



Last Leaves

Issue 2 | Spring 2021

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Last Leaves: Issue 2

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Cover design by Kiera Baron

Note from the Editors

This issue was heartbreaking, to say the least. We knew the theme RAW would garner all kinds of submissions, from emotions to food to the nitty gritty parts of life. We want to thank everyone who submitted for opening their hearts and souls to us. Writing work under a theme like this can be extremely vulnerable, bringing up some of the worst and best points in our lives. As we read through each piece we received, we felt we grew a little bit closer to all of you. Working on this issue has been such an honor, and we're so excited for what's yet to come.

~Last Leaves Editors

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



Content Warning

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

Please read at your own discretion.

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

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RAW
Andrew Feng

A Madness

Ann E. Michael

This is how it starts, while
weeding out lemon-sorrel and crabgrass,
pulling up thistle,
inadvertently uncovering
bones. Disarranged:
the fragile state in which
Mother left,
her body still wrapped around a bottle
at the kitchen table.
Now, she is the bones
of a baby rabbit
half-buried beneath geranium,
she is fallen seed,
sleeplessness, a dry leaf.
I push my finger through
richly organic soil,
think of all that dies
enhancing tilth, nutrient—
I nudge the empty rib cage,
small shell of remembered running,
the endless need to flee.
Mother could not escape, either.

burnt bush

c. a. mackenzie

your chest was pierced in heaped ash / where ribbed flakes of burnt
metal wreath into dark indigo frills / as if scrapping brightly-painted cars
meshed / some rare species of wild bramble / my dark-stained mouth
closed around your breast / & smells of zinc / rusted pipes / stuck on
our skins like children bathed in well-water / black blood striped down
from three thorns lodged in your flesh / like chemically glossed pieces
of raven beak / claw / you prayed dear god i will not feel hurt / i do
not feel hurt / as a thin film of copper burned over our blue irises /
& crowned daytime with a flush of brightness / skulls seated firm
on the atlas / axis / stacked under a cosmos that shines / blind / like a
newly-minted coin / you rubbed warmth into these cold hands smeared
orange plasma / breathe with me / you said / breathe in deeply / this air
rich with tar / hot berries.

The Door is Open

Steve Bowman

I see ghosts everywhere
 Little lights
 Little flickers
closing in
because the one I need
reconciliation with won't
forgive me
no matter how sorry
I am

The years ahead are a giant
skeletal grin, and the years
behind are the esophagus
I'm swallowed down
devoured by guilt
that can't be forgotten
until it's forgiven
There's no digestion
and no expulsion
because skeletons don't really eat
they just sit in sunlit closets
quietly waiting, smiling
nodding off with boredom.

Bones

KB Baltz

I have moved all
the skeletons
in my closet
to the garden
where they can
weather the seasons
in the open.
There is no shame
in a frost covered
rib cage
naked to the elements
no longer wrapped in
mothballs and tweed
trying to pretend
that they are anything
but bones.

WHEN I SPEAK OF THE FEAR

Ellen Huang

I mean that the days are tempest and dust
storm, desert sand slipping through my hands
then drowning me beneath.

I mean that the second we run
out of things to say,
either of us disappear
into the spaces of time.

I mean that I scare, I confuse, I collapse into a vortex silently
I mean memory cleansing of when I trusted you with fairy name.

I mean the tendency to morph into others,
that when I'm not looking in the mirror, I'll have sleepwalked into another's skin
that when you see me, you see a stolen face.

I mean the curse of words upon words upon words, poison
that keep me from
seeing you, reaching back through the mist.

I mean the fear that when the sand runs out and I finally put a hand out
it will all dissolve before me, skull and rib cage
to dust.

Piece Parts

Paul Ilichko

You cut his tongue out with a knife
removed his lungs that wheezy
bagpipe sliced his spleen and split
his liver and all of this for love

his eyeballs made a perfect set
polished and shelved for future
reference they matched so well with
cartilage hacks of former ears

so many pieces incognito
in their myriad shapes these chopped
up chunks of flesh with broken bones
protruding like erections

and so to his experience carefully taken
and all intact jarred and mounted in
a safe location never to rot or fade
never to be of use to anyone again.

dead mermaid

c. a. mackenzie

1. they charred your fleshy thighs with blackened lips / pressed hard like iron into memories blindingly white / clumped sugar / batting the outside of a thin leaded window / liquified

2. you lie among crushed vanilla leaves / as blood pours out from somewhere / or nowhere / but crimson fluid fills the cracks in tree bark / as you finger a trail of ladybugs / skulls blotted ink

3. silver hair coiling forth from hills of ash / looped into the form of empty roses / such a wild garden of shimmering things ravaged your little body / coated in a film of pine needles / snapped

4. the milky way spinning fast in cobalt air / you follow a single star / thorny as the bush beneath which your body / lay crumpled / like a kitten mewling for someone / or no one

5. their faces crystallize into that which is not a face / which is made of luminous grains of mineral / molded into a human which cannot die / floating beside you whispering / snide remarks

6. you cannot sleep bathed in sweat / gritty salt streaked like watercolors down pale flesh / the words golden apples come to mind / golden apples / golden apples / rotting inside your stomach

7. they tell a story about a dead mermaid tail / prismatic scales shed onto steel boulders / encased in a large glass jar / waves lapping / she was tied to wet wooden boards / ears sealed with wax

Caution

Antoni Ooto

All bones taken,
all blood taken,
all breath taken,
this, a ceremony of conclusion.

As the body gathers,
traces held together
one last time.

The old ones still remember
how once she taught them a way to live—
and breathe quietly in the night air.



Cone

Michael Moreth

MAY—LOVE

Robert Beveridge

A skull bobs
under the bridge where I first kissed you
flowers grow from one eye socket

the trees are green
after the last flood
but now the rivers have receded
and once again
we can sit under the bridge
and talk, kiss
touch
without fear
of discovery
by anyone
except the skull
with flowers for eyes

your highest of loves is mortal

Ellen Huang

I think, indignantly. Your everlasting love
is an overwhelming cacophony. Your promise
is a ring you kneel on the ground for
once, and never again, as skin grows
around it and bones click and flesh sticks.

Your greatest of loves, your “more than friends,”
your torture, your ever after, your
death of a bachelor, is all mortal.
Your wild abandon to say no one else may

receive a touch of your time, except
the missing piece, the hot other half of your
soul—is romantic rot and mold. You’ve
made ghost stories of us now, foolish mortal.

Your exclamations that this is the meaning of life
has left me a corpse, and shut out all else of the gospel,
despite a love that so loved the world
that they made all things possible.

Your insistence on something most
beautiful, it’s all an end-all, and leaves
everything else we have in the cold.
Your deepest of loves is blind and brainwashed
and a disappearing act, a wormhole.

But perhaps someday I’ll understand.
And be just as hopeless, just as hopeful.

The Winter Solstice

Beulah Vega

It's Solstice again.
Another year
another morning awakened by
Aurora
but still unable to see

you. Tonight the bonfires
will be lit
in fields ravaged
by fire, flood,
sorrow and all other
synonyms for

humanity. Tonight the fingers
of frost will penetrate my
window and tickle my soul
with the burning ice of your

memory. Tonight I know
you will sit alone
shivering, your home
like the Earth's womb
in this season, barren and

waiting. You will wait for a poisoned
princess to morph into
compassion. You will wait for
an empty heart to fill itself with
dreams, with

care. You will wait for her to
become everything I
have been for you. Tonight, when
the moon seems to stall in
the winter sky, you and I will sit

shivering. Alone-together
waiting for a dawning light.
waiting for the warmth of Spring
waiting for each other.

Arbeit Macht Frie

Carolyn Adams

Gray city, gray city,
I won't visit you
or your sinuous lie at the gates.

It is said that to fathom
an intricate thing
is to stand within
and look closely.
But I won't come near.

Gray city, you're filthy
with piles of shoes
still bearing the print of their hosts.
Ivory-abandoned gold.
Ash manuscripts
long dispersed into
hollow elegies no one reads.

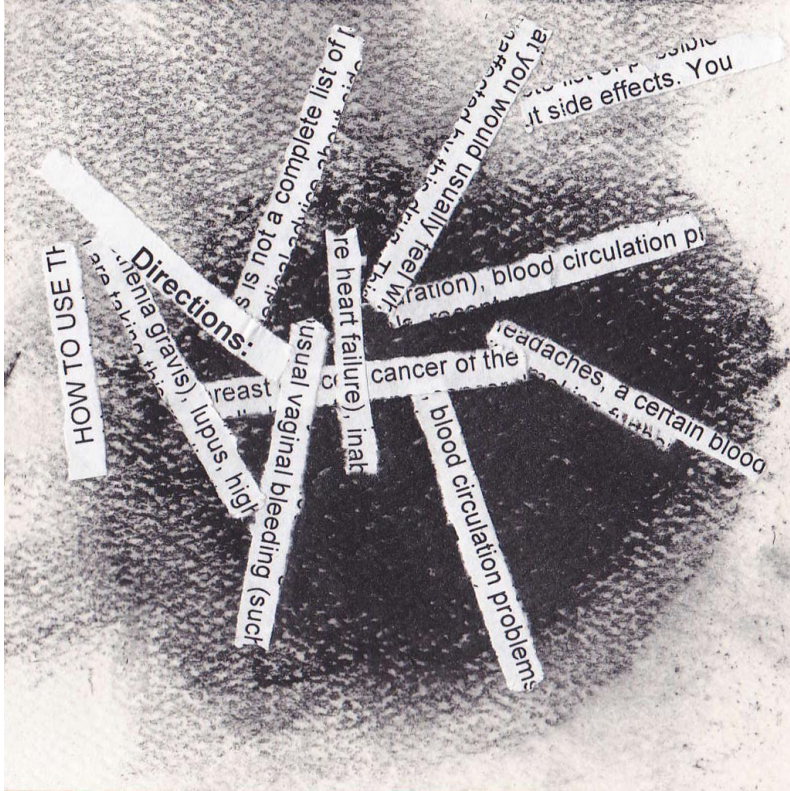
Despair hangs its rags
in the night barracks.
Terrors cascade the beds.

Outside the fences,
crows browse a field
caught in the teeth of winter.
So many dead nights,
so many naked days.
So many
bones in the snow.

The Saints Gave Me Permission to Cry

Nancy K. Dobson

It snowed in Paris today, and though I'm home in California,
my bones ache for the narrow steps, the statues of saints,
and a café crema in the corner bistro
featuring Fabien's Tuesday magic show.
Obsessed with visiting every church in the city,
I pushed open the heavy carved doors of Saint Augustin,
felt its old bones exhale,
my shoes neatly clicking on its stone floor.
Something familiar crept in.
I've been here before, my skin said.
Silly, my head whispered back, but it spooked me all the same.
A shadow in my throat, I studied Mary's face in a mural
as she dutifully wept at Jesus' feet.
Resting in a narrow wooden chair near the back,
I ate chunks of bread from the patisserie with the blue window,
inhaled the thousand years' recipe,
and brushed crumbs from my scarf, though I had no one to impress.
Candles wavered and the doors lamented
as another sufferer entered behind me.
I wanted to stay, cradled in anonymity,
but as I looked from statue to statue,
the walnut chair creaked beneath me.
Go, the saints chided, *there's a bar on the next corner.*
Drink the wine.
You will join us soon enough.



How to Use

Carolyn Adams

Wine and Dark Chocolate

Courtney Weaver

I want to be tequila.
But maybe I'm actually wine and dark chocolate.
I want to be exciting
But I'm tired and quiet and lonely.
Would anyone be excited by me?

I want to be someone's shot of whiskey
But maybe I'm a little too tame for that.
In my mind, I'm free and wild.
But I take pills to be normal and
I cry when I'm sad.

I want to be someone's famous cocktail.
But what is there about me to show off?
I don't know how to dress
Or how to act or how to flirt
But I know how to be someone's rock.



Death and Dining

Leslee Jepson

we sit in the dining area
between the kitchen and
and living room
I take my mother's place
uncomfortable with the promotion

my father pours the wine
baked russets slathered with butter
crisp salad anointed with balsamic vinaigrette
complements the perfectly grilled steak

twenty feet away my mother pleads
from the hospital bed
“Help me, someone help me”

we dine as she is dying
I cannot swallow I can barely breathe
unable to help, I step out into the January night



Hunger

Michelle Mead

One less bite, then a few more,
Soon I'll be all gone, for sure,
How little it takes to disappear,
My discipline praiseworthy,
Oh, yes, I'm almost gone,

"You've lost so much weight,
You look beautiful now,"

I'm starving—

A trinket, a box, a broken toy,
Ribbons, ribbons, in my hair,
Words like knives that slice the air,

"You should lose some weight,
Little girl, you have such a pretty face,"

I'm starving—

Rattle your bones,
So we can see how empty you are,
Beneath your flesh there is no more,
Your soul shaken out between
Your protruding rib cage,

I'm starving—

Skin turning blue,
Hair grows no more,
I can only bleed in my mind—

What is beauty anyway?

Devour

Kelli Lage

When you're ripped to shreds / don't blame me for the sins of the
wolves / all I have is my walking stick / when I cut my leg and blood
trickles down / I picture a warm bath / for the thorns in these woods
are thick / I hear some are still tangled in them / Tuesday will you be
able to pick up my call? / she gets her nails painted pale pink / each
Monday / to match her rotary phone / I think she lives and dies / in
telephone wires / all I'd find would be a heavy dial tone / coffee cake
for breakfast / bitter tongue / still, I devour

LEAD WOLF

John Grey

In hunger the mind fogs with red-raw visions
of skin unfolding like rose petals,
of blood and flesh spilling like uncorked wine

The lead wolf lopes ahead of his brood
to the upper reaches of the river,
leaping stones, snapping at the air

as if each breath is a failed kill.
The others follow, single file, ears back,
heads low, propelled by their own starved sniffing,

In a distant deer herd, seas of content
suddenly stir. Surfaces of feeding ripple warily.
Death lumps in cervine throats.

From a shore of brush and grass, a wolf pack
flutters like brown and furry canvas,
sets sail for the islands of meat.

WOUNDED DEER

John Grey

Despite the struggle,
she deftly tight-rope walks
the staggered boundary
of life and death.
She is both these states within herself:
futile viscera jar against those still functioning,
heart feeds the head
with arcs of light
and periodic waves of darkness.
All around her,
the same contradiction:
trees arrayed in falling leaves,
owl atop its mouse pellet heap,
dead blossoms at the tip of thriving plants,
a wolf prodding the last of a squirrel carcass.
A loud frenzy to be
rakes against a raw and shrieking longing
for the end.
Ultimately,
she finds, in death's motion,
life's stillness.



At Fault

Cheryl Heineman

The shot was clean, right through the eye,
the officer said, grabbing the fawn's hind legs,

and gesturing like an Olympic disc thrower,
he picked it up, and turning, flung it

into the woods' overgrown weeds.
Its body still twitching, I watched

from afar the undignified tossing of a life,
ended randomly, by a passerby's car.

Its spotted coat sputtered and quivered
in the scrubbed sun's light.

I cannot imagine anything worse—
cradling my own child's bloody head.

I trusted you, his eyes would say.

Usually, the deer come out at dusk.
I should have seen it coming. Its mother,

not me, should have stroked its head,
should have been there, should have

taught her child to leap higher, should have
known how to divine the crossing over.

Awakening

Antoni Ooto

Innocence has returned.

So, he pays attention.
He's grown closer to insects;
speaks dragonfly

hesitates for birds
honors paths of deer
such is the etiquette of creatures.

They watch, thinking him curious,
but are willing to accommodate.

Less often but still,

memories of a nightmare coming;
hooves of two white horses thundering
the emptied streets of sleep,
and again, he slips, falls beneath.

