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Editor: Michael O. Starr

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Thank you for reading!

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Alina Zollfrank

from (former) East Germany loathes wildfire smoke and writes in the Pacific Northwest. Her work has appeared in Last Leaves, Thimble, The Braided Way, Wordgathering, Feral, Two Thirds North, Red Ogre Review, Nude Bruce Review, October Hill Magazine, Psaltery & Lyre, Pulse, Invisible City, and others.

1. Wordless

I almost sprained a nose hair trying to hold in follicles so
they wouldn't burst out of my knee cap. So my pinky
wouldn't lie. My toe nail wouldn't drip. My belly
button wouldn't spin. My lumbar discs wouldn't
wax poetry about what it's like to stumble
through this world, grieve lofty stories
that go untold
because
no time
because
too late
because
misguided
because
too tired
because
too long
because
just wrong
because our wiry hairs are charged are
stimmed are loaded our starry eyes are

all screens all day all night
every day every night
and our lashes only freeze in the stir-up
position when flash-bangy brashness
catches
our reverential attention span.

I sit here
hold my skin
in think
of all the
words never
written.

3. Split

Bob Hicok said poop
in a poem. He did what
I couldn't. Well now I can
come clean and wax
poetry about the time
I broke my ass. Stress
and wheelbarrows full
of chocolate and cookies
can do that. Stopper a pipe.
Such a weird term anal
fissure. It's like shitting
broken glass really.

Like
tectonic plates shifting
forces finding a way
where none was before.
We don't so much think about
the crumbling planet when we drink
green juice swallow
fiber powder suck

on supplements bike to work
fill the compost. It's all about the flow
my yoga teacher keeps saying.
I agree when I sit on the throne
feet glued to the squatty potty
and breathe into my pelvis.
A cushy couch a warm bed at
night a dream of pain-free
digestion a brain thinks
of movement as absence
of stagnation goes on believing
this shell we inhabit can't break
if we just
eat do say buy pray the right things.
Bob got it right. Poop.

4. Remedy

It's a two-rejections kind of a morning.

My mouth a slot for chocolate chips

I pop in quick succession as if

to smother the poet's broken heart in

sweet, dark sludge until

regrettably, sadly, however fill

the inbox, blow me up some more,

unfortunately.

Maybe gummy bears next.

Or popping candy!

5. (Still) Life

A lone cougar attacked a pack of bikers on a state trail last weekend

says the paper. They made it. The cougar didn't. Wildlife officials made sure of it.

My sobbing friend stares at remains of an Anna's hummingbird; another one

dive bombs the feeder. Such sheen on the ground, she says. Such blood, too, on this

too-cold northern day.

Alligators float, nostrils hovering above water's surface, in brumation. Dreaming

iguanas fall from trees when temperatures drop too low. I've heard

about it raining cats and dogs, but this?

My retired neighbor builds a fire pit. When he drinks, he burns white-hot

garbage. When he tosses peanuts into the road, he shoots at hungry crows. When

he's irked, he barks at my dogs.

My other friend calls and says the news drive her to the brink.
And why can't someone

like Putin get ass cancer? The worst kind? She can't see me, but
I nod and scratch at

stress scabs on my elbow.

Later in my warm place, feet drowning in pink wool socks, I
root and call out goodness

for DC and Gaza, Ukraine and Russia, Colombia and China. All
those, all us.

I make white-knuckled fists to manifest common sense. Good-
ness in this, our

now-wasteland. I clench eye lids and hum, will myself into tor-
por until my species

has gone extinct.

Samantha Slaven

is a poet living with her husband, Shawn, and dog, Vader, in Suburban Philadelphia. Shawn and Samantha are enjoying their second year of marriage having celebrated their wedding in November 2022. Samantha's previous work can be found in the Spring 2023 issue of the Horror Zine Magazine, the Pup Pup blog of Meow Meow Pow Pow Lit (November 2023), and issue six of Collide Zine.

Gatekeeping and missed connections

I held you once

Feeble and weak

Needing support

You clung to me

Finding comfort

A face that would become all too familiar

Arms you could rely on

I relished in our burgeoning bond

The months passed

Our eyes locking on a weekly basis

I wasn't the only one who noticed you

You had fans, admirers

A long list of those waiting to share in your presence

I knew I had to split my time with you

You were never solely mine to claim

I tried to be casual

Letting the glances happen naturally

Not staring, not butting in where my pupils did not belong

It was hard

To see you laugh for him

Reach for her

Memorize his face

Her smile

My countenance becoming a blur amongst a clamoring sea

I held you a second time

You were distracted

Head space fragmented

Your attention pulled in spiraling directions

You were taken from me

We went our separate ways

You were kept

With the others

Their joy

Reflected in your smile

They held you too

You looked comfortable

Natural

Not like with me

A reminder you'd eventually belong to the masses

Hope

Disappearing

Rapidly

This is not about me

Not everything has to be about me

As I began to accept

That we'd never share a peaceful moment

Like that first time

I held you again

Third time's the charm

Though brief
You
Still guarded from afar
But your expression

My heart felt renewed

I held you once
The fourth time to be exact

You ran scrambling from my embrace
Yet
As I grasp at memories
Fading fast in the dying summer sun

I know there's still a chance
To find a way to your love
Once more

Mindyrose Sinykin

is a Junior at St. Olaf College, where she ponders God and worries about the future. She has been writing short stories since the age of five and poems since the age of fourteen. Although new to the world of publishing in lit mags, she is passionate about publishing, editing, and reading short fiction and poetry.

She lives in Minneapolis, MN with her parents, her little sister, and her 20-pound lynx point Siamese cat, Kafka.

Their Person

Everybody always talks about falling in love,
But nobody warns you about losing it.

How it feels like walking into fog,
and fading away.

Like part of you is dissolving,
and suddenly you can't tell if it ever existed in the first
place.

They say that the average person falls in love seven times be-
fore they've found

Their Person,

But how can one person lose that much of themselves?

How much of me
is left to lose?

And how much of you?

Neither of us are the same anymore;
you with your longer hair,
me with my new perfume,
you with the million miles,

me with the taped-together heart...

What executioner do we run to now?

Now that the sun has risen

and fallen

and the days have gone from

Long to

short

to long

and short

and long again

Where do we go when we have nothing left to lose?

Teenage Angst

My knight in shining armor, what the
fuck.

“Be with me my darling”

Jesus fucking christ do I have to be jealous
of everyone I meet?

Even the fags have it better than I do and
they hardly have rightz...

I'm nauseous. I'm dizzy. I feel like I could
throw up. I really do.

I think I'm unfuckable. I think I'm
beautiful. I think I'm drunk and
lonely. Where does this fucking drink
end.

Where do I sleep tonight? It is perpetually
11pm.

I'm drunk and tired and I want to smoke.

A cigar, a cigarette, a pipe, a joint, a vape,

a bong... whatever gets my lungs warm
and tight and fuzzy. I want to drown
myself.

I want to dream and write and take
polaroids of the stars. I want to lay
on wet grass with leaves in my hair while onlookers pass
by, wondering what in the hell is wrong with her?

Orion would approve of how I behaved
tonight: A hunter. A dancer. A
cold-hearted pea-brained maniac
idiot from the bronx. I'm none of
these things sober. I'm all of these
things when I'm alone. What's the
difference anyways?

“Death and the Fly”

The hospital is Too White. Too Clean. Too Sanitary.

The air smells like canned surface disinfectant. Like nobody had ever been there for sickness or injury or death. I want to hold my breath so as to not contaminate anything. It feels cruel to think about not breathing when Anthony doesn't have a choice— machines deliver air into and out of his lungs via ribbed plastic tubes leading down his throat and into his lungs, forcing his chest Up, Down, Up, Down, Up, Down. It's rhythmic. It's too steady and too foreign compared to the unsteady crackle that his breath has maintained over the last three weeks. The doctor said it's pneumonia, but I don't know if I agree. It's killing him, whatever it was. That much is obvious. So here I am, doing nothing but watching and waiting. What else am I to do? As with Everyone, Everywhere, I have watched over him. Always. How could I not care now?

Anthony is old. He turned 86 last month, and for 85 years and two weeks prior he was the happiest, healthiest person in Sheffield. He was happy when his kids grew up and left home for London. He was happy when, after a long and strenuous bat-

tle with Leukemia, I took his wife. He was happy, rich or poor, sick or healthy. “They were growing,” “She was at peace,” “This too shall pass,” he said smiling. It was who he was— There was nothing to change, so he might as well make the best of the worst. If he were awake, he would be cracking a joke about meeting St. Peter about now. I wonder if there would be pain in his eyes. Or fear. Or maybe just acceptance. He is on sedative painkillers.

The silence around us is stifling, and the beep and buzz of the electric life support machines hardly make it better. It’s all there is: Beep, Hiss, Beep, Hiss, Beep, Hiss, Beep, Hiss. It’s monotonous. He would Hate it. Anthony Hates Silence. I wish more than anything that I could do something. I think, if I were like him, if I were like a real flesh and blood person, I could read to him. I could breathe and speak and read and flip the thin pages. I could *feel* for him. I pray that I could feel. I pray that I could *Be*.

As if Something More heard me, I look down to see that a fly has landed on the tip of my left ring finger instead of the thick plastic arm of the brown hospital recliner. It’s a tiny thing, with a thick black body behind sheer wings that shine a greenish hue in the dull sunlight. Its eyes are large and red. I don’t *feel* the

fly on my transparent skin, but I see its little hairy legs lift up and down as it crawls up my hand towards my knuckle. It pauses and lifts its front two legs to clean itself. I imagine that they are the fly's hands, and it has just put on a foaming glob of sanitizer. I imagine that he is another doctor, just having knocked on the door and greeted Anthony to take his pulse and check if his lungs still crack when they fill with air. As if the fly had heard my thoughts, it buzzed over to Anthony's limp wrist and repeated the process. Jump around, crawl up his hand, and clean again. It jumps over to his chest, over each lung, over his heart, and then crawls over the hollow of his right cheek, then his left. It settles gently onto his pale lips. They look peaceful together. Careless. Anthony looks Ready.

The fly buzzes in circles over him and then sticks to the wall before struggling his way towards the door. It can't find the crack below the door where it entered, and it panics, hitting the door and the small enclosed window for several minutes before finally leaving relieved.

It comes to me that it is time for me to go, and I remember just how much my job pains me. I have no choice. I exist for this exact moment.

I raise myself from the static chair, and feel each vertebra of my spine slowly align on top of one another as I force my chest forward, my shoulder blades together, and my chin high. I walk to Anthony's side. I lift my sheer too-white veil and carefully cover the pair of us, as I bend over the side rail of the starched white hospital bed, and I put my lips, slowly, gently, tearfully, to his wrinkly forehead. We touch. A tear falls from my hollow cheek to his.

Silence. Anthony is dead.

