflowers, the answer is yes. They control the weather, and have been known to invade remote hamlets under cover of darkness. Any good businessman will tell you that the key to success is wildflowers. Neutrinos are a kind of wildflower, if you think about it. Think of wildflowers as a metaphor for good advice from a highly intelligent and sensitive friend. Every human being who's ever lived or died understands wildflowers. You can display them in your home or dry them and hide them away if you choose. If you melt down a box of warm colored crayons, distill the pigment into a single drop and swallow it, you'll sneeze wildflowers. Pick any wildflower. It can be transmuted into medicine or spice. A pill bug once slept in a wildflower for three and a half days. You literally can't do anything without somehow involving at least one wildflower. Tonight, when you're in your bed thinking of what you'd like to dream about, just this once, consider wildflowers; they were your face before you were born.

by Adam Edelman

The Case of the Arm

For a week my left arm tingled.
On several occasions
When I stood on my desk at the institute
Overcome with waves of light-headedness
Mixed with nostalgia for autumn walks
Before the flood of '93, I saw blue and red planes.

Between one and four
I wandered the footpaths behind the institute
And tried to conjure up Mike from Long Beach's
Last name, while the Blue Angels cut waves
In half up Evans Shore.
Usually somewhere a branch moves
And I discover something ultra minute
Like a zip-lock bag full of baby carrots
Or the thought that perception
Is fundamentally inductive.

I think that's why I still come out here
To see the one catfish emerge before the fireflies.
Questions spawning in the spaces between scales
Pulsate in time with this pain in my arm
Just long enough to make it hum a little
Like a grace note over a chord.

by Adam Edelman



A Woman's Body Is A Walking Ocean
by Jocelyn Ulevicus

50 CENTS A POUND

On the morning
of my delivery
I weighed in
at a squalling
9 lb 10 oz:
biggest baby on
the maternity ward
floor of Cleveland's
University Hospital
that week-- or so
went family lore.
The nurses joked
so I was told
someday I would
be starting at left
tackle for the Browns.
Fast forward now
12 years later
I was the runt of
our 6th grade class
save for one real
half pint whose name
now quite escapes me.
Such is the fate of
schoolyard shrimps.
My mother used
to set me on
our bathroom scale
and offer me
50 cents for every
pound I gained.

I never collected
a dime. As about
this time she ran
into Mrs. Derry
in the A & P
who boasted her
jaywalking son
Allen had been
hit by a car one
afternoon and shot
up 7 inches over
the next year.
I let all this roll
off my back as
I was too thick
with callow youth
to care to fathom
the depths of
human evolution's
savage roots and
the abiding need
of a mother with
three daughters
and runt of a son
for protection
against the lurking
menace of members
of my own sex—
those Demonic Males
one reads about
as we grow older

in the literature
of our species:
mothers crave tall
broad shouldered

boys or intrepid
squirts unafraid to
dash into the street
and dodge traffic.

by Robert Perchan



Untitled
by Mallory Zandog

HAIBUN EPILOGUE

I was reading Brautigan again after so many years. He had not aged well. I looked for the small ruptures that had opened up pathways to momentary insight and joy in my Hippie Youth. Here or there, almost yes. But mostly, almost always no. Whither, I had to ask myself, the magic of those sentences? The laconic spareness of Hemingway and antic mordancy of Twain. Dead on the page. You had to look away. We called him up once long distance – his phone number was printed on the back cover of our early edition – and caught him in a transparent and pointless lie. We forgave him then. He was our hero. But this let down. He drank, or so we heard, to keep his demons at bay. Or perhaps the numbness. Flip sides of the same coin.

She asked me woozily when was I coming to bed. I took off my glasses and rubbed my temples for long minutes, an hour. What would Trout Fishing in America say tonight? Do? I turned a flat page. Nada. I stood up from my chair. My back creaked. The aging, failed poet. The original promise and the blind spots. An occasional flare brightening a narrow auditorium. Followed by the fizzled squibs and clogged apercus. The silent decade. The bouts of sanctimony and envy. Then another equally arid. A stunted comeback and ultimate exile among these alien folk. The rickety haibun sequence and *What happened* of that last rejection letter. The sleeplessness and local hooch. The Booming Voice of Wit and Candor at bottom a cowed and silenced bore.

Rumble and thunder
from behind our bedroom door:
my drunken wife snores

by Robert Perchan



Untitled
by Mallory Zandog

THE CRACK: A REMINISCENCE

Did you ever meet someone who you really, really wanted to kiss? I mean where you were absolutely certain kissing would be more pleasurable than raspberry smoothies or Sunday double headers with your Little League teammates or the sex you haven't actually had yet? That's how I felt about Mesmeralda the first time I laid eyes on her in the seventh grade. I really wanted to kiss her more than anything else in the whole wide world. And the funny thing was – she had this scar that sort of bisected her upper lip right in the middle. It was very faint but I was always afraid to mention it. I thought maybe she had been born that way – with a what-do-you-call-it – with a harelip or whatever. And I didn't want to make her feel self-conscious about it so I was careful never to bring it up. But finally I couldn't hold back from telling her how much I needed to kiss her. How that faint imperfection only increased my fascination, my ardor, my unquenchable need. How thrilling I knew kissing her lips would be! Oh, Mesmeralda said on our last afternoon together. Guys say that to me all the time until I tell them about the accident. Then nobody wants to kiss me.

The accident?

I said. What accident was that?

Three years ago, she said, I went through the windshield of a car. I lost a piece of my upper lip the size of a thumbnail.

My God, I said. But you look fine now. I mean there's a little scar. But it's nothing. And I *must* kiss you. I absolutely *have to*. I'm sorry – I can't hold myself back!

Oh the scar, she said. That's part of the crack.

The crack?
I said.

Yes, she said. The crack. After three failed operations on my lip the doctors finally decided to graft on a piece of skin from the middle of my butt. Now nobody— The middle of your *butt*, I gasped. The *crack*? But it was too late -- for suddenly, sudden as a serpent's strike, the tip of her tongue emerged from between her lips as she lunged at me and plunged it between my own.

by Robert Perchan



Stick Lion Rampage Budapest Hungary
by Keith Edwards

Expedition Antarctica

I. The Trek

Damoy Hut radiates
like a turquoise pendant in the snow.
The bright color,
more than a decorative statement,
is a beacon in the stark white landscape.

We see it from a mile away
Much as the pilots who stopped here
to rest and refuel might have seen it
half a century ago.
A solitary dot in the distance.

The morning sky is heavy with snow,
sudden white-outs propel us
into a state of confusion
where earth and sky
collide on a blank canvas
devoid of all but the distant outline
of that single landmark.

A skua soars above our heads
telling us literally which end is up.
How does she stay aloft
in this wind that chafes
whatever skin isn't covered
by scarves and goggles?

We plant our poles deep into the snow

pulling ourselves forward against the wind.
I marvel to feel sweat trickling down my back
despite the penetrating chill.

II. Arrival

Approaching the hut,
the first thing we see
is the hefty black kettle
framed in the window,
centered above a single burner.

I imagine the sight of its small flame
flickering under a leaden sky.
How far it would radiate into the darkness
with its promise of comfort
whispered into the roaring wind.

When we reach the hut,
stacked high on cinderblocks
it offers a homey welcome
with its unpainted plywood walls,
and provisions lining the shelves—
tinned peaches, sardines,
salt and flour preserved for fifty years
since the last flight departed.

In the bunk room twelve beds
stacked two-deep
where weary pilots rested
before continuing on to
Port Lockroy to the south.

What did they see
as they wrestled their planes
onto the ice for those brief stopovers?
Always a pass-through,
the hut meant refueling,
a warm meal,
a blanket,
and always in the window
that kettle of boiling water for tea.

III. Return

Our hike here has been long
A test of our own endurance,
but a test taken
under the watchful eyes
of expedition leaders
who lay out the safest trail,
who track the weather patterns
to make sure the white-outs,
though briefly blinding,
will pass in due course.
They keep track of our red parkas
as we hobble through drifts.
And even accommodate each request
to snap a picture when we arrive at the hut.

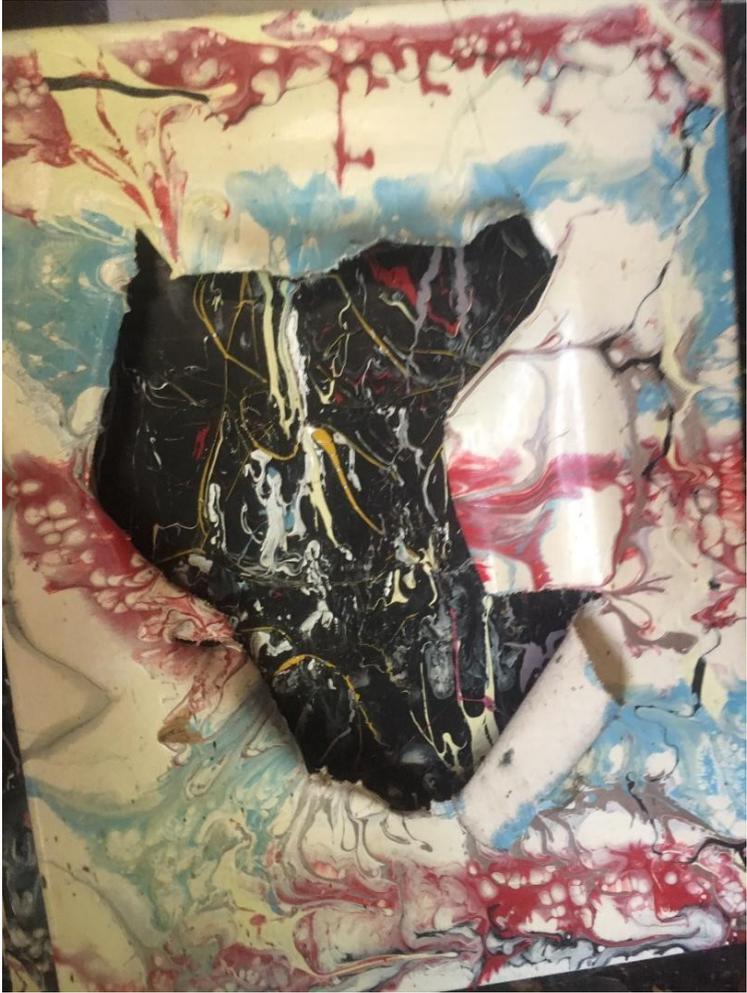
We play at danger,
knowing that after our mile-long trek
back to the landing boat,
windburned, and wet,
exhausted but exhilarated,
we will return to our tastefully appointed ship,

shed our life jackets and boots,
and retire to the upper deck
for afternoon tea poured
not from a black iron kettle,
but a silver tea service
beside a tray of pastries.

Yes, there will be sore feet and aching backs
and raucous exchanges about the gale force winds
that nearly blew us into the churning waters of Dorian
Bay.

But we can never know the relief of those pilots,
navigating through an impermeable wall of white
where no horizon delineates earth from sky
as they crossed the threshold into that
humble hut in the middle
of what some would call
nowhere.

by Gloria Heffernan



Untitled

by John D. Robinson

Deception Island, Antarctica

We are walking on the grave
of a volcano that is only playing dead.
The caldera's warm water meets the freezing air
in a steamy tango.

The beach is a museum of decomposition
where the odor of digested fish
lingers in the air—
a distant echo of the stench
of slaughtered whales
hauled onto this shore,
stripped of their flesh,
their fat rendered into oil,
their bones left to litter the beach
like toppled headstones.

Petrels perch on the bleached hulls
of wooden harpoon boats
Apparitions loom up ahead in the mist
Perhaps the ghosts of whalers
serving penance for their part
in the genocide.

by Gloria Heffernan

Proceed to the Route

Recalculating.

The voice is familiar but useless. Too many directions and nowhere to go.

Recalculating.

What good is a handheld GPS when you are so busy washing your hands you can't start the car?

Recalculating.

A gill is a respiratory organ found in many aquatic organisms that extracts dissolved oxygen from water and excretes carbon dioxide.

Recalculating.

If I were a fish, I would not need a face mask. Or gloves. I would take refuge in the sea.

Recalculating.

I would swim away free to touch my face without fear of toxic residue left on my fingertips from the shopping cart I filled with last minute essentials.

Recalculating.

I would plunge to the depths in a school of my brethren without adherence to social distancing.

Recalculating.

The lambent glow of the on-screen map suggests there are places to go. And ways to get there.

Recalculating.

The GPS is desperate to chart a course so I shift into reverse, ram the car through the closed garage door and speed away.

Recalculating.

I look into the rearview mirror at the car-shaped silhouette punched out of the garage like something from a Saturday-morning cartoon where the coyote smashes through a wall...

Recalculating.

...and over a cliff.

by Gloria Hefernan



Iceland Lightning
by Keith Edwards

Rise on Up

I'm looking at George Floyd
on the cover
of The New Yorker
and he seems sad
looking south
into lands lost on the Delta
where cotton in the seam
covers the dreams of those
lost in dreams deferred
where hope is not allowed
and tears can see
the pure brilliance of invisible men
picking cotton
in the humid chill of mourning
down in the callous hollow
where the women come and go
chatting about their hydrangeas
where did the summer go
and how does it measure
a life lived in the cross hairs
of subliminal annihilation
step out of the vehicle
license and registration please
arms raised
arms up like Ezekiel holding the wheel
holding up against all hope
against the wall
that divides us all
and in that holding
a life is defined
a life is lived large

go down Moses
go down to the river
where the waters of redemption flow
and in that flow
we hug the lost raisins
so they don't explode
and we know
that the flow
is rising on up

by Mark Hammerschick

Last Breath

We're sitting on the deck
no idea what time it is.
It's been a Martini Sunday
since 10 am.
The leaves in the trees seem different
canopies of coagulated breath
mirrored in your smudged wine glass.
A careless breeze casually stumbles
across the strained lawn,
my ice is melting too quickly
and armpits swell, expand,
moisture moves sideways
like your vacuous eyes translucent
in the slanted afternoon haze
but somehow it's not right nothing is.
We smile but there's no weight
it's like we're floating above ourselves
seeing the sound hearing your scent
and then I realize there is no breath
and your face does not move
and in that moment before the moment
of infinite intensity
a last gasp
those few furtive glances
as the terror of this moment
flows foreverfully silently
into that good night
beyond the silence of roses
moving in the morning wind
and in that mourning
we hold your hand

and in that holding
we move back into the womb
back into love
life to life
breath to breath...

by Mark Hammerschick



Storm Sky
by Dale Shank

Farms Deferred in the Real World

Just keep dumping it
miles and miles of milk
flowing south into desperation
into the intoxicated alfalfa fields
of this Arkansas ghetto
with nowhere to go
like those on the train to Dachau
but they had no milk
only their sweat
beading, creeping into moist crevices
lost with the rapture
of voices grinding
lips splitting raw meat
but that was a different time
when a world was burning
but in a sense this world
is always smoldering
beneath the neat slices
of evolutionary ennui
deep in the dark corners
where spiders leer
spinning miraculous webs
but this spinning is different
there is no center
there is no balance
only the stark reality
of this hopeless farm
drifting
taking on water
with no bilge pumps
and in that flow

dreams deferred do explode
no raisins to save
no native sons to save the day
since they are getting
blown
away...

by Mark Hammerschick

Swing Low Sweet Boys

I sense the thunder in my veins
pulse pulse
in the morning Maya light
like neural networks lit up by meth
cathartic breath
whispers, echoes
of lives lived long ago
well before the Precambrian
scrambled eggs of infinite light
expanding beyond the sense of sight
the flow must go
judgment day is upon us
riots in the streets
bullets in the brain
blue rain draining our kin
bludgeoning our boys
left out in the diaspora
of lives lived on serrated edges
shredded dreams deferred
caged men singing of things unknown
in the dark corners
where only the dead bodies go
singing them spirituals
swing low sweet chariot
and go home to my Lord and be free
spread the word
send the sound
for the reckoning is here

by Mark Hammerschick



Gorgon
by Silas Plum

Memory Is Not Being

Lips of sound,
lips for sight/
a trap for purpose
as I sly around
a playground of memory.
In its entirety, the color of red.
Your lips pulling me from
my chest -
to be alive.
A child's excited run,
chasing breath.
Sneakers for myself -
trailing laces
untangled behind in
feeling with the bright green contrast grass.
And then gone.

I cannot lure the moment by its throat
- even for one second -
in my hand.

Instantly, to be old in this park,
with discarded footwear as far as I can think.

