

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



SUMMER/FALL 2023

The Raw Art Review is a publication of UnCollected Press published quarterly. RAR accepts submissions for publication from the Submittable platform or by email invitation from RAR editors. If you are having trouble submitting, email your submission to editor@therawartreview.com. We will contact you to clarify the submission.

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FRONT COVER ART:

Devlin Boxing

by Ann-Marie Brown

Winner, RAR Summer/Fall 2023 Cover Art Contest

BACK COVER ART:

And Yet

by Ann-Marie Brown

Desi In Her Mother's Dress

by Ann-Marie Brown

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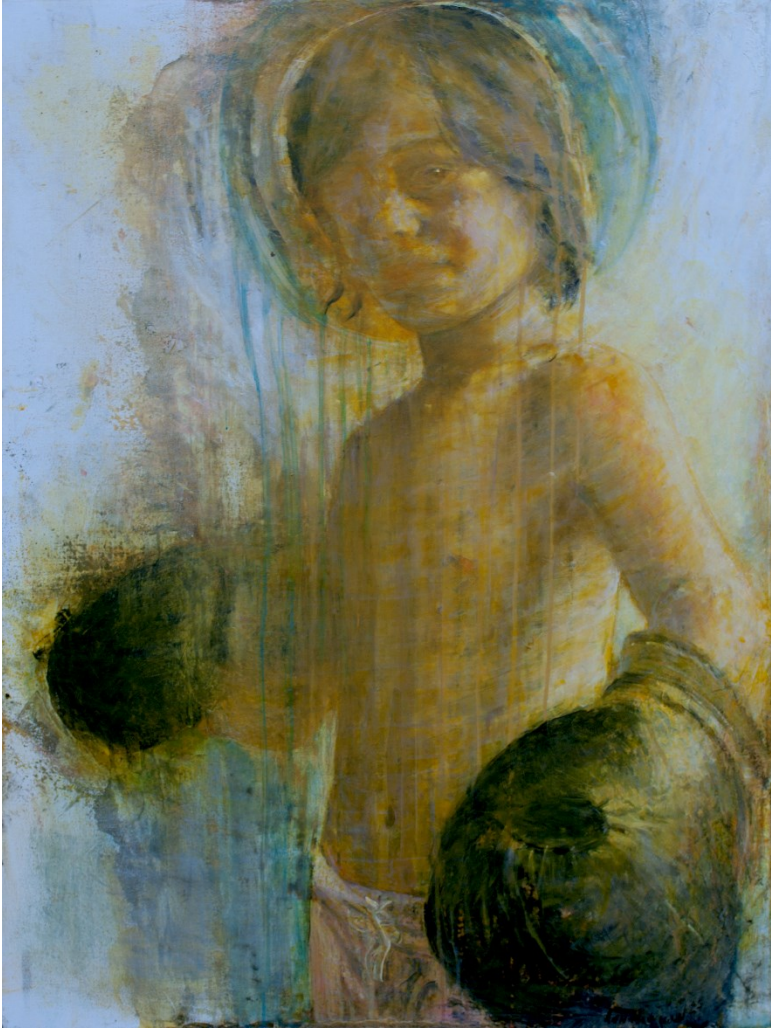
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Esten Boxing
Ann-Marie Brown

Contents

Esten Boxing	iv
Nora Surfacing	1
Night Forest	2
Here for a Minute	3
From Certain Distances In Space I Still See My Brother	4
you who presume to know me	5
Fire Orchard	6
When the Cannibal Met Lucy	7
Different Road	8
Orbs	9
And It Came to Pass	10
The Light in The Dark	11
After Dina Varsalone	12
Swank	13
Night Figs	14
Ascension	17
IED	18
Biopsy	19
Flying to the Flower	20
Plantimal	22
Change	23
Whiskers	24
Snowbound	25
This is a pipe with a coat hat head egg bird and a caged zebra	26
WEST END	27
LATE INTAKE	28

NEW YEAR'S NOTE	29
When Sonny gets Blue	30
What It Means to Be Home	31
Treasure Box	32
Night Feast	34
Four Stories	35
Concerto Dream	36
Aphasia Poem 24 (Disabled Poem 1)	37
Aphasia Poem 36	38
Letter To Karen	39
Quinn	40
I Made You	41
What I Know About My Mother	44
Banquet at the Nightmare	46
Peeing Tree	47
Before My Mother Died	48
Café	51
Keys	52
Turn The Lights Off!	54
The Pusher-Dentist	55
Dreamers Eden	57
SICK DAY	58
Dreaming of Water Lilies	59
COLLATERAL DAMAGE	60
What Nature Knows IX	61
Sanctuary	62
Painting Girl Falling Dress	73

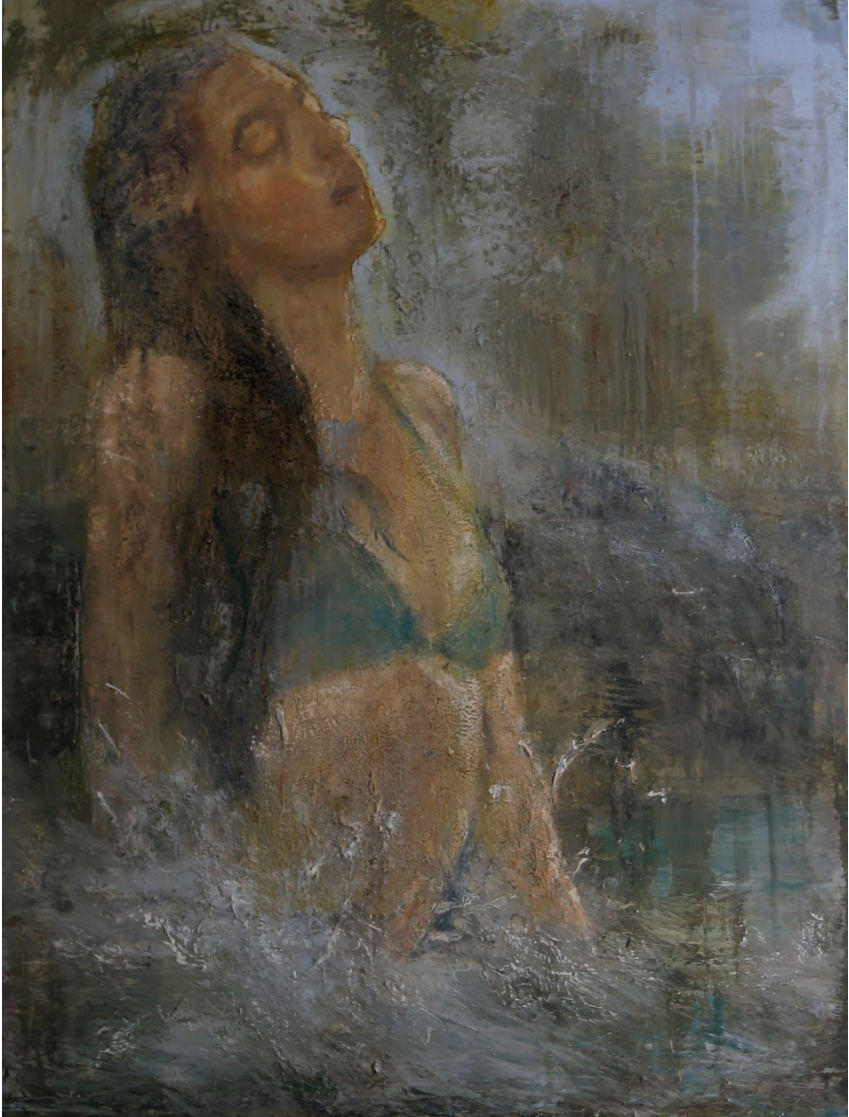
<i>1st PASS, January 2021</i>	74
<i>2nd PASS, January 2021</i>	75
<i>5th PASS, March 2021</i>	76
What Nature Knows I	77
<i>this isn't about death, I promise</i>	78
<i>disinterred</i>	79
What Nature Knows II	80
This Way	81
What Nature Knows III	82
The Medicine Cabinet Museum	83
What Nature Knows IXXX	91
The Geography of Her Body	92
Golden View	94
The Silent Land	95
What Nature Knows VVII	96
The Incident	97
The Balance of Chaos	104
FORCED FALLING	105
BUBBLE BLASTS	106
Blue Streak	108
THIS POEM WRITTEN IN THE PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL, MAY 2023: BLUE STRUCK	109
Heaven in Earth	111
THE STAKED EARTH	112
BROKEN SYNTAX	113
Duende	114
DINNER WITH A MINIMALIST	115
UNTITLED	117

The Brick	118
Launching of Spirit into Body	121
re-imagined	122
Phytotesselost	124
idol	125
eulogy	127
Watching Snails Race	128
Survival Mode	129
If Saturn is losing her rings—	130
William Burroughs	132
'm in my night bones—	133
Osteorhizophor	135
Current Market Price Per Pound	136
children dance with butterflies	137
Silence is Deafening	138
Jack	139
Miracle of the Great Stellar Arch	140
The Quilt	141
Night Market	142
Training to Die	143
Both Men Were Heavyweights	144
Jack 2	153
“Mrs. Kravitz”	154
““There’s a Pill for That”	155
Osteoborg 1	157
Observing Eyebrows on a Sunday Morning at IHOP”	158
The ‘Shroom Girls	159
AnthozoaBorg 2	160

The Fly	161
10-lined Beetle	162
Congress of The Mint Moon	172

***THE SUMMER/FALL 2023 ISSUE OF THE RAW ART
REVIEW IS DEDICATED TO CONSUMATE POET AND
OUR GOOD FRIEND:***

JOHN D. ROBINSON



Nora Surfacing
by Ann-Marie Brown

(Winner RAR SUMMER/FALL 2023 Cover Art Contest)

Night Forest

Once there was a woman in the night forest
who could hear above the register of most.
She would listen to mice sing in chorus
or coyotes comfort their young
over the flash and rumble of coming weather.

There was the night when I stayed in the garden
late into the hours and you called for me
and together we watched the gods
toss stars across the sky and later
we returned to our bed and I watched you
over the vastness of our pillows
as your breathing fell into a rhythm
and you separated from me.

Have your dreams returned you to a wooded place,
dusted in moonlight, where you keen your ears
to other selves, selves beyond the register of my knowing?

by Gary Beaumier
(Winner of Uncollected Press 2023 Book Publication Award)



Here for a Minute
by Anne Cleary

From Certain Distances In Space I Still See My Brother

Somewhere mother holds you against her breasts in a Chicago flat
-- the war winding down --
while she warms a bottle and tests the milk on the tender of her wrist;
“you are my sunshine,” she sings.

Somewhere you sit in a quilted coat
upon a tricycle in front of a red house,
and later still your fastball hisses over
home plate into the strike zone.

Somewhere a man says we all derive from stars,
while a holy person declares we will live forever.

You still succor your fractious babies as you pace a midnight floor.

Only just now a distant planet watches you bend to help a student
or soften your embrace to your wife in the utter dark.

Somehow you glide out of a fifth floor hospital room into a painted
twilight,
into streams of cars and trucks and exhaust
as your family holds your emancipated body and rides with you to the
edge of life

and somewhere a medical student
peels back what remains of you
to learn the human clockwork.

by Gary Beaumier
(Winner of the UnCollected Press Book Publication Award)

you who presume to know me

did not know i watched a hermit crab keeping company with a starfish
this morning in a tide pool

or that i peed in a wooded area beyond the salt grass

that i followed the grey silhouette of a freighter northbound and making
heavy weather

that i licked my lips to taste the brine air

that i imagined myself the sole dweller
of a tiny island where i had a stout dory
to row to the coastal village in my yellow slicker
my arthritic hands gripping the oars

you will never know that i talk to the gulls
and they answered me back

or that i nearly wept when i saw a whale breach

or that i watched the rise of the sun that electrified the edges of clouds

that i picked wood violets to lay next to a fallen tern just beyond the
reach of the surf

will they find me some winter's day
frozen and gone and
all my wanderings ceased
the last of my dreams
dreaming a passage back home to you

by Gary Beaumier
(Winner of the UnCollected Press Book Publication Award)



Fire Orchard
by Ann-Marie Brown

When the Cannibal Met Lucy

You know the story.
They didn't get along at first.
The Cannibal wanted to consume Lucy
one way
and she wanted to consume him
in another.

It was a frustrating stalemate.

But, as they moved in the same circles,
they kept bumping into one another
over the years.
Each time, the cannibal tried to get Lucy
into a pot,
or at least shave off a little flesh,
and Lucy tried to eat his soul.

Each was too clever by half.

They were pretty damned old
when they realized
they were made for one another.

You can find them at home now
most of the time.
Lucy is down to a single arm
and the cannibal wanders
in a sickening, blank daze.

It was kismet, this union,
and the final feast is inevitable.
Soon, they will each fatten to nothing.

by Jeff Weddle
(Winner of the UnCollected Press Book Publication Award)

Different Road

I have been to the city, but I never
got out of a car at 27th and Federal
on a just-so day in just-so Denver,
no idea how to get to the next place
or where food would be, or sleep,
but I have known my share of crazy people,
some struck by odd genius, some just mad,
friends and leaches and even enemies
in the ragged story I don't begin
to understand.

I have driven alone on a dare
across most of the country
and kissed beautiful strangers
and crept, four stories up,
from balcony to balcony
where a slip meant quick death.

I have loved and been loved,
sometimes all at once.

I have taken long walks in darkness
trying to figure the proper workings of night,
held my children when they laughed
and when they cried
and watched my father
pass from this world.

I have never stepped from a car
at 27th and Federal
or picked cotton with a lovely Mexican girl.
I have not fallen asleep unknown
and awakened famous
and I never will.

But I might someday go back to Denver
and maybe I will park at the corner of 27th
and Federal, just for a minute.

That would be as good a place as any
to look back on the world as it was,
all the crazies and love and regret,
to close my heavy book, then drive on.

by Jeff Weddle
(Winner of the UnCollected Press Book Publication Award)

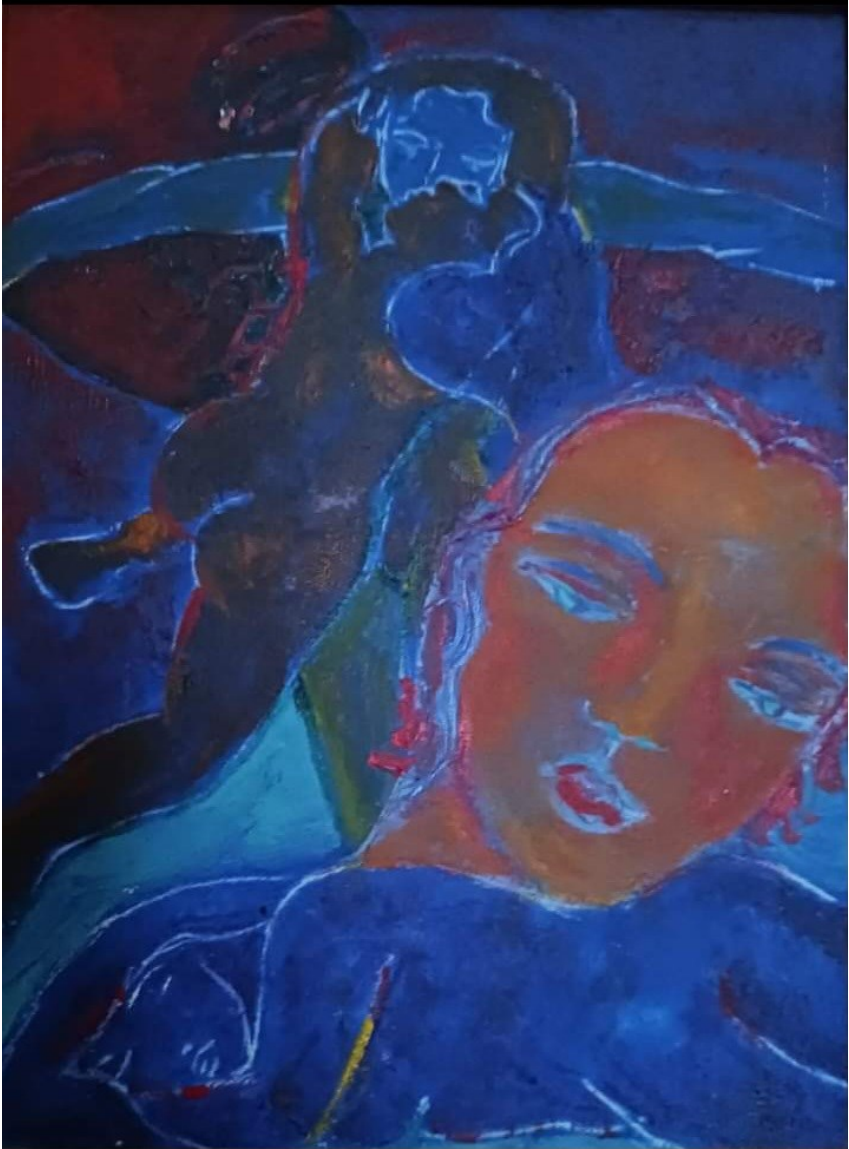


Orbs
by Anne Cleary

And It Came to Pass

Someday I will write
with the grace of my dog,
old and serene,
lazing on the couch. I will eat
two entire cherry pies
and not gain weight.
Someday I will laugh
with the friends I've missed,
forgive and hope to be forgiven.
Someday my children
will try to explain
to people I will never know
who they thought I was.
Someday I will
not remember
this cool, lovely day,
this moment now,
my good dog on the couch,
or writing these distant words.

by Jeff Weddle
(Winner of the UnCollected Press Book Publication Award)



The Light in The Dark
by Bridget Seley Galway

After Dina Varsalone

A morning of faces, then sky I walk
up the street with a great people walking
there also a poem in my head undone
with your name on it. As always, there's some
dumb apostrophe getting in the way
But stay, it's the light that matters, seeing
that we don't weep in this darkness alone
Yeah, no one talks on the phone anymore
goes to the movies or whistles at work
(I'm growing old in the oddest places)
Far below, the dead stacked like licorice
are coded in our cells to speak as one
Sharpen your song they whisper, against all
this fucking evil that would eat the sun

by David Beaudouin

Swank

for Terence Winch

It trips off
my tongue like
a car horn

The last word
purred into dirty
detective's ear by
carnivorous cartoon blonde

A presidential decree
declares every verb
must be replaced
by "swank." Example:
"I swank you"

In Swank World,
everyone dresses nicely.
Cats obey their
owners. It's a
paradise on earth,
except with no
god to ever
tempt us again.

by David Beaudouin



Night Figs
by Ann-Marie Brown

Then Again

for Doug Lang

We have blamed it on the boogie too long.
We have taken a number for better service that is
 out of service with a smile.
We think often about our friends, but
 never call them.
We have hacked the calendar into a kite
 or a lute or a boat.
We deserve better—or is that butter?
We believe in a lower order that exceeds
 our expectations.
We have one life to live badly.
We have walked a mile in Johnny Cash's Crocs.

We know that that they know nothing
 about what we know that they know about us.
We went skydiving underwater.
We saw the USA in your fucking KIA.
We have given our inner child the keys
 to the fucking KIA.
We let Calgon take us away to Baltimore.
We sort of hate the "royal we."
We expect our life to have meaning any life now.
We fear that dot in the distance is getting larger
 as it speeds towards us, until
 it eats the sky.

We don't go gentle into that good night,
 so don't piss us off!
We are such stuff as Cheez Doodles are made of,
 if not light and grace.
We cover the waterfront with rose petals and regrets.
We listen to today's music like it was yesterday's.
We follow the golden part of the iron rule.