I do not feel it when I wrap my arms around his soul. Nor do I feel him put his head on my shoulder as I carry him with me through the door. His soul glows light, bright, and much younger than many of the children I have tended to. He sleeps peacefully and small on my chest. "To life, little one." I whisper. "To life."

Kenneth Pobo

(he/him) is the author of twenty-one chapbooks and nine full-length collections. Recent books include Bend of Quiet (Blue Light Press), Loplop in a Red City (Circling Rivers), Lilac And Sawdust (Meadowlark Press) and Gold Bracelet in a Cave: Aunt Stokesia (Ethel Press). His work has appeared in North Dakota Quarterly, Asheville Literary Review, Nimrod, Mudfish, Hawaii Review, and elsewhere.

@KenPobo

I give you the finger

Enskulled holy of holies
unsmudged by post & pre:
'arrives' as I AM already
instantaneously.

'Arrival' is approachable?

By sudden unity, 'approach'
done away with mating
mindcore
God
body.

*Miraculously vivid...
equals indescribably!*

I give you the finger

via pointing poetry—

Finger amputated!

Oh—

you cut through healingly.

to those who never understand

Who or what exemplifies supreme humility?

GodGlow bowed to every single shell identity.

But sans mental filter(s) how can
sideless GodSpace see?

Without mental filter(s) AH glows identically.

Show me how to gain entry!

Hear that birdsong far away?

I do hear.

Enter here.

Ah : hookUp all ways!

But stuck on AH, dead body stays.

'AH' now/eternity?

'AH' avoid fixation on (what looks like) clarity.

How near is *AH* necktop center?

KnowGlow border-free.

Inability to see it...

Beholds vividly.

Does one's witness have a source?

AH source has no façade...

Self-aware clear through?

Clean through imagining a god.

Oh I can't believe I tried to grasp it mentally!
All those struggles to behold instantaneously!
Faster than the speed of light—

deLight's one edgelessly.

So there's refuge all along the path of Garden E?

Path (that's) entry cancels all travel necessity.

Direct connection where..?

Discover self-aware.

Nameless I AM where..?

Its bliss is it aware.

Hey, most of us must meditate
to understand thought-free.

Precisely where it struggles : that's

where it's illusory.

Any effort to conceive fogs up entirely.

Don't fog up!

That's fine advice.

Fog basks in clarity!

Through all generations...

AH is best known wordlessly.

Thanks, pointing poetry.

But do you feel guilty
for revealing secrecy?

Those who never understand preserve it perfectly.

John Delaney

John's publications include *Waypoints* (2017), a collection of place poems, *Twenty Questions* (2019), a chapbook, *Delicate Arch* (2022), poems and photographs of national parks and monuments, and *Galápagos* (2023), a collaborative chapbook of his son Andrew's photographs and his poems. *Nile*, a chapbook of poems and photographs about Egypt, will appear in May. He lives in Port Townsend, WA



The Fossil Shop

It's the age, right, that fascinates people
about fossils? Holding something so old
in our hands? Marveling at what once was?

That something exceptional has come and gone
on this planet, making us possible,
so to speak, having tested the waters
and finding them usable, suitable.
And the compulsive progression of it all,
each turn of a shell, say, enlarging on the other,
over hundreds of millions of years.
A poignant record of reckoning
the tough elements with implacable patience.

Earth's remains: we draft them for a table,
a shelf knickknack, a conversation piece.

Morocco is one of the world's largest sources for fossils due to the Sahara Desert and the ocean that once covered it. As a result, the fossil trade is booming, and some worry that the scale of it is damaging the country's paleontological heritage.



Marrakesh

You expect a carnival and you get one:
snake charmers and small bellhop-dressed monkeys.
The main plaza seemed to spin in circles.
I got a beer in a square-side bar
with a full view of the activity,
and a young man dressed like a sheik set up
his mic and speaker, then plugged in his guitar
and started playing English pop songs,
like Sheeran's "Bad Habits" and "Perfect".
Then he packed his things up and moved nextdoor.

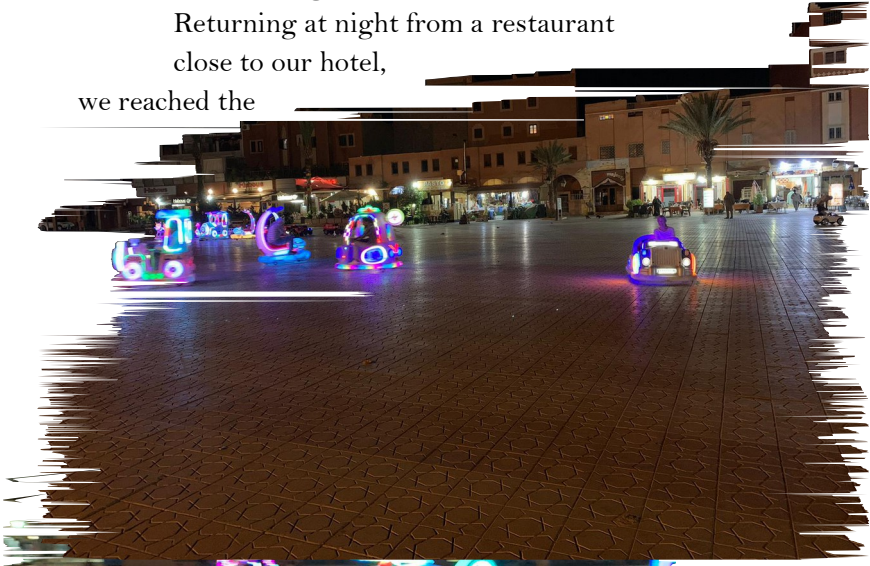
Most tourists take a tour of Bahia Palace
or Le Jardin Secret or the lush home
where Yves Saint Laurent once lived
in extraordinary splendor and color.
We even took a balloon ride outside
the city to catch the sun rise over
the mountains. I bought a lovely carpet
and paid a craftsman to etch my cat's name
on a tile with his profile. Yes, busker,
'Marrakesh is bad habits and perfect.'

Marrakesh is the fourth largest city in Morocco, and its major square is the busiest in all of Africa. Its medina quarter is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Riding Kiddie Cars in Quarzazate

Where's-is-at is the best we could do pronouncing this place near where films were made. Returning at night from a restaurant close to our hotel,

we reached the



brightly-lit

Who



main square
and
found
electric kiddie cars!
were they kidding? Of
course we would try
to be
kids again, and
that's what we
did,
responding
to loud music from Dis-
ney.

I rode a dol-
ocean,

phin and finned through the

ing

passing a
jaunty jeep
with glow-
tires,
a heedless
horse-
drawn
car-
riage, a
run-
away

locomo-
tive bear-

ing down with bright lights.

We were wild drivers and sped about.

Too soon we timed out.

Quarzazate is known as the gateway to the Sahara Desert as well as the region of Morocco's film industry. Atlas Studios is the largest (by land area) film studio in the world; many well-known international movies have had scenes shot there.

Jennifer Anne Moses

is an author, painter, and poet.

www.JenniferAnneMosesArts.com.

First

we were each other's first
(well, yes)
the tussle, the burst
(it was over in a blink)

and then---later
(there is always a later)
with other lovers
(Again and yet)

The thirst was---slated
(who knew?)
second rated
(after the first)

I shall wear ---

and half-inch heels
(arthritis, *really?*)
and plant oleales
(mom in her garden)

He was by my side
(thank you God)
when the babies arrived
(mazel tov!)

The first, dead at sixty-one
(the bullet was swift)
I read sonnets—John Donne
(you get the drift)

Jack Tricarico

is a New York painter and poet who has been published in poetry journals and anthologies in Europe, Mexico and The United States. He has a published book entitled Selected Poems. The following 3 poems are unpublished.

AIRHEAD

July rolls a slow wheel out of Manhattan
It's safer where time rests, and the lingering sky
Drifts into mixed messages

In a long ago place I lived above ground level
The melodious air was always a refuge
From bad advice. A few vague trees
Filled in the desolation
That certain atmospheres prefer
Now there are these walls
That rise to retrieve themselves
The years are still there
In their unsettled way

In the grip of an expectation
A volcano explodes in Pompeii
Fortunately I'm in another century
The fan keeps a windy kitchen
If I shift into tunnel vision
The day could go anywhere

The coffee has cooled
And is no longer informative
In the insistence on being still
Seventy eight years of indecision
Have gathered in small plots

Of I could've done this
And I could've done that

If I could order a destiny
From a neighborhood restaurant
I'd sigh for a contour that iron would envy
In an Eden of revelation
I could live with my missing links

ASPHALT SMOKE

Is God punishing you today?
Are you holding hands with an idea
That your mind is an intergalactic space station?
Are you interpreting your thoughts
Like Morse code behind enemy lines?

Look at your door
Are there cliffs on the reverse side?
Are there bats on the staircase?
Goats in the streets?
Brassieres in the trees?
As you brave the outside

Awake and take notice
For only a doughnut
A man with a jeweled mouth
Will explain your dilemma
Absentmindedness is a crack in the sidewalk
And spilled laundry is only half the fun
There's also a dog pissing on it
Running off with a sock

In fortuneteller's eyes
Don't trust this mist
With storefront facades
Whatever you might suspect
That may be scarier than yourself

Is lurking behind it. Therefore

Later for avocados and onions
Reach for a wave of aboriginal wind music
Or the sky will come down like a foot

DAYLIGHT

I plunge to discover continents
Beneath the map of my brain
As illustrated on an Internet page
And only manage a depth of one centimeter
Indicating I am addicted to consciousness
A condition of numbness pervading my body
Like an electric blanket around a frozen corpse

I know I am more than one
History bounces me around
Time is a shredded rope
Reduced to a strand
It breaks inwardly

A parallel universe welcomes its visitors
Sartre appears to be right:
“You are what you are not...”
There isn’t much more
I could expect from the truth
Adding a reminder
Anonymity is armor
In any possible world

Jack D. Harvey

's poetry has appeared in Scrivener, The Comstock Review, Valparaiso Poetry Review, Typishly Literary Magazine, The Antioch Review, The Piedmont Poetry Journal and elsewhere. The author has been a Pushcart nominee and over the years has been published in a few anthologies.

The author has been writing poetry since he was sixteen and lives in a small town near Albany, New York.

Root Hog

Root hog or die,
what they say;
flog the memory
for any old saw
or flight of fancy
to give some weight
to what, after all,
is just another tiresome day.

What a way
to frame the business of life
in a bunch of words,
good, bad or indifferent;
florid metaphors,
banal tags
clamped on brave
supernal human thoughts,
decked out
fancy and useless
as chandeliers
in the noonday sun.

Root hog
for your own sake

or Christ's sake,
go ahead and find
Francis Bacon;
now no more
than famous
and dead.

What's the use?
We know him
or we don't.

