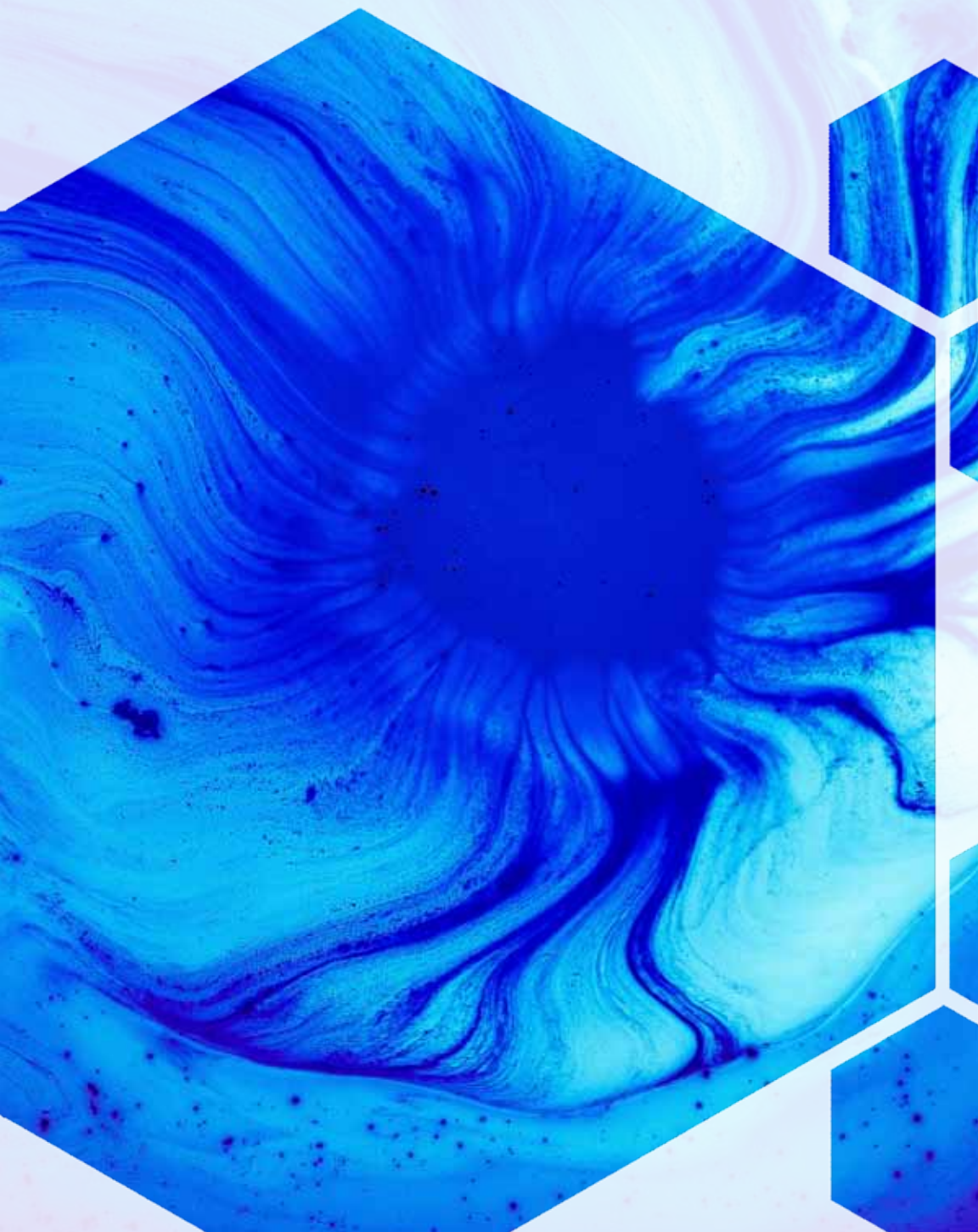


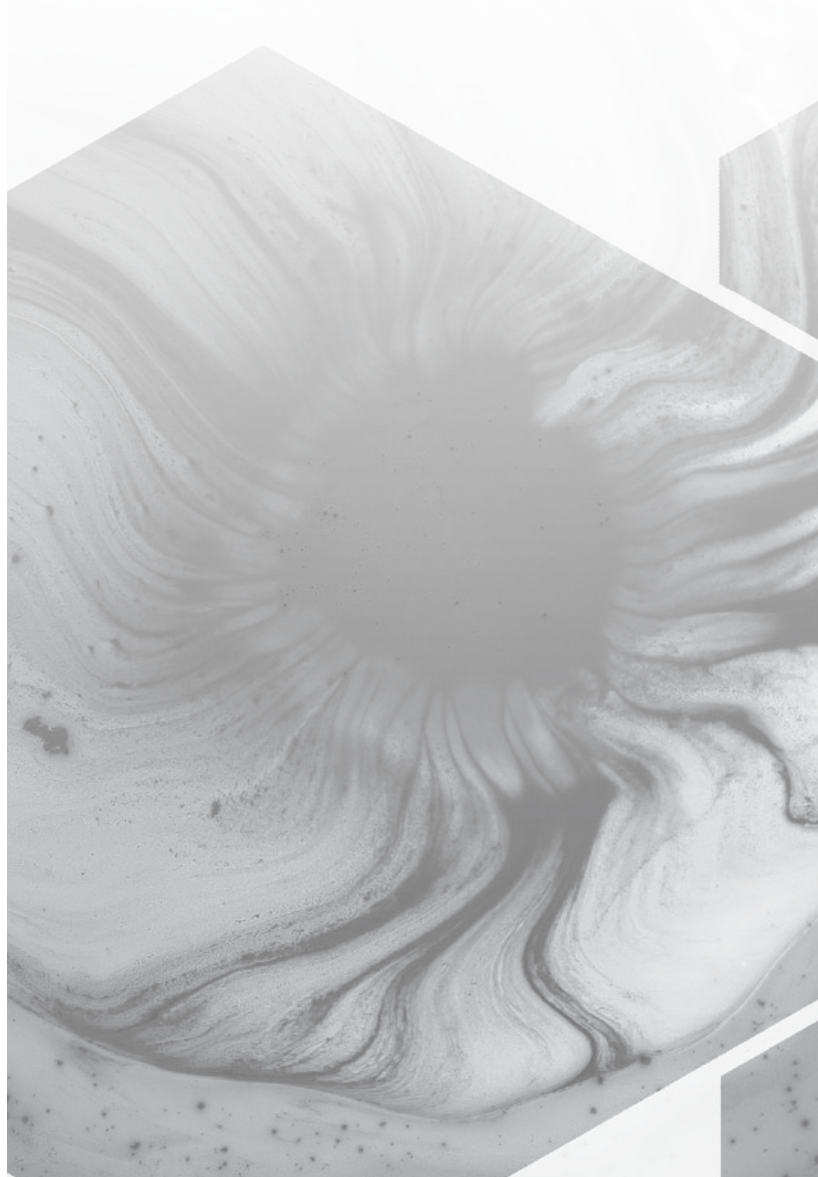
SIXFOLD

POETRY WINTER 2016



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

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Alexander McCoy

Half-life

brackish boy. looking like a question needs
to be answered, the tooth-end of a smile or
a timebomb, born into rebel skin, as in
where do you come from? *why are you here?*
make no mistake, Miami, they smell the brown on you
like blood in the dark.
in this war there are no half-lives, either
keep quiet, or else learn to kill.