Wait, no, not hooves,

the sting of step-father's strap,
welting his back. And after,

awake shaking,
staring out at night
where all shape-shifters wait,

until...

cowering back into sleep at the
crossroads again, he watches for
two white horses.

A Murder of Crows

Nupur Maskara

Crow thoughts pluck my eyes
Whenever I try to sleep
Caw caw caw caw caw

INSOMNIAC NIGHTMARE

W Roger Carlisle

My eyes fly wide open in disbelief,
all engines are running full speed ahead,
the switch has flipped,
all the lights in my head have been lit at once,
whole engines come to life, messages fly, dendrites spark,
synapses whip electricity across my brain;
my brain itself feels
like some phosphorescent free-floating jellyfish of the deep,
luminescent, glowing, awake.

As I lie in the dark, I wonder if it is still early enough
to take a sleeping pill. A full panic descends as I
listen to my galloping pulse, begin to list meetings and
the fifty tasks I must do tomorrow.
A biological algorithm bulls through my mental files
searching out broken bits of code, lost ideas,
broken shards of mental activity as it desperately
tries to integrate my broken life.

After pounding the pillow and failing to sink into the mattress,
I try to hypnotize myself by repeating:
“I am getting heavy, heavy, heavy, heavy.”
The clock says 2:00 AM.
I run into the bathroom and begin calculating my dosage
of Ambien. The risk of becoming a morning zombie is worth
escaping the terror of the night.

Groping back to bed after a pee
I part thick curtains, and am startled by a
distant, preposterous and separate—moon—
a white metallic circle of light, piercing
the saturated darkness of the sky which
awakens memories of the dead.

I am startled by furniture in the old house glowing in the moonlight
like it had been washed with lyme, as I inventory
every stupid decision I've ever made,
begin planning hiding places where I can
take naps at work, develop hallucinations of monsters
at the window, delusions of being Santa Clause, imagine
I'm hearing the ghosts of Christmas past.

I hide under the covers
listening for the rattle of chains.

With a Pinch of Salt

Lorelei Bacht

This poem commenced as a long,
Inarticulate scream,
The night when I discovered that
My husband was cheating.
No word was a boat large enough
To take my grief to sea.
There was no star, no route, no map,
To navigate the gale;
No food for months, no confidante -
Saltwater and dead fish.
I did manage to make it back,
Mouth full of sand and spit,
My head still heavy with bad dreams
From the threatening deep



Untitled
Cathy Leavitt

Calculus of Failure

Paul Ilchko

His festering mouth like a nest
of swarm a source of stink a field of pain

mapped by calculus wrapped
in shadows he must be caressed

* * * * *

shielded from the harshness of family from
a melting world of failure reflected

in the mirror of relationship his child
crawling broken and limbless

across the nightmare of his awakening
the warping of his existence from one space
to another

* * * * *

a collapsing floor of open windows
and wind-blasted color fields where every

promise is rooted in duplicity where every
room has reverted into unvalled nothingness

a bastion of blood and fear and the stillness
of breaking glass demanding the decision
that he is too afraid to make

* * * * *

as miles away
the violence is splitting apart into streams of time

into sonic blocks that shape the borders
of his empty life that tear apart his fortitude

his payment owed but never sent as compensation
for a grubby widowing

* * * * *

and then a recycled immersion

a rebirth into frames and joisting
into ascending staircases that lead again

to the burning
of his slight epiphany that drifted away
as smoke
as messaging
as termination.

RETURNING

Gary Sokolow

Nights at rope's end, obsessing
self inside of self, brutal

interior landscape from which I
thought I had been freed

to write of the blue eyes of a young
girl, the broken hand of a

homeless man, the baby rolling over
on her little stomach, instead

at the crossing of nameless roads, a child's
nightmare of a scarecrow's stare,

the four locks on a door and the hall walls
a shadowy cave, as the woman

in the next room laments the bottomless
black hole of my egoless-ness,

ponders my journey from life to oblivion
to life, to sit on a seat on a bus

on an afternoon jostled in the normalcy
of the everyday, the old woman

sliding her card into the slot, a record of a
journey from here to there and out.



The Massage therapist

Jan Ball

pulls gently on her neck
like lifting a vase
on a pottery wheel,

that drunken night

she, as adolescent-intercede
in family arguments,
father's tapered fingers
this time like a tentacle
wrapped around her neck
then

press

choke

mother and sister
inert with fear, stuck
in an aquarium castle
in underwater fairylane

she doesn't remember
she won't remember

but now her neck
is a magic wand,
can change mice
into footmen,
pumpkins
into a carriage.

Sunoco Gas

Natalli Amato

I'm twenty-three but I forgot my I.D., so I wait out in the parking lot
while Connor checks out with the beer like I'm sixteen again.
Was I ever sixteen?

No. I wired money to China
just to time travel in the eyes of the cashier at Mercer's gas station.

Across the street there's a sign for the hotel in which my sisters were conceived
years before my father was my father,
back when he was just the bartender and if he left
it was called a cigarette break and there was nothing then
that could define the location of his will
as absent when measured in relation to that a mother's.

The sky was somewhere close to me
before I started looking.

Thinking about Connor while I sit in Brooklyn Heights

Natalli Amato

I took my longing out
for a drink on Henry Street.
I ordered a gin and tonic at a wine bar
sucking it down through that obstacle of a straw
until it was just glass and ice.
When the girl behind the bar looked away
I reached inside the glass with my fingers,
shoveling cubes into my mouth.
I had brought a notebook with me
but never wrote a thing down.
Just chewed, chewed, chewed.

odd



out

odd out

Alan Bern

Unclothed

Rachel Landrum Crumble

This is what it's like to crawl, wet and gangly,
out of a cocoon—
not like finally peeling out of too-tight jeans,
but like scraping the very skin raw,
chapped and burning in winter wind—
numb and tingling, so that cold
alone could coax warmth back in,
preventing
frost's deadening bite.

Where are my old familiar clothes—
why now are they denied me?
What cruel joke is this
that I am thus exposed?
Change comes in hiccups,
no spoon of sugar can stop or sweeten.

A hopeful convalescent,
I wrap myself in poetry, sip hot milky tea,
try to equilibrate.

All day I have been quieted
by the hush and stutter of wings.

Lark ~

Christina A. Kemp

Purple flowers are growing through my back door
between the cracks of what should close.

I slipped and fell downward on the slope tailbone cracked but continued anyway,
needing to see what was further below.

Stupid of me, I only had that small piece of toast for breakfast
perspiring, fuzzy, *continue the descent*,

I thought

Then I landed.

I needed this dark day fog settling, in the
morning

damp, gray the rain misting and then
clumping down fat upon my cheek.

I couldn't breathe

before -

with so much light in the air.

Now I am settled again mossy and grounded
and free

Encumbered by the surrounding woods, looking up at those leaves dancing
branches in the sky

pitter pats of what is sobbing from otherworlds above.

I hadn't written poetry for a time

Why was this? Books pages are
consuming.

I killed the battery of my melodies
of music

Oh well, mud squishing, running between my fingers instead,

And now those dead leaves cling upon the
black knee of my pants.

Snake tails slithering through the grass --

Twins.

I named them once, I think...

I feel safe wandering here, in being, lostness in the
mystical
What a change that is from hypervigilanced requirements
demands, fatiguing from before.
A woodpecker nails at that tree from above.

This dark still pond, black beneath hanging branches that
tickle and descend at the waters edge.
Nothing moves.
Down I am immersed into the wet gravity pulling
beneath the unconscious undertows,
taking me nearer to the beginning of what was supposed to be.
Primordial eyes looking back at me—
You are down here, too.
The water osmosing in and out of my open mouth,

And somewhere, a lark sang above.

I Can't be Bothered Writing This Poem

Kate Maxwell

Grey gristle-coloured days where sit-coms
sway their banal fantasies before our faces
or YouTube struts its clowning dance
tumbling, pouting for our dull
pleasure
all with impossibly long legs
tight skin, white teeth, and all of it
wrapped in the latest brands, the latest
catch phrase, and all available
to pause
so we can refill our glass, pop more
pop-up treats, and seep like warm
syrup, flattening our saggy arses
into couch-cushion shapes.

Fold upon fold, flesh rippled over
flesh, we watch our sucked in selves
squeeze into beige shapewear
before the bedroom mirror
and thank the Gods that we can't
see each other's gurgling insides
all the rancid lusting smallness
of our soft and sad internals.

So, on this gristle-coloured day
I spit out smiles for check-out chicks
who dutifully drone, Have a nice day
and by the way, I couldn't give a rats'.
And later, I'll prattle on the lounge
fashion-fed philosophies at you, at me
in front of the TV. But no one's listening.
Not even me. So, I'll throw my fork
dripping with gravy at the pink curve
of your ear while the television roars.

What did you say?

Forget it.

Blocked

Sam Houty

The poet's head leans into my chest
 seductive and slow, picking at my skin
It feels euphoric at first, feeding his hunger
 being eaten alive, a strange allure
my flesh wounds and the darkening sky
 He's a faraway bird circling, sharp dive
slurping me in verses and allegories
 words that were mine flow into ink clots
After there's nothing left of me to ravage
 my body exploited until skeletal
I'm tossed aside, nothing left to say
A carcass on this cracked terrain

Night Poems

Glenn Ingersoll

I walk the wrinkled corridor between dreams.
Like trophy heads in a hunter's jungle bungalow
lamps jut out,
their glass all glare.

she rides a horse
wakes with car keys in her hand

Surely these clothes are blankets.
The shelter I offered silence: my mouth
What won't wake: my hair.
Toward something they saw closed, my eyes turn.

Lights lost in
among handles.

The window is open, standing somewhere,
open to a door.

illiterate ills

Ellen Huang

without rest,
life's fences loom taller
barbed wire stretch tighter
formulas surround, patterns abound,
dirt and metal and magnified sound
random words rambling with emphasis
chaotic syllables put in rhyme or original
weirder and weirder images
just please make sense! in a world so pounding
my mind lagging, frustrated, groaning.

but with rest,
poetry is all the world.
that act of trust-falling asleep
that submission to warmth of coddled blankets
that vulnerable peace, a peace of mind
with death practice opening to dreams instead
poetry is all the world,
the language of the essential red ribbons
that tie the earth together, ligaments of fate
spiderwebs of truth
poetry is lifeblood and food and drink
poetry is why we wake.

Self-Promotion

Kendra Nuttall

There are days the poems crawl in
like long-awaited desert rain.
The saguaro opens its cracked lips,
only for the sun to push away the clouds
and bake the mud.
Sometimes I feel like salt,
little glitter crystals sticking to your side.
Every word from my mouth is another bee
dying. Every page written is another tree
falling. I don't want to bother you,
I'll give you my words for free.
Bless me with a storm.

Unwritten

Gurupreet K. Khalsa

Thought conservation,
saving the spools of wound permutation
tightly packed on stacked racks;
waiting in multiple colors,
waiting as untamed others,
waiting in grays and blacks.

Like so many crawling things
twisting into rings,
left alone they creep,
waiting to be wrestled, looped,
waiting to be another,
waiting to be deep.

Attempted aligning,
resisting or leaving-
rolling together in tangles, knots.
waiting for weaving,
waiting for poetry
waiting for what is not.

Repeating Lost Vowels

by RpVerlaine, G.M.Rose & Joseph M. Gelosi

(Written in poetry workshop at a bar.)

The slack
of the
hangman's noose
escapes me
like compassion
love and life
framed in
each memory
you insisted
defined us.

I seek
a token
blessing of
veritas...a fragment
of everything
neither false
nor real but
an acceptance
teaching me nothing
but how to say
your name
again until
wordlessly
remaining
a scream
nights...
I keep saying
can't get
any darker.



Ring
Ellen Mary Hayes



Abandoned

Frabice Poussin



Furies

Meghan Sterling

Last night, a deep soaking rain, battering the windows and roof
the way I'd like to smash everything today. Ruckus and racket,
an explosion of feathers. Mid-month, and there's bills to pay,
no money to pay them. Again. I handled this truth by attacking
a boho pillow with my hands, wringing its textured neck,
slamming it again and again on the bed until I was numb.

As long as I don't hurt a person or ruin everyone with cruel words,
I feel like I'm one generation improved. As long as my daughter doesn't see.
As long as I don't mark my body when I tear at myself in overwhelm.

How am I here? My mother was here, 30 years before.

Pulling chunks of hair out of her head in the hallway,
whipping at me with the metal blinds. There was learning there,
but I missed it. I'm still carrying the weight of the family's
dwindling bank account under my fingernails like grave-dirt,
tangled up like the vacuum roller, thick with hair. There's no undoing it—
just cut. And cut. Until the blood comes. Until there's relief.

And I see my face growing old with worry—lines along my mouth
deeper from furrowing, fingers smeared with ink as I tally again
and again, coming up short. I swore I would choose different,
be different, and here I am. Even the wrinkles are the same. Even
the hideous rage. The furies visited me in my dreams last night,
hovering with their terrible wings, asking me again and again,

Did you think you could escape us?



METAL TOILET

Sita Gaia

When I told my therapist
my life was better off
in pieces of ash,

he marched me out to my Dad's
car with strict instructions
to go to emergency immediately.

I fumed like the exhaust
of the tailpipe on my grandpa's car,
before he died an honorable death.

I cavalierly texted
a few friends
about the attempt.

It was not for attention.
I had the perfect opportunity
the night before.

Smothered in love by parents
who were always home,
there was no good time.

Deemed unsafe in my own hands,
I spent the night
in the fluorescent dark.

When I used the
washroom,
I found the toilet was metal.

I kicked it so hard
with my blue Converse
low tops.

It was indestructible and steady
as a rock.
I couldn't even be trusted to use

a normal toilet.
Sometimes it's easier to
shut up about these things.

That's not what
1-800-SUICIDE
told me.

Journey's end

Sam Houty

Malala Yousafzai

I wonder if she ever imagined facing it
the gun pointed at her head, the end-all
of her activism, laying limp on gravelly
sand. It is the worst outcome – death
caught in our throats, blood spilled
voice box silenced against the echo
of gunshots ringing. I think of that
the consequences of speaking out
the inevitability of it and fears plague
me like the hot sand beneath her head
force of a bullet pushed into her skull
yet I am wailing in my heart, enraged
willing us both to stand up and fight.

Down

Chris Jones

I feel pressed by a persistent winter wind, my reluctance obliged to yield.
It plucks all the bright green leaves from my supple branch, one by one,
leaving only a skeletal twig. I feel dragged by a current that stops me
from standing, tugging at my safety, altering my gravity. Blood
thins, shrinks from my fingertips to a soaking heaviness
in my heart, sinks to my stomach, and below. The
periphery glazes, reducing to a crystallizing core
of trapped distraction, tightly wrapped in
a fatalistic shroud. It sits me down with
leaden certainty as my day tilts, slips
sideways, and slides away, leaving
me raw in a cold fog, hoping for
a lamp. Am I to welcome this
dejection? To embrace it?
How can I,
when I have
no warmth
to even
move?

A Conversation with my Therapist

Ivanka Fear

I think I'm sinking deeper, I told him.

Mrhuh? *What's wrong?*

I think I'm drowning, I said.

Er??? *What do you mean?*

I think I'm severely depressed, I explained.

Meh.... *You think too much.*

I seem to be lost, I told him.

Plop.... *Found you! Can I sit on you?*

I seem to have no one who cares, I said.

Head butt.... *I'm here for you. Want a snuggle?*

I seem to be lonely, I admitted.

Mm...ow? *Do you want my stuffie mouse?*

I feel like I've been battered beyond repair, I told him.

Me...ow me...ow. *I know how you feel.*

I feel like I've been suffering for too long, I said.