Moment passed, an unfinished
dissonance.

Memory | Seance.

To be bereaved of it -
between breaths, bedsheets -
to cover from gods that
pushed me out

by *Leon Fedolfi*

Palms On World

I in I am is nowhere,
from where it will return.
Hands placed for thinking
on her round distend - a true belly -
a great Grecian urn for our history.
Little red berry inside.

Those in the wilds feed the forests of mind.

I face a creature there -
staring back, smudged with currant,
blue and deep within the fenced-in vegetation -
a second emerald visage mask, I cannot see through.

Nostrils feed both sweet and decay
for a tongue that will travel down
for either dirt or the grass.

Face down, I cannot impregnate the earth with my last howl,
but I will whisper myself before I go.

by *Leon Fedolfi*

Raw Hide

Differentiation that draws a following cures itself.
White blood cells become the names of different hats you
can put on cattle.

You only have to be alive a few decades to realize
real change is the one you fought for
and later the one you built fences around.

How are you feeling, in that backyard Montana?
The fall through the sky that is the trajectory of your life.

Not good, a man named Jim, replies.

On his horse, fenced in by his belt and buckle.

His feet never finish on the ground.

He is looking for a young bride, a new mirror.

He has a sales pitch and will
sell the land he thinks he travels.

Thinks he owns.

He wants the land you walk on.

In the future people will think he was a man of odd habits.
A quilt of raw hide religion, specific language and behavior.
Something changed, but not really.

by *Leon Fedolfi*



Connected
by Belinda Subraman

A Study in Pink and Blue
by Asher KurtzFreilich

1

Sunday,
February 23, 1997,
8:04 PM.

“It’s a girl!”

2

My best friend is a boy.

3

Did you know Blue from Blue’s Clues is a girl?

4

Matchbox cars and Barbie dolls,
Dressing up and rolling in mud.

5

NO, I will not wear a dress to the birthday party.

6

Daddy’s little soccer star.
Or
Mommy’s tiny gymnast.

7

Basketball shorts, t-shirt, and a ponytail.
Daily.
No skirts. No dresses. NO flowers.

8

I don't have many friends.
I do not understand the girls.
The boys think I have cooties.
I can't be friends with boys.

9

The girls do not like me.
The boys do not know how to talk to me.

During silent reading one day, I fart loudly.
No one laughs.
It isn't ladylike.

10

I meet my first transgender person.
She is tall and kind, but my parents say "she" used to be "he".
I don't really understand. How can someone just change who they are like that?

The girls in my class start to wear skirts and makeup.

No skirts. NO makeup.

Is it wrong to want to just be me?

11

I meet my first boyfriend at summer camp.
He likes me despite my basketball shorts and ponytail,
Despite my lack of makeup and
Being outcasted by the popular girls for not being like them.
(Read: NO skirts. NO dresses. NO makeup.)

When I get back to school on the first day of 6th grade, everything changes.

The girls wear skirts. And makeup. And talk about boys.

Boys are cool but...

Had they ever considered being more like one?

No.

That's wrong.

Can't think like that.

Okay skirts. Okay dresses. Okay makeup.

No ponytails.

12

All the other girls were doing it, so I had to too.

Sports equals bad, mascara equals good.

Get it through your head.

Girls DO NOT like gym class.

Girls DO NOT like being loud.

Girls DO NOT fart.

Girls DO NOT act like boys.

13

I hate myself and everything I am.

I don't know how else to be.

14

When I act like all the other girls, boys pay attention to me.

It must be the right thing to do,

The right way to act.

I am lost. I cannot find myself.

15

Real girls wear push-up bras, yoga pants, and Ugg boots, with as many layers of makeup as possible.

Real girls don't go to school without their face on.

(What does that even mean?)

Real girls wear skirts. Real girls wear dresses. Real girls wear makeup.

Real girls don't lay in bed wondering what it'd be like to have a dick.

16

I wish I were a boy.

No drama. No makeup. No dresses.

Can't tell anyone about these thoughts.

Wrong.

Impure.

Suppress it.

Yes skirts. Yes dresses. Yes makeup.

17

I don't know who I am anymore.

18

I don't want to be a boy anymore.

I think.

I don't know how else to act anymore. Being feminine is all I know now.

YES skirts. YES dresses. YES makeup.

NO ponytails.

18

I join a gender-inclusive sport.

18

I meet my first nonbinary person.
I don't understand this.
How can someone just "not have" a gender?

Dresses? Basketball shorts? Makeup?

18

My new best friend comes out to me as genderfluid.
They say they are sometimes a boy, sometimes a girl.
And that's okay.

18

Over dinner, I tell my family about my best friend.
My family thinks genderfluidity is funny.
I do not.
I am a little less hungry.

18

I'm panicking.

Okay Google— Am I genderfluid?

Google gives me quizzes.

*So you think you might be genderfluid?
What gender are you?*

What is your gender identity?

Sometimes a boy, sometimes a girl.
That really sounds like me.

Maybe I am a boy.
Maybe I can still be a girl.
My family thinks being genderfluid is funny.

I do not tell them what I am feeling.

18

I call my best friend.
We meet in my dorm parking lot.

“What does it feel like?” I ask them.
It’s different for everybody, they say.

“I think I might be genderfluid,” I tell them.

Okay, they say.
Do you want me to call you by different pronouns?

“Only between us.”
And I blush.

19

I ask my close friends to refer to me as they and them, instead of she
and her.

19

I buy my first chest binder.

I almost cry because it makes me so happy
To see myself with a flat chest.

No tits. No skirts. No makeup.

19

My brother visits me at school.
He knows about my best friend. He does not know about me.

With my housemates, I joke about my identity.

My brother hears.

My brother does not know it is a secret.

19

My brother casually mentions my gender identity over dinner.

I am not there.

My sister tells me over a text.

I spend the night sobbing into my best friend's arms.

19

I have lunch with my parents.
I say we should probably talk.
I am shaking.

They ask questions.
They do not understand.

That's okay.
They take it well.

I should have known.

I am still scared.

My mother tells me that I should not
Go around telling people about my identity.
She says people will treat me differently.

19

I come out publicly on a Facebook post.

It takes me six hours to write it.

My ex-boyfriend from high school writes a similar post mocking me.
He compares my identity to an attack helicopter.

For the first time I experience transphobia that directly targets me.

I want to retaliate.

I don't.

19

I go to lunch at my grandparents' apartment in New York City.

My aunt and uncle are visiting from Georgia.

My uncle tells me that genderfluidity isn't real.
But even if it was, he says, you wouldn't be it because I've
Never. Seen. It. In. You.

I don't tell him he's an asshole.

My parents, aunt, and grandmother collectively tell him he's an
asshole.

And also explain why he is incorrect.
Which is nice.

Today I am less afraid of what my parents think of me.

19

My boyfriend buys me men's clothes, so I can
Feel more comfortable being myself.

This time I do cry.

For the first time I see myself as
Who I always wanted to be.

20

I consider going on T.

20

I do not go on T.

The idea of change being permanent scares me.

I wish I were brave.

21

I change my Tinder profile to say "genderfluid."
Most people ignore it.

21

Most of the team is new people.
All of them have been told I am genderfluid.

They take me out of the game because we are violating the gender rule.
We are not.

I realize they counted me as a girl.

I am not a girl, I yell.

I am not calm.

I am allowed to not be.

21

Every time I meet someone new, I am forced to come out again.
Every time I meet someone new, I am forced to wonder if they will
react poorly.

After being told what pronouns I use, most people do not even try.
I am forced to accept this.

21

Every day I wake up and decide if I am going to dress the way I want
to,
Or the way I am “supposed to.”

I say,

Sometimes skirts. Sometimes basketball shorts. Sometimes makeup.
Sometimes sweatpants. Sometimes button-downs. Sometimes dresses.

21

I will not apologize for who I am.

I will not hide from who I am.

And that’s okay.



Buer on Mars
by Silas Plum

(SUPPOSING) MY MOTHER WAS A BLUE HERON

I.

My mother was a blue heron who blew in off the Delta in a hurricane and wound up land-locked in Alabama surrounded by red clay and peaches and zigzag fences somewhere between the Romulus and Remus of almost-central Alabama, Jemison and Clanton. My father was your ordinary earthbound swain, and together they accumulated memories to feather their imperiled nest the way limestone cliffs alluviate dehydrated lichen. He bound her feet to the stone to keep her at home where they gave birth to five ugly ducklings, or perhaps five red herrings, or maybe five black sheep whose mother thought they were all the first lambs of spring but not at all fit for slaughter. She thought they were the very first.

My mother was the hurricane that blew the blue heron over the bridge that was my father, and in that storm she spawned five tornadoes that tore up all the trailer parks and knocked the battle-flagged dome off the Capitol building, bringing in five separate thunderstorms that washed out all the gutters and left trash walking in riding boots on the streets of Birmingham, Montgomery, all the way to Ohio and Chicago. My mother was the hurricane of many names bearing down on all the levees but my mother had no calm still eye. My mother was a cyclone, a full force gale, unbuilding things, washing away sandbags, but she herself was never thrown, because she stood one-legged, the other tied to a stone.

Suppose that my father was a swan and the swan was called Zeus, and that I do not have a mother at all but sprang straight from my father's head, full-grown and fully blown from his laureled godhead, and that we glide and glide together on lakes of obsidian, eating all the manna that rains across the wilderness, rains down from the quartermasters at Mount Olympus. Suppose that my father was a swan. Suppose that he glides and glides in his own reflection.

My mother was a blue heron. My father was Zeus, within her wingspan.

II.

Supposing that my mother was the Gingerbread Woman, iced and frosted and that she buttoned up her jacket and set her raisin eyes homeward and that she ran whee whee whee all the way home, to her licorice-scented gingerbread house near the river and my father chased her all the way there, stubbing a toe in the water, and that he started to melt. He melted until he lost a leg but still they had five ginger snaps that burned the mouths of their lovers from Birmingham bars to Michigan Avenue van de Rohe corporate mousetrap cubicles but every Mother's Day, Mother got five fresh bouquets of snapdragons. Father thought the snap children were not quite done, and were raw inside but Mother kept them warm in parchment skins and pronounced them crisp, perfect. Two turned blond as sand dollars and three stayed the russet of their birth and built their own gingerbread houses right down the street where Mother and Father ran and ran and Father melted as he ran and mother smiled a frosted smile at him. My father was a one-legged gingerbread man who ran until he caught her and set her up in her gingerbread house with peppermint shingles and bitter anise trim. Suppose that five ginger snaps grew into crumbling, hard-bitten lives after leaving Mother's pungent house but it still was perfect.

III.

Suppose my mother was a blue whale and that my father was oracle-eyed Jonah. She was out for a casual stroll in the same old neighborhood, so she yawned and drew my father in whole, where in her belly he acquired tastes of Biblical proportions and took in prophecies of heaven and changed them into intimations of despair. He dreamed in there of a chariot hell-bent on the firmament that would let him rise like Elijah, up and out of the belly of this beast. And in the belly of my huge blue mother he was sentient but mute, wishing for the gift of ventriloquism to hurl his prophecies forward past her viscous entrails. He wondered whether God gave him the short end of the stick when He made His prophet His pensioner, surviving on nothing but Mother's indigestible bits and the timely repentant expedient of prayer. While he was in there, God imprinted in him the sacred grief of the aggrieved, apoplectic priest and that of the eternally temporizing penitent, there in the slimy belly of the beast. He slept in there with a wall-eyed stare, tossing in his doomsday dreams of Ninevah, Thebes, thinking unawares of Nebuchadnezzar's mess halls, curious writings on the walls, hieroglyphs drawn from the mouths of babes, of griefs in the lions' den for a prophet's shattered peace.

My mother tired of his wrathful sleeps, his tossing in his bunk, found him too unsavory even for her bilious entrails, was bored that he was doomed to compose jeremiads about his disappointment and hunger. So my mother spewed him and ejected with him five sententious serpents born with guns and spears instead of arms and hands, and Father named each and every one of them for a mad captain named Ahab, but Mother played with them in the waves, tossing them from time to time in the air. When they misbehaved as children will, she rapped their guns with a spar and trimmed their spears to toothpicks. These mad captains would blubber after her,

struggling fruitlessly to capture her full attention and to learn her name.

My mother was a blue whale. My father was a prophet who saw in a vision five sermonizing sea snakes, born in God's image, their mother's perfection.

IV.

My mother was a through-the-glass darkly blue-tinted mirror with a whalebone handle. My father, always standing behind her like a stalker, cast his reflection forward and its ugliness shattered the glass. My mother, not one to waste things because squanderings always count, scooped up five slices of glass in her ungloved hands, bloodying herself in their handling. The five shards were born with telescopic vision that left them prone to punishment because they always threw light when they were told

to leave the dark corners alone. But Mother thought they were perfect, so jagged and so shiny. Bright and sharp, all the teachers wrote on their department cards. All her fragile fractiles shattered again, casting their father's reflection over their shoulders from Red Mountain to Lakeshore Drive, glinting in the sun, glaring in the snow. They shimmered like diamonds cast into the sand, dangerously sparkling at strangers.

V.

My mother was a riverboat that ran up to the bluffs by the melancholy Natchez Trace and sometimes picked up passengers like my prophetic peg-legged gingerbread father who was either a gambler or a drowning washed-up riverboat captain whose boat he'd let run aground when his drunken sailors hit a sand bar at Pas Christian. He called the dice

five times at the roulette wheel and Mother said he always bet against the house but that

it was perfect, just perfect that way. Five die rolled themselves through life like it was Russian roulette. They kept Mother in perfect suspense, but she was well-moored and never was tossed or troubled. The gingerbread captain had anchored her with a stone.

VI.

My mother was a blue-blooded mermaid who swam out of the sea oats at Mobile Bay. My father was the Minotaur who found her there, washed ashore and flailing. He split her tail so she could be taught to walk on land but she always precariously tottered like a footbound Mandarin courtesan. My father thought this was just as well because she was too beautiful to let her get away. It was just as well that she stayed, now that she walked on land. They had five mermaid-Minotaur children, born scaly and hairy, and clumsy on land. Their awkwardness made them angry, so they shook their horns and gored their lovers all the way from Birmingham to Binghamton. They were loud and hobbled along on their little splayed feet, stepping on cracks on every sidewalk. Mother laid them a trail of sardines and wild game so they would not starve out there. The children sometimes walked on glass from the time Mother was a shattered mirror

and sometimes there was ground glass in their food when they took sack lunch to school.

They walked on bloody feet and spoke with bloodied lips wherever they went.

Father thought they were awkward and quarrelsome, but Mother said they were doubly blessed, once by Poseidon and once by Demeter, and that from their first bloody steps and their first blood-lipped words, they were perfect.

VII.

My mother was a blue like cyanide is a blue, Prussian, evaporating. Heron, whale, mirror, gingerbread woman, riverboat, mermaid. She married my father, an ordinary swain, a swan on a lake of obsidian, a reflection in blue light with piano music, a whaler with a roulette wheel on a riverboat made of gingerbread, a beast with a horn. Together they had five red herrings, black sheep, ginger snaps, slivers of glass walking on bloody feet, slew-footed, who gored their lovers with their ghastly horns.

But blue blue blue blue Mother blew in off the Delta and blew kisses to them because they were perfect.

*by Pamela Sumners
(previously published in Tahoma Literary Review)*



blue yonder just enough
by Alan Bern

RESUME OF THE BEST OF INTENTIONS

I offered to be Michelangelo's hand model for his heroic ceiling but as he painted it God lopped it off and I drew back a bloody stump. The stigmata of my experience is written on the chapel walls, a little sestina in the long-winded Pentateuch of begattings and bygones.

Angry, I bit the hand that feeds me and it coiled up, struck, bit me back. I became an anarchist in the Order of Parliament, saboteur of the choir, a loud provocateur of clouds, a dung beetle crawling on the Sunday pews. I moved to a street where people had good tires so I could slash them.

The authorities told me to turn back my clock, so I went to Dealey Plaza and they said that's not what we meant, we use Dali's Eastern Standard Time, except for Indiana where it might be 1963 all the time, we dunno. Panicked, I turned the clocks counter and wound Big Ben's hands to 1984.

The People Who Matter began to wonder why I ate my lunch with the Untouchables, began to question whether my adaptation to deformity had made me a little too common, or a little too strange to them, because they were all the Michelangelo models who pleased God. I tried to appease.

