

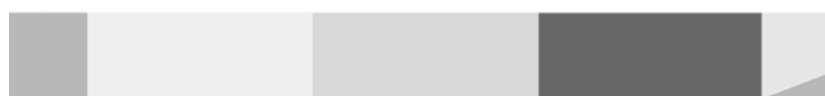
SIXFOLD

POETRY SUMMER 2022



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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.

Each issue is free to read online, to download as PDF and as an e-book for iPhone, Android, Kindle, Nook, and others. Paperback book is available at production cost including shipping.

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Joanne Monte

Anniversary, 2019: Sant'anna Di Stazzema

*In memory of Concetta Maria
and those who died*

I

Another milestone, my aunt tells me,
three-quarters of a century, and yet the memory
of it never slips into an emptiness,
never more than disappears.

The language hasn't changed, nor the trees this August,
the lawn splurging abundantly with weeds.
But this is what we know of peace, a gentle breeze
that blossoms in the moment.

Whenever she speaks, I try to understand,
her English still coated under a heavy accent
even after all these years, but I manage
to string the syllables into words, the words into phrases.

The barns were burned, she says; the livestock
were tortured and slaughtered by the few
who had only sought to drive their spears
into a body of blood and flesh. But the animals

did not run, they did they not fight back and kill.
It's that distant thread to the animal in *us*,
clothed in human form, so perhaps the animals
simply took pity on them, rendering them inhuman.

II

Almost everything reverberates in total recall
like a breeze fluttering through the leaves.
The spirit transforms into another spirit
between the then and now, echoing the memories

of the same event. She wishes
that she could hold them in her hands like a ball
that she could throw into a field of tall grass,
forget where it lands. But it was she who had landed

beneath her mother when the bullets shot a long line
of buttonholes into the flesh and bone
of every woman and child there. A massacre—
blood gushing out like a red tidal wave over the few

wearing the blackest swastikas. An enemy stealing
more fortune than thieves, killing more
than just the shadows. **DONE, they claimed,
IN THE NAME OF PATRIOTISM!**

III

She remembers the barn, an old scythe
propped against the wall that somehow caught the eye
of the light filtering in from the hayloft window.

She remembers her mother turning her back on the guns;
how she wrapped her body around her like a robe—
the same as she did on those nights when they sat fireside,

the war peering through the window as her mother
told her stories about love. But love speaks
in a visual language to a child just as hatred does in war.

It was in the soldiers' eyes, she says.
That's where it begins, where a child knows to look.
She saw the iris in the soldiers' eyes kindle a bloody orange,

the pupils bursting into tiny flames. The only love she felt was in her mother's arms tightening around her waist like a belt that held her securely in place.

The last thing she had seen before she and her mother fell was the scythe. What did it mean, that scythe? Why, she asks, would she even remember it?

IV

Eighty-one years are sewn tightly into every wrinkle in her face, into every strand of hair that she coiled into a topknot. How much longer will she live to remember a child too bruised to crawl out of a graveyard?

Every anniversary, she would sit for an hour or two among imaginary headstones, as she is now, and wait for the sun to casually wander down to the horizon where the light would soon begin to dash

like a child into the dark. She would watch the moon as it would sometimes rise in full, crowned in a glow of citrine high above a metropolis of stars. The sky at night. It would always remind her of that day in the war

when she learned how to focus her eyes so that she could see in the dark. A star would emerge as the supreme sparkler, the one and only to fire asterisks into that space where so many others were pulled at the end of their lives.

V

After all these years, she still remembers her mother's face; remembers her mother's eyes, warm and dark like a double shot of espresso that would sometimes spill over her lashes at the mere whisper

of her husband's name. He had joined a brigade of partisans
to rip out the swastikas, wring out the black shirts
and hang them upside down on the clothesline to dry.
Gone for months into the dark, a secret plan for disruption,

tying their hope to the boxcars of victory.
She remembers her mother telling her in a voice
that was a soft blend of almond and flowers to not ask
about Papa. *You must never speak of him, no, not to anyone.*

That was the day when the air was littered with ash,
when the blood and bone were all too fragile.
When at last her father returned, it was to a fog of smoke
that hung like laundry on a line that went from house

to house, from barn to barn. A stillness
of where he would find the dead, the fallen women,
infants not yet reaching the canal of childbirth.
Where there had been a house, a terminal of children

lay smothered in ashes. The church, drained of its color,
lost its effect, the pews were used for burning,
corpses tossed onto a funeral pyre. Never again
had there been a time in her life that was as dangerous,

she tells me, her withered fingers slipping through
her mother's beads, dangling a silver Crucifix.
The enemy had left it behind along with all the useless
and unsparing things their hands had done.

VI

Someone had carried her away from the barn,
away from the cold stiffness of her mother's arms.
Her father had found the scythe, used it to cut through

to the deeper roots of survival. She would leave behind the hills
and the olive trees, the spirit of the flesh in the empty fields
and step into the foreground of a new geography,

mapping the distance into tomorrow. It's where she would find
an aisle of sunlight, the perfume and the flowers of a world
that was no longer invisible. And yet, the light has never strayed

from the memory. It keeps its presence; its shadow,
a brushstroke on the calendar, always linked to the country
she never went home to and to the life she never lived.

Departure

A child at the age of ten, with your hand in your father's,
you left your home, the ghostlike chill of a Tuscan village

lying between the broad-shouldered hills and the sea,
the olive trees and the stone. The war was several years

over by then and the past, having been buried
beneath the anguish of monuments, was never meant to stray

from the starting point of another story.
And so you remember the home that you left as a shrine

with its poetry and its art, its lullabies of love, its mirror
of memories that hung on the wall, often reflecting

the grief in your father's eyes that had forever widowed
his heart. For years, he smelled the smoke in the olive trees,

the toasted straw in the barn where the women and children
fell, saw the ash and debris of what had been real,

ever so fragile, land in the foreground. It's what a war
will do, he told you, those daily reminders that are visibly lit

and recurring. And yet, on the day of departure,
with your hand in your father's, you stood on the deck

of the ship, its horn, a blaring bassoon, awakening the moment
to be lived, as far as it would take you from the wet rope

and sea salt—and the simple charms you might have packed
with whatever else had been put into your baggage.

America, Home, Freedom

of the bells, the words your father had spoken
in your native tongue until his voice was mute.

It burned from hunger, a wartime eruption,
burned from a spirit digging for hope

beneath the rising peaks of ash. Yet this new home,
had in its English translation a bedrock austerity: tenements,

fire escapes, alleyways and trash cans, the asphalt
and pavement, all beyond salvation, longing for the nutrients

of the soil, the fresh Tuscan green of the olive groves
you had run through as a child—the rareness of things lost.

It's where the rays of the sun will try to squeeze through,
shell shocked by brick and mortar, the yellow hydrants,

laundry hung out on the line where the anatomy of streets,
in full dress, are attached to the nametags

of their own “little” country. And yet, there's a sense
of permanence, embodied in nostalgia, a trusted unity

among the poorest and the most common, invisibly shadowed
and fearing to speak of a greater desire in this new land.

But it's here, that your ancestral mothers and grandmothers
will take you in, show you where in the pews of a church

you can pray when no one else is there. And always
through the tolling of the bells, a life interrupted,

the tiny haloes of the votive candles flicker with the hope,
the promise, and the dream of a world unknown.

Holly York

Chef

What I never told you is that
I really don't like fried chicken.

I was lucky, everyone said so,
to have you to feed me on recipes

you researched to find the ideal
scientific preparation for each

new dish: Beef Wellington, rosemary-scented
sweet corn, Peking Duck, quenelles de brochet.

You would pronounce them all tasteless while I
couldn't conceal my delight. But your true

intent was to discover your Southern
mother's secret chicken, brined, battered,

crisped in a tsunami of molten Crisco.
Your sky-hued eyes smiled as you announced it

as the evening menu. Jaw clenched, I would fork
a wing and push the small bones around my plate,
hoping you wouldn't notice.

The Garden

Vines choke every corner:
wisteria, English ivy, thorny
greenbrier, Virginia creeper.

Some can't be pulled up.
Draping stems drag down,
strangle all they grasp to stasis
in their ropy race to block the light.

We both knew why you didn't take the meds
per script—not for lack of pain—instead to hoard
a stash for when it all became too much.

It all became too much. Another fall—
you said *I'm done*. I talked you out of it
that day but didn't hide those pills.

Menu

The fruiting body erupts, grown
from rot within the earth.

Mea culpas spring from rot

within the soul, digest
the dead and mushroom forth.
You always said only half in jest

that you wanted to be laid to rest
in the woods, a banquet for creatures,
exposure as celebration.

You, who found so little pleasure
otherwise, those later years, loved
cooking for us as we sat around

a single table, “like a big
Italian family,” you said,
though we weren’t.

No exposure in the woods but your ashes
planted in the church garden
will nourish mushrooms after all.

Still, when I reach for the leash

seventy pounds of raw exuberance
pound down in a sharp-clawed play
to land on the top of my bare right foot,
fine bones and tender skin. I
hop around on the other foot—I curse
and howl, but you are no longer here
to laugh. Walk completed, the dog
bounds on to whatever's next,
looks for you,
leaves me alone
and scraped.

Finally, I Sold His Car

Radio tuned to NPR
parking pass still on the dash
tennis ball to massage his aching back
water bottle in the cupholder

in the trunk, biking shoes no longer used
navy blue sport coat, folded, in its pocket
a “note to self” about some chocolates
he planned to buy for me.

Anne Marie Wells

Catholicism Still Lingers in a Concrete Poem

The organ's aria rang out
from the National Cathedral,
quivering free the most delicate
of the cherry blossom petals with
its chords, littering the sidewalks
of Wisconsin Avenue with
belated valentines as she took
her dog out on Easter Sunday

morning, alone, too early to call anyone just to say hi, not even her devout, Catholic mother. And this woman's lonely, atheist heart found itself brushing her hair for her, covering her night-old eyeliner with a pair of glasses, pulling up stockings underneath a floral dress and pink cardigan, walking her, as if on a leash, the half mile to childhood familiarity in the shape of a pew and a hymnal. Is it so surprising though? When her heart knew she needed something, anything, even if it was only to admire Romanesque architecture and stained glass? To fall trance to the hollow murmur of responsorial psalms? She, like her mother, had held onto so much for so long with

-out a place for it all to go.
Hadn't she already spent a year
pretending untruths were true
for the sake of a quiet pulse and
six hours of sleep each night?
Hadn't she already wished on
dandelion seeds and sidewalk
pennies, birthday candles
and stars and nothing at all
to manifest her unrelenting
daydreams into reality? What
would one more try hurt? What
are prayers, anyway, if they are
not the release of our desperate,
captive hopes into the wild?