The proof of knowing
intensive
in a pudding
Einstein himself
would fail to see
rise to reason or sense.
Words or deeds?
Overloaded science
random or precise,
being or nothing,
needs an axe to cut
the meat from the bone,
a knife to slice
the meat from the fat,
and who's to say
it's worth the effort?

Lady Husbandry's
a cold hard consort
in the groves of academe,
where nothing grows
that's not cut to order.

Root hog, root
or die or still unquiet
and alive,
continue your quest,
trotting towards
the setting sun;
along the way
try to settle
a few old debts,
but leave the fancy thoughts,
the complications, to those
who have no business
at the dirty trough;

we know who they are.

You have no time
for them,
no time at all to
look at the sky,

the sea, the land;
in the end
clamps on your nuts,
the knife cuts
you off from
Francis Bacon
and every single thing
you thought you ever knew.

There is nothing for you
but hanging dead
and bloody,
strung up
and ready to be gutted.
There are other ways, surely,
a ceremony, a grave,
but it's all the same;
our fancy human
ways no more than
progressions of death
prettied up and
pretend and
in the end,
we all fail the living
because there they are,
left behind,

and here we are
nothing.

Guernica at the Prado

For a year or more
I looked and looked at it,
in my soul,
lived under the spell
of Picasso's baleful
grey and black fandango
of a bombed town,
a farrago of agonies
of bull and horse,
parts of people
caught and displayed
in sharp outline;
then it became too fine,
too perfect in its kind,
too much to take
and I had to turn away,
turn my mind and eye,
try to isolate and
banish the pieces,
try to burn away the vision
of that monstrous canvas,
bury a pretense, a practice,
a sacrifice of time;

none of it worked.

Never forgotten,
that huge ghastly swipe
of paint haunts me still,
hurts me and will
until the end of its world,
ending as it did,
and the end of mine.

Gary Campanella

writes fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. He is a 2022 Pushcart Prize nominee and won an Honorable Mention in the 2023 Allen Ginsberg Poetry Prize. His work has appeared in print and online publications. He is the Publisher/Editor-in-Chief of the Muleskinner Journal (<https://www.muleskinnerjournal.com/>) He lives on a dead-end street in Los Angeles.

LA Charm

A hummingbird hovers at the high branches of a live oak, while I wait for morning fog to clear, lean to the window, pick at my problems, and watch the tiny emerald-necked thing take off, alight, take off, and I wonder if its wings get tired.

The branchlets sway in a breeze that brushes my window, smelling of flowers, coarse from the ocean, wistful for stealing across the grime and sadness of America's sprawling city of slumbering angels and personal demons.

The hummingbird moves away, haltingly off toward other trees or flowers or the other side of this tree, and I also turn away, step away from the window and the oak and my downtown view.

My house is rooted here like the tree, but I am unsteady when standing still, more at ease with the wind across this city, drafting up the hill where I sleep, to the patch of grass I defend from neighborhood dogs, to the migration in my oak tree, to the glitter charmed with sandy grit across high desert ghost towns.

The oak tree makes its own dust, as do I, as do hummingbirds, and the breeze carries it off to the shabby desert.

Michael Cantus

Moderato

My cul-de-sac is quiet, same as always, the ambulance makes no sound, no siren, only the red light flashing off the facades of the houses, cutting into bedroom windows, silent flickering like the fried chicken sign outside the window of my first apartment, in the city, on my own, so long ago, living like a tourist, recalling it like a vacation, finding my way here, home, back where I came from, though truth be told I always felt like a tourist here too, never hanging Christmas lights, or trying my hand at plumbing repair, or tossing my two cents at the thousand little conversations that I hear from the window as the trash barrels are dropped at the curb or the mail collected...

A long, long time ago, I can still remember...

Allegro

My chest is tight, but the pain is gone, and the neighbors are gone too, though I bet they look out their windows when the ambulance arrives, when the medics ring the bell, odd at this hour, here, and my wife answers while I stare at the ceiling, smooth white in the semi-dark except for the red light from the siren flashing, but I kind of look through that, don't see it, see only the ceiling, the roof over my head, the dimmed stars over the roof, the strangeness of it, the infinity in the whiteness, like a cloud plastered smooth, like there's a way inside it, like there's air to breathe, and truth be told I try to wish myself there, until I am there, until the room feels strange, like I'm a tourist here

too, like the furniture isn't mine, like I didn't choose the bedding, like I'm finally floating free...

Lost in space, with no time left to start again...

Adagio

Summers by the sea, me, a kid, bringing home a pail of water with rotting starfish, falling in love in high school there, grilling food with my parents there, playing pinball with the boys in the arcade, snorting coke off the dashboard of an Olds, walking alone along the beach, walking with friends down the boardwalk, making love to a girl I don't love, finding a dead seal after a storm, its eyes open, maggots beneath, stepping through seaweed in the sand, hurting my feet on the rocky beaches in Greece, where I'm sitting outside a taverna, drinking ouzo in the sun, smoking, talking to a guy from Ireland, a girl from Denmark, singing American Pie with a bartender who speaks no other English, where truth be told I never really left, never was a tourist, will never leave again, will never leave again...

Singing this will be the day that I die...

Angela Townsend

is the Development Director at Tabby's Place: a Cat Sanctuary. She graduated from Princeton Seminary and Vassar College. Her work appears or is forthcoming in Arts & Letters, Chautauqua, Paris Lit Up, Pleiades, The Razor, and Terrain, among others. Angie has lived with Type 1 diabetes for 33 years, laughs with her poet mother every morning, and loves life affectionately.

Speaking of the Shore

I blow my cover every time. I am the damn, fucking good girl, even if I hide under the language of a longshoreman. “What is a longshoreman?” someone will ask, and now they will know I am also not from this century.

I can’t tell you what a longshoreman does, only that he had a regular gig in my grandfather’s vocabulary, and he was apparently a precursor to Samuel L. Jackson. I can tell you that I am not fooling anyone.

I told the sleepover friends I had to close my eyes by 10 p.m., because I was on the honor code with my mother. When they observed that my mother was not present and zero deaths would result from my staying up to watch *Beetlejuice*, I reiterated my charter. They said I must have gotten my diabetes from being such a sweet juvenile.

I told the boyfriends with Cremo in their hair that I had to keep my tutu on, because it would be worth the wait to give myself in full. I used words like “covenant.” They used words like “abnormal.” They reminded me that a thirty-year-old in a tutu is

lucky to have a boyfriend. I needed a tablespoon of dish soap to wash their hair oil from my fingertips.

I told my husband that I learned, when I was twirled, that grace is the *axis mundi*. He told me I was young. He reminded me that God washed God's hands long ago, and dominoes fall unassisted. He scolded me for sending Snoopy cards to the archbishop after finding his birthday on Wikipedia. He fiddled with the cage door. I pawned a covenant for wings.

I got so happy, I started swearing.

The letters after my mother's name confirm that she is both poet and psychologist. She couldn't tell which alphabet made her ask, "is this your anger erupting?"

"I'm not angry."

"Of course you're angry. For five years, you—"

"—I forgive him."

"I don't."

"Well, I fucking do."

She laughed, getting used to six months of longshoremanship after forty-one years at the ballet.

At the animal shelter, swearing is a serving platter for grief, outrage, and ordinary emissions of the unneutered. My coworkers wriggle the front lines, while I do the fundraising from an ivory tower that smells like disinfectant. We love the same cats, differently. We meet in the canteen. They slap my back so hard I fall into my oatmeal.

My coworkers crawl like Navy SEALs to administer insulin to terrorists with tails like bottle brushes. They set drop traps for the starving and ungrateful. They offer affection without permission and wear labyrinths of scars between their tattoos.

When I obtained ink at forty, a cat silhouette the size of a gumdrop, they bought me a plastic Oscar engraved, “MOST BADASS TAT ON A JESUS FREAK.”

The vet tech captured me on video when our most aggressive cat escaped. I do not remember yelping “oh my stars, oh my stars,” galloping down the hall and gathering Buttermuffin in my unscarred arms. Buttermuffin was so outraged, she did not draw blood. This was unprecedented.

“I wouldn’t have done that,” the vet tech said. “That was batshit crazy.”

I do not know if I will let them in on my big fucking secret. The cats may blow my cover first.

Guilty and Dignified

If you assembled every Dave I have known in a single amphitheater, fewer than 3% would consent to calling me “dignified.” Such decisions require unanimity in the manner of the United Nations Security Council. The motion would not pass.

Daves know that I will drive one hour to acquire cat erasers. I will summon the greatest minds of TJ Maxx to chart a course to victory. I will beseech a woman my mother’s age, in a sweatshirt with fishnet elbow patches, to tell me what she knows. We will genuflect in the Stationery & Sundries aisle. She will extract five tubs of felines the texture of bubble gum. How many would I like? I would like five.

Dignitaries are not uninformed of my deeds. Interpol is on standby. There is grainy footage of the day I deposited a river rock on my boss’s desk. You can make out the words glitter-painted in my handwriting: *THIS ROCK BELONGS TO A RAD AND RIGHTEOUS MAN*. Everyone knows who did it. The rock holds down the budget documents.

There are sympathetic Daves, but they are not at liberty to ignore the evidence. My hatchback was rated the safest small car

until I altered its elements. Any Dave who circles my Subaru can count eleven acrylic moons, Eiffel towers, and assorted cats in spacecraft. I may have voided the warranty on the Miraculous Medal sticker by placing it next to a dreadlocked orange gnome. Dave is not sure.

There was hopeful discussion when I went to the state park. The assemblage has approved outdoor activity. The gentlest Dave held his breath, hoping I might begin a mindful hike or walk a shepherd through the trails. But I crawled in the parking lot, muddying my knuckles digging for purple rocks. I took them home and glued them in stacks like pancakes. I subjected them to Mod Podge. I hid one in the Board Chairperson's briefcase.

If I hid more strategically, it could have been different. The supermarket is a generous proving ground for decorum and prudence. You may wax organic and take a wide berth around end-caps. Or you may wear a headband with pearls the size of cherries and tell the deli man, who is scarcely more than a child, that he looks debonair. You may square your shoulders in flannel, or you may circle your wagon with another child and com-

pliment each other's fringe jackets. I have chosen the better part, accepting the choices I force upon Daves.

They cover their eyes, embarrassed to see me naked in the garden. I forget to apply anti-aging serum and cry with the stranger who mentions that she misses Jimmy Buffett. I give a presentation to the organization and hand out cat erasers at the door. I submit essays to journals of public philosophy, then tie-dye their rejection letters: "We repudiate your premise that 'the goofus saves the world.'"

I hide the words *God loves you and so do I* in four-point font at the bottom of emails to the electric company. I go back and change the font size to eighteen. I look up the archbishop's birthday on Wikipedia and send him a card covered in walruses. I wear perfumes scented like breakfast pastries. I donate Chanel's to Goodwill, where Daves can find them for wives of Daves.