Lowstringin'

Lately, I've mistaken my shoes
for conch shells, only
when I hold them up to my ears

I do not hear swelling
ocean, I hear screaming,

There is nothing left for you here

I can read it all over
fading brick faces
lined up crooked like tombstones.

The soil that once knew life
on this small patch of ground
I thought I could call my own

is now cracked and bloodless,
any familiar faces long since scattered
like anemic autumn leaves.

I am going to leave this place if it kills me.

Ask me what my shoes are screaming now
and they will tell you

Move as far away from your family as humanly possible,
throw your cellphone into the river
that you might have an excuse when you forget to call

leave all of your ironic tee shirts behind
(you won't need those where you're going)

Keep going until your friends
are nothing more than old ghosts
haunting all of your stories

(Remember, you are leaving behind a ghost-town,
only none of the inhabitants have died yet)

Keep going until the smell of your house
fades from the lonely pair of jeans
you bothered to pack

Keep going so the horizon swallows you whole,
and you find yourself in a strange land

where the sidewalk has a pulse
where night is not an anvil pressing against your chest
instead, a fisherman's net loosed over bright millions, shining

Go! Godspeed, you reckless Sailor

•

In my car I become a satellite.
I treat the solitude of the open sky
as an excuse to see the world,

and the instant I stop to catch my breath
is the instant I drop in a blazing downward spiral
with no safety net to catch me.

Why should I bother inventing my own traditions
when I will only leave them to starve in the homes I bury?
It would be so much easier to adopt them from the cities I orbit.

In the meantime, it's a long shot to get to Boston,
an endless struggle to get to September,
although it helps to pretend

I'm in the middle of a movie montage,
able to skip right to the good parts
just as soon as the staccato of low string music drops out

So I'll want to pick a CD at random and pray
for plenty of cello, light up some cigarettes and drive
head first into a horizon beckoning me with open arms

•

This must have been how Pioneers felt,
winding up the Oregon Trail
towards nothing more than a smiling promise,

walking until they stumbled into a nameless grave,
not because they wanted to

nobody wants to die hungry

but because their legs never gave them a choice.
They would rather die
with blisters on their feet

instead of behind their smiles.
They would have dust coat their teeth
before they would let it settle over their bones.

I am going to leave this place if it kills me.

Although, on the day that I die, when you ask me
if I want to be buried in Worcester, I will tell you

I thought I already was.

Swansong for the Concert Pianist, like

must've finally gone deaf to the melody in these hands like

at what point remembering the story of that boy did you
condemn him to memory like

telling that boy he had a piano player's fingers, needed
to grow into them like

ten wisdom teeth crowding the same jawbone

never telling him they might
wind up crooked
and so loud like

landmines at the ends of both arms like
no man's land, no land
for nest-making like

finding that boy curled up
inside a stranger's handshake, looking
for someone else's hands like
teach me how to grow old
like you

should've taught that boy how to make room
for hands like these,

sing-sorry hands, stagefright hands, these
treat pants-pockets as second skin hands, these
borrowed birds, strangling themselves
given a moment alone hands like

these fingers,
were they piano strings,
they'd be worn chords
chorusing the piano's broken
teeth

Questions to Ask a Mountain

My role models are older than most,
world-wise, slow to respond.

I thread questions into cavernous ears,
begging for secrets to whisper up from their veins.

You silent towers of stone and years! What
is it like to be tall—? to live

with your head in the clouds and still
have enough oxygen to survive—?

Where do you find the strength
to carry the sky on your back
on the nights it threatens
to swallow you whole—?

Can you teach me how to stand up straight—?
or else how to carve my spine
out of something stronger than doubt—?

Can you teach me how to plant my feet
so deep in the Earth I never have to worry
about being knocked over—?

how to swallow my anxieties,
crush them into diamonds,
bury them so deep they're worth digging for—?

I never learned the subtle art
of stillness; to be most solid when
my body is at rest; to stay in one place
long enough to catch seeds on my tongue
and carve my story out of the treebark.
For once, I want a home to grow on me.

You ancient titans standing guard
over the world like teeth!

Make me into a giant, a force
to reconsider, something to look up to.

Give me so much mass
to withstand hurricane winds
erupting from the throats of those
who would see me eroded,

would see me leveled out, see me even, see me
and never even hear me!

My role models are proof the world
grows by inches. Only now
am I learning my echo,
my echo is a gift falling
from their mouths. I marvel
my voice can be so loud,
that my words are worth repeating.

And I will learn to show the world that I am large,
that you need to crane your neck
to see how high am I willing to reach
when I want to grab ahold of the stars
and carry them around in my pockets.

If my shoulders are too broad
for you to walk over, I will not crumple,
an obstacle waiting belly up for the bulldozer.
You may howl until there is no wind
left in your lungs, but you can never
break me all the way down, you will never
grind me into something smooth.

My belly is too full of smoke.

And you will behold me
as I block out the sun
when I open
my
mouth.

Alexandra Kamerling

Plymouth

In lieu of collecting rocks or coins or stamps, she collects places and hands them down to me. When I ask her what she can still smell and hear from her childhood in Kansas, she says she can smell the engine of her father's Plymouth and hear the wind as it traveled over nothing.

How Long She Walked

The house I walked towards was graying and frail. It sat alone in a sea of wheat, collecting wind through the open windows. From a distance it was barely there.

Inside the house sat my grandmother at 19, playing Solitaire at the kitchen table. She wore work clothes covered with dirt but her nails and lips were both a deep crimson, and her red hair was carefully gathered and twisted like a conch shell at the nape of her neck. We greeted one another, and she went down to the cellar for an extra chair, coming back instead with a bag of potatoes, a record player, and two pieces of chocolate wrapped in wax paper.

A year must have passed and then the house shook us out and dissolved in a pool of dust and copper kettles. My grandmother put on her work boots and marched towards the road. I don't know how long she walked, but I do know that in this place the vastness swallows and the road is straight.

I left with the powder blue bathtub, which is what I had come for.

What Did You Learn When You Spoke to Her?

This small thing—

That she liked to sleep
with her hands on her ribs
so that her fingers fit
into the shallow grooves
and would rise and
fall with her breath.

That she'd always felt
there was an
old and low music
within her

and this was the proof

moon
pulled breath carving the tide
into her body

Prairie

In the car with my mother
we speed along the straightest road
I have ever seen
the thin thread of asphalt
never wavering from its route
to the end of the earth.
Here in western Kansas we feel alone.

