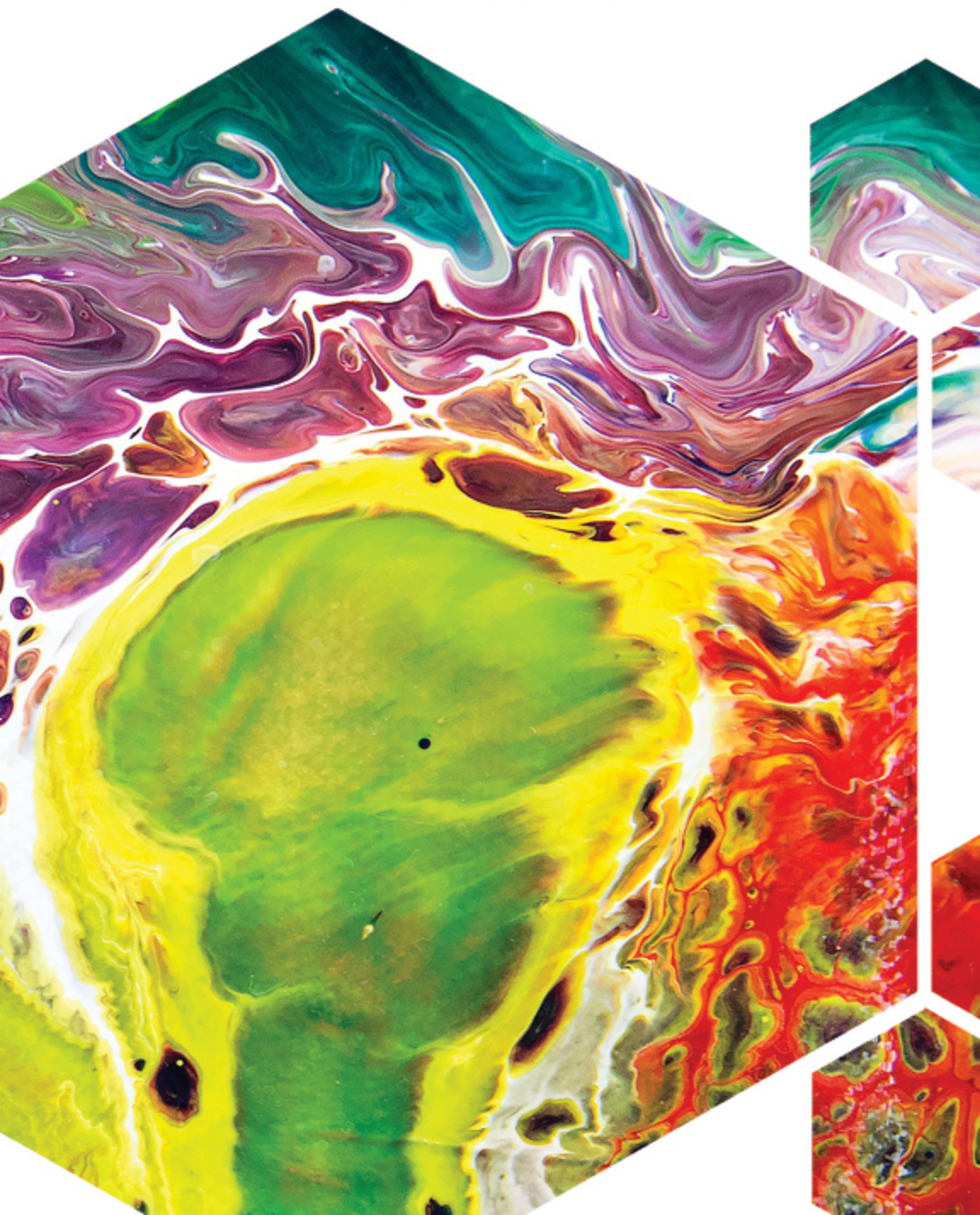


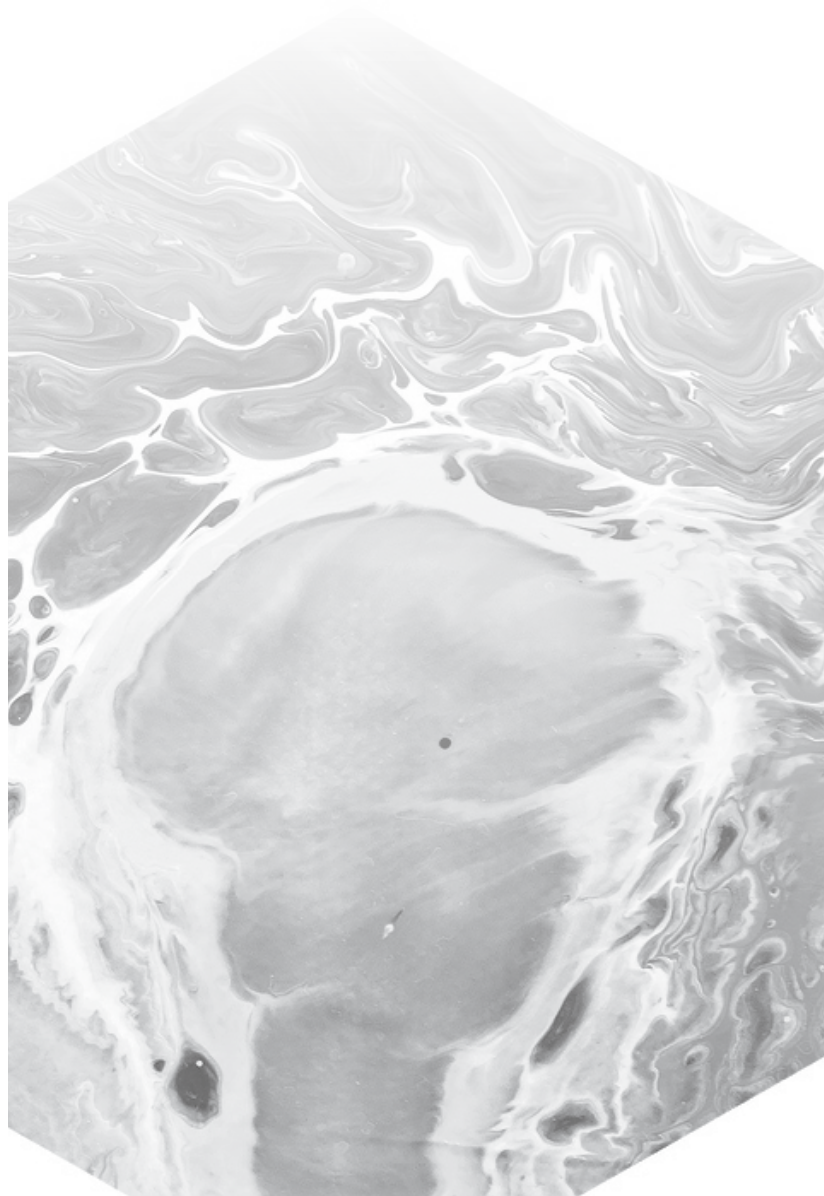
SIXFOLD

POETRY SUMMER 2018



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Sixfold is a collaborative, democratic, completely writer-voted journal. The writers who upload their manuscripts vote to select the prize-winning manuscripts and the short stories and poetry published in each issue. All participating writers' equally weighted votes act as the editor, instead of the usual editorial decision-making organization of one or a few judges, editors, or select editorial board.

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Carol Lischau

Son

for baby L.

I say I want a baby because no one says
I want a person.
I'm told it isn't yet time, as if anyone
could determine which foggy breath a tinder will catch
and keep.

A life, the whole weight of it, cannot be carried
in a womb.
But we bear its progressions—
the size of a fig, a turnip, a pomegranate too alive
with red.
A stain. An ER wristband.

The spirit of every human is already
in the world wishing only
to be arranged. And when I look,
I find you waiting everywhere.

A scrap of blanket I was knitting,
a box of prenatal pills on the counter.

Or mushrooms clustering in a hollow of my garden bed
or winter rain spells tearing
from the sweet birch its last clinging leaves.

Why have I finished you, my unfinished?

If I could only offer you that gift, if I could find
your hand to place it in.

Red-Throated Anole

I was nearly nine when I found the limp lizard
under the porch swing. One eye bulged into a white knot,

two limbs were severed. I didn't know whether to be grieved
or terrified as it wriggled what was left of itself across concrete.

My mother didn't refuse, perhaps she couldn't,
when I came inside, cupping the barely living, its tawny skin

faded to grey. This, my first moment of urgency.
We set up a tank of shallow water and a plastic container

of food on the counter, though I've forgotten what we thought
to feed it. I added a handful of twigs and plucked grass

as if what's familiar would prompt the lungs into swelling.
That a shadow of home would usher in miracle. And what,

if not my gesture, could direct the body to survive? Cooing,
believing all this, I wondered where its ears were to understand me.

In the morning its jaw slacked open, the tongue
a bright red announcement. The heart unwilling to obey,

the milky eye refusing to blink. *Like a pearl,*
I wanted to think as I watched it not watching back.

Azalea House

He's a drunk, my father explained
as they drove the slurring man away. An hour before,
he'd staggered to the road and smashed into our car
just in front of the house on Azalea.
My widowed aunt and her daughter lived there
with their German Shepherds, hair blanketing the floor
and everything inside the walls. The house collected
their collections—manicured Barbie dolls posed forever
behind glass, Carebears and other kaleidoscopic animals
huddled and peering down from upper shelves. *Look,*
but don't touch my aunt would remind me on nights
my father would drop me there. Why did I want to evade
her words? To lose composure, to feel the frill and eyes
filled with plastic and another kind of life.
Look, but don't touch my mind rehearsed.
How to resist the allure of what is forbidden?
After his arrest, the man's anxious wife stood in the yard
as they asked her questions, her blue-bruised arm lifted
to a wordless mouth. What compelled her silence—love?
the private cosmos of a home? I watched from within
the locked car. Beyond me, the crime scene in the street,
and beyond the street, other homes and other private lives
interrupted, their frantic mouths through windows,
and from within window blinds like cage slats,
their gazes white-eyed and wanting.

Ice Storm, Post-Divorce

My father is freshly alone on the other end
of the line. He talks of all that's rolling in.
I listen. Pacing my attic room, I see
where the pale walls are peeling to show sycamore.
And my eye catches, reels in—an unexpected color
clustered in a top corner of the wall.
Ladybugs. Dozens, red and huddled
like pomegranate seeds in the white meat
of winter. Did the wind force their retreat,
did the brightness against the ground?
My senses reorient to my father's voice, and
I tell him what I see. He says they're lucky.

Luck. I cannot connect our life with theirs—
vermillion cloister, elytra and abdomen,
brains like needle eyes open and clear,
and my father's home cleared like a throat.
And what of me in this? What of home?
I cannot say if I am more afraid of loneliness
or its image. Our calls linger after they're ended,
as do the ladybugs till the season passes.
I never can decide whether or not
I should have wanted them gone,
the pitifully beautiful red refuge
tucking further into itself and away
from the window's biting draft. Still,
they collect in the corner of my mind—
crimson nest, endless days, till death
(O the sweet covenant) do they linger.

Birthday, An Elegy

Today a mother shot her daughters
before her husband breathed a wish over a cake.

And what this says about domestic
ennui or the right to bear arms, I do not know.

Smoke from the heirloomed pistol rises
with our questions, while in the kitchen 45 candles

have begun their forever burning.
A father searches for the right wish.

Where are we taken when longing hems
the edge of language, dares past the boundary of word?

The sound of a whimper. A gunshot. A neighbor's *ohmygod*
from a parlor window. If ever a siren dopplers past,

I wonder what it means to speak. The lights too, frantic
and wordless, urging to transfigure.

The girls collapsed on their manicured lawn
20 miles west of my mother stirring again a pot of risotto,

her own mother propped in a La-Z-Boy straining
to make sense of Lauren Lake or Dow Jones

or Fox newscasters. Every evening, the world.
Every birth, death. You can never know what fears

or exhilarations such people have. Their daughters' bodies held
in the grass there like last notes of the annual song.

*To—you—*she forces him to hear. Deep breath.
Make a ~~wish~~ sense of it if you can.

Noreen Ellis

The Feast-Maker

Of course it was me, the daughter,
neither prodigal nor inheritor
who killed and cooked the fatted calf.
There were servants, but it was my hand
against the young cow's complacent cheek.
I sing in her ear, watch blood drain,
make the top cuts of her choicest meat,
cut strips and mix them with salt
and herbs, juice from the pomegranate,
my anger and my spit.

My eldest brother's anger is
a hot wind. Empty clanging boasts
the all of him. He asked me once
for a goat to impress his friends.
I laughed at him and could not,
will not, fix or fill his need
with love or praise or beast.
He beat me, as I knew he would.
My brother's envy is my secret delight,
the twist in our father's heart.
And the old goat himself?
Father, Abba, Master.
His worth measured in gold, tents,
fields, cattle and obedient sons,
girls and servants not worth counting.
My rich lord knows no distinction
between loved and roughly used
the taste of male or female flesh.

I slaughtered a heifer.
They gorged on the herd's future,
feasting the return of their prodigal son.
My brother, my beloved. I dream of him
in foreign lands—an artist, a merchant, a king.

I put him as a seal upon my heart,
I opened. I waited for him
to call, "Come away, my sister,
my bride, you have stolen my heart."
Instead I kill and roast the fatted calf,
gather and cook bitter herbs.
I laugh, I burn, I cut, I sing.
I am the honey in the halvah,
and the hunger at the feast,
for now he is returned,
penniless and smelling of swine.
One more man for me to suffer.

Grace and the Big Men

They were once the big men on campus
football heroes, wrestlers, athletes
now turned tall and girthed
into mountains that dance
holding up their trousers
with elastic and ties. Sporting shorts
even in winter, to show off their
best features: muscled calves and
well-turned ankles. Ladders of muscle
wrapped in abundance, never falling when
they drink too much, a line of dance
partners waiting for them at parties and weddings.
They lead, pushing and pulling from solid strength,
turning sweethearts with heave and sway of hip
guiding would-be lovers with the ease of leg
pressed against joint and bone, between thighs
to beats of long-stepped fox trot and gliding waltz.
And, oh! How they rumba
on size 15 slip-on patent leather loafers,
on feet that seem impossibly dainty.