D.T. Christensen

Coded Language

a soft knock on the wall at two a.m. means
the retreat of a bad dream: my daughter's code
to *please come check on me*. when I'm there
she's supine, looking up at neon stars stuck to the
wood slats of the top bunk, her sister inciting
the low grind of teeth above. the stars
unstick over time, we find constellation parts
in bedsheets, on the bottoms of shoes:
carried by the upward drift of
school and dance and a young prying brother.
I had a nightmare, she says. I lay next to her
and draw squares on her back, a thing she learned to
love from her mother, who learned it from her mother.
my wife taught me when I met her and I've drawn
squares on backs for 18 years now:
in a dorm room in Flagstaff
in a worn farmhouse outside Madison
in a suburb of the valley where the kids
grow too fast. I know where I'll draw them
next but it's hard to say when. we've always lived in
code like this: drawing squares, knocking on common
walls at night, three squeezes of a hand when we
can't speak. if all isn't code then it's close,
and as she falls back asleep I whisper
this night's coda: *don't hesitate to knock*.
don't curse the stars
falling around you.

Laura Faith

Ungodly

The socks are of wool or
of some other ungodly material.
You put them on. You know
you will itch. You hate
feeling prisoner
to your skin,
but you reckon
the baby
tethered to you now
might learn to stack the books
in his playpen one day, might
show you
how at not even two
he has managed to carve
his own way out.
His yearning hangs like anvil,
like a threat
to your head,
and you, nearing thirty,
wonder why
you suddenly feel it—
a most wholesome urge
to shrink.

The Summer after Graduation

Westwood, California—June 2014

We sit on the roof of Red Roebing, unmindful of its dilapidation, the cockroach your roommate stomped to guts the hour before, or the homemade mouse traps you set in the main room. It's been six weeks since you deemed us *official*, five weeks since Jessica took her last breath and one week since Ashley took hers. I practice my pranayama as June exhales her own trepidation, the damp wind too weighted to suggest an end to my premature sufferings. I did not grow up particularly religious, though now the thought of divine timing brings me comfort, you their parting gift, an exchange of prospect for braving privation—a poetry to all of this. We are too drunk to care about the loose tiling that could render us floor bound with an unfortunate mouse. If it weren't for the nauseating whiffs of Fat Sal's Deli, this moment would feel almost immaculate.

Our view of Ronald Reagan Medical Center is completely unobstructed, its roof vis-à-vis ours as if in standoff. I look at it, this acclaimed Goliath that once housed Nancy. From where I am sitting, I can fit its distance between my thumb and index finger when I cock my hand into a sideways L. As a helicopter approaches, we feel our last shots of lemon Prestige triangulate between our chests and touching heads. The chopper lands like a *savoir* onto its mothership, and you ask me what I am thinking.

Maybe they're transporting an organ I tell you. Maybe it's a pair of lungs. Maybe

they would have been the perfect fit.

Abigail F. Taylor

Winter in Choctaw

Hens bobbed across the barnyard.
You were in his housecoat.
Beans, day old, on the stove again.

The hens made chorus
with jackdaws and red birds,
who stayed in bald trees
and nests made of pretty shards.

You remember young summers
plucking cotton, bloody fingered,
and your brothers barefoot
in the field that was your father's,

Like the housecoat was your father's.
You rubbed his tobacco smell in
with your mother's long sighs
between the threads.

Snow Storm

In the crest of bald oak trees
sunlight burns orange like cane
as it's pulled and stretched
a heat so bright it's glorious.

Robins.
Dozens of them winter fat
flank the snowbanks
like tiny furnaces that sing bold
into the hollow dusk.

Swirling ice
clips the windows
and the stone. Green
and brown varnished pale.

All the warmth has fizzled out
except for the robins that whistle
in the cane of those old trees.

Let Her Laugh into Your Mouth Again

For Travis

First Kiss.
It tasted like the crab rangoons
heated all day on the buffet line.

And you had the dust
of Dollar Tree candy
stuck in your beard.

In the films (sent
to you in patchwork reels)
the first one is never dirty.

And they aren't like this
treasure tucked inside
the breath of a minute.

Movie love, so carefully
stitched together,
is always freshly scented.

Teeth free of tobacco stains.
Hair? Perfect.
But true magic?

Oh! That's in the take-away
boxes of Chinese food
for an impromptu picnic

At the lake.
And she laughs because
the ducks sound like they're farting,

and because you've climbed
up a tree, chasing after her
whim to be fifteen again.

She reaches for a hand,
leans into kiss you,
and to steal the Necco Wafers

from your pocket.
She breaks one in half.
It dissolves between teeth and gum.

I'll tell you a secret—
She never knew the right way
to love you.

But,
my God,
she tried.

In the Kitchen

Quietly, ever so, Nani leans against the counter until she's done with the crossword. Cigarette in hand. It's a Virginia Slim that she dutifully lights up each morning before six. Before breakfast. Thursday. That clue stumped her. Four across. Ah, it must be Thor. A thunder god. She remembers next week, she promised to make a rain quilt for her grandkids, that would protect them from summer storms.

Love Poem Number—

For David

Sometimes
I think of your nightly ritual
how you fold your durag and place
it in the middle drawer,
brushing those artistic fingers
against the fabric
with the same tenderness

that you hold a camera
a lock of hair
a gun
a clay knife
a dumbbell
deployment papers—

things that have meant nothing
and everything.

Come and hold my naked knees
in this amber dusk,
when the cicadas are
climbing upward, singing.
Singing for that which they burn
and, also, me.

Once I come writhing out of the earth,
it will be for a touch that isn't mine.
Your touch.
Not just anyone's.

Natalie LaFrance-Slack

peace

peace demands a turn to speak
from the back row of
the largest classroom
raises a hand in defiance
glances at confrontation
steadies for a fight

my mother
well intentioned told me that peace was
to sit in silence and wait
on God's timing
but did not teach me that I am a
goddess on my own time
that peace is seldom quiet and
operates in urgency
peace is the sound of feet running
pavement away from cycles of abuse
the sound of mothers lighting candles
in remembrance of dead sons and
daughters blowing smoke as they
ready to free the captives
wings spread

have you ever watched a spider
spin silk around a moth
held your breath through a field of
butterflies in your stomach
wondered aloud and tear filled at
the moment of triumph or long
pause before the
last supper

peace is the chewing of the meal
before you swallow and peace
is the nourishment from the

meal as you finish and peace is
the neurons that fire because you
ate and peace is the energy you
leave behind

when you pray for a soul you imagine
its entrance to heaven all song and sunrise
or the fiery flames licking it over all
defeat but peace is the freedom
to imagine one thousand other
outcomes
creation exists in the inbetweens of
life and longing and you cannot tell me
or my mother now that there is no
peace in a womb or that blood and
disaster and stars and universes do not
also inhabit it

watch
in a hurry before time wipes
across the slate and cleans to begin again
peace is the scream of the chalk
the first word of a toddler the last
word of a goddess
one thousand other echoes of freedom hard fought
and finally won

whole

It took me until I was thirty five to
love my body enough to listen
and Believe her when
she told me “no” with her smallest voice
in her biggest time
to let her unfold and fold
wrinkled and rolled
sober
into fits of laughter
to hold her gently when she
cried
to imagine uninhibition

Ravishing
in the beauty of enough
large and containing
multitudes I stopped biting my
fingernails to the quick
catching blood drops on my tongue
while smiling
I let the skin stretched home of my
infants breathe all the way in
until she is full

I met her in the corner at a cocktail party
and loved her as she filled her plate
as her eyes danced across hors d'oeuvres
and decorations and drank
opulence and dove into
Abundance
She is

I told her for the first time that she
is Beloved
worthy of stories with twists
and turns and lovers and victory
of climax and windows down hair blowing
tangled and unkempt

but draped in sunlight and
celebration
salt kissed and well traveled I
told her I loved the dirt on the bottom of
her feet the
scars inked into her knees the
way she extends others second chances
like an offering that
when I dream I can feel pieces of her heart beating on other continents
and yet

when I reach across my own body
caress my navel with my big hands
smile at laugh lines mirror eyes and
take up space
I finally love her loud enough
and quiet enough
and for long enough to know that
she has given and given and she is still
whole

dying

I think about dying every day
so when Eric the yoga instructor encourages us to inhale
and then exhale and
then close the back of our throat and
let ourselves feel empty and let ourselves feel need

I think

this is how I want to go

mid-breath

needing

laying on my back or stretching to the sky

still

becoming

in silence and contemplation

The act of re-regeneration

or laughing loudly as a lover tells a story

laying side by side

or walking a sunlit path

rays dancing off a chemo bald head

still victorious

I want to die in the act of creation

paintbrush arcing between delighted fingers

half covered canvas

dreams still unseen

I want to die mid poem

words aching at the back of my throat

my obituary will just say

Hello World

isn't it wonderful?

and my held breath will tell the world all the ways she was

the prize

I sold a bunkbed on Craigslist today and
when the grandmother came to pick it up
she told me about how the system had
taken her grandchildren
from their parents'
poverty
and paid
another family
for their care

how she'd fought to regain
them
to retain them
to house them
and to create safety
for them in what
turns out to be a very unsafe world
especially for bodies that
are brown or black or dark or big or small or

so I gave away a bunkbed today
and with it
a box of Legos a few old shirts
some Crayola markers
some kind words and
not enough

someone asked me if I believed in
attractiveness privilege
like
when things come easy because
you have been called traditionally beautiful
girl next door
all your life
and I think that I have always been
on the cusp of "Grab her by the pussy"able
and I wonder if that has done me better
or worse
if that is a prize or

I keep thinking of all of the times I was asked to be quiet
in a boardroom
and the times when my ideas were repeated
as if they were a man's own
and then I think
at least I got a seat at the table
in that boardroom
as a woman
and then I think
that's a horribly fucked up way
to think
about my right
and my worth

is that the prize?

as a teenage mother in the foodstamps
line I never once worried
that my children would be taken
away

hear this
as a teenage mother in the
poverty line
I never worried once
that my children would be taken
away

there is enough money in my bank account now to
feed my children
and line my eyes
to gift a bunkbed to someone in need

there is not enough money in my bank account to
speak up in anger
when my own words
are repeated back to me

is that the prize?