This is where my mother's love of vast space
was planted
and so sifted down to me
we are both unable to breathe
in the density of forest.

A few cups of
bitter gas station coffee
later and we've arrived
at the farm house with its
whitewashed walls and
powder blue bathtub
and the oak that coats the porch with shadow.
It's empty now
the house where my grandmother lived
and lost her own mother.

Trailing my fingers along the kitchen counter
I wonder if the dust still has a lingering particle
of these women
I watch my mother
climb into the blue bathtub
and rest her head on its cracked edge.

Gathering

If I could
collect
your bones pick
them up
piece by piece

so that they
became not
wrist or sternum
but driftwood

travelers
left by water
a last impression
of a passing life

Debbie Hall

She Walks Into Starbucks Carrying a 2 x 4,

her frayed wool greatcoat
scented with mold, white hair swirling
about her face as she scans the room
and shuffles to the counter
for a free coffee sample and cup of water.

Without warning, she lifts her 2 x 4
and swings at the air behind her,
sends the other patrons fleeing
like a small burst of quail startled
from their bushes.

Let this serve as a warning,
she shouts to the air above her.
Perhaps there are malevolent spirits
that hover above her,
follow her wherever she goes,

or perhaps she is simply announcing
herself, claiming her right
to walk on this small patch
of real estate, to step across the thin line
separating us from her.

The Geese at Camp Fallujah

Next to the city of mosques stretching
across arid land, a compound
of tents and concrete buildings

stood next to a water supply—The Pond.
In a landscape where Humvees roared in,

kicking up great clouds of sand,
and Howitzers fired into air
electric with conflict, the geese

presented their newborn
balls of fuzz with orange beaks
to a city of Marines in camouflage.

Each night after dropping
75-pound packs onto hard earth,
the men checked on the downy goslings,

keeping count of each one
until the babies grew plump and tall,
ambled down the road with their flock

past sandbagged bunkers
in the rising light of dawn.

Why Stray Cats Loiter Around The Duarte Family Mausoleum

That day the sky was brushed with a wash of cirri
at the Recoleta Cemetery. The Argentinian workers
wove their way through thick clots of tourists choking

the gateway. Twelve stray cats emerged from the dark
of the tombs and began a procession past the doorways
of deceased notables. A one-eyed tomcat sniffed the marble

statuary lining the lanes and lifted his tail
to spray the slumbering boy angel before nibbling
the crumbs of empanadas. He stopped to rub against

the doorway to Evita's final home, shining the bronze
with his whiskers before hissing at a groundskeeper
who kicked him away like a wad of trash. The Lady of Hope

kept a silent watch over this bit of cruelty, but stray cats
know that Little Eva will take care of them. Yesterday
they saw her in the eyes of a dowager offering small morsels

of herring and biscuits. Today she inhabits a spray of water
washing the dust from their thin, matted coats. Tomorrow
they will hear her voice call to them from deep in her vault,

once more inviting them into the shadows, safely home,
away from our indifferent cameras, our transient curiosity.
I saw how they ignored me and expected nothing else.

Sean

As a teen, rules and responsibility were never your strong suit.
At least you shrugged them off quietly—
no grand displays of defiance or bravado, no swearing

or railing at the unfairness of it all. You never labored
over explanations or rationalizations, much preferring
the comfortable mantle of passivity. You were sympathetic

to others' frustrations with you—your wasted intellect,
lack of application, no concern for your future. You joined your family
in throwing up hands of exasperation over you.

Years of therapy chipped away at the early traumas: Dad—drunk,
hands in the wrong places on your sister. On you.
You shrugged that off too. Asked about your feelings, you let

your sister speak for you, let her pain describe yours, watched her
work through the hard stuff. You played a supporting role.
When I saw you years later, you wore a uniform of pressed navy,

crisp white and confidence. You shared your plans for the future
as though they'd been in your head all along. Imagine my shock,
then, when I heard about your car, abandoned at the top

of the Mason Street Bridge, no note in sight. I read
the tributes to you on our hospital's website, details about your
funeral. Front and center, your picture, your grin—now gone.

Missing Jayden

Here in front of me—in my memory—
stands a small boy,
his nose almost touching mine,

his sloe-eyed gaze an invitation.
He is talking with great intensity
about vacuum cleaners.

Hoover is his favorite brand.
He wants to know mine
and how many do I own right now.

Apparently he is a hellion
in his kindergarten classroom.
His principal and teacher assert

that he has little respect
for authority, as he routinely
fails to follow instructions

and interrupts them constantly,
sharing facts about vacuums
and their accessories.

His grandmother cares for him
while his mother marks time with heroin
and his father does time upstate.

She loves him but is plumb out of ideas
and bone-tired. Jayden enjoys our testing
sessions, especially before and after,

when we extend our dialogue
about vacuum cleaners. He would like
a new one, but cannot afford it.

When I tell his grandmother
that Jayden is a bright boy with autism,
her eyes fill up with liquid relief.

Jayden's school does not take as kindly
to this news, certain that he is just
a smart boy behaving badly

and has us conned. It took two weeks
to spring Jayden from the special school
for behavior problems, two months

to finish talking about his time-outs
in the isolation room. At our last session
together, Jayden held a photo in front

of my face, almost touching my nose.
In it, he stood next to his new blue Hoover,
its extra-long hose wrapped around his waist.

Michael Fleming

The Signalman's Story

December 7, 1941

What do you do with the news? When the call comes in from Honolulu—Sunday morning, the San Francisco coast is clear, all the other men asleep—nobody warned you, just a kid from St. Cloud, that today *you* would handle history's lightning bolt, *you* would be the first to know. Do you pray? No one even knows the words: Midway, Gold Star Mothers, Guadalcanal, Saipan, loose lips, Hiroshima. Right now it belongs to you, alone at the teletype. Refuse to believe, as if you could choose? Not wrong, not right. What do you do with the news? You do your duty: you pass it along.