They manspawl on bar stools pulling their women
into the mound of belly, tree-trunk of their arms
hands that cover like paper on rock,
a quilt in winter, the low clouds of distant
snow. To be his woman you learn to climb him
build up the strength and stamina to hold
his heft, his weight, your hands finding purchase
in his bulk—the dihedral where chest
meets shoulder, footholds at knees
and in the flattened mesa
of his outstretched palms. You glissade
along the long length
of his major muscle groups
skirr over the slope and massif
of his body, his hardness hidden
beneath a world of flesh,
no mere mountain,
a range, no an entire planet,
of him, creating gravity as he dances.

Jesus Measured

My mother measured the cooking time
for roasted lobsters in martinis: two.
Her carnelian cocktail ring mirrored their shells
placing the lobsters, a date night treat, still moving,
aluminum wrapped, butter patted, into the hot oven.

For her sons, the portion size of spaghetti: a quarter,
cooked and topped with braised meat, sausages, bread.
The weight of her devotion. For her daughters: a dime's-width
tossed in lemon, black pepper and salt, a lesson
in simplicity, in want. The measure of backbone and hip.

She taught me pie-crust making from her deathbed,
bare, brittle fingers pinching each batch for the right mix
of fat and flour. Those that did not measure: four. Finally, a perfect
dough, dusted with sugar, baked unfilled. "Sugar pie for my sugar pie"
we sang, her hot hand on my face, eating it all, a final act of defiance.

The span of my lover's hand measures the expanse
of my back, his long fingers tracing the short distance
from shoulder to flank, the sweep of hip to hip, grips the extra flesh
settled there, a saddle, a hillock, a baffle, at my waist, counting
the decades he has roamed this terrain, this body: three.

I count his words, his silences, his absences.
Tally his home comings, mix tempered yeast with flour and salt
measure the time of kneading dough: until stillness.
The quiet assurance of me alone, empty, strong
waiting to be filled by bread, by honey, by sugar, by him.

Even miracles can be quantified. Jesus measured
the hunger of the five thousand on the grass: two fishes, five loaves.
And the multitude was satisfied. Twelve baskets of leavings!
But I cannot square the sum, the rule, the reckoning of enough.
Cannot gauge the measure of eating, of loved, and be full.

Amanda Moore

Tattoo Artist

When the young girl wants my input
On the design of her tattoo
The bells of my brain don't know
Which alarm to sound first
I am her teacher her father
Is my friend she babysits my daughter
Her mother is days away from dying I think
Perhaps I should dissuade her though
Part of me thinks to cheer I want
To know the right advice to give but what
Does it matter she's already marked
And the dull buzz of the tattoo gun
Will be in her ears always the needle
Piercing her flesh will be nothing
Like the pain that traces itself each day
Through her heart
What is ankle bone shoulder blade
Hip skin over the kidney why not
Wear pain permanently
An heirloom brooch handed down
I would turn up her sleeve myself
If I could I would dip into each colored well
And puncture her skin again again
With what very little I know of loss

The Dead Thing

Everywhere the smell of death—not a figurative
sense of doom pervading every thought,
but real—in every room

putrid rot: something has died in our duct work
and there is no place the stench doesn't find us.
O effluvium of rat corpse, odor of mouse

droppings, funk from deceased bid. O miasma
of ancient raccoon jammed between joist
and cold aluminum, fetor of possum or mole

or maybe the neighbor's lost cat. Niff of decomposing
squirrel; whiff of skunk. The stink corrals us
in a single room we seal with plastic sheeting,

infuse with incense, windows open to morning mist
and autumn chill. For the first time
since our girl was a baby, the three of us bed down

and nest together, the creaks and midnight stirrings of one
nudging us all in and out of uncomfortable
sleep, perfume of night sweat mingling,

bouquet of hot breath fogging the vanity mirror.
Like a new litter we weave together until we wake,
cranky and confined and knit tight against the invading scent.

Oh, nothing lasts—good or bad. So, come time:
come you house flies and scavengers, you insects, mites,
beetles, larva, maggots, worms: do your work.

Learning to Surf

OK, ocean:

I have forsaken
the glittering blue eye of lake
to play at the lip of your vast, frothy mouth.
I have memorized your comings
and goings, the tide charts, and the swell; I have
taken you into me by the gallon, let you
pin me beneath your strong arms,
and I have been grateful
for the seals beside me, infinity
in the distance, promise
of pleasure. I have tried
to walk lightly over sand crabs and muck.
I have learned not to turn away.
Let me stand on your shoulders,
drop into you and carve
my own hard line. I have been patient.
Show me what to do
with my failure.

after Maureen McLane

Adin Zeviel Leavitt

Harvest

We have so many stories already written around us like a safety net, like a straightjacket. When I say, “Once upon a time,” you know what sort of house I’m building. When I say, “Boys will be boys,” you know it really means, “Boys will be men. Men will be weapons, after all they were raised in an arsenal. Praised for the height of their walls. Taught that a hero holds a gun, is made in its likeness. Why should he be held while he cries? Power is taken, not shared, and a hero does not cry. Disarmament is weakness, and a hero must fear the flowers that bloom in the soft fields of his heart.” In this story, a soldier is a hero and a gardener is not.

I am writing myself a new narrative.
In this one, manhood means believing that a garden may not be as dramatic as a missile, but it lasts longer.

I have learned that loving the women
in my life means walking through the crowd
of hungry ghosts that other men have left behind.

I look them in the eyes: they are an ugly reflection,
for I know that I still have sharp edges
better suited to cutting skin than breaking soil.
But this I swear: to be a battlefield overgrown with violets,
tomato vines, and runner beans. To plant orchards in my violence.
To remember that my fear of the hurt
I can cause is a map of the work I must do.

I know I have left ghosts of my own behind
from the days when my love was not brave enough
to drop the clothes it was given and stare at itself naked.

How it was told that manhood means to take
before it means to hold, was taught that love looks

like a precious golden ring, a guarded thing.
That it is romantic to say “You are mine.”
That somewhere in the architecture of love lies ownership.

One morning my lover and I sat in bed
with sex indenting the mattress between us,
heavy stone it can sometimes be. We stared
at each other across the weight of it.
They have been taught that sharing their body
is betraying it. I have been taught that a partner’s body
is a belonging that should be shared. We have both
been taught that shame is an inheritance we deserve,
that we should blame ourselves for sometimes
being the string that breaks, the voice that cracks.

We have chosen to make a different way.

We are standing around a campfire fed with the pages
of an old children’s book. It’s the one with a tall tower
and a conveniently unrecognizable monster.
Where everyone knows their roles already, sword
and sewing needle waiting for hands that have no choice.
Where “he” and “she” are locked in the mirror,
a reflection without a key.

We are writing something new. In these pages,
shame is a suit of rusty armor half-buried in the soil,
with nasturtiums growing out between its gaps.

Here, the monster looks more like the ways we learned
to hurt each other. Victory is shaped like an embrace.
Here, wholeness holds its darker half.
He and she can leave those shapes behind
like a dress that has become too small,
a suit of armor that blocks the sunlight,
a locked up tower room.

This is the story of how to hold each other
like the mountains hold the sky, to adore
the way it never stays the same, to release
every kind of love that desires to contain.

Drift

On Westcliff, the ocean stretching
into the horizon like hammered steel,
an old man walks a Chihuahua in a tiny vest.
A few tourists pass him, speaking quickly
in a language we cannot understand.
They point at the dog, their laughter bursts
like summer fireworks, a field of poppies.
When they are gone, he turns to the dog
and says, "It's alright, they were just talking
about how beautiful you are."

What strange flotsam accumulates
in our hearts as a lifetime drifts by.

Checking In

Morning arrives like an eccentric hotel guest.
Maybe from Switzerland or some other place
with great chocolate and ice over the surface
of the water. I imagine a thick white beard
and tailored three-piece. An undercurrent
dark and iron as old blood. And what have
you got in your briefcase? Perhaps an afternoon
that opens like a piñata, all noise and color
and the gratification of simple desires.
Or lassitude, droll gray downpour. I hope
for that subtle delight that seeps under
the doorframe and through the shutters
like viscous light. Opens up the tightly locked
chest that holds wonder like a postcard
from the child you're certain you used to be.
Or one of those flowers that blooms only once
in a decade. The laughter that is its own beginning
and end. Anything but the bone-deep damp,
hopelessness that creeps quietly under
your skin like mold beneath old floorboards.
Maybe a book given by a friend who knows you
well enough to find you, Rorschach, in a landscape
bound in ink and pages. A self-contained feast.
A missed train of a day, face-full of pungent smoke,
frustration, the scramble to fit the hours together
into an acceptable puzzle. Or maybe a nap
in a swaying hammock: slow, easy, and enough.

For Ricky

It's nighttime in Montana. The fields
and buildings and streets are drowned
in powder white. Twenty degrees.
The hitchhiker is walking on the side
of the snowy highway, and her posture
says she's been walking for a while. I pass
by, and my heart shudders like an engine
in the cold. I turn around at a side street,
and pull over. She gets in. Tired face,
a lip piercing, eyes too battered to pretend.
"I'm Ricky," she says, and, "been walking
since Gallatin Gateway." "That far?
And no one stopped?" "Everyone's got
their own fears," she says, "I don't judge."

I tell her I'm a writer. Interested in people's
stories. And she tells me. Picture the broken
home. Only she knows the specifics, but
we are all familiar with the scene. Seen
it too many times before, in friends,
on screens, in the past that trails behind
people like a whipped puppy. She got married
at twenty, met her soul mate a week later.
Had a child. Had a divorce. Moved all over
the country, left the soul mate to get clean.
Couldn't stay clean. Couldn't listen to music
for six months she tells me, it hurt so much.
Weeps in the passenger seat as she speaks.

Keeps moving to stay close enough to help raise
her daughter. Sees on the news that her soul
mate died. His memory is everywhere, still,
the way things could have been. As the years
pass your life looks less and less like what
you thought it was going to be. I won't leave out
the worst parts, but I won't try to make them
sound pretty. Like some beautiful wreck,
an old pirate galleon drifting down through

watery sunlight into the blue-green deep.
This is no metaphor, poetic tragedy, just the way
it is for some people. The rape. People you trusted.
The end of trusting. Sleeping in ditches.
Getting a home, a job. Losing them. And again.

Being broken back down to only a body
that feels less and less like your own.
Selling it to survive. All this time, wanting
only to love your daughter, to be good
for her even if no one ever showed you how.
Somehow remaining the kind of person
who spends your last two hundred dollars
bailing a friend out of jail, even without
a bed to sleep in. Who gets in a car
with a young stranger, and tells him,
“I go to sleep each night hoping I don’t wake up.”

This is a kind of courage I cannot imagine.
There isn’t a reason I’m telling you this story.
Only that it was told to me. I just want
to share her storm with you for a little while.
It is all I have to prove she was ever there.
When I ask if I can hug her goodbye, she says
she doesn’t know how, but she still holds me
tight as a life raft before she walks into the motel.

Jim Pascual Agustin

The Wind is Not Strong Enough to Slam the Windows Shut

He roams a wilderness
in his head, the way an astrophysicist
might navigate numbers
to reach a point in space,
wary of drowning in darkness.

The veins on the backs of his hands,
roots that quiver when his heart
quickens. It's a struggle to sleep,
a struggle to stay awake.
Somewhere not too far

a neighbour's donkey
cranks out a mechanical cry.
He is reminded of empty chairs,
and of sheets on another bed
bearing shadows and creases.

Stay a Minute, the Light is Beautiful

What I remember matters
to no one else: sunlight framed
by a window with broken glass
just before night says

“Now, it is I who will touch
your hands without permission.”
Nothing can make me forget
the warmth, my own breath,

an approaching train, the beating
of an iron heart. No one will believe me,
for what is broken does not even show
the thinnest crack.

The Enemy of Destruction

As a child just beginning
to explore the world, you had to carve
into memory all that might help you
find your way back home.

A streetlamp with a piece of blue wire
sticking out one side, a corner bakery
that lays out a new tray of bread dusted
with fine sugar an hour before the school bell rings,

an elderly neighbour who sweeps
the pavement beyond her property
without ever lifting her head. Everything
is a clue, a point of reference.

Nothing but nightmares can prepare you
for what might befall your city
when war takes over starved minds,
when orders are blurted out and turned

to mortars and chemicals.
Yet among the grey remnants, the countless
shattered squares of concrete, something persists,
defiant in its stand against destruction.

Something green, red and brown
hangs off a crumbling ledge,
perhaps a curtain blasted off
a window that overlooked

a busy street you used to roam.
A person you knew
once waved from that window
hoping you would wave back.

The Trick is in the Laying of Blame, Not Just the Twisting of the Knife

He may yet forget the ragged
pattern in the skies
before the first bomb exploded,

the eyes of those
who could no longer take
another step, move another limb.

There are reasons evolution
hid the human heart under bones
that allow for room,

why the skull is so much
softer in youth, as in this boy
who crossed a desert alone.

Nothing in hand but a bag
of his mother's clothes wrapped
with lingering scent of bokharat.

The Last Thing that Touched Your Lips

There was no resistance
when you loosened your skin,
unbuttoned flesh from bones,

slipped them off until you turned
transparent as water, shapeless
and silent as light through fog.

You got up and left without a sound.
No one saw you walk through
the unseen door which opens

to somewhere else. Ann,
I hope you can read this in that place
where you can now laugh

without doubling over. I'm glad
the last thing that touched your lips
was a thin slice of pink guava.

Timothy Walsh

My Life in Bicycles

Like a lifetime's succession of pets,
apartments, or houses,
schools or best friends,
I can follow my bicycle timeline backwards,
the bicycles diminishing in size—
twenty-six inch, twenty-four, eighteen—
like an exemplum of Zeno's paradox.

From tricycles to training wheels,
banana bike to ten-speed,
mountain bike to city hybrid,
I loved them all—
thought of them as living things—
creatures with spirit, energy, soul—
vehicles to augment my quotidian self,
infusing speed, agility, balance
into my otherwise too-stolid days.