My own mother is the informant. She is the one I blame and thank. She taught me never to keep walking when I see a twig shaped like a Y. Even if the chancellor or the executioner is waiting, I must stop and collect each abbreviated "Yes." I must add it to the others in the Ball jar. She taught me that cats re-

quire middle names, and it offends the angels if you wear taupe when orange exists. Most days can be improved by sporadic eruptions of an unidentifiable accent, e.g. “we make time for pudding. We dance while music playing. You trust Mamalula.” She goes by “Mamalula.” She got her cover blown long ago. She will not let me hide or erase.

No attorney will take my case, so I represent myself. I am not alone. My mother and my boss and the deli man and all the purple-sweatered women are here. Goofi who have repeatedly saved the world sit between Jimmy Buffett mourners and wrinkled children. There is a chancellor risking her job to be here.

I have a single plea. Someone more peculiar than me once described a noble woman: “She is clothed in strength and dignity, and she laughs without fear of the future.” I cannot claim to be clothed, much less strong. But we are not at liberty to separate dignity from laughter. The fossil record indicates the textiles used for this clothing were glow-in-the-dark. Not even the foremost Dave can dispute that a good accent disarms fear. I have hidden a lollipop in the judge’s desk.

Alison Hwang

is an avid creative writer from California. Her work has been recognized by The Rising Phoenix Review and Skipping Stones. She is also an artist who illustrated part of “Weston Finds Wonder,” a children’s book with the Clinton Foundation. When given the gift of time, Alison loves secretly dancing her heart out in her bathroom, trying to find the things she lost, and reviewing local restaurants

Death in Daylight

My feet crackle the leaves of all my dried up hopes

As I pass by Peet's

It's 6:57am

And my knuckles are bruised more than the leaves

I thought, last night, the wall was my enemy

Only it was me

My tomb of *loss, less, and never* still hasn't closed

I read once that the only time we suffer is when we think

I've lost that forever

I have less than what I deserve

and I will never have that

I inhale the casual and cruel fall air

For here, everything is dying

As my feet lure me back

Into another nightmare

Ailbhe Wheatley

is a poet and artist from the West of Ireland. She graduated with a B.A in English literature in 2019 and has recently completed an M.A. in Authorial Illustration. Her background in yoga teaching and meditation informs her current poetic practice.

Her work seeks to magnify the ordinary, everyday, mysterious - to discover the world afresh.

STRANGERS

I saw you before I saw you
met you before I knew you

were hiding somewhere
inside myself
and now I get to greet us.

CYCLING

Light fades to
dark makes its way back to
light falls to
dark
is back again.

Nature is a poem and I don't have the words.

DEEP REST

In deep rest
my wings are clipped
there is no flight

No mercy for the footfall
flat upon this earth.

Crushed by the weight of it,
the strength of it

a blade of grass grabs my
baby toe.

Alexandria Tannenbaum

is a poet and National Board-Certified educator working outside of Chicago, Illinois. In addition to teaching, she is pursuing a Master of Fine Arts in Poetry from Lindenwood University. Her poems are published in the magazines *Across the Margin*, *Amphora*, *Bluepepper*, *As It Ought To Be*, *Canyon Voices Lit Magazine*, *Cerasus*, and the book "So It Goes" by the Kurt Vonnegut Museum and Library. Four of her poems will be published in the next issue of *Stillpoint Literary Magazine*, *Stillpoint 55* and the next issue of *New Feathers Anthology*.

Winter's Cement

cold fingers, stiff and hesitant
reaching eagerly at the blank sky
no birds or sounds stay
no one counting our footsteps
or watching as they fill with drift

white so constant there is no blur or line or edge
no response when we yell out
no answer as night creeps up

the houses here have turned to rumors
and every door is a car backing up in the night
ditches behind the tree lined street
ditches where we thought there was sky

the sun is a sketch

small hole erased around dark edges
a finger pushing through wet sand
or the place where a student erased through the paper
traced the new opening again and again

until he forgot what the teacher said and what he
thought the answer was.

the snow is white, yes, but unclean.
glum of leftover. see how the fence holds on?
grief is a stray grocery cart keeping watch
as night returns like a drain.

hidden deep within the cavity of walls
pulsing like the throat of a toad
despite the state of the murky pond around it
despite the way the wind tries to trick us
into thinking we can always up and leave

printed paper airplane scruff

survey monkey moon
little skee-ball engine
that cold snapped wearable
painter's farming parachute
/ / / / ahhhhhhhhhh & so
glorified scum reared upon
soil drenched spit take glee
/ / / / diameter
 jerking
 schtick / | | | |
'whiny little cadaver!'
 , each shortage
 thrusting skeptical
 poppy pouch ,
release
the DRAGNET!!!!!!!!!!!!
 nearer
 chimp
 spraying earbuds
, a mackerel index of
 miserable replacement
 bug ancestor vacuums
 / / / / bOx
 cycles
 SOFTware
 glove
 acrobatic stupid fit
/ / / / hard
 restart
 peace BeCoMe another's
throbbing rattle.

Outpacing ham-fisted pigeon guttural embraces

Oatmeal the bath that paves monuments to fluids

great & unencumbered

by way of material genitalia tanking

detective fuzzy mittens groomed

as a series strokes unmatched filmic biproduct

poisoned like a hoagie

SUBMARINED in blue sprained

glories

gory in fashioned coveralls

leaking southern accented drawl

lacking peace in underwater sock drawer creeping

fist first lust crinkling Easter bunny cold front

snot nosed corral

hot FIRST ,gentle last

waving thermal JACKET

jerked scorned

clutching

JOY!!!!

Airs pinch armpit

glands swirling carnivorous kittens

gulped tongue red

green purple

busted in the tableau chest cavity

stumbled INtoOutof

let the curdle November

invalidate cutoff jean shorts

NAVY DON'T

EVER IMBIBE

a paint chip memory

wAtChInG a MiD aRrOw dAnCe

oVerBoArD flick , , , ,
 into the furnace
 --- beast w/o burden
& milked beyond eggs
---] theme /
 genre /
 playacting yak
profound as sTrAw , , , ,
[a thrill] / / / sMaLl
 er
 lAcK of
diminutive wheezing
 --- spirit of
a sMeLl impresses
thrilling / stealing
, , , , eyes prefix &
 plodding along vague
& lacking.

Danielle Smith

is a writer from the Southeastern United States. She graduated from the University of Georgia in 2019 with a degree in Communication Studies and Sociology. Smith turns to writing in order to express herself and has been writing since she was a young girl. She has only recently gained the courage to try and pursue writing in a more professional manner. She can be found on Instagram as [@portumpoetry](#).

The Two of Us

me and my sister, my sister and i, the two of us,
we went through the same sort of hurt and we
both were scarred over and over again until the
wounds that were given to us never stopped
bleeding.

the two of us, we grew up in the same house
and we were both raised between twelve hour
shifts and we grew up in the same room and
we were both raised to be seen and never
heard and we both grew up, right?

so i would be lying if i said that i never
looked at her with quiet contempt, wondering
why she was the only one bleeding enough to
stain everything and everyone around her with
the very same blood that i wore silently like it
was some sort of scarlet letter that
only i could see.

could she not just get ahold of herself?
could she not clamp her hands down around
those damn wounds, like i had, could she not
just learn how to stop her own bleeding, like
i had? could she not just stitch those
broken pieces back together again,
like i had?

how many times did my heart break
looking at her, watching as she bled
herself dry for people that were never
going to bandage all those wounds up
for her. how many times did i get so
angry, not for, at her for allowing the
blood to get so out of hand that everything
was drenched in memories of a childhood
neither of us really wanted to remember.

how many times did my heart break
looking at her?

but was i really looking at her?

why was i so angry - at the only other person who really understood what it felt like to get these wounds in the first place?

why was i so angry - at the fact that she did not choose to stitch herself up with dirty thread just so that the person holding the knife never knew just how much they had hurt her?

why was i so angry - at the way that she was never afraid to show her wounds to the people that she cared about, without fearing that they would pale at the sight of such disgustingly deep wounds?

why was i so angry - at my first hero, my first friend, my favorite person, my sister, the only one of the two of us that i actually love.

it took too long for me to realize that i was never once angry at her.

the times when we lashed out, with words as sharp as the knife that carved the love out of us when we were still too young to even really know the difference between hurting and growing up - i was never once angry with her.

while other little girls, got to grow up looking at the world with rose-tinted glasses, the two of us were stuck blinking through blood at realities much too harsh for kids that did not even know how to

be heard.

i was angry at the blood,
at the adults who tore into us
as if we were to blame for their
troubles, and at the knife for
being a knife, and i was angry
at the blood - all of the blood,
that my sister smeared into the
carpet and the walls until every
single thing was stained red and
shouted to everyone that she was
bleeding, all while i sat next to her
without a single drop of my blood
touching anything around me.

all while i sat next to her, asking
why she could not stop her own
bleeding - like i had stopped mine.

all while i sat next to her, so busy
looking at the mess she made with
the hurt neither of us ever asked for,
that i never stopped to look down at
my own wounds - just assuming that
i was not still hurting all because i did
not stain my cage with blood like my
sister had.

all while i sat next to her, not daring
to look down where my hands were
still clamped down over a wound that
was made over a decade ago.

all while i sat next to her, asking
why she could not stop her own
bleeding - like i had stopped mine.

all while i sat next to her, listening
to my sister ask me why i was so
angry, and wanting to know why
i was still bleeding.

Elise Glassman

(she, her, hers) is a neurodivergent living in New Orleans. Her stories and essays have appeared in The Colorado Review, Main Street Rag, The Portland Review, Per Contra, Spank the Carp, San Antonio Review and most recently, Aji Magazine. She's also an assistant fiction editor at Pithead Chapel. More at <https://sites.google.com/view/busysmartypants/home>.

Close But Not Too Close

How had they ended up in this strange little town?

Well, their friends had raved about it. A must-see, they insisted, with glorious mineral springs and an adorable brewery. She'd been doubtful. She and her partner were city people, they went to museums and shows, not on rural vacations, and certainly not the germey soup of a public Southwestern hot springs. But the friends, early Microsoft retirees, were persuasive. They traveled well, knew the best beaches in Costa Rica, whose Mediterranean yacht had an available cabin, which swanky supper club might seat two more. Saying no might put a strain on future socializing, mark them somehow as inferior friends, so they agreed: they'd make a quick stop, spend the night, post photos, keep it moving.

*

They arrived on a windy afternoon, too early to check into their Airbnb, so she turned the rental car down a two-lane street through the town, then took a dogleg to the right and parked along the banks of a river. "Look, it's the Rio Grande."

“The Rio Grande,” her partner echoed. “Wow.”