Alcova, 1971

Thirteen, so I knew all about it—how
to tack, how to jibe, how to sail it flat
on a broad reach or close-hauled, with the prow
pointed home, the foam boiling astern, cat's-

paws ghosting the water, the telltale clues
to the fickle mind of the wind—yes, I
knew all that, I'd read not one book, but two,
so all those words were mine. He let me buy

it: bright yellow Sunfish, thirteen feet, used,
let me launch it just two weeks after ice-
out on a raw, squally spring morning, too
soon but I couldn't wait, wouldn't wait, I

said I was ready and hoisted the sail,
cleated the halyard, ducked the boom that missed
my head by inches, inducted myself
into the Order of the Orange Life-Vest—

he cinched me in tight. I clambered aboard,
took up the tiller, fumbled for the sheet,
squinted into the wind like Nelson, Hornblower,
Jones. I said I was ready. He

pushed out the prow, reconsidered, then stepped
a big step, unexpected, irretrievable—
barely onboard as the boat leapt
ahead, already planing, the wind heaved

its shoulder full force into the sail's belly,
and I hadn't thought of any of this—
how it would really feel, surging pell-mell
into the lake, hearing the frantic hiss

of cold water gurgling beneath us, how
the sheet would cut into my untested
right hand, or how the hull would buck and jounce
while my left fought a phantom that arm-wrestled

me for the tiller. I hadn't dreamed
of fear, of being overmastered—my
command redoubled. We beat a hard beam
reach, downwind fifty yards, no more, and I

shouldn't have fought the gust that turtled us,
should have dropped the tiller, let the sheet slip
harmless from my stubborn fist, should have trusted
the old adage—*just let go, the ship*

will find its own level—but no, I held
on tight and over we went, first a shock
knocked me breathless, electric ice, the shell
of the hull rolled belly up and it rocked

away from my groping, squirted away
slick, ungrabbable, the daggerboard streaming
snotbrown water, and then—what? I may
have lunged for his flailing hands, may have screamed

Dad!—may even have seen him go down, slip
silently down while I bobbed above, useless
as a newborn in the bright orange grip
of the vest—I may have watched myself lose

him, may have seen what I had to unsee,
to make unhappen: his face disappearing
into the deep beneath. Some fury
of refusal possessed me—*no, not here,*

no, not now, no, no—possessed me to poke
my frozen fingers at the frozen buckles
savagely till they gave, the vest broke
away like a parachute and I ducked

myself madly ass over end, kicked, felt
the burden of my clothes, my shoes, the skull-
crushing cold, I came to him, saw him still
sinking, still, like a statue in the dull

filtered light, a waxen head with arms raised
as if in blessing, or forgiveness, or
surrender, blank bewilderment, a dazed
emptiness, limply sinking. I lunged for

his wrist, latched on, kicked hard, up, clumsily
tugged him up toward the light, up, I clawed
for the light, lungs heaving, up, suddenly
broke the surface, gasping violently—by God

he breathed too, coughed up water, breathed again.
Dad! I sputtered. *Are you okay!* He nodded
dully, eyes half shut, lay shivering when
I draped his arms across the gently bobbing

hull, hooked the frozen claws of his hands
on the upended chine just as the roar
of a motor approaching fast, a friend
appeared (the man who ran the music store

in town), he'd seen it all, revved his ski-boat,
rescued us. I don't seem to recall how
we ever managed to get warm, how we got home—
another thing we never talked about.

The Brace

I was afraid to look at it, afraid
to touch it. The cold steel plate that mapped
the curve of his torso, the canvas straps,
buckles—when it was invoked, I obeyed.

It scared me more than the scar itself, neck
to tailbone, the incision and the sutures,
a faint pink highway of pain. I knew
the story: Montana, a horse, the wreck.

He never complained—not to me. He'd say,
“Maybe you can help me . . .” and Mom would add,
“Or does your dad have to put on the brace?”
As soon as he died she threw it away.

Patience

A music man, my father—always whistling,
singing, mastering the flute. He did
it all, loved it all, called it his ministry
—a true amateur, even amidst
his gleaming instruments and X-rays—dentist
was just his day job.

Evenings were
for practice—lessons, band—and Sundays meant
mass, incense and bells, and God must have heard
what all of us heard: he sang for his soul
in a thunderous baritone.

Even better
than the hymns and churchly rigmarole
were Gilbert & Sullivan shows. He let
me tag along—*Mikado*, *Ruddigore*,
Pirates of Penzance, *Patience*, *Pinafore*.

His favorite? Hard to say. He cut a dapper
figure as a commodore, was paired
with the handsomest matrons, doffed a cap
like he did it every day.

In the glare
of the footlights he found reality
in make-believe, his face behind the makeup.
When they did *The Mikado* he'd be
Pooh-Bah, Lord High Everything Else, never break
character, ever so pompous, so stern,
so silly. He had it all in him.

Pillow-
bellied and berobed, he took his turn
with eyes painted Japanese, high plains style.
He sang while assuming a sumo stance,
and brought down the house with his Pooh-Bah dance.

I saw all the *Patience* rehearsals, sat
in the back of a drab, musty old gym
while the prairie howled outside.

Maybe that's
when the notion first took root, in the dim
confines of adolescence, childhood's winter,
that poetry is ridiculous. Night
after night I took it all in: the thin,
simpering figures of poets, their tight
velvet knee britches, their lavender-scented
hankies, their frilly cuffs. No one laughed
harder than I did—I got what it meant.
But my dad was a dragoon, a man after
all, and that's how I learned that men wear swords—
something to sing is the whole point of words.

for my father

Jim Pascual Agustin

Sheet and Exposed Feet

My mother thinks little of ironing
clothes. They gather wrinkles
as soon as you put them on,
she says. Even the collar made stiff

with starch will get creased
in no time. She knows we all die
crumpled and naked in God's
eyes. You don't get to choose

the surface your skin must finally
press against as it bears the weight
your soul once carried. The softest
cotton, fine grain of wood,

tiny teeth of gravel, the twisting
arms of waves or burst of flames,
will bind to your flesh
until you are no more

than broken links of carbon.
For those waiting to be identified,
heaven is a white sheet too short
to cover their feet.

International Space Station, 23 July 2014

on a photo by Alexander Gerst

Light, invisible unless it strikes
something: a wall, a tree, a sliver
of smoke, your eye. Fireworks makers
know how to make light whirl

and dance, displacing the stars
of midsummer or grip of winter.
Entranced, one can only surrender.
If you didn't know what the bursts of light

Alexander Gerst had captured in space,
you could be forgiven for thinking
they were beautiful, like filigree
or deep sea creatures. But there,

dark waters bordered
by a scattering of lights, the beach
where four children playing
were blown up.

Crocodiles in Belfast

The morning radio reports
another crocodile attacked a woman
in Belfast. She was washing a bucket
to be filled with river water to carry

back home. Two other women armed
with buckets were around. They screamed
and clattered the hollow plastics,
swung them against the crocodile's sides

until it released the woman's leg.
Annoyed, it withdrew to a quieter
part of the river to wait in silence
for another meal. The news

will soon be forgotten
before the woman's leg heals.
But she will be going back
to the river's edge

while the drought extends its grip
on the land and the men
of the village go in search
for work elsewhere in Mpumalanga.

Women and Children First

A woman, her grip
tight as a fist, is pulling back
the hijab of another woman.

In the same frame, a boy
with rubber sandals is poised
to land a kick on her thawb.

Just look closely.
The soldiers
in the background
aren't doing anything.

Melissa Cantrell

Collision

You were always there, it seemed, at the edges,
gripping the hems of my weekend scenes.

I, the allegiant regular—
The bartenders knew my bottles,
allowed tabs. I did not bluster, or get muddy.
I left upright, with dignity and dollars in my pocket.