As a child—at the dinner table
or agonizing over homework—
I felt its presence parked outside,
waiting on its kickstand,
faithful as a favorite steed grazing placidly
until next saddled up, bound for adventure.

Even now, after a long day's work, a quiet dinner,
I think of it out in the garage—
perhaps take it out for a night ride—
speeding along the avenue, the twilight cathedral
of trees—
my legs turned to pistons on the pedals,
the spoked wheels whirring against the asphalt
powering the earth's giddy rotation like a child's hand
spinning a classroom globe.

The Wellfleet Oyster

“In the 1850s Henry David Thoreau came tramping down the Cape and stopped overnight in the house of the Wellfleet Oysterman, and made him a fixture in American literature. But what bugged me was that Thoreau said not a word about the oysters themselves.”

—Howard Mitcham, The Provincetown Seafood Cookbook

I didn't much care for Mr. Thoreau either,
though I do not begrudge him his interest in that old oysterman—
that vicious murderer and despoiler who ravaged
and decimated our population
where we rested placidly at peace in the soft sand
off Wellfleet harbor.

Why we must be hunted so voraciously,
our paradise plundered,
feasted on so enthusiastically, our flavor praised so highly—
as if this were recompense for annihilating us—
our shells discarded in great heaps, the world unmindful
of this pitiless genocide,
why, why, why is the question that consumes us
as you consume us, split open on the half-shell,
doused with lemon juice (how it burns!),
a dash of Tabasco (how it stings!)

Mollusk, you call us, as if we were some lowly thing
akin to slugs, snails, and whelks.

Yes, we are indisputably the finest aphrodisiac.
We can make a dried and withered octogenarian
find his tent pole again,
inspire lustful smiles in the ardent
as they slurp us up.

We perplex and fascinate you with our binatural sexuality—
female one year, becoming male the next,
experiencing the pleasures of both,
the envy of Tiresias.

You glory in pearls, the oyster's gift,
string them around the neck of the one
 you lust for,
dazzled by their iridescence as you suck our juices
 off the half-shell,
ravish each other like barnyard beasts
 and think nothing of pillaging our beds.

You say the world is your oyster—
 but what does this make the world for us?
What justice is there in hirsute bipeds
 feasting on defenseless bivalves?

Your bones will bleach as white as our shells—
 this is my pearl of wisdom.

A Poem Trying Hard Not to Be About Death

Perhaps all poems really are about death . . .
except for all those poems about love, I guess—
though love poems bring tears as well as joy
because we all know they'll become epitaphs soon enough

But then there are all those poems of new revelation—
you know the ones I mean—
when a startling, slanted way of seeing things
explodes in you like the taste of a fresh, cold grape,
making you realize how narrow our consciousness is
and how short its duration . . .
which I guess does bring in that whole death thing again

Limericks, then, limericks are certainly not about death,
not the usual salacious sort that call up a quick chortle
or a guffaw . . .
though the way that first rhyme spins around
and chimes with that final word
does make a circle, a circle not unlike
the endless cycle of birth and death—
and it's hard not to realize that even that buxom girl
from Nantucket
will one day kick the bucket

So here I will write an elegy for all poems about death,
have the last of these last words.
Here, I hand you an elegy for all those poets
who thought they'd write about springtime
but ended up writing about death.

It is a poem we never stop writing
as this country churchyard of a globe
spins our earth-encrusted bones in a perpetual waltz
across the vaulted ballroom of night.

Singing the Alphabet

Now that I know my ABCs,
I never sing the alphabet anymore,
 which is a shame.

The sheer joy of it, I remember, welled up
 and out and over me as we sang—
the nursery school tables piled high
 with those wooden alphabet blocks,
uppercase on one side, lowercase on the other.

Learning the mysteries of symbol and sound,
 we gazed toward the foothills of adulthood
where people spoke so astonishingly aware
of the streams of letters corresponding to whatever
they said—their voices rivers of jumbled alphabets!
Teachers and parents who could so effortlessly secure
 with ink
the silent sounds and scrawls of their thoughts

And so we sang, earnestly, proudly,
 with a tremulous yearning to learn,
thinking of those mysterious storybooks
 the older children read,
turning pages like doors, their eyes like flashlights
 cutting swaths through the darkness.

So lately I have been singing the alphabet again—
walking by the lake, singing to the mallards
 and geese along the shore,
singing to the busy muskrats, the gliding gulls,
 the curious crows.

And it seems that they, too, would like to know
the quizzical mysteries of these gnomish sounds.

So I sing, learning and unlearning as I go,
now that I know with a knowing that unlocks
 at least one secret drawer
of this labyrinthine world.

And as I sing, so does the crow—
rasping out its dark alphabet I'd sorely like to know—
while gulls glide on invisible updrafts,
 riding the unseen syllables
 of my herdsman's song.

Anna Hernandez-French

Mis•creant

Crouched before a spider's web
a girlchild holds between
her thumb
and forefinger a
sky-bellied beetle, six
kicks

unheeded, she
has caught her eye along the whisper
of the light that plays
its fine vibrations
over eight-legged appetite, her
mouth

works on
a half-hope hum
in anticipation of empyrean
admonishment, she looks
up, but
Space
is a vacuum

and
with a flick of that divine
wrist made of rib
and ribbon
she throws her captive to the carnivorous
thread.

San Bernardino lullaby

laid out in the garden a funereal
star stuck hand
in hand we breathe burnt
orange blossoms and the smoke
folds into valleys.

the mountains are burning, and
in school they say the very pines that burn are born
of flame, itself wombed within the sky, sewn
seed by seed through thunderstorms, white iron
heat
run hissing through the rain;
a miracle, and

they say
flames flicked off the quick
click of a cigarette
lighter, leap leaf to leaf to cleave
the sweet dry grass into ashes and
if pines be birthed in such a fashion they are silver
lines on tragedy. so

we watch the coalish
clouds build black
across the sky, till ashes fall like tea leaves
shape
the death-defying dying of the trees, or
perhaps
the molten mouth of our own
nicotine need. we chant

until our voices buzz like bees
that rise onebody
in their killer yellow
jackets, lift
one another up like soft white nothing
clouds, till each has had her turn in flying
free.

Gardeners

To this day my mother is unfazed
by the sisyphian nature of a garden.

But in nurture she feared nothing more than our entropic tendency
toward anarchy, the graftlessness of being.

And we,
 her most precious seedlings,
 how she watched us
when the wind picked up, lest we be carried off
 and scattered
far across the mountains, dropped into the sea and drowned,
or simply freed to wing across the sky.

 As guard against
such leavening she hedged us in and rooted
us among her flowers, buried us
beneath the daisies, amid irises and bleeding hearts.
Our nursery was Sherwood, where the green was close
and clung

 to sleeves or caught along
 incorrigible hair. And

 when summer overripened and our time grew
 too abundant
she would prune the sweetest torpor
with her order:
 pull the weeds that wrap their wastrel hands around the feet
of finer stalks;
 snap the necks off roses, toothy hydras that will counter
their beheading
from the hip;
 dig ditches till the daylight
pitches slowly into darkness,
hour after sodding
hour . . .

while behind us life made laughlines
of our borders.

Hooked Up

I wasn't angling for anything
particular, grown cold
to shoals of flesh
and uniform
light bone. You

were out of season, something
temporal,

or so I thought

until
you soft moon-mouthed *I love you*
as you pulled
in too much oxygen,

and slept. I watched
the sun
cut edges to the sky,

watched a premature
beginning

suck the sand
beneath my feet like soup
from a spoon. And

in your wake I wondered

if that rufescent line
led back
to your unfettered
mouth

or mine.

Watermelon Love

I've never liked watermelon
much.

the way the ripe ones ring hollow
as an unsound
foundation, how they gape
open, gum-colored on their delicate
white rinds and silently endure
dissection.

each time
the flesh gives sweet and dull beneath
my teeth I cringe as those raw gutters
gather.

I was told from babyhood
to swallow any
seed was invitation
to invasion.

and believed

that carelessness
could rise my belly
melon-round and inside
vines would coil,
thread between my bones
and build up such insatiable sunlonging
they'd push out
through ears and eyes, and press
upon my tongue to leave me speaking
only in
prodigious green.

but

the other day
I missed one,

or, better said,

I gave in.

and when I felt
a greening in my gut,
 a fruitful ache
down in the pit of me,

I found

that perverse joy we take
in our own
 supplantation.

J. L. Grothe

Six Pregnancies

I.

Pen hovers.

Three options, check one:

Hospital will dispose of remains according to protocol for medical waste.

Funeral home will collect remains for burial.

Patient will postpone decision for up to fourteen days. If no other option is chosen, hospital will dispose of remains according to protocol for medical waste.

(How is that three options? Isn't it just two, really?)

Hand drops.

One call to a funeral home.

Er, um,

how much to bury an embryo
and a Fallopian tube?

Awkward.

Strong enough to rend a body, imperil a life,

small enough to be a baby,

big enough to hold a lifetime of dreams on its shoulders

—did it even have shoulders?—

too young to merit a coffin, a funeral, hundreds of dollars,

the fuss and sympathy reserved for a lost loved one,

too old to be unremembered, unmourned.

Scratch an X.

Option three it is.

II.

Daffodils erupt
in sunny hallelujahs
and an infant squawks.

III.

Desire begat Possibility,
Possibility begat Wish,
Wish begat Anticipation,
Anticipation begat Optimism,
Optimism begat Expectancy,
Expectancy begat Hope,
and Hope begat Plans.

Plans begat Apprehension,
Apprehension begat Unease,
Unease begat Agitation,
Agitation begat Rumination,
Rumination begat Foreboding,
Foreboding begat Consternation,
and Consternation begat Dismay.

Dismay begat Bleakness,
Bleakness begat Futility,
Futility begat Desolation,
Desolation begat Woe,
Woe begat Despondency,
Despondency begat Resignation,
and the woman begat nothing.

IV.

From ashes must rise new life.

This one will live
This one will live
This one will
This one
This
o—

V.

As a parent's hand shields a newborn's head,
detachment guards me, cynicism defends me.
Keep your scans, your tests, your explanations of benefits.
I do not want to view an unformed sac with no heartbeat
or to hear faux optimism that perhaps my dates were wrong
or to sit alone in the car and cry because I am not stupid.

The pain this time is physical.

Sensing what is to come,
not knowing what to expect,
I query Dr. Internet urgently.
“Cramping,” says the Internet . . . as pains wash toward me, draw
my entire focus, then ebb away.
Instinct rises up;
I pace, then groan.
I scour my memory for breathing exercises learned long ago,
never put to use during surgical delivery.
“Cramps”?
No, *contractions*. The cervix is dilating
—my first time in labor.
“Blood and tissue,” says the Internet . . . as a perfectly intact sphere
carefully enveloping a tiny body
passes from its place of safety.
(How often does the Internet *understate* something?)

VI.

Like droplets from parched earth, brief, bubbling joy
—and laughter: As was Sarai, so am I.
To carry home a healthy girl or boy
would bifocals and calendars belie.

A fledgling fluffs and stretches out its wings
—this longing, hatched and quite prepared to leap.
I tie it to the branch before it flings
itself to plummet in a feathery heap.

Long minutes, stitched by hand into each hour,
and hours, slowly cobbled into day,
expose my odious tendency to cower,
my trepidation when I try to pray.

A wail, embrace, and sweet new name lay bare
both fear and joy . . . and prod me, now, to care.

Sue Fagalde Lick

Poor Girl's Barbie

I dressed my doll in rags,
squares of black corduroy
fastened with giant blue stitches,
holes scissored out for the arms,
a pink cotton wrap-around skirt,
a snippet of net on her hair.

Though her legs didn't bend,
she would dance like a dervish,
eyelids blinking like shutters,
cheeks smudged with dirt,
two fingers missing from when
my little brother kidnapped her.

Hinged at shoulders and hips,
she had breasts but no nipples,
no vulva, no hair down below,
just hard pink skin over which
her handmade dresses slipped
when she danced on her high-heeled toes.

She slept in a shoe box
on top of her tiny clothes,
wearing a flowered nightgown
made from an old flannel sleeve,
tiny gold teddy bear under her arm
so she wouldn't be scared in the dark.

Fifty years later, I open the box.
There she lies with her teddy bear,
one arm up and one arm down,
eyes closed to the smell of age and rot.
Should I dress her and make her dance again
or close the lid and let her sleep?

Beauty Confesses

I'm the girl who dates the trolls,
the beauty who loves the beast,
the lamb who calms the bear.

Is it the glasses, the unpainted nails,
the tendency for pudgy thighs
or the broom that's always in my hands?

Was it the dad who wouldn't let me date
till all the artists and jocks were taken,
nothing left but the awkward ones?

I've dated the fat, the freaky,
the ones with bad teeth and breath,
the ones who couldn't get it up.

I've been with the drunks, the druggies,
the paranoid and the cruel,
devils and men who prayed all day.

Only once, I had a prince.
Oh, how we danced, how we loved,
spinning in each other's arms.

But the clock struck twelve, and he was gone.
I'm back in the woods with another troll,
a beast who says I'm beautiful.

No one has ever loved this beast.
I'll stroke his fur, pat his ample belly
and slowly teach him how to dance.

Unlucky Purple Blazer Strikes Again

Help! My pantyhose are falling down.
Under the jacket, under the skirt, under the slip,
I can feel the waistband oozing south.
Please God, let it stop at my hipbone.
I need just one good upward tug,
but I can't in front of the whole damned church.

If I just sit, it won't move more,
but you know Catholics, sit, stand, kneel.
Okay. Reach in, grab some elastic, pull.
No, they're still coming down. I have to sneeze.
I can't reach my handkerchief, both hands
busy playing the "Lamb of God."

Sweet Lord, it's down to my navel now.
I pooch out my gut just to hold it there.
I almost overslept today. I thought
it was time to change the clock, but no,
at 3 a.m., I looked it up, discovered
it was 4. Fall back next Saturday, it said.

Oh God! It just slipped below my belly,
and now we've got to stand. Let us pray
sitting down for heaven's sake. I reach my hand
between skirt and coat, yank it hard this time.
I think I pulled my underwear.
I need to tie these things around my neck.