Nicole Sellino

i. Painting

Painting is not always a product
of expensive paint and temperate bristles
and talent and expertise

sometimes, it comes from the gravity
the weight of the paint on the brush propelling it forward
the wind that comes at the precise moment you need it to

the accidental flick of the wrist
the unannounced water droplet
the pigment of imagination

painting is not always a product
sometimes it is a circumstance

ii. Baltimore

These cobble stones tell secrets
if you listen very carefully
they rumble at you about the horses that
galloped on their surface

the brick stones tell stories
late at night when no one is listening
they remind you of long ago fires
and misshapen nails being hammered in

the water is here
the same water that Frederick Douglass worked along
the same water that houses male ducks and their mistresses, souls,
sailboats, and the wheel
the same water that welcomed ships home in 1853

The Domino Sugar factory's sweetness
that is indeed plumes of white smoke
lies as a beacon of a lighthouse
And endless twinkle lights in the dark blue night
swinging this way and that from one window pane to another
across the narrow streets, swooping like a lady's fine pearls
illuminating the stoops, the rats, the little free public libraries
the ancient pathway of Edgar Allan Poe shining in their brightness

Baltimore is crabs, craft beer and baseball games
Baltimore is quiet and loud and new and monotonous all at once
A good monotonous, the kind that is your daily routine
The monotony you don't want to end fueled by articulated lattes
Baltimore is Orange and Purple doors
and sirens, fresh air and ice cream
it is small, yellow, wooden salt boxes on every corner

Baltimore is a charm that belongs on every bracelet
a giant city rolled into one neighborhood
etched in every memory
of our collective unconscious

it will tell you stories
if you listen to it

iii. moving, an interruption

is it the physical location
or the transitory period that's the hardest?

a house looks different
based on who isn't in it anymore
an empty counter sans coffee pot, a quiet TV, a missing laugh

where are my tweezers?

it's funny how it's not about the gifts at Christmas
give me a banana wrapped in shiny paper, i told my mom
it doesn't matter what's inside anymore

just being together is enough
my stuff is packed in boxes

did i pack my toothbrush?

when there's a different vantage point
you learn to be resourceful
you really only need one plate and one set of silverware to get by

you learn to tough out the tough times
surrounded by cardboard boxes and packing tape

where are the house keys?

and with those times, your hands get rough and your lips get
chapped
and the bags under your eyes carry all of your emotions and
belongings that your suitcase can't fit

was selling the blender supposed to feel like selling your soul?
it's just a blender, i told myself
a blender

but it wasn't just a blender
it wasn't just a set of margarita glasses
it was not simply a forgotten lamp
and it was never just a set of French bulldog salt and pepper shakers

these items did things
they held things
they supported things
they *were* things
you know?

Just like that recalled embodied prison
the pain shooting down, weaving
itself into the fabric of your life
encasing me into upper body
freedom, the silence stretching
into dread of forever.

Grief lengthened wordlessly into
a disembodied touch.

I wanted to hug you.
At least extend my hand
for one caress
in solidarity.

We blend potatoes into vinaigrette
I hold the bowl, you scoop the onions,
I think about the two years you taught
water safety
when spring melts open the Yukon shores,
and your summer's respite on Saltspring Island.

You know warriors are lost to peace,
yet you draw me into this other life
hand me bread and the gift of your welcome.

Water on the heart

To Billy

In the hospital you missed foamy lather,
the weight of wet hair curling in your hands.
Under my towel I spot the red mark
where lasers stung away brown skin.
But you display your other scar
between your ribs, witness
to your heart trouble:
It is the pump and not the blood,
you tell us with a gesture,
raised shirt like a white flag.

Water on the heart,
pressing in on that limited organ,
your human body shrinking slowly,
pressing in on our squeezed soul.

Your voice splashes cheer at your survival,
I coo along for good measure.
When I leave,
determined not to let my heart
give out
I kiss you good bye.

Sheri Flowers Anderson

On Being a Widow

I mean I miss
the momentary back rubs,
the warmth of your hand
on the spinal pain between
my shoulder blades,

but maybe I sleep better
now that you're not here. Or maybe not.

The void is wide open, expansive enough
for both wakefulness and dreams

in the absence of your maleness
not pressed into me at two in the morning,

in the weightlessness of your forearm
no longer laying across my side,

in the empty air where your fingers
no longer seek my belly and breast,

in me not fetus curled
while you embrace me in sleep,

not folded inside your
singular reach of us, not matching
your rhythmic breath.

My solitary breath—I hardly hear it—
continues without you,
the way memory of that slow dance in our dreams
lingers within my skin.

We Are All Dying

The ash tree in our front yard is dying.
Every morning branches and twigs are in the yard,
the droppings of old age, the weariness of holding on,
worn thin and brittle by expansive exposure.

Before cutting the grass, we gather these branches,
not acknowledging their peaceful end nor the jagged sorrow
that pokes and tears through plastic trash bags.

Like the branches and twigs, we too become weary, weakened
by strong winds, soft winds, the slow watershed of loss,
by the constant lifting of daily life.

We drop parts and pieces of us every day—
our hands less steady than before,
our balance a bit off as we stand,
eyesight weak in annoying dim light,
dropped words we strain to hear.

We plop memories into shallow pools of refreshment—
our iced tea or hot coffee or energy drinks—
trying to maintain our rooted strength.

Our arms outstretched, we seek hugs, normalcy,
or even lift them in praise,
though we flail in even the softest breeze,
stumble at even the slightest lean.

The Marks of Good Intentions

Unfinished projects leave a trail
of invisible punctuation.

For months—or even years—
exclamation marks surround
abandoned notebooks.

And question marks slip into junk drawers
stuffed with justifiable randomness.

And ellipses dots follow paint cans that
patiently collect dust in the garage.
And partially read books
protect fancy bookmarks like hyphens.

Unfinished projects land softly
in a halfway house in the mind and heart,
that parenthetical space of our to-do list.

We feel the quiet tug of commas,
like tiny hands reaching for us.

RJ Gryder

The Quarry

glassy vision
of puff clouds and sky
the reddish brown
of copper rust clay

streaked through the taupe
walls accordion of mud
to be grabbed the handles
of mirrored lake and pine

tree toppers the way
dynamite and industry
carve out their space,
the way earth reclaimed
herself.

Already

after Marge Piercy

Don't look at me like that.
You make me lonely with love, blink
and I might miss me; I've already

grieved for when you leave.
I've already tasted the reflux
of missing you ten years
from now. A mistake of trying to swallow
you whole. You're just too
big for the tip of my tongue, to
be poised under top teeth
with mouth in perfect *O*
ready to spit you out where
you're fated to land, where
you already live when I don't
bite down hard enough.

Already the corner of the pillowcase gets in the way
of looking at you. I'm jealous of the way
she holds your rest.

Try as I might to thwart the reflex, of *grab clutch hold*
I end up dragging my nails down your spine,
blood already welling as I gather you in my fingertips.

Coping

Hateful chicken for breakfast. Forgot lunch.
Dinner is a veggie dog and three margs
with three straws. I forgot to bring my tooth
brush and brain pills but I remembered the
cuffs. The moon falls asleep first. I clock in
before the sun, unless breakfast fills my
bathroom. Bile hits tiles, stays there. Back to bed.
I haven't cleaned my ears in ages. I
can't hear anything you're saying. Lunch is
chocolate milk. Dinner is nailbeds. On days
I sleep I make no money. If you sleep
naked you don't have to wash pajama
pants. Breakfast doesn't matter, I can't hear
anything you're saying. Slouching over

someone else's grocery cart filled with
only Organic, please. Lunch is Dr.
Pepper, large, one-o-seven. I forget
not to lean on everything. I straighten
and my back is microwave popcorn. Well,
so's dinner. Breakfast doesn't matter. Lunch
doesn't matter. Lunch is an entire
rotisserie bird. Lunch is preceded
by the miracle plant that roots in my
alveoli. My mom always said if
I stood like that I'd grow up to be a
question mark. The way I'm bent, you'd think I'd
have more answers. But I don't remember
lunch. And I still couldn't finish dinner.

Felling

She's been vomiting
up sawdust every morning

and I have been taking
an ax to the telephone
pole. It's better than

trying to drown the TV,
but not by that much. Rubber

black snakes spray their venom sparks. She manages a
glare over the toilet bowl,
and I don't care. I

reject her light pollution.

I'm going top down.
Hacking my way to the
ground.

She will leave when
I'm done. But I'm not sure
that she will. My fingers

are dark crispy I confused
them for the reptiles

a while back. But don't leave
quite yet, I don't think she should. It's hard to whittle

down with just my palms
left a wanted poster
for a blind cat. on the run,
answers to Leopold, I'm

almost grounded. There are
splinters in my tongue the wires hiss, lick.
She spits, flushes,
stands don't leave yet.

Cold comfort

When the wind bares its knife
sharpened on carmine corners
and five hundred plastic coats

the slip on the sidewalk
is as numb to me as your pinky
in the glove with the hole—

as the thick corners
of a love you've already
folded up and tossed.

Wet breath catches
before it can cloud milky
& strange, shaping unspoken words

that gather in my gut.
Acid to cut through
frosted eyelashes and icing tongues.

How it turns the warmth
into everything. An exhale
into the pith of your neck,

your arms around my shoulders
smaller than the cold,
hot enough to thaw.

William S. Barnes

the history of a color

you can see it where the pathway bends into the hills, across the contour, rising.
all the grass in seed and thick between the ruts and where the road falls off.

cowfields. a wooden gate.
hedgerows mark the water lines.

everyone is calling. the skies darken. piling into the north.

*

no single color in the chromatic range of green
appears in Neolithic painting.

and the glaucous sea
is the same shade to Odysseus

as Calypso's glaucous eyes, as the glaucous underside of the leaves in her orchard,
as the shimmering honey she makes

—a sweet paleness there.