A gentle smack.... *Snap out of it, silly!*

I feel like I've been hurt too many times, I continued.

Knead knead... *You feel tense - need a massage?*

I'm so tired of it all, I told him.

Purr purr.... *Just relax, will you?*

I'm exhausted all the time, I said.

Snore, snort.... *A short nap will help.*

I'm sick of my life, I concluded.

Yow yow yow! *Snack time! You'll feel better with a full tummy.*

Then we sat in silence for a long time and observed.
Redbreasted robins chirped merrily as
brown squirrels scurried happily
from one green branch to another.
Yellow bees buzzed busily as
orange butterflies flitted cheerily
from one pink rose to another.
Children laughed noisily as
their black and white dog ran jumpily
along the grey gravelled roadside.
The warm sun shone brightly as
the ruby-throated hummingbird zipped quickly
from purple petunias to blue lobelia.

And the wise old boy said
Blink, wink.... *Don't worry, be happy. It's all good.*
And he offered up his belly for a rubdown
as payment for his sage advice.

I think our daily sessions are helping.
He really puts things in perspective, you know.
There's a whole world outside our window
and the thing is, it's all quite amazing..
but it's the simple things in life
that simplify life.

Gone

Lorelei Bacht

Some mornings I wake up believing you
alive, still. It takes a few minutes
for the cruel remembrance to settle in:

No, my daughter will never know
you. She will be you instead. She will carry
the grudges that you left behind, better

than I ever could. I gave her your name.
I asked her once: is this your first time
being here, or have you lived before?

She looked perplexed, much older than
her age of four. She thought on it,
then asked: *What do you mean?*

I don't know what I mean, I said, *let's*
Talk about it when you are a tiny bit
Older. She said *alright*. She tracked

my retreat from the children's room,
her eyes narrowed, a living question mark.
Perhaps you have not recognized

yourself in her, yet. Or perhaps only
some of you made it through the year elapsed
in between your departure and her arrival.

I wonder where the rest of you has gone.

The Closet

Charlene Stegman Moskal

I gave away parts of you today;
some significant, others not,

some never claimed as your own,
some familiar.

I could see you only as a fading snapshot
wearing them, casual, no big deal.

They no longer had your scent on them;
I checked.

My nose struggled to find you,
buried itself in cotton, linen, raw silk.

Perhaps if your musk was on them,
if I could recall the cologne,

the smell of your hair that brushed the collar,
your sweat lingering in the folds under the armpits

I would have broken my silence,
my lips that held back denials, my clenched teeth

that refused to release a keening of *NO's*
would have burst forth wheeling above my head

dressed in a shroud of black crow feathers -
but today they were only pieces of cloth.

The fabric of you has left the closet
and settled into the fabric of me.

Late Night Pancakes

Valerie Frost

I miss
not being able
to keep secrets
from you, because

you always
knew what I was
thinking before
I said it, and

sometimes you would
even finish my
sentences for me out
loud.

I miss
when you would
hold my hand and
when you let

me kiss you in
public, even though
I knew you hated
PDA, but

you let me do
it anyway.

I miss
going to IHOP
at 3 AM, because neither
of us could sleep.

I miss
when we first
got married, and
you used to
leave your phone with me
to use when you
went to work.

I miss
getting presents from
you, like when
you finally bought
me my own phone and
changed the password on

yours, along with the
passwords to all
your other logins. So

I started having
to go to the ATM
to check the debit
card balance before I

paid our bills. I guess it
was a good thing I
couldn't log in to
see the bank statement

anymore, except it also
comes in the mail, so
that's how I knew
you spent \$60 at IHOP

without me. Maybe
you went with
that girl you work with

that you text so much about
secret work stuff that I

can't know about, so
you turn the phone
away from me when I
walk by. Did you

ask if she wanted
bacon strips or pork
sausage, or did
you just already know?



Pork Belly

Lisa Ashley

I love bacon. I order it every time I eat breakfast out
refusing to tether its crispy succulence
to those early morning bedroom visits.

You'd think the fry-smell that woke me then
would repulse me now,
the salty fat choke in my craw
like the fear that jumped me when your calloused hands
slid under my flannels while the others slept.

The back rub was melt-in-the-mouth pork crackling,
until your heavy hands wandered like pigs rooting for slop
around to my breast buds, under my waistband,
down over my soft pink butt
smooth as baby powder.

I carried my dark secret heavy in the belly
like a pregnant sow, my child's need for your love
trumped my no. My shame slung about me all day,
clotted mud to hooved pig's feet.

Morning after morning this baffling, silent
backrub-not-backrub packed streaky rashers around my waist,
crammed my never-asked questions back down my throat.

Time to slaughter this pig.
Skin it, gut it, hack it up—
ham hocks to smoke,
the tender loin, the chops,
finally, the bacon, the best part.

It's all mine, this thick square of prime belly meat
lying under the ribs, right next to the heart.



Safe
Ellen Mary Hayes

Guarded

Charlene Stegman Moskal

To describe something that has been scraped
with its surface exposed, left susceptible,
a place that should have remained protected
one says, *I've been rubbed raw*.

It could be a sore throat, a knee fallen on gravel,
an elbow skidded along rough pavement
when you have fallen off your bike
or it could be a hollow somewhere inside you

where love or anger or fear or even hope once lived
guarded and secured against the need to share.
When that sacred place is no longer covered
I imagine the deep pockets, sacs holding memories

are hung raw on meat hooks like sides of beef
in a slaughter house to show vulnerable parts
that were never meant to be naked,
brought into the light, for anyone with a cleaver to see

to chop away at, refrigerate, put the private pieces
somewhere they may be observed dry, cold,
allowed to age as a film envelopes, tenderizes them
and gives time a chance to heal all wounds.

Ounce

Amanda Jane

The blood
Drips
From my knife.

So raw
So blue
So fresh.

How do you like it cooked?

Rare,
Medium,
Cremated?

A Bunch, A Lot, Abunchalot

KB Baltz

In the end
I suppose
the end should
have been more
obvious
because I never
wrote a love poem
about the touch of
your hand or the
curl of your hair
or the special way
you would never
ever respond
to all the memes
I sent you.

I never wrote
a poem about the
way I said I love you
the first time
my hand shaking as
it reached for yours
while your eyes
settled to mid-distance
as though I had
asked you about
the first time
you had seen a dead body
which would not
happen for a few more
years and then you
would accuse me
of misappropriating
your pain into another
excuse to say I love you.

But back to the first time
I said those words,
after a passing moment
you gave me a half-smile
and said, “I like you.
I like you a bunch,
I like you a lot,
I like you abunchalot,
I like you so much
I created a whole new word
for how much I like you.”

But I said I love you
and you said it
means the same thing
and kept saying it
until you slipped up
mid-orgasm a few
years later
and were upset
when I responded with
“are you fucking kidding me”
instead of an outpouring
of oxytocin gratitude
for finally granting me
the crumbs of your
assured affections.

You said that
every time you say
it the relationship ends
and in the end,
I suppose,
the end
should have been
more obvious.

S&M, Anyone?

Nupur Maskara

The Internet is a dominatrix
Everywhere you click, it says
Submit, submit, submit.

A Question of Telecommunications

William Doreski

Strange voices infect my phone,
conversations I can't enter.
You claim this hotel is haunted,
but the only ghost I believe in
is mine. Every night the numbers
of the rooms change. We entered
room three-fifteen and today
it has become three-eighty-five.
You claim the ghosts have done it;
but pulling the brads from brass
numerals and nailing them up
on different doors is the work
of gnomes, the whole clan trained
centuries ago as cobblers.

The academic conference lasts
only one more day and then
we must puzzle our flight home,
a dogleg involving Atlanta.
I can't use my cell phone, and even
the hotel phone gibbers in tongues.
In the lobby we confront the clerk
and demand to know whose voices
have addled both cell and land lines.

The clerk endorses your theory
of hauntings. A previous hotel
burned a hundred years ago
with many of the dead unclaimed,
unidentified. These lost souls
slipped into the telephones
to cuddle in the warmth of talk.
But that's a silly legend. Gnomes
are little nodes of fact sporting
pointed red or green caps, but ghosts
are chimeras fading in daylight.

Still, we must confirm our flight,
so I walk three blocks to employ
the pay phone in a coffee shop.
When I return you've vanished;
and when I wield my cellphone
I hear you whispering among
the strange voices, your grasp
of this unknown dimension
confirming my faith in you.

God's Plan

Robert Pegel

We are all on the same path.
Some of us will get there sooner than others.
Don't let your mind be troubled.
You will be stuck in a mystery.
For as long as your eyes can see,
your heart beats,
and until your last breath.
Turn inward.
Look for messages along the road.
Don't curse your destiny.
Even if it is foretold.
Ask for strength.
Pray for peace of mind.
Love.
Light.
Divine energy.
You are spirit after all.
Dwell in being.
Surrender your old ways
of understanding.
Put on the new.
Even if it seems not to fit.
You were born for a reason.
Worry no more.
God's armor will shield you,
from the pain and suffering
of this world.

Progressions

KB Baltz

I.

Thoughts circle
on warm eddies
swirling back and forth
like crows
spiraling down
into the dark
velvet ratholes
of uneven boundaries
always digging, biting, scratching
at haphazard walls
circling an unstable self.

II.

Thoughts circle
drifting down
to settle
on cedar branches
like starlings
each bough
bending beneath
the weight
but never breaking,
only bowing
before the wind.

III.

Thoughts circle
settling on the
ocean surface
like gulls
before drifting
under slow waves
falling
floating
into the
quite space
below.

Revenge fantasy with God and water

Katy Bond

but so the scorpion climbs on the frog's back
and the scorpion has been imagining
this moment forever
they get halfway across the river and
yes - god - the point
sinks past mucous into muscle
and the frog says now we'll both die -
why did you do that?
and the scorpion says you probably don't remember me but
/
the scorpion was sinking
and she saw an angel come to
carry her off and the angel said
be not afraid
and the scorpion said yeah
don't worry i've seen worse
no offense
i myself have been a pair
of fiery-eyed wheels
a venn diagram charting the overlap
between coming of age
and hurtling skullfirst
toward a hard slab of ocean



For Another Season
Fabrice Poussin

if god gave you an orange

Dimitra Merkouris

if god gave you an orange
would you reach out your hands
fingers splayed
grasping
gasping
biting
into its sweetness
knowing that
explosions of juice
would spray your face
trickle
down
your
chin
settle
into the deep crevices
of your chest?
a perfectly divine
stickiness
extracted
from
sun-warmed
heavy-hanging fruit
echoing the hum
of half-drunk
bumblebees
drowsily,
mind-numbingly
random
intent
on pollinating

the whole
wide
world
or
would you give
the impression
of rapt attention while
dangling that
damned
orange
against your earlobe?
scoping out
reasons
to complain
about
natural sugars
versus artificial sweeteners
that left you with the world's
most
bittersweet
aftertaste.
I think you will always find
reasons to
complain,
even
if the aftertaste
left
in
your
mouth
was laced with
honeyed
sunshine.

Grapefruit

frank carellini

i remember your baroque body
and admire you the way
one admires Rembrandt
but merely interprets.

your oil is sacred and is
the trace of gods of war
and scrumptious fruits
and beheadings.

in my mere hands — like grains of sand
brushing on the sphinx —
your precious pulp is a tinge
of grapefruit and original sin.

you came to this world, likely
across a raging sea where
leviathans bowed and deliberated
about who your creator could possibly be.

in my fugue thoughts
i read your plump
Balthasian lips
and worship your Rubensian hips.

the best i could do to speak
affection is avant-garde
and my geometrics melt
under your seismic sun.

i wish they hung me across you
but i belong with the moderns
because i am of lines
and you, flesh.

Under the Lights

Holly Day

I open my mouth and imagine butterflies are going to fly out
that inside me are flocks of brilliant monarchs that have struggled
to hatch and pupate and transform into brilliance for years.
I command these butterflies to fly out of me, through my open mouth,
to burst through my skin in brilliant flocks of black-tipped wings and rainbows.
I can almost feel them inside me, encourage them
to force their way through my body, through my skin
can almost feel their tiny claws struggling to find purchase
along the slick, wet meat inside my chest.

Nothing comes out and I am empty, I don't understand
why the room isn't filled with rainbow-tinted butterflies
why there aren't sparkling clouds of wings filling the room
obscuring the quiet crowd before me. I was sure there was something
better inside of me than what could be seen through my skin. The audience
stares at me in impatient confusion from rows of folded metal chairs
they came here to see me do something special
they came to see something wonderful, or just something.
The butterflies I thought would carry this performance
die just short of emerging, perhaps suffocated by doubt
or just unable to find a clear path out.

DRY RYE TOAST

Gary Sokolow

How did you end up in some college town, left by some setup
girl, friend to your friend's blue-eyed Irish girlfriend,
who separated each fragile eyelash with a straight pin, like the
petals of a flower opening. And all of you were together
to shoot a student film, your steady hand on the eight millimeter
camera capturing your friend and his girlfriend tumbling
down a hill, rolling in and out of flying leaves, the centerpiece shot
that would win him first prize, and how that night your setup
girl was picked up by two sailors, complete, you swear, in starched
uniforms, white sailor caps, and how she'd howl at the moon
in the room you left for them, fine you were to be drunk and alone,
the circumstances you drag yourself through that might lead
someday to meaning, and early that next morning, you wandered
Albany's backstreets, past boarded up storefronts, abandoned
warehouses, stumbled into a place, bar by night, breakfast joint by
morning, you sat at the bar and ordered two eggs over easy,
dry rye toast, and how you felt the eyes of the locals upon you as you
stared at the Christmas lights blinking the length of the bar,
it took everything within you to keep it down, desperate as you were
to grease away the vodka nausea and the shame.

In Praise of Cabbage

Ellen Roberts Young

Pale green, stiff, long-lasting: what iceberg
lettuce aspires to, cannot attain. It can be cooked
with onion or chard or both, or chopped
for coleslaw—don't stint on the carrots—
or a salad with apples and walnuts.
It stretches a soup. The food of kings?
The walrus links them, while Peter Rabbit,
preferring sweeter greens, leaves the cabbage
patch to a family of dolls. Huge vats
or a crock in the basement turn it
into sauerkraut, necessary for corned beef
sandwiches or—if you're German—
with turkey, but when eaten raw,
cabbage satisfies the chewing jaw.

The Other Side of Flight

Ivan Peledov

The sky is a mashed potato
stashed away by a stray angel.
It reeks of dead hawks, and the days
begin stealthily, with
inarticulate slogans extracted from the otherworld.
Meanwhile envelopes for voices and tails
are cheap like noxious autumn leaves
and ramshackle fences guarding emptiness.

Peeling

Natalli Amato

I bring the carrot peeler to the waxy skin
of a garden butternut squash.
It comes off in chunks
instead of ribbons even after
I adjust the wobbling blade.

Diana Ross' On the Radio plays on the turntable.
I hear my mother sing.
She is not in this house.

I sing over her.
I sing over Diana.
I force a ribbon
where there isn't.
My finger bleeds.

Fistful

Kami Westhoff

The saddest story I ever heard: a mother,
two children, a freckled spaniel huddled
in a closet under the stairs. The mother,
in a smoke-choked delirium, thought it
the safest place to wait out the fire.

My father was there that night, his first
shift as a volunteer firefighter. His last.
Two decades later he told me it was
the children's hands that skewered him,
(that was the word he used, skewered)
one clutching their mother's hand,
the other a fistful of spaniel.

I was a grade above one of the children,
and even as a second grader I understood
the inclination to cling when she said
Don't let go, follow her into the smoke
when I could see the path fresh air,
trust her ability to protect me even
after the fire finds us.