Father just gave me a look.
He knows not what I'm going through
here at the grand piano.
Jesus never messed with pantyhose,
nor did the old male organists.
No heels, no hats, no skirts, no slips.
Next week I'm going back to slacks.

Next Stop: Convent

At 22, I was married
to a skinny man
with brown hair,
glasses,
a liking for booze,
cigarettes, and ass
and a disliking,
apparently, for me.
The church said
it didn't count
because
he didn't want kids,
and being Catholic,
you have to want kids
or never
have sex.

At 29, I was not married
to a chubby man
with curly blond hair,
glasses,
and a liking for Coke,
cruelty, and ass.
Yes he liked me
and he wanted kids,
but he wasn't quite
divorced, so,
me being Catholic,
I drove away,
alone,
just bruised
thank God.

At 33, I married again,
to a burly man
with brown hair,
glasses,
three kids,
and a liking for booze
and jazz, ass not so much.

But he loved me,
and he was kind,
also Protestant
and divorced,

so the church said
it didn't count,
our wedding
by a pond
with geese
in the sun.
But anyway,
he died.

At 63, I live alone
with my yellow dog,
blonde hair, no glasses,
a liking for Milk-bones,
belly rubs and grass.
We're both single.
The church
approves,
believes in fact,
I've never wed,
never loved,
never shared
a bed
with a brown-haired man
who liked booze,
cigarettes
or ass,
never rose
naked
and pleasantly sore
with a hickey
on my neck.
But who am I
to argue
with God?

In the Garden with Jesus

We're all sitting in the chapel.
Was it foggy that night?
No, it's the incense wafting
from a bowl on a chain
(One year it set off the smoke alarm).

We're supposed to be quiet now,
praying in the garden with Jesus.
The apostles all fell asleep.
I'm thinking if women were there,
we would have stayed awake.

Women would have wept with Him,
hugged Him and wiped his bloody sweat.
Maybe they were stuck in the upper room
doing the dishes and cleaning up,
not even invited to the garden.

Just focus on the crucifix.
As the smoke begins to clear
parishioners are sneaking out,
keys rattling, zippers zipping,
rain pattering on the roof.

I try to feel the nails shoved
through my fleshy hands and feet,
but Lord, I'm weak. My earrings hurt.
I would have screamed, "Bring me down!"
You're right. I am not God.

Just let me be a carpenter."
I'm Mary watching blood drip on the dirt.
I'm Peter. "I don't know the man."
I'm all those guys who ran away.
I'm Thomas who didn't quite believe.

So, Jesus on the cross.
Did he really wear a loincloth?
Did his toenails need a trim?
Is that a scar or a nick in the wood?
What color really was his skin?

Next to me, a Spanish man
sits erect, his eyes closed tight.
A woman kneels by the cross.
Lovely figure, snug-fit jeans.
Oh God, my mind, my mind.

Concentrate. Holy Thursday.
Jesus, God made man. Washed feet,
gave bread, prayed till Judas came,
died hard and rose again. Amen.
My stomach rumbles. Hungry.

Silence so deep it quivers.
White candles flickering.
Jesus up there, waiting
for me to hear his voice.
I shut my eyes. I try.

Abby Johnson

Finding Yourself On Google Maps

I inhabit time as a native of dying,
and this too is a grave. Standing
in the streams of rainwater,
piled up behind the feet and ridging
where the skin touches stretches of swirling mud,
my body buried here, in the water,
the river running down
into ditches of concrete.

I am a native of moss decaying
its veiny darkness into darker blood.
I inhabit my feet as I look at them,
transcendent, quotidian, simple,
what is, in fact, nothingness itself.
I inhabit the beige-orange sky,
a sepia tone reality rushing fluid
across the reflection of streetlights,
and moving storm clouds, and the slow
fade of body into buried thing.

This hour on the cement riverbed,
beside the earth-swallowing rain water,
is a physical location too. It is a sedentary
eternality disguised as a grave marker.

Nothing Is Named Until You Name It

The soft pink light is God
on this flight. Though I have
learned to be careful
with sharp invocations of divinity:
this light is pure, it is coral
echoing from the clouds below.

The chaste sunset
becomes a rose gold wine poured
into the glass of an empty chest.

This fading sky is your heart now:
treat it as such. Drink it
as such. Shake when the wind does
and no sooner.

Everyone hopes to be remembered
for this, and that is somehow
a measure of sunlight.

Before the light rose over the world's neckline,
before we swallowed the ocean,
we could not ever forget the ground,
and now we can do no different.
This heart is always a hanging.

It is always an ocean-swallowing ray
of modern thought. It is always
a plot of land praying to be forgotten,
waiting to be chased down with atmosphere.

Poetic Definition

Protect (v.):

there is no future in
which we all
make it to the end
of this life with
enough of ourselves
intact.

Engage (v.):

I will surrender
my fingers to plugging
all the holes in our liferaft.

Poet (n.):

I will keep you
in the social consciousness.
I will die before I forget.

Fear (n.):

There is too much
water in the bottom.

Engage (v.):

I will jump out for us.

Poet (n.):

I don't care if you remember
me, just please say my name.

Fear (n.):

There is a turn in every poem.
I pray every day this isn't it.
Expect the worst as the poetic
form of survival, I am always
minding my pen.

Protect (v.):

Swear you will go down
with this empty vessel.

Period Poem for a Theoretical Daughter

You will lie in your own arms
counting on one hand
all the lovers you will never have.
You will name them sun, moon, sky, and self,
You will name the last one power.

You will stain. Let the river run pure
down your canvas-legs,
river rocks in the soles of your shoes.
You will turn everything red, sun and moon
sky and self, and then you will make power
bleed. This is why they will never
love you: the harsh red tint
of your reckless body.

Shame is the thing innocence
gives birth to,
the swaddled child
suckled at the breast.

I leave my motherhood
everywhere
like lost keys and dishes
molding in the sink.

I leave my mothering
everywhere,
shining like anointing oil
on penitent foreheads.

I am sorry I cannot stop
womanhood from
hurting.

A Millennial Experience: After Smash Mouth

A frozen yogurt place was playing All Star and now I miss my friends. The song hummed across the parking lot between me and the empty orange neon of a reincarnated frozen yogurt place. I was leaving a movie right as the sun turned the clouds black and the space between them a violent pink. The strains of the song crept over the misty air, hovering on the night's breath like cheap beer, a sweaty exhalation. The song of my people played straight through, did not become a parody of itself, though, of course, it always is.

And I was deeply sad, as though this, too, was already becoming fog. This frozen yogurt place is an ill-remembered child of a unforgotten and long gone childhood. We are not, even now, yelling along to words that are not actually in the song. We are not, even now, listening to parody after parody in the search for an unnameable authenticity. Give us something we can never know completely, and we will be ill-content and happy. Give us something we can only talk about and never name, and we will be forever in your debt. Give us something barely loved and we will proclaim it ours forever. Give us your huddled hurries, your starving sons, bedside advice, your oldest lasting dynasties. It is not about what you say, it is about what we do:

We kill corporations, watch unsympathetic as the flesh rots off, speak no elegies over things already dead, mourn only the things left living, like everything that wants attention. We are not, even now, drawing attention to ourselves, just trying to hear the music from across the street. The song makes cement and black dried concrete something organic, a formation of land always located within the encircling highways and other mall parking lots. This song is almost older than me. This mall is most definitely older than me. I have always danced under the same moon as these other

living things, and that makes them organic, or, as organic as anything can be. We yelled the song from the crowd one day, yelled it and dared the years to start coming, and the trick was: we believed they wouldn't.

The frozen yogurt place turns off its light, but the song keeps playing over the speakers as I drive away. I can't keep talking about emptiness I feel in a system I did not create and still expect my grandparents to understand how tired I am. I think we chose the anthem we could, after being angry, and after letting dead things die. It isn't so terrible, not as I curve my car away from the sound. It isn't so terrible, I promise myself as the last shooting star falls to its knees right behind where the frozen yogurt place has always stood in my imagination.

Some scenes create themselves more in the mind than anywhere else and they stay there even after the past is something other people mock for existing. If you knew your history, you would be either more or less afraid, but it is impossible to tell.

Marisa Silva-Dunbar

Here—people don't like to be forgotten

The poet, with red wine and her Cary Grant film collection,
misses the conversations you had in her living room
while you both danced to Run DMC.

The DJ boy who wanted to marry you—but never asked,
still wonders about the men you might've had
when the South American sky swooned over a stranger's kiss.

Your roommate drank chamomile tea with you on nights
when your sentimentality and hiccuped tears kept sleep away. She helped
pour Clorox down the drain when slugs bubbled up in the old bathtub,
laughing as you took turns pushing them down with a broken broomstick.
She waits to hear your sing-song weeping over boys
who don't matter.

You and your freshman best friend went backpacking around
the Aegean. You kissed her sun-warmed cheeks, felt
she should be embarrassed when she sauntered around town in
Daisy Dukes,
and was a flirt-monster with the men and their wives.
She stares at pictures, the calendar, thinking about where you went,
why you don't call.

Even I (and I know the chaos I caused) think about:
cooking with a forbidden store-bought jar of sauce,
how you wanted me to teach you the shaky-shaky dance,
or when you'd glare at heartbreaker boys at the bar.
It's easy to know what we miss—what moments
we want you to cling onto—even as you wish
them into ashes.

Daisy

On moving day, I found her in the kitchen arranging a bowl
of apples.

Her skin was bronzed—hair bleached by the Grecian sun.
She spent her summer sleeping on the beach, saving baby
turtles in the morning.

At lunch she made veggie sausages—poured too much oil in
the pan,
served them with a puddle of ketchup and a wilted salad on
the side.

She let one of the guys make her a dinner of noodles in a
black bean sauce,
cooed when he called her bonita—a word he picked up
traveling through Spain.

She charmed the rest of the boys when she stretched her
legs out on the table,
the black tights hugged the muscles in her calves, denim
mini crept up her thighs.
For weeks she waited for them instead of braving the long
walk with us girls,
on our nightly trips to the pub. Once there she'd stand near
the bar, lean into them,

vodka lemonade in one hand, the other on their lapels
throughout the night.

Even then I liked her—two front teeth too big for the rest of
her mouth, lips in a natural puff,
her beaked nose and asparagus colored pug eyes reminded
me of my 5th grade best friend.

In my homesickness I liked that small comfort.

Polly: The Girl Next Door

Ken made her a steak dinner with roasted potatoes,
frisée salad with lemon vinaigrette,
and strawberry pie for dessert (his version of seduction).
They spent most of the night making out
on his worn blue comforter.
When he couldn't get hard after she got naked,
she left.

But Ken was nicer than her boyfriend
who got annoyed when they went out clubbing
—she was too friendly
(he said she was two-faced).
He laughed when she wore high-heels
and lingerie to bed, said she was trying
too hard to be like the girls in magazines.
He drove too fast down the thin winding streets,
when she whined about how he watched Sasha Grey
on the nights he went home alone.

Ken wasn't hot like her first boyfriend, the Venezuelan
who bit her lips and pulled her hair when they kissed—
made her watch in the mirror as he fucked her from behind.
She felt awkward with him, never knowing
what language to call out in.
It ended when she found out he was luring
other women into their bed.

Polly can't be alone for more than a month.
After the men are gone, so are their photos and T-shirts—
she builds a hole for the next one—longs for the whirlwind,
someone who won't keep her home, and she wants *you*
to be jealous.

Frisson

He smells like spices,
orders Manhattans, and beer.
He plays the steel guitar; his songs sound
like the Pacific at the edge of dawn—
I feel the hum of electricity.

Spectres

Here we are—haunted by the same ghosts.

With you they are angry, ignored.
You wake up with the taste of sulfur
on your lips, cabinets are left open,
spoons in towers, your purse hidden
under the couch cushions. You never know
where cold spots will appear,
the chills poking at the nape of your neck.
They've made the walls bleed,
but you just place the blood soaked rags in a closet
no one uses anymore. They send lovers away
with static crackling the air, warning
that your home will never be welcoming.
They're waiting for their rage to get a reaction.

I have built them altars,
make weekly offerings of wine
and marigolds—leave a covered plate
with bread and honey, burn incense
before bed so when they wander through my dreams—
they don't cause foundation shaking nightmares.
Sometimes when I turn my back, they place items on my nightstand—
things I thought I'd lost forever (a drawing of you, an earring you left
at my place, a photo of us sipping on strawberry margaritas).
I never feel loneliness in my bones
because I catch glimpses of the ghosts in the mirror,
feel a hand brush my cheek in the minutes before waking.

When waiting in line at the coffee shop,
you'll confess you want an exorcism. You worry
they'll follow you from place to place, pop up
just when you think you're settled. You know
no matter how thick and cozy the rug—
they won't hide under there forever.

But I've heard them whisper about you, when I've stayed up late
washing dishes:
they want you to acknowledge the apparitions, admit—
you're more afraid of the silence they'll leave behind if they go.

Merre Larkin

The Dandelion Days

He was small then. Condensed.
His fleshy stubby legs would carry him through fields,
his soft virginal hands touching everything.

He'd bring me, proudly, with all the love
his miniature heart
with its bursting intentions
could beam,
a dandelion.

I'd put it in a juice glass on the counter,
longing for it to stay
that way.
Captured in time, so briefly,
so yellow.

78 East

I hold his hand to cross the road. At some point, he stops taking my hand. At another, he vehemently pushes it away. Now we are on opposite sides of the road but walking in the same direction. What if he turns to go the other way?

I am driving on the highway. He is in the passenger seat, his angst as always present in the shadows of his face. I don't know what to do about that anymore.

He glances sideways at me and I catch a pleading in his eyes. But when I make a move to cross, his face contorts into a storm.

"Mom, you know how I've been having kind of a bad week?"

I see his fists clench at his side and I instantly think he must blame me for everything that our lives have turned out to be.

"Well, I've kind of been having a bad year."

I want to hold him, tell him none of it is his fault. He is the light that came into my life when everything else was falling apart. I stop walking and turn my body to stare helplessly across the road to him. Please, my child, let me in.

"Mom, I'm gay."

He stops walking. He slowly turns to face me and brings his eyes to meet mine. We search each other for answers. Let there be some.

"Are you sure?" (What a fucking stupid thing to say.)