*

lying on our backs in the dirt by the summer-ditch
we can hear it.

there is nothing in between. the air and the body itself
gray-barked, riven and wet and filled with its voices.

a shelter, close as skin.

*

Goethe says darkness is not the absence
of light, but rather
another kind of wave, like light,

complementary, as mind is to heart.

—color comes from holding hands,
the warmth that rises in between.

*

a pair of salamanders
suspended in the lake
in the middle place

wavering between day and night—

columns of gold
descend into the water,
deep into the heart.

still. as a match.

*

then viridis appears, and a whole family of names to mean the luminosity
resident in things: viridine, viridescence, verdance, verdure, verdet
rising from within. the way knowing feels

before speaking can begin.

*

at first, I couldn't see.

I couldn't tell between the mirror and the gaze, your fleeting eyes.
the glance. your sunlit arms.

it doesn't matter.

you were here. a sudden fluency—

eyes closed windows flung wide

and the wind so near and ready and the brilliant canopies of
leaves

and the sudden rain pouring straight down in.

to hatch

at first, it's something broken makes me look, the sharp, small flake like a tear in
the grass.
and then it's the color.

we look up. *nestlings!*

*

Sunday. near the beginning, I left my car in a ditch, tore my shirt on the fence
then slept in the grass, hidden till the moon rose and the sky turned violet

and the voices came out of the wind and pinned me to the ground. tell me a story,
they said.

*

*Monday. once there was a girl named Sophia. she was normal in every way but
for the arrow in her eye.
over time the arrow grew and the world darkened. of course, she could not see it
because it was hers
and because it slept in her eye. one day, in the way that revelation always
happens, she caught a glimpse
of herself sidelong in the milliner's shop-window and she saw: the arrow like a
wing with its mallard fletches nesting beautifully there, in her eye. at first
she felt shock, then shame, then a fear close to terror. and now, what is she
to do? the world is a wonder, unfixed and unknown. the self in it too. what if
she recognizes nothing? what if bloodied
and blinking she wakes herself blind? having named the thing beside her
that darkens, can it be removed?*

*

once, I found myself walking down the street. black asphalt. like tarmac.
on the right, a city park with elms, evenly spaced.
on the left, a sidewalk, bright windows, dry goods, women's shoes.
in front of me, there is a manhole missing its cover. I leap in and fall.
at the bottom, I find myself sitting in a rich black earth. I see with my hands.
I touch the roots. I smell the good dirt.
later, I climb out and find myself walking down the street. black asphalt. like tarmac.
on the right, a city park, green with elms and lawn.
on the left, a sidewalk, windows, candles made of beeswax.
in front of me, a hole. it is very dark and I can't see, but for the love of leaping,

I leap in. at the bottom, I find myself sitting in a rich black earth. I see with my hands.
it is moist and warm and I want it to fit. I want to taste.
later, I find myself walking down a city street. it is night. the city lights are like stars.
there is a hole pulling me in. I leap.

*

circling. circling. dawnlight. a bear on the path in my dreams.

*

late now. Tuesday. too soon. the mayflies
rise at dusk from out of the rocks, into the current, peeling themselves
through the veils at the water's surfaces.

*

*Wednesday. something happens at the end of winter, a swirling time, when
spring threatens to wake us all,
and the wind starts to blow its ruse and its danger. 'come out if you dare.' the
darkness is leaving.*

I'm afraid I've lost everything.

*

once, I went looking for the elk beneath the ridge in the flats by the creek:
a young bull asleep in the grass. when he woke to my walking, he stood.
and for a minute he stared, not moving.

*

*Thursday. once in a winter desert. hard rain deep.
I am flooded and flooding. unraveled. unleashed.*

pine dropseed. mountain muhly. junegrass. sweetgrass. wild manna grass—
suddenly, he bursts into flight.

*again and again. a madness of water.
of heat.*

*

Friday morning. the garden window's open, binding us to it.
—eggshell blue, like that.

Saturday. nested.
little wing. clouded.

rising. to a hard rain deep.

it was a gift. the night. the sky. the wind.
it was a kiss. *like permission.* unfolding.

the waters

there are fishes in the story. side-by-side. a crimson thread.

we watched from the bridge. into the currents. a green bus. and a girl. it was cold above the tree line.—we were looking for ptarmigan

in the season that fades from mottled-brown to white and the snow deepens. in pools against the rocks.

*

*there was water in it. unexpected. mineral-carved canyonslide
we pull over. searching. for the voices. for the birth. for the fall.*

*

once, my father gathered me into his arms before dawn and we drove to the river. I wake to the mist curling back across the water and the sun flashing and I am blind-casting into the wildlight and leaning toward that sudden pull my heart racing.

*

*voice, tongue, lips in the wet world under—
fluid and scaled and cold. is that speaking?*

*to be finned and gilled and tailed and giddy and longing. to be painted.
IS that?*

*

some far slip. some rut. cut across the contour. and the summer dirt. powder. electric. or— touch. and it pearls away, a voice no more than air.

if you lie in the sand and stare straight, you can see how the water shapes it. how it braids. sifting. something not broke.

something that cannot break. how everything fits. how everything's wave.

*

*a mermaid in the pool in the summer surrounded
by a million screaming somebodies, and yet
beautifully alone. infinite. chlorinated. blue.*

*

first snow—first flakes. twisting. one-by-one.

a bay-colored rock. laid in sheaves so that it breaks horizontal.
we stand in the eddy. at the fault line.

what falls away is a gesture into. scree into pine into prairie.
green into blue into white.

you can feel it. the winter's night. coming in. coming through.

*

*some nights I dive down there to speak
some nights I tell myself stories to make myself weep—
then, let the tides stroke my hair. [I stroke my own hair, till I fall
myself to sleep].*

*

sometimes the lake is gray, or burnished like steel or mist or flat. opaque. repeating.
black. with the barest light on top. warmer than air. I am swimming in between.
liquid. not.

sometimes I am woven. and in it.

*

*my voice is in the crests. waiting for the when in which I want them,
see them, love them—
wish to speak, and you will speak, girl.
wish to die, and you can do it—foam only.
wish to live, and here you are—aquatic and electric and abuzz—*

*

in the story there's a crossing. sunhot. rock-gleam. the animal river.
wish to speak and my feet are rooted.

—all the stories crossing here.

*

*[in the days when wishing is having, I get what I wish for, and then I wish I hadn't]
I want the jungle-lushness rainstorm in my heart, marsh birds
on my tongue I want
to be so quicksilvered so flash-flooded up-filled
that I overflow
that I mudflow spill it
without
fear of parching, fear of perishing for the lack,
for the lack alack alack—*

and what is it that you long for that you cannot have?

*

tracks at the soft edge. heron here. pressed it. creased this. waited, stepped here
waded, watchful. the water pulls me deeper in. the little silt waves asking

if I want to be taken.

*

*the cold of it.
waking
the inside-out of it. oiling in fin and bone—
the slick of it. the smooth-sticky swim of it
eeling
upcurrent, in wave, upstream, in slither—in deep*

*

and the bird, this heron, quickly sharp now
lifts—till her wings, outstretched, for the slightest moment—slips

to the heat of it—leaps, to the radiance—the sweet bright curve of it—
bent now, curls now—lifting, up—

*

*to the backlit wingspray streaming
streamfew, droplight [having flown once . . .]
dripfall, wet, falling, [having fallen]—from out of no place, from out of nothing—
to the mind dark, rock dark, wet now—*

*

to the heat of it. parsing and pouring and leaving—and dazzling.
to the want of it.—I want to come in.

the least wave

we're travelling together downstream.
barefoot. along the river. along the dry, cobbled edge. late summer.
I am trying to recall to you the first beach: a steep slope of sand.
the sudden deep water. the slip of it.

you turn to look at me. press your forehead to mine. then slow
you trace the bones of my face with your cheek. with your chin. till
 we are leaning
against each other. till we fall into a strange orbit. your head
 perfectly fitted
to the circle of my shoulder. we are slow wooden gears. each
twist seeking into the hollows of the other. I am
helping you to turn. my hand
slips to your waist. to the curve of your hip.

I can feel you then. inside. listening.
how you rise to meet. the expanse of you
unfolding then.—I have no ground.
I cannot tell if you know.
or why you move against me. into me. the way you do.

the beach in my story is far from here.
a circling I can't seem to unwind.
and yet all the surfaces are shining:

the river spinning past.
the sweetnesses of the sand.
the willows. my tempest.

please.
begin again.

NOTES:

the history of a color

The title is taken from *Green: The History of a Color*, by Michel Pastoureau, Princeton University Press, 2014. In ancient Greek, there were no words for what we think of today as the color green. Homer used the word “glaukos” to describe the color of water, the color of eyes, the color of leaves, and the color of honey. Pastoureau writes that the Greek word “glaukos” “conveys the idea of a color’s paleness or weak concentration rather than a precisely defined shade.” The first words in any western lexicon denoting what we think of today as the chromatic hues of green arose in Latin during Roman times. Pastoureau, p. 20.

“Viridis,” “viridine,” “viridescence,” “verdance,” “verdure,” and “verdet” mean green, or pertain to various shades of green and derive from the Latin verb “vireo” to green.

For Goethe, darkness was not an absence of light, but rather, a polarity of lightness like the poles of a magnet, which interacted with light; color resulted from this interaction of light and shadow. “Yellow is a light which has been dampened by darkness; Blue is a darkness weakened by light.” Goethe, Johann, *Theory of Colours*, 1810. paragraph #502. For Goethe, green is the color that arises when light and darkness interact equally.

to hatch and *the waters* are written for two voices.

Suzannah Van Gelder

breaking a thing

in the time between caterpillar
and blooming lepidoptera
there is only goop.

nothing but potential energy
and instinct, all soupy and
stewed together inside a chrysalis.

now, in the times when I cry
standing in front of the
supermarket Hanukkah display,

when nighttime scoops out my
coping mechanisms with a
plastic serving spoon,

I'm reminded of the four square inches
of wood paneling on the garage
that welcomes back a luna moth each year.

Somehow through generations, through the
process of liquifying one's entire existence,
there's the promise of wings when the chrysalis breaks.