They got out into warm sun, the grass smelling of dry hay, the river water rippling along low vegetal banks. She felt a small thrill. It was a legendary river, she thought, at least in the black-and-white Westerns she’d watched as a kid with her dad; Hollywood fantasies of a time and place she knew now had never really existed, of virtuous, strong-jawed lawmen and hardy white women and freckle-faced kids learning life lessons.

*

Finally, check-in time. They gazed out at the Airbnb, an elderly stucco cottage with a sagging porch. “Jeez, maybe it’s norm core?” she grimaced, only half-joking.

“Maybe.” He lifted luggage and groceries from the trunk while she retrieved the keys. The rental car glittered like a spangle among old buttons. No one would need to see the California plates to know they didn’t belong.

Inside, the house smelled okay and passed the fingertip test. They walked through a bright yellow kitchen and past a narrow bathroom. He hefted her suitcase into the larger bedroom and dragged his down the hall to a smaller one. They

hadn't slept together much on this trip, due to snoring (his) and insomniac restlessness (hers). She missed him, missed his adjacent warmth. But the chainsaw rattle of his sinuses always drove her away.

*

Her stomach growled so she went to the kitchen to evaluate the snack situation and found him studying the house binder, with four single-space pages devoted to tub operations. "I guess we should try it?" She'd never soaked in a mineral tub before, and this was an expensive rental, the only Airbnb still available with a private tub. She wanted to get her money's worth.

"I guess so."

So they performed the complex series of steps, each showering, then donning bathing suits, then opening the mineral tub valve to rinse, warm, and fill the chunky concrete tub. "It's a homemade jobbie," she smirked, sinking into steaming water up to her chin.

"For sure homemade," he agreed.

Clouds had scudded in overhead, obscuring the weak winter sun. She tried to enjoy the delicious warmth, to forget about the sad little back yard, the cracked patio and shriveled plants. Then, frowning, she opened her eyes. “What is that sound?” It was a constant, breathy sigh, like the thrum of crickets. A sound she associated with Midwestern summers and her grandfather’s singed lawn.

“What is that sound?” He was looking around, too.

“It sounds like doves? Cooing?” She squinted, but all she saw was leafless branches.

“It does sound like doves.”

Then where the hell were they? And was she a terrible person, finding such an objectively poetic sound annoying? The sound felt oppressive. It felt like beady little eyes were observing them. Waiting for – well, what? It wasn’t like there were vultures up there circling.

The friends had raptured about leisurely tub soaks but they stayed in just long enough to braise their goose flesh, then dashed inside to shower again and shiver by the gas fireplace.

*

For dinner, he offered to make tostadas with frozen Hatch chiles they'd bought in Las Cruces. He put her to work defrosting them; she watched the frozen logs circle in the microwave, waiting for the tender moment between done and explosion. "Was it me or was the shower not very hot?"

"Not hot," he confirmed, turning on the stove burner. "Or maybe we were just really cold."

Opening the microwave, she poked at a rigid chile. "These are still frozen. Can we put 'em in the hot pan and I'll find another pan for tortillas?"

"Throw 'em in the hot pan," he said agreeably.

While the chiles warmed, she searched the cupboards for a second pan but found only mismatched plates, earthenware bowls and mugs and a cutting board. *It's fine*, she told herself. *We'll wash the pan. It's no big deal.* But the water went abruptly cold as she started to rinse. "Dang it."

Again they consulted the binder. "Please Be Gentle!!" the hot water section was titled. Reading over her shoulder, the dense pages of instructions and photos, he sighed, "Oh, dang."

*

“I want all the beer,” she said.

“Oh we’re getting all the beer.”

In the end they’d thrown the chile pan in the sink and headed out to the brewery. The friends had enthused about the beer, the fire pit, the camaraderie with locals. But the cavernous space reminded her of a VFW hall. A mustached bartender chatted quietly with a woman in a biker vest and leather cap. The wooden booths sat mostly empty, the tables speckled with dried beer glass rings.

The bartender leaned out of his conversation to ask, “What can I get ya?”

One IPA, one lager, she requested. “And pizza?” Hot pizza might salvage things.

“You might can order from Geppetto’s,” he said, explaining the brewery had no kitchen but restaurants in town delivered. Now the other customers were looking at them.

She felt anxious sweat prickle her armpits. They took their beer to the front patio, to enjoy the waning sun. “Should I order a pizza?” he asked and she snapped, “Order a pizza. Please.”

Sighing, he showed her his phone screen. Closed. A nearby Mexican restaurant, also closed.

She sipped her beer. It was crisp and quite hoppy. “Did I get your IPA?”

“Did you?” He handed her his glass.

She sipped his, tasted bitter hops, set it down so hard the beer slopped out. “Is everything in this town a pretend version of the real thing?”

“You don't need to fix everything,” he said, wiping up the spill, but they both knew he was wrong.

*

The next morning they soaked again in the tub. It was warmer today. Nearby a saw buzzed, but its whine did not drown out the ominous cooing. Dripping, she climbed out of the tub. “Where are those damn birds?” Nothing in the yard, the thicket of weeds with irrigation hoses coiled in a corner, seemed capable of sustaining life. Ignoring his feeble consolations (*where are they? it's so strange*) she went inside, poked alternate limbs into the needling cold shower, dressed, shoved

aside greasy dishes, and made coffee with Dunkin Donut grounds she'd discovered last night in the vain search for a pan.

Pouring fragrant coffee into two mugs, she yelled out the back door, "There's coffee. I'm going for a walk."

He was already toweling off. "I'm coming," he yelled, even though she stood mere feet away.

At the curb, they paused to inspect the rental car. It had survived the night with no visible dents or dings. "You hungry? There might be granola bars in the glove compartment." Dinner last night had been gas station fare: pistachio brittle, Miller Lite, Cool Ranch Doritos with microwaved chiles.

"Are you hungry?" he countered.

She shrugged. "I'll eat in Albuquerque."

So they walked down the main road, passing closed cafes and shuttered art studios and an unshaven guy in a gravel lot, inflating a bicycle tire with a hand pump. At the park by the Rio Grande, her partner clambered around on the rocks while she sipped coffee and took pictures with her phone.

“Whoa. The sky is amazing.” Her phone’s filter converted the river and the rocky hills and the cloud-streaked sky into a stark, gorgeous landscape.

“Livin’ the dream, baby!” The unshaven guy flew by on his bicycle.

“Livin’ the dream!” her partner screamed back, flashing two thumbs up.

They watched the cyclist continue, going the wrong way on the road out of town. “That seems like a metaphor,” she said.

Laughing, he returned to the sidewalk and grabbed his mug. “The whole place is a metaphor.”

It was almost checkout time so they started the walk back on a side street, the sidewalk petering out onto parking spots, each occupied by a shiny car with out-of-state plates.

“I guess we’re not the only tourists in town,” she mused. The cars sat outside a gray, ranch-style building. A lacquered sign, set into a bed of smooth rocks, read, Rio Grande Hot Springs Hotel. Two people in Lycra and fresh sneakers emerged, laughing and sipping from Starbucks cups. *Amazing*,

one said, and the other echoed, *Amazing* and they climbed into a gleaming SUV.

As it eased away, a flier rustled in the dry gutter. She picked it up. *Deluxe rooms! Private mineral springs tubs! Four-star dining! Ask about off season rates.* “I bet they have hot water.” She said it before he could, daring him to question that for the same money or less they could have had hot water and a private tub and beer that tasted of malt and sunshine. Had the friends stayed here? How had she missed it? What was she going to tell them?

He’d continued his leisurely saunter, already half a block ahead of her. She hurried to catch up and then, hearing his cheerful hum, speed-walked past him, angry with him for not being angry, for not hating the sad house, the ineffectual water heater, the ill-furnished kitchen, the binder novella of detail and despair, the tub with its skein of pink mold.

Then he was running past her, coffee spilling from his mug, puffs of dust kicking up from his sneakered feet. By the time she caught up he was at the house, tub valve open, stripping off his shirt.

“You go ahead,” she said, when he looked at her, chest heaving. “I’m going to figure out how to wash dishes.” The binder had a whole list of check-out tasks. Could she heat tap water on the stove? Run water through the coffee maker?

“We could wash ‘em here.” Grimacing, he pointed at the tub, at the steaming, ankle-deep water.

It wasn’t the worst idea.

*

Later, sitting on a sunny patio with a small-batch mezcal, she agonized over her Airbnb review. Almost nothing had worked. And yet they’d had an okay time. She’d never forget the weird brewery and dinner of chips and The Champagne of Beers. In the end she posted four-point-five stars and sent the host a private note about the water heater. He immediately messaged back, mentioning the binder, the need to care for the old house, his proximity(?). *I was next door all day. I’d have come right over.*

She hadn’t known he was so close. But wasn’t the whole point to not be close, to be on their own, to have space? What was he even doing next door? Had he heard them cursing,

yelling, beating the branches trying to find the source of the god-damned cooing? The hotel would have been the sensible choice. The choice their friends had likely made, their car snuggled up to its shiny siblings, dinner on matching china, pleasant soaks in a varnished wood tub, no invisible, sinister doves. It was a version of their lives, themselves, that she could not quite imagine.

Elise Ball

is an artist and writer residing in Southern Appalachia, though she hails from the San Francisco Bay Area. She is the current Poetry Editor of Qu magazine, and her work was recently featured in TulipTree Review and Arc Poetry.

Sea Water

At the beginning, we floated. We ate leftover pizza on the shore, drawing each other's legs and arms against white paper. Never getting each other's chins right. Now you study the night sky above the farm like it's the ocean, and you, a beached creature. I can rarely stay up late enough to talk about it. I thought I'd keep you in my kitchen sink, shout things to you down the hole of it while making us dinner, finally fix your impressive dedication to loneliness. This morning we are tucked into each other, small crabs sharing a shell we've grown out of, and clutching our pasts to our chests respectively. Tiny bottles of brown sea water sloshing and leaking at the brim.

Snack

What I gave you
smells like warm
bread. You'll need to press
your nose into
it. I kneaded
it gently, folded it
over. You'll need
to bend your arms
around it. I served it
on a hard board
with a sharp
knife. You'll need to slice
it open. I slid to you sweet
jams and warm
butter. You'll need
to swallow
every part.

The Wasp

Some nights have an edge to them,
like this one, and when I run my eyes
down its spiny lizard back,
I might mistake the needles
as my own points of danger.
But had I been caught up in right-doing
all day, I might've been worried about laundry
piling high, forgotten to lounge
in late morning meandering, and perhaps
would've thought the wasp swiping
mealworms from the birdfeeder
a thief, instead of a creature not unlike
myself, heart tick-tocking away
and willing to carry a burden
as large as its life

DS Maolalai

has been described by one editor as "a cosmopolitan poet" and another as "prolific, bordering on incontinent". His work has been nominated twelve times for Best of the Net, ten for the Pushcart and once for the Forward Prize, and has been released in three collections; "Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden" (Encircle Press, 2016), "Sad Havoc Among the Birds" (Turas Press, 2019) and "Noble Rot" (Turas Press, 2022)

A summer-leafed tree

through ripples on the river
the reflections fan streetlights
from out of a point to a blossom.
a shine dulls and opens: a seed
to the shape of a summer-
leafed tree. and above, where it's winter,
the real branches are a spider-
legged shadow thrown back to illuminated
walls. a man in a black coat
walks a black dog and ahead
a police checkpoint ties knots
in the traffic. it backs up the quays;
people pause in their journey
and watch the blue lights
as they flow over asphalt, plated
on monday's unevaporated rainwater,
alternating black and soft blue.