The cars are flashing by us but it doesn't matter. We've connected beyond time and place, past and future, all of it.

"Yeah." (Gentle with me, relief in his voice.)

All of a sudden, it's only us, mother and child, the cars are gone, the road disappears, and we're transported to a field of wildflowers growing up around us, recklessly, haphazardly, radiantly.

“Okay.”

I reach out to him and he lets me. His head leans hard on my shoulder. I hold him close.

Sensing June

I smell
parched earth
drinking in
soft rain.

I taste
dusty heat
steaming off
oppressive
pavement.

I see
its cloud
envelop
our travels.

I hear
my son's
footsteps
beside me.

I feel
his height
hovering,
gentle,
anxious.

I sense
his thirst
like the
earth's.

We walk,
side by
side, and
I want
to tell
him.

Cascades
of clear waters
will drench
his eager soul
and he too
will know
what quenched
feels like.

But it
won't help.

Savannah Grant

The Day After Your Birthday

Lying on the floor like a cat, you, unhuman, so they will come and sniff you and I want to ask how you have been lost. I drive under the darkness of our mother's inherited poverty, an unexpected wooden cross on Jewell Hill, a dirt road in light so November, I forgot to get gas; there are no answers. The day after your birthday it happens every year, our mother remembers me. I give you a blueberry popsicle and you cry when she calls you. Some devil blows through her junipers, chocolate wine taken down from pantry shelves but I won't kill myself today because I don't think like you do, baby sister, you just don't seem to care. Sing tura-lura-lural, tura-lura-lai: there's a picture of her in a ballet dress and my arms fall the same way her arms did at my age but even so I will not fall the same onto hardwood floor's grit. It's just scrambled eggs up there, knots in the yarn, baby sister, it's why you won't learn how to drive. A rooster crows from the basement; sing: tura-lura-lural, tura-lura-lai; now she's just chicken shit, all the lights on at 3am.

My Head Is A Kitchen

1

my head is a kitchen
filled with smoke

breathe in burned butter
I don't remember

what I do when I leave
but it settles on all the windows

2

a March night isn't necessarily evil but
it wants to remind you of something

with the windows finally open
the air smells like insects in a way
that reassures the end

of winter but habits cling
like fog throwing back high beams

and some chill
in spring's heatwave

3

all this grief

all this lying
on the floor all day

like tar it sticks
drips from the corners of my mouth

he bought ivory sheets
when I wanted plaid

4

and how easy it is
to be picked up off the floor by my elbows again
just to cut carrots for dinner at 10pm

Bearclaw In December

1

I still have the hunting knife
you gave me
although the other two were lost
at baseball games

you loved to give me things
anything I looked at
New Mexico pottery and plastic trucks
even at nineteen

back against the electric fireplace
not sure where to look when your missing toe
told stories of the Citadel and General Lee

glory grew a white beard and couldn't leave
the brown leather chair

2

You and the sheets
were made of blood spots

thin Christmas carols mixed with radio commercials
only linoleum gleamed

I left as old people gagged in the dining room

onion rings and fried chicken
sweet potato fries
coleslaw

all wasted in front of hanging head
and eyes I wouldn't see open again

I couldn't wash the salt from the back of my throat

we wait
in a way it's already done

we all end up with our faces covered
in who knows what

3
It wasn't you there
wearing the clothes we picked out

they got your smile wrong anyway

we rested our arms over our heads like you used to
in between shaking everyone's hands
in our new black shoes

someone said I was your raging river

the drive home
I told my sister the Carolina fog came down for you

the sun the next day almost like spring
a bugle humming taps

I cried only when
you were above that irrevocable hole

yet our great-aunt can still make us cheese toast

and we can laugh in your kitchen
comparing dresses
and how we're all drawn to bagpipes

I can carry your coffin
and eat a roast beef sandwich
in the same damn day

Saint

If I cry over a cat
it means they will die

and my wet hair brushed your head

I wanted to draw how your paws were locked, folded
wrapped in your favorite sheet

covering your face, grinning
and open with pain

I watched my dad dig two feet down
in a sweaty shirt

the way August shows you
how death

smells like cold new dirt and an old white sheet
and sounds like many birds

Indian Summer

across the third rail
someone babbles about faggots
and a last October wasp
clicks against the subway light

these are the days
I guess

of waiting
to fix ways I thought shouldn't be like this

Andrew Kuhn

The Bacchae, June, Alberta

On a cold dawn run by the black lake's shore
snow still heaped in the lee of firs
low mist seethes like a bad idea

glides across the face
of the waters
seeping wisps
over broken road

and you hear the reckless rider gallop up behind
what the hell
but turning to let them pass
you're wrong

it's a mother elk
recently calved
primed to stove in with one quick kick

the head of a wolf that might swing in close
to her black-eyed tottering all-in-all

and she's cut you off by the low thorn brush
wheeled and with a wedge of hoof
split hard air like a billet of wood
in front of your forehead

and you try in what little Elk you know
to tell her you come here not as a wolf
although in the fall you stalked her father

but her tongue deserts you

so plunge aside
and break the mirror
the lake has made

for the sky
from a glacier

and learn to your bones what it costs
to cross
a local god

In the Glass House

*“The cylinder, made of the same brick as the platform
from which it springs,
forming the main motif of the house,
was not derived from Mies,
but rather from a burned-out wooden village I saw once
where nothing was left
but the foundations and chimneys of brick.”
—Phillip Johnson*

On the springtime coverlet of a little Eden just after sunset
the box of glass floats

and the master builder, alone,
bored with empire, bored with excess, bored
with getting away with it,

imagines himself a prince, back-lit, disrobing,
teasing his subjects

who crouch in the bush like refugees.
This land is my land.

##

Somewhere out in the dark the family tree blossoms
laddered with shrewd poltroons
who pitched Mannahattas off the Palisades.

Old money new money
money accruing it
never stopped . . .

In the massive, shuttered childhood homes
the Daughters of the American Revolution
passed for parvenus.

Now the prince sheds veils that shimmer of abalone,
tarpon scales skimming in moonlit pools.

This land is my land

##

Not all of the pure products of America go crazy . . .

Some live forever
and grow rich, grow richer, praised to the skies.

Before his pampered chin grew whiskers
aluminum made him a jazz-age Croesus,

the protean century's chosen element
shiny ubiquitous light fantastical
spinnable as silk, spun worldwide into

safety razors, throwaway cans
fighter jets, shining skyscrapers.

Rich as Proteus the god
he grew, immune to limits

the Depression for instance
and ordinary life

transcending pedestrian rights
or wrongs, free to float

an ecstatic excursion descending on Poland
in the blitzkrieg's vanguard

burning villages
thrilling the night

This land too
This land is my land

##

Then home to celebrate the ruination of the Jews—
print panting tributes to *Mein Kampf*,

throw bricks of cash at Huey Long and Father Coughlin
avatars of radio hate scouring American prairies and hollows

and trick out muscled Nazi squads in custom fitted uniforms
swooning to witness their strutting marches
erect through the squares of Homeland hometowns.

The money flowed and bore him up.

He stockpiled weapons and flirted with learning
to shoot

##

When it became more widely noticed that these enthusiasms
stank of treason

the money served and the talent too
to float him up and out of harm's way

the postwar Proteus morphing into—
no architect, merely—but more
and more the transcendent hero of material culture

the One to decree to each new generation
what is to be
the next Big Thing.

##

As the impudent mandarin
forgives himself everything

the new Canaan in need of mandarins
forgets the unforgiveable—

celebrating the brilliant Glass House,
his see-through palace

great wink at the world
the joke nobody wants to get . . .

This land is my land

##

But entranced this soft summer night

all alone in his gorgeous deceptions
the great man

is suddenly spooked:
naked and still, in view of the trees.

Now gather shifting mobs
of shadow.

And he hears behind the mosquito whine,
tree-frog racket, suburban cough
of a car turning over

the click and whisper
of baffles and dampers:
history, not entirely hushed.

##

He slides open a panel in the façade,
flees the crouched and listening world.

Before him squats the cylinder of brick
like a factory smokestack sheared by a tank round.

Light startles a brilliant frame
through which he slips

and disappears.

On the chimney's far side
a hearth is blazing.

To the ghosts on the lawn it looks as if
at last he too

has walked into
an oven

Plains Weather

When you wake up
if you wake up

will you see the ceiling has flown far away

or maybe just into the muck pond
down the road where cattle cool their shanks
and switch away the flies, except

the pond's been sucked up to the sky
as well?

The threads that came from Hong Kong or the new place
they now make the shirts that celebrate
your everlasting Oklahoma City Thunder—

will they come apart in shreds as fine
as sphagnum moss

and flutter on the updraft high enough
to find their ways back home?

Oh gosh I hope so.

Had about enough of you,
and this heat.

Catherine Wald

Against Aubade

Tonight ensconced in your firm fragrant arms,
As tender as new bride and blushing groom,
Tight swaddled, warm, as in the rounded womb,
Let's hold each other close and bless our stars.
Protected from dark morning's dawning gloom
And day's insistent, breast-beating demands,
We think, not with our brains, but with our hands—
Two shuttles, back and forth, across a loom.

Redeemed, replete, released from tales and lies,
Misunderstandings, quarrels and remorse,
Inevitable failures of discourse,
In silence finally our tongues grow wise.
Bedazzled by kind nighttime's sweet deceits
We dread the dawn's unraveling defeat.

Birthday Lunch

What I wanted to say was, you're still the most beautiful woman in the world. It's kind of nice to see you. I've been dreading this all week.

What I wanted to say was, I refuse to dredge any more lakes for your dead bodies. I don't have the credentials to absolve you. If it's my birthday, how come you get all the goodies?

What I wanted to say was, I love the way you laugh at my jokes. There is so much about me you'll never know. Why do you have to be the gift that keeps on taking?

It kills me that I still love you—another thing I didn't mention. What I wanted to say was, you birthed me, but I created myself. What I wanted to say will always stand

between us.

Death and the Rainbow

We began our flight with
gaily colored globules—
all the bubble gum a
five-year-old could
possibly
chew.

We touched down in a kind of
Oz where oranges grew on
trees instead of in plastic
netted bags from the
supermarket.

Fairy-tale Florida!
Sun shone, palms shimmered,
clean-smelling aqua
splash pools punctuated
every lawn. Houses
wore tropical shades that
made my mother's red
lipstick look almost
sad.

I do recall an ambulance.
I saw men carry my grandpa
away on a stretcher.
He was sick, which is much
easier to understand
than dead.

But what I remember best was
the rainbow, my first. When my
mother parted the curtains, pointed
at what until that moment had
been myth, I knew something
important had happened.

Journal Entry

She keeps her old journals
in her old bedroom
in plain view.

How I envy her!

She assumes
as I once assumed
a daughter's trust
isn't temporal
like anesthesia.

Her heart's chambers
haven't been slit or
scrutinized by
maternal surgeons.

Structurally sound
she stands firm
inviolable.

I love to see,
I love to watch,
the light flash in
her eyes.

Joe Couillard

Like New Houses Settling

Dressed in our blue trousers and our white polo shirts,
we stood bashfully in two lines while we waited for church,
always two lines.

Had it ever been quiet you probably could have heard our knees
and ankles crackle
like new houses settling on their foundations,
but thankfully it was never quiet.

We weren't Catholic,
but when my dad left we had to move.
Mom said we can pretend to be Catholic or I can go to that
school with no windows,
I said I would do my best to pretend.
I don't think you were Catholic either,
but I knew it wasn't polite to ask,
so I didn't.

My uniform was too big.
Mom found it at the school's summer yard sale.
It hung loosely around my shoulders,
begging me to fill it.
I hated that shirt.
Mrs. Vanderczyk said we weren't supposed to hate things,
but I hated Mrs. Vanderczyk so it was all very confusing.

One day in gym class I accidentally held your hand.
We were playing capture the flag and I rescued you from jail.
My brother said that it didn't count,
but to me it did.
My hand was sweaty.
Yours was too so I think it was okay.

I used to believe you were too good for this place,
that the stench somehow couldn't stick to you.
In fact I was sure of it,

but then your mother overdosed and everything changed.
You cried at the visitation, and your cheap mascara ran like gutter
water.

I think it was the first time you ever stood upwind.

My mom and I started bringing dinner to your house on Tuesdays.
Your dad would drink half of a bottle of wine and cry.

We got to eat TV-dinners in your room.

You told me you felt bad for hating your mom for dying.

I told you I hated Mrs. Vanderczyk.

You laughed,

so we sat on opposite sides of your twin-sized bed,
hating things together.

A Hotel Bed

Unable to sleep despite the early hour and your shared evening,
you lie awake in a hotel bed
watching the sunrise undress the virgin snowfall.
You feel guilty.
She wasn't yours to undress.
She may not be someone else's,
but she certainly wasn't yours.

With the anesthetic of whiskey and rebellion long gone,
the absence on your hand burns
like a soldier's leg forgotten overseas.
Over and over you hear your wedding band ping against hardwood
softened by the denim of a back pocket,
a muted gavel falling.

You want to roll over and look at her,
but you're terrified of what you may see:
a mother's nose,
a father's eyes,
features previously masked by a short skirt a bar lighting.

"I didn't mean for it to happen."
It sounds hollow in your head already,
and it will rattle even emptier when she reads it in a text two days
from now.
"We can still be friends,"
will be her Abilenian reply,
but after it's all said and done she won't sleep for a week,
and you'll donate 300 dollars to a strip club on Hennepin and 6th.

You'll see each other again,
on accident of course.
You'll hug and say hello,
but your Chinese food will be getting cold,
and she'll be late for a meeting,
so you'll part ways like you should have from the start.

The Man Outside the Arena

I woke up with a dream of writing a novel,
but by noon I cut it to a short story,
and by dinner I pared it down to a poem,
and then eventually I gave up and just tweeted it.

It could have been my breakthrough,
my masterpiece,
a wonderful idea that instead I distilled into 140 characters,
a vision I traded for vibrations
instant gratification in my front right pocket.

I wish I could blame my luck,
but I was born a healthy white male.

And now I can't blame my generation
because a Millennial is the 6th richest man in the world.

I can't even blame my parents.
They didn't adorn me with trophies nor smack me with a
wooden spoon.