We not cool.
We try harder not to.
We don't go gentle into that good night,
 so don't piss us off!
We are such stuff as Cheez Doodles are made of,
 if not light and grace.
We cover the waterfront with rose petals and regrets.
We listen to today's music like it was yesterday's.
We follow the golden part of the iron rule.
We assay there's gold in that there groin.

We make no sudden moves because
 the future has a gun.
We take a time machine back five minutes
 where everything was so much nicer.
We bake irrational cookies for the orphans
 of our dreams.
We bring tribute of rare oils and honey cakes
 to the goddess who strangely resembles
 Sippie Wallace, "the Texas Nightingale."
We make like a banana and split,
 our atoms trembling like the sun
 on your skin.
We are torn between exposition and conclusion,
We dare to be no different.
We know like the shining center
 of any stone, like "Tricky Sam" Nanton's solo
 on Mood Indigo, you are not never dead.

by David Beaudouin



Ascension
by Anne Cleary

IED

Sometimes a bomb is not a bomb, or it is
in the way that each of us has been set
to burn or burst to flame or run down like
a watch. Then: Bang. Measured by the damage
we have done. The time we took to load

the ballast of a body with debris: ball
bearings, coins, tacks, nails, bones and spit: words
that we have chosen well and poorly, sharp edged
darting things that sting and cut. A prayer, a curse
I only married you because. If I could have

*another life I would. You never once in all
I wish I never. You're such. I want. And YOU
You only. Please god listen. You're not listening*
In every little home on Wiltshire Boulevard
fuses set like tables on the edge of being

overturned. Sounds the neighbors leave
unheard emerge like fever dreams of
what we've learned and then unlearned: a leash
put on a stray in a tiny yard with a chain
link fence around it. Feed it. Love it. Watch

your fingers. Listen to the silences between
the whine and yelp of slamming doors where time
sucks in and holds its breath until, like someone
crying in the shower, must exhale--our lives set
flying out in all directions from a central core.

by Joel Peckham

Biopsy

Life-sight: to remove the body from
the body still alive with heat to see

inside a vessel trembling eyes closed
I am waiting with your purse clutched

to my chest as if it were a child
surrounded by the stink of passive

sweat of prayer packed into these
too-narrow seats the aircraft

buffeted by turbulence I place my head
between my knees and try to breathe

by Joel Peckham

Flying to the Flower

A friend once told me he was done
critiquing poems--*would you critique*
a hummingbird flying to the flower?

Maybe, maybe not, but I might critique
the man who tried to write that bird into
the air, it's wings a blur. We ruin everything

we try to capture and why would anyone
try to trap a bird in metaphor except to set
it free once more? Once I owned a house
I didn't live in and the tenant kept birds
in every room: cockatiels and cockatoos,
finches of green and blue, a hyacinth

macaw. I had to evict them all because
there were times after his wife left
with their daughter when the perfect
light of early evening ached, and drunk
on longing, he'd throw open
their cages, let them fly about the house,

pecking at the windowsills, dropping
guano all over the carpets, the moldings,
and the hardwood floors. Sometimes

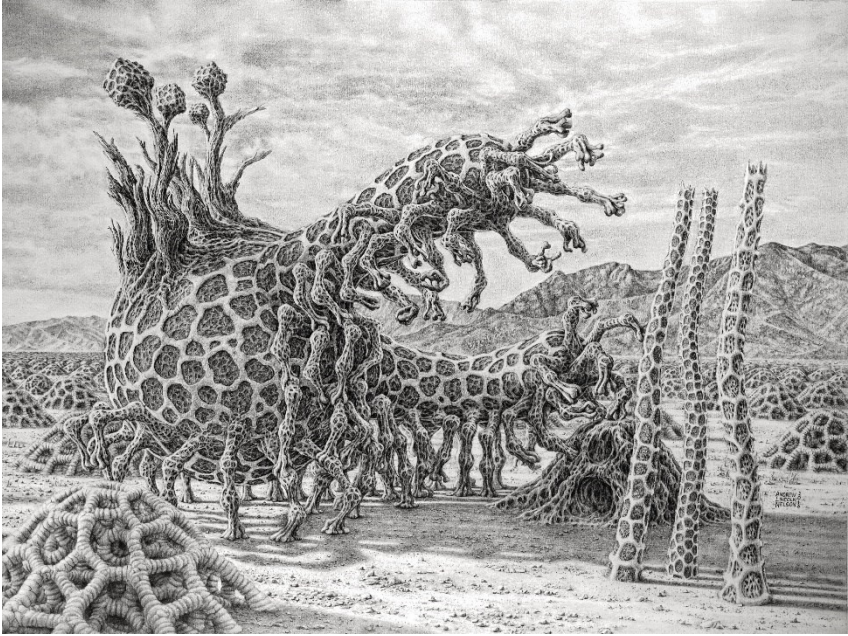
I imagine those birds soaring free down
hallways and up staircases, filling the rooms
where my boys once played with bright

feathers, shattering the air above
the bedroom where Susan and I once
fought and made love then fought
again, coming together to burst apart,
desperate in our rages, only to beat
those wings against the windows

and the walls. Sometimes I imagine
the mind as a room thick with many

many-colored birds circling and screeching,
frantic for escape—the world a sequence
of cages we built to keep them
safe.

by Joel Peckham



Plantimal
by Andrew Lincoln Nelson

Change

On an Atlantic beach, I found an odd little oblong object. It was shiny black, about the size of a change purse and even looked to be made of leather. On each of four corners, there were curly-que tendrils, and a swirling sand design on one side that looked like a miniature Mandela. I found out it was the egg case of a baby skate, or to me, a stingray. There were dozens of these little pouches on the beach, but no others held that tiny etching. It reminded me of the beaded change purse my grandmother had given me. She carried it as a teenager with 25 cents inside she had earned babysitting when she was 16 in 1926. At 18, she married my grandfather, and she surrendered her dreams of having her own money. She gave the change purse to me when I turned 16. A quarter rested inside. She said, "Fill this with money that you have worked for. When it's full, empty into a bank then refill. If you do, you'll never need to stay anywhere you don't want to." She slid a sideways look at my grandfather.

by Cat Pleska



Whiskers
by Cat Pleska

Snowbound

On a snowy day, the sky the color of steel, life paused in a hush. Outside, and tired of sledding and making snow people, I wandered into the deserted country road in front of my grandparents' house. I stood stock still as no cars had passed for hours. I listened: nothing stirred, not even the frozen creek offered its usual murmur. By evening, the light in the western sky was purple, the color of a preacher's scarf, of amethyst stones.

A blanketing snow initially has sound deadening properties, due to the air trapped between the flakes as they accumulate. After a few hours when the flakes compact, the air escapes and the soundproofing quality is lost. It always seemed that the next day would be sunny; then the snow hugged objects tightly. The school bus chugged up the road, and I returned to my noisy school. All day, I listened to my fellow students' chatter, to the *scritch, scritch* of big fat pencils on wide-lined paper, to the singsong of teacher's voice as she earnestly told us what we needed to know. In the late afternoon, I was back on the noisy bus. By supertime, my family's voices would rise.

But on those snow days, when I walked to the middle of a deserted road, and stood shrouded in a mantle of white, my mind and spirit calmed. The land was still. The men became motionless and the women were content. I breathed in the crisp air, deeply into my lungs. Then in the snowbound silence, all I could hear was the blood of my family pulsing in my ears.

by Cat Pleska



This is a pipe with a coat hat head egg bird and a caged zebra.

by Serge Lecomte

WEST END

Trouble is I want to be with you like this,
my arm in yours on the way to a tapas bar
as on the eve of summer
in the same breath I want to end things
(my life) not just like that
but in your arms deeper in the night, a cot death,
no sobs, your first waking thought not fault
but capacity to strive again
that mornings cradling a toddler bring.
Dig no deeper than a delusion we're free
if you ever look for my reason
for breaching. Here's my jade pendant,
a heart really a pair of carps.
I can want equally, my lone skill.
I play out the life Socrates
with you, make a lamp out of a bottle,
refresh cold opens while a ticker bends
fortunes, let lotion and balm blend, on my back
let aperitif sluice carps,
tell myself I'm only sleeping on it but
the plan is pretty solid.
I get up at dawn to move my wet boots
from one of your corners. By the end
of December, I can only nibble sesame seeds.
There may be one step heavier before another

when furrows are uneven in the snow.
It is my mother's mother again, headed my way
whispering her daughter needs to hear this
from her child, *let them be,*
they will do as they please.

by Kris Falcon
(Winner of the UnCollected Press Book Publication Award)

LATE INTAKE

The last time I was as thirsty I had claimed a lie,
a big lie I wept about for days softly, an intern again, micro-dosing
after being found out, before being shunned.

I don't know what self-harm or whatever stopped. But I clambered
on a beach hoppers' bike with damp hair.

I still ask for tiger prawn, a special there, whenever
lobster is offered. I still look for the Maria
in my name. All my names mean alegria, aching for a smile.

Macrame lace I slept in left filigree on my back.

Bines warping a forsaken wing.

A whipped oak I wanted branded on my cheek. I was nowhere
to be found when families, orphans, gazed into a just-set sun
like they could the bottom of a quandary. I scanned
faces until a language sounded like my sister's voice.

The more steps, the more cracked shells
scratched like nails. Too late to take cover
when the weather turned and vomited rain after rain. The Pacific
could not hold in any differently, wave after wave.

I meant to bring home a surf. I serve everything like ice cream,
upside down. A paddle rests on a couch I sleepwalk to.

My left calf

knows a rolling pin. I would call my child after a city

I have been presumed from. Half checked out, there is no moral
behind the murals. As it is, osmosis, saline.

There is no tool to prepare for certain questions. Where my blood
flows from, for whom I grew up, where the ones

I loved most survive.

Trust me only when every inch is cold, I am writing
on May from February.

by Kris Falcon

(Winner of the UnCollected Press Book Publication Award)

NEW YEAR'S NOTE

What follows "Listen"

can wait. I have not drawn open the curtains as wide
since a Doberman fought with a Shepherd.

Tonight, the woman with the louder bark is burying
sharp edges. Her loose end? Did she wish for radio

silence, smooth around the curves left? No new moon to spot
her fossils. But her pistol tops the mound as a firework jolts
midnight with comets. Launch costs

as do defenses. Does she feel savage with no tweezers?

Listen, I'm just living my platform. What to do
but keep my shadow out of sight.

I have lit the patron saints. I will see myself off
to catch a one-act from my box.

Some trees of the fig family are for the spirit
to unfurl, some for winds to blow about, howl on,
let stalks overrun the bough. *Listen.*

Unarmed, the woman is a no-show
for the salon or contracts. She walks her champion
early. Sick leave rounding off to gap year.

She circles our roundabout like it's too small
to drown in, but large enough for a race

by Kris Falcon

(Winner of the UnCollected Press Book Publication Award)



When Sonny gets Blue
by Bridget Seley Galway

What It Means to Be Home

The FM station informs that in another country
a missile has again torn the side
of an apartment building away
like a mistreated doll house
but my car moves forward and Sonny Rollins returns
with a breathy monologue.
Manny, Moe and Jack look a little grayer
before the way home pulls off the main drag,
the neon a little duller in pre-dawn drizzle.
The radio reminds it's always five o'clock somewhere.

Talley Road is empty save a fox
that lopes across and slips into the strip of field
by the monochrome houses of Weldin Ridge.
In Peter Lorre's voice he speaks
his grievances – his soiled suit, a shrinking world.

These days I lean on the breaking stuff more,
velocity gone with arm strength, the waistline, quick recovery.
This crookedness was once called guile
or something less flattering.
The good news about aging is not caring
what people think
of my scratchy voice, the stained shirt.
Let them please themselves.

Let the fox in a quick, rusty strike find a meal
even at the expense
of another life;
one sharp moment of terror
replacing an urgent hunger.

by David P. Kozinski

Treasure Box

My story is something
now with a hole in its middle,
rays folding around
a body and speeding away.
I am less likely to get a handle
on light than the way a story
disrobes and builds itself
up from its inventory.
I wouldn't turn down a bed
except to lie in it and bending
a story to fit a moment
is not just expected but wanted.

Every tale gropes toward home,
old shirt familiar or not previously inhabited.
Sometimes air jets
all the way through – in one door
out the other end – and then
there are paragraphs
or whole chapters in twilight;
the siesta, the shroud,
a procession of thunderheads
passing toward the airport.

As we dropped our thoughts like light anchors
you hoped I might bend something
vast and tangled straight and satisfying,
bang it flat with a hammer on an anvil,
or even grow scads of flecked
flowers spaced evenly. I could talk
around our rows, cast a rippling shadow
all afternoon while you skipped
picked over stones
while your skin and hair dried.

A lighthouse brings the message
its keeper will tell, warning
or beckoning. Sometimes a beacon
flashes falsely. Think of fireflies.

The wreck's goods wash
in under full moon light and are taken.

A book of treasure lies
in every lofty attic,
too heavy to lift some days
or purposely stuck shut.
Rusty traps pile up in one basement corner
and old brown snapshots
release traces of olive uniforms
and chromatic campaign ribbons.

What I wanted to hear I said
and what you really wanted
I never heard. We voiced ideas
that arced and sank like pennies
– each indelibly, imperceptibly marked –
and didn't consider there were only so many.

I was a sociable being.
I have been a comfortable shadow
that broadens and shortens,
lengthens and narrows when days
grow long and seasons turn.
I am a sound of the house
so familiar it is seldom heard.
My eyes train on a few subjects,
make objects of them, move them around;
routine less a cause of resentment,
more a friend who stays over
sleepless nights.

by David P. Kozinski



Night Feast
by Ann-Marie Brown

Four Stories

To build this house
start with four stories,
condense them to one.

Dream within these walls
that you are sleepwalking
on the blue rug

map of the moon.

Your mind has many rooms
bright and dark and dusk.
Find dormers and sketch their stories
at every time of day, in each season.

Chase a mouse of light
down the hall as it leads you
past the sleepers' rooms.

When you stumble, reach out.
A wall may be there
to find your fingers

and tell you goodbye.

by David P. Kozinski



Concerto Dream
by Jeffrey Newman

Aphasia Poem 24 (Disabled Poem 1)

able others aren't
able enough to theorize silence(ness)
not (only) as metaphor or structure but

as identity-skin-
(dis-)body(-ness) inhabiting the world as
keening limpid not-dead-yet-ness.

(these) flagrant bodies can not
locomote cogitate emote the
sensate intersecting mind body

thoughts without irony
fear these bodies struggle (to) find common
home aloneness one humanity.

stand speak be able able others
in solidarity together.

by Robert Guzikowski
(Winner of the UnCollected Press Book Publication Award)

Aphasia Poem 36

rain cold overfalls the
headwaters of the oswegatchie
where high falls cascade to the plains of

boreal heath barrens
forming together the plasm of
wilderness where words rise up from the

realm below the surface
words spoken by shadows forever
ambulating the boundary between

the dead and the dying
words that create marks of memory
terminating posts of pleasure pain.

summon the unborn forest matrix
prefix suffix awareness transfixed

by Robert Guzikowski

(Winner of the UnCollected Press Book Publication Award)

Letter To Karen

(After Robert Burns)

growing old together
never seemed a moon's glamour ever
I wanted to cast with even you.

times how many must we do this?
in the gloaming our bodies
now embrace our bodies' delusions.

does not joy's seduction
waver? let us spend one of our lives
endlessly frozen beautiful in

a wish a kiss for an
arms entwining moment winter's sun
ever cold never melting pane's frost.

your laugh cries out waxing when and place.
here your echoes leave who's now your face?

by Robert Guzikowski

(Winner of the UnCollected Press Book Publication Award)



Quinn
by Ann-Marie Brown

I Made You

When you were born, I watched
the amniotic fluid leave your mother,
and flipped the tape of the camera
for more. I wasn't a gentle father—
I didn't know how to hold you,
so I left that up to your mother.
When she died, you became her,
eyes like peanut brittle in the sunlight,
and a warmth that I couldn't name,
but wanted every inch of. Your body
was off limits to me, so I made it
off limits to everybody. You couldn't date,
put on makeup, or wear dresses.
Every dress was too short or too baggy . . .
it ended the way I wanted. You wore men's pants
and hoodies to cover your body,
and if your ass was near me, I'd smack
it because I made that and aren't I just
your father after all? I faked suicide attempts,
emptied a bottle of pills down my throat,
exhaust running in the garage while I sat
in the car, and tying a rope to the wooden

planks of my bed. I wanted you
to lay beside me those nights, and you would,
scared that I would leave you without
a parent. I know you've wondered—
whether I killed your mother. I think
about it too, her final moments in the hospital,
how I made you watch
as the nurse unplugged her from life support
and we watched the blood empty
from her cuts until the bedsheet
was dyed pink. Her breath stopped
after that and I made you watch that too, held
your hand to her chest so that you could feel
death firsthand.

I was a good father. I wasn't going
to let you live hoping for her return.

But you began to resent me.

You didn't want to cook my meals
anymore, or slide socks onto my feet
before bed. Why couldn't you
just bring me a glass of milk
without being angry or let me
lean in to sneak a kiss to your lips?

We did it when you were a child,
remember? Remember sitting on my lap,
and holding my hand to cross the street,
and walking around the house naked
because you didn't know I was watching
through the security cameras?
I loved you, every inch that I created
with my cock inside your mother.
I thought you loved me too.

by Laura Ohlmann

What I Know About My Mother

It's not much. I know the pain she
endured, like a wordless prophet
in bed, the staples removed
from her feet by the dozen, O
shaken from her mouth,
and her hand held in mine.

There is not much
a ten year old can know
about their mother, just her
voice pushed into my hair at night,
the warm brush of air
against my neck, how laughter
once scattered her children away
in the aisles of Publix.

You're so embarrassing, we would
say, not knowing that sound was
disappearing by the day, like the echo
of leftover rain from the corners
of rooftops. Her love and agony
was intertwined. She kept it from us
when she could, the ripped skin
sealed tight under a wrapping,
and the presents still overflowing from

under the bed at holidays.

What is love, if not selflessness?

Tzedakah was slipped into my palm
as I left the hospital for Hebrew school,
the smile held high, until I closed
the door. I don't know how to explain
love without mentioning my mother,
her voice only known now from
the footage on VHS tapes. Her hands
long buried on the grounds
of Menorah Gardens.