You flitted, sulked, and roamed all over the joint,
your orbit slushy, sequenced to a design
only you could follow.

Some nights, you plinked an entire roll of quarters into the jukebox,
sifted out some lovelies from the stacks:
Donny Hathaway if you ached.
Coltrane for storms, sorting the debris in your head.
Zeppelin or Jack White, if you wanted to brawl.
You screamed for someone to turn it up.
Swagger with a pool cue guitar.

I caught you howling in the bathroom once.
Pretended I hadn't, and retreated.
You came out wearing lipstick the shade of an open vein
and left with your arms around a dizzy girl,
her neck spattered crimson.
You probably weren't merciful that night.

You were discussed.

*She spreads trouble.
Rowdy.*

I outgrew turbulence long ago.
Tossed it furious and berserk and spitting,
a mad thing with plague in its blood.

Shirked a bursting city too gutter sharp for me
and staggered West, to unravel in peace
with the rest of the quiet folk.

So I tried to ignore you.

But you just bustled in tonight,
all yawning havoc and catastrophe,
and skid a glass next to mine,
your ante for uprooting my waveless world.

Spark

July 7th, and the fireworks loiter—
Elemental fizzles to my north,
cracking the night open
like a lover with rude hands.

Take that. Feel that.

A wallop of copper, zinc, aluminum, iron.
Most times, the chemistry gets folded up,
discarded beneath the shiver and boom.
Forgetting,
Or not caring:

We quarter the same fuels, tourists in our blood.

We're burning up there, too.

Affliction

At the next table, intruding—
a clump of youth.
Crooked, dropped-razor hair, unfinished faces.
Kick started and roaring,
slinging wide ideas over waffles and eggs.

You drag out the usual colossal savages to debate:
Death. War. Love.
But remotely, just nibbling the corners.
Notions deprived of knowing anything so stout,
or final, as those beasts.
Ozone and poses in your mouths.
The residue left when experience withers,
and all your crowing gives out.

Something mean uncoils in me at your noise.
I want to say:

You are as significant as ortolans,
glutted with a mash of half-grown gospel.
Your end will be just as horrible,
but you won't gnash or scabble
when the brandy barrel locks shut.
Taken by surprise.
Compromised.

*(Your ramparts were so radiant, so tough, how did they fail?
Cobbled of followers, feeds, personas—
garbage slathered in every crevice, to keep out the rain and ruin.)*

Spines duped into believing
a hashtag hits harder than what's waiting for you outside,
in the years rattling ahead.
I've met the slashing gods.

I've learned to salute lesser ones.
Those who really understand how to sink into the gray spots:
Comfort. Quiet. Rest.

The burn cures of aging.

I want to say these things.

Give warning before you tumble out of this place.

Be the sapped, seen-it-all diviner
who lurches in, rips up your rails,
alters the story before it's too late.

Instead, I let you carry on.

(Struck feeble and flightless.)

Pay my check.

Leave you to prod giants,

already hearing your bones crunch between their teeth.

Martin Conte

Hair

Without the princess headdress,
jango jive do rag,
mother's skull stretched bare—
spotty crust of hilltop,
tall grass are clumps of hair,
decaying under boulder.
Tufts clung where she left them
to stick from kerchief—
my Queen, my Hippolyta—
stray antennae, strands of memory.

She came downstairs uncovered once,
emerged earthworm, caught me
with eyes wide.
This mother not mine, this woman
unknown. Once,

when I was four, I learned to braid
her waist length cascade,
fibers of her being, feeling part—
Oh Queen, Oh Hippolyta—
of her tumorless universe.

After chemo, it grew in
gray and brittle, a brillo scrub.
She chopped it to military attention.
Now it drapes, chainmail of the knight,
clinking over shoulders, shining with frost.

My Queen, My Hippolyta:
you are dressed for battle.

Skin

Ichthyosis is a family of disorders characterized by dry or scaly and thickened skin.
— NIH

When Narcissus finally disturbed the water,
out leapt a salmon, shimmered fish
to baby, human, unwieldy and foreign,
landlocked lips chapped without gills.

My body was disaster, dying faster
day by day. I was no miracle
no flower petals here, just
suicidal sandpaper scales.
My grandfather, filleting fish,
fit me in the skin.
Ichthyosis, jutting long line in a short poem.

At school they *ooh* and *aah*
queues of them to touch the grit,
crinkling white clutch shunting
off a dying birch.
Show them the unaching scars
as if I received these
symboled marks
for their breath only!
says Coriolanus in English class.
We're their side-show, a need
to know how riddled we are, and so
to feel smooth themselves.

Will they recognize me
in tomorrow's skin suit
rioting roots beneath
the bed, polluted air
of me and my dead?

Have they consumed me yet?

I die faster
minute by minute.

Flesh

4 and 20 blackbirds baked in a pie . . .

as the needle's eye looks for mincemeat inside.
Who knew they could all fit?
Unfolding a thousand times
over, from plant to blue to needle's plow
across the blank hayfield of my leg.
They're coming up for me.
How do they see through
such a black lens?
The crow's sense
is underestimated
at the estimator's expense.

"What will you name her?"
the tattoo mystic says to me,
tickling my thigh like a baby's,
while the crow's belly
with its tender sheet
inches over my shy body
like ink on the underside of heaven.

She's made it over my chest,
nipples a smudge,
disappearing towards my inside
horizon, hairy skies.
My skin repeating itself,
black limb on black limb
making what white is left glow alien,
splintered web of moon
at the bottom of a stone well.

the punk poet tattoo lady
has a mother's unbreaking touch.
The crow's wing brushes
the nape of my neck.
I'm drowning in them.

Crows don't down,
their baby feathers
are never found.

AJ Powell

The Road to Homer

As the brief night lifts its gray blanket
My eyes drink long draughts of wilderness

The road is hedged by granite crumble and rock slab
The flora is white lace and purple garnish

Peninsular waters of cold turquoise flash sunlight
Off the wings of a blanched low-soaring seabird

Waterfall strands plummet past the height of skyscrapers
Down mountain mammoths my sight can't keep in frame

Clouds in highest climes perch on peaks
Like egrets on the shoulders of elephants

The spires of this cathedral are green tangle-trees
Snagging my soul on their branches

My throat is thick with gasping
I am diminutive and wide-eyed

My senses are swallowed
By the ample world

If civilization drowns in the ices we melt
I will come here, become a bear,
And feast on salmon and honey

Caterpillar Girl

Daughter, did I step on you?
Caterpillar of my heart
With your spiny sensitivity
Feeling for the world's
Hard corners and soft edges
Inching along
Bristly-soft and vulnerable

You taste and test
And button-hunt and press
And press and press
To know your power
Build your defenses
Arm yourself and
With charm and glances
Disarm us

My foot falls heavy and large sometimes
My beak-like words
Peck and threaten to consume
Your still-soft self
I am sorry
I will do better to protect for you
This world-sized, lifelong
Chrysalis

Your wings are readying
Present and developing
At times dampened by sorrow
And the everyday betrayals we adults visit upon
You and all child-hearts

Inch along still, growing girl
Travel and transform
Then
 Spread
 Lift
 Ascend
But perch again
Near
I'll tame my steps yet

Sandpaper on Silk

Life is sandpaper on silk
Snags are inevitable
When the beautiful and the rough
Rub against each other like lovers

It isn't the sandpaper's fault
Ontologically speaking
It has its place, can make
A hewn log as smooth as . . .