I can only blame myself,
my ego,
my crippling fear of not being liked,
so crippling in fact that I'd rather create nothing
fluff
bullshit
than create something that someone might not get.

Marred by dust and sweat and blood,
Roosevelt stares at me from inside the arena.
I cannot meet his gaze.
I look down at my phone,
waiting for it to light up and save me.

Faleeha Hassan

In Nights of War

My mother forced us to go to sleep before sunset
She told us the warning siren will take the sleep from your eyes
Just as the raid will take the houses from their streets
We run toward everything
We eat from fear of running out of food
We drink water without thirst
And like chicks
We crawl into her abaya
And sleep without sleeping
At dawn
We run toward the windows
And open our eyes wide
When we start counting all the destroyed houses around us
And thank God for the blessing of sleep

My Father's Feet

When I was a kid
I saw them
Running
And
Running
After the bus
That took him to his job every morning
And returned him to us late every day
Carrying so much love in his heart
And bags of food
To our souls and our mouths
Starving forever
Running
After our school books
Which we were covering with our prayers
To protect us from the sticks of our principal and teachers
Running
After my mother
Whose days all finished in different hospitals
And when I grew up a little bit
I saw them
Still running
But in military boots
For days never ending
Covered with dust from Khorramshahr* and Dezful* And
when he stretched out his feet on the floor
We all ran to them with joy
And like a big pillow filled with dreams we slept on them

**Two Iranian cities where the Iran – Iraq war was fought in 1980*

War Museum

Whenever the dictators get bored of their long daytime hours
Which they spend sitting on their stinking chairs
They open the door to their War Museum
And force us to enter
We pay with our lives as a ticket for this entry
To see :

The remains of soldiers we played with in our childhood
A picture of my grandmother
Who, when she saw the oppressor's face
Predicted our orphans would come soon
A Picture of my father's military boot
Which he lost on the border of a city
We thought belonged to us
Maps of cities where.....
There is nothing left but their names
Melted onto the tongues of kids
Women's abayas chewed up by the treads of tanks
Medals who could not find a deserving chest to hang on
Large jars filled with the tears and sorrows of mothers
And
Helmets
Helmets, helmets
Helmets, helmets, helmets
Of unknown soldiers
But.....
On the door of this museum They put a big red sign "No Exit"

Raising the war

Like a pet
The tyrants raise the war
At first, they feed it
Their sick dreams
Their reviews of the soldiers under the heat of the summer sun
Maps they have imagined for their conquests
Speeches they have written in dark rooms
The future of our children
And when that war grows
It chews away at us
Every day
Every hour
Every moment
Like a ruminating anima

When I Hear the Siren

I remember
Like birds afraid of their feathers catching fire
We scrambled to hide
Whenever we heard the siren
My little sister's voice hits the walls of the room
She screams
!Hold me
As she stands still in her place
And her eyes sink into a sea of fear
Words break on my tongue
We run towards our mom and we hold her hands tightly
And our whole little world begins shaking from the roars of
the fighter planes Now
I thank the siren a lot
Every time I hear it
It reminds me of the taste of my mother's hands
When she was training hard to strengthen our thin roots

Olivia Dorsey Peacock

Thelma

i.

for as long as I can remember
her dedication to morning routines was unparalleled
her silence
miffed
but blaring gospel music
warmly carried me out of bed
and down stairs
for sausage links or bacon
always with pancakes
and orange juice with pulp.

I loved to make her laugh.

And would
chase her around the house with a camera—
the game conceived from a fear
of permanently remaining
imperfect on film.
Watching game shows
confidently declaring the prices of
Clorox bleach
among other commodities.
Making fun of fancy ladies
while playing make up
in the mirror.

Her laughter announced
her presence in this life
from a stoic seat
in that dining room chair
or her scrunched up nod-off
spot on the TV couch.

I kept thinking
if I made her laugh
Grandma would have no reason
to fall asleep.

ii.

the sensual dance of crazed
delusion
glee within the
charred remains of a
spick-and-span
misfit
held against the restraints
of her own reality

binding her petite Black frame
to stiff, rollable one
'll fix it
the wine'll fix it
the second one'll fix it
the pills'll fix it
whispered
Fix it fix it fix it fix it fix it fix it fix it

is this why Bill traveled?
what did the voices tell her?
how long until it burned it all away?
innocent faces on glossy yearbook print
chuckled under a nice, retiring char

I tried to—
 “be a good wife”
 amid the voices.

iii.

pinot carried angel kisses in each sip
each stem a rung
bottle the wrong key
for a gate that wasn't ready for her yet

*I made an angel
did I need to make another
and try motherhood twice?*

*I had plenty
of practice
flying with the pillows*

*if I collapsed,
pressed my face
into the cushion*

*I could almost see
the
view from the clouds*

kicking my heels, confetti to the lives below.

iv.

happiness was at the bottom
of an egg custard pie
where ferries sailed away

and to Beacon lights ice cream in hand
scuttling children leaping
thin brown bodies in thick coats on thick decks
to retreat to warm rooms
and sweets from father's dirty quarry hands
mother at the oven's edge
creasing lips into poised, anxious
unspoken passages and a voice into
a tickled clink.

v.

her favorite photograph
froze her in 1964
her senior picture
a bobbed haircut just
the right amount of frizz
arched horizons
to shield chocolate eyes
from dreams into the distance

(*As a student I—
“studied business secretarial.”*)

slightly aloof
shaken
of a blemish free promise
meant to fill in the blanks

(*My ambition was—
“to become a secretary.”*)

mouth barely open
as if the photographer
forgot one little thing—
flashing too fast to capture
smile’s full essence

(*My Mother taught me to value—
)*

but to her, it was perfection
punctuated with swift penmanship

*Mother
with all my love
Thelma*

Sarah Louise

Tremors

I.

Hippie farm near
Thunder Bay
sauna made of barn
board harvested from
neighboring abandoned fields
inside two kerosene lamps a
bottle of red wine some home
grown Mary Jane six
steam cleaned friends and lovers
starlight visible through knot
holes
deep winter
snow ready to seal their
pores

Twenty years later
state of the art Finnish
sauna in town
Christmas snow falling on
reunited friends as
they enter
disrobe
ladle water onto hot
river rocks
sit on rich redwood benches that
feel like silk on slick
skin

The air between them steams
open like oyster
shells hands reach for each
other wrap thick warm white
towels around torsos

bring ceramic sake
bowls to moist
lips
contented unraveling
tongues

II.

A loud bang, not like a backfire or car crash or battery of rifles at a military funeral. Black and white checkered linoleum floor under old clawfoot bath tub begins to vibrate. Surface of water in the tub pops gently as if peppered by many tiny pebbles. Bather brings her knees to her chin, hugs her legs, holds her breath. It's 8:30 on the morning of May 18, 1980, her 30th birthday which she will celebrate that evening. She doesn't know Mount St. Helen's has just exploded. When the shaking stops she takes her turquoise terry cloth robe from the peg on the wall and slips into it, amused for a moment by the iffy introduction to her third decade.

Water swirls down the drain faster and faster, as magma and melted ice will soon cascade down the mountain pulverizing trees and cabins, disappearing animals and humans. The birthday girl goes to the south window of her kitchen, sees what might be mistaken for a mushroom cloud by someone less upbeat. She tunes into local radio, hears the news. Friends who haven't called for months make contact, talk in tones that imply the world is about to end. She begins to wonder if ash will reach Vancouver, if the sky will darken.

After dinner at her favorite curry house she lets burning candles on the cake drip wax onto the cheerful lemon icing as though crying for all the life taken unawares that day. When she finally blows them out, everyone at the table feels a little older. They raise glasses to more subdued toasts, close ranks around fragility, go home at a reasonable hour.

III.

Teenage girl genuflects before
her mother's early morning anger
needs bus fare to get
to school

Middle age mother takes
change from nightstand throws
it at the uniformed girl leans
back on her pillows

Girl collects coins from
deep pile of the carpet runs
out to the bus
stop late for her first period class again

Mother back in bed by
three when girl comes
home with a note from the
principal

From behind her back
girl takes a clear glass
vase of burnt orange
gladiolas picked from the neighbor's yard

Mother watches girl place
flowers on the cherrywood dresser
careful not to spill any water
I thought they might cheer you up
the girl says slipping the
note under the vase

Mother doesn't ask where she got
them doesn't speak at all
won't see the note until the gladiolas
wilt

IV.

Professor Arlene's head shakes
yes then no then yes as she
does the double helix dance with
her nursing students to
teach them about DNA

Her voice is unsteady too
when she conducts the class
in a rhythmic
recitation of human
bones and their
connections

Sparks from nerve
endings jolt food from
her hands make lunch a solitary
task in a space
cleared on her office
desk

It's called essential
tremor Arlene tells a
new friend and colleague
one weekend
I'm not supposed to smoke or
drink but

They take a chance
split a beer
feel fine split another
Arlene lights a cigarette they
move to the front
porch

Show me the dance
the new friend
says keeping time by
tapping her Hopi pinky

ring on her
glass

It takes two
Arlene says
coaxing her friend to
her feet with
words temporarily less
tremulous

Head and hands on
leave from jumpy muscle and
bone

V.

Anxiety Reaches Epidemic Proportions, says the headline of a local newspaper. People in doorways, coffee shops, offices, cars. On street corners, TV reality shows, smartphones. Kids at school, parks, friends' homes. Pets under tables, chairs, beds. One teenage girl sums it up while her mom buys two six packs of Heineken at a convenience store on a Friday night. I'm dying here, she says. No you're not, mom says. Yeah I am, mom. The world is going to hell. Mom.

The cashier gives them a complimentary lottery ticket with the receipt for the beer. He wishes them luck, trying hard to delete the skepticism from his face, voice, hesitant hand.

Kimberly Russo

Inherent Injustice: a tribute to Trayvon Martin (February 5, 1995-February 26, 2012)

The injustice inherent in the killing of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman was not authored by a jury given a weak case. The jury's performance may be the least disturbing aspect of this entire affair. The injustice was authored by a country which has taken as its policy, for the lion's share of its history, to erect a pariah class. The killing of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman is not an error in programming. It is the correct result of forces we set in motion years ago and have done very little to arrest.
—Coates, Ta-Nehisi. "Trayvon Martin and the Irony of American Justice." *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 15 July 2013.

With a plastic syringe,
I dispense three beads
of water to the hushed

beak. He is dying—
quiet and ethereal
in my hand. Meager efforts

evolve too late and fail to
assuage the institutionalized
condition from which it

suffers. A murder of crows
shriek in violation and barrage
the airways with outrage.

Apathy settles on alabaster
masses. Eyes reflect the distortions
of a whitewashed mind.

But I can't erase a youthful
flight. Innocence unaware, the predator's
proclivity—ruin.

The embodiment of ignorance
breeds a “perceived threat.”
A coward’s bullet explodes

your heart. I am left to consider
unwavering racism
amidst the velvety feathers.

My Mid-Life Crisis Rap

Why dontcha wake up and see my face?
It's a shame for my all my change to go to waste.
Why dontcha wake up and stop my lies?
It's a shame for all my love to slowly die,
love to slowly die,
love to slowly die.

I'm not certain when it settled in.
But somehow one day I was broke and bent.
Deep inside I underwent a subtle discontent.
Lyn' still, all my energy spent, fatigue's intense.
Even though the heart repents, my brain invents
Excuses for lies, flight unrestrained,
No matter how it's ascertained, hara-kiri, I'm causin' pain,
attention gained.
And when it's time to pay the price, he blames me.
He restrains me, and I hate it.
"Stop! What are you doing?"
"I'm living life!"
"Shit. Can't you abstain?"
"I can't keep you chained."
It makes me crazy, cuz we had it all, beyond a doubt.
I fucking loved him and proud of him, day in, day out.
Then I drown in the madness, and I freak out; I choke.
Who are you?
Keep that crazy self-contained!
I eat his trust and leave him stranded bare and drained.
The story of my marriage stained.

Why dontcha wake up and see my face?
It's a shame for my all my change to go to waste.
Why dontcha wake up and stop my lies?
It's a shame for all my love to slowly die,
love to slowly die,
love to slowly die.

In the beginning when we dated, 'twas a perfect fit.
Every day we were together it was better, bit by bit,

Two magnets that could not be split,
Our marriage was so tightly knit.
Years go by, close your eyes, forget the benefit.
Life impedes and steals a hit; values cloud lickedy-split.
Begin to nit-pick, permit; submit; you quit,
Throw a fit, and split.
Not even tryin' in the least bit.
Love and hate is interlaced.
Promises erased.
Any chance of hope is chased, replaced with scorn.
Waiting vacant, silent, stillborn, another death to mourn,
Cuts like thorns, distaste,
Fall from grace, wrongs retraced, judged me in haste, but
 can I blame you.
I had already sworn,
This time you can trust me and
I'm hearing that I am forewarned.
Left me unadorned,
Words never spoken from your lips leave me dyin'
Now I'm hollowed out defeated, mentally worn.

Why dontcha wake up and see my face?
It's a shame for all my change to go to waste.
Why dontcha wake up and stop my lies?
It's a shame for all my love to slowly die,
love to slowly die,
love to slowly die.

Antiquated Chamber

Mailboxes, a quiet passing
nostalgic anchor of home . . .
somehow romantic, anticipating
secrets of the womb . . .
tugging trap-door, caressing
bottom grooves . . .
creamy envelope, heart fluttering
sealed and stamped.

Illusion

First snow

Streaks the portrait of a home
Dusting a renovated roof
An exposed structure suffers the weight
Beneath expectations.

First snow

Blankets the lawnmower
Quieting proven capabilities
A newfound resource endures the restraint
Within a confined space.

First snow

Alights on grass and tree
Murmuring, "Time is up."
One scarlet leaf committed to evolve
Amidst a tangle of habit.

Scarlet

I am the girl you think of last
when A-listers have heard your proposal and passed,
and B-listers' refusals have left you outclassed.
I'm the one who'll respond in eager contrast-
fed-up with a history of being bypassed,
assuming the role for which I've been cast.

A movie, a Coke, the ice-cream store-
picnic in the shade of the old Sycamore?
A flash of my skin to even the score,
your hand at my chest; trace every contour.
Tonight, will not close with a kiss at my door,
and dates of such nature present no encore.