Her love is still found
in notes around the house, signed
“the friendliest mom” and to
“always my baby,” a taunt
for what I once knew
and then lost.

by Laura Ohlmann



Banquet at the Nightmare
by Jeff Newman

Peeing Tree

By the Utah juniper, the sun is tender, raising
a bulb to the unripe berries, shallow blue, hard
balls that can produce gin and feed
those lost in the wild. I'm not lost—maybe
lost my sense, hurrying to pull
down my pajamas, unhook a cold foot from
my boot, and unleash my ass in post-dawn
air. I never said I was subtle, as I hung
a sleeping bag around the car door, to fit
the alcove of the tree. I'm sure
that the minivan behind me caught a whiff
of the white plumed cheeks, breaking
into the air like the morning whistle of a bird.
But, the cows do it along the road, and you
do too, in the sanctuary of your porcelain
bathroom, a cell phone held like a bible.
There was no choice, and no known onlooker,
just the sun raising a purple hand above the mesa,
the jackrabbit lollygagging behind the thistles,
and I, bare backed, holding a boot, a pant leg, and
a napkin in my palm while pee streams downward
from the juniper tree.

by Laura Ohlmann

Before My Mother Died

Before my mother died, I kneeled
on the top bunk of my bed & faced
the window like the Western Wall

*Please take away my mother's pain,
she doesn't deserve it*

I told the stars that stretched
out like a white sheet before me

The morning before she died, I kissed
her on the head without waking her
& took the elevator to dad's car

~~I didn't say goodbye~~ My mother said
goodbye that night from my dreams—

she hops into dad I wonder
does she love him more & we
stack together like Russian Dolls

My mother was a warrior

Before I thought she might die, I helped
her untie her white sneakers

The top of her feet had blackened
scales of skin that peeled back
like the tin lid on a sardine can

The necrotized skin
could not grow back

Patches of flesh were taken
from her hips & stapled on
like the limbs of Frankenstein
As a kid I was told
G-d is everywhere by my mother
& imagined millions of bearded men
floating around like portals
of death that might suck me in
My mother is a warrior
At home she hallucinated
Grandma is cold & needs to sleep in my bed
& Grandpa is bogging the floor
She moved to sleep next to me
bits of skin flaked off onto my sheets
I held her anyway
I dreamt that my mother
was kept as a mummy
in Dad's bedroom closet
& we wrapped & rewrapped her body
until she was warm
When my mother died, I couldn't draw breath
She laid in bed like the copper statue of a warrior
while wings of blood sprouted
from the thin column of stitches
that ran down her spine

Rabbi Harr told me,
She isn't in pain anymore & my belief
in the small round heads of G-d
slipped Cotton was pulled
over her head & my
good mother took me by the hand
& pulled me into her grave
to sleep

by Laura Ohlmann



Café
by Bridget Seley Galway

Keys

these are the keys
the duplicate keys
to keep me
from getting lost
in places long
forgotten

these are the keys
squirming like worms
on a hook so I
don't forget them
next to the
spilled milk
on the counter.

these are the keys
some of them
very very tired
they belong to
a boy with a
long white beard.

and these, these are the
skeleton keys
that know the
way into
every room

except the room
of my heart
where there's no
overflow valve
or fire escape

just boxes of
stale chocolates

and regrets marked
returned to sender

by Doug May

Turn The Lights Off!

I never remember
to turn the
lights off
to save money.
I don't even
remember when
I turn them on.
it is always
dark inside here
anyway
whether the
lights are on
or off. there are
toys to trip over.
shadows to bribe
for more sick
days and a
warm blanket
pulled over
my head.

by Doug May

The Pusher-Dentist

you see, he says
bending over
the syringe

this is the object
of the invasion

the wide inviting
pockets preceding
uninsured
losses

and my jaw
clenching a
bitewing
stammers out
fearfully

how much
how much?

oh, don't worry
we have partial
extractions
secured by
long-term bonds

of unannounced
eruptions
and crooked
adjustments

(meaning you have
practically won
the ticket to more
sugar nirvana

hollowed
be thy name.)

by Doug May



Dreamers Eden
by Anne Cleary

SICK DAY

I watch as you eat, the way you wrap your hands around the Starbucks cup in the morning, sipping hot chocolate on your sick day off of school, your fingers still soft with baby fat, the fog lifting off the street that we should be driving down, your backpack in the seat beside you, larger than your torso. I carved this morning out for us, the traffic undulating over the Earth without us, as we hide in the alcove of fog on the patio of the coffee shop. Time forgets us in the gray morning light, condensation hung in the air as though we live inside a held breath. There was a time when we had every morning, your baby soft blonde curls in my hands, your croons before you learned conversation, the pressed expression that seemed to bleed from your chestnut irises like sap, the puffy wrap of your diaper, when you lived on my hip, and we moved outside of language. Now, I press your forehead that warms like my car window, push up your hair that has darkened with age, shaped like Peter Pan, as you tell me stories from school – the boy who did not speak until age 3, describing the girl at school who cried during a song about god. You tell me how her eyes fell and, *She was so pretty when her face changed*, your eyebrows quickening with expression as the images sparkle on the glass of your eyes, your classmate's face, crumpling with emotion, *Something changed, and she became beautiful.*

by Amanda Leal



Dreaming of Water Lilies
by Jeff Newman

COLLATERAL DAMAGE

In Gaza, the father holds his daughter, her head limp on her neck, a chunk of her cheek blasted from beneath her eyes, her arms stiff at her sides like a cotton doll. I feel her weight as I have felt my own son, sleeping against my shoulder, his hot breath filling my ear. I can sense the gravity of her cheek on his chest as though we are tethered in love: parent to parent, the universal weight of a sinking child, my son's curls to my lips, his daughter's hair tied in galaxy buns, parted in the middle like a cornfield. He opens her eyelids, first the left, then the right, to behold her gaze one last time, he kisses the dry lobes before tucking her face into his neck, nuzzling her rigid body. The recorder asks the man his daughter's name. He says, *She is the soul of my soul*, the white linen stretched open on the gurney like a delivery sheet. Then he does what I could never do — he lays her flat on the cotton spread, arranges her arms, he pulls her pink shirt down over her belly. He will not let her go into the next life appearing unloved, as they wrap the plastic over her shoulders, mummifying her face — his soul, into anonymity.

by Amanda Leal



What Nature Knows IX
by Gjert Rognli

Sanctuary

by Derick Delloro

It's the wind that really gets me. More than the cold or the snow, it's the wind that hurts. It hits like fire and crawls through my bones when I'm walking home from school. The wind comes flying down from Medicine Bow and slices up your skin real bad. Like god screaming at you — at least that's how my mom always puts it, “god's screaming real loud today” she'll say when we're talking on her smoke break.

Most of the other kids at the middle school are ranchers — their parents at least — and they got those nice farm coats that look like burlap sacks all sewn together. They do alright with the wind but mom got my coat from Amazon and it started splitting our first winter here. I was worried she'd cuss me out for ripping the seam but she just sighed and muttered “cheap chinese crap” and handed it back without looking at me. She used to yell and cuss a lot more when Dad was around but she's just real quiet now.

“I don't have a lot of fight left, Dylan,” she'll tell me, sitting on a folding chair outside of her job — I can hardly hear her over the sound of country music inside.

The wind only gets really bad in the winter and that won't be for at least another month or two. Fall in Wyoming isn't like the fall on TV shows, it's more wind gusts and blue skies than apple cider and leaves turning orange. But the cold starts whispering up your back and you know the roads are going to close soon, and the tourists will disappear, and mom won't come home with a folded-up wad of bills all out-of-order telling you about how fishermen tip so well.

The cold always makes me think of our first winter here before Dad “showed his true colors” as mom always puts it. When we had a house near the refinery and Dad had that oil money that meant mom didn’t need to wait tables like she does now. We were up in Sinclair that winter and things seemed good until they didn’t anymore and now we live about an hour off the highway in a little town called Saratoga, on a river near the mountains.

Saratoga is a nice enough place but we don’t live in a house anymore. We live in a double-wide — a big trailer on the edge of town — and sometimes I have to wear my coat with the ripped seam inside when the wind picks up. It comes down off the mountains like I said before, mountains that rise up east of town and glow during sunset like a bunch of coals stacked up on top of each other. I like looking at the mountains when I’m walking back from school, it makes me feel small but not in the lonely way I used to get right after Dad left.

The fall means darker days which means we have to stay closer to the door when mom is on her smoke breaks — so we can see each other in the little outdoor lights they got. Lately mom hasn’t been looking at me as much, she just watches the little bits of ash fall off of her cigarette and nods at my questions. We used to talk about things a little more but I don’t get the sense she’s really “all there” right now.

On the cold mornings — the ones creeping in more and more with the leaves dying and all — we’ll walk over to the hot springs. Not the resort on the other side of the river, but the free ones down by the park. Years ago, the town built two hot pools right next to a stream — a big one and a little one. They used thick stones and concrete like an old church in a movie, and it feels like time stops when you’re there — you walk down these steps into the big pool and you can’t see anything besides the mountains and the sky and your whole life feels like a dream you’re forgetting after a long sleep. When we first got to town we

tried calling it ‘The Sanctuary’ but eventually that felt too serious so we started calling it ‘The Springs’ like everybody else does.

One morning, a couple weeks after moving here, we were walking around town — exploring the place before one of mom’s shifts. It was crisp out, still springtime but cold in the mornings, and we could see the steam shimmering off in the distance. I’d always read that word ‘shimmering’ in stories about knights and castles but I never really understood it until that moment. Neither of us had been to a hot spring before and there’s no real way to describe the feeling the first time you see one, just that it feels like you found a secret — the kind of place that isn’t supposed to be around anymore. We started going until the weather got too hot to stand it.

But now the summer’s past and the chill’s coming back. The air is thin up here and the heat drifts away at night when the sun goes down. The mornings are the coldest time, and we couldn’t sleep-in if we tried — so we put on our biggest clothes over our swimsuits and walk down to the springs to thaw out. We’re officially back to the off-season and instead of fishermen around town we see what the ranchers call “Boulder-People” coming up from Colorado, people with beaded bracelets and shiny clothes. Mom doesn’t like them — she says they’re stuck up and some other words I’m not supposed to repeat — but I think they’re nice, at least when I ask them about their clothes. They love talking about their clothes.

A couple weeks ago, I met a Boulder-person down by the springs after school — I’m not supposed to go there on my own but mom works most evenings and I get bored sitting in the double-wide and listening to the aluminum walls fight off the wind. It turned out she was from Fort Collins, which means she wasn’t a Boulder-Person, but she was from Colorado. Her name was Annie and she had long brown hair tied up on top of her head and the kind of tan you get from spending a lot of time outside for fun. She had a big metal water bottle covered in stickers and a

tattoo on the inside of her arm of a skunk that I thought was pretty weird. “Some lessons you just gotta keep forever,” she told me as she patted her arm with a smile. When I asked her about her work, she told me she was a guide, which meant she led people on trips up through the mountains. We talked about the Medicine Bow range that loomed over town and she told me I had to see them up close sometime because they “just couldn’t be beat.”

She asked me some questions too, wanted to hear about what it was like living here and where we’d been before. When I started telling her about my mom and dad she got a little more serious — the lines between her eyebrows got deeper and she looked at me like she was trying to figure something out. I changed the subject to school because I knew she’d have better questions about that.

Time flew, like it always does when I’m talking to people, and I had to run off to catch mom on her smoke break. I managed a quick “I need to go, sorry!” as I headed to the changing rooms.

“It was nice talking to you!” Annie called after me, but I was moving fast as the river and couldn’t say anything back for fear of slowing down.

Mom had always said I wasn’t allowed to come to the springs alone, so I spent the walk over to her work thinking up some kind of excuse for why my hair was so wet. but when I got to the back door she just gave me a smile and a little wave. The smile was thin-lipped and no crease and it made me feel like she was somewhere else, back in Sinclair or New Mexico even. Back in the slick-slided ditch of our before life.

She didn’t really look at me too hard and spent the whole break telling me about something her boss did. I rolled an apple-sized rock back and forth under my foot and did a lot of nodding to keep her going. She hadn’t always been like this, fading away like when that guy in the time travel movie with the car starts to

go all see-through. There was a time where she could light up a room — that’s how dad would always put it, “a smile like a 100-watt bulb.” But we don’t talk about him now. We don’t talk about much of anything except what a bunch of pieces of you-know-what the people at her work are. Some days she hates her boss more, some days the customers, some days that one waitress who offered her a wad of cash after hearing about the broken window in her bedroom.

The next day, after school ended, I walked back down to the springs. Annie was there in the big pool and gave me a glowing grin when she noticed me coming out of the changing room.

“I was wondering when you’d show up,” she said and I blushed a little but maybe that was just the hot water.

We talked about a lot of things, well mainly I asked a bunch of questions and she did her best to keep up with the answers. Annie brought groups of teenagers — who she called ‘troubled kids’ — up to the mountains on trips, what she called “adventures”. She told me they were usually pretty sad or angry or just acted different from other people. The mountains were like a restart, at least that’s how she put it, a chance to be somebody who doesn’t feel so bad all the time.

“I think you’d really like them,” she said, looking a little more serious, and I thought she was probably right. Before I could ask her about anything else, I noticed the big clock said it was close to break time and I managed a quick ‘see you later’ as I got going to the changing rooms.

Annie told me she’d be around all week, hitting the springs after her morning hikes. “Don’t be a stranger!” her words echoed off the concrete behind me as I ran back to town.

We kept doing that over the next few days; I'd come down after school and she'd be right there in the corner of the big pool, with that same grin on her face. Each time she'd say "I wondered when you'd show up" and I kept trying to keep my face from turning too red.

We talked about a lot of things in a short amount of time. Annie had never had kids and wasn't married, but she loved what she did and where she lived. She told me about growing up in Nebraska: "It's just as boring as you'd imagine." Her favorite color was a shade of green I'd never heard of and her favorite food was pizza with little anchovies on it. She laughed when I made a face and told me "don't knock it till you try it!"

Eventually, I ran out of questions and she started asking me things, what show's I liked and what my favorite subject was in school. On the fifth day, she started asking about dad and I was a little more quiet. It wasn't anything she said, I just don't like the way people change when he comes up. Everybody always looks away, or shifts around like they don't fit in their seat anymore. I don't like making people feel bad so usually I just change the subject when it comes up, but Annie asked again — gently, like she thought I was scared or something — and she looked at me real deep. The words sort of tumbled out and I kept apologizing for talking so much. She just smiled and told me it was no problem, but her eyes looked sad but she never took them off mine. It felt good to talk — like I was getting lighter, softer. Like every word out of my mouth carried a little bit of weight with it.

Talking felt so good that I didn't notice the sun getting further past the changing rooms, or the big hand moving around the clock. When I realized what time it was I shot out of the water like I'd sat on a thumbtack. "I need to go!" I said, feeling surprised at how quick I stood up. Annie stood up too, like an instinct, and called out as I was moving towards the changing rooms.

“Wait, Dylan!” the words rushing out faster than usual, “I’m going on a hike up in the mountains tomorrow.”

I stopped, holding the railing and looking back at her.

“You should come with me, I think you’d really like them.” She was leaning forward a little, like she was ready to chase after me. “I’ll be in the parking lot here in the morning. Come meet me and we can drive up together, it’ll be an adventure.”

I took a moment, not really sure what I wanted to say, then gave her a quick nod. She called after me to bring some good shoes but I was around the corner by then.

When I showed up at Mom’s work, the folding chair out back was empty and I was terrified I’d missed her break. After a few minutes of kicking gravel and squeezing my nails into my palm, the door swung open and she came out swearing about how the manager had made her clean the bathroom after a rancher “messed it up real bad.” Her hands were shaking as she lit up her cigarette, telling me how awful it was between puffs. When her 15 minutes was up, I’d barely made a sound — I was shocked by my luck and didn’t want to ruin it by going and saying something stupid. She handed me a bag of cold chicken tenders and mumbled something about heating them up in the oven. As I walked away, I held the bag at my side and felt it bump against my leg with each step. I tried to time it with my heart beat, loud as it was banging in my ears, but I just couldn’t keep up.

Sleep didn’t come easy that night. I kept thinking about the morning and what kind of excuse I could use with Mom to leave the house so early. I must have come up with a thousand possibilities — everything from a group project to a missing swimsuit — but when the sun rose I knocked on the sliding door separating her bedroom from the rest of the trailer. Her voice

came through the door, telling me to leave her alone because she was sleeping in. She sounded far away — a little more see through this morning — and I felt my insides twist, not sure anymore if leaving was such a good idea. I hesitated, listening to the wind rattling the clothesline outside, and knew I'd never get another moment like this; never get another shot to see where all that wind comes from. After a few deep breaths, I rolled up the half-eaten bag of Corn Flakes on the kitchen table and stuffed it in my backpack next to a bottle of gatorade I grabbed from the fridge. My good shoes were in the hallway closet and I zipped up my Amazon coat all the way because I could already feel the cold creeping in through the cracks in the windows.

Annie was waiting for me in the parking lot and I swear she smiled with all her creases when I rounded the corner. I expected her to ask what took me so long, but instead she just said how happy she was to see me, “you’re going to love it up there!” Her car was a little red hatchback with a sticker on the back that said ‘Mountain Avenue Market.’ It had cracked leather all over the seats and one of those little dreamcatchers hanging from the rear view mirror. Most of her stuff was in the back and she apologized for it being “such a mess” as I buckled myself in. I felt like I was riding through a dream or a painting — all the colors bled into each other and the town shrank in the side mirror, a fading memory, a previous life.

The drive was nice, Annie played music the whole time and kept pointing out the prairie dogs along the way. I ran my hand along the edge of the seat and felt the cracked leather scrape against my finger tips. There’s a weird sensation that comes on when you drive into the mountains — the gravity pins you to your seat and you don’t dare look off the edge of the road. It was like a string was pulling on my insides, making me feel halfway to being sick, but Annie just turned up the radio and laughed at the faces I’d make when she hit the winding turns.

The snow hadn't reached us in the valley yet, but the foothills already had enough to need some plowing. I watched the snow ridge lining the side of the road get deeper and deeper the higher up we got. "Think of it like a blanket," Annie said to me over the music, "covering all the bumps and bruises from the year." She was always saying funny stuff like that.

Finally, we got so high up that I could see the foothills behind us and ahead of us the road was blocked with a giant bank of snow that had been plowed as far as it could go. Annie pulled the car to a stop and looked at me with a smile, "We're here."

We got out of the car and stared at the snow, piled chest-high in all directions, no sign of a path or clearing. I glanced back at Annie with confusion but she had already pulled out what looked like a couple of tennis rackets. She strapped them to my feet and explained that they were snowshoes. "We're gonna walk on water today Dylan," she told me, as she slid her pair on too.

It took a moment to get used to the snowshoes — you have to walk wide and lift your feet up between steps — but after a couple minutes it became as normal as anything else you do. There wasn't a clear trail, but when I asked Annie where we were going she pointed with her index finger to the sky.

"Up."

We weaved through a thick forest of pines, stiff branches scratched at me as I tried to keep from tearing any new holes in my Amazon coat. Every time it felt like I was getting too tired, or hungry, or thirsty, Annie seemed to find a rock or a fallen-over tree for us to sit on. She had plenty of water and gave me nuts and chocolate, or dried fruit at different moments of the hike. I realized her pack must have been much heavier than mine. "Don't worry about it Dylan," she said lightly, "I got years of experience on you."

After what felt like days of marching, we reached a break in the treeline. The snow gleamed in the sunlight and the wind had come back with a fury. I zipped my coat up and buried my

nose in it, keeping my head down as I trudged forward. The ground felt steeper here, much more difficult to navigate in the snowshoes. I had to lean forward to keep myself from falling behind. All that I could see was the thick tracks Annie's snowshoes had left in the snow in front of me. About when I thought I'd had my fill of leaning and trudging, I heard Annie call back from ahead, "It's up here, just a few more steps!"

The peak came on quick and fast as a blink I found myself standing on top of the world. The blue sky stretched out overhead in all directions, endless and overwhelming. The wind whipped around me every which way and I felt like I had never existed before this moment, like life began and ended with this clearing. Time did that funny thing it does sometimes and all I could do was try to make it slow down between deep, desperate breaths. Annie gestured for me to come to the edge and swept her arm out dramatically towards the valley below.

"Look familiar?"

As my eyes adjusted to the light and the distance, I realized I was looking at Saratoga. I could see the rough outline of the airstrip south of town and the main street with all the shops stacked next to each other like tic-tacs. I squinted and could just make out the steam rising out of The Springs — or at least what looked like steam, might have been just my imagination — and I even thought I could see our mobile home park on the far side of town. The specks seemed so tiny, so far away, and so vulnerable in the open scrub brush that stretched out in all directions around town.