VACANCY

the mouth wears a neon vacancy sign. it is less an invitation for occupants, and more a proclamation of self. sleep is suggested by the incessant buzzing of the neon tubes but there is no one to occupy the beds. the body is a place for things to visit, but never stay. the groundskeeper is home sick for days at a time. beds stay unmade lights stay out lungs are boarded shut. the missing guests speculate the secrets hidden in the sternum. someone buried the bones beneath the floorboards long ago and the dust calls for someone else to unearth them. behind the teeth of heavy curtains lies the disgusted truthfulness of solitude. sun-faded and crying, the NO TRESPASSING sign wishes for someone to disobey it and break the curse of lonesome. through the cracks in the skin of the parking lot the ferns arrive and die. the melancholy of this place is housed in everything avoided, untouched, and forgotten. a house for anyone but a home for no one too much charity has made this place decrepit has left this body empty. VACANCY screams the buzzing, but the body chases away the guests.

Idolatry

the receptionist here calls me “girlfriend”
because (I’m guessing) the tits give something away
that the hairy legs and monstrosity couldn’t obscure.

this thought makes my brain convulse,
thrash about and throw the sweaty sheets
off me as I untangle myself from nightmares and diction.

Each morning is a new day for penance, castigation
through repeated dressing and undressing, interactions with
coffee shop clerks, and of course,

the unceasing venture of existing as myself.

I’m ready to return now
to the place of femicide and covered mirrors
and erect a monument there.
Something unmistakably androgyne
shapely and formless, called by every name
and known only by one, representative of
all bodies and absolutely nothing at all. I’m
ready to call out now
to every aura and entity as yet unseen
and aid them in pilgrimage to our Idol.
Laughing and rolling and dancing in
reverence of these bodies, in defiance
of our old names, in celebration of
our survival.

I’m ready to be born again,
now as myself. Authentic human form,
loyal only to love and the principles of
sex, drugs, and rock & roll,
screaming, naked, joyous, disgusting,
whatever, really. I am.

not the magnum opus

The proverbial “they” have ordered us inside.
I think there is more to it.
Nothing conspiratorial,
 no second coming of Christ
 or dumping microchips in the water supply
 just
whispered anxieties over breakfast.

The proverbial “they” say that if
you leave a monkey with a typewriter for long enough,
it’ll write Shakespeare.
I, defective specimen, stare at my typewriter
until it rusts. I could be left alone until
fists become stones
bones become anchors
teeth become leaves.
 Still, I won’t write the next miracle into existence.

The proverbial “they” has kept me confined and called it Eden.
No thanks to them, I say.
What good have they done me? I say.
I, experimental failure, stare at the apples
until the forbidden fruit shrivels away with age.
I could be left alone until
 the next paper pandemic
 the next coming of “they”
 the next birth of a world.
Still, I wouldn’t eat from that tree.

 Still, I won’t write anyone’s scripture.

Sam Bible-Sullivan

The Vengeful Worker's Soliloquy

None of us expected to live.
All of us drowning in our own mucus

we just wanted to have their lives
in our hands for the first time.

Most of the bastards had left
gone to their bunkers

or liquified themselves.
Classic money bullshit

preferring to live as a fragment
rather than risk confronting

the humanity they'd consumed like sunflower seeds
couldn't risk us shells coming back to cut their gums.

Those are the fucks I wanted to put between my molars
and crack open real slow, until my tongue
could scoop out all the meat.

Bet that shit would've tasted
like gold flakes on vanilla ice cream.

But you work with what you find
and we found an S class sinner

some silicon tech tyrant
living in some little prick McMansion.

We actually wore ski masks when we broke in;
the comfort of cliches dies hard.

We found him sleeping
face pale, eyes purple, sick as the rest of us.

We almost stopped then; he looked like a boy waiting
for his mom to place a damp cloth on his feverish forehead.

But June didn't get to ease her son's fever,
his brain boiled while June worked to keep their house.
She came home to her dead child after a 12 hour shift.

So we pulled the piece of shit
out of bed, tied him to a chair

doused him in gas and spit
and lit him on fire.

We weren't sure he couldn't pay his way out of hell
so we guaranteed he burned.

Trying to Recall the Name of a Skull

everyday you're here amidst the moss-stone
sunbleached white against green cushions
I think I saw a painting like that once
I knew what a painting was once
I knew who you were once
I know you had eyes
green grey blue amber orange apple
new day new eyes
fill up those sunken grottos with gems
you had a gap tooth
but now you have teeth gaps
or have you grown teeth to fill your gaps
I tried to put stones in those teeny holes
but picking up is tricky
I tried to pick you up
but you just got wet
sweaty bones
you sweat in the mornings
unless you're letting someone else try to hold you
are you two timing me
I guess you can't cheat since I don't know your name
is it peter
piper
pec
pepper
sally
shelly
seashore
I don't think seashore's a name
but we went there once
you were scared of the seagulls
and my parents
but the seagulls didn't care you drove a 2005 camry
I didn't either
we found a swing to sit on and we watched
the sky get sunkissed like our cheeks
then you put your head on my lap
and I played with your hair
until the seagulls squawked with the stars

Two rats battle over the last piece of flesh on my bones.

They could split it,
set a table with a red, checkered
cloth, some candles, a bottle of vino,
have some smooth accordion
serenading the background, pretend
they're Lady and the Tramp;
I wonder who'd play the Tramp.

One's clawed the other's eye out now,
and the one with the soupy eye,
desperate, disoriented,
has chomped down on its own tail, giving
the eye clawer time to skitter away, my flesh
in its mouth, and soupy eye notices none of this,
just keeps taking bites out of itself,
whole chunks between its jaws,
blood on its maw and seeping from its socket
and rear, gasping out distressed squeaks
between chews of its own meat
until it finally collapses,
its side jumping up and down
and up and down and up and down,
then nothing,
a new pet to keep my carcass company.

I always thought at the end of the world
us paycheckers would be soupy eye,
and the investors would be eye clawer,
but when the end arrived,

they were the two rats,
and we were the piece of flesh.

I was around a bonfire when it hit me that I'm alive during a possible plague.

I was drunker than a lush on judgement day
and another blunt was gettin rolled beside me,
so skunky scents rose above the smoke,
and when those scents were lit between my lips,
 I found myself intrigued by all the burning,
 the layers of it fractaling,
 and me inhaling every bit.

We smoked the blunt until it was slight singe,
and I watched as the fire was doused,
as the oxygen gulping flames were drowned
into simmering embers, embering simmers,
centered amidst sinners,

lightbearers thrust out of heaven,
tiny stones of lost potential.

The Dying Worker's Soliloquy

I'm not brittle
let's get rid of that early

there's just emptiness
in my ribs

not that i've
not known
empty

I had my blank spots,
under construction,
what mom used to say,

"We all stay being
built until the day
we're not."

I'm not brittle
there's just no more building.

did I have more plans?
yes

am I angry I've been robbed?
yes

but I don't feel tired
anymore and the soles of my feet
aren't dry and my shoulders
are just shoulders now.

I did deserve more than this.

Some part of the world owed me something.

But I was never
a loan shark, and debts

are never settled with counting
fingers

it all just goes to the dirt
and grows as soft slicing grass

Hills Snyder

Eclipse (July 4, 2020)

resin elbows on the arm rest
the king of cowboy chords on the radio
we've just been out on 60 West with
two tuna sandwiches and three beers
at a concrete roadside table
painted turquoise, what
fifty years ago?

its chipped and brindled surface
a map of some place that is trying to exist
pine sap lesions under
twisted cedars and a towering lament.

a thousand points of litter
scattered by previous pilgrims
we sit among them
wishing for large plastic bags.

monumental clouds
cumuli suggestions of hope
outline a fleeting dignity.

a straining Garryowen shatters love of country
before hanging on Lincoln's lip
a footling stogey of disrespect.

no one sees it fall.

a granite façade runs with tears
in each a grain of salt suspended
as the head of state claims rain.

we open the third beer
love of country is back and pulls in
unloading a family setting up picnic.

in the twinkling of an eye

that phrase like a faded label
on the discarded soup can at my feet.

don't know if it's cream of mushroom
or potato.

the words are torn and partially obscured
as am I.

Birth

It was the year love broke everyone
we were there
dancing under that unmeasured arc
corrosive rain dripping round the edges
a perimeter we dared not expose
it was safety of a sort.

On all fours we dreamt dizzy fishtails
guzzled in mud
we zigged
zagging was next
but we did not know that.

We would later lay down
next to owners of toaster ovens
with enough gumption and schlock
to scorch a circle of dry land.

There was just room enough for shattering finery
finery from a world that made and made and made
itself in the image of some Darwinian malt shoppe

heavy crème

delight oozing from pale lips

thick white dollops

that dripped and dripped and dripped

defining the ninth illusion we were always hearing about.

Some clownish heel-clicking slug

with a grin we could have wiped the pasture with

introduced itself with handshakes and teeth.

Then, someone said, Hey

where'd you get that parasol you thieving

dumpster fire mailman.

We were surprised to find it was you

smiling like a butler fresh from some cliché.

While it is true you provided some kind of distraction

we could not help running for it

stripping off our static garments as we went

bumping into the world.

Dog Walk with Seventeen Cars

a friend calls to offer Spurs tickets
I decline
been waiting for this night of doing nothing
yesterday was a long road trip
preceded by days
and labors
Jackson Bailey tugs at the leash

little plastic San Antonio Water System flags line a driveway
some blue some green
as if for Lilliputian armies
in the distance an ice cream truck
plays *Frosty the Snowman*
followed by *Love Is Blue*
Jackson Bailey tugs at the leash

in an alley a baseball with a busted seam
is near a water meter
that three weeks ago was draped with a Mickey Mouse towel
it was there for two days
but when I went back to photograph it on the third
the opportunity had passed
Jackson Bailey tugs at the leash

the large cottonwood two streets over
or at least what's left of it
offers that leaf rattle that always brings me peace
in an hour we are home
while we were gone
seventeen cars were stolen in Albuquerque, New Mexico

Nightfall

the round and shiny knob you grip
getting to that other room
reflecting all behind you in miniature
as in a hand-size mirror

as you open the door
the knob and image swing away
you step in
to a world hung with drapes of heavy conjecture

quaint and threatening doilies
are strategically placed on every surface

a claw torn blanket
a flash of red obscured by your hand
a frayed edge

didn't your grandmother tend toward violence?