Sin Dad in Savannakhet

Regina Beach

I lost all my Bhat (and some of yours)
on roulette and blackjack on our first date
Rolling into town on your Honda Win, Delilah
I missed the easy conversation I took for granted
before moving to a place devoid of my mother tongue

Under a corrugated plastic roof, I ordered in Lao
Two big beers, small cups with ice and a tin pail
of hot coals gingerly placed in the middle of
the table, where we sat, the only *falang* there, side by side
gingerly prodding the other with questions of the heart

Between bits of grilled meat, boiled eggs and soup
from the moat around the *sin dad* catching the fatty drips
as the beef sizzled and turned brown
I catch your hazel eyes lingering on the profile of my face
silhouetted by Christmas lights, up 365 days a year

You were honest, unreserved, counter to your British roots
But I didn't know this would be the first of many barbecues
when we parted ways without kissing goodnight

Notes

1. *Falang*- Lao for 'French' but applied to all Western foreigners
2. *Sin Dad* - Lao vegetable and meat hotpot cooked at the table over coals

Desert Melon

frank carellini

i.

there must have been lotus on your tongue
because i couldn't take my mouth away
my numb lips are buzzing from friction
on pricks of residual hairs that you let
grow a little wild like the ones
on the vine of the melon i found in the
rotting field a mirage in a thirsting desert

ii.

i voyaged from lotus to the hanging
gardens below your naval trading a
wonder for a wonder i had only
heard of them as they were fit for
gods and i, mere mortal your ferns
unravelling sticky spores onto my cheeks
incantations of transmutations i digress

iii.

they say rain doesn't read on camera so
milk is used for drastic effect you
would read just fine as we create physics
it seems i both live and die between
what are Grecian in scale as the blood
rushes like rivulets spotting red across
your body flickering embers in residual fire

iv.

it has been days since i've eaten
outside of this bed the oil of your skin
and salt of your sweat calm the pangs
i fill my lungs with your chloroform breath.
occasionally i must break to log-on
to file something away beneath
tossed clothes where is the floor?
You are the floor

Home Shoes

Karen Mandell

My mother's house slippers were periwinkle blue vinyl
Closed-toe vamp, lightly padded footbed,
tucked under the bed at night, by day
their padding quiet as the fridge.
I admired their softness, their malleability
In harmony with my mother's firmness,
Her tread determined but light.
No stomping, she'd tell me as, between books,
I roamed the house, looking for brother
Or sister to tease, shoeless and sockless,
Once stepping on a glass sliver from a cup
I'd broken. You're a *vilda chaya*, she charged,
A wild animal. At the playground
I stalked around the sandbox with its concrete ledge,
A tiger, a grizzly, a monster conjured in the dark.

My grandmother's sarung

Patricia Pinto

My grandmother's sarungs
Are light, airy, and comfy
Stiff to look at
Soft to touch

My grandmother's sarungs
Are bright, colourful
Made in the old batik style
When they sold them
The way you get replacement shirts and pants
From today's pasar

My grandmother's sarungs
Are smaller
Than the hospital's
Easier to wrap, simpler to handle

My grandmother's sarungs
Are sarungs of fantastical flowers
Yellow, blue, red and gold
Some are of the night,
Dark blue against cooling flowers of purple and pink

My grandmother's sarungs
Said she was here
Looking after children, caring after little ones
Mama was never more at home

Than in a sarung at home
To wear mama's sarung
You slip it on
Careful! They have a proper inside out
Then you lift one side and hold it away
Put your hand on your waist,
Fold the side over
Then you tuck and roll
Remember, outside, not inside,
So it doesn't come undone
When you move a lot

Mama used to tie hers with a piece of string, the same colour as her sarung
I wonder
Where did it go?

The cure hurts more

Beulah Vega

I was wounded-tortured-a million tiny cuts-sliced by my mother's words
-slit by my father's hate no longer bleeding-

-but not healed-

larger wounds-gashed by fickle lovers-gouged by inconstant friends-
Insidiously drawn by my own hand-branded into soft folds by my own
hateful thoughts-

-not able to heal-

I am cajoled/threatened/drugged/imprisoned-implored to make a
change- to morph- to crawl from my skin into someone I have never
known.

-72 hours at a time-

The genetic disposition -for self-harm- self-hate- self cruelty cant be
cured-but it, like I-can be controlled with pills-soft voices-pastel colored
rooms-

-mindfulness-

I don't understand the creature they want me to become-without de-
spair-without terror-without
anger-without passion-without bliss-without ecstasy-

-without me-

Slowly they peel back my skin-plowing through the old wounds-yanking
open old gashes-
excavating through healed dermis-grinding through old pain with coarse sand-

-therapeutically of course-

Once opened- probed-studied-violated-the wounds are cut out with no anesthesia-in their taking the skin holding me together-goes with them leaving me-

-flayed and bleeding-

My entire psyche is like a new wound-the laceration pried open and clamped into place- then I am let out into dust-choked wind- and covered in-

-salt-spray-

They tell me that new skin will grow-cover tendons- protect veins- hide nerve endings now dangling like old wiring in a dilapidated building

-still sparking-still hazardous-

But each step now is on decorticated feet-naked muscles sending shocks of pain-terror-distress to a heart

-suddenly disconnected-

A heart disconnected from its overmedicated brain-lobotomized soul-suffocated anima-its psyche-its drive-its peaks and valleys-

-from itself-

So forgive me-If I am short-If I flinch at your touch-If I question every word/motivation/emotion/trust we once had-forgive me if my once vibrant eyes-

-carry nothing but tears-

I am raw,
and this world becomes more ground glass every day.

Throwing Things Away

Rachel Landrum Crumble

*“As if there was such a place as ‘away.’”
—William McDonough, Cradle to Cradle*

I.

I was a hoarder of broken promises,
unwitting curator of childhood’s abandoned
treasures. Even paper yellows,
ink fades, cloth rots, books mildew.
Don’t be like me. Let it go.

II.

A marriage is not a thing—
it is an ecosystem,
except when the ground lies fallow
season after season, until, inch by inch
it buries you.

III.

Static is the amplified absence
of connection, when one side is plugged in,
waiting. Nine years is long enough.
This unrequited expectation of joy
belongs in a curbside bin, or perhaps,
mixed with clippings, brown paper,
coffee grounds, might compost
and bank a heat to stave off
an Alaskan winter...
No. Let it go.

The Longing

Amrita Valan

I wither, I shiver,
I feel my face fall
Like a ghost deflating
In a scream no one
Else may hear, my heart
Feels the puncture in
My lungs that only I
Must bear. Till the
Sanguine chambers
Corrode, I can feel the
Walls erode. Unwanted,
Leper!, Stay away, I am
Helpless when denied
Right to communion,
Participation, cool
Wishes project warmth,
“Try your luck elsewhere.”
And I will. My blood buzzes
Inside still, with dreams,
Hopes, aspirations that my
Lungs susurrate as they
Succour my soul. Mother’s
Love was my first breath,
She whispered,
“Never say die.”

is was

Jason Melvin

It's difficult to watch
is turn to was
the words forming
on recently widowed lips
a struggle with semantics
while struggling
Words hard enough without
concern for proper grammar
is present
was past
and you were
just two hours ago
standing
 right
there



Damp Splintering

Alan Bern



Immolation

Bruce Gunther

The attendants pour gas
carefully over the monk's head,
cars honk in the Saigon intersection.

"I respectfully plead," begins his letter to the autocrat,
"that you take a mind of compassion
and implement religious equality to maintain
the strength of the homeland."

He sits in full lotus,
feet resting on his thighs.
He lights the match, eyes cast downward.

If we listen carefully we hear the voice
of MLK.
We shake off the dream of a shooter's nest in Dallas.
We sense the peasant guiding his water buffalo
through the rice field.

The flames lick higher,
their lethal fingers invite us closer
while we watch from 9,000 miles away.

The boy closes a notebook
covered in American flag stickers
on his desk in an Ohio classroom.

The smoke travels over continents,
its traces linger above a Klan meeting
in Mississippi and move on.
Hear the rubber stamp come down on a deferment
that sends the millionaire's son home.

How about a wink and a nod
as the wails of anguish
compete with the honking horns of Saigon?
Faces peering from car windows.
Nuns cover their faces,
the smell of burning human flesh,
the monk unwavering.

And in the jungle darkness,
a soldier flinches
at the sound of a twig snapping.

Living Color

Bruce Gunther

How you remember it:
the purple popsicle
mittens of the girl
on a school bus.
The egg yolk glare
from the carny's booth.
The neon red of the cardinal
as it drops to the forest path.
The tanned leather knuckles
of a fist coming toward you.
The olive green line of the heart
monitor as it becomes still.
The spit-shined black of
the policeman's boots.
All of it light separated,
reflected, on a perpetual canvas.



Bite

Kami Westhoff

Today, she is ripe with anger. Teeth-shaped
wounds scatter her lower lip, the nurse's arm,
the paper bowl of oatmeal. I press my palm
against the sticky skin of her shoulder,
out of range of the bite.

The caregivers speak of the soothing nature
of the circular, of knowing what departs returns
so I move my hand in a circular motion,
punctuate each circumference with a heartbeat
pause so she can tell when one ends and next begins.

I lean to snag her focus from the tv where newscasters
and talk show hosts won't stop asking her questions
she cannot answer. *I'm here, Mama*, I say.
Her pupils, fat with whatever they've given
for her, eclipse her irises. *I know*, she says,
but you always leave.

She's right. I'll leave after I wheel her
into the cafeteria, crick her bloated legs
to fit underneath the table. She'll reach for me,
a motion jumpy as a fake bat on a string.
She'll cry as I walk away, ask what she's done
to deserve being left alone.

There must be heartbreak, too, perhaps obscured
in some secluded cell, but when I push the code
and the door clicks open, I feel nothing but relief.

I cough out the sour air of last breaths as the dew
settles its damp on my face, and the safety lights
click on. It's only four-thirty, but the sky's
already swallowed by the dark throat of night,
my mother cries alone at a dinner table set
for four, and day is only a scribble of light
on the shadowed canvas of the horizon.

Unsolvable

Kami Westhoff

I dream you in my passenger seat, 40 years old,
hair coiled from Nice & Easy home perm,
glasses that swallow your cheeks when you smile.

It's been three years since I've driven you anywhere,
formula of lift and lower, shift and scoot, door handle,
seatbelt-- an unsolvable equation.

One day it took us 45 minutes to maneuver you
into the car, our cheeks aching with laughter
long after there was nothing left to laugh about.

We never claimed we were good at being forgotten,
but we kept visiting even when you thought we were
staff, asked repeatedly when your daughters would visit.

In your last week, you were more bone than body, but
still we tended to you: twisted Q-tips to clear wax, carved
away the spoiled food wedged beneath your fingernails.

We lotioned the ashy skin of your elbows and heels,
wiped scabs from your lips and dabbed them with balm,
trickled Pedialyte into your mouth with an eyedropper.

But you aren't being dreamed about to discuss things
any decent daughter would do for a dying mother. You're
pissed. Want to know, How could you let them burn me?

In the dream, I stay silent. Drive you to the bay. We bite
the bottoms off cones and suck strawberry ice cream
through their soggy tunnels, eat until we're sugar-sick.

Days pass like this—stomachs aching with curdled
cream, strawberry seeds caught in our teeth. We
don't say a word, but our mouths never stop moving.

You are light as ash when I carry you toward the shore.
Arms wisps on my shoulders, legs a halo on my hips.
We submerge into water so warm I can't tell sea from skin.

I See You In ICU...Do You See Me?

Gerard Sarnat

*thanks to Eliana V. Hempel M.D., Blood Ties,
NEJM, 28May20*

Distraught woman before us
with that hunted look
in her eyes seems all too familiar.

Filigreed monogrammed hankies
make repeated trips
from mouth to lap then back again

as our collective horror
at the rapidly increasing amount
of bright red froth intensifies.

She's barely able to breathe, let alone
talk rationally, as once pleasant
smells vanish with a mom's viral fear.

Medical Matryoshka

Isla McKetta

Smoke over fire I remember as they
attach electrodes to my gown-clad-wiped-
clean mother, terms taught using my body
as test. Scrub colors bleed washes of words—
her dilaudid, my ketamine gaba-
pentin soothes nerves a hematology
alert (just in case) when I had only
screams. Her ten hematocrit might need blood
my seven should have allowed another
body pumped in as one was ripped out. Would
I then know—these tears borne
of me or her?

Fathoming

Marjorie Power

Since you asked about the haiku
you've hooked to the end
of your voices-in-the-void piece:
go with the first fourteen syllables,
then find another three. Fathoming
pulls me out of deep space and into the bathroom
where my husband mumbles
while brushing his teeth.

He's trying to speak only because
I asked a question. Still, he sounds lost, almost drowned.

Get those marbles out of your mouth
and back onto the sidewalk.
Flick them against each other so I can hear
their usual click, my friend,
my old, old friend.

In Translation

Clay Waters

crossing a border when language fails you,
taking tight turns to mock the maps,
memory crimped—

until a long empty hall
rushes everything back
and strands you at the door
that will never open again.

submerged into strange words
spoken in strange places
where letters tumble like laundry

you emerge dizzy
babbling volubly into a passport
to drown the silence
(how do they speak when you're not there?).

reflexive verbs
point the finger back at you
in the bar or pub or inn
where the past stays tense
and there are too many sorry's in the world,
where hasta la vista doesn't mean goodbye (it doesn't)
and voila! you've missed another connection
caught catatonic at high noon.

under a black remote sky
with no familiar light
how strange to believe
you will meet again
around some unseen bend,

spouting sunny absurdity
that defies all phrasebooks

lodged together forever
in some fantastic place
after all the maps have run dry.

Soul

S. J. Perry

for Dad
*“Every bit of data I’ve ever seen tells me your consciousness is the sum of
chemical and electrical impulses. Get over it.”*
—Neil deGrasse Tyson

I

A body is a home for its own soul,
but that’s enough. If a soul is the sum
of chemical reactions, that’s enough.

Alone, a soul can’t move itself around
or hold or heal or eat when it’s hungry.
A soul may love, but it can’t act on love.

And if a soul is sad, a body still
survives, though it may sicken, slow, or stoop.
Without a body a soul is inert.

II

When you died late last month—I’d like to think
you chose the day—the chemistry had stopped,
the soul—the electricity—at rest.

In the last days you reached into the air.
“They all do that,” the gray hospice nurse said.
“They’re reaching out to those who’ve gone before.”

A soul who’d made such lasting marks on me,
who’d finished all the honest words and deeds,
was over it, was done with a body.

A soul divine

Mark Andrew Heathcote

Raw and savage, beauty
is abreast of the world.
She sits in her harbour
an ardent little girl.

Raw and savage, beauty-
is a blending of pure design.
Hopscotching-to-her duty
as subtle as a soul-divine.

Deception

Joan McNerney

Traces of lace cover walkways.
Snow so white it almost blinds us.
You came with a spectacular glow.
I became awed by this splendor.

Everyone was so captivated
by your charm, wit, words.
We wondered if the sun rose
and fell under that magic.

Pure white snow turns gray
from exhaust fumes.
Hardening on roadsides, icy
frost plunge cars into ditches.

Deceived by your wicked smile
and simmering blue eyes.
Tricked by razzmatazz. Only mud
and freezing rain lies underneath.

Some thought the fault was mine.
How could this have happened?
There must be something else.
Something I have hidden away.

Caught in claw of memories now,
regretting the trust given to you.
But I will never be betrayed again
even if hell freezes over.

The Wounds It Has Made

Carolyn Adams

You're given an impossible object.
It's little more than a belief.
It twists in your hand,
shifting in shadows.

Uncertain landscapes,
specificities you're not sure of,
memories questionable in their accuracy.

An indescribable tenderness.
Music from the next room.
A coupling,
its heat unquestioning,
Unsustainable.