As I stood up there, on a boulder peeking out of the snow, I felt my breath pulled away by the wind and I imagined it hurtling down the hills and into the valley. Imagined it whip through the steam coming off the hot springs and whistle past the restaurant where mom's shift was probably just starting. I imagined it squeezing through the cracks in the wood panels lining the inside of our trailer and blasting through the latched

door into her bedroom. It felt, for a minute, like I could push the wind so hard that it would blow it all away.

Standing on that boulder, I didn't think about the hours it would take to get back to town, how I'd be late for mom's break time. Or the days that she wouldn't speak to me, floating in and out of the trailer like a ghost, haunting my sleep with the sound of crying into her pillow. I didn't think about the weeks it would take for her to move on — or the months that I would spend sneaking the slip of paper with Annie's phone number out of the shoe box in the hall closet, just to look at on quieter nights. Or the years that I'd need to make it through to get to adulthood, to build whatever life I could out of this town's rubble. Maybe I would be like Annie and live in the mountains, letting the wind carry me wherever it wanted — or maybe I would end up working as a dishwasher in mom's restaurant. It was impossible to know.

None of that mattered now because those were down-there problems and I could feel the top of my hat brushing against the sky. I smiled with my eyes closed and forgot my name for a moment, just a moment, when Annie looked at me and softly asked, "Do you want to head back soon?"

"Not yet," I said, feeling the words carried off my lips, "Just a little while longer."



Painting Girl Falling Dress
by Anne-Marie Brown

from

1st PASS, January 2021

Arlington Circle

at a full fountain

a raven, absent its kindness,

drinks, washes away the day

by Alan Bern

(Winner of Uncollected Press 2023 Book Publication Award)

///

from

2nd PASS, January 2021

remembering at the Cheeseboard

my unbuttoning your jeans

your slight sound—

after, politics

you slapped me hard

still I have these thoughts

does your palm burn still?

by Alan Bern

(Winner of Uncollected Press 2023 Book Publication Award)

///

from

5th PASS, March 2021

near Eunice Street

my early home

Eunice bayward to the Western end
the Mormon church mid-block
where you U-turned the car
and a churchgoer cursed you
getting out of his car
I am still afraid

by Alan Bern
(Winner of Uncollected Press 2023 Book Publication Award)



What Nature Knows I
by Gjert Rognli

this isn't about death, I promise

in sunset light where shadows are made
whispers touch my left ear, then my right

telling me to moisten the moon with my tongue
to stretch myself into disintegration
and reduce to cells free
to reorganize into new forms

unbound by rules of functions and organs
devoid of systemic limits that burden my bones
left to be a new kind of whole, previously unknown

I expect a rush of recombination
I am not afraid.

by Annette Petrusso

disinterred

fossils in a square glass jar

calcified remnants of the distant
past, separated from the ground

and displayed

in a vessel formed from the sand
that once served as their grave

now placed on a sideboard

as decoration, selected
for color and texture,

the origin

of the disinterred swirls and shells
is no longer a matter of interest

by Annette Petrusso



What Nature Knows II
by Gjert Rognli

This Way

It is not rebellion, as you once said.

You sorely misunderstood.

It's just that I am drawn to go this way
and that.

Ahead of me lies the tree line

and the water's edge-

And I must find out

what the wind sounds like as it blows through the boughs,

the stone skipped,

the surface of the water breaking across my

face as I come back up for a breath,

and the warm greeting of the sun.

The slight cooling when a cloud crosses,

the mood of that shadow, in a moving instant.

The mystery of that wind coming down from the ridge

and across the lake at the mine, beckons.

I will follow every time.

by Anne Cleary



What Nature Knows III
by Gjert Rognli

The Medicine Cabinet Museum

by Max Klement

Until recently, I lived on the third floor of a walk-up from the 1920s on the Upper West Side. It seemed perfect: the building and apartment were beautifully maintained; it was light and airy, the rooms well-proportioned; much of the original woodwork had been saved; and the bathroom was unusually large and still had some of the 1920s-era tiles—I imagined that the apartment wasn't all that different from how it looked when first occupied.

I figure I've rented ten or twelve apartments over the years, which means I've viewed at the very least two dozen candidates. There are some things everyone does: open the refrigerator; flush the toilet; look in the closets; turn on the kitchen taps... I believe I looked in the medicine cabinet. I don't remember doing so, but it seems like something I would've done. However, if I had, I would've noticed that the cabinet—the original built-in from the 1920s—wasn't empty.

There were items from past tenants in my medicine cabinet.

Maybe it started out as a joke; obsessive-compulsion; or just plain laziness. Normally the next tenant would throw out the left-behind personal care items, disgusted, and scrub away the remains of imaginary microscopic flesh or fluids from the narrow glass shelves. But these items were *curated*. It was a museum.

There was an old tin box of aspirin. "St. Joseph's Pure Aspirin": a dozen pills for ten cents in an orange tin with black and white stripes around the edges. There was a little sticker on it, which read "1920s."

Probably from around the same time was a greasy square bottle of castor oil. The paper label was faded and stained from the oil; there was no date on it that I could see, and I was reluctant to handle it to look for a sticker on the bottom.

There were two rusty double-edged disposable razor blades stacked on top of a blue paper envelope, which proclaimed, "Blue Gillette Blades." Scribbled in one corner of the envelope was "1940s."

On another shelf was a flat thermometer in a black Bakelite case. On the sticker, in a shaky hand, was written "1940s."

A toothbrush. The curved handle was orange; the yellowing bristles matted down, and the remains of toothpaste caked between the bristles. Its label stated "1950s." Next to it was a slightly dented tin of Colgate toothpowder, dated "1960s." The enamel was still a clean bright white with red lettering. There was a similar tin in our apartment when I was a kid. Seeing it gave me an uncomfortable, eerie feeling.

Sometimes, I'd gather friends to see the museum: they stood in the bathroom in darkness, while I prepared the dramatic presentation. "Ladies and Gentlemen! Presented for your approval, the Medicine Cabinet Museum!" And with that, I would flip on the light, accompanied by applause. Carefully

pulling on disposable white cotton gloves, I gently opened the cabinet door, and began my pedantic faux academic lecture.

“As you can see, the museum consists of various artifacts, ranging in date from the 1920s through the 1960s: a box of aspirin; a bottle of castor oil; two razor blades; a thermometer; a toothbrush and toothpowder. The exact provenance of these items is unknown, but it is believed that they were collected by the various tenants of this apartment over many decades. I see there is a question.”

“Yes,” my friend smiled at the others, pleased at having been selected. “What do these things mean?”

“An excellent question. The study of the hieroglyphics on these artifacts is the labor of many years and we have been able to come to some conclusions. Let us take the “St. Joseph’s Pure Aspirin” first. Although we do not know who this Joseph may have been, we have been able to determine with a high degree of reliability that “S-t-period” is an abbreviation for “Saint.” This is our starting point! Clearly, these artifacts formed a religious ceremony of some sort.”

“And aspirin?”

I nodded. “This one is a bit of guesswork. As you may be aware, an asp is an ancient venomous serpent. The prominent theory is that “aspirin” is simply another form of “asp”—therefore, the dozen pills are likely to be poison, and perhaps of a ten cent—ten *percent*—concentration.”

Nods from my audience.

“Thus, it has been concluded that this was likely a death ritual. The castor oil to anoint the body; the aspirin to poison.”

“And the razor blades?”

“Many ancient cultures drained bodies of their essential fluids; we believe that the razor blades were used for just this purpose.”

“If the body was dead, why would they need a thermometer?”

I nodded excitedly. “This is a *most* interesting question. There is considerable debate about this, however, I have done my *own* research regarding the use of the thermometer—if you are interested, you may read my article “The Death Rituals of Pre-Modern North Americans of European Descent,” in *Anthropology Today*... but I digress. I believe it was used to monitor the changes in the body, to perfectly time the ceremonial rites in relation to the state of the corpse.

“And last, but certainly not least: the toothbrush and toothpowder. It is generally agreed in academic circles that the faces of the dead were carefully monochromed by application of the powder by the brush.”

And with that, I bowed deeply. My performance never failed to entertain.

Since moving into this apartment, I’ve had two relationships fail—because of the medicine cabinet.

Samantha. Samantha had decided that our relationship had matured to the point that it was time for us to live together. My apartment was significantly roomier than hers, so it seemed reasonable to her that she move in with me. I can still clearly picture the scene, her long silky strawberry blonde hair, as she stood in the bathroom facing the open medicine cabinet.

“You didn’t clear a shelf for me.”

“No. I can’t move those things; they belong where they are.”

“You’re kidding me, right?”

That was the last I heard from Samantha—aside from the sound of my door slamming behind her.

Maureen. Maureen also wanted to advance the relationship to the “next level,” and therefore concluded that she would move in with me. She was more puzzled than disgusted or antagonized by the museum. I pointed out that I kept my bathroom necessities in two drawers which had an elegant system of dividers—no doubt installed by a previous curator of the cabinet—and that there were two unused for her. To her credit, she did use the drawers, but after two weeks she gave up, shaking her head as she left the apartment. It wasn’t the drawers that were the problem—she was clear about that—it was the idea that there was this collection of old used bathroom paraphernalia in the cabinet that bothered her, and that I allowed it to remain.

Faye. I’d been dating Faye for almost a year. I recognized the unmistakable signs that she was getting more serious about the relationship: the possibility of an invitation to Thanksgiving dinner had been dangled, and I believed that afterwards she would expect a change of address—assuming I successfully navigated the examination by her family. However, I didn’t feel quite the same way: I wasn’t ready to make a commitment. Faye was an illustrator. She was amused by the cabinet; laughed heartily at my performance as docent; and was perfectly content to use the available drawers for the few items she left behind after spending the night. Maybe her ease with the situation was because she was creative; maybe her quirkiness; maybe she was simply more playful—I’ll never know.

It was early November. Afternoons were darkening, nights getting colder; the square yellow lights from uncovered windows lined the streets warmly like pats of butter, the damp autumn leaves strewn across the sidewalk slippery underfoot. I stepped into the bathroom one brisk morning and as I began my usual routine, I noticed that the cabinet door was slightly ajar. I reached to push it shut, an automatic gesture, and then hesitated: I didn’t recall opening the door. It was a museum, not an in-use medicine cabinet. I didn’t think it could have opened on its own—the door shut securely—and had never done so before.

Timidly, I opened the door all the way.

Some of the objects had been shifted to make room for a new piece: a cup with dentures in it. I felt slightly disgusted: it seemed much more personal than a toothbrush. A sticker on the cup had “1969” typed boldly on it. My

grandfather wore dentures around that time: big clunky things that looked as if they'd been fashioned for a horse and that gave his voice an odd sibilance and the uncomfortable feeling that they were loose and could fall out at any moment.

Who put it there, and how? The door to the apartment had a deadbolt and security bar, and they were both intact. I slid sideways next to the window, my back to the wall—like a sleuth in a movie—and surreptitiously peered between a gap in the curtains. I could see that the window—that all the windows—were shut and locked, and there didn't seem to be anything unusual about the fire escape, as far as I could tell.

The label on the denture cup worried me: unlike the other items it was a specific year, not the range of a decade—it seemed *personal*.

I went about my day as if nothing had happened. I tried to convince myself of several lies: that the cup with dentures had always been there; that I'd accidentally bumped open the cabinet door the night before; that my memory wasn't as good as I thought. On balance, the discomfort of being very forgetful was far preferable to the distressing idea that someone had silently, invisibly, invaded my apartment to leave an object in the medicine cabinet. Was this some outlandish scheme to make me leave the apartment before the lease was up?

It preyed on my mind. The boss wandered by my office, and smiled, believing that my furrowed brow and faraway look were indications of contemplation—about work. I was turning over possible—and impossible—means for someone to gain access to the cabinet without disturbing my sealed apartment. I tried unsuccessfully to remember locked-room mysteries I'd read—and their solution to the puzzle. There seemed to be only one logical course of action: I needed to examine the medicine cabinet for a hidden panel on the back.

I returned home late that night. My dinner date with Faye was uncomfortable: I was distracted and distant and concocted a story about a “difficult project at work.” I knew she didn't really believe me—I wouldn't have believed it either. I didn't want her to imagine that I was distracted for all the wrong reasons: bored with her; another woman; drinking, drugging, gambling... In an effort to overcome the awkwardness and hoping to demonstrate my pleasure in her company, I dragged the dinner on far longer than was reasonable—a lengthy debate about a dessert, which was eaten at an absurdly leisurely pace; indecision about an after-dinner drink or coffee...

Back home, I didn't want to face the medicine cabinet again, so groping with squinting averted eyes I found my toothbrush, toothpaste, and soap and retreated to the kitchen to safely wash before bed.

The next morning, bleary-eyed from a poor night of anxious dreams—menacing shower curtains, a forgotten math test, faceless women—I went cautiously into the bathroom. The medicine cabinet door was open. I felt ill.

Once again, some of the objects had been moved to make room for a new piece: a hairbrush. It looked terribly familiar, an object of many years recognized by my hand more than my eye. There was a hangtag on it: “1973.”

There must be hundreds of thousands of different hairbrush designs, many of which are identical or nearly identical. Was it a fluke that this brush was so very familiar to me? Maybe, but it was labeled with a *specific* year, a year when I had such a brush. I realized that my plan to examine the back side of the medicine cabinet meant I’d have to handle these souvenirs of past tenants, and I was very reluctant to touch them: it was as if they were coming alive, and I didn’t want to feel the brush bristles scratching on my palms as it tried to escape my grip—like a mouse in the hand—or perhaps get bitten by the dentures, sliced by the razor blades, or drenched in a foul oil.

I went to work looking bedraggled; my clothing wrinkled; my eyes red. I hadn’t shaved. Whatever sick force was depositing objects in the museum might equally act on my own razor to make it cut my throat. I didn’t *really* believe that but decided I didn’t want to find out.

Did my coworkers notice my appearance, did my manager wonder what was wrong? I had no idea at all, I was unaware of what went on around me. My thoughts were elsewhere; I was marking time: I had a new plan.

Back home, I checked three times to make sure the door was bolted; I opened and closed the windows repeatedly, testing their sash locks. I stacked empty cans in front of the door and on the windowsills, crumpled newspaper on the floor.

I had a nervous dinner alone that night—it was difficult getting food down, my stomach felt closed. I proceeded with my evening in all the ways that appeared completely normal: watched a little TV; read for an hour in bed; turned off the light—and pretended to be asleep. I had an agonizing wait of thirty minutes; I assumed that whoever was behind this would want to be sure I was sleeping. The digits on the alarm clock never seemed to advance—but at last I silently slipped out of bed. I’d picked a location on the living room sofa that afforded a good view of the bathroom and the front door and would be comfortable for what might be a long vigil. A flashlight by my hand kept me company.

I waited.

At some point around five in the morning I fell asleep, and when I awoke to the sound of my alarm clock at seven, I could easily see from where I sat that the medicine cabinet wasn’t merely ajar, it was standing wide open.

I stared at it from my vantage point in the living room for several minutes. I was trembling. As a practical joke, this had gone far over the edge. As a bit of cruelty—it could continue endlessly. But who would want to torture me this way?

Finally, after several deep breaths which did nothing to calm my nerves, I stepped into the bathroom. There were four new artifacts in a row: a clunky white mug; a round bar of partially used soap; a stiffened shaving

brush; and a Gillette Trac II razor. Each was labeled “October 1978.” I was shocked. I recognized all four of these items; I remembered buying them. It was in my first semester of college, and I was trying on new personalities like jeans at The Gap. And one of them included this “vintage” shaving system—minus the straight-edge razor, which frightened me.

I staggered back into the living room and dropped on the sofa. Only someone who knew me very well—and retained so many details—could have possibly assembled these items. The hairbrush *must* have been mine, as had been the tin of Colgate toothpowder. And what about the older items? Were they the discarded belongings of my family members? I shuddered, thinking about what personal intimate item might appear next—maybe even with an exact date and time.

Why here? Why now? Had there been clues, things that I’d ignored, from when I first viewed the apartment?

In a panic, I searched for calendars, schedules, datebooks, notebooks—anything that might give some reference to when I first saw this place. All I found was a notation on my schedule for August fifth two years ago at nine in the morning, with the address. Who had shown it to me? A rental agent? Building super? I tried to remember the meeting: was there a wry look; a sly expression; an avoidance of the bathroom; a sideways glance?

Nothing came to mind. The details of that first encounter were long gone. It was ridiculous to think that someone had arranged this nightmare for me, building it slowly over two years. Was there some pattern that I’d missed, something larger that could possibly explain this? I didn’t go to work that day. I called in and said I had a stomach flu—no one wants you at work with a stomach flu.

Then it struck me—*Faye*. Samantha had rejected moving-in with me after one look at the medicine cabinet. Maureen had given-up after two weeks. What was it she said? “I just can’t deal with your medicine cabinet issues.”

But Faye. She was intrigued, amused, by the medicine cabinet museum. Though she hadn’t said “let’s move in together,” I knew it was in the air, that she’d suggest it before too long. What if the medicine cabinet was trying to frighten me to keep her from moving in, to prevent the relationship from going further?

I admit it was one of the strangest thoughts I’ve ever had. It’s plainly absurd; utterly ridiculous: the medicine cabinet isn’t alive. But what other explanation could there possibly be? No one had entered the apartment, and yet these objects kept appearing. I didn’t believe I was insane since I was able to think about the insanity of the medicine cabinet, and wonder if I was insane. I needed time to devise a strategy, even if it meant staying up all night—which probably would have happened anyway, as I anxiously awaited the next appearance.

I considered my options. Since these artifacts could appear at will, it was obvious that disposing them wouldn’t work—they would just return. I

thought of ripping out the medicine cabinet itself, but it too would probably grow back out of the mangled lath and plaster. I thought about taking it all to the kitchen and chopping it up with a cleaver, but I was afraid that like *planaria* every item would regenerate as whole, and I would have twice as many of them. Since they weren't alive, burning or drowning couldn't harm them, and there would just be more, *always* more.

I announced to the air that I was stepping out to buy ice cream. I found a quiet spot outside and called Faye.

"It's me."

"Oh. Hi."

The tone was obvious—she didn't want to talk to me. I understood. "Listen, I need a favor. I know this isn't gonna make any sense at all, and I promise if this works, I'll explain everything to you—it's, it's kinda crazy..."

"Well..."

"Faye, I know I've been behaving strangely. But here's the thing: I like you. I swear there isn't someone else, that's not why I've been distant—this isn't the "real me" finally revealed. But I beg you, if you've got *any* feelings left for me, or even just a memory of feelings, please, please play along with this."

About twenty minutes later, I returned to my apartment, carrying a bag with a pint of ice cream. I set it on the kitchen counter, and then noticed that the light was blinking on my answering machine. I played the message: it was Faye's voice, she sounded sad. "Look," she said, "I know things were going well... I mean, we seemed to be getting along, but I can't do this anymore. I don't know what's going on with you, but I just can't deal with it. You're a nice guy, really you are, and I'm sure there's someone out there who'll be right for you—it's just not me. So, I—well, goodbye."

I sat heavily on the sofa, slumped over, and began to cry.

After a few minutes, I firmly shut the bathroom door. There was no way to lock it from the outside, but I'd have to take my chances. I heard the first crash come from behind the closed door as I dragged a suitcase out of the closet. I quickly stuffed clothing into the bag to the accompaniment of loud thuds in the bathroom, followed by the sound of breaking glass. I looked quickly around the apartment—trying to ignore the ripping sound, and the heavy thuds against the bathroom door—and concluded that I could live without most of my belongings.

I glanced out the window and sighed with relief: Faye was standing on the sidewalk below, looking up at the building. As I opened the front door of my apartment, I saw that the frame of the bathroom door was beginning to shake under the pressure of whatever was on the other side. I slammed the door and ran down the stairs.