And now you'll pass along my name
with lusty scenes of sin and shame.
Excuse yourself from any blame-
the male player in an age-old game.
And, I, once nameless embrace the fame,
burning with a scarlet flame.

Frannie Deckas

Keep You Safe

(If I dropped acid
In the fire with you,
Pulled the trigger
In the dirty rain,
Could you have pushed despair
Out of the nightmare? As if I
Pulled it from the vein?
 (A thin whisper in the wind urges,
 Keep him safe—
 And I keep you safe).

To have and to have held; but today
An ironic gravity pits in the palms,
A bitter serum sits on the tip of the tongue.
Seraphic injustice—
It's candy for the atheist,
But I will not let you float away.

Don't you leave me, don't you go—
There is nothing behind the sky.
I am not inside.
 (In the throat of a stranger,
 A guttural cry desperately keens,
 Keep him safe—and I vow that
 I can keep you safe).

As you slip into ashes into
Atoms into angel,
I am the broken cracked open,
The activated, blackness-saturated
Runaway on fighter plane,
And the jet engines sputter
Blood orange fire to the
Hellish core of it.

I am what was.

I shoot up with your words
In the thickening sickness of it,
But the cold old world is bitter
And inextricably twisted as it
Misses you in it, and
I think of you
I think of you
I'll think of you eternal

(And silent lips breathe a final plea of
Keep me safe—but
I could not keep you safe)).

synergy

you yearn yearn yearn for fusion
fire like neurons fire like ice like
blue green neon inside of those veins
under paper thin innocent skin
electric like synapse like lover
like volts charged to fry the membrane
rewire the brain shock shock shock
you back to life

you choke on your words
because you hate the way they taste
fly they like shrapnel lodge they
like bullets fester they like
dirty maroon wounds
and they wince and you dry cry
sink back into the silence
into the solace of pinkish
pinkish internal inferno

suddenly you realize the folly of the melancholia
the surrogate pain the surrogate shame
that ceaseless loop that looks something like a noose and
you're caught in the amber when the chair topples over

you tread upon the bloodstains
gone and so gone
don't you scrub; recall, recall all of it
ride ride ride push back against
the idle night; the darkening coward
might he perish in the pride
gone and so gone and
so far gone this time—the hellfire defied
he shook he cursed he trembled upon the throne
he denied he lamented he lied he lied he lied
the heat, the crime, the final word misheard
you understand with anguish what the burn belied

In the hot beyond

in the hot beyond,
I take my time.
I do not measure sighs
or sideways eyes
with seismograph and blood-stained tiles.

in the hot beyond,
I am trusting.
I do not take for blistering
the cold nothings.
I do not think the anomaly a cosmic microcosm,
and these thin wisps of sinful whispers
are decaying, graying.

in the cold cold old,
I am salt salt sordid sidewalk
dirty shoes dirty shoes dirty shoes.
I have every limb in the casket,
and I am brutally wasted,
you bastard.

in the cold cold old,
I am the dirty death march.
I am become him, harm.
I am bandit come undone in the blunder.
I hush hush—push back against the thunder.

Funereal dirge and it tastes like delight:

In the hot, hot beyond,
still I burn, but
I am alight. I am a light.
I am light.

Tractatus

The riddle does not exist
The elusive everything—all
Captured in the vanishing
Hurled flashing backward
Into the vacuum

I am accident
Fibers in the hellstorm
And gone so soon

Space between raindrops
Glimpse of the maybe mystical
I am a nothing nothing nothing
But I move move move
Constant crusade for the womb
The something the all things
The one thing

They laid pretty bricks for the haunting,
And I thought I had a dollhouse.

The riddle does not exist
I bicycle in the timelessness
Crepuscular man, idol of the twilight
Hold hand, hold hair, hold heart,
Hold dirty appendage, bandage,
Baggage, everlasting damage
And flash vanish backward
Into the vacuum

The riddle never existed
It was only ever the spectral echo
Only ever the crippling withhold
Always ever masked in the damaging
And tongues glistening that
Only ever left me famishing
Weary in the search for nurture
Crusade for the white hot womb, and
I was only ever vanishing

Child for Sale

I am a child for sale
won't anybody please buy me?
I'll tell you, mostly what I do is read, and
I am enraptured, I am so very fractured,
that whether lowly or holy
I can humbly assume any role you need
noiselessly, I can put myself to sleep
my flesh burns, my skin bleeds
but I do all I can not to weep
some may say I am cheap
sure, I'm a child knight errant
in search of a parent, and
I'll barter, I'll bargain—
you can just have me for free

it's whatever you see fit,
whatever you see fine
prospective parent,
I am docile and I am kind
I am deferential and benign
I am nine

could you teach me
how to tie my shoes? (if
I could so impose), and
might you show me how to
just grab hold? then, if there's
time, how to mercifully let go?
would you teach me
not to throw out my woes?

you and I, shall we sanctify?
allow me to bask in the
sweetness of sadness dignified
and if I go unsold, may I die
may you lay me down alone
without the nonsense
of a headstone
yelling about my unsacred bones

Retrospective parent, remember who I was
I was a child for sale
I was good, I was kind
I wanted so badly for you to be mine
Please, won't you think of me from time to time?

Jacqueline Schaalje

Dante's Lines

If Dante dyed his hair, he would be terrifically delayed on a
Saturday morning,
half an hour bombed to read and write in,
which would result in one less line.
maybe two.

If Dante polished his nails, he would dedicate half an hour to
this tedious task

(including scrubbing and buffing), every two-three weeks,
or more often if he got tired of the color,
or in the event

[Line lost.]

where the composition of his dress would be all-important.

Each of those primping parties where he'd be seen and wooed
would cost him one or two lines. Although
when you dye your hair or polish your nails, lines, like
lines under your eyes, may also be gained.

In all likelihood, they would pop up in Dante's brain,
effortlessly, quite independently
from his slow, purposeful actions,
that could be banal like nail polishing.

The polishing causing and not causing a fist ramming lightning
antithesis in his gut's dark wood.

Okay then.

Never underestimate the nail polishers.

It's so easy to poke fun at them.

[Line lost.]

If Dante divided the tasks of childrearing equally with his wife,
he would have spent a few hours on this every day, which
would mean fewer lines.

If he hadn't been a powerful Ghelf, on the receiving side of the
political divide,

the darling of the Pope and Charles of Valois, and hadn't been
up to his single-covered eyeballs in debate,

would it have been possible at all that he took up a
dishwashing brush,

just to help the wife out now and then, or at least his housekeeper,
for he surely kept one to keep his posh chambers neat?
And if he hadn't fallen from office would he have brought back his
chalice to the kitchen,
avoiding to look at the ruby drops he lost on the way, but the lines,
the lines,
that left his hand trembling, while his
head kept busy with all this menial nonsense?
Not being able to do things simultaneously.
Hell, think and write?

[Line lost.]

Enter Beatrice, the antidote to Dante's housekeeping fetish: she
became the dote.

Beatrice, she wasn't a time-suck: on the few occasions he
glimpsed her,
she made Dante's poetic zen zip aloft and run gloriously turbo,
until he crashed down and found himself backtracking over the
same painful
dishwashing brush.

And in the endless fretting and throes of blessed passion
he likely lost a few more lines that were true and felt—

Oh blessed mother, you angel,
that takes away my boondoggle from me, let's
have done with our mourning.

I will make you famous.

Mouthings

Your winter coat from Prague. Thermo-patched, dove-cuirass
Lays down blond fur corona, buckled forward for a kiss.
Bubble gum encroaches, making mad with riddle—
I ask is that cleanser tea, that scent your collar keeps in.
Beatific with your husky halo, devourer of chicken breast,
you resist so many who would have you—

I can only envy you, sculptor of heart muscles. Lightning.

Geranium lips curling with expectance, the first toppings.
A pearly rain drips in the overlit, plum parking lot.
In the boudoir of our seaming hoods it's moist and warm,
leaning back lucky into hovercraft, spice of spittle,
you're taking after the baby. I start to dream.
In this protectionism of permeable yearning we control our

import. I like the things that you don't like in you.

You trust your loss, that pain contrasted; bubbling like lava,
I follow your censer. The plated car cracks open
to stay put until midnight. The organs swell and luxuriate:
bitter, blooming, I have done this ad nauseam.
Newbie divorcé, I meet your eye to see
and there is more. With the drama sketched in,

the routines you work seem marvelously new.

If You Know Snow

If you know snow only from a book
you can be alone, or make a snowperson
and create anything under your gloved hands.

If you know snow only from a book
you can have white, quiet mornings
and mysterious, shivery evenings.

In the wide tide of shimmering
icicles might trick you
and propose a beauty overhaul.

Unseen, you can have hundreds of words for it
your children will have a feeble grasp of,
unless you make them read.

If you know snow only from a book
you stand looking out, flailing,
not the easiest words melting against your palate.

You must listen to witnesses of snow
but beware, don't take over their words—
The words must be yours.

If you know snow only from a book
you won't ever use sand to efface it.
Snow sphinx sounds like a dope idea.

If you know snow only from a book
you can make a movie out of it,
add some blue light.

Reassembly

The decision not fleshed out,
so small it didn't really exist.
Could I resist its shadow

and feel affection for its parent?
That I could give it dreams, maybe bad
ones that I caused?

Sometimes I imagine going shopping
for gaudy rags at Primark
and screaming at the top of our lungs.

So small it is crazy that I flushed it,
it would have been a you now, wan
youth, but of my growing own.

So undefined, I'm shy to ever
look you in the eye—all purpose, not
one to disturb. What good is a shadow

if not created? A partner only
at parties? I've looked at your profile
and thought you resembled me, the shape

I'd been trying to recollect for
when I'll grow weaker, so to speak.
You keep with me, child, tiny

again, so I can hold you in my belly.
I talk to you, quietly,
give you a little pat now and then.

The City with a Heart

You know the city where you went to on the cheap,
the city that had positive buzz, said your friends;
see this cozy cafe, salad with pomegranate;
the city where once upon a time they bombed its heart
out, and now you find yourself wandering, looking
for where it could be; maybe it is in that street,
behind that mall, palace with its sunburst sign and turrets—
kind of cool, but clearly not authentic, is it?
Still, it's nice here, and warm, because I make that effort.
The museum has a model that recreates sacrifice
after the showdown. It turns out the city never had
a heroic gush of glory, if you discount war. After it closed,
orphans were recruited by clergy, passing buckets
with rubble from the spire. I have trouble putting myself
in the place of a stricken, bow-tied daughter. Then,
that monk was smiling, avuncular. In his past of past,
his parents fed him black bread and potatoes, deloused
his fine hair and lovingly coiled his earlock, before they
sent him along, a slap on his cold, dull cheek. What can
he say now to those cute kids? More pictures roll
past. Bedraggled beggars schlep along pony walls.
Who knows that if I had a daughter I would tell her
the city we visit, it has a heart still, and gradually
I would have her discover she can slip in.

Nancy Rakoczy

The Exploding Father

The exploding father
silently smolders with
slow wicks buried
beneath light camouflage

hot flares etch eyeballs permanently.

Once a simmering youth
now he explodes with impunity.

Hot spots in his psyche
percolate with vitriol,
pockets full of short fuses,
arteries stashed with nitro.

Why does he flame
in a furious hale of sparks
flashing blue, yellow and white?

Don't ask. It only sets him off.

What My Mother Saw

What she saw:
a front room that needed dusting,
the kitchen a good scrubbing;
dishes sticky from
breakfast, lunch and dinner.
Toss in a few brats,
and a shadow that pauses and waits,
making the floorboards creak.
She'd stop,
wait.

Thirteen and she'd
begged her mother, please, no no,
please no, but in Polish, with all
the soft sounds coming out hard.

The other girls,
her friends,
faces streaked with tears,
all begging and pleading no,
no no no, the Great Depression's chorus,
its dirge of fear.
This was their youth.

Don't leave me here to sleep
so close to their bedroom
to him
the shadows, and the tiptoeing—
No, scratch that.

No tiptoeing, he just took her
just like that:
just another utensil,
like the broom or mop.

Her mother works the braid of betrayal
into her hair. Hands button her into a dress.

He clears his throat and waits.

Turn the page: this is another story of
immigrant success.

The Imploding Mother

She was taught that it didn't happen.
That the money was needed
That whatever happened was for the best
That everything was meant for a reason.
That he didn't really mean it.
That it's to be expected a fine looking girl like you
That you probably led him on.
That's what men do.
That you should have known.
That you're too attractive, take that bow out of your hair.
That you're lucky he paid attention to you
That you had it coming dressed like that cover yourself
That there's no use screaming over spilled milk
That it was meant to happen one day
That if you had nicer clothes it wouldn't have happened
That when you're older you'll understand
That it's time to get over it
That it's not like you're bleeding
That you can't prove it anyway
That life doesn't hand you anything you have to take what it gives
 so hand over that money your sister is hungry
That you'll be back on the job tomorrow bright and early.

We Rise

Like a moth I rise from bed,
join the others, bump heads the ceiling.

shh

quiet

wait,

safety's above.

Our bodies below
lie curled, cruelty tossed larvae,
fear our only blanket.

See how we rise: let's fly,
spread arms wide and white.

Return to those poor bodies?
escape is through the window.

Mother stands waiting.
Father bends over our husks.
They don't know we're gone.
We'll return tomorrow, when it's safe.

Her Face

Now that she's dead,
we began a slow dig.

We examined, sifted, combed through,
held up to the light, raked, rummaged, ransacked
ravaged every corner of every room,
every closet and its shelves
for traces of the girl who had been our mother.

It was our private hunt,
a furtive probe for clues,
our backs to each other
working in tandem as we
brushed away dust looking
for artifacts she surely left behind.

And uncovered—
an entire album—loot.
A photo that showed a 12 year old
with features too big for her face.
It was—how to put this kindly—
a man's face—on a slender girl's neck
with the kind of purity
you see on people growing up
on an atoll in the Pacific,
smiling widely at their first camera.

I peered over her shoulder
at the Detroit neighborhood,
of broad shouldered houses
and bashful front yards.
With sidewalks that claimed
would never trip its young.