I lit candles, fondled a rabbit's foot I kept concealed in my neat pocket. I was the first investor in a shamrock farm on a reclaimed Superfund site. I put heather over my transoms and recited the incantations of the Psalms. Salted my windows and doors, hung chicken feet and mistletoe in the trees.

And still, no luck in sight, I bleed on the chapel walls as God re-coils, strikes

*by Pamela Sumners
(previously published in Green Light Review)*

REST

I like the sleepers, the angel-creepers, the dreamers
on pillows shredded by old dogs whose feathers
billow the room when old dogs bellow their keening

When I sleep and dream I dream mighty women
who file their nails with catfish bones they use
to play funeral dirges on strings of catgut and
tarantula teeth, although sometimes I dream
of calves who died in Virginia moonlight

and wonder why old men queue up to call me
on my birthday, to be first in line with wishes
to strum the vanishing harp of all of us, as if
music mattered. Then I dream whitewater

rushing

the old feathers forward, to a cave that embraces,
diligently if a tad carelessly, trusted anyhow.

*by Pamela Sumners
(previously published in Hole in the Head Review)*



Fossilized
by Emily Rankin

Fatbergs in the Pipe

by Noah Goldzer

“Have a nice flight, hunny” is what she said. “Ted will be here, bending me over your billiard table in ten minutes” is what she meant. It's fine, really. I don't mind, really. Really. I pick up prostitutes whenever I go out of town. In Dallas, some of the expensive ones used to be Cowboys cheerleaders. They come out wearing the uniform, shaking the pom-poms, doing the splits and everything. I mean, it's clearly bullshit, but what does it matter? They can be anyone, dress any way, and say anything so long as you have the money to pay them. Imagine that: being paid to be someone else. I envy them that, sometimes. I tip always.

Kimberly-Clark was holding a half-week conference down there on “flushable” wet wipes: the new leading innovation in the towelette marketplace. See, as it stands today, all wet wipes have to come with warning labels: *Do not flush down toilet*, 'cause they turn into these things called “fatbergs” once they get into the sewer. The guy they hired to explain all this, some scrawny blue-haired kid in a labcoat, said they ran statistical analysis with sewage plants nationwide and found out a lot of people are still flushing the unflushables. Cooking fat, cotton swabs, condoms from college kids, and baby wipes tossed by new mothers are busting pipes from Spokane to Pensacola.

Apparently, all this shit congeals with the alkalines, the rust, and the lead that peels off those nineteenth-century pipes to make a fatberg, a sort of flammable brick of sludge. Fatbergs can't be loosed like normal clogs. They can't be broken down with lye or saltpeter (that's the stuff in Drano); they can't be snaked out, because they're too heavy; and the swirling motion that a flush makes just helps calcify them. No, the only way to pull them out is to get your hands dirty, go down, break a pipe, and—you know what, fuck it, it doesn't matter. This is supposed to be a story about the T, not those pipe-busting little bastards.

Right—the T. If you get on the train in Boston at nine o'clock on a Saturday night, you might see some shit. If the Sox game just ended and they won, you might see some drunken shit. If the Sox game just ended and they lost, you might even get some on you. That's just how it was last night. I'd flown into Logan from Dallas, trading balmy Texan sunshine for New England's autumn drizzle. Martinez hit a two-run homer while I was somewhere over Pennsylvania, Benintendi brought in a third, Moreland stole home on one of Nunez's three doubles, and the Yanks even walked the catcher, twice. Didn't matter. We lost. You can always do your best and still go home empty-handed.

Now, the T isn't like a fatberg. When the T gets stuck—say, like in the tunnels under Boylston Street—it doesn't calcify. If it did, the MBTA would call a guy to come pry it loose with the world's biggest crowbar, but they don't. No-no-no, they make you wait. There's usually just another train ahead that's stuck because another train ahead is stuck because there's yet another train ahead that's stuck. You can't avoid blockage in Boston with responsible flushing. You just have to sit.

So there I was, on that tiny, half-ass seat that skirts the edge of the middle bench halfway down the crowded second car on the Green Line, outbound to Riverside at 9:07 in the evening. I know it was 9:07 because I checked. Then again at 9:09. And 9:10 and 9:12, just to keep my eyes anywhere but on the creeping ass-crack of a behemoth *David Price, Number 24*, whose namesake gave up four god-damn runs just a few hours earlier. Now, get me straight here. I don't blame this guy for his weight, for the crowd, or even for drastically underestimating his jersey size. His ass was in my face and that's just the way it was. I doubt he enjoyed giving me the show any more than I enjoyed watching it.

There must have been thirty other passengers on that car, but the only ones I could make out clearly were directly to my left and right: a tall dark-skinned man with his hoodie up, nodding along to a beat on his headphones, and a four-foot-

something Asian woman in a loose-fitting navy blue pantsuit. Descriptions are a real shitshow, aren't they? This guy's fat; that guy's black; the tiny woman with the little wet spot in her armpit, desperately clinging to the grab handle above her, just happened to look Asian. Kimberly-Clark sends out surveys for this kind of trash. They wanna know which demographics use the most feminine hygiene products and Kleenex so they can cast the "right" color actors for their ads. That's a shitshow, too. You know what they find out when the numbers come in every year? The demo-group that uses the most Huggies disposable diapers is babies.

Well, when we finally got moving again and hit Arlington Station, a seat down the bench opened and I prayed Number 24 would plop into it. Nope. Price was a swell gentleman and gave the spot to a young mom tugging a shopping bag under one arm and a little girl under the other. The little girl, wrapped up tight in a bright pink bubble-coat, must have taken the Sox loss badly, 'cause she whipped her fuzzy yellow mittens, dangling from strings in her sleeves, back in forth in front of her, hitting mom and strangers alike. She kicked the seat, tussled with the shopping bag, let out a horrid shriek every few seconds and we all pretended not to see or hear her.

"¡Ya basta, Camila! Estaremos en casa pronto."

Headphones to the right of me looked up but seemed immune in his solitude. Pantsuit to the left of me definitely heard it and, catching my glance, flashed her eyebrows and sighed. Number 24 shifted slightly on his right leg, and his left butt cheek filled the gap. For all I knew, his belly shielded me from the wrath of Camila's flailing mittens. The other passengers grew silent; too terrified or complacent to compete for volume.

"¡Camila, detente ahora mismo! Estas molestando a estas personas."

That's how it went for the fifteen minutes and ten centuries that passed between Copley Station and Fenway Park. Camila

shouted, her mother scolded, and everyone else pretended to be fucking astronauts, 250 miles above in the noiseless vacuum of space. I shut my eyes. I cupped my forehead. I calculated the WHIP loss Price incurred to my fantasy league team that night. Maybe it was just one game? Maybe I should have stopped betting on the Sox years ago. Hell, Pedro set the record for walks plus hits per inning-pitched way back in 2000: zero-point-seven-something. 2000. Y-2K. The new age. I started dating Gabby then, freshman year at Lyman High School. She'd sprouted in the summer and suddenly had legs and an ass. Well, I guess she always had those; it's kinda hard to run track without an ass. Or legs. That's shitty, isn't it, the way we talk about that stuff? Like girls' bodies become women's bodies only when they're interesting enough for us to gawk at. Men are such shitbags. I'm definitely a shitbag. I hope Ted isn't.

Anyway, I ignored Camila as best I could and delved deep into memories of Gabby. I went back into her basement, where we used to fool around and pretend to watch that show, *Charmed*, whenever her mom came down to do a load of laundry. I'd never fingered a girl before, but it seemed pretty simple. Gabby'd take her pants down just to her thigh and I'd slide under her panties so she could redress quick whenever the stairs creaked. She stretched her toes when I was inside her and let out this tiny squeal, like a chipmunk sucking helium. We made love there for the first time after junior prom. She wrapped her pantyhose 'round my neck and I barked like a dog. She giggled and said that's how she wanted it. The dress stayed on and so did *Charmed*. I was still there, in that dank, musky basement with Gabby's hips in my hands and her moans in my ear when—"THIS STOP, FENWAY STATION."

Camila was still screaming. Just as well. The last time Gabby and I tried having sex, and it's been years, she put the reruns on Netflix and my junk shriveled right up. It's funny: Fatbergs are filled with used condoms like it's some kind of pipe-based trade-off; irresponsible flushing for responsible fucking. It'd be wrong to say we chose otherwise 'cause teenagers don't

make choices: they make mistakes. But that was a lifetime ago. I'm not the star infielder anymore and she's not the relay champion. I'm in PR now and she sells custom flatware on Etsy. We're just college dropouts whose son died.

The Sox-Yankees game was long over, but the drunkest tailgaters were still finding their way home. At the Fens, a mob of red-on-white stormed onto the T, so abundant and powerful, it dislodged the massive Number 24 from my kneecaps and pushed him farther down the car.

“Fuck the Yankees! Fuck New York!” and this and that and the other thing.

At the sight and sound of the inebriated horde, Camila's yowls turned to full-on bawling. Her mittens, formerly weapons of offense against the other passengers, turned defensive as she cuffed them to her ears and shuddered, snot running down her bubble-coat and sticking to her mother's shoulder. To her credit, the girl's guardian covered her daughter's ears and turned her impatient chatter to the tailgaters.

¿No ves que le duele la cabeza? Vete. Cállate!”

“Yo, speak English, bitch!” spat one of the fans.

¿Perra? ¿Te mostraré una perra!” She plopped her daughter onto her seat and pushed through the crowd after the hooligans, brandishing her shopping bag over her head like a bat at the plate. Rather than stick around for strike one, the Sox fans recoiled and fled up the car, knocking elbows and bumping knees on the T's path toward Longwood. They clipped the Asian lady in the pantsuit and laughed as she fell, continuing their hateful chant into the bowels of the train until no one could hear them over Camila's ceaseless wailing. Pantsuit picked herself up just fine, flicked off the ruffians, and shot me another exasperated glance.

We exchanged nods and I retreated back into my brain. I tried thinking about the *good time* I'd spent at the Dallas–Fort Worth Hyatt, but that damn blue-haired geek on the conference stage

popped into my head instead. There's only one good thing about fatbergs, he told us. Once they're removed, those suckers burn like nothing you've ever seen, and people sell them on the illegal biofuel market all the time. No shit. He showed us a video. This thing lit up like the Fourth of July, buzzing and zipping and spilling out on the ground in little rivers of fire. Oil-lathered cotton swabs burst in blue flashes and crystallized condoms sizzled like slimy orange sparklers on the screen.

Jason would have *hated* it. Fireworks terrified him. Dogs terrified him. The kids in his class terrified him. I did too. Loud sounds and bright lights triggered his seizures. We couldn't take him to a Sox game or listen to one on the radio. The phone's ringing set him off, so we canceled it. The doorbell hurt his ears, so we disabled it. My motorcycle was pure torture, so I sold it. Our neighborhood was too loud, so we moved. And then he died. *Chronic focal encephalitis* is a cocktail of pain—one part brain inflammation, one paralysis and a third of dementia. You haven't heard of it 'cause it's incredibly rare but that only means *almost* no one gets it. 0.01% is still someone's kid. Jason was ours. Now everything at home is quiet and nothing works.

So. The hooligans vanished down the car, but it didn't matter. Camila, the little pink firehose, could not be plugged. She hissed and cried and tossed her hands around, slapping legs and kicking the middle pole, sending tiny vibrations up the hands of strangers to match the ringing in their ears. It was only a matter of time before someone said, "Shut that kid up!" Okay, I said it, but that's beside the point; *someone* was bound to. That was in Brookline. It was then that Headphones looked up and tossed his hood back, spotting the scene with wide eyes as if woken from a coma. He stared left. He stared right. He winced upon beholding Camila and slowly pried the music from his ears.

"Hey. Hey, you, little girl. You like Disney? *Moana*?"

Camila's eyes were clenched, and ears blocked, but her mother noticed the man and cocked a brow as he held out his

headphones across the aisle. The man swung his pointer finger back and forth between the headphones and the woman's shopping bag. Camila's mother looked down into her satchel as if to remind herself of what she'd bought. She nodded. “*Sí sí sí*”.

Every soul in the middle carriage of the ten o'clock D train to Riverside watched as the two switched carry-ons. Without a word, Camila's mother swiped her daughter's hands away and placed the bulbous white headphones over her ears. I took a quick survey of the car: Price grinned from ear to ear; Pantsuit, the wet spot under her arm as wide as home plate, gazed on wildly.

All with seats rode their edges and those without leaned and tilted where they stood for a better view. Headphones swiped his iPod. He tapped the screen. He swiped again. Camila's eyes shot open as if struck with mighty force. A Disney chorus mumbled over her ears. She sniffled. She snorted. She smiled. The T rolled into Beaconsfield Station. And then Reservoir. And finally toward Chestnut Hill. The sound of *chug chug chug* on the track returned, followed by “THE DESTINATION OF THIS TRAIN.” You could even hear the tiny *bings* of requested stops up above. It was a great moment, like the Christmas truce of 1914, when the guns went silent and the soldiers crawled from their holes into No Man's Land to rejoice in sport and celebration with their enemies. The battle was over. Peace and tranquility had returned! *Headphones: the MVP!*

But as we approached Chestnut, the man gathered his backpack and rose from his seat, drawing groans from the train. “This is me,” he said, holding out the woman's shopping bag. She nodded with a smile and pried the music from her daughter's ears. I held my breath but Camila, surprised yet unfazed, whispered a “Thank you” and turned to hug her mother. With her cries defeated, the D train exhaled as its doors opened. Number 24 squished himself onto Headphones' vacant seat. His flab pushing against my elbow was a warm and welcome relief. As we rolled on toward Newton, I held out my hands to apologize.

“I’m sorry for yelling at you,” I told Camila’s mother.
“It’s been a long day. I don’t know what came over me.”

“*Está bien, señor,*” she told me, and to Camila, “*Ya casi estamos en casa.*”

They say marrying young is foolish 'cause you won't know how your spouse deals with the kinds of big decisions neither of you have run into yet: domestic living, taking vacations, family squabbles, managing finances. But that's horseshit. No one sees the *real* kickers coming. Like, which one of you gives up a career to stay at home and staple foam paneling all over the walls? Whose credit is ruined so the doctors can cut your son's brain in half? Which tiny headstone do you pick out, the one with the baseball glove or the race car? Gabby wanted to use a service called *Little Angels LLC*. I wanted to stick my head in a wood-chipper. We compromised on an upright, marble stone with a jigsaw puzzle. Jason liked putting things together. He could do at eight what we can't at thirty.

Our condo is off of Newton Highlands which the D-train hit around 9:45. By then, Number 24 had the whole bench to himself and Camila was asleep on her mother's knee. As I stepped off and walked to my car, I noticed that Pantsuit, the young Asian woman who'd taken such a tumble in all the madness at Fenway, was parked but two spots from me.

“Crazy night, huh?” I said, louder than expected over the night's renewed silence.

The young lady looked around the empty lot and raised an eyebrow. “Don't tell anyone,” she said, “but I always pray they lose and don't make it to the playoffs.”

“Yeah, that would have spared us from a night like tonight.”

“Where did that guy come from, anyway? Did you see? The guy with the headphones?”

“He was there before I got on. I sat next to him the whole time.”

“Damn. I sure wish he thought to do that sooner!”

“Yeah. Yeah. That would have been nice,” I said, or something like that.

I thought about asking her out for a drink. She was cute, the night wasn't over yet, and Gabby would hardly call a search party should I return late, or even the next morning. Pantsuit clung to her purse and smiled as I raised my hand in suggestion. But there, nestled into my finger, was my wedding band. It was stuck behind my knuckle and had been for a while.

“You have a nice night,” I said, waving her off. As she pulled out of the lot, I wrestled the ring loose and held my finger up to the streetlight. A bruised halo remained. It was time to go home. It was time to go.



Nickel
by Silas Plum

Sonny Liston Workshops His Creative Nonfiction in the Hereafter

Phantom punch my ass and no pit-a-pat punch neither. Three times in first-round rematch Clay hit me with rights right upside my head and third time I never seen it comin' and I go down— hey that shit happens. Then that fool stand over me hollerin' and cockin' his fist like some prison punk like he never heard of no neutral corner, sportsmanship, respect for the other fighter. I say why get up just then just so he can hit me upside my head again? And him standin' over me like that — that become a famous photo and people look at it — they still lookin' at it more than fifty years later — like he some kind of bad-ass hero.