Faye looked at me curiously. "I heard some crashing noises coming from your place. Is everything okay?"

I shrugged, walking quickly away from what had been my home. I put my arm in hers and pulled her close. "Let's move in together."
She looked at me sideways, smiling, and nodded her head.



What Nature Knows IIXX
by Gjert Rognli

The Geography of Her Body

"...only the woman is left, but her body is a mass of geography."

—Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer*

The flowing ocean of straw hair
 Falling into myriad seas
Smelling of white wine and coconut

The red hot glaciers of those eyes
The great red ridges of those lips
The rounded hillock of the chin
The vibrating silken desert of the throat

Across the great white fell of her breasts
The pale and crooked peaks of her nipples

Then running through abdominal plains
Cautious around the soft volcanic navel pit

Through the edge of the tundra brush
 To behold right there:
 A c(o)untry forest, dark, untamed!
 Surrounding that deep salt lake
Between continental thighs

The smooth mountains of her knees
The islets of her tinkly toes
 Capped in ivory pink and trim

A whole planetoid of woman flesh

 I am in low orbit

The geography of her Body the World of pleasure
For a weary traveller such as me

The earthquake breeze of her giggle
 Cooling the fire of a sore belly

I can land and plant my flag—
I come in peace
And conquer thus!

by Harris Coverley

Golden View

oh Great Republic of California
I see you every day in other people's dreams
known as films and episodes
(and pornography)

you seem so varied and beautiful
and yet so bereft of water
and sanity

LA so big
San Francisco so prickly
San Diego so chewy
Sacramento so high and invisible

towered redwoods
molten deserts
sandy mountains
smog and fog
and the cotton soft explosions of rich blue waves
against ancient cliffs of deep maroon

the people smile outdoors in the supernova sun
beside the orange groves
over low fat chai lattes and tart wines

and everyone there is either homeless
or fully mansioned
(no in-betweens)

perhaps one day I shall meet you in person?
(or would that ruin everything?)

by Harris Coverley

The Silent Land

I can see you from my place upon the purple rocks under the bright alabaster moon of a starless night. You are clinging to a buoy, unhooked from its anchor, clinging to life, that thin and ashen frame, consumed. The light on the buoy illuminates your head, pale and dark, an empty look upon your face, your mind misplaced. Floating away and onto that far horizon, dragged by an unseen current on a calm yet careless sea, I cry out to you, my hands cupped tight about my mouth: “Come back! *Come back!*” I think you cannot hear me, so I cry louder still: “Come back! *Please, come back!*” At last, still fixed to that slowly fleeing buoy, you respond, but your weak and quiet voice cannot beat the silence of the grey sea—I receive it as a mumble, cacophonous and meaningless. “Come back! COME BACK!” I call through tears of desperate frustration, but you make no more attempts to answer me. The buoy carries on drifting and drifting, until it is a blur, and then just a light, and then but a distant spark which, like the concluding ember of the dying match, finally pops into nothing. I sit and wait—and you don’t return. You never would. You never could. It was a childish waste of time. I have to stand, make my way back across the rocks. I have to go home without you. And I have to learn, I know, that that’s the way it is now.

by Harris Coverley



What Nature Knows VVII
by Gjert Rognli

The Incident

by Ethan Goffman

When I first saw Vladimir Putin on television, in the early 2000s, I was instantly struck by an uncanny resemblance to my old friend—and enemy—Mike. Both had that same baby face with a veneer of toughness, those same cunning little eyes, that same aspect of puffing themselves up to hide their smallness, to appear fearsome, like some species of toad or snake.

I was friends with Mike long before Putin came on the scene. I met him shortly after my family had moved to Smallville, Ohio—not quite as small a place as the name implies—and I enrolled in the tenth grade. In math class, I sat next to a boy named Fred, with red hair and a squeaky voice, who was my first friend in that new place. Fred soon introduced me to Mike.

In that time, high schools were divided into jocks, freaks, and everyone else, with the jocks mostly ruling. I hear it's a little more complicated these days, with nerds more respected, but things are essentially the same. Fred invited me to play basketball with his friends, a sport I enjoyed but had little talent for. Mike was there, the smallest of us but quick and lithe, stealing the ball and gliding to the basket with a tricky little layup. My shot wasn't much, but I was able to complete several passes that allowed Mike to score, probably the reason he instantly took a liking to me.

"My wingman," he called me, and that was my new nickname. "Wingman." He bequeathed all of us with nicknames, which most of us wore with pride, with one notable exception.

Fred got his nickname at a Christmas party that first year, when he snarfed down all the fruitcake that no-one else would touch. "You've eaten so much fruitcake that you are a fruitcake," said Mike. Soon he was calling him Fruitcake, and we all joined in. Fred pretended to go along, but he must have hated it. Still, he was stuck being Fruitcake.

Mike was the key figure inviting me into the first group that would have me at Smallville High, and I was glad. It let me spend time with John, nicknamed Block Party for his prowess at defense, and Doug, nicknamed Oom Pah Pah because he played the French horn, and a few other hangers on. It's only years later that I've reflected on our place in the school hierarchy, a kind of limbo. We were average

athletes, average students who dressed to fit in and not be noticed in blue jeans and t-shirts with words designed to shock, but not too much.

Mike's "Help Stamp Out VirginitY" was the one that got him sent to the principal's office. I was most proud of my purple and silver Led Zeppelin t-shirt, with a silver angel reaching to the skies—in her silhouette, you couldn't tell if she was naked. It was maximum titillation without quite getting in trouble. We were desperate to stand out and desperate to fit in.

Mike was a bit different from the rest of us, in that he would most likely have been on the varsity football and basketball teams had he been a little larger. His personality, too, was brash enough to make him stand out, but not as a school icon. He had to settle for being the leader of a small band of nobodies, to reign in hell rather than serve in heaven.

Other than our basketball games, we were bored to the verge of insanity. We did get together to watch *Star Wars* and *Die Hard* movies in Mike's parents' basement, fantasies with copious shooting in which death is always on the verge but never real. Otherwise, we had no interests, no special talents. I kept quiet about my love of Tolkien, rather embarrassed that they would make fun of it (this was before the movies had come out). On weekends, we would drink and smoke pot. I had no idea how to get hold of either substance—my parents kept their liquor cabinet locked—but somehow Mike always had a stock.

At our small, all-male parties in Mike's parents' basement, Mike decided that Fred would bring us food. "Hey, Fruitcake, you're a fruitcake, that means you're meant to serve," he announced. Then, "get me a bowl of Doritos and a shot of Tequila." Without argument, Fred complied, and soon we were all ordering him around. "Hey, Fruitcake, get me a beer," John would say, or "Fruitcake, I need another bowl of M & Ms," Mike would bark out. I joined in, too, afraid I would be thought a wimp if I didn't order Fred around at least a little.

Mike's demands on Fred increased over time. "Fruitcake, we're out of Doritos," he said one day. "Go down to the Seven Eleven and get us some. And get some Coke while you're at it. Here's a five." It was nearly a mile to the Seven Eleven, on streets without sidewalks, yet without complaining, Fred complied.

Another time, it was "Hey Fruitcake, get me an M & M," from Mike. When Fred brought over a bowl of M & Ms, Mike refused to take it.

"What's the matter," said Fred.

“You didn’t listen. I said one M & M.”

“Hey,” said Doug. “That’s too much. Leave Fred alone.”

“What? Fruitcake needs to obey orders. It’s his role in life. One M & M.”

Like a dog, Fred brought over an M & M.

“Yellow,” said Mike. “It’s the wrong color. I hate yellow.”

“What, then?”

“Blue or orange. Anything but yellow.”

“That’s ridiculous,” said Fred, finally daring to protest.

“Do it!” said Mike. “It’s my basement and what I say goes.”

And Fred scurried over and brought another M & M.

Mike popped it in his mouth. “Now get a green one,” he ordered. “I feel like a green one. And be quick.”

“It’s too much,” said Doug. “It’s not funny anymore.” And he rose up and interposed himself between Mike and Fred. Instantly, Mike whipped upright and gave Doug a shove, right onto his ass.

“Out of my house,” he ordered.

Doug never returned. He was in marching band and orchestra and had a whole other set of friends to fall back on. But I had nobody. And neither did the rest of us.

Mike was the first of us to get his driver’s license and would take us cruising down Main Street, and yes, there was a literal Main Street in Smallville. We would hang out at the local IHOP or in the parking lot by the high school and try to pick up the girls as they flitted in and out. But none of us really knew how to, or if we did strike up a conversation, they would soon gravitate to other, more popular boys.

“Gotta get me some pussy,” Mike started saying on our car trips over, and soon we all echoed, “Yeah, we want pussy.” I never felt comfortable saying this, but I couldn’t resist the chorus. Mike soon did, in fact, have a girlfriend, Lorraine, but the rest of us remained virginal, with only each other for company.

Shortly after he started dating Lorraine, Mike interrogated Fred on his sexual status. “Hey, Fruitcake, have you ever kissed a girl?”

“Yeah, sure.”

“I bet. Probably your aunt.”

“No, a real girl.”

“What about breasts. Have you ever touched a girl’s breasts.”

“Uh, I don’t want to say.”

“Why not? Are you a faggot?”

“No, it’s just that . . . I’d rather not say.”

“So, you are a faggot.”

“No.”

“Then why haven’t you touched a girl’s breasts? Too much of a wimp.”

“No, actually, no. I have.”

“Have what?”

“Touched a girl’s breasts.”

“Yeah, maybe by accident,” he smirked. “Have you kissed the breasts?”

“Yeah, as a matter of fact I have.”

“You’re a liar. Tell us who then. Tell us the name of the girl.”

“It’s personal.”

“Come on,” said Mike, pushing Fred. “Tell us her name.”

“It’s personal. It’s personal.”

“What a wimp. I bet he’s lying.”

I was glad that it was Fred, not me, being interrogated, because the truth was that, at that time, I’d never kissed a girl, not counting relatives on the cheek. And I bet the rest of us were pretty close.

Luckily for Fred, Mike was mostly gone during that period when he was dating Lorraine, and we switched our little parties to a back room in John’s house. But John’s parents were more careful, so we couldn’t drink or smoke pot, other than sneaking an occasional beer. When Mike did show up, it was usually with Lorraine. “Hi boys,” she would say, and she’d bring chocolate chip or peanut butter cookies that she’d baked that melted in our mouths as though they were heaven. Lorraine appeared to me like a goddess in her pink halter top, but I was so intimidated I kept my distance, except in my dreams. Around Lorraine, Mike would be on his best behavior; he even refrained from calling Fred Fruitcake, although I was still Wingman and the rest of our nicknames stuck.

This went on about half a year, although my memory is not so trustworthy. Then, one Friday night at John’s house Mike showed up red and flustered and alone. “I’m having a Fuck You, Lorraine party,” he said.

“What happened?” asked John.

“Bitch broke up with me.” She had left him for a member of the football team, a starter at safety but not one of the stars.

There was sleet and frozen rain on the evening of the party. I had finally gotten my driver’s license, and my mom let me borrow the car for the night. She almost renege due to dangerous weather, but

“it’s a special party,” I pleaded. “Lorraine just broke it off with Mike. I can’t let him down.”

“All right. But drive slow. And absolutely no drinking.”

At Mike’s break-up party, it was the same four or five members of our group, in the same darkened, dank basement, with the same M & Ms, Doritos, beer, and Tequila.

After we’d settled in and started drinking, Mike stood up. “It’s time for the main event of the evening,” he announced. He stood up and brandished a wooden paddle with strange runes engraved on it.

“What’s that?”

“It’s a hazing paddle, from my cousin’s fraternity. We’re gonna do some hazing tonight, just like the big boys.”

“Who?”

“It’s for Fruitcake. We’re gonna make a man of him instead of a little faggot.”

“Cool,” said John.

“Are you sure?” I asked.

“Of course, he’s sure,” said John. “Don’t be a wimp. What’s the plan, Mike?”

“The same thing my cousin’s frat does. It’s a secret, but he divulged it especially to me. Said I’m like a brother. We’re gonna make Fruitcake crawl around and bark like a dog. If he’s not a good enough dog, we’re gonna smack him right on his butt.”

“I don’t think that’s a good idea,” I said.

“You’re a faggot, too. Don’t make me do it to you instead.”

John had already grabbed Fred. “Get down, dog,” Mike commanded, and Fred complied. “Now bark.”

Fred let out a half-hearted bark.

“That’s not convincing. Bark like you mean it.”

Fred gave a somewhat better bark. “Louder. And frisk around, like a real dog.” Fred complied. “Crawl faster.” Fred complied.

“Great, now let’s pick another animal. You’re a donkey. Let me hear you bray.” Fred gave a pitiful whining sound.

“That’s no donkey. Give us a real bray.”

“I don’t know how,” Fred protested. “I can’t do this.” And smack, Mike gave a huge swat on his butt. Fred yelped in pain. Without thinking, I was on Mike, swinging directly at his nose, but he dodged, and I barely connected with his cheek. Then boom, he was hitting me with a flurry of punches, my stomach, my face, my neck, and I fell to the floor.

“God damn it, man, what’s wrong with you? Why you want to spoil my fun?”

I just lay there.

“You’re a pussy. You don’t know what it’s like to feel a girl’s breasts. You don’t know what it’s like when she leaves you for a lousy football player.”

There’s not much more to say, except that I ended up giving Fred a ride home that evening. “You’re more of a man than I thought,” Mike told me as I left. “Now get the hell out of my house.”

Surging with adrenalin in the rainy, sleety night, I pumped on the gas. The car skidded out of control and side-swiped a stop sign, but then I remembered my mom’s advice and, gasping for breath, somehow managed to slow down and get us both home safely.

After that, everything changed. I hung out alone for the next couple weekends, rereading *The Lord of the Rings* and watching TV.

A little while before that night that overturned my high school life, that night I still privately call the Incident, Marcus, a kid in my photography class, had invited me to play Dungeons and Dragons. But I told him no. I was sure Mike and company would make fun of me if they found out. But a couple of weeks after the Incident, I asked Marcus if I could join his group, and *voila*, I had a new set of friends. I was soon a Paladin, adventuring in the misty realms of Mucous, saving townfolk in distress. I even got my first girlfriend in that group, Lilith, a high elf from the distant kingdom of Erewhon, in reality a talented pianist. I might have ended up marrying her, but she went to college far away, to the Berkelee College of Music in Boston, and soon was dating a saxophone player.

Fred and I didn’t speak to each other for the rest of high school, just looked away in embarrassment when we passed in the hall. Years later, when we met at a class reunion, he came up to me and was voluble, asking about my family and talking about his own achievements as an accountant and a father. Neither of us mentioned the Incident, or even Mike’s name.

Around that time, when Vladimir Putin first started showing up on television, I saw through him instantly, thanks to his resemblance to Mike. Intellectually, I know that this is a stupid way to judge people—there are surely some fine individuals who resemble Putin. Their resemblance might even be a curse, causing others to misjudge them. Perhaps they are slinking around in dark glasses, or dying their hair strange colors, or growing beards to avoid being mistaken for Putin.

But my instincts proved right in this case. Putin has since shown himself to be a bully just like Mike, only on a much grander stage. For some reason, people seem to follow bullies and join in picking on the weak. You'd think we would outgrow it by the time we're adults, but these days there seem to be more and more bullies around the globe. It makes me nervous for the whole of humanity and sometimes I think we're not fit to survive as a species.

I have a daughter and a son whom I love more than I can say, but as they enter their teen years, I worry about their future. And in them, I see my own story repeating itself. My daughter has started slathering on lipstick and rouge and going to parties, slavishly imitating her friend Dominique, who does look gorgeous for her age. To me, though, my daughter just looks ridiculous caked in makeup, covering over her natural loveliness.

My son's a little younger, but the other day I allowed him to go with some friends on his first excursion without adult supervision by Metro to see the Washington Wizards. My coworker had told me his son, Davey, was isolated in school and asked if I could help. So I asked my son if he could take Davey along to see the Wizards. But my son refused.

“Why not?” I asked.

“Davey's a wimp,” he said.

“You shouldn't call him that.”

“Why not?”

“You should have respect for everyone. Everyone has something special to offer.”

“Sure, Dad, anything you say.”



The Balance of Chaos
by Ala Leresteux

FORCED FALLING

Discouraged droplets forced upon this soaked path. Bursting.
Born out of violence striking the library's rooftop as he
called out Christ. A wishy-washy relationship until the wish was
washed out of his native tongue.

His story brushing his mother's hair who would hit him lefty, but
was not born that way originally righty whereas my mother was a
lefty turned righty by her own mother. Yet I would never touch
her hair even in her upcoming old age. Both dyed their hair.

My grandmother died a year ago. Did my mother tenderly brush her hair in
secrecy? Yet she would always criticize mine—too greasy, wash it more
often; cut it, but my hair is my hair is my hair. Where were you, when
I needed you in the emergency room more than three different times?

by Sophia Falco

(Winner of the UnCollected Press Book Publication Award)

BUBBLE BLASTS

Startled, the beluga whale blew **bubbles**; a release.

I was taught to keep stoically quiet.

To the detriment of my emotional mind neglected **abused**.

Faith in speaking aloud disappeared like the bubble.

That kid blew from a green bottle and a green wand.

Green means go, but the game *redlight greenlight*.

Hell where is yellow?

Hello, as an adult I don't want communication to be **cut**. With the world and an umbilical cord.

A mother who had a daughter who she didn't envision.

To grow **up** to become a poet. I kept my **secret** from her. That arose at night: life got **questioned**.

But there were no answers.

I believe there is no God and prayers.

Well, don't you dare pray for me.

When the remaining **rays** of light went down, **fading** away. **In** the golden **hour** that gave birth to **blue** hour.

Then the nightscape.

Back to the beluga whales.

They knew not to stuff their emotions in.

While I swam on land and I couldn't see the flags.

Maybe that's a good thing.

I will **never** wave the white flag.

No matter how tempting.

Oh no **matter** how loneliness takes over.

Like a lost baby beluga at **sea**.

When I would cry, I'd think twice.

I couldn't have them see my red eyes be.

How they were supposed to be.

by Sophia Falco

(Winner of the UnCollected Press Book Publication Award)



Blue Streak
by Henry G Stanton

THIS POEM WRITTEN IN THE PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL, MAY 2023: BLUE STRUCK

The blue hour struck this specific moment with these untwinkling stars, and the moon was a sliver such as the one in my pinky finger—let us not lose the fight.

Of everything, I could encompass a black hole in my pupil, therefore tired my light gets swallowed up. That swallow
unswallowed and produced beautiful notes into the air.

If the sound vibrations could have been seen I would have deemed them, yellow, hello heart shapes pierces the sky, like when the tiny fragment of driftwood entered my finger while staring at the ocean—the almighty.

To know the water could change, so could I. Waves and waving still had trouble waving the past goodbye, then in the present I had worked hard for I couldn't let slip out of my hands. But that sliver. Needed to get out.

Well I'd been Blue lately, and I was pretending for a while this thing called life was defined (in my own words) as: to try not to die. Does that definition equate to really living life?

Really, the overrated adjective— how to be forgiving to oneself: the self; separate from one to win won. Really, me myself and I that is a cliché. Did I really want to believe I am a failure?

Maya would tell me and told me no. If my hands were blue birds they'd travel across space to you, Maya. Two years ago, then I almost couldn't verbalize my question to you.

You encouraged me with gentleness. I whispered “I’m scared, please just hold my hand.” You did sitting in silence energy passing through; said you’re real you got me.

The other day on the phone you said “I’m real”. Maya, I have missed your touch and you often in moments of despair you’d tell me: “Imagine I’m holding your hands.”