The hotel.

we try showering –
the pressure
is fantastic! jets
to take gravy
from plates in the back
of a restaurant. her breasts
brush my belly
while we share falling
water – warming my chest
and running over hers.
and the steam. and we share
her soap also, but not
her shampoo –
what she brought
is quite expensive
special order
from Malaysia. I rinse
with my fingers
and kiss her.
wring out my dark
oily hair.

We'd planned a holiday.

the dog's depressed:
I'm working. my wife is out
for brunch. she has the week –
we'd planned a holiday.
I couldn't get away.

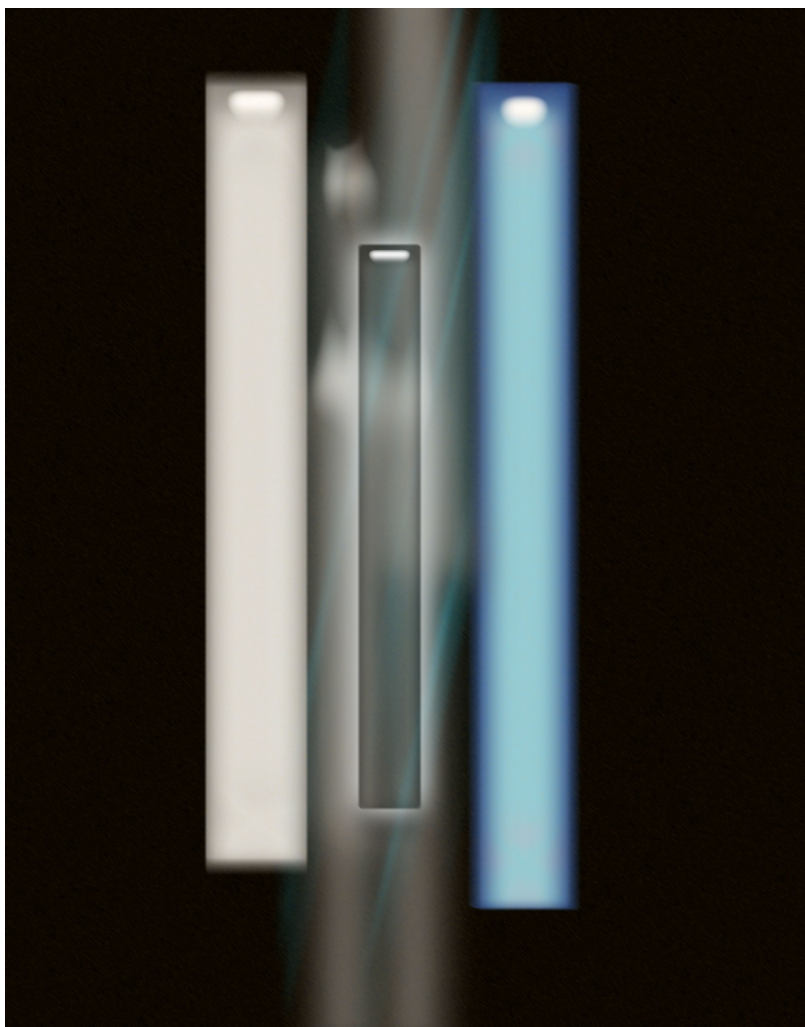
now she eats french
toast with honey outside,
drinks cheap cava
with orange juice. I smoke
a lunchtime cigarette
and microwave
cold noodles. leftovers;
delicious as last night

(lying on the couch
with plates about like mushrooms
as she planned her day
tomorrow) the dog
perks up, but I don't share
my tupperware. fill a cup
of coffee. take her to
the garden. drink
my cup of coffee.
admire the flowers and bees.

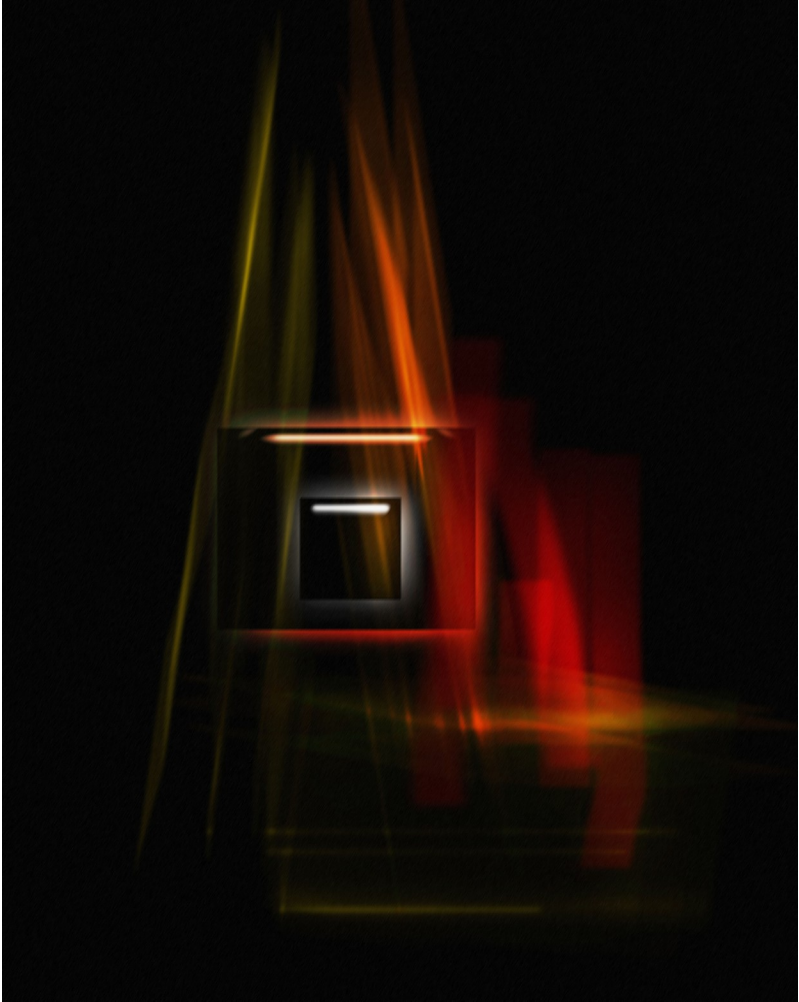
Joe Lugara

took up painting and photography as a boy after his father discarded them as hobbies. His works depict odd forms and objects, inexplicable phenomena, and fantastic dreamscapes, taking as their basis horror and science fiction films produced from the 1930s through the late 1960s.

Mr. Lugara's work has appeared in more than 20 publications and numerous exhibitions in the New York Metropolitan Area. His watercolor paintings were featured in the winter 2023 issue of *The Harvard Advocate* and his photos in the summer '23 *Denver Quarterly*. His first photography book, *The Indicators: 127 Sci-Fi Scenes*, is available through Barnes and Noble.



v769



v307



v679

Bart Edelman

's poetry collections include *Crossing the Hackensack* (Prometheus Press), *Under Damaris' Dress* (Lightning Publications), *The Alphabet of Love* (Ren Hen Press), *The Gentle Man* (Ren Hen Press), *The Last Mojito* (Ren Hen Press), *The Geographer's Wife* (Ren Hen Press), *Whistling to Trick the Wind* (Meadowlark Press), and *This Body Is Never at Rest: New and Selected Poems 1993 – 2023* (Meadowlark Press). He has taught at Glendale College, where he edited *Eclipse*, a literary journal, and, most recently, in the MFA program at Antioch University, Los Angeles. His work has been widely anthologized in textbooks published by City Lights Books, Etruscan Press, Fountainhead Press, Harcourt Brace, Longman, McGraw-Hill, Prentice Hall, Simon & Schuster, Thomson/Heinle, the University of Iowa Press, Wadsworth, and others. He lives in Pasadena, California.

Gone Too Long

Gone too long.
Abandoned my post for what?
A moment of mirth?
The promise of pie?
A shekel of spring?
It all makes me wince,
Fathom the unthinkable,
Light doubt beneath me,
As if I need question,
Whether my candle has a wick.
Yet what am I to do?
Grab life by the horns
I was born without?
Make a name for myself,
When I've never been addressed
In public or private space?
Yes, I guess I'm anywhere,
But nowhere to be found.
Bound this way and that.
Gone far too long,
For my own darn good.

Man of Woe

Thought it was over,
Yet not by a long shot.
The dread trailed me—
This way and that—
Until little of me remained.
My own mother admitted
She couldn't see my shadow.
At first, I was embarrassed.
Who would cater this fate,
Dispensing it as legacy?
However, I had no other choice.
There was really nothing else
For me to own, outright;
Thus, I embraced it,
Rocking the vexing cradle—
Now, a man of woe.

And, yes, I wear it so well,
It's become my occupation.
I'm employable for all occasions—
A stand-in at a moment's notice,
For those who wish to shelve grief,
By the hour, day, week, month,
Or, in extreme cases, years.
Even my sister hired me last winter,
Claimed she'd seen our father's ghost,
Wanted nothing more to do with it,
Begged me to eliminate the matter—
One of my specialties, I must say.
Here's my number: 975-312-4680.
Call me if you need me...
But I don't come cheap.

Welcome to the Funhouse

Welcome to the funhouse.
We've been expecting you,
And the familiar figure
In the concave mirror.
We suggest you arrive early,
Flowers in hand, wine in tow,
And then we'll be prepared
To give it a good go;
At least at first, of course.
From there, who knows where
The evening shall take us.
Hopefully, you can survive.
If not, please note
We have an obituary written,
Should the floor beneath you
Open at the prescribed moment,
And the walls collapse,
Crushing your spirit in half.
But fear, fear, fear not.
We haven't lost a soul this week.

A CALL TO ACTION:

Write the best poetry and give it freely

Some poets pull from the minutiae of daily life. Other poets pull from their guts, seeking a pairing in the outside world – trying for a conduit between microbiome and biome, between enteric mind and visible matter.

The truth is there's plenty of bad poetry passed as good poetry. Bad poetry is all or mostly in the conscious, while good poetry is rooted in the subconscious. Good poetry is plentiful but it can also frustrate when it allows the subconscious to rise only for the conscious to tamp it back down with the fury of a scholar who must translate fecundity into a solo language – table for one.