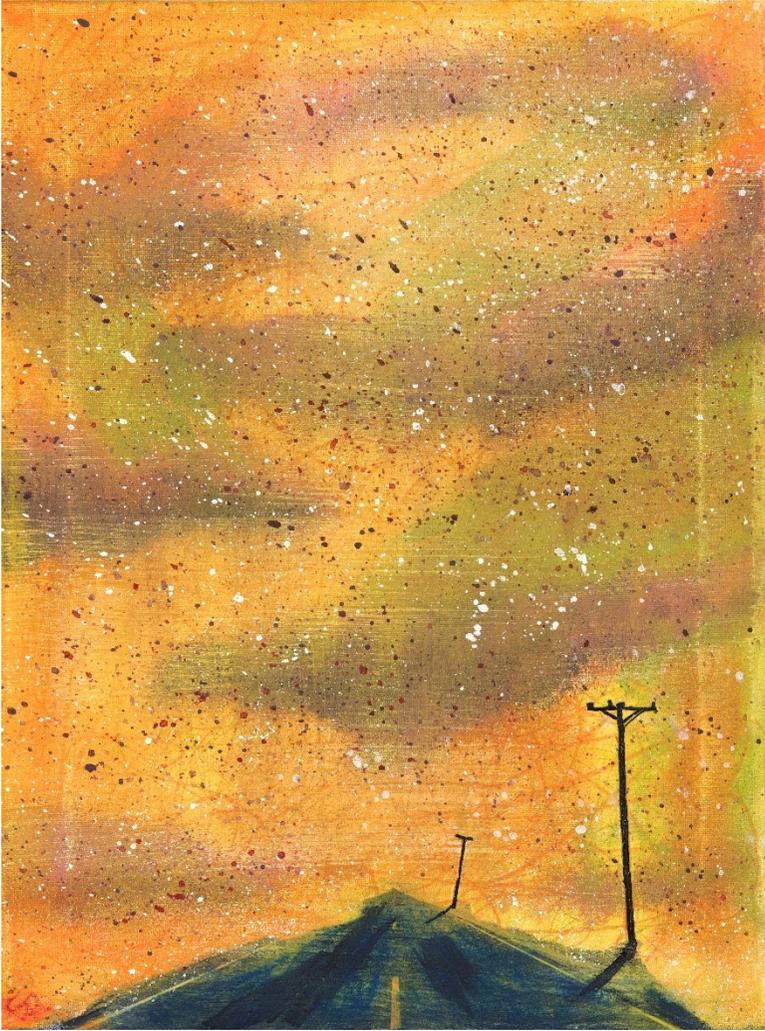
And don't get me goin' about Jersey Joe — good fighter, ex-champ, nice man but good-for-nothin' horseshit referee. He leave Clay standin' over me, go over and jaws with itty-bitty timekeeper. Meanwhile, Clay finally step back, I stand up and we start mixin' it up again and then I'm fucked — Jersey Joe come back to the action, says I been counted out even though nobody done no countin' that anybody hears, least of all him. He raise Clay hand say Clay he still be heavyweight champ, which make me heavyweight chump. Fans and press and even other fighters — every soul on Earth 'cept my wife say I took a dive. Well, Elijah's scary-ass FBI-infiltrated Muslims just done kill Malcolm and that shit do make me think.

You know what else make me think? How people believe what they want to believe. How people don't like facts gettin' in the way of what they like to believe, what they told to believe. Like how people think Clay served prison time for standin' up to the man. Hey, it's cool he stand up to the man by not lettin' the army draft his ass, but his pretty face never spent a day locked up and that's the truth. Me, they throw me in the Missouri State Penitentiary, motherfucker. Stand up to the man? I stick the man in a trash can and take the man's gun and badge. So who be the real bad ass?

But phantom punch my ass and no pit-a-pat punch neither. That clown Clay he too quick too slick (just like first fight) and he hit me upside the head — never seen it comin'. But after that I got no shame bein' second-best fighter in whole motherfuckin' world for next five years till I die — still don't know what went down that day. Think by now I'd been told. But no.

Word here in the Hereafter say maybe he and me get it on for fight number three. If it comes it comes. I got nowhere else to be. I'm already in tip-top afterlife shape and word 'round here say Clay — ok, I'll call him Ali — he ain't nearly as fast as he used to be.

by Robert Rubino



End of the World
by Emily Rankin

Make Paperwork, Not War

Were you in San Francisco
for the Summer of Love?

Or in Vietnam?

Or did you protest the war
that defined your generation?

No, no. And no.

You pulled clerk-typist duty in '67
the next year too

while stationed on safe & sleepy
stateside Air Force bases

in Mississippi, South Carolina & Wyoming.

Never fired a weapon

(more importantly a weapon was never fired at you)

never even carried a weapon.

Thank you for my service.

by Robert Rubino

What Kind of Man Reads Playboy?

Were you at Woodstock
In that symbolic summer of '69?
Did you at least watch Neil Armstrong
take one giant leap for mankind?
Negative that, sir.

You were in the Air Force in '69
a horny virginal 21-year-old clerk typist
stationed in Thule, Greenland — remote & isolated
no sun in winter, all sun in summer
no females ever.

You helped keep democracy safe in the Arctic Circle
where back then they didn't get live TV
where you mostly played racketball
dropped acid, smoked hashish & read Playboy.
That's right, no joke, you *read* Playboy.

by Robert Rubino



Untitled
by Mallory Zandog

Neo

IN this neo-utopia
we are the newest children
remake the world
in our fashion.

cut futures imperfect across a
slumbering cretinous divide,
dying Dionysian gyrations
of neo-liberal's uneasy
leering smile.
captured in ink,
conjured sepulchral magic
that lit scrolling feeds of the divine.
woke advocacy,
the ephemera of changing perspectives –
calyx of commodified
vassalage.

But I wish you filmed that
You said
I wish we had that captured.
I wish we had that made.
Heaven and hell
just one share away.

laying here, in slick,
magic tricks, the confessions of sleep
and subtextual readings of the
machinations of high noon retrograde
in lugubrious dendritic thrall.
that slips and grasps a beam of light
to say fuck you
to all these shadows.

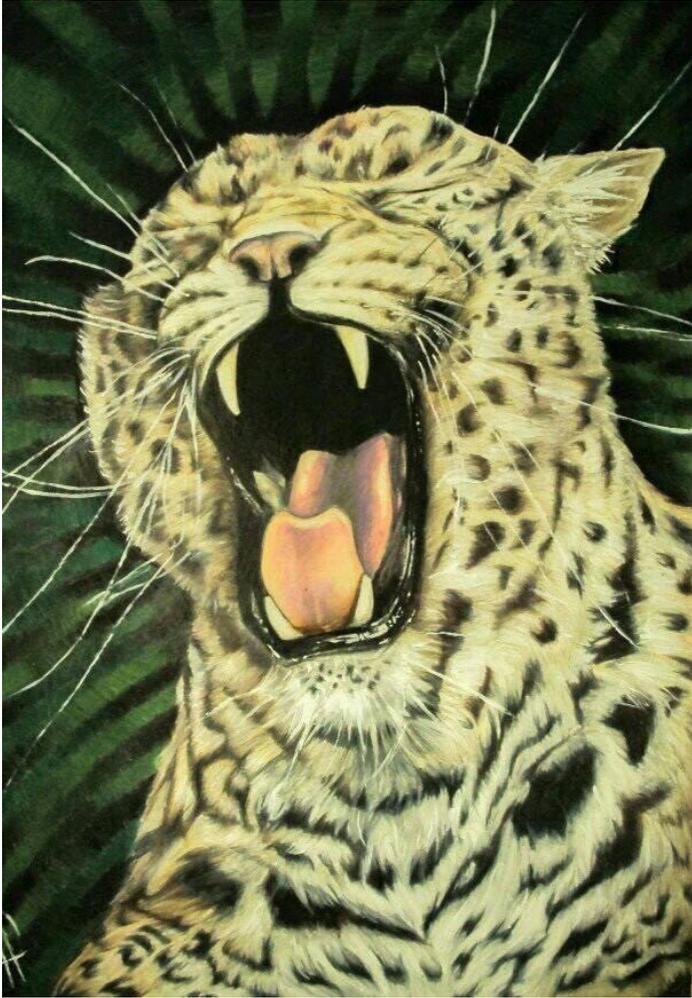
I see you.
You're the only thing
I know for sure
is there.
Anywhere.

All is smoke and mirrors,
inchoate lit.
And th lights go technicolour -
a diaphanous world gathers
cloacal pleats,
swells of hemmed splendour.

And I can be fascinated again,
coy enchantment amongst favour,
Even amidst
all this lecherous
e
- Conomy.
comfortably far away.

We are the neo-utopian children,
balanced precarious
neo-soldiers. We are,
the last the earth will shoulder,
smoulders.
The earth sweats,
a future indifferent
to imperfections slick-
shoulders ripple.

by Bradley David



Cheetah
by Jodi Filan

Gift Shop (Admission included in entry fee)

I don't think,
I Get It.
or (aloud) were simply observing
the joined form of object, and observer,
rarely attached to solid like a
thing. (or this price tag)
we're post-thing, at least
for the time being.

you, me, and
our glorious audience
of affluent majesties.

Gallery Opening:

'new abstraction/extractive identities'
darling, they buy your expressions (literally)
but they won't take your card
here (again, but thank fuck.)
still, sterile laugh blooms in our hollow purses
the wind through subdivide warehouses,
empty, echoing anecdotes retold
over-crowded entrées
ever bobbing yachts on the emerald arbour.

I don't know what Art is,
but this?
it isn't.
SO,
Go back to school, so,
pay up
like paying delivery partners

for starters,
to get taught what a line looks like:
from inside out.

you wanted to be spontaneous
burning your fire, for no commerce
or witness (or trace).

a circle, ephemeral grace
burned in white (a curious choice)
on your
incandescent forearm.

(where?):
the human, intersects, with the author -
all things that forsake the latter,
make the former.
But it's nice to feel
at this juncture -
that my line meets yours.
Artistically (emotionally)
x

see,
emoji's are, a priori
evasive.
though the letters look archaic
up late in their bed clothes.
you asked to begin new correspondences,
in circles, concentric email alter-egos,
but yours never showed (so I made one)
a you of my own.

'one can either make a certain kind of line -
or not.'

Eviction Notice:

rising costs, gentrified easel dwellers
sell their cake to eat it too,

in refined sugars, and screentime mouthfeels

(productivity goals go
unachieved
).

(zoom out)
build forts, now diversity checks
and see then

(pans)
the stoves
still heating.
inductions/
(back in, close for reaction)

in the ensuing lines,
three dots, pulsing, like some
paranoid threesome (rhythmical, manic, maniacal), like

the weight of your reply
after too many wines.

by tram sirens night
some poets (her, again?) (I thought we talked about this)
only

(in therapy)
choose to colour their ink
when kosher.
Can be derived, not in their deep intimacy with depressing
vines,
but in how they ask for the bill,

when it's the polishing cutlery
to punk End of Service.

New Lease:

Oblivion (ah him, again).

And is it; jilted lover
or, the wilting artist
that phlegm envy rising
in an afterschool library?

Those that care more
For the circumstances of their Success
than the success of their Art (thanks Keith)

leave bread crumb trails
acknowledgements of Success,
like dutiful ants
across continents.
in high brow press, incontinence,
lending
sloshing over contemporaries
(I really should be more supportive,
But I don't
feel up to it)

in endless readings
Insta lens and other absent minded
burner identities, and their insouciant surfeit charm.
post-structural calm
dissertations,

(I had to wikipedia that,
just to understand, her thesis)

echoing proud castrations,
they'd cut off their arm
Kondo that shit -
Do You Feel Love
for unused shelf-space? the smell of empty gift stores?
fictional chimeras for sale on the promenade -
produces,
artful distillery.

now the walls been torn out for the gallery,
Index cards Toxic Masculinity →
empty halls to fuck themselves in -
does Duchamp still make
sense?

What does, indeed, a line look?

the decision, (s)
to not put down
any line
at all.

like Samo© said, (something like this, though, I
deem, in hindsight
that he'd approve of my revise)
in the end
only matter what it pay for.

Sold:
At the end of the night
(counting tills)
screens, wiped clean.
do not disturb,
velvet bollards.

by Bradley David



Carol Lombard

by Jodi Filan

A Drop of One's Own (this metaphor is not my own)

Even in a waterfall,
 a raindrop
 is still on its own.
pulsing roar of ever impassioned,
passive violence
into plunged pools.
crescendos to world's end,
intrepid gives lip upon the cusp.
a rush of watery bodies
skirting nature's cleft chin.
tumbles upon itself
in the cascading depression.
at the crux of river,
single drop
all currency spent
meandering ancient seams.
find one in the infinite,
amongst the few,
reside the many.
the
waterfall
 is just a
 drip
on its own.

Even,
we fear this unruly tain.
an instantaneous intersection of circles,
in restive pools
butterfly whispers upon the axis
treacle movement of time.
paramount, exhuming

steam upon shoulders
in the plunge, recession,
this tide is done
lifting boats.
this artisanal earth
sculpted the chasms that lay just beneath
the chimerical wash
negotiating in the islands
of rock, sharp inhale
through broken teeth
that suck up
towards the shore.
in ancient legends of country the stories
are still all some people have.
their pens are shaking
as ink means
pursuant to the judge
and these contracts bound
children
of a lesser suspicion.
the fictions, the tales that come
truest to life
told only in their tongues
the only way they stay their own.

these ancient snakes that wound their skins,
stories spun
-not mine, but his -
around the sepulchral loom.
sculpted an army of soil and clay,
so they say
made mountains for soldiers
and rain tipped with spears,
talking with rotating moons.
amid the monsoon,
a lesson

in control and humility.
their cry the strength of their ancestors,
script in the washed bones of
a country died so many deaths
but one.
the individual
came armed with threats
of divine liberty
prosperity
for some.
domestic terrorists
of self
in cascading
silent majorities.
even myself
is not my own.

the former is squinting
in penetrative gaze
beneath the deluge,
equilibrium -
restive pools
turn reactive.
stewing container
still dredged debts
of anguished generations.
water mustered
and muscled,
current,
showed what it is to be moved
against its will.
I am squinting in your gaze
falsely defied
in the mindful clarity
of heavens swell.
a single raindrop might sell itself -

an intrepid comes to find
as a little more than it knows itself,
upon the brink of the sunburnt horizon –
of etymology,
of retribution,
of divine beauty
in the choreography
of genetic redistribution,
as a swelling pride in its ilk.
even bathed, teased
tousled in the past tense,
even my light is not my own.

people become circumstance,
circumstance becomes people,
begets nothing in the silence
between breaths.
steady, but intransigent,
insolvent, crying out for the “I”.
incompetent
at receiving this most sensuous,
base ritual,
of inside and out,
of breath and then
Not.

Inhale,

Exhale,

By the second stroke, I'll be waiting.
in our own rhythmic divine.
trying to live in disclosure
without ceremony
but even,
our graves are not our own.

by Bradley David



The Owl at Honey Bee Canyon

Here's how you can find him:
Follow the trail down the hill
then turn north under the road.
Walk up the wash a mile or so
till you come to the ruins of the dam.
Keep going. On your left
you will see figures, animals, symbols
etched into the flat faced rock.
There he is, the Hohokam owl,
helper to the Guardian of the Valley.

What you will feel when you see him
I cannot say. But maybe, as I have,
you will sense the presence of people
from a thousand years ago,
brothers and sisters laying their heads down
tonight in the same place we will rest ours.
Maybe you will hear the great horned owl,
friend in the dark, hoot his promise
to protect us under this black sky
lit by a million stars.

Artwork by Kim Sosin
Poem by Janet McMillan Rives



A Man and his Dog Rest in the Sunlight
by Kim Sosin

Jasmine Tercet

We played pretend I, Lincoln; you, Mary
White House, breakfast, dawn,
little rainy Christmas Day 1861.
Abraham, Abraham,
Thou are not ruining my Christmas dinner again.
Silent as a stovepipe hat, I squat.
You and your cabinet boys enjoy
your little meeting tomorrow.
Mary, please pass the marmalade.
Your sons were so looking forward to opening their presents.
We the people need to decide if the union
can risk engaging in war with Britain over
our capturing Confederate agents on a
British ship while fighting Mister Lee.
I suppose I'll have to cancel the choir and dinner guests.
God himself doesn't know what time you will return Mister Lincoln.
Mother, I wonder if our Yankee boys and those Confederates
will lay down their rifles,
swap some Figgie puddin' and pecan pie?
Father, proper ladies of the Confederacy knitted
scarves and socks for their soldier boys.
Mother, tiny children were urged to pray,
Yankee wolves stay away from our doors.
Yet Southern slaves taste freedom on Christmas day.
At the Horton Taft's house, Willie boy and Tom fired crackers
and pistols practicing to be soldiers. Stayed for dinner.