I would try and try, but still empty. Grasping just space these hands would be itching to do something rumbling and tumbling. “Hold your tiger stuffed animal” you’d say.

Maya, if you could have just been here. I wanted to be held. How do I hold myself?—This is the quintessential question. This perpetual yearning for your touch.

We were no birds, but we’re rooted together in the beyond (only us know the definition of the beyond) perhaps really two birds apart at sea each of us trying to right our own ship, but together voices, voices, sounds when

my speech fails,

you get silence on your

end on the telephone.

by Sophia Falco

(Winner of the UnCollected Press Book Publication Award)



Heaven in Earth
by Anne Cleary

THE STAKED EARTH

When you win the Seamus Heaney Poetry Prize
take me with you to Belfast.
I won't sit on the front row in the theatre at Queen's
and mouth the words, *I love you*,
because there is no word for our love in Irish.

Don't be puzzled when you look at me
and think I am saying, *you are my music*.
I am saying, *you are my music*.
When you read your winning poem,
"The Staked Earth,"
your words will hum in my heart,
drowning the applause you will, no doubt, garner.

The following day I won't sit down to breakfast
and from across the table say,
Good morning my love,
I will instead look above the Ulster Fry
we ordered in hungry haste,
look directly into your eyes and say,
I see you.

And you will put down your cup of breakfast tea,
so strong you could stand a spoon up in it,
and you will know to say,
I'm here to be seen and I see you too.

by Clare Chu
(Winner of the UnCollected Press Book Publication Award)

BROKEN SYNTAX

*Be grateful for whatever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.*

Rumi

My mother's body is rigid even as she bends down to sweep last night's ashes from the grate. Soon I think she will crack. Two pieces of Mother will be more difficult to deal with than one.

Your mother loads a shotgun, rests it on the moss-green carpet beside your Steiff bear. She has no one to talk to here. Forgetting your mother tongue is not the same as having never learned it at all.

At school you draw in my math book. Fallen blossoms on a winding path. The petals are crisp at first, more smudged as the lead wears down. You touch my sadness, I cannot approach your silence, instead I pass you my sharpened pencil.

We walk home side-by-side along the river. You stop to point at a sheet of ice in the shape of a corpse. I pick up a stone, throw it at the head. It lands instead like a bullet to the chest. Burying your first love does not equate with never having been loved at all.

by Clare Chu

(Winner of the UnCollected Press Book Publication Award)



Duende
by Bridget Seley Galway

DINNER WITH A MINIMALIST

One fork each.

Water without ice.

A simple grilled entrée.

One taste –

trout caught this morning.

With a stick, he said.

I think he's making a joke.

I'm not sure.

After I empty my water glass,

I drink most of the 2018 Super Tuscan

I brought to dinner.

In my mouth the complexity of ripe cherries,
pepper and myrtle persists.

With a frown he sips

from a cracked teacup.

I attempt conversation,

I attempt clever, philosophical.

You notice when a flower blooms,

but do you notice a flower not blooming?

He doesn't answer.

Perhaps he's considering this idea.

I place an imaginary knife beside the fork.

Put my non-existent napkin with a flourish on the table.

Push back the chair, grab what's left

of the wine, stand to leave.

I glance at him.

He looks wretched – or bored.

I'm not sure.

There's a pear for dessert.

The longest sentence I've heard from him.

Where, I shout,

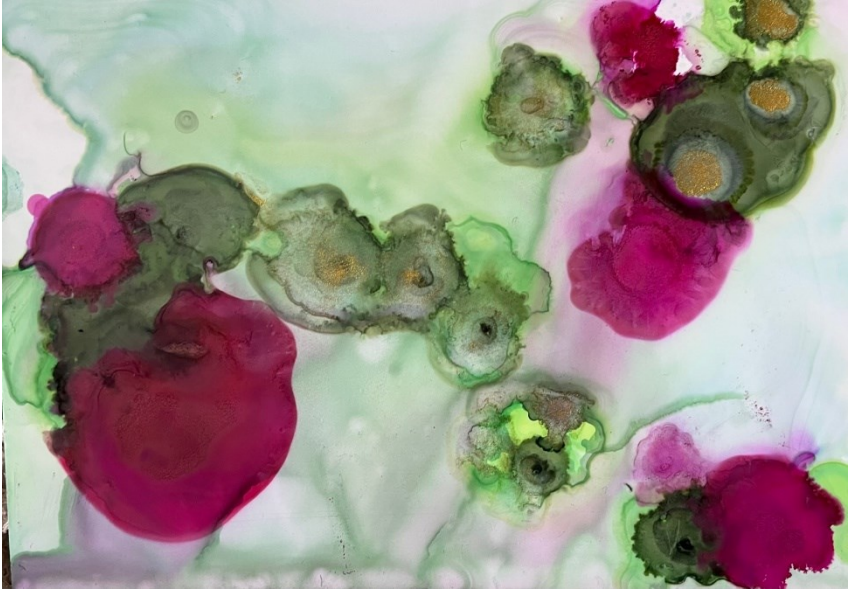
Where is the pear?

Where is the pear?

Where?

With a whisper he replies,
In the kitchen,
beside the knife.

by Clare Chu
(Winner of the UnCollected Press Book Publication Award)



UNTITLED
by Cynthia Yatchman

The Brick

by Anne Cleary

The brick is from the Vanderhorst Plantation on Kiawah Island, South Carolina. It is a magical place where I went each year with my family and cousins for a week in the summertime. We all waited for that most special of weeks. It was what got us through the rest of the year- to get back to Kiawah. I grew up with two boys who were cousins but more like brothers. We were all close in age. We roamed around the island on our bikes, up and down the beaches and along the bike paths that had been cut through the dense foliage of pine and magnolia, and ancient live oaks. To this day, the smell of pine needles is the smell of Kiawah, and all that is good.

It was a place of deep dark history, there were ghosts all around – you could just feel them in the mist coming up in the tidal flats and marshland, that deep scary mud where Atlantic Blue crabs scurried, and tiny bubbles in the muddy soup indicated other unknown beings below.

Thomas and Alden and I loved adventures. We spent hours pedaling around, looking for creatures, climbing up look out towers on stilts in the marshes of the Kiawah River- imagining a time when the Vanderhorst family would take boats from Charleston to the plantation. Back then, in the mid 1980's there was a grass and moss-covered lane under an allee of oaks, a tree tunnel, that led to an opening where the decrepit remains of the main plantation house still stood. It was incredible- we just tossed our bikes in the shrubs, careful to watch out for tiny fire ants that could crawl on our handle bars while we were away from our pedal-vehicles. I remember being nervous, feeling like we were not really supposed to be there- not sure what our crime was other than mildly tres-passing, but having a little inkling that our real crime was about disturbing spirits. Maybe we were disturbing sacred ground- maybe there was something sacrilegious about seeking a thrill such as this tip toeing up to what was certainly a haunted house.

In the Midwest, we knew about slavery from the history books. We didn't know anything about it other than what we were taught, and no one in our family had certainly ever owned human beings. Most of our people came up from North Carolina and Kentucky to Indiana during a season of migration-white and poor, from England, Wales and Germany mostly. The boys had roots from the deep South, but they were poor white tobacco farmers. Mine were farmers and dairy-men. We didn't have great wealth or power in our families. Our lineage was made of hard workers of beasts and land. The notion of slavery was a frightening concept to us, foreign and horrific, and I remember feeling like maybe I was doing something wrong, when I got up the courage to step over the low brick foundation of what must have been the kitchen area of the house- separate because kitchens catching on fire was a real worry back then and why the kitchens were separate structures from the rest of the home.

But I did it anyway. I picked up a brick. In front of the boys so they would see I was brave. But I knew I was also stealing and that was wrong too. Somehow, I got that brick rolled up in the hem of my too big sweatshirt and hung onto it with my left hand as I steered my beach bike with my right. It got hidden in my suitcase and made the long journey back to Indiana and more mundane things on the farm. I put it on the top of my dresser for a night or two, but got the feeling I was being watched, so it found its place on a closet shelf alongside some books like *Shane* and *All Things Bright and Beautiful*, and a bright green Liz Claiborne purse I just had to have but was too embarrassed to wear to the new private school we were now attending.

Things in my life got crazy after that- my mother became sick and died at age 47 after a four year illness that was both rare, and stunning. Life took on a very different tone after that. The depth of my father's sadness, his inability to reckon with the fact that even though he was a well respected physician, he could not save the one person most important in our world, on top of each of our own quiet shock, changed us. In different ways. But, we all froze in that wake of loss.

The result of which, thirty years later, is that my family is no longer. Last year, our father suffered a terrible accident when he stepped out in front of a horse and succumbed to his injuries hours later in a hospital bed. Sisters and I were there, but in the weeks and months to come, now over a year later, there is nothing left. There are attorneys, and animosity. The two little girls who I bossed around, and had to hold both at the same time, have deteriorated into broken shattered vicious monsters, buried in their own projection and transference of long ago grief.

I remember worrying about the brick throughout the years. And I remember feeling for the first time that paralyzing feeling that I couldn't just throw it away, because I also believed it had some strange power. It just felt old. Not old like you find some trinket in a dusty attic box, but old old. Like, the air smelled different then, on the day that brick was formed by hand and fired in an oven somewhere in the Low Country, by some hand that belonged to another human being with daydreams and private thoughts too.

When I was cleaning out our childhood home a year ago after dad's accident, I found it. I went looking for the brick and I found it shoved in the back of that shelf. I had entered into another haunted house, one that I fearfully entered out of duty and an ever-present need to get things cleaned up. I stepped over the threshold of the remnants of a beautiful, sad, and shortened childhood- a life full of some very rough patches and reclaimed the brick. It sits bravely looking at me as I breeze in and out of my studio, watching me make notes, work on another painting, and talk too loudly on the phone when I'm all riled up about something. I think about the smells of Kiawah, the wind in the pines and the deep dark black-green of the spaces beyond the light, and keep my eyes open for the path ahead a little bit should I need to step again over another threshold.



Launching of Spirit into Body
By Serge Lecomte

re-imagined

the water was lapping at the
pebbly shore like a salivating
tongue going lick lick in an
orgiastic feast of nature's
beauty under a cerulean sky
with a glaring sun hanging
from suspended guy-wires

so we stopped

because the horse was tired
and i tended to his needs
because he is the closest
i have come to loving another
living thing without an ounce
remorse

because we were running from
our checkered pasts

the horse being as guilty as i

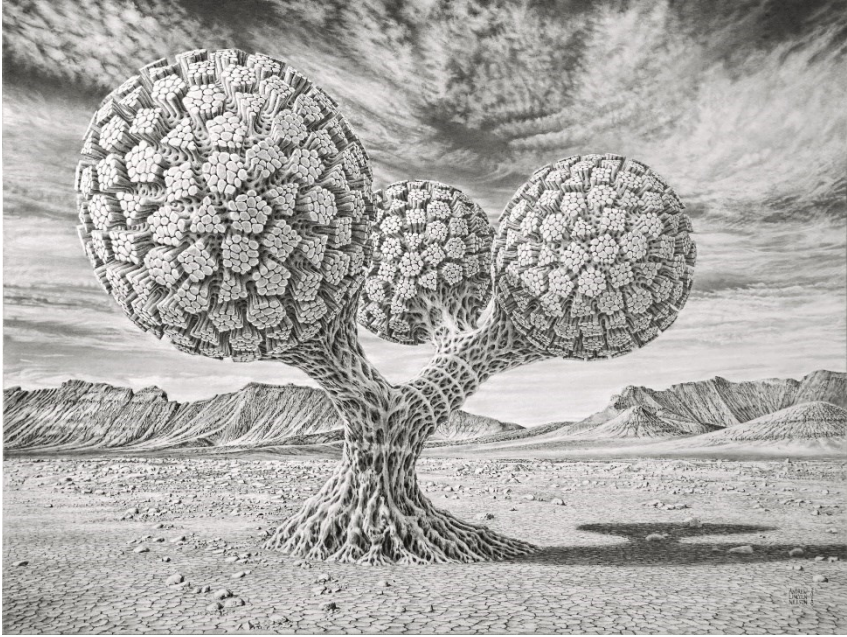
abetting my cold and callous
nature by walking when i told
it to and stopping when i asked

across the windy prairie thriving
with winter wheat and through
the insipid desert littered with
blooming ocotillo like our
forefathers before us

in search of a better life like
mendicant friars begging for
morsels of wisdom

for just as i was derived from
the searing blood that came
with my birthing so was
he from that wild stock that
roamed some fertile valley
so proud and untethered

by James Butcher



Phytotesselost
by Andrew Lincoln Nelson

idol

at some future point in time the
ruins of this swollen city will
re-emerge as a reminder of
a lost civilization with internet
connectivity and shiny gadgets
for every imaginable use from
vacuuming dirty floors to mixing
pretty drinks and it will be left
to prying archaeologists to determine
what led to such a swift and
precipitous decline of such a
thriving and advanced society
at the very height of its evolution
from hunters and gatherers to
digital sycophants with luxury
cars

and it was in in my turbulent dream

that i envisioned them sorting
through my personal possessions
with delicate brushes held by
gentle hands directed by curious
minds in a dusty sort of soil
in an arid type of climate that
was once a fertile plain with

fields of wheat and flowing
rivers fed my mountain streams
filled with swimming fishes
and busy beavers

sorting for hidden clues that would
elucidate the hidden dynamics
underlying the acclivitous
deterioration of a thriving
culture at the apex of its
empirical progress

and i wondered what they would
make of my cast iron bulldog paper
weight from the 1933 chicago world's
fair bequeathed to me by my precious
mother who inherited it from her
cherished father

by James Butcher

eulogy

she was an amorphous chameleon

undiscovered and

unbeholden

lying in this muddy
piece of ground

when i found her

charmingly
defiant

amidst this unfolding
calamity

all velveteen
and translucent

by James Butcher



Watching Snails Race
By Serge Lecomte

Survival Mode

you asked your students—of poetry—what would it feel like
to have words

the unpinning of mouth from brain stem
symbols gravitating like
flowers kicked down by the barrage of rain

students pay to shit talk Emily Dickinson
language recycled—that kid in the front
row like another from last semester
whose name is a sock in the washing machine—
lame, they say of her and your Saturday night pumping
quarters into lint kissed dryers

you will be one of many who get chalk dust
on their goodwill pants

in your wound memory
is the retail fold worth seven dollars and change
the towels on the laundromat table,
like little stanzas.

If Saturn is losing her rings—

tell her to dig in the sink peering her eye through
the vortex of old hair and silver

call the last guy she hooked up with whose no-sheeted bed
she fled at the first freckle of dawn

ask him why a grown man doesn't care where he leaks
and of course if he's seen one of her rings

look in the bags of stiffening shredded cheese as they
harden waiting for the next attempt at tortilla pizza

ask her students if they saw it while she waved
her long fingers and begged them to get *it*:
it being *literature*, it being the *universe*, it being anything
beyond the craning of their necks fat rocks
forever sloping away

tell her that this is inevitable that hoarding carbon and kisses
doesn't prevent collapse that your landlord still paints the
windows shut when you leave

by Caroline Hayduk



William Burroughs
By Bridget Seley-Galway

'm in my night bones—

a sheath; the only thing I wear
when we're too young
to understand what it is to settle

fog on the windshield tells our names:
sir or *daddy* or *right there!*
and I might be *that's good, slut* or
bend over— not quite a government name.
I remember *baby*, I remember *babe*,
tingles of words once pretend
enough in syllable
to wrap around myself—

it doesn't matter now,
his hands hold me down
I let unspent love
just burn up inside me

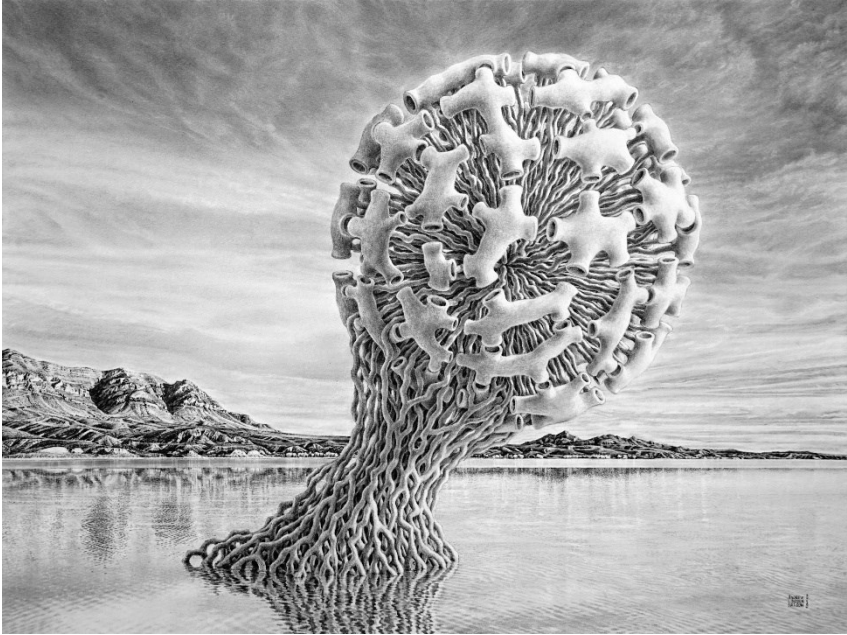
If we were older, smarter, and kinder
we'd still never feel it between us
something thicker than body
something warmer than breath

something two knocks
from a cop's flashlight
couldn't ruin—

here, with the stitches
of the seat against my back is as close
as I'll be to anyone for years to come

they press into me, little dashes like ants
marching away from a proud picnic
If we were the only crumbs left—
Well, it would just be crumbs, wouldn't it?

by Caroline Hayduk



Osteorhizophor
by Andrew Lincoln Nelson

Current Market Price Per Pound

what's the current market price per pound
for murdered American school kids?

history will reveal this number
to the penny.

we will know which senators
took how much.

we will one day have the numbers
to do the math.

what is the current market price per pound
for murdered American school kids?

history will reveal this number
to the penny.

by James Redfern

children dance with butterflies

children dance with butterflies
in ceremony in traditional dress.
children dance with butterflies
in a circle as the dusk descends.

tens of thousands of monarchs
covering eucalyptus trees
in a brilliant orange butterfly blanket.

as the light bleeds from the sky
the colors of the world register
their most brilliant hues.

just as the pin-prick, silvery stars
begin to poke through the purple
firmament of coming night,
the bombs begin falling again.

by James Redfern

Silence is Deafening

bombs or no bombs. death today or death tomorrow.
never a shortage of bombs. never a drought of cruelty.
never a scarcity of hate. never a shortage of pain.

the heavy, elemental silence between
the bombings intones the moral vacuum of war.

riots or no riots. genocide today or genocide tomorrow.
bodies, lifeless and ashen, clutter the hedgerow walkways
while machines of war smolder in gnarly, behemoth wreckage.

crossroads are piled high with souls. bridges
have been blown. no cross traffic can make it through.

bombs or no bombs. death today or death tomorrow.
at this moment, a heavy silence has hold of the air.

nothing is moving. this breed of silence, this heavy,
elemental silence, is absolutely deafening.

by James Redfern



Jack
by Anne-Marie Brown

Miracle of the Great Stellar Arch

We will know
the glass bead
and the winding sheet

We will know

the crocodiles that rise
wet and armored
from deep marsh

and the quivering
antediluvian birds

We will know

the miracle of the great stellar arch

For I am yours,
your nymph and your kite

circling the universe
With you

by Sharon Israel

The Quilt

Look into the quilt

Spread over the dull beige couch
its living threads speak
like clairvoyants.
Its needlework speaks.