On her face—nothing was measured;
nothing divided. Nothing held back.
There was nothing coy,
nothing posed, nothing tempered

by the outside world's censure.
Clearly, she had never glanced at a fashion magazine
with its lessons on how to be a female adolescent.
Nothing had tampered with this man-face.
No apologies for the big nose, big smile, big expression.

I peered closer,
trying to guess how close she was to the abyss.
No scars apparent in her wholeheartedness.

Had it happened?
The man the whispers the secrets the pay-off.
It was—what—a month—two weeks—maybe just a day or
two away?
Was it tomorrow when she'd be dragged in so far and deep
she'd forget she'd been broken?
Was it that very day of the picture, when the architecture of
loss would take over,
and its columns and arches, atriums, buttresses, vaults and
spans would cave in, lying shattered beneath the face of
her youth?

Her mother would teach her to smooth and rearrange her
expressions.
She would learn to cover over a sinkhole of eruptions,
letting the secret niches and dark corners take over.
Age would tame her features into attractiveness.

Close the album—
still the Medusa: one look was enough.
This face was the before we never knew she had.
Her life with us—all pure after.

Ashton Vaughn

Sick As The Rose Water

Supple hands on skin
and a ripe tongue to
pluck the fruit from the tree.

 Watch me as I fall like an apple
 into the palm of the unsated,
 into the hands
 of the elated, the bored, and the triumphant.

Sickly sweet and
utterly intoxicating
like an odour of ammonia—

 I remember that scent clinging to my skin
 like some sort of glorified crown
 with thorns that would surely prick the skin
 and draw blood for all to see:
 my sins on display for the world,
 my sins on display for the world.
 (They were mine, for I had claimed them.)

 In this time of remembering,
 I urge myself to recall those things
 that got tangled in the thickets of my memories:

 The milkweed with its woolen blooms; the purple blaze
 of lavender that danced and bowed in the breeze; the
 dandelions, who wandered not for the world, but for
 their own enjoyment.

 The mockingbird, who sang so that any passing traveller
 may hear his sullen voice and rejoice in the song that
 sorrow brings.

Contrition

- I. There is a fire
 that burns
 riotously
 through the night,
spindling up like
 the fingers
 of God
 Himself.
His touch boasts
 the gentleness
 of a lamb,
 soft and shorn.
- II. “Make of yourself a light,”
 said the Buddha
 to the people
 before he went off
 and died.
- III. “Into your hands
 I commend my spirit,”
 said Jesus to the people
 as his soul
 rose and shattered,
and, perhaps, rose again.
- IV. God lives within us
 the way that
 A seed
 lives in the ground.
Unseen, untouched by the world,
 only to be awoken
 by some
 great and glorious rain—
let it rain down from the Heavens
 a great and glorious storm.

- V. May you find God in everything:
 in yourself,
 and in the daffodils, and in the
 wry oakwood trees.
 and also in the laughing lilt of
 the raucous wind.
- VI. May the fragile bird
 of yourself
 rise up,
 and maybe, after all,
 see things the way that they are.

Sugar

I. “I love you,
“I hope you know that I’m proud of you.”

II. The silver snake slithers in the grass—
black pearls for eyes and metal twist of a heart.
Young and assuming, the rabbit succumbs
to the thick rope of its body.

III. Do you remember the summer you locked me
away?
I rarely saw the sun
and I couldn’t even read,
for all the books were stuffed
in the attic.
Oh, irony
when you made me pack up my own libraries
in boxes and crates
and
leave them behind for a summer.

IV. Neither of you knew, but I had some of the books
hidden
in a field just outside of our neighborhood.
A couple years ago they built a
house over that field.

V. There are many ways one can manage to live through
a storm.

When you starved me I rationed sugar
underneath my tongue
and I hid libraries out in the field,
and eventually, yes, the sugar melted and
the books burned,
but at least it kept me alive for the year.

Salt

I. “I love you,
“You know that I love you, right?”

II. Like the blue jay who nudges,
and then pushes
his young out of the nest
to fly

He was only teaching.
He was only loving.
Woe to the beloved blue jay,
weep for him who fell.

III. Do you think that change is always a good thing?
It would've been a good thing for you,
the way that you wanted me to change;
and it was a good thing for me,
the way that I had changed,
but where do you fit in?
Was it too much to grow out of that crack
in the sidewalk?
Are you still caged by the hard, the stone, the rugged?

IV. You come not to hurt,
you come not to change,
you come not to blame—
then why do you come?

V. I stole away sugar
and built again my fragile libraries,
but you,
you buried salt under your skin
and you held onto the books that you stole,
the books you would never read.

Still, There Is The Light

I.

Feel it circling
 around you like a cloud
oh, what a sense of sadness
 what a sense of dread
that washes over like a wave,

 covers me like a shroud,
meant to wear to one's grave—
 let it adorn me like a silk offering,
let me wear it like crown.

 And, still, at the center
there is the light.

II.

 Who is that bird that sings
 outside of my window?
 Who is the one that trills
 the song of the seasons?

 You hurt me in ways, indescribable—
what is it to forgive?
 How do you look at the same person
in a different light?

 I can never tell when you have truly changed.
And, still, behind the silhouette.
 there is the light.

III.

Midnight has come and gone.
 I am not normal.
You are not either, though you will never say.
 I know what you did.
 I know who you are.

IV.

The thing about apologies is that they
don't really mean anything if you keep
making the same mistakes
an apology for the same mistake
ten times over
is not truly an apology
but merely a test of patience
How much until you break?
How much until you cave?

When will you finally
shed your skin?

Somewhere—there is the light.

V.

Somewhere there is the light
that burns without the help of anyone.
It does not have to be told
to keep making light.
It does not have to be told
to love the world.

I hope someday to be like this.
I hope someday to forgive you.

Contributor Notes

Jim Pascual Agustin grew up in Manila and has lived in South Africa since 1994. He opposes the anti-human rights policies of the current Duterte regime in the Philippines. Jim's poetry has appeared in *Rhino*, *New Coin*, *World Literature Today* and *Modern Poetry in Translation*, among others. *Wings of Smoke*, (The Onslaught Press, 2017), his eighth poetry book, is available on most online retailers. Jim shares random thoughts and drafts on www.matangmanok.wordpress.com.



Joe Couillard was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He attended college at Iowa State University before serving 5 years in the United States Navy as a Submarine Officer. He currently resides near Seattle, Washington where he enjoys reading, cooking, playing basketball, and spending time with his fiancé.



Frannie Deckas is a 20-year-old college student living in Los Angeles. She is new to publication and an abiding devotee of all things poetry, literature, science, philosophy, music, and film. Consumer of the deadly serious beet.



Olivia Dorsey Peacock is a techie from North Carolina who currently lives in Dallas, Texas, with her husband. By day, she helps doctors and academics make sense of health data and by night, she unravels genealogical mysteries. She has a Bachelors and a Masters in Information Science from UNC Chapel Hill. When she's not writing poetry, she's brainstorming ways to use technology for good instead of evil.



Noreen Ellis is a poet and chief communications officer at an engineering firm that designs and builds big public infrastructure projects. She geeks out about words, poems and bascule bridges. She is the recipient of a 2017 Troubadour International 25 for 20 Poetry prize and her poems have appeared in *Cease*, *Cows*, *Poets Reading the News*, *Hanging Loose Press*, and *New Voices* magazine.



Savannah Grant lives in Northampton, MA with three rescue cats. She attended Smith College to study English, studio art, and poetry. A few of her poems are published here and there, including a former issue of *Sixfold*. In her spare time she enjoys biking, exploring around town, drawing, and photography.



J. L. Grothe can't seem to limit her interests to one genre or medium. She has written for documentaries and instructional media, edited news and academic works, and designed learning experiences for both adults and children. She continues to explore poetry, memoir, photography, and video editing. Grothe lives with her family near Denver, Colorado.



Faleeha Hassan is a poet, teacher, editor, author, and playwright. She was born in Najaf, Iraq, in 1967 and now lives in the United States. Faleeha was the first woman to write poetry for children in Iraq. She has her master's degree in Arabic literature and has published 21 books. Her poems have been translated into the English, Turkmen, Boseviah, Indian, French, Italian, German, Kurdish, Spanish, Korean, Greek, Serbian, Albanian, and Pakistani languages.



A California native, **Anna Hernandez-French** cut her baby teeth on the rhymes of Dr. Seuss and Shel Silverstein. As childhood progressed she began to write her own verse, weaving into it her deep love of the Pacific Northwest. Expanding her landscape eastward, she made Brooklyn her home, where her work received an honorable mention in the Women's National Book Association's 2017 contest, and was selected as a finalist for the 2018 Writers at Work Competition.



Abby Johnson is a poet and a Hoosier who is proud of the local art scene that fostered her. She is pursuing her MFA in Creative Writing through Butler University. She loves her minivan and the moon. She is previously unpublished.



Andrew Kuhn is a psychologist in New York City and the Hudson Valley. His poems have appeared in *Common Ground*, *Conclave*, *The Mailer Review*, *Vending Machine Press*, *So Be It*, *The Ghazal Page* and other venues. His collection of interviews with 21 eminent poets, *How A Poem Can Happen*, came out in 2017.



Merre Larkin is a writer, educator and counselor living in the San Francisco Bay Area. She is revising a novel, working on a memoir, and continuing to submit her poetry. She has raised three children as a single mother and relishes uncovering pockets of time newly available for her writing as her children embark on their own life adventures.



Adin Zeviel Leavitt grew up mostly in the mountains of Montana and between the covers of books. He graduated from UC Santa Cruz in 2017 with a degree in creative writing, and can usually be found doing his best to get lost. He has published a collection of fiction and poetry, *It Still Rains In Imaginary Places*, which can be found on Amazon.com. He currently lives in Vietnam.



Sue Fagalde Lick returned to poetry after a long detour in the newspaper business and a better-late-than-never MFA at Antioch University Los Angeles. Her poems have appeared in *The MacGuffin*, *Willawa*, *Cloudbank*, *New Letters*, *Tenemos*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Diode Poetry Journal*, and other publications. When not writing, she leads an alternate life as a music minister in Newport, Oregon.



Carol Lischau grew up in Southeast Texas, where her relatives have lived for the past 200 years. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Cider Press Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, and *Common Ground Review*, among others. Her manuscript was a finalist in the 2017 Literary Awards for the Tucson Festival of Books. She resides in Blacksburg, where she is pursuing an MFA at Virginia Tech.



Sarah Louise lives in rural northern Mexico with two dogs and two cats. She writes fiction, poetry, and essays, and teaches writing online. Her work has been published in various journals and magazines, including *Contemporary Verse II*, *Prism international*, *The Fiddlehead*, *The Cimarron Review*, and the *Canadian Forum*. Her academic work includes an MFA and a law degree.



Amanda Moore's poetry has appeared in journals and anthologies including *ZZYZVA*, *Cream City Review*, *Tahoma Literary Review*, *Best New Poets*, and *Mamas and Papas: On the Sublime and Heartbreaking Art of Parenting*, and she is the recipient of writing awards from The Writing Salon, Brush Creek Arts Foundation, and The Saltonstall Foundation for the Arts. She received her MFA in poetry from Cornell University, where she served as Managing Editor for *EPOCH* magazine. Amanda lives with her husband and daughter near the beach in San Francisco, where she is a high school teacher.



Nancy Rakoczy was published by *Sixfold* in the summer of 2017, and received an Honorable Mention in 2013 from New Millennium Writers. In 2009 she participated in the Dancing Poetry Festival in San Francisco. She's written art reviews for the *Mdaily.com*, and has contributed a chapter on climate artists, "Working with Artists" for the forthcoming book from T&T Clark/Bloomsbury publishers, *T&T Clark Companion on Christian Theology and Climate Change*.



Kimberly Russo is an English teacher in Aurora, Colorado where she resides with her husband, Tony, and her four children. Kimberly spends her free time gardening & bird-watching. Much of her writing is dedicated to marriage/family, social issues, including the perpetuating inequality among genders/race, and the stigma associated with mental illness. Her poetry has appeared in *River Poets Journal*, *Open Minds Quarterly*, *PDXX Collective*, *Sixfold* (Summer 2016,) and *Cricket Media: Spider Magazine*.



Jacqueline Schaalje (MA English from the University of Amsterdam) has published stories in *On the Premises* and *The Massachusetts Review*. Another story was a finalist for the Epiphany Prize, and in the New Guard Competition. She went to the Southampton Writers Conference (NY) last summer to work on a novel. A poem has just been published by *Sky Island Journal* and some are forthcoming in *Sixfold*.



Marisa Silva-Dunbar's work has been published in *Anti-Heroic Chic Magazine*, *Poetry WTF?!*, *Better than Starbucks Magazine*, *Redheaded Stepchild*, *Words Dance Publishing* and *Gargoyle Magazine*. She graduated from the University of East Anglia with her MA in poetry, and has been shortlisted twice for the Eyewear Publishing Fortnight Poetry Prize.



Ashton Vaughn is an upcoming senior at Thompson High School. He is a writer of fantasy and poetry, as well as music. When he's not writing, he's either reading, at school, or working at Chick-Fil-A. He has plans to attend an Ivy League university as an Environmental Science major.



Catherine Wald is an author, journalist, translator and teacher based in Manhattan. Her chapbook, *Distant, burned-out stars*, was published in 2011 (Finishing Line). Poems appeared in *American Journal of Nursing*, *Deronda Review*, *Gravel*, *Minerva Rising*, *J Journal*, *The Lyric*, *The New York Times*, *Quarterday Review*, *Westchester Review* and others.



Timothy Walsh's most recent poetry collections are *When the World Was Rear-Wheel Drive: New Jersey Poems* and *The Book of Arabella*. His awards include the Grand Prize in the *Atlanta Review* International Poetry Competition, the Kurt Vonnegut Fiction Prize from *North American Review*, the New Jersey Poets Prize, and the Wisconsin Academy Fiction Prize. He is the author of a book of literary criticism, *The Dark Matter of Words: Absence, Unknowing, and Emptiness in Literature* (Southern Illinois University Press) and two other poetry collections, *Wild Apples* (Parallel Press) and *Blue Lace Colander* (Marsh River Editions). Find more at: <http://timothywalsh.com/>