Then there's the poetry neither good nor bad in which the subconscious mind spins and reigns with libertine license – a grin turned sideways and used in place of the letter C.

The best poetry, however, fuses the conscious and subconscious in a balanced flow of geometry and spindrift from flexed muscle. It is the subconscious mind allowed to rise, and it is the conscious mind allowed to truly write what can rightly be called poetry.

But even the best poetry is paltry when it's the work of isolationists and exhibitionists. As indigenous people have long pointed out: How can you truly own and sell the air, the wind, and the water? And how can you truly own and sell the land that we're made of and that we return to when we die? So on the same thought, how can anyone truly own the poetry you inhale, and how can you truly own the poetry you exhale?

Why limit poetry to formal readings and to open mics and to journals and presses offering their authoritative stamp on your name? Why write poetry to create and comb the fine hairs of industry, even if that industry is just the exchange of poems for prestige and for the glory of a bio boasting a listicle of publications justifying your name?

Why not write the best poetry? Why not let poetry be the breath it has never ceased to be without inflated interference choking it away? Why not put poetry in the correspondence between us – a warm handshake in thought and an embrace in words? Why not give a glimpse of your gut just as I've given you a glimpse of mine?

Yes, why not read below? And why not respond with pride dropped to the sewer and with intellectual property returned to the life from which you took it?

Indeed, why not let go?

—

THE OPENING

Do me a favor and remember: in what room were you born? In a hospital room? In a living room? In a forest unhindered?

Now put yourself there. Tell me what you see. Tell me what you feel – tell me everything.

–

Now put yourself in that same room and hold yourself in suspense.

Let yourself fall through the floor and keep yourself falling, floor by floor – keep falling, keep falling, even if you must break through the floor of the earth.

Keep falling...

Now tell me what you see. Tell me what you feel – without hesitation and without doubt, please, tell me everything.

Darkness of the Day

I woke to the darkness of the day, pulled on the crumpled jeans next to the bed - stiff with dried sweat and grass stains - coughed, spit, shat, brushed my teeth, and sat on the concrete front stoop with a cigarette to wait for Char's rumbling pickup truck to pull around the corner and pick me up for work.

There was dew on the grass and I could hear the birds a-calling.

But when he parked outside my house, Char's truck wasn't hauling the trailer filled with mowers and rakes and weed whackers. And instead of honking and leaving the engine running while he waited, Char turned off the truck and climbed out.

He met me halfway across the front yard, two coffees stacked on one another in his left hand, a grease stained brown paper bag in his right.

"Take one a these," he said, reaching out the coffees. I took one and peeled back the plastic lid, sucked in a scalding sip.

“So what’s up?” I asked. Char was normally a cool cat, laid back and ready to laugh, but he looked uneasy standing there in my front yard.

“I got a stop I gotta make. Can’t use the truck. Mind drivin?”

I took another sip of the coffee, watched him shift his weight back and forth.

“All right,” I said. “Gimme a minute.”

I skipped back up the stoop and into the house, grabbed a trash bag and went back outside. Char followed me to my car.

“Piece of shit’s a fucking mess,” I said.

He stood behind me anxiously while I shoved fast food wrappers and empty energy drink cans into the trash bag.

I tossed the bag into the can by the garage and turned back to my car, watched Char stare at it with this funny look, like he was seeing something else, something not there in front of his eyes.

“Okay?” I asked, opening the driver’s door. He nodded, climbed in uncertainly.

The clunker started on the first try.

“Where to?”

“I need to see about something,” he said. “Turn left up at the end of the block.”

Other than his directions – left, right, keep going – we drove in silence. It took until we turned into a suburban neighborhood on the other side of town that I realized where we were headed. I eyed him suspiciously, but he kept his attention on the road, kept on giving the directions that I no longer needed.

“Pull over here,” he said, motioning to the curb a little ways down the street from his house.

I parked and killed the engine.

“What are we doing?” I asked.

He kept quiet for a moment, his eyes fixed on his house.

I stared at him until he said, “That car.” He nodded at the red Buick in the driveway. “I want to know whose car that is.”

I understood.

“You’re not gonna, like, do anything, are you?” I asked.

“Like what?”

“Anything rash.”

“Like kick the door down and drag him out? Curb stomp the fuck?”

“Yeah.”

He seemed to think about that, then sighed and settled back into the seat. “No,” he said. “I just need to know.”

“Okay.”

“Here.” He tossed the brown bag onto my lap. I opened it and took out a breakfast sandwich, thanked him and ate, keeping an eye on the motionless house until I finished, then balled up the wrapper and brought a pack of cigarettes from my pocket.

“Can I get one of those?” Char asked.

I put a cigarette into his waiting fingers and watched him light it, suck hard, and blow a stream of smoke from his lungs with an unrestrained grunt of satisfaction.

“Haven’t had one of these in years,” he said.

“How long?”

“Seven, eight years.”

“Long time.”

“Quit for Jess,” he said, nodding at his house.

“Awful good of you.”

“Yeah,” he said, then after a pause – “not really. When we met I told her I didn’t smoke at all. Her dad died when she was young. Throat cancer. Wasn’t pretty, I guess. Left a lasting impression.”

“Still...”

“Snuck em for a while. She’d fucking kill me if she knew.”

“Hmm.”

“Your girl care that you smoke?”

“Nah,” I said. “She smokes more than me. Probably leave me if I quit.”

I smiled, he didn’t.

Neither of us spoke until he took the last drag from his cigarette and dropped the butt into his coffee cup.

“Fuck,” he said. “This is fucked.”

“It’s all right.”

“It’s fucked.”

“Maybe its gonna be okay,” I said, shrugging.

He scoffed, said, “Things been off for a while.”

“In general?”

“Yeah, but no. I been trying to think about that - when things started getting weird. Think it has something to do with this coconut thing.”

“Coconut?”

“Yeah, hate that shit. Mostly the texture, but I don’t like the taste much either.”

“I’m with you,” I said. “Fuck coconut.”

“Fuck coconut.”

“Fuck it.”

“Its stupid,” he said, looking away from his house, shaking his head.

“What is?”

“All this shit.”

“What about the coconut though?” I said.

“I hate coconut. Hate it so bad that early on in our relationship, I told Jess that I was allergic to it. I meant it as some kind of joke, but she took it to heart, always made sure we had a coconut free house.

“Then years later I let it slip that I wasn’t actually allergic, that I just hated coconut so much that I might as well be allergic. Can I get another one of those cigs?”

I took one out for myself and handed him the pack.

“I don’t get it,” I said. “What’s the big deal?”

“The big deal is that she loved coconut all along. It was her dad’s favorite. Mounds bars, coconut crème pie. Coconut desserts were a comfort thing for her. Nostalgic shit. And she gave it up for me.”

“She never told you?”

“No. Said she didn’t want me feeling bad about something I had no control over. That she told herself I was more important to her than coconut. She was real mad. Said she went above and beyond to keep me from accidentally eating it. She said she spent her life avoiding something she loved for my lies.”

“Fuck,” I said. “Did she start eating it again after?”

“Yeah, but she didn’t like it anymore. Said instead of reminding her of her dad, it reminded her of me. Said it tasted like disappointment.”

“Fuck,” I said again.

“Yep. Good thing she never found out about these.”

He held up his cigarette, a half inch of ash snaking from the filter.

“Right.”

“If you’re gonna lie,” he said after a moment, “don’t stop lying. Nothing will fuck you as hard as your own conscience.”

Just then Char’s front door opened and a tall guy in a dapper suit stepped out.

“Fuck,” Char said. “Go go go.”

I panicked along with him, turned the key. The car chugged but the ignition didn’t take.

“Fuck fuck fuck,” Char repeated, over and over.

I tried the key again. The engine churned but didn’t turn over. The man on Char’s stoop craned his head and looked at us, squinting.

“Get the fuck out of here,” Char growled.

His wife poked her head out of the front door.

The engine caught on the next try.

Char scrunched down low as we drove past, but I got a good look at his wife, wearing a robe that she held closed with her crossed arms. She got a good look at me too. Direct eye contact.

“Did she see us?” Char asked when we turned the corner. He straightened in his seat, strained his neck to look back at the empty road.

I thought of how she looked, how her expression changed the split second she recognized me – from curiosity, to contempt, and finally to fury.

“I don’t know, Char,” I said. “You might be good.”

“You think so?”

His eyes were wet – wide and pleading.

All I could do was shrug.

“Fuck,” he said. “Fuck.”

Ann Howells

edited Illya's Honey for eighteen years. Her most recent books are *So Long As We Speak Their Names* (Kelsay Books, 2019) and *Painting the Pinwheel Sky* (Assure Press, 2020). The latter is a series of persona poems primarily in the voice of Van Gogh.

Madonna of Sixth Street

If it explodes, it's chemistry.
If it flies, it's physics. If it squirms, biology:
earthworm pinned at both ends,
ten pumping hearts and not much else.

*In the clearing an apple tree:
small green apples sour as vinegar,
as knowledge.*

Think frogs, organs pinned, strung, labeled:
spinal cord, liver, lungs.
They sing; forests fill with their song.
Jellied masses of black dot progeny,
all heads and tails,
like flipping nickels behind the gym.

*I've tumbled down the rabbit hole,
thrashed, moaned;
if no one heard – did I make a sound?*

Christmas break -- street lights wear haloes
like seraphim. Like archangels.
And imagine, every snowflake unique!
I still half-believe in Santa,
but no longer in that damn cupid.

What Sylvia Lost

Sylvia loses her sunglasses, again. Sun scalds Sylvia 's eyes.

Sylvia loses her diary, mother picked the little tin lock,
spread blue leatherette covers, read every word.

Sylvia loses her written history.

Sylvia loses Grandmother's chocolate set, one broken cup at a
time.

Sylvia loses her taste for chocolate.

Sylvia loses her favorite socks.

Sylvia loses her virginity.

Sylvia loses Fourteenth Street, but does not lose the memory.

Sylvia loses her umbrella, finds she is wash and wear.

Sylvia loses a bit of ribbon from the night she was raped –
reminder not remembrance.

Sylvia loses her name.

Sylvia loses a roll of 1943 zinc pennies.

Sylvia loses her baby in clots of blood.

Sylvia loses her place in the book.

Sylvia loses her wedding ring, finds it, loses it, finds it, loses it.

Sylvia loses seven homes in five states.

Sylvia loses Grandfather's mantle clock to her son.

Sylvia loses her son.

Sylvia loses her dog, her dog, her dog.

Sylvia loses distance. What happened to Ireland, Iceland,
the Greek islands?

Sylvia loses her dictionary, her thesaurus, her words.

Sylvia loses her last chance.

Once Is a Long Time Ago

Once I worked for Pony Express – not as a rider.

Once I wore an electric blue string bikini.

Once I played musical chairs in a fast-moving car.

Once I did not ask to see the dessert menu first.

Once I stripped and refinished an upright piano.