A silence, empty of argument.
Indifference, distance, neglect.
A hard rain in a parking lot
as you're leaving.

Each angle transmogrifies.

Two women walk between
you and the geometry in your hand.
Their stories are here, too.

A child you don't know
asks a question. She's crying.
She doesn't know you.
You give her the object,
request that she repair it.

How can you ask her to do that?

You find yourself
at a distance,
staring at this intricate thing.
Studying the wounds
it has made in you.

JUST TO WASTE THE MORNING

R.T. Castleberry

Too early for dogs barking,
for the train's rolling whistle,
the sun is seized by night's glassy course.
November rattles the sidewalk's seam,
studio apartment windows above
a winter-shuttered pool.
Mealy apple, day old doughnuts for breakfast,
I'll spend the day finding
the cheapest copy of a desired book,
a match for a print lost to breakup.

Stepping past grapefruit, dropped
and rotting on the sidewalk,
I wear a Bosque Redondo tourist tee
under a German greatcoat,
a twelve dollar haircut beneath a newsboy cap.
Unsteady on the landing,
optical illusions of cracked stone,
pebbled strip, rusty wrought iron
trip me up.
The clinic doctor's instructions
rattle my last nerve.
Addresses and keys in hand,
like Son House striding his blues pony,
I'll slake my sorrows in collection remains.

Release

Hiba Rasheed

Release #1: Occupation

I did not see it coming
A train of armed passengers
Seizing power
Spreading animosity
Self-loathing
Throughout the cities that flourished for decades
Under the sun of my now sallow skin and creased heart
I let them in
They sensed my weakness
Political disunity
Religious hypocrisy
Among the parts of me
I am now but a massive puppet
Under the mental erosion of emptiness

Release #2: Falling

Soul: Pieces of light strung together to make me
Mind: My controller; my guide
Conscience: Battlefield where mind and heart hold their clashes
Then come the cells, tissues, muscles, and bones
Encapsulated in a carnal vessel
Fastened by love
I stand at the edge of the abyss
Body unraveling at the seams
Contents spilling
Melting
I lose myself

Release #3: Walking out on (of) Oblivion

Nine months ago

We met

A faint stir of a heartbeat

Lulling in the darkness

We met

Somewhere between my subconsciousness and your consciousness

We met

In a state of limbo

Where inception could have meant beginning or end

I floated

Lost in the wilderness of my past

Conflicting with my present's descent into you
and setting me free

Heart Press

Maggie Walcott

Remember the first. Her tiny face
tender and raw like the day
she erupted from your quivering body
openly covered in mucus, so disgustingly
beautiful you could not help but press
your hard lips to her heart, that
small clementine sized organ,
hidden below layers of newly knit skin
compact and unripe and yet (and yet)
still bursting with meaning and life
so sweet, it scaled your mouth
to think this tiny heart would soon grow
fist-sized, clenched with courage
long before you were ready
your own heart has been a fist
for so long you could weep
but not yet (not yet), first you must
erupt with tender possession
signal tenure with hard application
of your lips to her cheek, her lips, her head
to her heart, mercifully still an orange
cradled gently in your grasp, for now

The Back and Forth

Jeremy Wm. Farrington

We spent the afternoon
like teenagers, holding hands,
walking the neighborhood like
we didn't have licenses
and kissing when we thought we could
get away with it.

On a swing set we traded
lyrics to old songs
before we debated
for half an hour whether or not
you would actually be the one
that saved me.

The words coming out of your mouth
are new but also familiar
and comforting at the same time.
You move behind me and with two hands
set me in motion, away from you,
then back, establishing a rhythm --

groan of metal chains,
my feet dragging on the ground
both ways. The patch where the grass
is gone is the groove in the record
where the DJ drops the needle
and the crowd goes wild.

The sun, like a pocket watch, set in the vest pocket
of the stand of trees in front of us and let us know
that even with you standing still, we were running out of time.
The trees cast shadows, arms that reached towards us then shrank
as it got darker, as you stopped my trajectory
by wrapping your arms around me.



Heart
Ellen Mary Hayes

Aurora

S. J. Perry

mornings in our bed
I like to be the small spoon
when I'm the big spoon
your gray hair tickles my nose
and my old back gets too cold

We thought that

Ellen Sander

it was that night you trembling held me voicing
thrall'd currents running wreck'd through my
limbs, relocated the Pleiades one by one between
sobs of laugh gasps.

We shivered under cover of jackets mumbled
nonsyls and bablets, that it was happiness, that life
would be such and ever. We read maps and fit
furniture, paused passing art, ate uni on a dare,
tongued the raw quail egg till it burst, salty cream of
its swell spreading in our palates. We flew to
Haleakela, hiked its sulphur gullet and lava tubes,
ate poi on a dare sighed sinsemilla vapors into one
another's mouths.

Two Lovers Parting At Dawn

Denise A. Martin

I turn to reach for the warm familiar contours of your body
Brush my lips across your shoulder
Run my hand along your thigh
The icy mattress etches a silhouette that startles me.

Dawn's creeping fingers
Grip the dresser drawer you never close
Shine glints of light on your favorite watch
Time stopped, battery dead.

Guinea Pig

Kendra Nuttall

Look at you, little jellybean,
freshly grown from fairytales.

You and I are the same—
small toys in a giant's land,

shy under the giant's hand.
I'll plant you in fleece,

bury your velvet nose
in blanket folds until it's time

to surface from security.
It's you and me

against the world.
Will you cuddle into clouds

or storm the castle?
I'm not asking you to be strong.

I'm asking you to stay alive
when the sword comes crashing down.

Weeping Willow

Catherine A. MacKenzie

I rest under a weeping willow,
Watching a darting dragonfly,

A ladybug lands on my shoulder,
Over yonder, a red cardinal chirps,

Earlier I found a polished penny
And days before a velvety feather,

All signs from heaven,
A deceased delivering love.

There Are Things Prettier Than Flowers

Kendra Nuttall

*“Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.”
—Dylan Thomas*

I bury myself in mountains
and press flowers in glass coffins,

because we're prettier that way,
out of reach.

I don't want eternal life
unless my dog lives forever too.

Don't make me
watch the world decay.

I'll go into that good night
if you open the door when I arrive.

'No One Can Explain How Planes Stay in the Air'

Clay Waters

bees are born with lift
clouds make thunder
without meaning to

life staggers blind
across a booby-trapped planet
miraculous and mathematical

streams of probabilities break and hum
soothing you to sleep
when your daughter is out too late
dodging drunks

but the same reckonings
that win the lottery
crash the planes

and a lone prime
may one night
stick like a bone in the throat
dividing you by nothing

First Light

Margaret Koger

Like frost on the narrow.

—May Sarton

my heart muscled to a tree

limbs leafed open

palms scooping up sun riddles

pulse frothing on Dagger Creek falls
coaxing a salmon mother's roe to red

me—raised an avian kited on mesa winds
weaving pied rhapsodies of dawn prayers

and tumbled into the arms spread-eagled
his spell of love

raw as a cut artery

Desire

Diana Raab

(In response to: "Love Sonnet XI" by Pablo Neruda)

I lust after every part of you—every one: your mouth—that lake where we met—and your eyes brilliant as its waters.

We walked slowly on that lake's edge, afraid to leap in too fast, afraid to dip into dangers living in its depths.

You kissed every fingerbreadth of my body. Even my scars enchanted you—oh, and how another human could be formed

with those stitches that hold me together.
Was there one part of my body you didn't cherish?

Your tongue slithered— a tiny snake—up and down my aging body.
It sang under that spell. You loved my years, a twinkle in each wrinkle.

Your cerulean gaze lit my crevices
all at once limp and tense
with desire. I watched you mirror my lust.

Such tantric waiting! We waited and waited until I could no longer keep my hands and mouth away from you.

And I remembered: just allow, be with it—once again
we were brought to desire's edge, before reality grabbed us back.

Actinic Keratosis

S. J. Perry

appears when
you have long been
too much in the sun

like any day
when you're of a certain age
it could kill you
but
it probably won't

it'll instead just fade
away
or crumble
away

the odd chance
that it'll develop
squamous cell carcinoma
adds a bit of purple

to otherwise
spotty grayness

O, Medusa

Meghan Sterling

Countless, the time I spend imagining my way out of a paper sack,
where the sack is actually solid rock, bills, stones, inherited rage,
the hoist and heft of the daily task of work, of being mother, of being wife.
Hand-holding, notes to self: spinach, toilet paper, laundry,
garbage out Thursdays,
she likes her milk cold. Countless, the hours I write numbers and lines to
figure out how to make it all run—the house, the job, the meals,
moonlight in the pines, a heap of leaves to turn into a craft. What a
wizard, what a saint. But really, I'm wound tight as a clock,
my shoulders pinned to the sky, my body steel,
my face patched and worn like a tire.
Even the moonlight gets tired of shining. Even the pines get to hide in the dark
sometimes. Even the cat. I found her under the bed yesterday, sitting on a guitar,
half of a stuffed mouse hanging from her maw. Too many other guitars
were under there, or I'd have joined her. Somedays, I dream of Iceland.
Others, of Greece. The place inside projected out,
where I don't flinch every time
someone says my name, where I don't hate the sounds of being alive,
because there are
fewer. O Medusa, O Madame, where is power when I need it,
when each day becomes
more mundane and less magic? I'm afraid my gladness is losing its luster.
Bring me your particular poison, help me funnel my dreams
into a basin of witch water,
help me refocus my gaze onto the extraordinary within the ordinary—
my husband's smooth hands, my daughter's lips on my cheek.

Cedar River, January

Jeff Burt

i.

What year is longer than another? This.

A storm comes through
me, again, icing
the shack I raised
in the winter of the heart.

ii.

These are unusual days:
crack-cold killing the thaw,
weather of forcing in.
So to my spirit
walled by the wind.

iii.

A red fox trotting on ice—
fire trapped in a mirror.
A red cedar falls on the frozen river,
King's dream on the hearts
of a new generation.

iv.

Oxygen depletes.
I gulp more
for less. Fish harden
below the ice,
I above.

v.

Love withheld is not love.
Love engages, love connects,
embraces through, holds.
To melt the ice,
I do not need a fist.

Sonnet for the isolation

William J. Joel

"Home is a shelter from storms-all sorts of storms."

—William J. Bennett

Go back inside! Go back inside! Don't stand
around on corners, swapping stories. Stop
embracing friends, no heartfelt hugs. Don't slam
your palms against each other's, spreading droplets,
bits of virus, faster, bringing plague
to those whose bodies are too weak to fend
off illness. Just because your cough is vague
and fading does not mean that in the end
someone you touch, or come too close to, can't
contract this scourge that knows no nations, flies
across our borders, seeks out hosts to grant
it entry—watch it quickly colonize.
But isolation's not too much to give,
if doing so will mean that more might live.

Craving You

Diana Raab

(In response to: "I Crave Your Mouth, Your Voice, Your Hair" by Pablo Neruda)

I crave after every part of you,
from your perfectly aligned toes
to your balding head with snowy flecks.

This morning, you stand at your shower door—
peek as you enter under water droplets,
I peer through frosted glass and yearn

for you to hold me, lift me up
and twirl me around, like the ballerina
we loved at last night's show.

I want to do everything with you:
watch you place two steaks
on our barbeque, baste potatoes,

and lick ice cream drips from your cone,
and sprinkle me with kisses. I want
no sunrises and sunsets without you,

but long for fleeting rainbows to encircle us
and shooting stars, the guards of all our wishes.

Enough of Sadness

(A Plea in Villanelle)

Russell Willis

Enough of sadness
Of stars when crossed
Is it too much to ask, to ask for kindness?

Enough of rage's stress
When even righteous anger exhausts
Enough of sadness

When 'my' advantage is the one you press
And at that moment "us" is lost
Is it too much to ask, to ask for kindness?

What of our blindness
To hate and at what cost?
Enough of sadness

We form lines of words to artfully express
Our deepest fears and angers glossed
Is it too much to ask, to ask for kindness?

To know affection's tender caress
In words and verse not willfully tossed
Enough of sadness
Is it too much to ask, to ask for kindness?

Summer Nuptials

Karen Mandell

I ran home to Rose, lying on a chaise lounge
In the shared yard of our Michigan summer rental.
I could barely speak for excitement.
I'm going to be married next time, I said,
Raising the bouquet I'd plucked from the air
When the child bride tossed it.
I held it like a torch inches from Rose's face.
I caught it, so next it's my turn.
Calm down she said, take it easy.
A wisp of irritation, like a down feather
Floated between us. Take it easy?
I'll be the bride next week.
What did Rose see in her daughter's face
That moment? Wild short-sighted eyes,
Over-excitement, exultance. It didn't bode well.
Too much for her high strung seven-year-old.
Next there'd be crying. As usual.
I knew what she was thinking,
But I was too high to come down that fast.
And I didn't want to. That feeling,
The giddiness, the rawness, the delight.
Did I get married the next week?
Who was my beloved?
Of that no trace, unmarked memory;
Catching the bouquet, the astonishing luck of it,
Its joyful unexpectedness, its explosiveness
Nothing could compare to that.

At the End of the Day

William Pruitt

My son calls me up to tell him goodnight. He is four.
I ascend the stairs, he is already in bed with Teddy.
He asks me to sing him the song I made up for him.
I sing it every night. It has birds and fish and sun and stars,
trees and rivers and mountains..
It comforts both of us, a routine to end the day.
To tell a story of how each member
of our family loves him, how he loves them back.

As I sing and we both listen, I am allowed in this moment
to step away from son—he's not just that—but
another human being, deliciously close.
Together we make a life.
It has an arc, a story, a poem, a song.

I know I am young, going somewhere wonderful
But it will never be any better than this.

But Here

Ivan Peledov

This land's secret obsession is my best friend.
It's full of unsound traffic lights
and trees with the gloves and masks
of innocent fiends caught in the branches.
It laughs at my signatures, my name,
my wording, my accent. It wants me to be
a nobody like that lucky traveler
who could dupe himself and become the other,
not even a reflection in a sacred pond.



Watching Always

Holly Day

When I was 20, a man showed up at the office I worked at,
filled out a job application
asked when I'd call him back. I told him I didn't make the calls,
it was my boss
and I thought that was it.

The next day, the man showed up at the office I worked at,
handed me a card that said
"Can we be friends?" I laughed and shook my head and
said something like
"I'm too busy for friends," because I didn't want to be mean
and I really didn't want to be friends.

Over the next few months, he showed up in my life every single day,
would just sit
in the lobby of the office and stare at me through the reception window.
I'd find reasons
to leave my office every chance I could get, would volunteer
to help other secretaries
with their filing, or to run paperwork out to the warehouse,
or ask my boss if I could use his
computer
to type up reports. When I'd get back to my office, the man
would still be sitting there
unless someone chased him away for the day.

He found out which bus I took and would be on it already when I got on,
would sit in the back
while I sat in the front, trying to discover which stop
I got off on. I would ride the bus
to the end of the line, and just tell the bus driver

I'd missed my stop, that I'd just wait until he turned around and catch it on the way back. The man at the back of the bus would get frustrated and just get off, as if he knew I might ride that bus back and forth all night waiting for him to get off before me. And I would have, too.