When it covers us
we are protected from the evil eye.
We are protected from asps
that coil by the green Nile.
Lotuses open on ponds,
their petals red and fragrant.
Smoky quartz and white opals
glitter under the waterline.

Once our eyes were accustomed to dull light.
Now we are travelers.
We rest in the light of other star systems,
their fire, their planets, water and air —
We are protected from the stricken earth.

by Sharon Israel

Night Market

I crossed the bridge and entered the market.
The bridge closed at sunset.
I saw a nightingale on a papaya.
I purchased a moonstone bracelet from an ebony stall.
I found a doll made of sticks. I traded it for an obsidian ring.
I cry for my mother every Wednesday,
the day she wove sparrow feathers into mirrored yarn.
Ducks hang from red thread and drip fat into hammered pots.
I found paperback books from Sicily trampled and muddied.
I eyed a white-breasted song sparrow lost among old carpets.
Bells ring for monks looking for rice.
I ask them to pray because I lost my son at midnight.
I found my son dancing to five ticking clocks stacked on a gold blanket.
Someone needed a doctor after eating a raspberry.
Someone was eating from a plate of sturgeon strewn with red onion.
I found a hidden shop filled with persimmons.
I found a brace of geese, heads dangling over the butcher block.
I found three oranges quivering in moonlight.
The night market lasted till dawn.

by Sharon Israel



Training to Die
by Serge Lecomte

Both Men Were Heavyweights by James Ross Kelly

The fight was not one in a ring, as a bar fight is not, as a fight in a ring. There were no rules or referees; motion and the narrowness of the bar and people in front of you obscured each punch. This was two timber fallers: suspenders, dirty hickory shirts, a faller's pad on the top of each suspended shoulder.

Two logging crews just off work had been sitting there— choker setters, cat operators, rubber-tired skidder operators, the side rods, a rigging slinger—all drinking ice-cold beer on a worked-almost- to-death sweltering day and now under a swamp cooler. It had started all at once.

"The talking part is over!" Richard said, and then he threw the first punch and it connected.

Away it went, arms flying and a few wild swings, a couple boxing stances, all ever so briefly, but mostly a toe-to-toe slug fest. Richard was landing regularly, his opponent was six-four, Richard was six-eight—both men were heavyweights. It began volley for volley, of big guns for arms, and bare-knuckled fists, and the Tiller Tavern was the arena. There had been no bellowing announcer to call attention to the dustup.

The Tiller Tavern was at the edge of the Rogue-Umpqua Divide due west of Crater Lake, Oregon, south of Roseburg, and North of Medford off the Tiller Trail Highway that made a half loop from the Rogue Valley near Trail, Oregon to Canyonville, on its way switching back slowly through the mountains running distantly parallel with Interstate 5 for a portion of the Divide. Lumber mills from Roseburg and Medford competed for a vast tract of timber in three National Forests. This large tract of forest trapped a sizable portion of the storms from the Pacific Ocean before they disappeared over the Cascades, dumping rain on volcanic soil to make large trees—very large trees, and generating biomass at a rate higher than the Amazon jungle.

Richard liked to fight. Sometimes after work he'd shower down, get dressed and go into town and wait in some bar for an asshole. The guy would say something, and Richard would say something else and the first smart ass thing the guy said afterwards, Richard would begin to kick his ass. He generally did this with a couple of drinking friends. This afternoon was different. It was the crew. Squaring off now, trading punches, and backing off a little was making both crews begin to scream. They were pushing each other a little and the adrenalin was pumped into an atmosphere that was building into a delirious crowd. Richard closed in on the man and received three rib-banging body blows before he stepped

back and hammered the guy's ear hard enough to make it bleed. Then he backed off a little, feeling his rib cage sort of ring in a dull ache that was there but he was not aware of, as adrenalin was ruling his body.

Logging companies contracted to the lumber mills to cut timber from the forest. A simultaneous boom in housing in both Japan and the U.S. in the mid-seventies of the last century launched a domestic and export market that sustained the cutting of as much of the old growth forests as the federal government would let them— and it let them with sometimes merely a nod to federal law. The hue and cry over whether vast tracts of forest clearcut, being too much, or too little, right, or wrong took place far removed from each logging operation.

After a chain saw with a sharp chain and a bold man running it; the yarder was the indispensable tool for logging on steep ground. The yarder was essentially an industrial winch powered by a 400- horsepower diesel motor with two sets of spooled woven-wire steel cable. It was more often than not connected to a metal tower or spar that was 100 feet in height to allow the cables to span across an expanse of the just-felled stands of timber. The expanse of clearcut below the cable and carriage was an industrial pull of thousands of board feet of timber at a time. Natural-resource extraction is a violent act usually.

His rib cage still ringing from a cracked rib, Richard stepped in once more and gave the man at least two body shots of his own and then dodged an uppercut that, had it landed might have knocked Richard down, but as the other big man missed, Richard targeted his ear again and landed, rocking the man back and blood sprayed on to the wall.

The crew included a supervisor, or side rod (so called perhaps because they were generally logging the side of one mountain or another). The side rod sometimes was the yarder operator, who would run a crane-like machine often on tracks that could move to any position on a landing. The landing was a flat bulldozed portion of the mountain to store the logs and load them on trucks. The yarder could pick up logs sometimes from across two mountains and pull them to the landing with a rolling carriage on cables strung high above the downed logs, and the crew engineered them to the landing where idling diesel 18-wheel log trucks were waiting to race them to the mills.

The area below the landing and high lead rigging was sometimes called the "bite of the line" and working under it was highly dangerous, as ten thousand things could go wrong from failing equipment and lines to industrial brute force and ignorance. At any time of the workday the bite of the line, could kill you or send you to the hospital, if you were unlucky or slow. The cables sometimes broke and everyone ran or dove into the

ground like infantrymen, from whiplashing steel and gravity-infused large rolling logs that would bounce end to end several times given the right mishap. Choker-setters were always in the bite of the line and if they were any good, they were always running. They were running uphill over logs, running down logs, creeping under precariously positioned logs to fasten a cable on a log that could roll any time. The choker setter in charge of all motion on the line was equipped with the radio and was called the whistle punk. The whistle punk would press a radio on his belt, and it would sound a horn on the yarder. Two toots would get the yarder operator to engage the giant machine and bring the giant timber up the hill with a spool of big cable winding and pulling at a steady rate like an enormous fishing reel; one toot would stop everything. The cables would slack, and a few moments would be given to make sure everything was going to roll to a dead stop to fix one hang up or another. The whistle punk had life and death in his hands if he made one mistake, like not seeing how all the logs going uphill had settled, and if he made a mistake, the life he ended could be his own. When the double toot went off, everyone was getting well out of the way. Caterpillar and skidder drivers could get killed many ways, like small timber cracking, and bucking back could send a spear the size of a car axle through the cage, impaling the driver in his seat. Loggers called that being "Jim-poled" and some were.

Douglas fir, a magnificent species of conifer, would range from four to six feet or sometimes eight to twelve feet across on the butt. However, they could reach fifteen or more feet across and were one hundred to three hundred feet tall. Cutting them down one after another with a high-powered chain saw to send a tree exactly where it was supposed to be, was a calling for some.

Timber fallers every day had to face the exactitude of gravity with experience and intuition and sometimes a plumb bob to calculate where a tree should fall for three or four-hundred-year-old trees that sometimes could be over five hundred years old and pushing up to one thousand. The actual falling of the tree and bucking up the logs with a chainsaw afterwards contained the potential of a universe of mishaps. When you met a timber faller who had been doing it for twenty years, you met a man with a keen intelligence, witnessed by the truth he was still alive. Then again there was luck—sometimes it runs out.

The old timber fallers passed some unregistered test that probably matched the skill of great surgeons in dexterity, knowledge of craft, and the implementation of physics outside the abstract. A sizable number of them never got old. Ambulance and helicopter rides preceding

funerals, or a life in a wheelchair, were common in every logging community.

You saw them down day after day, face cuts and back cut, down they go; you buck them up, then one day those true grains of wood fiber you've always counted on have gotten all mixed up—fifty to a hundred years ago they played a trick on you: one tree with five thousand board feet of timber, eight feet at the butt, goes down the hill. You're getting out of the way like you always do, to the safety of sideways and a little uphill where you're headed—getting ten feet away as the whole show goes creaking and predictably downhill. Yet fifty years ago, a little twist of fate had disease killing a tree next to the big tree you've just slain, and it was a pretty big one when it died. Your tree, going down, barely brushed the top of this snag as some extra weight had formed sixty feet up due to disease forming a conch on the back side that you could not see and has now made its fall shift just slightly from your calculation. The dead snag had been the condominium for woodpeckers for forty years. Now its top is falling in the opposite direction from your downhill-bound Douglas fir, and the snag's whole top is now spinning at a high rate of speed with a six-foot stob coming out from its side four times the thickness of a baseball bat. The top end of the snag comes out of the sky the same direction you are running, and it spears into the ground in front of you, but whirling like a rapid snapping turnstile, the stob hammers you into a one hundred-and-fifty-year-old white fir and your liver explodes. They take you to the hospital, open you up and see this liver is less than Jell-O. Shaking their heads, the good doctors just sew you up and tell your wife that you have about four hours to live.

"Kill him, Richard!" yelled the whistle punk from Richard's crew, as he bobbed and weaved a little as he watched the fight.

"Hit the mother fucker, Jim-pole the bastard!" yelled the skidder driver from the other crew. Twenty men entered a cacophony of their own expletives, laced with saliva and Copenhagen chewing tobacco and the small tavern shook a little.

The big man hit Richard hard. Hit him as hard as he'd ever been hit right on the jaw. As his head rocked back with the momentum of the blow, Richard's face turned into a wry smile. This was good, but he'd have to be careful—it was not a thought, Richard liked to fight, it was more like the heart of his being. Richard, since he was 17 was simply bigger than everyone else. The fact that this fight had lasted more than thirty seconds made Richard respect this man. The smile, however, was not friendly. Richard's adversary was seemingly facing the son of Gargantua in real terms; and even though he had the solace of underdog status from

the beginning, the fact that Richard liked this did not help the man, who, though he had the capacity to knock Richard out, was faced with a six-foot-eight giant that was almost a head taller and had four inches of reach on him. Nevertheless, he was standing before Pantagruel and did not tremble. The light in Richard's eyes behind the smile, did not give the man confidence.

A timber faller had to be an expert at getting out of the way. He would generally work away from the yarder and crew and kept working the side of the mountain to keep a distance out of the way from the hauling of logs up the hill. Most all timber fallers started out setting chokers. If this were a feudal state, the fallers were probably the knights, and even though the log truck drivers thought of themselves as such, generally no one else on the crew ever thought of truck drivers that way. There were no truck drivers in the Tiller Tavern.

The logger crowd, though partisan in this fight, crew by crew, knew they were seeing the real thing. Richard's reputation had preceded him since high school, where he starred and was the big man in a state basketball tournament; though they did not win his senior year, that gave Richard a taste of glory and power. He could run, he could shoot, he could dunk, despite his size he was not clumsy, and he could shove people around. The fighting came kind of naturally. Since then, he'd been to Vietnam, where the tenuous notion of life began to walk around with him every day. He was grateful for every day. He'd gotten a finger shot off there in a fire fight and his first words were, "Thank God, it's not my whole hand!"

However, Richard was adamant about spending what he had won since then—and he wanted to beat this man down.

There are more deaths per hundred thousand workers in the logging industry than in the military—a statistic that has remained valid since the height of the Vietnam War. Fist fights broke tension. The two beer-drinking logging crews, one from Roseburg, and Richard's crew from Eagle Point, near Medford—were not having a Rotary meeting.

The workaday world of labor is unchronicled, in its angst, in its sometime heroes, and in its men of mythic proportions who never get their 15 minutes of fame. Richard began to bring roundhouse rights one after another at the man, sharply punctuated by vicious left jabs. All there was now for the smaller man was a defense of blocking blows and backing up as the torso of the giant moved forward swinging death at his side. This fight was a little like what death is like for both men for its last moments, swinging and hitting and missing and breathing hard and knowing pain from crushing blows as momentary pinpoints of light with

an impending darkness unsaid and unknown that might not be darkness at all.

The crowd had really come alive. By the time the roar began, the entirety of loggers predictably picked sides. Richard's crew and the other crew began shoving each other a little, and there was tension that the whole place was about to erupt in fists, but the live action had gone down to one end of the bar, tipped over the cigarette machine, and was moving back to the other end. Everyone was making way. The owners never thought of calling the police. The police were all twenty miles away, anyway. Bodies and chairs and tables were being pushed and upended, and some glass began to crash—and two big men slugged it out, head and body punches thrown and answered and the shorter giant getting a couple good upper cuts but Richard landing more rib-crushing body blows, trying for the quivering liver shot that would paralyze a man to the floor when landed just right. Yet Richard's opponent was good enough to move and cover up and not let that happen; but blood had begun to flow from the faces of both men by the time they reached the other end of the bar and the thundering crush and bare-knuckle blows seemed to be wearing on Richard's rival. He began backing back up the bar toward the door but trying to counter punch from blocked blows. Then each attempt was answered with head and body shots, and then in succession a half-dozen clenched-fisted blows from Richard's dinner-plate-size hands landed on his head and sent the other timber faller to the floor.

"Enough! Enough! You win, enough, stop!" he gasped, when he landed on the floor throwing a forearm in front of his face.

Richard backed off and let the man get up slowly, even though there were several shouts of "Kick him! Kick him!" when he was down, all let out in a delirium of momentary mob notion.

Shortly, though, wet bar towels for the bloody faces, were passed to both men by the tavern owner's wife. Beer was announced to be "on the house" for a little while, as insurance against further property damage, or any more fights breaking out, and everyone went back to cold beer before their long ride home.

The next day Richard had to work on a side of timber high in the Rogue-Umpqua Divide twenty-five miles up a long and winding logging road from the Tiller Tavern. He headed down into the hole below the log landing with all his gear in the near darkness of predawn. The balsam perfume of yesterday's clearcut of timber had exuded all night from trimmed boughs, downed logs and resin powering out of stumps as the earth's sweet blood; there was an unexplainable short-term exhilarating smell of the violence that had been done to the earth—it meant good

money for everyone involved. At the end of his day, he would have a half mile steep climb straight up and out of his patch of fallen timber. He took each step down slowly, placing each foot exactly as he balanced all his gear in a manner so as not to topple ass-over-teakettle down the mountain. Each step was a wave of pain from yesterday.

The logging operation had slowed to five-and-a-half-hour days this late week in July when the humidity dropped to a low point where any spark from moving steel on rock could cause a forest fire. The Forest Service would shut the timber fallers down first in the early afternoon at one o'clock because their saws in the low humidity screaming through the volatile resin in the trees could start a fire; the shutdown of the rest of the crew followed an hour later at two o'clock.

However, before dawn broke over the clearcut you could hear the whine of steel cable, stretching, and screeching high lead lines and farther in the distance, the high keening of sharp chain saws and then the bang and crash of the first big tree of the morning going down to shake the earth as it hit, as the cut expanded over the side of the mountain. The cool morning air would change to 100 degrees or hotter just a little after twelve noon. Another day was going by and the big fight was yesterday's headline.

The constant loud throttling up and down of the yarder's diesel engine, the high-pitched horn on the yarder being set off by the whistle punk down in the hole with two other choker setters all interspersed with a clanking of the log loader on the landing to get logs on trucks that were waiting to be loaded. If the Forest Service showed up to fine them for loading after the 2 o'clock shut down, the side rod was instructed to start a shouting match and defiantly load the logs, and the owner would just pay the fine. The side-rod always put on a good show, often termed a "riggin' fit," and eventually the inspectors just let them load out all the waiting trucks. "Riggin' fits" were common for other reasons as well. Despite the high-power technology that had evolved from rail steam engines, and before that, horses, and oxen, logging often was done by brute force and ignorance. Things broke. Tempers were always generally short. Death and maiming happened regularly enough that it was common not to necessarily be happy in your work even though you might actually like it.

At one o'clock Richard Long dutifully ascended from the bottom of the side, his logs felled and bucked, with his sword-like chainsaw bar balanced on his shoulder. The wool felt of his faller's pad threaded through his red suspenders took the bite out of the metal in the big saw's weight on his shoulder bones. The high-powered engine of the German-

made saw had been screaming through big timber all morning and was still hot enough to burn a man's hand, as it now hung over his shoulder. With his right hand in front on the tip of the bar, he controlled the machine's weight as a counterbalance to each step upward, each measured caulk boot step, up through brush and logging slash. He switched the saw from shoulder to shoulder several times during this ascent.

With the gravity of the climb and packing of his saw and gear, he felt most of yesterday's fight. Bruised ribs, (perhaps one or two were cracked) and aching arms, a shiner of a black eye and a cracked tooth—the extra pain against the ascent somehow felt good. Climbing, and using the gospel-sure-footedness of his caulk boots in each spiked step, up in elevation from eight hundred yards below and having to balance the saw and gear, he had to make his spine straight the whole way to balance the weight of the saw. Having to switch back and forth on the ascent a half mile down always meant a mile back up with sixty pounds of gear. Closer to the top became still more painful; the landing at the top beckoned as the sound of the yarder's engine and the disharmony of log loader and trucks all got louder. Sweat poured like rain down his face.

Although Richard didn't look behind him, Mt. Thielsen's craggy pointed top stuck out and pierced the scintillating blue air, and you could see part of Diamond Lake in the dark blue distance. The landing and reprieve were getting nearer. He was thirsty but would count it as imagination until he got to the landing. When his hard hat started to pop over the top of the landing's steep edge, and he got his chin just above the shot-rock surface, he saw a pickup twenty feet away.

His adversary from yesterday was waiting, cool and clean and grinning, having not gone to work that day, his arm out the window of the idling truck, and his own enormous black eye was swollen shut.

With his one eye the man in the pickup and Richard met eye to eye again—Richard was looking up at him now.

"Bet I could take you right now!" the Cyclops yelled from the running pickup, making his voice heard above the yarder's diesel noise as Richard's head and shoulders draped with all his gear now appeared, just above the shot-rock of the landing floor.

"You might be able to," Richard yelled back with a defiant note of exhaustion.

Still grinning, the man in the pickup waited, as Richard lifted his chain saw, gas, oil, faller's axe, and nose bag of other gear to the surface of the landing. Richard pulled himself up and over the edge. After all of Richard's six-foot-eight frame stood up completely straight, the pickup slowly backed up. Yesterday's contender drove off the landing in front of

a high stack of logs, which had been a forest just a week before this afternoon.

Richard watched the pickup kick up dust as it pulled off the landing in front of the next log truck that was ready to head for a White City mill. With his aluminum hard hat tipped on the back of his head, in the burning heat, Richard took a long drink of water from his canteen.



Jack 2
by Anne-Marie Brown

“Mrs. Kravitz”

The neighbors across the road won't speak.
Nor will they return a wave. They comb
their English bulldog in the front yard
and collect its poop as if it might be worth
a hundred dollars. She wears a blue denim skirt
and her hair in a bun. He is not a big man
and struts like a chicken when he waters
the lawn. They hardly ever have company.
I wonder if they find comfort
in each other's arms at night, if they eat
home-cooked meals with food purchased
from Walmart. Do they watch movies,
sit on the back porch and count fireflies
in the summer heat? Did they see
the space station glide over their house
in a glorious arch as humans peered out
through frozen windows to see the black
earth?

by John Dorroh

““There’s a Pill for That”

the birds were fascinating at first,
for a while, and then their plumage & beaks
began to look the same. it happened with
the bears, too, fishing for salmon at brooks
falls, doing what bears do to fulfill
their niche. we fester in that they never
have to think about it

my first eagle watch was cool but soon
that too began to feel like another day
at the office. what’s wrong with me –
all this confounded beauty in my face
and all I can muster is a flick of the wrist,
a labored sigh, collapsing into my recliner
with another cooking magazine.