I consulted my pocket watch,
Lincoln, you know war is always
coming yet avoid festivities.
Escalating evening sleet washed war room window
dead ruddy damselfly hung
her multifaceted eyes reflecting
blood of soldier martyrs swaying on winter wheat
to the revelry of newly decorated White House.

&&&

On the colorless page
your chestnut words almost black
like a bland toad bleaching on the pond sill
like a once voluptuous Koi leaping and swallowing her
like a swooping heron consuming both
like a shadow capturing the flickering
like breaking light dissolves all
as your mind disappears from the page.
In my brain rewind forty-nine years together
upward flies my drone pursuing your memory:
Amphibian slurped by carp
burped by bird
raincloud choked, regurgitated brightness.
It's not the bite in your words.
It is the silent illness between your words
that pings my soul.

&&&

Last bitter words I slung
you caught tenderly.
They still rattle
in my mouth. Up
the knoll staggering
where our little café
reigns as a ramshackle
cathedral without a steeple.

The stifling sun twists
the storefront into shades
cooper, sunflower, and violet
stained glass like. Winded
I stare at three perfect
holes in the café
window covered inside
by decaying newspapers
proclaiming, *Strife Over*.
The dates are smudged.

Bullet holes?
Too symmetrical.
Want to fit my fingers
like into the risen Christ's
side to see if they're real.
Café door's stuck. Jam
my shoulder squeeze through.

On small gray tray
my mocha coffee
a cup as life-size
as a funeral urn. On
creamy surface smiles
a Cheshire cat. Chuckling
I stir its face
into an earthy
concoction.

If there was a sound
didn't hear it. Three
sharp twinges
in my side. Shove
the bleeding back
like bad memory
of our final words.

My pain dies when
you appear above
surrounded by halo
of Cheshire cats. Sweetness
of your hair rains down. Braided
blue roses,
bleached tulips,
almost white lilacs,
gardenias, and jasmine

pull me up
your good thief.

It was a slow
news day.
Small column
on page 23 read
Turmoil Declines.
Victim found face down.

&&&

by Ted Zahrfeld



What the Lion Sees
by Tony Murray

The Karmic Agent

by Sam Aleks

The wailing police sirens drown out the gentle song of the calming flame. I count two sets of red and blue lights before abandoning the house to the raging fire. I don't turn – turning makes you look guilty. I walk slowly, steadily past the dying trees, past the shabby weathered houses, and down the cul-de-sac until I finally reach my redbrick and coal apartment haven nestled in the gloom of that gray afternoon fog.

Standing by my kitchen window, I watch the burning home with some unease. There is a soft snowfall drifting, the smell of sulfur. I breathe it in, it takes me back.

###

This obsession started small, like a blemish before a body rash. First paper plates and toys, then discarded furniture. Cardboard boxes, old moldy desks, full motion swivel barstools, ergonomic office chairs, dilapidated cabinets – sometimes even plain discarded wood when I got desperate. The turning point came through a random self-indulgent experiment one idle afternoon. Finding nothing else around the neighborhood, I set fire to an old CRT TV and never went back to recyclables. That day I found burning TVs gives you so much more. A sudden jolt of life came like always, but what followed was a soothing calm never known before, an ease to my tension. A steady state somehow lingering beyond the cooling death of the cinders and the ash.

This first TV emitted a gentle black smoke cocooning my entire complex in a delicate womb that

evening. The delicious combination of gun powder and melting plastic fused and filled the air with a flavorful aroma like that of old rubber boots baking in the sun. As the smell overtook, the melodic crackle of the blaze outside softly cooed me to a new sleep, a sleep free of nightmares. The night rejuvenated and the morning welcomed. For the first time my back straightened, my shoulders squared, and the vastness of the world came as a glorious reminder of hope and not a crushing burden.

###

My parents named me Onra, but only ever referred to me as “girl.” They had prepared a long list of potential male names before my birth, being certain that they would have a boy. Unfortunately, the big day proved the first of many disappointments for them.

Still, they tried to bring up a boy as best they could. My father made an active attempt by involving me in what he called “man’s business.” He took me fishing, shooting, and hunting, all activities I quickly began to excel in. In fact, I *enjoyed* these things and my father even gave me pats on the back after a few of our more successful excursions. I liked seeing him proud, but his subtle, hollow smiles never fully eased the tension in my shoulders.

On my thirteenth birthday he bought me a pair of military-grade binoculars and frowned when I asked him what they were for.

My father is a retired construction worker and my mother is on disability due to gout. They live about a half hour drive away in Glendale and are what one would dismissively refer to as “decent people.” They are good neighbors with a clean lawn, they wave hello, and always

recover their bins the day after trash day. Since moving out, I've been doing my best to limit contact with my parents. Holiday and birthday phone calls. I haven't seen them in two years.

###

The phone rang two days ago while I stood in the kitchen watching the fire fighters pour sand over a blazing flat screen. Through the receiver, my mother told me that father had a heart attack so severe it awarded him three attendants, two doctors, and almost half of the cardiac ward. She told me there isn't much time left. So, I figured visiting the hospital would make the most sense.

I watered my plants, ironed my clothes, and applied make-up meticulously. I walked up to my apartment door. The discolored paint made me uncomfortable. I considered applying a fresh coat before leaving the house but dismissed the idea. I reached for the knob, turned, pulled, opened, and finally walked through the archway.

With deliberate movement, I made my way down the flights of stairs holding firm to the railing and counting the steps as I descended. Each step labored my breathing, each motion weighing more on my chest like the fitting of cinderblocks. By the time I reached the front door of the complex, I felt dizzy and lightheaded. The empty suburban seemed to sway and rock like lava flow. A sudden urge to sleep struck without warning and my legs were in full motion, running back up the stairs, back to the front door, and back to the safety of my little home. I phoned mother to tell her I felt too sick to leave the house. I would visit later, some other day.

I drift away in the evening, my body almost nonexistent – but the torpor never lasts. By three AM I'm awake again, mouth dry and mattress soaked. Lying in bed I often recall the sensual music of distant flames. How I used to carry matches with me everywhere.

My father is an old man, it makes sense for him to die and yet there's pity in it too. I shuffle memories in my mind like playing cards. The day when as a teenager I left the house past curfew to find comfort in the old department store – then but a skeleton of what it once was. The way my father slapped me after finding me outside in the darkness and how bad it stung.

###

The garbage mounds littering the sidewalks sat proudly the day before the house fire. Occasionally, a clump of damp paper towels or a green glass bottle fell off a mound, rolled across the street, met the curb, and disappeared into the void of a gutter drain. I savored those subtle moments as I made my way down the street, but even the most dignified migration of garbage didn't make up for the lack of television sets.

Sure, one of my neighbors, an elderly Filipino couple, had left a decrepit desk sagging against a tree, but I knew that wouldn't satisfy me. Burning is like a drug – you need bigger and better kicks each time the tension returns.

I took a longer walk than usual to make sure I didn't miss anything. The pale house on the far end of the street often held the most garbage. The people living there seemed to enjoy breaking things. Each week guaranteed a new piece of furniture. However, that day the bounty was bare. The dirt-ridden front yard offered nothing but a

poorly coiled garden hose and two tacky pink flamingos. I even moved the items around, lifting them up and checking the dead grass below in utter disbelief.

As I skulked around, a muddy and discolored mustang careened down the quiet street and parked abruptly in the driveway. The beast on the broken concrete wore a rusted grill frown and an array of crashes for a frame. The driver door swung open and out stepped a pair of snakeskin boots. The man that followed looked haggard, but strong. The sinew of his neck and arms bulging outward, covered by greasy skin and long hair matted and clumped by oil. The man looked directly at me, freezing me in place. He flashed a little smirk before stomping toward the front door, swinging it open, and greeting the inhabitants with a rowdy groan.

I stared at the mustang, recalling my father's old project car. We worked on it together, him fiddling under the hood and me holding the flashlight. He'd dig into the car's guts, grunting, swearing, smelling of motor oil, as the small TV in the garage played background noise. I remember wanting to be left alone, to be in my room where it was quiet – but he insisted on me joining him. So, I stood there, flashlight in hand, illuminating the inside of the car. I eventually saw it as a game, an exploration of a cave, a hunt for treasure. We rarely spoke during this time, so it made the immersion easier. Father is older now and I'm older too. It's the natural thing, a known outcome, the antidote to life.

My breathing became labored despite my standing still. The metallic sway of the mustang, odd and distant – I could feel the space between us grow large yet remain flat like a canvas. The machine and I connected by time and space yet set apart. I decided to continue down the street to

clear my head. *A couple of laps around the cul-de-sac, I thought, just a quick walk.*

On my way back I saw a boy sitting perfectly still on the dead lawn, a stoic apparition. He was holding a magnifying glass up against the descending sun. *Maybe he's just a vision?* I thought, he was serene, surreal. The metal frame of the mustang was no longer in motion, it was just a car then. We were all present then.

What little light shone past the distant mountains collected in the boy's glass. He directed the pulse of energy upon the dirt before him, boiling the surface of the mud, penetrating it.

"Hi," the boy said. He was staring at me, but I hadn't noticed. His eyes were light blue and just as piercing as the beam of light.

"Hello," I said. A knot developed in my back; I rubbed my shoulder.

"You look sad."

"Me? I'm okay. What are you doing there?"

"Playing with the ants," the boy looked down at the grass and motioned the beam around.

"You like that game?" I rubbed my shoulder. The boy shrugged without looking up.

"Is that your dad?" I said, "the guy that drives that car."

"That's my new dad. Do you want to play with me?"

"No, I'm very busy," I started walking, "I have to go."

###

My mother began getting hot flashes at 39. Despite this, my parents somehow managed to conceive another baby, their little miracle boy. The boy weighed six pounds, eight ounces and was named Kai.

Kai looked like a shriveled raisin when I first saw him, not a real person but an impression of one. Something out of clay, an abstraction. I reached out my hand and he curled his around two of my fingers, smiling a toothless smile, the gap between his gums like a hollow cavern. I smiled back, feeling my face tighten, my mouth stretch.

My parents showered Kai with endless toys. Delighting in his smiles and giggles while leaving me alone. Without their hovering, I was able to experience life on my own terms – unburdened, unhinged. I found comfort with the other rejects at school, Cecilia being one of them. Cecilia taught me the meaning of catharsis through fire.

I spent most of my teenage days with Cecilia after school. Her denim and leather style rubbed off and soon we were both sporting that grunge look. The other kids at school avoided us like the plague. The only one who paid us any mind was Kai. As he got older, his mimicry of my look increased. He began following Cecilia and me, trailing noiselessly behind us – sometimes we went hours without realizing he was there. Sometimes my father would interrogate me about his whereabouts, as if I was his keeper.

When Cecilia introduced me to fire, she did so in Kai's presence. We were out one late afternoon after school looking for something to do, walking aimlessly. We reached the park, sloshing through the wet grass as the clouds enveloped the setting sun. Cecilia lit a cigarette and offered me one. I accepted nonchalantly to disguise my inexperience.

I coughed, feeling the cigarette smoke burn through my throat. The coughing came in waves and I rocked against the tree we sat under to urge the tar out. I tried to gauge her reaction. *Can she tell?* I thought, but she didn't care. She was too busy with the ash of her own cigarette to notice.

"Watch this," she said, pressing the burning end of the cigarette against her arm. She didn't flinch.

"Why did you do that?" I asked.

"Because I can," she said. "Come on, let me show you something."

She led me to a small shack in the middle of the park. The structure was made of wood and had no entrance – The doors and windows were barred by planks.

"Check it out," she tugged at a plank, pulling it off to reveal a mass of moving filth. Large clumps of dirt scurried out of the shack in droves. I stared in alarm, they had vein-like tails and large, jutting teeth. They smelled like a septic tank and made shivers run down my spine as they grazed against my ankles. I did my best to remain stoic, Cecilia laughed. She forced her arm into my flannel pocket and pulled out my matchbox.

"What do you say we take our bonfire to the next level?" she said, striking a match. I watched the shack light up, first blue, then red, then intense yellow. My back tingled and I didn't know what to think. I stepped away, creating distance between Cecilia, the fire, and me. I felt the presence of a small body behind me. Kai had followed us, seen the whole thing. I registered wonder in his eyes, shock at the mesmerizing dance of the flame. We stood there, silent, watching the show.

The whimpering finally snapped me back. It must have been going on for a while. The fire was already

surrounding us when Cecilia started pulling me away. By the next day, the blaze had grown out of control. By the end of the week, the fire fighters had managed to control it long enough to search for the body.

###

Earlier today before the house fire, I spent the early afternoon scouring my apartment. I found old journals, jeans, small scraps of poetry once pinned on my bedroom wall. I dug through my bedroom closet, shoveling through memories until I found the old lockbox. I opened it, finding the binoculars still in pristine condition.

I pressed them against my face and observed the gloom of the neighborhood at twilight. The birds in the trees, the shabby houses stretching down the road, the old couple two doors from my complex in their rocking chairs – that dying generation. My father in his hospital bed must have been watching television. I saw the mustang again, careening down the street, disturbing the picture beyond my lenses.

It moved in subtle zigzags; its roaring motor first distant then knocking at my eardrum. It turned into the driveway and produced the sinew of its driver once again. The man moved his haggard body in a bent determination. His fists clenched and his expression scowling with malice. Tension moved like a stream of ants through my body, the man pulled the door open, stepped inside, and slammed it closed. I rubbed my shoulder to ease the knot.

I aimed my binoculars toward Filipino couple's house in the hope of finding something, anything to work with. Their lawn was empty – every lawn in the neighborhood was empty. The sidewalks were free of

clutter, the empty trash bins being evidence of the garbage man's visit. I frowned and grit my teeth as tears started forming, I brush them away and return to my observation. A noise in the distance focused the sway of the binoculars back to the green mustang. The door of the house swung with the gentle wind and the boy from before walked out toward the street. He sat on the curb, rubbing his face.

My phone rang, it was mother again. She told me that father's condition wasn't improving. She urged me to visit and I agreed,

“Yes,” I said, “it would be good if I came.”

I stuffed the memories back into my closet and pulled out a shirt and jeans. I changed, noticed a stain on my shirt, I rubbed it with my finger, but couldn't remove it. I took the shirt off and put on an old flannel that Cecilia gave me back in high school. I took a moment to examine it in the mirror; red, plaid, pockets, burn holes. She lived with three sisters and claimed her clothing by pressing the lit ends of cigarettes against it. She gave it to me after the big fire to help me stay warm through the walk home.

I put on my sneakers, tying the laces twice, then straightened my hair. I approached the door, grabbed the knob, turned, pulled, opened, and exited through the archway. The heavy feeling returned as I descended the stairs.

Outside the blue hour was approaching. I walked down the street, phone in hand, and ordered a ride. I walked past the shabby house and looked at the boy. He didn't see me at first but looked up as I moved past.

“It's you,” he said.

“Hello,” I stopped and put my phone away. We looked at each other silently. I notice the bruise around his eye.

“You look very sad,” he said, “are you okay?”

“I’m fine. What happened to your eye?”

The boy looked away. Flashing lights bursting from the window illuminated us. I looked past the boy and saw the haggard man lazing on the couch inside. Before him was a glorious screen flashing with rare energy. I felt the glow of the television even at this distance, the radiance of it seeping past us and out into the emptiness of near night.

“It’s really loud in there,” the boy said, “I don’t like it loud. That’s why I go outside.”

“I don’t like it loud either,” I told him.

“Why do you feel bad?” he said.

“I feel fine,” I reached into my flannel pocket and found an old matchbox. I examined it and remembered the smell of Cecilia’s cigarettes – how it blended with the burning timber and disappeared like a face in an ocean of people.

“What’s that?” the boy said.

“This?” I showed him the matches, “It’s a matchbox. I use it to burn things.”

“Like ants?” he said.

“Yes,” I smiled, “like ants.”

I tossed him the matchbox and continued staring at the screen in the house.

“He makes me mad sometimes,” the boy said, “do you get mad too?”

“No, I’m a very calm person,” I checked the time on my phone and concluded that visiting hours at the hospital were over.

“Are you leaving?” the boy asked.

“I’m going home,” I stared at the lightshow in the house, “does your new dad watch TV often?”