I don't know said the wolf
horizon from east of east to west of west
in the black curve of his eye

lashes radial like a child's drawing of the sun

Four Days after Christmas at the Golden Spur

a stranger says
it's cold as fuck out there

and then, another
*yeah, thought I'd better stop in for a warm up cold beer.
warm up the insides*

and the stranger
anti-freeze

John Wayne is cardboard thin
stapled to the paneling
the shadows of his legs like skis to nowhere

the stranger buys me a sacrificial bottle

next to the duke the prow of a bighorn sheep
emerges from the wall

a taxidermy specter
his right front hoof on pointe
the left a suspended counterpoise

he will dance his way round a low shelf
topping a plywood frieze burnt with cattle brands
border round an empty stage
rocking R, bar H

such is his frozen joy

or at least his furtive, golden glance
suggests this may be.

the stranger, now less so, supplies more sacrifice

glass clinks a momentary alignment

the front door of the bar swings open
spilling brazen white sky framing Santa

he is seated in a lamp laden jeep
at the gas station across the road
Christmas bulb definition, headlights, grill, the works

They won first prize!

a sudden blonde appears in the doorway
she wants a set up for four

the stranger glances her way as a third sacrifice
spills on the floor

Santa says, *who needs Ethan Edwards?*

the puddle gathers light

Lauren Fulton

Birth Marks

Temple

I am too faded // but for the most intimate / appraiser //
diminished // by time / disguised by age // the small divot /
slight darkening / a pox on the delicate / child's body //

Pale skin dotted pink / tumble down a fever dream /
delirium of bright wax colors // masterpiece of innocence
/ quickly painted over // I am the original sin / bittersweet
apple / fangs through protective flesh / swallowing
the sweetness / abandoning the core / the bite / of
disconnection //

I am a phantom of touch // search for relief // scar of
primordial need.

Carpus I

Below the fold / where wrist meets palm // twisted cross /
bird in flight // scrape of metal on skin // imperfect / catch
to a fall //

Fleeing grandmother's hospital bed // her scarred
flattened chest the family birthright // four stitches // one
for each of the child's years //

Doctor sewing skinned / bodies back together // mother
sobbing between gasping mother / screaming daughter //
grief upon grief / upon grief.

Genuflect

A patchwork on both knees // we are legion for we are many
// bite of gravel // lightning bolt nerves on curbs // long slow
ache on pews //

Blood / bone / stone / branch / dirt / sand // patella lodging
pain / fearlessness / girlhood safety // discovering all
pleasures have their limits //

An exorcism of innocence // boy child racing bicycles /

becoming girl child chased / learning protection / means
cover / shrink / hide //
freedom driven out / of the body and off the cliff // in a
scrape of blood and dust.

Achilles

A needle and a lighter / adolescent attraction to the sharp
and the hot // discovery that pain can be desire // can be
communion //

I am the etch of initials into ankles // symbols onto thighs /
soft touch of a girl's hand // the soothe before the sear //

Learning to bite cheeks // to hold inside the agony / of the
burn // to look with love / into eyes // while hands make
visible / the ache.

Carpus II

I am the attempt at symmetry / at remembering // of
turning accident to intention // I am the small x on the other
wrist // the cold metal / blade a mother's gift / a lesson / in
reining in / the unruly / the unsightly //

Easy after so many effortless nicks on knees // now with
a quick flick of a scarred wrist // a fledgling cry / blood in
bath / flood of fear / arousal of power / apprehension of
depth //

Wrists pressed together / flight of two doves // parent/child,
lover/beloved, memory/imagination.

Bridge

Black rubber burned into intersection // skull thump
on dash // funeral program crushed in pale knuckles //
screams from the backseat // car full of black-clad teenagers
blindsided / by grief //

Another friend lost to another car / garage parked /
suburban idling // Flashing lights and sirens / the ferryman
chaperone // from one death to another //

I am the dull thud / the quirk in the eyebrow // I am

the mark of the beast / I am the permanent witness / to
bereaved mothers // burying their faces // in the rent
garments of their children.

Pelt

A congregation of cells // supposed to be dispersed // on the
skin // malignancy / in waiting //

Sentinels guarding crease of thigh / valley of breasts / nape
of neck // bulwark of the body's own making // paladin of
purity / that terrible angel //

Removal a benediction / now I am who am // trinity of
steeped scars // chambered echoes of stitch / and staple /
of shame / both excised / and etched into / the body.

Extremity/Pointer

Lonely celebration // wine bottle spiral // no corkscrew / but
// resourcefulness / recklessness // in abundance // a deep /
scissor slice to forefinger //

Blood dashing / on graduation gown / clear cut to tendon /
mechanics of a body bared //

Close call / not the first / not the last // expletive of luck
luck luck //

I am the revelation / of the father / in the daughter //
inheritance of affliction / calamity in the veins // a
patrimony of self-destruction.

Umbilicus

I am the feline / striped witness / to motherhood // flanking
the knotted depression / in the belly // legacy of the
matriarchy //

I am the leanness / I am the swelling / the pain and /
pleasure of fullness // of emptiness //

I am the presence of mothers past // passed to their babies
// the gut of their own lives // their own //

Scarification.

Exit Interview

When I asked my mother to explain
mammogram she said
imagine all you were told was beauty
pressed to dust in a pill
you'll choke to swallow.

When I asked my mother to explain
biopsy she said
an interrogation at needlepoint -
all the body's secrets laid bare
under bright lights.

When I asked my mother to explain
chemo she said
When you kill parts of yourself,
even the ones you want to die,
you can't help but be sick with the loss.

When I asked my mother to explain
radiation she said
remember Rich said, "your wounds come
from the same source as your power"
and there is no cure for either, only exposure.

When I asked my mother to explain
hair loss she said
when you spend your life wearing
a crown of thorns and honey
there is relief in the tender touch of a silk scarf.

When I asked my mother to explain
scar she said
even a leaf leaves a mark on a tree when it falls.
Does the oak mourn the damage done, or
stretch its limbs and grow something new?

When I asked my mother to explain
prosthesis she said

Springboard

Before the toe dipped
into deeper ends and before
the deck-smack of wet steps,
dampened feet getting colder
each metal rung up the ladder,
before heels hold the wobbling
body to the board, before
the arch before the sigh before
breath
before splash and sting
of water-slapped skin before
the body bubbling to surface, gulping
lungs clung to sides of safety—

There is the gasp, the shivery snap,
clammy shell of a still-sodden suit
pulled over goose-pimpled skin
prickling apprehension, there
is the glance at eyes, familiar,
older crinkled slant of some wonder
unfathomed until long later, and now
satisfied someone is watching, dry
docked feet walk, wrinkling
toward the after.

Claws

Everything I've ever let go of has claw marks on it.
—David Foster Wallace

Let go and let god, your dad
used to say, but you hold on
the same way that he did.

Bits left under beds of by-
gones left in shreds, a holding
pattern repeated.

As long as you live I will grow,
and so will the slivers
of memory you cling to.

Bodies I've gashed, every
bit of your past, careful—
I'll also slice you.

Claws deliver to fangs
who devour, your hunger
pangs finally sated,

By violence wrought
against instinct, caught in
affections I have abraded.

Paint me red and pretend,
possession can lend beauty,
and what it grows into.

Blades made by your cells,
forensics that tell the dead
stories you've finally lived through.

David Sloan

Recipe for Grammy's Musical Stew

Before you start preparing this meal, put on your swarming birds apron; it gives you more of that St. Francis aura than usual.

Approach the counter less as saint or surgeon than conductor, a musical liberator, the knife you're wielding more baton than scalpel.

Begin by mincing the onions in a slow staccato, *maestra*, *lento* of a pre-sizzle overture. *Brown in butter and olive oil*, the Tuscan special label

our friends sent us for “celebratory” occasions, which back in the day meant a promising prelude to a steamy evening. *When the onions are golden*,

add cubed beef. Slice rinsed mushrooms with your practiced snare drum precision *and add before beef is fully brown*. Don't think

about the Mushrooms Supreme you concocted early in our marriage. Love is making room on the tile floor for a beloved—

who inadvertently poisoned us both— while kneeling and heaving in alternation through the night. *Sprinkle in desired herbs*,

according to mood; rosemary if you sense a headache coming on, *oregano* if you're channeling Isabella Rossellini, *thyme* if you're in no rush.

Add with a flourish pinches of flour (speaking of, remember to admire the tulips I brought home and artfully arranged in the glass vase

on the dining room table), *beef broth*,
and a splash of red wine. Pour a glass
for yourself. *While it's simmering for an hour*,

peel the patient carrots with long strokes
of a trombone slide. *Skin the potatoes—*
washboard percussion—*cut into chunks*,

and drop them like musical tone-stones
kerplunking *into the stew*. *Serve*
over rice, a side of steamed broccoli,

and fresh oven-warmed bread to sop up
the gravy. Mustn't waste a drop. We may not
even need mood music. I'll do the dishes.

Arson

He descends the hill in saffron
and crimson, proceeds with prayerful
devotion, the air sweet with jasmine
and yak butter. He lights a candle,

subtlest of foreshadowings.
He should have been at the temple
chanting or sweeping or making
alms rounds. Instead he joins

the procession to protest
recent shootings. A fellow devotee
places a cushion in the middle
of the street. The monk extinguishes

the candle, sits in the lotus position.
A growing crowd gathers. A friend
takes a five-gallon can from a car trunk
and pours gas over the monk, who,

in one unhurried motion, lights a match,
the sound like a finger snap. He bursts
into flames, remains unmoving, silent,
even as his bald head begins to bubble.

Later an official will call the act
self-inflicted arson. In Kánh Hòa
province, a couple kneel in front
of a lit candle, a lotus blossom

and small framed photo, trembling
shoulders almost touching. Their lips
move almost soundlessly, mouthing
two words over and over—*Our son*.

Prostrate

I'm the guest of honor, garden snake at a picnic.
My childhood friend and his grown daughter
peer concernedly down at me.

They perch politely on camp chairs skirting
a blue blanket in the yard, balance plates
of hummus, crackers and crudités.