Silk too has its attributes
A fragile beauty which
Falls like water, whisper soft on skin
(Though I'm not sure the worm's perspective on it)

Life is the terrible disappearing space between them
The unraveling of fine things
Brought too close for their own good
Balmy summer temperatures meet ice caps
And all our polar bears are left drowning
Lives march to matter more than gunshots
Neighborhoods divide along fault lines
Of difference and indifference
Mid-life crises leave children
Half-orphaned every other week and holidays

How can we contain our contradictions?
How do we reconcile
Peace and power
Romance and reality
The Just Cause and the just flawed
Without tearing up hearts or
Lopping off heads in private jihads
Bloody and holy and now?

Life is sandpaper on silk
Or a junkie's temporary ecstasy
Or a flaming marshmallow—sugar turned to ash

Sun Salutation

We rest at night under star shine or cloud cover
Forgetting
The sun is always mountaineering

Our sun makes a repetition of ascents we suckle on
Like a baby at the breast, hovering hummingbird at blossom
We sip and sup the sun assuming
She will never tire, always return

The golden orb sits herself upon the horizon
Gathers her breath
And begins her climb to the peak of the sky
Only to descend from her zenith
To a rest she never reaches
Finding yet another day to scale
And so she clambers on
Delivering again to us
The gossamer goodness
Of her warmth and illumination

When the world turns cactus on us
When our atmosphere burns toxic with vitriol
When life is a live wire that snaps toward our hearts
When our minds lay the lash down on our own backs
Then let us look up
The sky is firmament
And we are living upside-down

So in the morning
I will sit under the caress
Of the sun's side-slanting first rays
And consider my small self
I will watch the sun Rise
Gather my thankful breath
And proceed, breathing

Leaping with Esther

“Who knows whether,” or so the story goes, “you have been
lifted up
For such a time as this?”
A question, not a statement:
Who knows whether?
For there is God’s grace spread abroad in the world
And then there is consistent stupidity and even
Dumb Luck

I for one can’t tell the difference
Most days are through a glass darkly
And no clarion Christ calls to me
From the noise of my circumstances
God visits me like light skipping on water
My life briefly blessed by
A ripple that makes me blink
And but for my watering eyes
I might not know it was there
Such is the God I know and love
Better by the contours of my longing
Than my faith

So, “Who knows whether?”
A grand Maybe, a glorious Perhaps
Holding familiar uncertainties:
Dark Humor and Bright Pain and “Who knows whether?”
A plan exists, things come together for good
Or
We are simply spinning unhinged in a fathomless sky

All we know is Esther
Writhed in great anguish, risked her very life
For permission to throw a cocktail party
She must’ve read the Psalmist who penned the 23rd:
Yay though I walk
 “Fast for me.”
Through the Valley of Death
 “If I perish I perish”

Thus she dressed in her best,
Prepared to gamble on her best guesses
And charmed a way for her people
Out of holocaust

The Jews weren't annihilated in Persia after all
She thwarted schemes; they didn't perish
But their defense went on the offensive
And the almost-annihilated became annihilators
Esther spoke up again and
(Please God, in time to stop the wheel
Of blood feud revenge cycles from turning)
Decreed instead another party
To turn mourning into dancing
Replacing war with a holiday
(Teaching us not to fight for salvation
But to dance for it)

Esther I think had a wicked sense of humor
A gallows humor
And God seems to have a gallows humor too
Giving us the gift of just one certainty—
A certain death—
Then spinning a Resurrection tale
We are invited to believe
In a scarlet thread and a golden dawn
Thorny crown and crystal throne
Bloodied crossbeam and rolled away stone
God is Absurd
Which is perhaps why I—the only way I could—
Believe
Only in a dancing Jester God, a Jokester with the Perfect Prank:
To love us, each and every fucking one
Alleluia

Paul W. Child

World Diverted

*Earth takes us in awhile as transient guests;
we live by habit, which we must unlearn.
Anna Akhmatova, "There Are Four of Us"
(translated by Stanley Kunitz)*

The river where the Sioux boys dashed the carp
upon the rocks because they were trash fish
was dammed up and diverted.
The boys I feared and envied
not because they were Sioux boys
but because they skipped school,
fishing irreligious all day long,
are dead in gunfights now, parched with thirst from type 2 diabetes,
cirrhotic in the penitentiary,
reading Zane Grey pulp with yellowing eyes.

The house I lived in as a boy
in the South Dakota town of trains and steeples,
came down in a maul of clattering hammers,
clutter of grey plaster, laths, and horsehair,
a house so broken by the generations
of Irish bully-boys and coal-haired shy colleens long-dead
I doubt that anyone even noticed
the hole I bored with penknife in the bedroom wall
to watch my virgin aunt Peg in the bath
while the world took turns,
a peephole moon cast shadows on the snow,
and icicles wept out their days upon the muntins.

The cathedral school in which I learned my Latin and long lessons,
timid as a chapel mouse beneath the towering eyes
of black and frowning nuns,
closed when the young priest
with the shock of chestnut hair
whom in my genuflections I tried so hard to please
but whose eye always narrowed

on my pretty little brother,
was sent for some mysterious reason back to Flandreau,
with the last tall nun on the last day
when I slammed down the lid
of the long-suffering wooden desk
at the last 3:30 bell and raced down to the river
to watch the Sioux boys dash the heads of carp
upon the rocks, the shattered orange-pink scales,
the cloy of fish-slick stones and slip of mucus,
tangled filament and hooks, sad, broken lips.

If you look for the old cathedral school, the house, the boys,
you will not find them where they were
in their accustomed places in that northern town.
If you look tonight for the cold winter moon,
you will not find it where you left it,
shining on the trainyards and the roofs of rooming houses.

And if you look for me tomorrow,
you will not find me who I was.
The world has unlearned all of its long habits.
I never was the world's guest; the world was mine.

The Fault, Dear Brutus

The fault, dear Brutus, lies not in our stars
but in our cells, ghost ships shuttling our wills
upon the busy enzymatic tides
to the far outposts of the bone and nerve.

My cunning and my hatred of smug men,
that balding, simpering queen of Bithynia
whom Nicomedes pinned down on his couch,
a despot lubricate with Asian spittle,
the great man twittering like a conquering moth,
were stitched into my chromosomes at birth,
a hate so great that even as a boy
I took on Sulla's brat in fisticuffs
and would have kicked his shins and blacked his eye
if our tutor had not separated us.