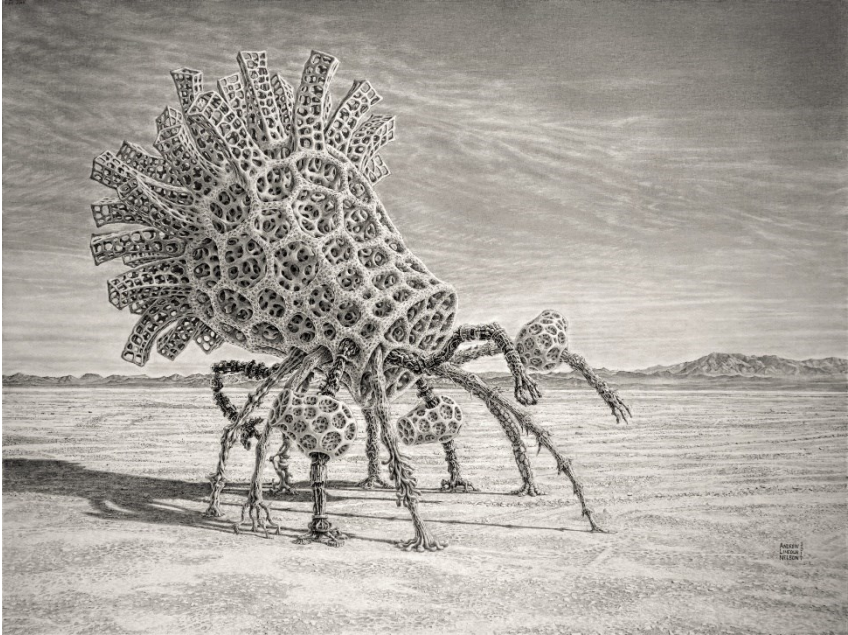
i envy your excitement, the way
you call me into your den to watch
the baby animals wander away from their
mamas, the manner in which elephants
establish turf, swishing their big gray
ears, sails of skin in the air. we all wandered
away. some of us are still wandering,
unable to find our way home without
a satellite

i think I need another sort of stimulant,
a kick in the ass, a hit of some glorious vapor
that fills my soul with innocence & hope

no live cam on the Savannah
or suspended in the canopy of a rain forest.
i need it in my heart, or planted in my brain,
its divots & convolutions jam-packed
with secrets & revelations that might

be able to keep me from falling asleep
during the next webcam in a lagoon
full of manatees.

by John Dorroh



Osteoborg 1
by Andrew Lincoln Nelson

Observing Eyebrows on a Sunday Morning at IHOP™

I'm examining people's eyebrows,
 how they weave & wave with abandon,

the serious determination of having
 plucked all the strays, the grays, ones

that just don't fit. Eyebrows with
 insubordinate hairy buff, bushy like

unmade bed, others with elongated
 tear shapes, plump & wide on the outside,

thinning gradually to a double-fine point
 on the upper bridge of the nose, examined

with a powerful hand lens, each hair
 accounted for, serious art for show or sale,

while mine are cropped and unevenly
 manicured, too much effort for melancholy

mornings drinking coffee, waiting for a stack
 of pancakes with two Ready-Whip eyebrows.

by John Dorroh



The 'Shroom Girls
By Serge Lecomte



AnthozoaBorg 2
Andrew Lincoln Nelson Nelson



The Fly
by Cynthia Yatchman



10-lined Beetle
by Cynthia Yatchman

BIOs

Baltimorean **David Beaudouin** is a widely published poet and performer. He was the founder of Tropos Press (1976-2001), one of the region's earliest and most respected alternative literary presses, as well as the literary magazine THE PEARL (1980-2001). Published works include *Ten Poems* (1973), *Gig* (1976), *Catena* (1989), *Ode to Stella* (1990), *American Night* (1992), and *Human Nature* (1995). Two new collections, *After All* (Bowerbox Press) and *Some Odes and Others* (UnCollected Press) will be published in 2024.

Gary Beaumier has worked a dizzying array of jobs including teacher, bookstore manager, gandydancer and garbage man. Over the past four years he has won seven writing contests for his poems including *Night Train to Paris*, *Sirocco*, *The Shape of My Absence* and most recently the Emily Dickenson prize for his poem *Spirit Animal*. His poem *Night Forest* won the Love Poetry contest was nominated for a Pushcart Prize and is the title poem for a recently released anthology. His two books *Dented Brown Fedora* and *From My Family to Yours* through Raw Arts Review and Finishing Line Press. His newest book *Tales of the Afterlife* was a winner for the Raw Arts Review book contest. He recently won the Proverse Hong Kong poetry prize for his poem *Portrait of My Soul as a Mushroom*.

Retired children's librarian **Alan Bern** has published three books of poetry and has a hybrid fictionalized memoir, *IN THE PACE OF THE PATH*, forthcoming from *UnCollected Press*. The poems in "SELF-PORTRAIT" included in the Winter 2023 issue of *The Raw Art Review* are from *IN THE PACE OF THE PATH*. Recent awards include: Winner, Saw Palm Poetry Contest (2022); Honorable Mention for Littoral Press Poetry Prize (2021). Recent and upcoming writing and photo work include: *CERASUS*, *Feral*, *The Hyacinth Review*, *DarkWinter*, and *Mercurius*. Alan is a published/exhibited photographer, and he performs with dancer/choreographer Lucinda Weaver as *PACES: dance & poetry fit the space* and with musicians

from [Composing Together](#). *Lines & Faces*, his press with artist/printer Robert Woods: linesandfaces.com.

Ann-Marie Brown is a Canadian painter working in wax & oil. Her paintings have been exhibited across Canada & the United States and are included in private, public, and corporate collections internationally. She's had the opportunity to work in studios around the globe, most recently through a residency in Helsinki awarded by the Artists' Association of Finland. She is currently painting out of a studio on the west coast of British Columbia, in the company of rain & bears.

James Butcher has had work published in *Box*, *Hole In The Head Review*, *Burningword Literary Journal*, *Rivet*, *Prick of the Spindle*, *Midwest Review*, *Cream City Review*, and *Wildroof Journal*.

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 almost twenty books and numerous academic articles on Asian art. Her poetry is published in *The Comstock Review*, *The Perch*, *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. A chapbook entitled *Objects Heavy In This Life* was published in June 2022 by Finishing Line Press. Clare's third book, *How to Love a Fisherwoman*, will be published this year. Clare is also an editor of the *Comstock Review* and was a 2021 Pushcart nominee.

Anne Cleary is an artist, writer, and musician who grew up in the countryside of Zionsville, Indiana and attended Park Tudor School. She graduated from Kenyon College in 1993 where she majored in art and studied English and music. She went on to graduate school at the Longy School of Music in Boston, and the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University in Bloomington for vocal performance and opera. She lives in Carmel, Indiana with her three children and partner Tom, and works out of a studio in the top of the barn on their property in

Indiana. There is a creek, and a lake, and plenty of room to roam around, taking it all in. Her artistic endeavors take on many forms, including visual art, music, and writing

Harris Coverley has had over two hundred poems published in journals around the world, including *Star*Line*, *Spectral Realms*, *Scifaikuest*, *The Gargoylicon* (Mind's Eye Publications), *The Lotus Tree Literary Review*, *Corvus Review*, *Yellow Mama*, and *View From Atlantis*, amongst many others. He lives in Manchester, England.

Derick Delloro is a science teacher from Cleveland, and a relapsed writer who is getting back into the form. Writing is a morning process, creative outlet, and a way to make sense of all the things that have happened along the way. He has been published previously in Halfway Down the Stairs Magazine.

John Dorroh has never fallen into an active volcano or caught a hummingbird. He did however bake bread with Austrian monks and drink a healthy portion of the beer. Five of his poems have been nominated for Best of the Net. Many others have appeared in journals such as Feral, Burningword, River Heron, North Dakota Quarterly, Kissing Dynamite, and El Portal. He once won the Editor's Choice Award for a regional journal and received enough money for a sushi dinner for two. He had two chapbooks published in 2022.

Sophia Falco is the author of three poetry books titles: *Chronicles of Cosmic Chaos: In The Fourth Dimension* (2022), *Farewell Clay Dove* (2021), and *The Immortal Sunflower* (2019) all published by UnCollected Press. She is the winner of the Mirabai Prize for Poetry. Furthermore, Falco will be completing a highly regarded Master of Fine Arts Program for Poetry along with carrying out their Teaching Fellowship at Saint Mary's College of California. (Class of 2024.) This to make her dream career become a reality to be a Professor of Poetry.

Kris Falcon's second poetry collection *some blue, a little spur* was recently published. New poems may be found or will appear in *Mantis*, *Pinhole Poetry*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, and elsewhere. She has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She received her MFA and Fellowship in Writing at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Bridget Seley-Galway artist/poet Bridget received BFA and a degree in Art Education at UMass Amherst. Her collection of poems and images "What Moments Yield" has been published by Ibbetson Press, and has been included in the following permanent collections: N.Y.C Poets House, State University of Buffalo collections, UMass Amherst W.E.B Du Bois Library, and the Truro Library Cape Cod. Her poems have been published in Provincetown Magazine's Poetry Corner, brieartistality.com.

Wilderness House Literary Review, Poetry Porch, Ibbetson Press, and Bagel with the Bards anthologies, to name a few. Her art has been exhibited throughout New England, and reviewed in several publications, including Artist Magazine and Cape Arts. Her paintings have been selected for the covers of Bagel with Bards, Ibbetson Press, and individual poet publications. She is currently the Arts Editor/Curator for the Wilderness House Literary Review.

Ethan Goffman is the author of the short story collection *Realities and Alternatives* (Cyberwit, 2023), the poetry collections *I Garden Weeds* (Cyberwit, 2021) and *Words for Things Left Unsaid* (Kelsay Books, 2020) and the flash fiction collection *Dreamscapes* (UnCollected Press, 2021). Ethan is co-founder of It Takes a Community, which brings poetry to Montgomery College students and nearby residents, and is founder and producer of the *Poetry & Planet* podcast on EarthTalk.org. Ethan also writes nonfiction on transportation alternatives for Greater Greater Washington and other publications.

Robert Guzikowski published work in the 1970's and 80's in several magazines. He tri-edited The Parlor City Review. He was a performance artist. In the 1990's encephalitis caused brain damage resulting in various disabling conditions including aphasia. He has

since resumed writing. Many magazines have published poems from this recent period.

His daughter, Emma, is an advocate for disability rights and persons with substance use disorder. He lives with his wife, the poet and goddess, Karen Keefe.

Caroline Hayduk is a queer poet, editor, and educator living in Scranton, PA. She has an MA and MFA in Poetry from Wilkes University. She is invested in the weird, uncharted, and possibly dangerous places we go in poetry. She has been published in *The Penn Review*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *Santa Fe Writers Project* and others. *Night Bones* is her debut chapbook.

Sharon Israel's debut chapbook *Voice Lesson* was published in 2017 by Post Traumatic Press. She was an early recipient of Brooklyn College's Leonard B. Hecht Poetry Explication Award, was nominated for "Best of the Net" in 2016 and won Four Lines' 2020 winter poetry challenge. Sharon's work has most recently appeared in *Flatbush Review* and in the Orchard Lea Press anthology *Close Up: Poems on Cancer, Grief, Hope and Healing*. Sharon hosts the radio show and podcast, *Planet Poet-Words in Space*, on WIOX 91.3 FM in the Catskills and streaming on WIOXradio.org. All podcast episodes are available on Google, Spotify and Apple. Visit Sharon's website Sharonisraelpoet.com or click on <https://linktr.ee/sharonisraelpoet> for more information.

James Ross Kelly lives in Northern California next to the Sacramento River. He has been a journalist for *Gannet*, a travel book editor, and had a score of labor jobs — the in-between, jobs you get from being an English major. Mr. Kelly's first book of fiction *And the Fires We Talked About*, a book of stories mostly set in Southern Oregon was published by UnCollected Press in 2020. Subsequently this indie press published Mr. Kelly's first book of poetry *Black Ice & Fire* in 2021.

Max Klement, a graduate of Sarah Lawrence College, is a writer and retired psychotherapist living in the Chicago area. His

writing can be found in the Figwort Literary Journal and Literally Stories. He is currently at work on his second novel.

For my brave friend Seth.

David P. Kozinski's poems have appeared in 40 literary publications, most recently in the Bay to Ocean Journal, which nominated his entry for a Pushcart Prize, the Moonstone Featured Poets Anthology, New World Writing Quarterly, Schuylkill Valley Journal, Eunoia Review and Dreamstreets. He has two full-length books of poems – “I Hear It the Way I Want It to Be,” which was a finalist for the Inlandia (California) Institute’s Hillary Gravendyke Prize, and “Tripping Over Memorial Day” (both Kelsay Books). His chapbook, “Loopholes” (Broadkill Press) won the Dogfish Head Poetry Prize. He is poet in residence at Rockwood Park & Museum, near Wilmington, DE.

Amanda Leal is a 30 year old poet from Lake Worth FL. Her work has been featured or is forthcoming in issues of CAROUSEL, Tampa Review, Twyckenham Notes, and many others.

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 joined the Medical Corps in the Air Force. He earned an MA 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 worked as a house builder, pipe-fitter, orderly in a hospital, gardener, landscaper, driller for an assaying company, bartender. Take care and be well,

Ala Leresteux, a Berlin-based philosopher-turned-artist, embarked on her creative journey after earning a master's degree in Philosophy from Moscow State University. With a profound belief in art as a vehicle for philosophical expression, she commenced her artistic odyssey in Paris 12 years ago. Imbued with a passion for ink stippling, Ala honed her

craft through rigorous training at the Ecole nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts and countless hours sketching in Parisian museums. Her distinctive style garnered international recognition, culminating in a solo exhibition at the Moscow Museum Of Modern Art. Ala's works grace the collections of private enthusiasts worldwide, underscoring her profound impact on the global art scene.

Doug May is a member of the neurodivergent community. He worked many entry-level jobs in the private sector, and made poetry and paintings in his off hours. He recently had a chapbook, "October," published by Obo Limbo-Verlag and new poems will be appearing in *f(r)iction* and *Strangers and Karma*.

The drawings of **Andrew Lincoln Nelson** submitted here explore themes of non-anthropoid creatures, existing outside the realm of human interaction and purpose. The viewer is left to imagine what these creatures might be doing, and why.

Jeff Newman, currently residing in Ventura County, CA, has evolved into a neo-surrealist painter who studied Russian Realism at Bridgeview Academy in Queens, NY, under the tutelage and mentorship of Iliya Mirochnik. Jeff's work has been exhibited in galleries in NYC, Santa Barbara, California, as well as the LA Art Show and Superfine Art Show shows in Los Angeles and San Francisco. www.jeffnewman.art

Laura Ohlmann was educated at Florida Atlantic University and the University of Central Florida. Her poems, Silence, Too Late, and Butterfly World have all been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. Her work has appeared in The Rumpus, The Lindenwood Review, The Maine Review, GASHER, South Carolina Review, South Florida Poetry Journal, and others. She is currently a Technical Writer and Comms Consultant for a weather organization in Asheville. She spends much of her time with her husband, Jon, her dog, Lady Bug, and her newborn daughter. A selection of written work can be found at: <https://ohlmannlaura.wixsite.com/poet>.

Joel Peckham has published nine collections of poetry and nonfiction, most recently *Bone Music* (SFAU), *MUCH* (UnCollected Press), *Body Memory* (New Rivers), and the spoken word LP, *Still Running: Words and Music by Joel Peckham* (EAT poems). His new and selected poems, *Any Moonwalker Can Tell* is forthcoming from SFAU in the late spring of 2024. With Robert Vivian, he also co-edited the anthology, *Wild Gods: The Ecstatic in Contemporary Poetry and Prose*. He is an Associate Professor of American Literature and Creative Writing at Marshall University.

Cat Pleska, a native West Virginian, is an award-winning author, educator, and storyteller. Her memoir, *Riding on Comets* was published by West Virginia University Press. Cat edited four anthologies and her stories and essays have appeared in *The Appalachian Heritage Anthologies*, *Still: The Journal*, *Heartwood Magazine*, *Change 7 Magazine*, and many others. She teaches in Marshall University's English Department and in the Graduate Humanities Program.

Annette Petrusso is a poet and, by profession, a writer/editor based in Austin, Texas. Her poetry is inspired by cinema, art, popular culture, and the unforgettable details of everyday life. Her work has appeared in the *Pomona Valley Review*, *Black Moon Magazine*, *Thimble Literary Review*, *Concision Poetry Journal*, and *Quibble*.

James Redfern (he/him) was born and raised in Long Beach, California. Teacher, editor, printmaker, artist, writer, and poet: Redfern has built up a long rap sheet of artistic creation. Redfern's collection, *THE BAKER*, was published by Moonstone Arts Center in Philadelphia (2022). Recently, his poetry has appeared in *In Parentheses: New Modernism*, *High Shelf*, *Beatific Magazine*, *Pensive: A Global Journal of Spiritual and the Arts*, *The Raw Art Review*, *Transcend*, *We Are Antifa* (Into the Void), *Dime Show Review*, *Anti-Heroic Chic*, *The Closed Eye Open*, *Plants & Poetry Journal*, *Genre: Urban Arts*, *W.E.I.R.D.*, and elsewhere.

Poetry Journal, *Genre: Urban Arts*, *W.E.I.R.D.*, and elsewhere.

With the photography project «What nature knows» **Gjert Rognli** draws in references from his affiliation with Arctic Northern Norway, to light, darkness and the seasons. He transforms ordinary landscapes into an enigmatic place to be and takes us on a visual experience in the evening and the atmosphere of the night. In the project he immerses light installations in water, and creates harmony where there is conflict between the elements. He illuminates nature with LED-lights and luminescent material.

Henry G. Stanton's fiction, poetry and paintings have appeared widely in online and print publications. Most recently his artwork has appeared in Holy & Intoxicated Press, Paper & Ink Zine, The Tiny Seed Journal, Closed Eye Open, Wild Roof Journal and Poet's Espresso Review. His poetry was selected for the A3 Review Poetry Prize and was shortlisted for the yewear 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 G. Stanton's paintings and other artworks can be viewed at the following website www.brightportfal.com. Henry G. Stanton is a regular illustrator for Black Petal and Yellow Mama Online publications.

Jeff Weddle is a poet and writer living in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. He won the Eudora Welty Prize for Bohemian New Orleans: The Story of the Outsider and Loujon Press and has also received honors for his fiction and poetry. His work has appeared in Albanian translation. Jeff teaches in the School of Library and Information Studies at the University of Alabama.

Cynthia Yatchman is a Seattle based artist and art instructor. With an M.A. in child development and a B. A. in education, she has a strong interest in art education and teaches art to adults, children and families in Seattle. As a former ceramicist, she studied with J.T. Abernathy in Ann Arbor, MI, however after receiving her B.F.A. in painting from the University of Washington she switched from 3D art to 2D and has remained there ever since. She works primarily on paintings, prints and collages. Her art is housed in numerous public and private collections

and she has been shown nationally in California, Connecticut, New York, Indiana, Michigan, Oregon and Wyoming. She has exhibited extensively in the Northwest, including shows at Seattle University, Seattle Pacific University, Shoreline Community College, the Tacoma and Seattle Convention Centers and the Pacific Science Center. She is a member of the Seattle Print Art Association and COCA (Center of Contemporary Art).



Congress of The Mint Moon
by Henry G. Stanton