I lie face up, squinting in fidgety afternoon
shadows. First foray outside after the accident.
I try to writhe discreetly, any position

that will blunt electrified strands
of barbed wire raking hip to calf. Can't help
resenting the ease with which they sit.

I lose the conversational thread,
picture myself whole, pedaling on Highland
past sad, huddled cows, or chucking

firewood rounds out of the pile
as if they're beanbags, then uncoiling
a monster maul to bust up oversize chunks.

At night, escape depends upon diverting
attention from flayed nerves
to external solaces; weight of a duvet,

waft and click of the fan, creak of a headboard,
pillow's cool underside, reassuring
rattle of pills knocked off the chair.

My wife insists the worst has passed,
even as she teases how I bask in playing
the invalid. I want to believe her prognosis,

but I'm still pinned on my back, still
fretting about that i-word, how
there's two ways to pronounce it.

Making Maple Syrup

A Wedding Poem

I. The Long Wait

It takes patience to make syrup from sap.
You must tap the right trees at the right time,

but you can't start with tapping; you must wait
out a deep winter freeze, when maples

are dormant, when the forest can feel
as if it's mourning the losses piled up

in previous seasons, loved ones
snatched away, relationships wrecked.

II. Seeing the Trees AND the Forest

That in-between time—when nights dip
below freezing, when days creep above—

can sneak up on you. What starts
as providing home-cooked meals,

companionship, comfort
against the chill, stirs alchemy.

Crystallized sap and wounded hearts
begin to thaw, then flow.

III. Filling the Buckets

First you cozy up an Atlantic sunrise
from Cadillac's granite ledges, then wave

farewell to a sinking Western sun
from a red corvette cruising up Highway 1.

Tourists mistake you for Hollywood idols.
Horseback and hot springs in Costa Rica,

posing as flapper and bow-tied dandy
in front of a vintage biplane.

IV. Assembling the Parts

Building a home-made evaporator from scratch
takes ingenuity: so does blending families;

converting a steel drum into a stove for the boil,
trick-or-treating as Pooh and friends; breaking

up firewood for fuel, somehow breaking an ankle
in a parking lot to start a romantic weekend;

stovepipe and flue, tacking and rafting. All it takes
to fit odd parts together is a little gumption.

V. Up in the Air

The sap bubbles away, sweetening the air. Earth,
water, fire have given your love texture, life,

and heat, but the sky's your binding element.
Pilot lessons, kites dancing and diving, and one

momentous balloon ride, burners fueling liftoff
and a mile-high ascent to pop the question

you both knew was coming. Below,
three thrilled balloon chasers,

with Nana and Grampy, follow a shadow
the shape of a joyful teardrop.

VI. After the Boil

You take care to filter the amber syrup.
Catching impurities is crucial for future

enjoyment; then the pouring and storing.
You've toiled together, boiled together,

blended families, affections, improvising
each dicey step of the adventure.

Now you know sap will always flow
again, buckets never really empty,

and the sweetness lasts the more
you pour into it, the more you share it.

Nancy Kangas

Kentucky Rest Stop

Cat was like no way we're doing this leash thing,
woman.

Woman,
don't tell me you didn't see this coming.
You set your honey down

in the pets-allowed grass near our hot cars.
Here your beast shrank inside the straps
until it was an arrow and shot itself

into the world beyond. That is,
towards the river.

And you,
don't tell me that woman should not
have brought her cat in her car. Or that that cat

is coming back. Don't tell me cats
don't like cars. I'm not talking about cats.

Don't tell me you've never been that woman.
Never stood there holding a leash of nothing.

She'd packed the tuna treats.
Kitted out the backseat.

Cat,
you didn't stay
with the one who loved you.

Now you've got the river. And the river doesn't care.

Preschooled

a golden shovel, for Marge Piercy

Dezarai is freshly five. I am teachered up at the bitty table next to her. I want her to be a pitcher that pours for me a glass of herself. There are cries from the blocks corner. I ask, “What are you glad for?”

Dezarai’s gaze is stone. O turn her to water, a river full and traveling. Dezarai’s hand moves to the crayon box. She almost chooses blue. I carry the wait. She finds the top of the page and writes every letter she knows. T, H, R, and capital I (a stick with four wings). Then the little i, like a person without arms. “What do you love?” I pull for any of her nouns. Her letters lace the paper. Work begins now on the back. “Look at that!” she delights. “That is my name. That is my first and last names for real.”

Dry Dock Cranes of Brooklyn Navy Yard

Mesmerized
by the muscle of the dark green water

three stout-bodied cranes night-wandered
to the edge of the East River.

Yet when the sun rose and the sky opened
they understood themselves as obvious—

three high hulks on skinny-long legs
unhiding in all that air. They froze—

let the paint peel in curls
off their sides.

I don't know how long they held it, their breaths
or what made them give up pretending

they weren't rough beasts
among us. There they go—

slow-swinging their snouts and chains.
I ache to own the sky like that.

Noreen Graf

Sister Mary

Sister Mary brushes snow strands
from her mother's frozen face.
A single, silvery thread. Burrows.
Into the winter-worn crevasse.

It roots below her icy-blue skin.
Turns to twine, then twists to rope.
Sister Mary prays and pulls. Tugs.
And pries and yanks.

Her mother's memories tumble.
Clinging. Like cat claws.
To a concocted life. Spewing.
Over. A bubbling witch's brew.

Fallen, like apples. The memories
plunk. And Sister Mary flees.
A single, silky, silver strand. Stuck.
Beneath her shoe.

The old woman propped in bed.
Crooked. Like a raggedy doll.
Picks at her memories. Cocooned.
Stirring in her hands.

Some she flings to the floor.
Some she nibbles and spits. Tired.
She kicks them from her bed
like so many toys.

To make room, at last, for sleep.

In Attendance

The oxygen machine keeps the rhythm in the room.
Plunk, then a long hiss, regular as a tocking clock.
Her mouth gasps for air below caged eyes.
We sit. Circled around her and count time
between breaths. Tapping thumbs
to fingers. Like we were kids again.
One-two-three-four. Another breath.
We begin the count again.
One of us is swallowing snuffles.
I don't know who. Not me.

Cell phones silenced, we whisper
in this sacrosanct place. That used to be
our living room. A dying room.
I can't hear her words across the bed
Over the plunk and hiss.
I think my hearing is going bad.
Did she say something?
I stick my ear to her face, and she recoils.
I'm sorry, I say, hoping to hear her whispered reply.
The plunk and hiss intrude.

Her throat rattles, lungs wheeze and weep.
Plunk. And she forever stops trying.
Hiss. To say what she has already said
and forgotten. And doesn't need to say
because we already know.
Plunk and hiss. Something of her is gurgling.
She fights for air and drowns
in every breath. Plunk and hiss.
She exhales. We count on our fingers
like children to five.

She gasps. We startle, and count,
and wait. Plunk and hiss. Plunk
and hiss. She gasps again.
We count and wait. Hold
our breath. Plunk and

hiss, plunk and hiss.
Plunk. Her eyes and mouth freeze.
Open. To let her soul escape.
Hiss. One of us unplugs
the machine.
I don't know who. Not me.

We breathe in
the still air.
Until
we break. Even me.

What I Took

I took her amber wedding pic
I didn't take her mink,
I took the dollies that don't match
A rosary I don't pray.

I didn't want her worn-out mink
I'm keeping her diamond ring
I took the rosary I don't pray
Her leather gloves too small.

I'm keeping her diamond ring for me.
Two dishes, roses red.
I grabbed her leather gloves too small.
Her quilt is packed away.

I took two tiny dishes, painted roses red.
A flowered plate with gilded gold
A rosary I don't pray.
I took her amber wedding pic.

Before I turned away.

The Crickets' Song

I listen to the crickets' trill.
Thinking there is nothing else.
Joined in concert by skittering
leaves, and a breeze that clatters
my chimes.

I attend to the contour
of the Mango tree, against the
clouded sky. The rustling wind,
washing my face. In a rhythmic
cold embrace.

The dog sneezes, then yaps
at some distant howl. A chorus
of barking commences. Echoes.
Crescendos. Then halts, in time
for the Crickets' rumpus refrain.

I would have called you tonight
to cackle with me. Added laughter
the this raucous. I listen instead
to the trebled call. A doleful
crickets' cadence.

Jim Bohan

When you leave . . .

a persona poem after Kris Bigalk

Take all your expired prescriptions,
especially those that kept you up.

Take your torn tennis shoes—the ones you
couldn't bear to throw out. I'll bear it. Trust me.

Take the expression you always used
whenever I "embarrassed you."

Take what you hid under the bed—I won't sweep
or touch or grab whatever's lurking there.

Take the faded jacket you stitched with male
shrugs, embroidered with smirks whenever I asked
why you didn't give it away.

Take the male pronouncements I wasn't to have
an opinion on. (You'll need a bag that's very large.
Women have no clue, right?)

Take the stack of magazines—you said you only
kept the ones that were just "to die for."
Since I won't be dying any time soon,
get the whole stack out of here.

And be sure to take the care you sewed
into the fabric of what we had. Baby socks
that do not match are all that anyone could knit
from those pathetic shreds.

Nothing Tea

Pour nothing
into empty cups.
Drink pretend all up.
Make sure to make
a *lot* of noise
with mouth and spoon.
Slurping? Highly

recommended.
As are scraping and
banging your saucer

with your plastic toy cup.
Why do all this—
and even more?
For the prize you seek.
And nothing tea
is a perfect way to bring

its warmth to you.

Thomas Baranski

The salary of a soul

Put a dollar amount to my soul
I dare you! This trickling merry-go-round

cuts crooked, a cyclone of sabers
melting like teeth, leaving my tongue

split between fear and music.
I choose a diminished third

at this buffet of lacerations
where my hands serve all I have bartered

for my breath. Here each table of feasting weeks
carves their names as veins in the corpses

of forests. When life is a currency weighed
in whiplash gasps, I sprint to keep pace

with the industrial strut of chic-garbed time.
So, what then might my entire being earn?

A text, skittles on a diabetic day,
a yawn, a welcome beyond the mat, perhaps

these little gestures in Jupiter weight
drag drag raw as bone, bone as

birth: the first understanding that
we is me spelt in cuddled panic.