“Every night. I hate it,” the boy scowled, “he comes home and just sits with the sound turned up.”

“What about your mom?”

“My mom works a lot, I don’t see her most of the time.”

“What happened to your eye?” I asked again.

“Nothing,” the boy looked at the matchbox. I saw hunger in his face and knew I should ask for the matches back. I waved goodbye.

The light flicked off. The boy rose noiselessly, walked back to the porch and waved. I felt a lump in my throat. he reached for the knob, turned, pulled, opened, and finally walked inside. I stood alone in the street, quiet.

I took a walk around the block. Then another. Then a third. I circled through the neighborhood until the streets were fully submerged in darkness. On the way back I heard the crackling, felt the smoke rising like a demon freed. I stood a while and waited there by the pale house, watching the smoke rise and transform into fire. The fire spread quickly

###

I’m standing in my kitchen now, safe and alone. The wail of the police sirens is audible, but the lights are still too distant. I pick up my binoculars and see the smoke bellowing from the dancing flame atop the roof of the shabby house. That oscillating horror.

The door of the pale, burning house swings open. The haggard man staggers out, shirt aflame. A rough black smoke is rising from his torso. A large woman follows fast

with a blanket. She drapes it over him as he rolls on the asphalt in the street. For a moment there is calm, then the woman begins to shout.

People gather around the blaze and the sirens approach ever closer. The police are first, I see them on their way. The woman attempts to rush back into the blaze, but someone from the crowd prevents her. The boy is missing, I realize. The boy is in the house with fire surrounding – my fire. That dreaded inferno, that perfect storm.

I'm tackling the stairs two, three at a time. My legs are running down and out into the black and orange street. The crowd is gathered like a tribe around a bonfire. They're murmuring, some covering their mouths in shock. A few are holding their phones to their ears, beckoning the fire fighters to hurry. The police have just arrived, the officers are pushing people back.

I'm sneaking by the side of the house, the cool of the evening at my side as my shoulder boils against the buckling wood. I'm near the bedroom window now, I reach up. The smell of burning flesh, a kind of pork. I'm looking at the burn marks across my hands, then at the small body past the window frame cocooned by smoke. I climb in and face it, the disintegration of self.

EPILOGUE

The sterility of the Valley Presbyterian initially unnerved me. The smell of medicine, the orderly and dutiful behavior of the nurses, the subtle beeping of the machine hooked up to my arm in the otherwise silent white plaster room. It all felt like a dream, a fantasy that one is apt to project on the less fortunate, but never on oneself.

The sting of pain and insufficient morphine drip prevented any depersonalization. *I am here, this is real, I am in pain.*

Gauze covers my left arm and half my face. The nurses call me a hero but refuse to bring me mirrors. They say that I'll get to go home in a couple of weeks.

I am gently dabbing at the gauze on my face when the nurse pulls back the privacy curtain.

"You have a visitor," she says, smiling faintly.

As she exits the room, an orderly brings in a patient in a wheelchair. He helps the man onto his bed and adjusts his pillows in an upright position before leaving. The man coughs heartily, and I turn to face him.

I feel no panic, no tension. I feel nothing but sorrow. I open my half-burnt mouth to speak, but the pain and delirium produce only a sad and muffled gurgle. The faint whisper, the sad greeting transfers only as faint human static, and we are lost.



Self Portrait
by Tony Murray

Just You See

Just you see
three notebooks
Dirty, Next and Done
he was big enough
to write in pen
an old tent
with a view
of the edge
how long the mind
before a tree
becomes the wind
how many poems
an eye or a beak
a black crow
doesn't flinch
I lift my head
to say farewell

by Rob Schackne

Becalmed

He becomes a writer
a thousand years waiting
and for some reason

for a harmless detonation
he writes odd poems
of hearts and souls

(by all means, my love
transfer those cultures
Astérix to Astro Boy)

he starts out on the Mekong
a thousand years waiting
for the wind to pick up

a kite gets caught
between the gust & the air
and falls at the border

he watches a boat
by a slow silver river
play an old game in the mind

the inklings to scatter
from blows and the hot wire
sparks fly off the thousand words

the kite goes as high
as it can, one eye spotting
the dangers below

looks like soldiers
in a thousand fields sow hearts
marked in land mines dark

a poem comes grudgingly
like a body pulled along the ground
and silent people stare

by Rob Schakne

String Haiku in Five Parts, for John Cage R.I.P.

The glass pieces
a billion bits
scattered everywhere
after the hoodwink
that irresponsible bomb
trucks thundering past
the music schools and factories
today I was invited to feel
a piece of space cotton
my grandmother's cheek
the sound of wings
the last notes of a city
how dramatical
the music fades away
I don't really care
to be healed again

by Rob Schakne



Orpheus
by Kerfe Roig

Six

the latest nap
on the day's shift
coordinates
sex soft with sleep
the respondents
ask afterwards
without a word
their tongues moving
without a sound
both were sleeping
thought this talking
to be kissing

by Alan Bern

facing

the hanging framed

black-on-ivory woodcut --

thick-outlined

friend skeleton

holding up a fine long spear

at angle

over his head twisted

looking back

full face grimacing

alongside

slide-slide tap

slide-slide tap

on the wood floors

shining

by Alan Bern

Cattle Farm

Somehow, I had inherited a cattle farm in West Virginia. I found a peace I'd never known herding the great creatures, so large and stoic and stupid and profound and sweet, among the sharp green fields and hills beneath a bright sky. They made soft thrumming noises as if speaking to me, or to the universe. Perhaps the universe answers them? It never answers me, but I am too neurotic and self-aware, so the universe is smart to ignore me.

I got to know individual cows. Elsa was my favorite, mainly snow white with patches of brown, soft fur. She would rub her rough tongue gently against my hand. It seemed to be love. These massive beasts that could have easily trampled me were gentle as lambs.

Soon, I will have to send some off to be slaughtered. I might become vegetarian. The bloodiness of meat has become disgusting. Still, I need to sell these cows. That's the way a farm works. You always hurt the ones you love.

by Ethan Goffman

One Day in an Orchard

At my feet were stacked piles of apples, green streaked with red, a mild red, a ruby red, a blood red struggling to shine through. I glanced up and realized I was in an orchard, trees shimmering with apples.

I sensed that one of the apples was THE one, the apple of sin and knowledge. Eating it would complete the circle begun by Eve that had signaled the start of human history. Eating it would bring about the apocalypse. I must not eat it. Yet I must, I felt compelled, it was time. Could it possibly be that I, who felt myself among the least significant people on the planet, as insignificant as the untouchables in India, the slaves that still exist in the hidden places around the planet, the child labor in the poorest of countries, the girls sold as sex slaves, the prisoners who stuff our jails with yearning to be free, would be the catalyst for the end of time?

I picked up the first apple, took an enormous bite. It was slightly bitter but mostly bland, not at all juicy. It choked me, but I gagged it down. Apples had never been my favorite fruit, and these were among the dullest of apples. If I only forced myself to smaller bites, eating them would not be unpleasant, just boring, and there was a whole orchardful. I could spend the rest of my life here, eat apple after apple, and still never find the apple of the knowledge of good and evil.

I took a second bite.

by Ethan Goffman

The Word

The Word was out. Final, definitive proof of the existence of God had been discovered, or so it was reported, in a part of the Middle East so distant it was on the other side of the planet, and then another thousand miles beyond. Dressed as a Knight of the Round Table, I set out to find the final proof so that humanity, knowing there was ultimate purpose, would not suffer any more, or at least would suffer a bit less.

I set out on a twisty, torturous, dusty road across vast fields, through thick woods, over rolling hills. For a small portion of the journey, I was actually atop a horse (although a beaten-down old nag), but most of the time I merely banged two coconuts together. I travelled high atop craggy mountains, through deep tunnels in primordial darkness beset with dripping, forded mighty rivers, stowed aboard several barges and one dragon ship to cross vast oceans. Along the way, I consulted with a mystic atop a mountain peak, several viziers, and one particularly brilliant court Jester. I fought three ruffians--two were assaulting maidens and one was just a loud-mouthed fool. (Alas, I won only one of those three battles.) I even slayed a dragon, albeit a particularly small, innocuous one who wasn't doing any harm but had scared some of the locals (I still feel guilty about that one). Finally, after a thousand days, a thousand nights, and 3.1416 seconds, I arrived at a golden shrine. Glorious hymns rose up in the morning sun as I opened an ornate receptacle atop the shrine and pulled out a faded yellow parchment. On it were three statements:

- this paper is the word of God.
- The word of God is infallible.
- God exists because this paper says so.

by Ethan Goffman



I no longer speak to myself
by Serge Lecomte

The Damselfly

You dropped my hand and a damselfly
landed on it, lacy-winged and indigo-striped,
oblivious to the weighty words that
floated to the ground.

I dared not move and doubted the drops
that fell on my thighs were rain.

A second damselfly hovered,
a helicopter assessing its landing pad,
inserting his cerci into the lady.

A great shove from behind.
I doubled over and sucked in my breath,
a zephyr that might unseat them.

The male,
holding the single key that fit the lady's lock,
curved his body beside hers to form
half a perfect heart
that she made whole.

I clutched the jagged cold metal
you slipped into my pocket.

by Debbie Fox

Period

By her own words

she was

a flower of the Gibraltar mountain.

'yes | said yes | will yes'

Words moist and luscious

though she was given so few of them.

Voiceless, Molly was late to bloom

until,

breasts sagging,

her sagacious last words and testament

'yes | said yes | will yes'

closed the unpunctuated book.

Slammed it shut

full-stop

on the Irish man of letters.

by Debbie Fox

i hope it doesn't rain

drawing inspiration
from stones
smashed
to death
by desperate fists

i can show you a place
where the sun is
blackened by crows
and a cricket symphony
chirps beneath the moon

it is true,
that grey days
bring about
clarity to
the eyes of a poet

but any day
spent together
side by side
softens the sun
and slows down time

and in these moments
where flowers grow
from our hands,
reach out and touch
the stars overhead

and just remember:
every breeze
carries my words
and every raindrop
carries my name

but today,
i hope it
doesn't rain

by Tohm Bakelas



The Lone Duck
by Serge Lecomte

Haiku Rain Poem

Summer lotus pond
yellow micro-flowers grow
more moisture above

hard rains come and stay
earth below can hold no more
bayous flood their banks

red rooster shelters
too dispirited to crow
hen pecking to come

fog settles harder
aged archival photograph
pass a summer rain

flood plain is in sight
rains that poured for days on end
one trumpet bell saved

by John Lambremont

U.S. Blues Revisited

If I should say to you:
sometimes I feel like I'm dying,
this is not a mere song lyric,
nor a figure of speech;

as the tears I weep today
I do not weep for me,
but for the wretched state
of this, our home country.

It feels like the cancer within me,
inoperable and weathering chemotherapy,
has metastasized across the nation,
and no one can find a remedy.

There is no longer any tolerance
for opinions that are opposites,
and free speech has costs and takes tolls
in a homeland that's lost its soul.

We should put down our signs and our guns,
and take a good look at the other ones,
until we can see that our hate
is rapidly sealing our fate.

by John Lambremont

Remembrances

My aim was unerring;
my dirt clod hit him
squarely in the eye,
and burst into pieces.

I never figured out
why almost every time
I knelt down in the pew
I felt like passing out.

Startled by the spotted skink
scuttling up the tree trunk,
we laughed nervously;
and then, stolen cigarette in mouth,
I choked and took accidentally
a big, deep inhale.

In our enthusiasm
for laying the brick patio,
I forgot completely
the music festival.

When we got back
to the back yard,
he walked to within ten feet
of the lawn chair, then ran to it,
turning to announce
that he had won.

The only green grass
was at the end
of the garden hose.

Attain the highest
release point possible,
and don't forget
to flick the wrist.

He told me without question
that at the rate we were going,
we would soon be doing drugs.
He was right, of course,
it was the next (best) thing.

He simply couldn't believe
that I would break his nose
with the hand-fashioned blackjack
the carpenter's apprentice made
and gave to me to use.

Those tiny curved nail scissors
were an instrument of torture
made for a bad child.

A hot, steaming bowl
of the old Cream of Wheat,
kindly iconic Negro included,
topped with a spoonful
of granulated sugar,
a pat of butter,
and an ounce of milk.

by John Lambremont



Alaskan Highway
by Serge Lecomte

(phantom whispers)

I'm empty
filled to the brim
with nameless entities
that permeate through me
but their powers still elude me
black eye holes take in the light
razor blade cut across a smile
I'd settle for a sheepish grin
filed down feet follow rivers
and streams of despair
I don't care is the only offering
I can muster upon arriving there
into the black tar well
into the india ink I sink
from the pit I witnessed
a left-hand bent light and spin a web
of foresight
I knew I was close to that finish line
I also knew I would choke
like the hare, I was always early but always felt too late
many years later I know I will always wonder what did
the tea leaves say about me in the bottom of the empty cup?
a solemn cast scattered about the stars
a listless walk down the boulevard
I've come a long way from where I started to not
have found a home

by Rucio Panza

(Everyday unidentified objects in our eyes)

finger on the pulse
fragmented thoughts
cause/effect blood loss
communists hang out in abandoned malls
all across America
struck a rich vein
what have we learned?
morality the new vanity
never mind the cut artery
thirty seconds or less to forever

war rages free from boundary lines
soldiers wander in search of an enemy
may as well stab themselves in the brain
retaliate against feeling fear is freeing

wandering red eye plucked
straight from an apple tree
stand by in waiting for the lay over
time lapsed
a waste heap of rubble
hindsight consulted safe in its
little bubble of superiority
future subject to the past
the new thing never lasts

step outside the box
against the ropes
hands up
prepare for a friendly fight
in the depths of such despair

the light at the end of the tunnel
burns out quickly

a warning beacon to stay clear of the rocks
in each magnified glass used on weekends
to drown out the past
they said to run but never said how fast.

by Rucio Panza



Living Fire for our Sant'Agata, Catania
by Alan Bern

(Lost at Sea)

traveled too far from where we were supposed to be
we've come a long way from where we started
to end up where we began
it fills me with grief to know we've parted
my heart forever martyred
on some hill overlooking grape vines

I've stumbled my way back to good graces
wandered through the desert of my dreams with water
aimlessly searching earth's empty spaces for a hint of what
was
lost in me

found a gem deep within wind whipped ruins,
split apart by the advancement of trees and the underbrush.
slowly crumbling into the dirt, dust, the clay was always
meant for us
Nature is a jealous lover; it takes back what it gave so
freely

lost her through the ages
I've sat and waited long enough
to be rewarded for my failures
they never seem to ferment into success
my body is one of lies

bloodroot blooms each spring
covering forgotten graves
to love is to make yourself a willing slave to affection
to surrender naked to tinder nights
as passion's fires erupt into desire

I know each curve it doesn't matter the mask worn in this
lifetime
rehearsed long enough to serve her every need
I've always been a pauper peasant, I aim to please
no mind, no matter
never again will I leave her clasped hand
forever to be jailed in her locket

sanctuary, I plead
I'm tired and cold
look at how I shiver
my weary bones can barely deliver this body
don't you remember?
I love you
don't torture me with one more fading dream
don't let me die here incomplete

by Rucio Panza



Untitled
by John D. Robinson

Not My Heroes

The person you were
taught to be
gives no pass
when your life's dreams
are called out
by the voices of the victims
of aged norms,
the art forms
of excused accusations
falling on deaf ears
Old world truths
are no excuse
when the new world
transmits through
your locked doors
and the heroes of your time
are heroes no more
Childhood messages
are not enough
when a stolen glance
is still theft
and the words you once read
are no longer written
on the page,
the unacceptable rhythm
of rock'n'roll predators
Outdated cultures
based on an undiagnosed
brutality of spirit
must be smashed
from the inside
by those who gain most,
whose claws scrape the doors

to the bare wood beneath
to paint the world anew
and forget the old.

by Dave Cullern



invisible cities
by Kerfe Roig

Be Afraid Not To Live

insure everything
alarms everywhere
double check the door
triple check the gas
bat by the bed
expensive jewellery
freshen up the garden.
Paint the walls every 5
new carpets every 10
retirement plan
window man
vitamin regime
facial
cut and colour
prime time
Ikea art
live, love, laugh
Netflix choices
books from Smiths
garden centres
house plants
more kids
private schools
piano lessons
parental controls
stay away from strangers
fear of the dark
don't
go
out
all inclusive
4 stars
complaints to the management

guided tour
insure
insure
insure
super heroes
romantic leads
Blitz spirit
cues and tents
best seats
Pimms and Proms
cheer the balls
when Saturday comes
3 square
new shoes
dental plans
beige tile
neighbours eyes
PTA's
calender management
death

by Dave Cullern

Riding Wild Rivers

I am loose skin
stretched across old bones
like ship sails
pulled taught in the winds;
scorched by the sun,
worn out by the night time cold
of the unknown seas
I circle
in ever smaller ways
as the waves
grow large
around my flagging hull.
I am failing organs
filled with used blood,
created by blind chance
in unsanctioned laboratories
holding magick rituals
on the dirty tables
of mad doctors
who pile 50p's on the meter
for when the lightening
runs dry.
I use the Earth;
steal oxygen
to store
in my dry, choking,
swag bag lungs,
filled with smoke and holes
and the songs of parents
already rich with the fruits
of the land upon which
I lay my dreams of more
and more
and more again.