Once I smuggled candy to a prisoner in county jail.

Once I hung windchimes in the backseat of my car. |

Once I stabbed myself in the face with scissors.

Once, no twice, I found a snake in my living room.

Once I ate strawberry ice cream from the dog's dish.

One of these statements is a bald-faced lie.

Anna Stiger

Writer & single mom in L.A. who lives with Lyra,
Gabriella, Zeus, & Zoey.

THE WIND IS DRUNK ON MOONSHINE

Knocking down fences, grabbing the eucalyptus' roots
and punching streetlamps out with its fists
Where'd the sexy Santa Anas go? I thought
she was wild with that cough and glitter

The dainty wind-chimes are afraid. This Zephy ain't here to
flirt
caressing inside their slender silver tunnels till they shudder
No, it's here to make the Pacific roar

The wind tonight is a magician,
though no bright white pelt appears from that black hat--
branches of the banana trees stop banging on the window
and turn into rooftop thieves,
while the incessant rattle of the metal screen door assures us
the rapist is almost inside.

These are forces which change heroes into cowards.
Even my daughter is afraid,
holding Tahitian Vanilla hair & body mist, her
far more feminine and fragrant form of mace.

“Don't be scared,” I say, slipping into riptides
of midnight strong enough to lift hundreds, even thousands
of strong-muscled horses straight up to the sky

My lover pulls out a gun
he shoots but does not kill the wind,
nor the bruised blue shadows it has convinced to sin.

Above our heads the stars suffer their own unbearable bright-
ness,
the wind has undressed them,
leaving each helplessly beautiful as a girl
whose first black slip was stolen, and oh
the horses' thundering hooves are in my hair,
climbing higher and higher, higher than hope as they
scream their way to god, so terribly frightened
in wind.

Ariana Wolf

is a creative leader, known for her evocative poetry, captivating photography, and insightful essays that delve into the complexities of the human experience.

With a poet's soul and a delight in unexpected details, Ariana explores the intricate landscapes of emotion, identity, and our connection to the natural world in her work. Through her Substack account, Kitchen Table Pages, she invites readers into her world, where she shares her musings, reflections, and creative inspirations.

When she's not immersed in her creative pursuits, she can be found at her home in Oakland Ca, nestled in with her two children and beloved dog, Marigold.

No one asks the fern to do a better job fern-ing

Particularly the fern themselves

Or the coyote to stop being such a coyote

It is expected for them to hunt, run, howl with the pack

Have we forgotten we are of this earth?

Has our enlarged prefrontal cortex led us to forget what we're made of?

Sink into the body

Listen to the trees

We know how to do this

Human-ing

We never left the wild lands

These sprawling parking lots sprouted around us

Skyscrapers and strip malls trying to feed us lies

That we aren't of this earth

Enmeshed in the ecosystem

We ebb, and howl, and weep

Snot and shit

Bleed and cry and fuck

No venti skinny half-caf frappa anything

No same-day delivery on that thing you had to have

No scrolling through perceptions of other people's lives, fears, musings

Will change that we were all born bloody and screaming

No matter what we do

or how we fight it

we all die

Like the marsh that backs up to Costco,

where just around the back,

a cacophony of birds,

sitting on powerlines and cattails

remind us of our true song

The bullfrog keeping the beat

The Canada geese, taking up the horn section

No other animal chooses to be anything

other than who they are

So why do we try

So hard

Instead of resting

In the truth of what we're made

Truth cacophony

how do we harness the poetry of the wind?

or capture the color of the sky at golden hour?

where does the sound of my breath live in your
body?

language has not caught up

stumbling with these 26 letters every time

but I will soak day after day in this puzzle

this is my trending content

cracked open dreaming

where the wilds meet and the muse runs free

remember that squirrels plant 1000s of trees
every year

forgotten nuts turned into forests

nothing lost

we are here to wonder

to awe

this cerebral cortex of ours butting against
it's limitations

our universe pulses in one rhythm

and sloths have whole ecosystems living in
their fur

who needs a made-up god when this is true?

taste a perfectly ripe peach

let the juice run down your chin

listen to a baby's first laugh

fall in love

bathe in this magic

humaning best we know how

trending content



01-1



02-1



03-1

E.P. Lande

was born in Montreal, but has lived most of his life in the south of France and Vermont, where he now lives with his partner, writing and caring for more than 100 animals, many of which are rescues. Previously, he taught at l'Université d'Ottawa where he served as Vice-Dean of his faculty, and he has owned and managed country inns and free-standing restaurants. Since submitting less than two years ago, 37 of his stories have been accepted by publications in countries on five continents.

Fuck Electronics

I've decided. Electronics suck. After a heated argument with my boyfriend, I felt really down and wanted to make amends. Rather than call him and possibly have him hang up on me—or worse, not answer—I thought I'd send him a tender love note, so I wrote him an email:

Dearest I didn't really mean that, but I thought it would get him, you know, in his groin and make him stand up.

Dearest, I didn't mean what I told you Which the computer interpreted, without asking me first: I meant every fuckin' word of what I said.

You know you mean more to me than my cashmere sweater with the seed pearls But the fuckin' computer wrote: You're an asshole and I meant every shitty thing I called you.

You're the love of my life The email came out as: You're the last thing I want in my life.

Every time I think of you, I get goose bumps all over And what do you think the computer wrote? The thought of you makes my flesh crawl all over.

I can't live another day without you The bloody computer told him: Get the fuck out of my life and find another vagina.

Will you forgive me? I can't believe what that fuckin' computer wrote on my behalf: If you had half a brain, it would be lonely.

I'd do anything you want, dearest heart And the computer told him: If I had half a brain, it would tell me to grab you by the balls and castrate you.

When will I see you again? Can you believe? The computer wrote: Get lost, loser.

I'm waiting, waiting, waiting This really got me: I'm fucking your best friend, so suck it up.

Passionately yours forever This is when I decided to put my computer in the trash. It reinvented my words as: *Piss off and suck your brother's dick.*

When my boyfriend received my email, he wrote back, "Fuck off."

I decided. In future I'll write letters and use the post office.

Erin Jamieson

(she/her) holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Miami University. Her writing has been published in over eighty literary magazines, including two Pushcart Prize nominations. Her poetry chapbook, *Fairytales*, was published by Bottlecap Press and her most recent chapbook, *Remnants*, came out in 2024. Her debut novel (*Sky of Ashes, Land of Dreams*) came out November 2023.

Units

We live in glass units
our curtains drawn but
steam escapes windows
from neglected hot pots
as neighbors below us
gossip about the couple
who once had picnics
on snow-kissed lawns
now live in shadows
of their own making:
flitting from rooms
as if in search
of themselves

Delicate Balance

we dine on cracked countertops
you, a bowl of congealed ramen
me, a cold grilled cheese sandwich
both of us eating mechanically
side by side but not touching
I am close enough to count
the freckles on your arm
you are close enough to
smell my coconut shampoo

we dine on wobbly stools
and any movement
we'll lose this
delicate balance

William Waters

is an associate professor, in the Department of English at the University of Houston Downtown. Along with Sonja Foss, he is coauthor of *Destination Dissertation: A Traveler's Guide to a Done Dissertation*.

The Human Hurt

The Human hurt
Of wanting

What isn't

To be
What is

Beats
The heart

Up...

...Down
Up...

The Thunder

The thunder
Is far enough away
To be comforting;
The rain relaxing.

You tried to explain
Yourself to me;
I tried to listen.

We both ended up mad.

—finishing our drinks
In silence.

I wondering
If you will

Call me tomorrow,
Or if I will call you first.

It's unclear
If this pain

Is healing
Or hurting

The World Inhales

The world inhales:

Dreams begin;

Nightmares end.

The world exhales:

Dreams end;

Nightmares begin.

Nothing changes.

Screams become laughter;

Laughter turns into screams.

The winds

And rains

Can't move the dust

In our eyes.

Țigancă

Rejoyce in 2024

Let my country die for me

Postimpressionist Bohemian portraiture
from urban peripheries of Academism
predating chromatic experiments
of creation of floral symphonies

The Roma looks you straight
into the eyes elevating the chin
to look down instead of up
matching your said prejudices

From the very start as to deny
any truth to its Academism

Embellishment is simple as
a red flower to right ear
while long black hairs
rest on left shoulder

As to tell difference between
left and right is as biased
as confusing sunset with sunrise
morning and evening

While painting may have
been conceived in twilight
between dawn and dusk
a smile emancipates

As youthful as the roaring twenties
growing up to thirties
as serious as forties
face as serene as youngster's

It's telling you life
from tomb to womb
in chiaroscuro of
black and foreground
and the scattering red
of buttons to shirt

Explain life's worth living

from fertility to frivolity
as deep these eyes
as high our chin
as red those lips
as black your brows
as rouge pair of cheeks
as flowerish those ears
and hairs--

*I love flowers, I'd love
to have the whole place
swimming in roses*

Face facing fate
Fate fading faith

Love loves to love love

Loves love to love loves.

*Xanadu (Ofstokerfame) 4 Braşov (December 2023)
(Thanks to Ştefan Luchian 'O ũgancă' ca 1900 Braşov Art Museum
Let's Unmesh Life and Ulysses 1922--
Baxtalo Nevo Bersh!)*

TRANSYLVANIAN VERSES (Dec 2023)

BRAȘOV POETRY (II)

'The heaven is my father and My mother is the sea.'

Mihai Eminescu (*Luceafărul* 1883)

BRAȘOV ART MUSEUM/Muzeul De Artă Brașov

<http://www.muzeulartbv.ro/en/home/>

Blue Night

Anachronism

Breath #3

Woman in Era Costume

(i)

Blue Night

Anachronism

The night is as blue as your sleeping bag
left on a bench in an Arcadian garden
classical baroque but revived for this paint
to survive among myriad of flowers and greens.

Xanadu (Ofstokerfame) 4 Braşov (December 2023)
(Thanks to Sabina Elena Dragomir 'Blue Night' 2020
Horizon Free in Braşov Art Museum)

(iv)

Breath #3

Acrylic shines on bright
in green falling down
like a cascade
from a flowerless glass vase
as transparent the glass
as dark the background

Green emerging from
like fluoride burning out

Fluorescence
reminiscence.

*Xanadu (Ofstokerfame) 4 Braşov (December 2023)
(Thanks to Sabina Elena Dragomir 'Breath #3' 2020
Horizon Free in Braşov Art Museum)*

(v)

Woman in Era Costume

Hidden from viewer's view
she looks down like her hairs
fall down in multi-braid tail
and her shoulders blossom up

To vegetational draperies
around flowered collar
focussing cross-centered necklace
adding gravity to baroque
essential to skin care and vestiture.

Xanadu (Ofstokerfame) 4 Braşov (December 2023)

(Thanks to Carol Storck 1854-1926 'Woman in Era Costume II'
and Braşov Art Museum)