What is the texture of a dream
blue and bulging with metaphor

under a rent-is-due roof? In one way or
another, I never feel it enough

for my truth.
Oh! To be consumed.

Plastic-Wrapped World

How would we dance
if our lungs composed
condomed ballads of plastic romance
detailing the innocence we claim
because our blood-bleached paws
never touched the throat
of a choked turtle?

There are enough cardboard boxes
to house every human
yet the refugee's tent still fears
the demagogue wind;
we dissect petals and eyes
to leave no trace behind
but forget we have built the crime
into the scene of our bonfire hive.

If you had to see your mother gutted:
intestines and aortae ripped out
with a plastic steak knife,
which immigrant would you blame
when the carnivore is your hand
and your teeth have rotted black
from blood-leeching the soil
beneath your lying Judas feet?

Ursa Major bears witness to our crimes
best attempting to inform the cosmic police
of the savage horrors she has seen
whilst shielding her child's starry eyes
from the black hole that was built
by the apocalypse born of mother earth:
a matricidal race clawing in consort
to extract the black milk from her bleeding breast
all while her tears rain acid
from the dearth of clean water
and her voice attempts words to express her story
but her truth was stolen with her tongue;

now her lips are sealed with the plastic wrap
whose steak-burning altar
we have come to worship at
as we chant the mantra of extraction
and set fire to the trees beneath her crucified feet
laughing into the oil-black void
of the forever night
we are too flaccid to believe
will soon be our eternity.

Playboy

Each human, a number,
notch on bedpost,
representing *i*: imaginary
invention of perverted masculinity
and a self worth as miniscule
and real
as *o*.

Each new addition
to his body count
divides his soul
by his nothing self
spawning a black hole
sucking in diamonds
and doves
and any comets
whose tails
he covets.

The singularity of his pursuit
fuels his expansionist ways
and as he grows with screams
he boasts of his once lovely stardom
and rages over the supernova force
of his *romantic* sabine death
which will birth a million starry-eyed boys
to repeat
this infinity
game.

Let us name him dread and look forward

In my much younger youth, I thought a man
was the sum of his mutilations.

So my cousins and I lit dynamite
in the throats of toads.

The croaking aftershocks of my life's explosions
still echo in the color of twilight.

My feet are scarred from the debris of indifference
unprotected by even the privileges of gated innocence.

I still do not tend very well
to the garden of my blessings.

I struggle to swim
through the flow of time,

dragged down by the guilt of caskets
and the weight of the love I can no longer give.

We call it heartbreak
because we are used to living

through the beating of broken things;
after all, we tread daily on shards,

the shattered glass of rainbow souls
jailed in the prism of white light;

Rage is the circumscribed word we must use
to describe this staining of fleshed windows

and *Rage* is the story of pain
untold around a wildfire; and now

think of your tongue
and all the burning years left to come.

Contributor Notes

Sheri Flowers Anderson, for many years, wrote poetry and stories in the slim margins around work hours and a busy family schedule until her recent happy retirement from her day job. Her poetry has been published in local magazines and anthologies. She currently lives and writes in San Antonio, Texas.



Thomas Baranski is a writer and educator currently based in Madrid, Spain, whose work attempts to bridge the gap between honesty, reality and hope. Originally hailing from the metro Detroit area, his travels around the world have influenced the themes and wishes of his work. From environmentalism to masculinity, his pieces do not shy away from the harshness and beauty of our modern world.



William S. Barnes is a botanist and conservation biologist working for the New Mexico State Land Office. Author of “The Ledgerbook” (3:A Taos Press, 2016) Mr. Barnes’ recent and forthcoming poems can be found in *Bangalore*, *Comstock*, *Crab Creek*, *Ilanot*, *Mudfish* and *Ocotillo Reviews*. “The history of a color & others” is from his new manuscript titled “the artemisia” based on the true love story of Artemis and Actaeon.



Sam Bible-Sullivan first began writing poetry at 12. This initial interest grew to be a passion which led him to study poetry writing at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His poems have appeared in *Atlantis Magazine*, *Charles Carter Magazine*, and, an anthology of North Carolina’s Best Emerging Poets. He is also a playwright and has written two full-length plays which have received stage readings. He’s currently based out of Raleigh, NC.



Jim Bohan is a poet/songwriter from St. Paul, MN. His poems have appeared in the *Minnesota Daily*, *Big City Lit*, *Talking Stick* and elsewhere. He’s been short-listed three times for the international erbacce prize. Unsolicited Press published his poetry collection, “*I travel in rusting burned-out sedans,*” in 2018 and will publish another in 2024. Jim and his wife Bonnie have two adult children and do daycare for their two granddaughters.



D.T. Christensen lives in Massachusetts with his wife and three kids.



Laura Faith is the author of the YA novel, “Amanda Phake: The First Phake ID”, as well as the poetry collection, “A Convergence, So to Speak”. Her work has appeared in *Narrative Magazine* and *Eunoia Review*. She received a BA in French and Francophone Studies from UCLA and an MA in teaching from UC Irvine. Laura teaches English, French, and creative writing to K-12 and college students. Follow her on Instagram and Facebook at @poems_by_laura



Gilaine Fiezmont works as a teacher and researcher, writes speculative fiction, and loves it when she is struck by inspiration for a poem. She reads and listens to stories and poems from many lands and across many genres, occasionally in her native French or later Spanish. She is currently working on poetryambassadors.org to celebrate and promote poetic explorations, and continuing her *Alnos Chronicles* online and via ebooks.



Lauren Fulton is a queer, single mom and writer of poetry, fiction and essays. Born and raised in Florida, she now lives in Portland, Oregon. She loves naps, public libraries, cooking, and she really misses traveling. Follow her twitter @laurenfulton21.



Noreen Graf was a finalist in the James Jones First Book Contest, and runner up in the Chester B Himes Short Fiction Prize. Her short fiction and graphic literature has appeared in *The Ocotillo Review*, *Sixfold*, *Dirty Chai* and *Political Irony*. She is currently an MFA student in the Creative Writing program at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.



RJ Gryder is a multidisciplinary writer who works in a school library in Orlando, FL. They are a graduate of UNC, Chapel Hill where they wrote their Creative Writing undergraduate thesis in poetry. RJ has been previously published in *30 North Literary Review* and *The Charles Carter* anthology.



Nancy Kangas is a poet and teaching artist based in Columbus, Ohio. She has poetry in books and journals including *MAYDAY Magazine*, *Forklift, Ohio*, and *Rattle* (Poetry Prize Finalist). She is the co-director of *Preschool Poets: An Animated Film Series*, which features poems composed by her students, and is at work on a short documentary film about crying.



Natalie LaFrance-Slack has her father's smile. She carries her mother's laugh and loss around her eyes. She is a sister to many; a long time lover. With her three teenage sons, Natalie can often be lost in the woods, driving narrow highways, or finding live music in little towns with one stoplight. A child of repressive religiosity, she finds beauty in writing her way out of the walls she was told would contain her.



Joanne Monte is a poet, novelist and editor. She is the author of a poetry collection entitled *The Blue Light of Dawn*, which received The Bordighera Poetry Prize. She has received several awards, including a Pushcart nomination. Many of her poems deal with human rights issues, some of which were judged as a finalist and semi-finalist in such competitions as Princemere, The Jack Grapes Poetry Award, Palette Poetry and The New Millennium Writing Award. She is also the author of a highly reviewed novel, *The Day to Eternity*.



Nicole Sellino, a current resident of Jersey City, NJ, credits Long Island, Baltimore, and the Pocono mountains for her gravitation towards nature, animals, and all things fresh air. When she's not painting, writing poetry in the margins of any flat surface, and admiring her rock collection, she can be found eating key lime pie and enjoying the sunsets—even the gray cloudy ones.



David Sloan's debut poetry collection—*The Irresistible In-Between*—was published by Deerbrook Editions in 2013. *A Rising and Other Poems*, (Deerbrook), launched in 2020. Honors include The Betsy Sholl Award, the inaugural Maine Poets Society Prize and two Maine Literary awards. After five decades of teaching, most recently at Maine Coast Waldorf High School in Freeport, he is semi-retired, focusing on the joys of grandparenting, gardening, cycling and more regular writing.



Writer, artist and musician **Hills Snyder** lives in Magdalena, New Mexico, where he runs an art gallery/house concert/performance venue, kind of a small array. His writing has been published in *Glasstire*, *Art Matters*, *Artcore*, *...might be good*, *Dreamworks*, the *San Antonio Current* and *Southwest Contemporary*. Residencies include the Ucross Foundation, Banff Centre for Arts, Fountainhead, and the Artpace International Artist-in-Residence Program. Photo credit: Ramin Samandari.



Abigail F. Taylor is a Texas poet and novelist of Indigenous and Irish descent and has been published in a handful of magazines and online journals. Her debut novella, *The Night Begins*, with Luna Press Publishing hits the shelves in 2023. She can be found on twitter: @AbigailFTaylor or her blog: abigailftaylor.wordpress.com



Suzannah “Su” Van Gelder is a queer, nonbinary poet and artist from upstate New York. Inspired by queer elders, comedy, magick, and the burden of existing, their work is characterized by brutal honesty and humorous cynicism. In 2020, Suzannah was selected as a finalist for the Iowa Review Poetry Award. You can find their poetry in the February 2023 edition of *Beyond Queer Words* as well as the eighth edition of *Reservoir Road Literary Review*.



Anne Marie Wells (She | They) is an award-winning, queer poet, playwright, and storyteller navigating the world with a chronic illness. She is a faculty member for the Community Literature Initiative poetry publishing program and Strategic Partnership Fellow with The Poetry Lab. Her debut book *Survived By: A Memoir in Verse + Other Poems* is slated for April 2023 with Curious Corvid Publishing.



Holly York is Senior Lecturer Emerita of French at Emory University. Her poems appear in *Crosswinds* and in online journals in the U.S. and U.K. Her chapbooks are: “Backwards Through the Rekroy Wen,” “Picture This” and “Postcard Poems.” Her current project is a collection titled *Flight Recorder*, based on her life as a Pan Am stewardess in the 1970s. A blackbelt in karate and grandmother of five, she lives in Atlanta with her two Dobermans.