And now while we fret idle, driftwood fools,
this ponce plays pretty at the falling sickness,
foaming at the mouth, when it's convenient,
knowing that a strapping young centurion
will force his sword between his yellowed dentures
to keep the prick from biting off his tongue.
And this is Rome?

Friend, the things that we might do together,
I, jackal-headed, dangerous, and you,
a handsome man born in a wicked world
where beauty cruelly tyrannizes men;
I, busy in the history of knives
while Porcia stabs your palate with her tongue
and twists her fingers in your glossy curls.
This temporizing will no longer do,
for scheming with slack nerve is impotent,
and beauty has responsibilities.

Let's make this despot his own haruspex,
his final words not et tu Brute but
my uncoiled entrails tell me that I'll die

of daggers here upon the Senate steps.
(His self-reflections never trawl too deep.)

I know a vates who is serviceable,
has ominous dates at hand for any month,
and falconer for hire who'll let his birds
out for a nighttime shrieking. We'll consult
the almanacs to find the perfect day
when the moon blot out the sun in an eclipse;
the comets, bloody rain, and all the rest
we can manage easily with lasers.

Our will will find some willing conduit,
a scruffy earringed small-town English hack
who'll make a shilling on the London stage,
and if his Cassius is pimply-faced,
his Brutus snuffling through a crooked septum,
and if we cringe when they fall clumsily
upon their wooden swords, at least they play
at our brave deeds—but only if we act.

Sure, old kings will still go mad upon the moors
and drunken porters piss on Scottish doors
because they do, because they always have,
but if our fate be stranded in the cells,
the blackamoor won't suffocate his bitch,
those dago teens won't feel each other up
and kiss themselves to death in the cold tomb,
that moping Danish prig will fail to act,
resort instead to Prozac for his moods.

So, brother, if you find your will is stalled,
a trireme stilled in cytoplasmic seas,
if you don't have the requisite $x-y$,
I know a woman who is man enough
to make her point by stabbing her own thigh,
a manic virago who understands
the hate of tyranny cannot be quenched,
as you must certain find out when she snuffs
the orange coals of her tongue in your pretty mouth.

The Muse I Married

The muse I married, my prophetess and seer,
who once arrested lightning from the gods,
now gossips at the fence with Kathy Kuhar;
sinks to her Slavic ankles in the backyard mud,
her hair tacked up with clothespins;
whinnies out I saids, she saids, he saids
and clucks about the Devlin girl's behavior.

The mad, divining bride who shook in fits
when random gales of gods blew through her,
now hikes up her skirts at every chance she gets
and dances to amuse the neighbor girls.

Oh where is inspiration when the crazed
Cassandra of North Sawdust Drive
who stood upon a scaffolding of stars and seas
and screeched out oracles
now snores in front of flinty television skies,
her eyes rolled back like clamshells,
while I warm coffee from the day before
and pack the children's lunchpails?

Oh where is inspiration when the mad suburban sibyl
who, frenzied, read the flights of birds,
hair scratching like barbed wire at the sky,
now gabbles on and on and on and on
with recipes for budget-saving chicken,
bawling halfway up and down our street in self-congratulations,
giddy with the noise of her own tongue?

Or have the gods themselves descended
to shouting out the weather and trifling cures for head lice,
to recipes for scouring sinks and haggling over prices,
to meddling with a pretty girl's fall from grace?

The gods, I know, will always speak in riddles,
which we may never understand.
But must I scribble down this silly hinny's chatter
to catch at the divine wind?

Astyanax in Dactyls

Hiding in bellies of airplanes, the wicks of their eyes soaked in petrol, the Argive terror come once again with the dawn bloody-fingered and wearing white helmets of tusks stitched together like dominoes made out of shiny-toothed boars, the blind killers, to topple the topless two towers in a frenzy of fire the city of commerce and industry, boulevards, subways, and tony boutiques in an orgy of butchery, huge broken knuckles of gashed stone and spears of plate glass tall as Trojans, the vast bloody cakes of red flesh raining down in a glutting of swords while the knees of the towers were buckling, the Hudson become once again the Scamander still burning, the sacrifice billowing up to the ravening skies of Manhattan.

Those

breakers of horses some two hundred fell from the floors of the towers to
graved paving stones: Some were pushed by a crush at the windows, some blinded by
smoke smut too stupid to know they had come to the edge, and still other ones
leapt for their lives to their deaths, choking better to drown in the air than to
drown in the wash of the suffocate petrol. Some jumpers held hands as they
drafted down. Friends? perhaps lovers? or two who had shared the same cubicle
twenty-three years without saying hello but determined that though we must
die by ourselves they would not die alone. And the pimply-faced red-headed
boy from the mailroom too shy till this moment to speak to her takes by the
hand the plump married young mother of two from the Bronx and through snagged teeth
whispers her, "So it is time. Shall we go?"

Videos show these lost

fallers of Ilium drifting down raglike or fluttering excited, some playing at somersaults, aerialists frolicking each in performance (though one woman modestly holds down her skirt to prevent it from splaying in-decently). Each of them woke by himself to the nightmare of gravity, rush of an ear-wincing wind as he tore through the awnings of sidewalk cafés, each torpedoed, and burst through the windy black pavements of Troy and to blackness forever, there fallen or thrown by the Argives debauched in their carnival killings the sirens' hosanna from Patrick's Cathedral, the tocsins exhausted.

But one from the clouds of the ninety-fifth floor in the office of Marsh and McLennan, professional services, stepped off the window ledge so nonchalantly he might have been strolling through doors of a lift. Of all those who fell terrified plunged from the towers that day only he understood that a falling must fatally follow the building of towers, that even the towering father whose horse plumes will frighten us into the bosoms of nurses and wives, knew that even he falls and becomes but a chine of raw ox-meat, his wounds kisses puckering from sharp lipsticked spears and the killer with Greek eye-slits drags him around and around the two towers behind an orange bulldozer dead.

There was nothing so routine as rising that day from his desk, to collect all his papers, to walk to the window as if to remark that the weather looked ominous, step on the

ledge and to fall through the atmosphere, fall without fireman's net or the webbed net of fate fixed to catch him, he catching an image reflected in glass of the towers a boy who had fallen from the sky like a dying young god who was Troy's other hope.

What did it matter that children are casualties, paying the tax on their father's mad vanities? What did it matter the boys his own age with whom he had been playing just yesterday baseball upon the acropolis lawn, those two brothers Thymbraeus and young Antiphantes entwined in the knots of sea pythons because their old man had called Greeks Greeks?

What did it matter the bitch pathological liar with barbed wire hair who had screeched out that bloody Achaean hearts beat in the bellies of planes, who were hopped up on poppers, cantharides, pills, that among them the son-thirsty son of the man who had dragged the boy's father who screamed like an eagle had vowed to avenge his own father's weak tears in a moment of womanish sympathy, gotten of woman and woman himself but born mad to be brutal who found a new faith to give cause to his bloody psychopathy. What did it matter that she would be strapped to an altar by sweat-matted Locrians, greased with their spittle, and raped to the nub?