I am used up legs,
running this flesh
away from the umbilical cord
I sucked dry
in parasitic feasts
shared with dead generations
whose damage is done
and long forgotten
beneath the legacy
I leave behind
in their wake.

by Dave Cullern



Smoke Signals
by Danielle Klebes

the saga of the spider

i.

“call me jaded,”
i said to the spider
that sits in the corner
of my ceiling.
“you’ve been there since
day one,
don’t think i haven’t
noticed.
and i know you’ve seen it all.
do you think
i’m still wearing
those
rose
colored
glasses,
desperately wanting
to hold things together in
one
last
ditch effort?”

“tell me, little friend,
your take on
this life
you have a front row seat for.
they say
two eyes are better
than one
and you have eight,
so tell me, little friend,
what do you see up there
from your bird’s eye view?
down here
there is doubt and mistrust
in my own thoughts
thwarted by the views of

my so-called
better half.”

ii.

there's a spider running circles
around the driver's side mirror.
every so often,
arching its back,
raising its body,
standing tall on its legs
getting ready to attack,
attempting
to scare away
some evil
that's been haunting it.
but it backs down.
lacking courage to make the leap
or knowing the time is
not right,
the spider circles the mirror
again.

every tuesday night the spider is here
as I stare into the depths
of my own
darkness
trying to unearth
the things that have
haunted me
for years.

and at 9:59pm, the spider
disappears from sight and
I emerge from my car
lacking courage or knowing
the time
is not right;
i wait for another week to pass,
to meet my friend at the mirror again,

thinking maybe next time
we both may
take that
leap.

iii.
the spider
that has been on the
kitchen ceiling since the day
we moved in is
no longer there;
same with the spider that
moved frantically
across the driver's side mirror.
i have noticed their absence
since yours began,
as if they thought
"my job here is
done, she has the courage
to speak her mind, I
no longer need to watch
over her".

cobwebs and shadows are
clearing and
new light
shines in.

by Melissa Taylor



Oy
by Debbie Fox

Some days you just beat it till it makes noise

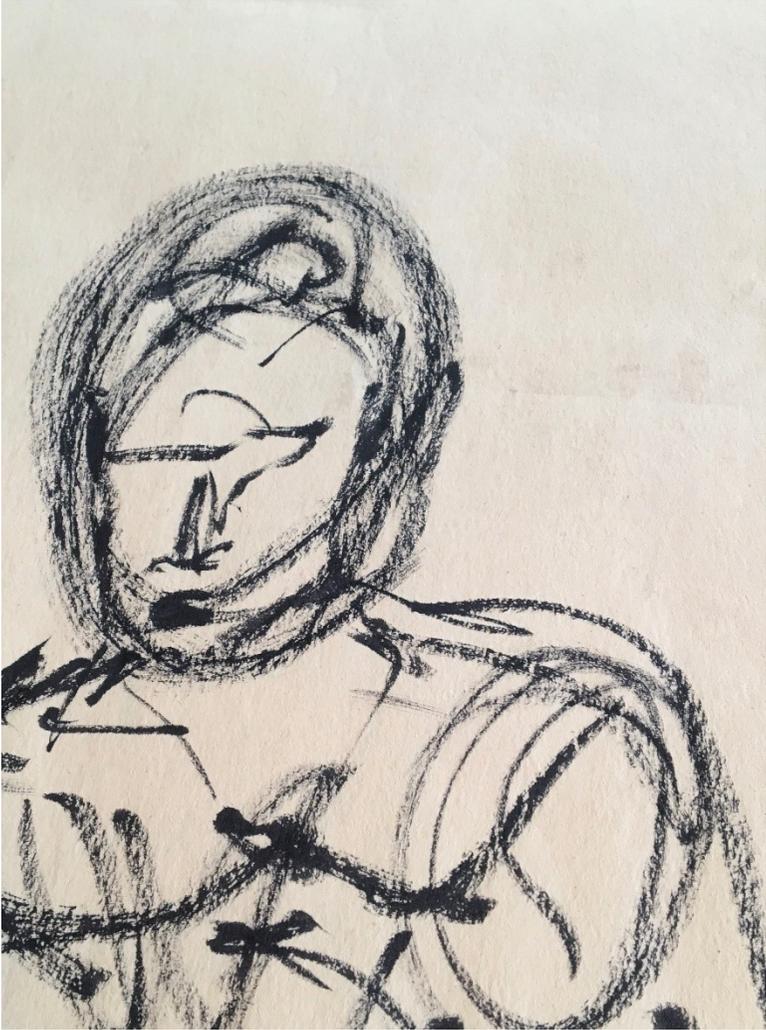
I don't
want to
die for
love not
sell my
soul for
savage
guitar skills
not trade
my dreams
for money
not make
science into
God no
I don't
want to
drink my
way to
better poems

or sleep
my way
up the
corporate
ladder I
won't twist
my needs
into a
hang knot
I won't
live or
die by
the sword
I can't
turn water
into wine
can't make
5 pm into
happy hour
I can

dance like
nobody is
watching I
can cry
a river
or set
my ghosts
on fire
I can
fly under
the radar
or too
close to
the sun
but today
I am
just riding
out my
morning like
a skeleton

horse and
trying to
make magic
out of
spare time
spare change
and all
the hope
I can
find in
times like
these.

by Matt Borczon



Off Kilter
by Debbie Fox

Sunday

The gasp
of my
daughter
at the
painting I
made this
morning
the warmth
of my
wife's skin
against mine
as I
wake up
and fall
in love
all over
again
the sun
low in
the branches
of a

tree like
a balloon
about to
pop
the smell
of coffee
and Little
Italy moving
on the
early morning
wind
these are
the things
that make
my Sunday
holy even
as the
world continues
to burn.

by Matt Borczon



Anatomy
by Debbie Fox

Some days

Are made
for banjo
sadness
for spoken
prayers given
to holy
statues in
front yards
for rabbit's
feet and
dog bones
for lucky
charms and
for deals
with the
devil
some days
are for
agreements
signed in
blood for

sacrificing
your first
born son
for old
testament fear
and not
for modern
love
some days
everyone
should leave
through the
back door.

by Matt Borczon



Forest Floor
by Belinda Subraman

BIOs

Sam Aleks (Samvel Aleksanyan) 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 Abstract Elephant Magazine LLC*, *The Northridge Review* Spring 2014 Issue and the July Issue of *Pif Magazine*. His artwork was featured in the *Canyon Voices* Winter 2018 Issue, The RAR Summer 2019 Issue, and displayed in the Northridge Annual Student Art Exhibit, Spring 2014 as well as in The NOVA Frame and Art Gallery, Fall 2014.

George Douglas Anderson is a teacher, critic and poet who lives in Wollongong Australia. He blogs at Bold Monkey- a site devoted to small alternative press reviews and writing: <https://georgedanderson.blogspot.com> His previous chapbooks include *Dancing on Thin Ice* (2008) erbacce-press, *Melting Voices* (2011) Perspicacious Press, *Teaching My Computer Irony* (2016) Epic Rites Press- Punk Chapbook Series 2 and *Fuckwits & Angels* (2019) Holy & Intoxicated Publications, UK. Anderson's first book of short stories *The Empty Glass* (2020) was recently published by Alien Buddha Press. His chapbook *The Portal: The School Poems* will shortly be released by Holy & Intoxicated Publications. *The Rough End of the Pineapple* is his first full-length collection of his portrait poems.

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 is the author of several chapbooks and his work has been nominated several times for the Pushcart Prize.
- Tohm.

<https://tohmbakelaspoetry.wordpress.com>

Instagram: @flexyourhead

Retired children's librarian **Alan Bern's** poetry books: *No no the saddest* and *Waterwalking in Berkeley*, Fithian Press; *greater distance and other poems*, ***Lines & Faces***, his poetry broadside press with artist and printer Robert Woods, linesandfaces.com. Alan earned a runner-up award in The Raw Art Review's "The John H. Kim Memorial Short Fiction Prize" for 'The alleyway near the downtown library'; he won a medal in 2019 from SouthWest Writers for a WWII story set in Italia, 'The Return of the Very Fierce Wolf of Gubbio to Assisi, 1943 CE [and now, 2013 CE]'; he won the 2015 Littoral Press Poetry Prize; and his poem "Boxae" was first runner-up for the Raw Art Review's first Mirabai Prize for Poetry, 2020. Alan has poems, stories, and photos published in a wide variety of online and print publications, from which his work has been nominated for Pushcart Prizes. Recent photos published include: parliamentlit.com/alan-bern, unearthedesf.com/alan-bern, thimblelitmag.com/2020/08/10/emptying/, and wanderlust-journal.com/2020/07/01/around-the-few-blocks-nearby/. Alan performs with dancer/choreographer Lucinda Weaver as *PACES: dance & poetry fit to the space* and with musicians from Composing Together, composingtogether.org/index.php/sample-poetry-from-our-musical-storytime-performances/

Matt Borczon is a nurse and Navy sailor from Erie, Pa. He has published thirteen books of poetry and published widely in the small press. His next book *Today* is a Michigan Ghost town will be out at the first of the year through Concrete Mist Press. He is married with four children, three cats and a beloved dog.

Artist: **William A. Brown** Status in the Art World: Under the Radar Education: MFA^[1] University of Florida, BA Emory University, Work: Emory University Faculty (Sr. Lecturer

Emeritus) Works produced as an artist: Avant-Garde films and videos 1976- present. Still Photographs: 1972-1976, 2006-present. Documentary Work- 1976-present. Art Video Site: <https://william-brown-bzhc.squarespace.com>

Clare Chu was raised in Malta and England, and has adopted Palm Springs, CA. as her home. She is an art curator, dealer, lecturer and writer who has authored and published twelve books and numerous academic articles on Asian art. Her poetry is featured in a continuing collaboration with Hong Kong-based calligraphic and landscape painter, the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, in which poet and artist challenge and expand traditional media boundaries. Her poetry is published in The Perch, The Comstock Review, Crosswinds Poetry Journal and the Raw Art Review amongst others. Clare's debut collection, The Sand Dune Teacher, was published by UnCollected Press in June, 2020. She is a 2021 Pushcart nominee.

Dave Cullern is a poet based in Hastings, UK. He is a doting cat mother, the vocalist of the band Haest and runs the coffee company, Sham City Roasters. His debut poetry collection, 'Fuck Ballads #1 Modern Extremes' is available now. @fuckballads

Bradley David is a Sri Lankan - Australian artist and writer. He works primarily in intersectional politics, advertising and why modern life, as far as it could be defined as such a singular thing, is a technological hell of cumulative travesties. His work has appeared around, mostly in that zine you found at the bottom of your shoe after that bar you don't remember. He makes phenomenological omelettes.

Stephanie Dickinson lives in New York City with the poet Rob Cook and their senior feline, Vallejo. Her novels *Half Girl* and *Lust Series* are published by Spuyten Duyvil, as is her feminist noir *Love Highway*. At present she's finishing a collection of essays entitled *Maximum Compound* based on her longtime correspondence with inmates at the Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women in Clinton, New Jersey. She is a gunshot survivor.

Gail DiMaggio is the author of *Woman Prime*, selected by Jericho Brown for the 2018 Permafrost Poetry Prize and published by Alaska University Press. Her work has appeared recently in *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Posit*, *Whiskey Island*, and *The Avenue*. She currently lives in Concord, NH.

Adam Edelman's poetry has appeared in *Narrative Magazine*; *Deluge*; *Forklift, Ohio*; *decomp*; *Bridge*; *Metazen*; and *Barnhouse*. His chapbook, *'Outpost,'* was a semi-finalist for the 2017 *Verse Magazine Tomaz Šalamun Prize*, and his chapbook, *'It's Becoming A Lot More Difficult To Feel Unchanged'* was a semi-finalist for the 2018 *Black River chapbook competition* from *Black Lawrence Press*, was shortlisted in the 2019 *Platform chapbook series*, and was a finalist for the 2019/2020 *Eggtooth Editions chapbook contest*. He holds an MFA in poetry from the *New Writers Project* at the *University of Texas at Austin*, where he received a fellowship from the *Michener Center for Writers*. He lives in *Chicago, Illinois*, where he is a PhD student in creative writing at the *University of Illinois at Chicago*.

Keith Edwards was born in New York City in 1957. Having grown up in a family composed of a Broadway dancer turned professional painter, a "top 40" songwriter/Tony

Award winning composer and a classical instrumentalist with the Boston Symphony he had to go his own way. Keith studied Aeronautical Science and piloting, getting his first flying job at age twenty-one. However, throughout his life, Keith has always kept up his avocation as a musician and songwriter scoring top 40 on Billboard with Jose Feliciano, and having two of his musicals produced Off-Off Broadway. In recent years Keith has become an avid traveller leading to a love of photography in his travels. This prompted a confluence of all of Keith's life experiences launching his passion for re-living his travels in rendering digital art from his photos.

In September 2020 Keith's piece "The Italian Monk" was selected for exhibition in the University of Arizona Museum of Art's "New Perspectives" exhibition. <https://picturing2020.artmuseum.arizona.edu/works/keith-edwards/>.

His piece "Marseille Hangout" is the recipient of the Raw Art Review Summer 2020 "Runner Up" award and along with two other works are published in the magazine. <https://therawartreview.com/2020/12/31/the-raw-art-review-summer-2020-journal-issue-has-arrived/>.

His website is at www.PosterArte.com

Sophia Falco is the author of her debut poetry chapbook: *The Immortal Sunflower* (UnCollected Press, 2019), a winner of *The Raw Art Review* Poetry Chapbook Contest. Falco graduated magna cum laude from the University of California, Santa Cruz along with the highest honors in the Literature Department. She has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Her poems have appeared in *The Poetry Matters Project*, *Tiny Seed Literary*

Journal, Indolent Books, Wingless Dreamer, The Beautiful Space, among other journals.

Leon Fedolfi is an aspiring poet. Much of his current work wrestles with dissembling and reassembling identity-relational frameworks in a format he likes to think of as a pre-poem. He does not know yet precisely what that means. Leon was awarded the 2020 Doug Draime Prize for Poetry sponsored by The Raw Art Review, and has published in Prometheus Dreaming, The Write Launch, High Shelf Press and others. He has a book of poetry, *The UnInvented Ear*, coming out with UnCollected Press this fall.

Jodie Filan was Born in Saskatoon, SK. Canadian prairies. Currently homeless and struggling with addiction. She hopes to bring awareness with her art to stop the stigmas associated with addicts. It has changed her art style dramatically over a single year. Most days she gets by on the kindness of strangers, with gratitude. You can find her on facebook

Debbie Fox is a dual Canadian and American citizen, and live north of Toronto. The first novel I wrote is *The Jazz Funeral*, about a jazz band in New Orleans seven years after hurricane Katrina. A young woman abused by her mother runs away from her home in Brooklyn, and wreaks havoc on the band. I'm currently writing my second novel, which is speculative fiction. I've been lucky to meet two wonderful Canadian poets who, on the side, judge poetry contests. Each one awarded me with their incisive insight, plus first-place and runner-up prizes. My publications include: **Creative Non-fiction:** *Shoes*, Existere Journal of Arts & Literature; **Poetry:** *Shuffle*, Azure Journal of Literary Thought; *E Equals*, The Poeming Pigeon; *Benumbed*, The Raw Art Review (shortlisted for Charles Bukowski prize);

The Damsel, The Raw Art Review; *Period*, The Raw Art Review; *She Fell Hard*, October Hill magazine.