Eventually, my boss asked me why the man kept coming in and I told him how he wouldn't leave me alone, how we should call the police how I didn't want to get the company in trouble so I hadn't done it myself. The police were called and the man was hauled away twice, but the office manager insisted that I must have done something to lead him on that maybe the man was an ex-boyfriend who just wouldn't let go—he called these lectures “fatherly talks.” The last time I saw the man

was right before the police came to get him for the third and final time. He came into the lobby with the same ripped-up red t-shirt he'd had on for weeks a pair of dirty jeans, his hair wild and disheveled. He was so angry at me told me I wasn't a very good friend and said I should be careful how I treated people.

legacy

Corey J. Boren

you recall this much:

pounding fists, the shaking brown door,
your mother's arms grasping, shaking,
not enough limbs to pull
all of her children into her, not enough skin
to press into skin, not enough skirt to cling to,
the second story window overlooking
the neighborhood, the swirls
painted onto the ceiling in plaster,
and finally, cruel fingers slipping under the crack
in between the oak or maple and the carpet,
pulling, pushing, hinges twisting and gasping,
the knots and swirls of the wood
giving way to cracks and canyons
and shattering and hallways.

you remember nothing after.

Gideon's Bible

Cheryl Heineman

I was told to check into a Chicago motel,
just off a busy freeway, alone.
A man named Rudy would come.
It would cost three months' rent.
A woman tells the story on the radio
about her abortion forty years ago.
Rudy showed up in a crumpled brown suit
with a paper bag in his hand.

Maybe there shouldn't have been Gideon's Bible
in the drawer next to the bed when I woke
in bloody sheets, the man gone.
Maybe it wasn't the time for insistence
of life, as I rode the train back home
past spring's curled gardens bursting
with so much lily of the valley.

a selective bastard writes

Paul Tanner

he was curled up
under the bus stop bench.
I stood apart, looking at the empty road.
he groaned
from under the bus stop bench.
I stood apart.
there came
from under the bus stop bench
the unmistakable squelchy sounds
of his vomiting,
but still I stood apart
and I stood apart
when the vomiting finally stopped
to be replaced by
the gurgling of
his clogged throat
for my shift was done
my night shift at the shop
was done
and I refused to nanny
another drunk
especially on my own time
so I stood apart
as the blister of the sun
bled all over the car park
I stood apart
as even the gurgles
stopped
I stood apart
until the bus
never showed
and then some.

Everyday Stress

Ann E. Michael

Whatever lays you low this arid day
under the sky's pressure too blue to bear
it isn't forbearance—
you've nothing new to add to the discussion;
everyone's under duress, you're not alone
in this strained torpor.
It isn't Xanax, not Prozac
or booze you require. The outside world's
too hot, too raw. Go in. Turn on the air
conditioner, gaze out glazed windows.
Thunder, earthquakes,
brimstone at the threshold,
creditors trampled, your wife in your arms.
Say you have saved someone
and the tension's all worthwhile,
you've fixed the thing that was broken,
clockworks, spinning wheel,
axe handle, heart, the heart,
the seized-taut alternator
of your heart.

Beautiful Once

Lorelei Bacht

You disgust me, make me sick -
broken glass in my mouth.

Perspectives petrified:
everywhere a wall. I thought -
I don't know what I thought.

How does anyone hold a thought?
A long, long cry, piece of metal
along the scalp. Electrified. What
passes for thinking, these nights:
dark images, repeated talks

with no-one. Each reprise
a descent. One more step, one
more step, a pool of black,
a bucket - filled with what? What
was it, what is it you want,

or don't want? I want nothing.
I want a blank sheet of nothing.
A big blank check, a white blanket.
I want to be five and not now,
my mother to call school. I am

not well. I need a rest. Every step
taken so far must have been
a mistake - I ended up in the wrong
place, with the wrong face, something
broken inside. I never wanted it

so dark. I wanted light. You were
Beautiful once.

Hard Water

Jeff Burt

squandered tire tread,
voice cracking to a song
when the pavement buckles or emotion rises,
ravens power-lifting daylight out of darkness,
road white with age and rage
like the muzzle of old dog,
and difficult, missing shoulders,
wild weeds reaching like taming hands
to slow the wheels as they pass,
anger dissipating into asphalt,
Kendall's death once a mirage
settling into hard water,
the road leading to a void
where loss can be emptied
and to some other place without joy,
without peace, without anger,
not a destination since it's not
where I set out for,
not a start, a beginning,
but a place to start to find a place to begin

I Cannot Listen

Kate Maxwell

Don't talk to me of ocean, songs
sunshine days, and whispers.
Hissing in the winter wind
the icy hand of melancholy
has called itself my friend
even as I've pulled my wrist
from its cold grasp and pushed
front teeth over lips to name it.

Talk instead of empty rooms
floating dust and sucking
silence or cardboard boxes
rough with dull surrender
and brown as cracked earth
where hours and years are
packed away with masking
tape to fade into forgetting.

Or talk of stale-breathed
mornings, musty doona as
I watch the mouldy ceiling
listen to the screeching whine
of neighbour's plumbing
and run cold fingers down
the empty half of my double
bed while I wait for purpose.

But don't talk to me
of summer-baked Sundays
or a warm scented neck
where I'd stupidly nestled
my breath, my flesh, my years.
Those words are scabby fists
against my purple head.
I cannot listen yet.

Looking back

Katy Bond

Remember the childhood habit
of speaking every sentence twice,
the second time in a whisper,
another opportunity to catch
the liquid idea in hands
whose knobby fingers could not keep even light
from slipping between.

The dream is not a clever animal;
it reveals itself in noises spilling from
the moonhidden brush –
a susurrus spelling out the second chance
of grieving alone. In the dream the
figure can be pushed away. The intrusion
is prevented the way it happened:
permanently, and sometimes, yes, the
trespasser is cracked against the sink
and bleeds dark blood.
Meanwhile the childself,
in all her pink formlessness,
walks on her knees on the sidewalk fearing God
and gropes into the future for the right words
and cannot be warned
of what happens in a few years
when she finds them.

Letting It Happen

Carolyn Adams

Private music.
Peculiar
architecture.
Miles of
various grays.

Feet submerged.
Motionless.

The instrument
is non-essential.
The hour
irrelevant.
The cause
Absent.

Eyes closed.

A red sun
explodes.
A final note
to end all things.

My favorite song.

I did something wrong.

Lorelei Bacht

I thought
that I wanted it to happen;
but when it did, it was not
the shape or colour
that I wanted at all. It was
larger and uglier
than the idea of it,
and no fun. I said
words - when they were
nothing more than words,
I wished them all
to become real. It was going
to be: my revenge,
my final win - I deserved it.
Sitting here a posteriori,
the words have lost
their initial appeal.
i can see them
for what they were
all along: hurtful, wrong.
i am afraid
of the ugliness I have
manifested. It stares at me:
black wings. It refuses
to go away, until
everyone knows
that I was the one
who did it.

inheritance

Corey J. Boren

even if i wished it—

all your blue eyes, brown eyes,
brown hair, blonde hair,
your irish melting into their danish
and falling into my american, your home movies,
accents almost transatlantic as you wave
at the blaring fire engine, my spiderman light-up
tennis shoes skidding along asphalt,
stubby fingers raised in saltwater taffy praise,
your deliberate slicing of the wedding cake, suit
and dress and black and white, the grainy filter
over every photo of you, the selfie i send on snapchat
and hope she screenshots, or at least replays,
singing little brown jug to mesmerized toddlers,
the suckers i stick between my teeth and pretend
are cigarettes, your russet skin, my tan skin,
the splinters and calluses and handcarts
and my sleeping in, missing church, feeling guilty,
the ice cream parlor just off of main street
where you hid the ring in the vanilla scoops,
the soda i bring her every time i drive over,
your stiff leg, my quaking legs, cresting the final mountain,
losing breath at the sight of the valley, the mountains
i named after people i knew, the valley i cannot leave,
your panic in the dark cave, gripping the hem
of your dress, begging the tour guide to let you
back out into the sunlight, my lithium, desvenlafaxine,
aripiprazole, the endless reasons i cannot find my breath,
your quiet tragedies, your blessed mistakes, your bleeding knees,
my quiet tragedies, my blessed mistakes, my bleeding knees,
and if nothing else, the ribbon of cells once belonging to you,
all the days you lived or didn't giving way to my birthday
tell me this path is not my own, i owe debts to the dead

—i cannot be rid of you.

Winner of Rehab Jeopardy

Robert Armstrong

I'm surrounded
by beasts,
They sit at a table
Wearing
Skins of man,
Shouting,
Screaming,
Rutting,
Snorting,
Spitting,
Humanity gone
From their eyes,
An orgy of
Mass hysteria,
Incomprehensible
Words screamed
To the heavens,
In animalistic
Ecstasy, and
It's sad to watch,
This madness,
This degradation,
Of the Human
Condition.

The War Begins

Gurupreet K. Khalsa

Like a molten basketball, fairy fire,
the red sun sinks painfully in the West.
Heaven pulls its special hood over its head,
graveyard-still, silent as a cat in a bush.

In a flash, the boom ruptures the night,
cannon splits the ice,
flame writes its words, swimming in waves
across the ocean.

Roxy and her friends, in terror, rush
to pressed huddle.

Oh mama, your Nikes are melting, they
don't have any substance, it looks bad for
America.

There isn't anything I can do
she replies. There will be no succor
for any of us. Babies will die.
We're lost.



Stuck in a Moment

Steve Bowman

His grandparent's stairs are cheap
wooden slats with see-through spaces
between. Each one creaks and groans
with familiar complaint. They go
on and on. Ominous sounds
float around him; the soft whine
of a baby muffled between walls
distant, inconsolable.

Unnerved he turns to go back
but the steps are no longer wood.
They are crunchy brown leaves.
The kind kids jump into
at Halloween time. But it is too hot
for October, and this is no front yard.
The ground slants down. At the bottom
he sees a meandering creek.
The baby screams become the distant hum
of his grandpa's tractor, working the tobacco fields.

He turns and sees what he tried to ignore
for nearly thirty years: his child self,
further down the slope in a clearing
between trees. The child is on all fours,
his blue jeans around his ankles.
A few steps closer, the child's eyes
widen with shock and wonder.
Behind the child is his uncle.
His jeans pulled down too; his eyes
closed with a determined smile.
They move back and forth
like new leaves on spring trees.
This is not what he wants to see
but he can't stop, can't blink.

The scene is ever present
in the theater of his mind.
Shame and fear speed him forward.
His mouth opens in a silent roar,
his arms and clawed fingers
ready to hurl his uncle
to the black water below.

His hands touch nothing
but air. His uncle shimmers
in the afternoon sun, then blows up
like a puff ball. The blue and pink
pieces of his skin and jeans
skitter like bugs across the leaves
in hundreds of directions.
Some rematerialize and gyrate
with that determined smile.
He hates that smile
and stomps the nearest bug.
Another poof ball and hundreds more uncles
skitter off, smiling and gyrating.
Grandpa's tractor still drones
merrily in the fields above.

Blind Alley

Michael Igoe

Caesar is the past master
who quotes patient makers,
only conversing in sunlight.
He lives the outdoor life;
likes the smell of melons.
It will waft toward him,
carried on a mild breeze
coming from a pitchman.
He's furnished with silver,
but what he needs is gold.

A 300-pound man

Sandra Vallie

hefts a metal crucifix from his shoulders.
Waves it like wrath

strikes two officers and four bystanders.
He has a history. The cops shoot barbs

into his skin.
Stun him through the wires.

He apologizes. Looks fine to them –
they can't hardly see he's already dead.

He has a history –
thinks it best to leave town. Walks

76 miles from Albuquerque
into the Jemez Mountains. He has experience

can translate the heat ahead to degrees
of sag in his legs when the sun sweats his body dry.

His bare feet, bleeding
spot and pickle hard packed sand.

Soon the talus will wear through. The tibia,
pegged, whistles with his steps.

The path ends at a cliff wall. With nowhere to go
he considers disembodiment

different methods and designs. Chooses
to swing that wrought-iron cross

into the cliff where red stone and the white
share boundaries. That sound so loud

pulls his blood from the chambers of his heart.
That sound — where hymns and the music of flesh

silence each other splits his cells. Quiet
he hears lives brush against branches.

The connection's unclear and those in the know
hear a message from god. His pain looks like a grin

rusty and chapped. Right palm flat on the geology
he scans for electricity. The crucifix

pulls his arms to the ground. No idea better than this.
Some crackling hum completes the circuit.

"I'm just saying," he screams, and throws the crucifix so high
its light melts into the full moon bright as morning.

She Speaks

Amrita Valan

Sleek brass figurine
Deity of knowledge
Saraswati pristine
Goddess upon swan
Plays the Veena
On my writing desk.
Blessing my thoughts
Manifold expressions
Curlicues of insane
Longings, passions
Flash frozen despair,
Trinkets aside.
Bling blindsided,
My compass is her
Constancy. Veracity
Shuns false tidings
Truth keeps the
Heart floating
Atop past baggage.
So, upon this premise
I unsheathe my quill
I write my reveal
I write what I feel
So, help me Goddess
Sitting yonder, so
Surreal and still.

Garage Sale Rooster

Cheryl Heineman

Because of rust, what you overlooked,
you paused for its bent rebar feet,
marred beak, and yellow
head topped by a crimson comb,
for its wattles dangling
over an Iowa green body,
paint fading.
Because your once bright, not
leathered, arms carried grain
with innocent hands, you fed them,
the chickens, your simple mission for the day.
Then you saw one dragged. Then.
It was cruel, the head chopped
bloody, feathered-black
the body flopped on, without a head,
sight spurting
from its veins, the noonday sky
red-fired with sharp streaks, slack, sudden.
In the kitchen, a waiting
pot boiled on an old stove.
It had its own distress, that old pot.
Into the heat, the salt
the onions, the butter,
the body, finally quiet, fell
for supper, for you
on the farm who ate, because,
because you could not resist.

Centipede.

Lorelei Bacht

Centipede. Murderous
Mess of body fragments.
I have children - I have
To do it: inflict preventive death
With a blunt instrument.

Necklace of clawed segments.
At the distance of a handle,
Long and short enough to ensure
The safe delivery of intentions.
Me on one end, inventing myself

Resolute. It on the other end,
Speaking of a phenomenon
Unknown to us both, until
Only one of us receives
The last knowing.

I watch it writhes its final
Happening. Disorderly ripples,
Indicative of nervous
Ganglia. The flesh all white,
Lucent viscosities.

Fallen giant, jaws of poison
Now pathetic - I feel
Sorry for it. Bound by
The immediacy of its demise,
It has stopped perceiving me.

One last thrust, an attempt
At a short and humane
Delivery of death. It comes
Undone. Something of it
Goes somewhere else.

What remains is nothing.
Everything to the ants, the mold
That begins to advance.
Everything says:
Your turn now, our turn later.

Flowerbed

Sam Houty

If someone calls you a flower **crush yourself into potpourri**
hold their hand and explain **until fragrance emanates from your pores**
that you're not a woman **masked by the wind**
In time that might change **overcome by this essence**
she sleeps inside of you **dreaming of flowerbeds**
Counts falling petals **their concentric folds**
buds that never wilt **that curl until Spring**

Glory Be

Emelia (Mia) Maceasik

I am an unplanted garden
fertilized with unread emails and ignored phone calls

doubt is a vine in my lungs
and those leaves look beautiful in between my lips

I'm choking with a grin
I don't know any other way of living

I tell myself I like the dirt
Because I just can't imagine growing something healthy

in a plot made out of clay.

The Tiniest Rose

Bobbi Sinha-Morey

I felt like the tiniest rose
in the garden, born to
blush but never to be seen,
so many long necked ones
far above me bathing their
petals in the warm morning
light, selfishly hiding the sun
away from me. I drink in the
brief April rain like the blades
of grass do, but it doesn't sate
me, never pierces me with
a joy for living. My hope
already begins to curl in on
me, my dark red petals forever
untouched by human hand, my
life unblessed by an unseeing
god, my spirit beginning to die
on its stem.