James Garland: These are 3 poems from a self-published chapbook called "The Cove and Other Poems from The New Millennium". When I write, my intent is to reflect and inform what it's like to be alive now, in these times, and to build a sense of place, and context. My intent is to try to make sense of this mad time in this cataclysmic age, or at least give it a try. That endeavor grows increasingly alarming and more difficult.

Ethan Goffman's first volume of poetry, *Words for Things Left Unsaid*, was published by Kelsay Books in March of 2020. His poems have appeared in *Alien Buddha*, *Ariel Chart*, *BlazeVox*, *Bradlaugh's Finger*, *Burgeon*, *The Loch Raven Review*, *Mad Swirl*, *Madness Muse*, *Ramingo's Blog*, *Setu*, and elsewhere. Ethan is co-founder of It Takes a Community, a Montgomery College initiative bringing poetry to students and local residents. He is also founder and producer of the *Poetry & Planet* podcast on EarthTalk.org.

Noah Goldzer is an English teacher, cat lover, bad pun teller and MFA graduate of Emerson College. His short story "Fatbergs in the Pipe" won first place at Emerson's Graduate Student Awards in 2019 and his debut novel "Seek" was published by Martin Sister's Publishing in 2014."

Mark Hammerschick writes poetry and fiction. He holds a BA in English from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana and a BS and MBA. He is a lifelong resident of the Chicago area and currently lives on the north shore, most of his professional career has been focused on digital strategy and online consulting

as a solution architect and digital transformation strategist. His current work will be published in *The Metaworker*, *Vext Magazine*, *Breadcrumbs Magazine*, *Meat for Tea: The Valley Review*, *Lucky Jefferson*, *The Fictional Café*, *Wingless Dreamer*, *HP 2020 Poetry Challenge*, *Trolley Magazine*, *Blood and Thunder: Musings on the Art of Medicine*, *The Write Launch*, *Scarlet Leaf Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *The Showbear Family Circus*, *Carcinogenic Poetry*, *The Toasted Cheese Literary Journal*, *Change Seven*, *Panoplyzine*, *Borrowed Solace* and *Waxing and Waning*.

Gloria Heffernan is the author of the poetry collection, *What the Gratitude List Said to the Bucket List*, (*New York Quarterly Books*). She has written two chapbooks: *Hail to the Symptom* (*Moonstone Press*) and *Some of Our Parts*, (*Finishing Line Press*). Her work has appeared in over fifty journals including *Anchor*, *Chautauqua*, *Magma (UK)*, *Southward (Ireland)*, *Stone Canoe*, *Columbia Review*, and *The Healing Muse*. She teaches at *Le Moyne College* and the *Syracuse YMCA's Downtown Writers Center*.

Jasmine Khaliq is a Pakistani Mexican poet born and raised in Northern California. She holds an MFA from *UW Seattle*, where she also taught. Her recent work is found or forthcoming in *Black Warrior Review*, *The Pinch*, *Phoebe*, *Raleigh Review*, *Passengers Journal*, and elsewhere.

Danielle Klebes is a multidisciplinary artist based in Massachusetts. She has exhibited at notable galleries and museums across the United States and in Canada and Croatia. She is spending much of 2019-2021 participating in domestic and international artist residencies. Danielle received her MFA

in Visual Arts from Lesley University College of Art and Design in Cambridge, MA, in 2017.

Lily Rose Kosmicki is a librarian at the public library and by night she is a collector of dreams. Her zine *Dream Zine* won a Broken Pencil Zine Award for Best Art Zine 2018. Her work appears in *Interim: A Journal of Poetry and Poetics*, *Seisma Magazine*, and elsewhere.

John Lambremont, Sr. is a poet from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where he lives with his wife and their little dog. John holds a B.A. in Creative Writing and a J.D. from Louisiana State University. He is the former editor of *Big River Poetry Review*, and has been nominated for The Pushcart Prize. John's poems have been published internationally in many reviews and anthologies, including *Pacific Review*, *Flint Hills Review*, *The Minetta Review*, *Sugar House Review*, and *The Louisiana Review*. John's full-length poetry collections include "Dispelling The Indigo Dream" (Local Gems Poetry Press 2013), "The Moment Of Capture" (Lit Fest Press 2017), "Old Blues, New Blues" (Pski's Porch Publishing 2018), and "The Book Of Acrostics" (Truth Serum Press 2018). His chapbook is "What It Means To Be A Man (And Other Poems Of Life And Death)", published in 2014 by *Finishing Line Press*. John enjoys music, playing the guitar, fishing, and old movies. He has battled pancreatic cancer since 2018.

Serge Lecomte was born in Belgium. He came to the States where he spent his teens in South Philly and then Brooklyn. After graduating from Tilden H. S. he worked for New York Life Insurance Company. He joined the Medical Corps in the Air Force and was sent to Selma, Alabama during the Civil Rights

Movement. There he was a crewmember on helicopter rescue. He received a B.A. in Russian Studies from the University of Alabama. Earned an M.A. and Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University in Russian Literature with a minor in French Literature. He worked as a Green Beret language instructor at Fort Bragg, NC from 1975-78. In 1988 he received a B.A. from the University of Alaska Fairbanks in Spanish Literature. He worked as a language teacher at the University of Alaska (1978-1997). He was the poetry editor for Paper Radio for several years. He worked as a house builder, pipefitter, orderly in a hospital, gardener, landscaper, driller for an assaying company, bartender in one of Fairbanks' worst bars, and other jobs. He resided on the Kenai Peninsula, Alaska for 15 years and recently moved to Bellingham, WA.

With roots in the Mississippi Delta, **Cynthia Le Monds** lives in the Bay Area of California. She holds a BA in political science and an MPA from St. Mary's University of Texas. She's pursuing an MFA in Fiction Writing at San Francisco State University where she serves as a contributing fiction editor of Fourteen Hills magazine.

Kaecey McCormick is a writer and artist in the San Francisco Bay Area. Named the 2018-2020 Poet Laureate for the City of Cupertino, her work appears in the chapbook Pixelated Tears (Prolific Press) and numerous journals and anthologies. When not creating, Kaecey enjoys time with her husband and four daughters.

Tony Murray Beauty is not in the eye of the beholder, but in the eye of the imaginative" "Many a teacher told me to: 'Try and stay inside the lines', which today, thankfully, I don't"

Sylvia Van Nooten is an asemic artist living in Western Colorado. Asemic art, with its pastiche of ‘language’ and images, allows her to merge texts and painting creating a hybrid form of communication which is open to interpretation. Her work has appeared in The South Florida Poetry Journal, local galleries and at the exhibition Mai Piu in Italy.
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Rucio Panza lives in a small town in Iowa along the mighty Mississippi.

Robert Perchan’s poetry chapbooks are *Mythic Instinct* (Afternoon (2005 Poetry West Prize) and *Overdressed to Kill* (Backwaters Press, 2005 Weldon Kees Award). His poetry collection *Fluid in Darkness, Frozen in Light* won the 1999 Pearl Poetry Prize and was published by Pearl Editions in 2000. His avant-la-lettre flash novel *Perchan’s Chorea: Eros and Exile* (Watermark Press, Wichita, 1991) was translated into French and published by *Quidam Editeurs* (Meudon) in 2002. In 2007 his short short story “The Neoplastic Surgeon” won the on-line *Entelechy: Mind and Culture Bio-fiction Prize*. He currently resides in Pusan, South Korea. You can see some of his stuff on robertperchan.com.

At age 12, **Silas Plum** won the East Coast POG tournament. The prize was 500 POG’s, small collectible cardboard circles, each with an identical red and blue design on the front. From that moment on, he became obsessed with the question of Value. Why were these important? How could anything not necessary for survival be worth more than anything that was? Does artistic sentiment have value? The POG’s are gone, but the questions remain. Through assemblages of defunct currency, discarded

photographs, and long-forgotten illustrations, Silas Plum challenges the idea of objective vs subjective value. He believes strongly in the tired old maxim that the true value of an object is more than the sum of its parts, that the gut is a truth-teller, and that the Aristotelian notion of learning-by-doing is the best teacher around. Judge his worth at silasplum.com.

Emily Rankin was born in Riverside, California and university in Abilene, Texas where she received a BFA in 2011. Her body of work ranges from Graphic Design and Scenic Painting to collaborative performances with Verstehen, an improvisational and interactive series which incorporates live painting, sound, and electronics. She is currently based in New Mexico. www.eerankinart.com

K. Riley is from Houston, Texas. They studied creative writing and literature at Stephen F. Austin State University. Their works can be found in SFA's literary magazine HUMID, in Beyond Words Literary Magazine, and on Matthew Lippman's website LOVE'S EXECUTIVE ORDER. For more information on their publications, visit their Instagram: [ampersand_anyway](#)

Janet Rives' poems have appeared in such publications as Lyrical Iowa, Ekphrastic Review, Sandcutters, The Avocet, The Blue Guitar, Fine Lines, Heirlock and The Raw Art Review and in several anthologies including Desert Tracks: Poems from the Sonoran Desert (Tucson Poetry Society) and The Very Edge (Flying Ketchup Press). Her chapbook, Into This Sea of Green: Poems from the Prairie, is forthcoming in fall 2020 (Finishing Line Press).

A resident of New York City, **Kerfe Roig** enjoys transforming words and images into something new. 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](#), [Scribe Base](#), and [The Wild Word](#), and published in [Ella@100](#), [Incandescent Mind](#), [Pea River Journal](#), [Fiction International: Fool](#), [Noctua Review](#), [The Raw Art Review](#), and several [Nature Inspired](#) anthologies. Follow her explorations on her blogs, <https://methodwomadness.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/>

John D Robinson is a UK poet: hundreds of his poems have appeared in small press zines and online literary journals including : Rusty Truck: Outlaw Poetry: North Of Oxford: Tuck Magazine: Misfits Magazine: The Sunflower Collective: Winamop: Bear Creek Haiku: Chicago Record: The Legendary: Paper and Ink Zine: Algebra Of Owls: Full Of Crow: The Beatnik Cowboy: The Clockwise Cat: The Scum Gentry: Message In A Bottle: Horror Sleaze ,Trash: Your One Phone Call: In Between Hangovers: Rasputin: Revolution John: Vox Poetica: Hand Job Zine: 48th Street Press: Poems-For-All: Philosophical Idiot: The Peeking Cat: Midnight Lane Boutique: Underground Books: Dead Snakes: Yellow Mama: Bareback Lit: Eunoia Review: Hobo Camp Review

Since retiring from daily journalism in 2013, **Robert Eugene Rubino** has published poetry and prose in various online and print literary journals, including Hippocampus, The Esthetic Apostle, The Write Launch, Haunted Waters Press, Forbidden Peak Press, Cagibi, Cathexis Northwest, High Shelf Press, Raw Art Review, MacQueen's Quinterly and Gravitas, and in the anthologies Poetic Bond IX, Earth Hymn, Poets' Choice and Poems from the Lockdown. Before the coronavirus, on most

Wednesday evenings he would be found at Sacred Grounds Cafe in San Francisco, participating in the West Coast's longest-running poetry open mic. Now each week he participates online. He lives in Palo Alto, California.

Rob Schackne born in New York, lived in many countries until Australia finally took him in. He was a Foreign Expert EFL teacher in China for many years. There were some extreme sports once; now he plays (mostly) respectable chess and pool. He listens to the Grateful Dead. He claims he can read Shakespeare in the original. Some days he thinks there is nothing easy about the Tao.

Dale Shank's assignment photography includes performance art, wildlife, environmental documentation, professional pool players and indigenous culture events. His fiction and poetry have been published in: *Exquisite Corpse*, *The Healing Muse*, *The Raw Art Review*, *Akros Review*, *Before the Sun*, *Croton Review*, *Joint Endeavor*, *Powder*, and *University of Portland Review*

Kim Sosin's art photographs have appeared in such publications as Landscape Photography Magazine, Fine Lines, Daily Haiga, The Raw Art Review, Wanderlust Journal, The Ekphrastic Review, Sandhill Cranes of Nebraska, Ten Years of Sandhill Crane Migration, and The Heron's Nest. Her photographs were chosen for the cover of several books, including *Voices from the Prairies* (in which she also has poems), and *2019 Sandhill Crane Migration*. She also has poems in publications such as *Sandcutters*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Failed Haiku*, *Fine Lines*, and forthcoming in *Verses from the Plains*.

Henry Stanton's fiction, poetry and paintings appear in *2River*, *The A3 Review*, *Alien Buddha Press*, *Avatar*, *The Baltimore City Paper*, *The Baltimore Sun Magazine*, *High Shelf Press*, *Kestrel*, *North of Oxford*, *Outlaw Poetry*, *The Paragon Press*, *PCC Inscape*, *Pindelyboz*, *Rusty Truck*, *Salt & Syntax*, *SmokeLong Quarterly*, *The William and Mary Review*, *Word Riot*, *The Write Launch* and *Yellow Mama*, among other publications. His poetry was selected for the *A3 Review Poetry Prize* and was shortlisted for the *Eyewear 9th Fortnight Prize for Poetry*. His fiction received an Honorable Mention acceptance for the *Salt & Syntax Fiction Contest* and was selected as a finalist for the *Pen 2 Paper Annual Writing Contest*. A selection of Henry Stanton's paintings, fiction and poetry can be located www.brightportfal.com.

Belinda Subraman been published in 100s of magazines, printed and online, academic and small presses. She has a Master of Arts from California State University. Her archives are housed at University of New Mexico, Albuquerque. Her latest book is *Left Hand Dharma* from Unlikely Books, 2018: https://www.amazon.com/dp/0998892572/?fbclid=IwAR1qTJ6tB6qippVEgYtjZNzc_N5e6E5l8lujDDV0sEe2DJ9Sp2qVQmovDYc In 2020 Belinda began an online show called GAS: Poetry, Art & Music which features interviews, readings, performances and art show in a video format available free at <http://youtube.com/BelindaSubraman>

Belinda is also a mixed media artist. Her art has been featured in *Unlikely Stories*, *Eclectica*, *North of Oxford*, *El Paso news* and *Red Fez*. She sells prints of her work in her *Mystical House* Etsy shop. <https://www.etsy.com/shop/MysticalHouse?ref=seller->

Pamela Sumners is the author of "Ragpicking Exekiel's Bones" (UnCollected Press, 2020) and "Finding Helen," winner of the

Rane Arroyo Chapbook Prize (Seven Kitchens Press) (forthcoming). A 2018 Pushcart nominee, she was also selected for the 64 Best anthologies in both 2018 and 2019 and nominated for 50 Best in 2019. Her work appears in several anthologies and she has received several awards in poetry competitions. She has been published or recognized by about 40 journals in the US and abroad from 2018-20.

Melissa Taylor is an occupational therapist and mother of two from New Jersey.

Jocelyn Ulevicus is an artist and writer with work forthcoming or published in magazines such as the Free State Review, The Petigru Review, Blue Mesa Review, and Humana Obscura. Working from a female speculative perspective, themes of nature and the unseen; and exit and entry are dominantly present in her work. She resides in Amsterdam and is currently working on her first book of poems. To see her artwork and her cute cat, Pilar, visit her on IG @beautystills.

Surrounded by an Asian garden filled with his sculptural creations, **Ted Zahrfeld** resides in Michigan. His first novel, *she sparrow*, was published in December 2017. A collection of poetry, *kissed by a dove named Lincoln*, is forthcoming.

Mallory Zondag is a Mixed Media Fiber Artist located in the Lehigh Valley. She graduated from Pratt Institute with honors and degree and in Fashion design. While at Pratt she focused on creating handmade textiles through felting, weaving and printmaking for her collections. Since graduating, she has pursued a career as an independent artist and arts educator. Her work ranges from felting and weaving to sculpture, printmaking and painting, sometimes combining two or more of these

mediums to form a single unique piece. The natural world informs her creations of dimensional textures and sculptural pieces, evoking images of mossy forest floors and patches of growth spreading across decaying structures. Each piece explores the ideas and themes of the natural world, entropy, balance and humanity's place within it. Mallory shares her passion for handmade one of a kind textiles through a variety of educational programs in addition to selling her custom made pieces. She teaches fiber art programs for a variety of schools and organizations in mediums ranging from felting to mixed media painting. Many of these programs involve a collaborative element where the entire school works together on a single project. These programs bring an exciting and hands on artistic experience to the students as well as emphasizing community and collaboration through art. Mallory has exhibited in galleries and participated in artist festivals and collective shows in New York and Pennsylvania and has participated in artist in residence programs in New York and Pennsylvania.



A Wild Hair
by Henry G. Stanton