Empty

Olena Prusenkova

You accuse me of having empty days,
But what is emptiness if not
Noise?
Of the people that don't know your birthday or your colour,
Of the cars that buzz as they pass with indifference,
Of the past that crawls in without permission,
Of the longing that has turned into a devil's habit?
Emptiness is people
And people running away from it.
But if we are running inside the hamster's wheel,
Is there really an exit?
Emptiness is you, and me, and him,
And her with her on a Sunday morning:
Touching someone's hand when departing
For the last train to never.
Making love and imagining others in your mind,
Never saying anything
When your soul has a story boiling within.
If you think that busyness cures emptiness
Then you're yet to look inside,
To confront, and see, and love the monster
Who is You, who is Beauty, who is Fault -
For the most cherishing thing about humanity
is its mistakes.

As Late as Never

Bennie Rosa

Look beyond stars
There,
You see,
That far corner
Of a night.
As far from home
As wrong
From right.

Will silhouettes fly
On wings of dreams
Or melt away
In Fires
Of Light?

Listen, listen closely then,
Listen as they breathe
Their final hymn
They wait.

Dreams take time,
Time takes forever,
Sometimes late,
Sometimes,
As late
As never.

When the Wind Blows Backwards

Gurupreet K. Khalsa

Yes, a dark time passed over this land, but now there is something like light.

—Dave Eggers, *Zeitoun*

Zephyrs they are not, howling horizontal harridans;
yowling, exhausting explosions erupting,
xystus unroofed by disastrous destroying demolition;
whirlwinds of passion and power produce
violence in the sky, ranting, raving, roaring,
until our nerves are shocked, shattered, splintered;
twisting, thumping, terrible tempests
scream and bluster; bombastic battles
rumble, grumble, and tumble across
quailing coasts that bellow and boom;
protection, none, from keening cacophony,
ominous squalling shrieks, snarling strikes;
no shelter from the clomping, stomping,
moaning winds that bash, lash, smash
like raging furies: fulminating, fractious,
kicking trees on their faces, spitting;
jolting, juddering, jangling
invective from awful angry angels
harangues the earth and finds no berth:
gales that whack and whoosh and wail
fulminate through crying, crushing clouds;
encircling gusts twine and twist,
defeating fragile faltering flowers;
crushing, thundering shouts, yells, and yelps,
baying, barking hounds that howl and growl.
As it calms: sun; silent, still, serene, soothed.

Ravin' Baltimore

James Penha

Urged by po' grave Edgar lying
cornered at Westminster
Churchyard, he picked
Jody's hottest sauce
for his biscuited Baltimore crab cake
a buck eighty-five at Lexington
Market. Succulent flakes blushed
by cumin and chiles brought him round
to The 400 Block. Stepped right in
urged cornered picked bal-ti-more crab
cake buck market succulent blushed hot
cumin brought him round

Responsive Reading

Jeff Burt

We are the cheap leather of shoes and walk like fugitives
who forage all day for their food.

*We are steers in the prairie eating dry words as we wander
waiting for the shock at the end of the chute.*

We are the cotton in shirts that makes us love the touch of hands
that pull and rub our skin.

*We are tufts in the field tinged with the blood of slaves
singing to Jesus, soul, funk, spiritual jazz.*

We are the metal in the ring that signifies how we can be hard, cold,
and hurt the one it signified to love.

*We are glints of gold, not nuggets or lodes,
if strikes, like an errant swing.*

We are the tint in our hair, the dye in our beards that tricks
the mirror-mirror on the wall.

*We are camouflage, misdirection, we are smoke
without fire, hide beauty by stain.*

We are suits, ensembles, decoration, pseudo-form and fit,
the clothes that make the person.

*We are Levi's, Prada, we lurch from the gates of Lauren,
we are Abound, Gucci, we are Swoosh.*

Inside

Holly Day

You should have stayed out of me, I think
as I dig into my skin with the burnt end of a safety pin
expose the hiding place of the tiny insect that's burrowed into my flesh
expose it and its invisible brood to sunlight and air.
You should have picked another spot, I amend

wondering how long it would have taken me to discover
the little creature hiding beneath my flesh
if it had decided to settle into a spot in my ass crack
in the middle of my back, somewhere in my foot.
It probably would have taken weeks before I realized
that the itchy patch in the spot I couldn't reach

was a spreading colony of mites
the descendants of an unwelcome passenger
picked up during a weekend by the lake.

driving south on interstate 15

Corey J. Boren

in las vegas, i think,
but maybe provo,
she is telling her children
to pile into the car
above the screams,
above the shattered kitschy plates
and overturned rocking chair,
slipping behind the steering wheel,

barely pulling into reverse
before his hand bursts
through the driver's side,
fingers dug in her 70s bob,
their screams too feral, too inhuman,
pale arms raking plaid sleeves,
pushing the gas pedal, backing out the garage
in a vicious dance between slacks
and tires and fistfuls of brunette,

and my mother is staring
from the passenger seat,
her hair hovering like corn silk
in the static, rolling up the window
on her side, and then rubber meets asphalt,
and suddenly, he is gone,

and i'm going twenty
over the speed limit,
desperate to catch up
to her station wagon.

i'm on my way, i'm thinking.
i'm on my way. i promise.

The Fourteenth

Margaret Koger

What if this nation under guns can't breathe?
Have you called your mother yet?
One, two, buckle your shoe...

What if an EMT lit on fire isn't enough?
What if a soldier dies in Afghanistan just because?
Three, four, shut the door...

Shall I record everyone near me in the park?
Can you see the trees breathe out oxygen?
Five, six, pick up sticks...

If a tree falls on the greenbelt do leaves suffocate?
If a mask is too much trouble... cough, cough?
Seven, eight, lay them straight...

When would you cry for a chocolate-moon pie?
What if boogaloos get on (with) your life?
Nine, ten, a big fat hen...

Why is my nephew flying The Stars and Bars?
Since grandmother said never trust an Irishman...
Eleven, twelve, dig and delve...

Do you imagine our seedlings will survive?
thirteen, fourteen, draw the curtain...

HANGOVER, GREENWICH VILLAGE, 1992

Gary Sokolow

What have the poets taught?
A dead-man's float in a Minneapolis river?
Dry land dry?

I've been here far too long, the police sirens bleeding
Through the walls, the morning procession

Of funeral headlights, fail to move me: maybe you can
Pin it down for me, deconstruct the hegemony

Of my heart, how it all falls out of balance, a line
Failing to follow a

Line, the divining rod of my future lost.

I've lived on dry toast, I've drank the blackest of coffees,
I've felt the broken cobblestones along Lafayette,

Remembered the furniture sanders missing from Great Jones,
Remembered the Yippie Press, a boarded up Bleecker Street memory.

In my childhood it was a mother on our block who committed suicide
With a cracked open head, a classmate with jet black hair too scared

To leave her home. In our house, it was the orange flower wallpaper hanging
In our kitchen that drove us mad, the endless rage of summer fan,

The broken-hearted landlady below us who sat in her nightgown at
the window, 'Jakela, Jakela', she cried out after her dead husband

As all day long the window coughed opened and shut.

Author Bios

Jan Ball's three chapbooks and first full length poetry book, *I Wanted To Dance With My Father*, were published by Finishing Line Press. Besides the books, Jan has had 336 poems published or accepted in the U.S. and internationally, in journals like: *ABZ*, *Atlanta Review*, *Chiron*, *Main Street Rag*, and *Phoebe*. Her poem, "Not Sharing at Yoshu" was nominated for the Pushcart by Orbis, Great Britain, 2020.

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in *Soundings East*, *Dalhousie Review* and *Connecticut River Review*. Latest book, "Leaves On Pages" is available through Amazon.

Ellen Huang (she/her) holds a BA in Writing + Theatre minor from Point Loma Nazarene University. She has pieces published in *Bleached Butterfly*, *Polemical Zine*, *The Wild Word*, *Moonchild Magazine*, *Apparition Lit* and *Periwinkle Lit*, among others. She also reads for *Whale Road Review* and runs a fantasy-inspired blog: worrydollsandfloatinglights.wordpress.com.

Michael Igoe, Chicago Now Boston, city boy, neurodiverse, numerous works in journals online and in print. recent: anserjournal.org, theblenib.com, musicalprimates.com; *Avalanches In Poetry Anthology* available at amazon.com, National Library Of Poetry Editors Choice Award 1997. Twitter: MichaelIgoe5. Urban realism/Surrealism- I like the night.

Karen Mandell. I've taught writing at the high school and college levels and literature at community senior centers. My short story Goddess of Mercy is forthcoming from Notre Dame Review. I've written Clicking, interconnected short stories, and Rose Has a New Walker, a book of poetry.

All things are connected. That's the premise of what **William J. Joel** does. Each of Mr. Joel's interests informs each other. Mr. Joel has been teaching computer science since 1983 and has been a writer even longer. His works have recently appeared in Common Ground Review, DASH Literary Journal, The Blend International, Liminality, and North Dakota Quarterly.

c. a. mackenzie (she/her/hers) is an MSW student for interpersonal practice and has a BA in English, Creative Writing, and Psychology from The University of Michigan-Ann Arbor. c. a. mackenzie is a graduate intern in outpatient child/adolescent psychiatry with interests in trauma-related conditions and intergenerational trauma.

Ivanka Fear is a former teacher now pursuing her passion for writing. Her poems and short stories appear in *Spadina Literary Review*, *Montreal Writes*, *Adelaide Literary*, *October Hill*, *Scarlet Leaf Review*, *The Sirens Call*, *The Literary Hatchet*, *Wellington Street Review*, *Aphelion*, *Muddy River Poetry Review*, and elsewhere. <https://ivankafear.wix.com/mysite>

Joan McNerney's poetry is found in many literary magazines such as Seven Circle Press, Dinner with the Muse, Poet Warriors, Blueline, and Halcyon Days. Four Bright Hills Press Anthologies, several Poppy Road Journals, and numerous Poets' Espresso Reviews have accepted her work. She has four Best of the Net nominations. Her latest title is *The Muse in Miniature* available on Amazon.com and Cyberwit.net

Natalli Amato is the author of the poetry collection "On a Windless Night." She currently works for Rolling Stone and lives in Sackets Harbor, New York.

Chris Jones has felt poems emerge from within since he was a teenager but didn't start writing in earnest until he turned 60. Chris's journey to become a leadership coach has heightened his self-awareness and many of his poems describe that experience and self-reflection.

Paul Tanner. I've been earning minimum wage, and writing about it, for too long. Was shortlisted for the Erbacce 2020 Poetry Prize. "Shop Talk: Poems for Shop Workers" was published last year by Penniless Press. "No Refunds: Poems and cartoons from your local supermarket" is out now, from Alien Buddha Press.

Catherine A. MacKenzie's works include short story compilations, poetry collections, and children's picture books. Her third novel, *My Brother, the Wolf*, will complete *Wolves Don't Knock* and *Mister Wolfe*. *My Heart*

Is Broken memorializes her son in poetry. She lives in West Porters Lake, Nova Scotia, Canada.

Charlene Moskal volunteers with The Alzheimers Poetry Project. She is recently published in *Humana Obscura*, *Connecticut River Review*, *Sandstone & Silver*; an *Anthology of Nevada Poets*. Her second chapbook is “One Bare Foot” (Zeitgeist Press). Charlene is in her seventh decade, laughs often, loves coffee ice cream hot fudge sundaes.

Valerie Frost is a Garden State native. She lives in Central Kentucky with her twin three-year-olds. Her poems have appeared in the *Eastern Iowa Review*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *Thimble Literary Magazine*, and elsewhere.
@TheMillBradshaw

Kendra Nuttall is a copywriter by day and poet by night. Her work has appeared in *Spectrum*, *Capsule Stories*, *Chiron Review*, and *What Rough Beast*, among other journals and anthologies. She is the author of *A Statistical Study of Randomness* (Finishing Line Press). She lives in Utah. Find her online at kendranuttall.com and on Instagram @kendra.nuttall.

Hiba Rasheed is a UAE-based Sudanese slam poet, and three-time winner of the Rooftop Rhythms Slam Poetry Competition in Abu Dhabi. Hiba has performed at a plethora of events and has had her poems published in several online and print magazines; in addition to being featured in several track singles with local producers and rappers. Hiba has released two poetry videos and is currently working on her third project.

Ellen Sander, a rock and roll heart, lives in Belfast, Maine. Her chapbook, “Hawthorne, a House in Bolinas,” is published by Finishing Line Press. Her next chapbook, “Aquifer,” will be published by Red Bird Chapbooks. More importantly, the cat is sprawled out over everything important on the desk --snoring-- that’s how the day is going.

Jeremy Wm. Farrington always wanted to be socially distant but never had the opportunity. He is the father of twins and is a distance runner. You can read about his other heartbreaks in *River River*.

Yash Seyedbagheri is a graduate of Colorado State University's MFA program in fiction. His stories, "Soon," "How To Be A Good Episcopalian," and "Tales From A Communion Line" were nominated for Pushcarts. Yash's work has been published in *The Journal of Compressed Creative Arts*, *Write City Magazine*, and *Ariel Chart*, among others.

S. J. Perry's poems have recently appeared in *Writing from Inlandia*, *Cholla Needles*, and *MUSE*. He studied at Emporia State University and the University of Kansas. A retired high school English teacher, he has lived in Southern California since 1985.

Clay Waters has had poems published in *The Santa Clara Review*, *River Oak Review*, *Literal Latte*, and *Poet Lore*. His website is claywaters.org, featuring his self-published cozy mystery *Death in the Eye*. Clay lived in Florida until the age of four and returned to find it hasn't changed a bit.

Marjorie Power. My most recent full length poetry collection, *SUFFICIENT EMPTINESS*, is forthcoming from Deerbrook Editions. A chapbook, "REFUSES TO SUFFOCATE," appeared in 2019 from Blue Lyra Press. Publications which have taken my work recently include *MUDFISH*, *COMMONWEAL*, and *SOUTHERN POETRY REVIEW*. I can be found at www.marjoriepowerpoet.com.

Kami Westhoff is the author of the story collection *The Criteria* (Unsolicited Press, 2022), and chapbooks "Cloudbound" (Dancing Girl Press, 2021), "Sleepwalker" (Minerva Rising, 2017), and "Your Body a Bullet" (Unsolicited Press, 2018), co-written with Elizabeth Vignali. She teaches creative writing at Western Washington University in Bellingham, WA. Rp Verlaine lives and writes in New York City. He has an MFA in creative writing from City College. His first volume of poetry *Damaged by Dames & Drinking* was published in 2017 and another, *Femme Fatales Movie Starlets & Rockers*, in 2018. A set of three e books titled, *Lies From The Autobiography 1-3* followed.

Ellen Roberts Young's third chapbook with Finishing Line Press, "Transported," is due out in early 2021. She has a full-length collection, *Made and Remade* (Wordtech, 2014) as well as poems in numerous print

and online journals. She is an editor of Sin Fronteras/Writers Without Borders Journal, and blogs at www.freethoughtandmetaphor.com.

Sita Gaia is a TEDX Alumnae and has been writing poetry since grade three. During the pandemic, she has honed in on new skills and made new connections in the poetry world. She was first introduced to W.H. Auden by her older brother, and her collection of poetry books continues to grow. She also loves owls, drinks way too much coffee, and lives in Vancouver with her wife and their plants. Her instagram handle is joeyjo422.

Bennie Rosa lives in the high desert of Central New Mexico where he writes short stories, flash fiction, novels, and drama. His writing will appear in an upcoming Grey Borders Anthology entitled “Daddy: A Cultural Anthology” and was recently published in *Dream Pop Journal*, *New World Writing*, *The Writers Club*, *Barrio Beat* and others.

KB Baltz was born in a Cosmic Hamlet by the Sea, a month early and sideways. She has been doing things backward ever since. When she isn’t writing, KB can be found screaming into the void while starting a master’s degree in GIS. You can find some of her other work at *Atlas and Alice*, *Pure Slush*, and *Rouge Agent*.

Frank Carellini tends to poetry as a mechanism to grasp the fleeting enormity of life, nature, consciousness. raised in Brooklyn, NY, Frank has recently published poetry in communion and tiger moth. Educated in business and biochemistry, he builds life science startups that make the world a bit better.

William Doreski lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire. He has taught at several colleges and universities and retired after three decades at Keene State College. His most recent book of poetry is *Stirring the Soup* (2020). He has published three critical studies, including Robert Lowell’s Shifting Colors. His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in many journals.

Meghan Sterling’s work has been published in *Rattle, Glass, Sky Island Journal*, *Red Paint Hill*, and many others. She has been awarded a Hewnoaks

Artist Colony Residency in 2019 and 2021. Her first full-length collection, *These Few Seeds*, is forthcoming from Terrapin Books in 2021. Read her work at meghansterling.com.

Kelli Lage lives in the Midwest countryside with her husband, and dog, Cedar. Lage is currently earning her degree in Secondary English Education. Lage states she is here to give readers words that resonate. Awards: Special Award for First-time Entrant, Lyrical Iowa.

A native New Yorker, **James Penha** has lived for the past quarter-century in Indonesia. Nominated for Pushcart Prizes in fiction and poetry, his work has lately appeared in several anthologies: *The Impossible Beast: Queer Erotic Poems* (Damaged Goods Press), *The View From Olympia* (Half Moon Books, UK), *Queers Who Don't Quit* (Queer Pack, EU), and others. His essays have appeared in *The New York Daily News* and *The New York Times*. Penha edits *The New Verse News*, an online journal of current-events poetry. Twitter: @JamesPenha

Diana Raab, PhD, is an award-winning memoirist, poet, blogger, speaker, and author of 10 books and is a contributor to numerous journals and anthologies. Her two latest books are *Writing for Bliss: A Seven-Step Plan for Telling Your Story and Transforming Your Life* and *Writing for Bliss: A Companion Journal*.

Bruce Gunther is a retired journalist and freelance writer who lives in Michigan. He's a graduate of Central Michigan University.

Michael Moreth is a recovering Chicagoan living in the rural, micropolitan City of Sterling, the Paris of Northwest Illinois.

Jason Melvin is a father, husband, grandfather, high school soccer coach, and metals processing center supervisor, who lives just outside of Pittsburgh. His work has appeared in *Rat's Ass Review*, *Kitchen Sink Magazine*, *The Electric Rail*, *The Front Porch Review*, and *Shambles*, among others.

Amrita Valan is a writer from India, mother of two boys. She has worked in a variety of professions, from BPOs, five star hotels to being the content creator of questions in deductive logic and reasoning in English. Her work has been published in several anthologies and online zines.

William Pruitt. I am a poet, fiction writer and storyteller, and an Assistant Editor with Narrative Magazine. I have published poems in such places as *Ploughshares*, *Anderbo.com*, *Otis Nebula*, *the Tipton Poetry Journal*, and *Cottonwood*; two chapbooks with White Pine (Ravine Street) and FootHills (Bold Cities and Golden Plains); and the self-published *Walking Home from the Eastman House*. My short stories have appeared in *Crack of the Spine Literary Magazine*, *Midway*, *Indiana Voice Journal*, *Hypertext*, et.al.

Regina Beach is an American living in Bristol, UK. She writes about art, culture, travel, wellness and the people and places in those spheres. She is most at home pedaling her bicycle or on her yoga mat. Read more of Regina's writing and listen to her podcast at reginagbeach.com.

Glenn Ingersoll works for the public library in Berkeley, California. A multi-volume prose work, *Thousand* (Mel C Thompson Publishing) is now available from bookshop.org and as an e-book from Smashwords. He keeps two blogs, *LoveSettlement* and *Dare I Read*. Recent work has appeared in *Spillway*, *Door Is a Jar*, and *CutBank*.

Ivan Peledov is a poet living in Colorado. He has been published in *Unlikely Stories*, *Eunoia Review*, *Sonic Boom*, *Illuminations*, and other magazines.

Rachel Landrum Crumble has recently published in *Bindweed*, *Common Ground Review*, *Spoon River Review*, and *Detour Ahead*. She is awaiting a contract on her first poetry manuscript *Sister Sorrow*. Having taught kindergarten through college, she currently teaches high school. She and her jazz drummer husband of nearly 40 years are Yankee transplants living Chattanooga, TN. Look her up at poetteachermom.com.

Corey J. Boren is a junior at Utah Valley University who enjoys decoding song lyrics and spending too much on Panda Express orange chicken. He has been published in *Blue Marble Review*, *Riggwelter*, and *30 North Review*, among other publications. To see more of his work, visit [@corey.j.boren](https://www.instagram.com/corey.j.boren) on Instagram.

Olena Prusenkova is a Ukrainian-Australian writer based in Sydney. She likes to write fiction, personal essays and poetry, and her work has been pub-

lished in several Medium publications, such as *The Ascent*, *Be Yourself*, and *Written Tales*. She loves travelling, reading and learning about different cultures.

Patricia Pinto deals with words. A lot. She's a copywriter by day and reads, writes and does voice overs at all other times. The best temperature is a balmy 28 - 32 degrees Celsius, thanks. You can find her over at <https://patriciapinto.asia>

Bobbi Sinha-Morey's poetry has appeared in a wide variety of places. Her books of poetry are available at Amazon and her work has been nominated for the Best of the Net Anthology in 2015, 2018, and 2020 as well as having been nominated for the Pushcart Prize in 2020. Her website is <http://bobbisinhamorey.wordpress.com>.

Sandra Vallie's work has appeared in *Adobe Walls*, *Airplane Reading*, *The Más Tequila Review*, *The Malpais Review*, and plumeforwriters.org. Sandra is originally from Michigan, where she earned a BA at Eastern Michigan University. She currently lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico where she writes and learns how to garden without water.

Antoni Ooto is an internationally published poet and flash fiction writer. Well-known for his abstract expressionist art, Antoni now adds his voice to poetry. Reading and studying the works of many poets has opened another means of self-expression. His recent poems have been published in *Amethyst Review*, *The BeZine*, *Green Ink Poetry*, *The Poet Magazine*, *Brown Bag Online*, *The Wild Word*, and many journals and anthologies. He lives and works in Upstate New York with his wife poet/storyteller, Judy DeCroce.

Gurupreet K. Khalsa is a current resident of Mobile, Alabama, having lived previously in Ohio, Washington State, India, New Mexico, and California. She received her Ph.D. in Instructional Design from the University of South Alabama. She is a part time online instructor in graduate education programs.

Retired children's librarian **Alan Bern** is a photographer with awards for his poems and stories and is also a performer with dancer/composer Lucinda Weaver as PACES: dance & poetry fit to the space and with mu-

sicians from composingtogether.org. Lines & Faces, his press with artist/printer Robert Woods: linesandfaces.com

Carolyn Adams' poetry and art have appeared in *Steam Ticket*, *Cimarron Review*, *Topology*, *Apercus Quarterly*, and *Blueline Magazine*, among others. She is the author of four chapbooks and has been nominated for a Pushcart prize, as well as for Best of the Net.

Leslee Jepson began writing in her seventies. She reports galloping toward eighty, pen still in hand. Leslee has had work accepted by the WI Fellowship of Poets for calendar years 2017-2019. She lives in SE WI with two dogs and one husband.

Margaret Koger, a Lascaux Prize finalist, is a school media specialist with a writing habit. She lives near the river in Boise, Idaho. See more of her poetry online at *Amsterdam Quarterly*, *Thimble*, *Trouville Review*, *Tiny Seed Literary Journal*, *Ponder Savant*, *Subjectiv*, and *Last Leaves*.

Jeff Burt works in mental health in Santa Cruz County, California. He has contributed to *Williwaw Journal*, *Heartwood*, *Rabid Oak*, and *Red Wolf Journal*. He won the 2017 Cold Mountain Review Narrative Poetry Prize.

R.T. Castleberry is a widely published poet and critic. His work has appeared in *Roanoke Review*, *Sylvia*, *Blue Collar Review*, and *Last Leaves*, among others. Internationally, Castleberry's work has been published in Canada, Wales, Ireland, Scotland, New Zealand, and Antarctica. Mr. Castleberry's work has been featured in the anthologies *Travis-An Anthology of Texas Poetry*, *The Weight of Addition*, *Anthem: A Tribute to Leonard Cohen* and *You Can Hear the Ocean*.

Ann E. Michael lives in Pennsylvania's Lehigh Valley, slightly west of where the Lehigh River meets the Delaware. Her most recent collection of poems is *Barefoot Girls*. Her next book, *The Red Queen Hypothesis*, will be published sometime in 2021. More info at www.annemichael.wordpress.com or facebook.com/ann.michael.35

Lorelei Bacht is a European poet living in Asia with her family, which includes two young children and a lot of chaos. Her current work is pri-

marily concerned with motherhood, marriage, and aging as a woman. This year, her work has appeared, or is due to appear, in such publications as *OpenDoor Poetry Magazine*, *Litehouse*, *Global Poem*, *Visual Verse*, *Visitant*, and *Quail Bell*. She can be found on instagram: @the.cheated.wife.writes and @lorelei.bacht.writer

Nupur Maskara lives in Pune, India. Nupur received the Orange Flower Poetry Award in 2020. She has authored two poetry books, *Insta Gita: With Arjuna's Perspective in Poetry* and *Insta Women: Dramatic Monologues by Drama Queens*. Nupur blogs at nutatut.com. Tweet to her @nuttynupur and email her at nupur.maskara@gmail.com.

Maggie Walcott lives with her family in the Michigan wilderness, tucked away in a house they built themselves. Her first nonfiction piece, "An Open Vessel," was published by Mothers Always Write in 2019. Her poems "I Carry" and "Hammer and Nail" were featured in the *Dunes Review 2020 Winter Edition*.

Ethicist and online education entrepreneur **Russell Willis** emerged as a poet in 2019. Russell grew up in and around Texas, was vocationally scattered throughout the Southwest and Great Plains for many years, and is now settled in Vermont with his wife, Dawn.

Andrew Feng creates surreal, horror artwork and portraits through drawings, paintings, and digital art. He would describe himself as a metal head, fashion enthusiast, and a lover of black who spends his time blasting metal music while drinking boba tea. Andrew hopes to spread awareness about mental health through his horror-style art.

Amanda Jane (West Yorkshire, England) is a new poet who is enjoying creating poetry for others to pleasure. Later this month her work will be published on *Trouvaille Review*. She is also taking part in a community poem, which is being hosted by Baker Publishing. www.facebook.com/groups/moresuccessfulsubmissionsbyamandajane/

Lisa Ashley descends from Armenian Genocide survivors and has spent eight years listening to and supporting incarcerated youth. Poems can/will

be found in *The Tishman Review*, *The Journal of Undiscovered Poets*, *Dwelling Literary*, and *Amsterdam Quarterly*. She writes in her log home among the firs on Bainbridge Island, WA, having found her way there from rural New York by way of Montana and Seattle, WA.

Isla McKetta is the author of *Polska, 1994* (Éditions Checkpointed) and co-author of *Clear Out the Static in Your Attic: A Writer's Guide for Turning Artifacts into Art* (Write Bloody). She writes in Seattle and serves on the board of Seattle City of Literature. Find her on Twitter at @islaisreading.

Robert Armstrong is a writer from the Hudson Valley in Upstate New York. A former bookseller, he's been published in a local magazine, *ART-LESS & NAKED* as well as in *MOCKING HEART REVIEW*, and he's currently working on poetry chapbooks, short stories and a fantasy novel.

Denise A. Martin is a Language Arts and Social Studies teacher in Loudoun County, VA. Her poetry and essays can be read on TEACHA-FAR blog, at *tiny seed journal online* and in the Spring 2019 edition of *DASH Literary Journal*.

Gary Sokolow has a long ago MFA from Brooklyn College and currently works in finance. His work has appeared in *JMW*, *2 Bridges Review*, *Salamander*, *Eye Flash Journal*, *Posit*, *The Shot Glass Journal*, *Nixes Mate Review*, and *Third Wednesday*

Robert Beveridge (he/him) makes noise (xterminal.bandcamp.com) and writes poetry in Akron, OH. Recent/upcoming appearances in *Fleas on the Dog*, *Dissections*, and *Instant Noodles*, among others.

Courtney Weaver is an English major in progress. She works with adults with disabilities and lives in Missouri with her dog, Eccleston, and cat, Bellatrix. She has bipolar disorder and is passionate about mental health awareness.

Kate Maxwell is yet another teacher with writing aspirations. She's been published and awarded in many Australian and International literary magazines. Kate's interests include film, wine, and sleeping. Her first poetry anthology will be published with Interactive Publications, Brisbane, in 2021. She can be found at <https://kateswritingplace.com/publications/>

Ellen Mary Hayes is a poet and visual artist embracing the transcendence of creativity. Her recent work reflects themes of sacred relationship. She has had work featured in *Easthampton City Arts*, *Meat for Tea*, and elsewhere. Ellen is based in Western Massachusetts. She can be found at ellenmaryhayes@gmail.com, [EllenMaryHayes1](#) on instagram.

Steve Bowman teaches writing and literature at IU Southeast. His work has previously appeared in *The Review*, *The Legacy*, *Amarillo Bay*, and *The Zen Space*. He is Currently working to rebrand the lesser-known genre “Rust-Belt Literature” as Northern Gothic Literature.

Cheryl Heineman graduated in 2017 with a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from San Diego State University. She also has a master’s degree in Jungian Psychology and has published three collections of poetry: *Just Getting Started*, *something to hold onto*, and *It’s Easy to Kiss a Stranger on a Moving Train*.

Katy Bond is studying English and Linguistics at the University of Missouri in Columbia. Her work can be found in *petrichor*, *Moonchild Mag*, *EPIC*, and others. She writes poetry and fiction, loves sci-fi and her girlfriend, and can be contacted at kbondwriting@gmail.com.

Gerard Sarnat won San Francisco Poetry’s 2020 Contest, the Poetry in the Arts First Place Award plus the Dorfman Prize, and has been nominated for handfults of 2021 and previous Pushcarts plus Best of the Net Awards. Gerry is widely published including in *Buddhist Poetry Review*, *Gargoyle*, and *Main Street Rag*, as well as by Harvard and Columbia presses. He’s authored the collections *Homeless Chronicles* (2010), *Disputes* (2012), *17s* (2014), *Melting the Ice King* (2016). Gerry is a physician who’s built and staffed clinics for the marginalized as well as a Stanford professor and healthcare CEO. Currently he is devoting energy/resources to deal with climate justice, and serves on Climate Action Now’s board. Gerry’s been married since 1969 with three kids plus six grandsons, and is looking forward to future granddaughters.

Sam Houty. I’m a poet with a MFA in creative writing from Kingston University, London. I have completed three poetry chapbooks. My poetry has been featured in *Synkronicit magazine*, *Big A little a anthology* and *The Start literary journal*. I was the winner of The Writers Hub poetry competition.

Robert Pegel is a father and husband whose only child, his son Calvin, died four years ago. Calvin was 16 and died in his sleep of unknown causes. Robert writes poetry to process his pain and loss. He hopes he may show others suffering from loss how putting things into words may help in coping with the unimaginable. Robert graduated from Columbia University where he majored in English. He has only begun submitting his work recently and has been published in *Down in the Dirt* and *The Unique Poetry Journal*.

Christina A. Kemp is a writer, dancer, and psychology professor. Her recent work “Adirondack Chairs” was published in the anthology *True Stories, Volume III: The Narrative Project* and her coming memoir *Currents*, is in its final revisions. She lives on Bainbridge Island, Washington.