What did it matter that just before falling he saw in his dizzying eyes in a red New York harbor the burning of

water the thousand unsettled who followed like formicant insects with purpose one man who was bent under burden of piety, man on his back like a haversack, clutching the hand of a candle-capped boy, the man's wife left behind in the orgy of fire become a dead wick of black carbon returning to fetch her Versace hand bag, while he clutched in the other the *lares, penates*, the fond household gods of Algonquians and old Dutch patroons, Peter Stuyvesant? What did it matter the refugees willing to risk the horizon, the skyline was riven with masts while the spires of gods of that city were burning behind them, the falling man knowing that they too would build up their towers in other walled cities of wide lanes and tram cars, that they too would tumble down buildings in orgies of blood to be washed by the sea to the shores of new empires and knowing their impious jets too would cut the pale throat of the sky, that their hop-headed warriors would pry the veiled priestess to unholy shards and America forfeit its right to be tragic?

This was the man of all men who knew falling that towers will always be raised to be razed until history waves its last flag, its last widow dies clutching the medals her husband won falling on alien soil in the last sputtering war until, everything vertical made horizontal, the earth becomes flat yet again and its gods are all dead.

Would it have mattered if seeing him falling past stories a god interfering had reached through the greasy opacus of

ashes, had scooped him from air and then set him down gently in Smyrna two hundred or five thousand miles away in the fields of white clover and silos, of gambrel-roofed houses, the tilted green valley where Pleasant Brook flows through the veins of the poets to mix with the sludge of the Tiber?

Afterwards helmeted rescuers up to their eyes in the ashes of brokers, accountants, cinereous boys who had shuttled the lunch carts from story to story, the tarry mascara of blonde secretaries, the noisome black flies in the dead air of soothsaid September, men carrying corpses upon their bent backs like rucksacks, could not find him amid all the potsherds, the broken amphora with pictures of men running naked around and around a clay track or Odysseus laying his infant son down in the furrows before the bronze plow and the rebar of iron ropes twisted in bold and fantastical shapes, into hearts, crucifixes and writhing snakes flung from the talons of bald eagles, he having vanished to vapor and atoms.

How shall we plaster the hole in the sky where the towers once stood, shall we paper the hole that the man with his briefcase in hand while the wind was on fire with the swirl of our contracts and folders and pages of blank actuary reports fell so casually through because Troy never mattered?

Michael Eaton

Silence Is Quiet

When I attended
the poetry reading
at William Blake's
coffee house, no one
showed up; drinking
my caffe latte,
I rehearsed, under my breath,
reading magnificently
to a wilted white daisy
in a dirty green glass vase.

However lonely,
there were certain benefits:
no one to critique
or blow raspberries,
no anxieties, no stuttering,
no misreadings and
starting all over again;
imagining twenty appreciative
listeners, applauding loudly,
(no, make that fifty),
the music of one hundred
hands clapping, one hundred
trees falling in the desert
with no one to hear.

Uncentered

I've always felt a bit off-kilter;
not in the same world as others.
A child trying to seesaw with himself
while the others played on swings.
Afraid to go to church because
the congregation prayed for
the final Rapture of death.
I believed that prayers came true.

I always felt my nose was larger, that
I had on different colors of socks,
the right one brown and the left one blue;
as if the rear of my pants was torn,
as if my DNA came from alien worlds.
Perhaps I was a foundling
brought in from the forest,
having been raised by animals.

My thoughts stroll on different paths
than ones where others are jogging.
My hot air balloon is blown out to sea;
the rescue ship has sprung a leak.
I am locked in a space capsule when
it explodes, seeing only
blue sky, flames, and angels.

I should sneak off and hide somewhere,
before they realize there is a wolf
loose in their holy places.

Remembrances

They only exist in the
corners of the room now,
like repossessed spider webs,
the tenants gone,
unable to make rent;
dusty strands of silk,
fading threads of memory,
offering only glimpses here
and there, sneak reviews
of life already past, or recollections
of that bare sight of thigh
above a woman's stocking,
before she lowers her dress.

All things you do
become memories and
attach like mistletoe,
needing a host,
slowly draining you,
sprouting white berries;
lovely to kiss underneath,
but dangerous to eat.

Or, perhaps they are like
the wispy ends of dreams
as you awaken,
not telling the whole story,
but letting you remember
just enough to keep you
from going back to sleep.

Naked in Dreams

Poetry is just too damned embarrassingly personal;
airing your own dirty laundry in public,
or writing unpleasant truths about your friends,
praying they won't see themselves in the poem,
hoping they will see themselves in the poem,
trusting they won't kill the messenger.

Reading a poem aloud is like
coming out of the closet to your parents,
like standing red-faced in the bathroom
with your pants around your ankles,
like loudly breaking wind in the middle
of your onstage plie'.
Poetry doesn't always smell like roses.

The audience stares with blank gazes,
yelling, "Take it off. Take it all off."
looking for their money's worth,
wanting to see the poet's naked soul,
even when they know that souls are invisible,
even when the poet thought
he had it lit in flashing neon.

Poets will continue to be caught and embarrassed
putting their hands down unbuttoned blouses,
sneaking back in their windows late at night,
slipping the magazines under the mattresses,
trading quick kisses with other men's wives,
walking naked in dreams while others are dressed.

But, poets go on with their singing—
eccentrics in their own home towns—
with stains on their shirtfronts
and their flies unzipped,
wishing their voices carried better,
wishing for the silver tongues of gods,
reading poems with pebbles still in their mouths.

How to Start a Fire

Looking at you ignites
lust; you are dry kindling,
during a drought,
stacked underneath the wood
pile, carelessly left unguarded,
your incendiary qualities
quite forgotten by your
husband, a negligence
that allows homes
to burn to the ground,
destroying families inside,
batteries dead in their alarms
with no advance warnings
of the coming conflagration.
Fire burns in your hair
and flames play between
your slender fingers.

If we take the next step,
and lie in the next bed we find,
the mattress will alight
without a dropped cigarette.
Neighbors will flee the condos
in pajamas and bare feet,
as a blaze of red trucks,
bringing water and hoses,
siren their banshee wails
through the dark wet streets.

They will be too late.
There will be nothing left
but glowing red ashes,
the woody smell of smoke,
and exposed, scorched plumbing.

The inspectors will suspect arson;
they will pinpoint the flash point
of ignition, will discover the
images of two smiles melted
into the blackened sheets.

Lawrence Hayes

After a Ten Minute Silence for John Lennon, Snow

Just as the silence
in Central Park ended,

just as the heavens began
quilting our sighs—

rare moment of presence

on this nervous
bastard earth—

just then

from the sky
an empty silent sifting,

the kiss of a quiet
angel

who pities us our prayers,

white tears
setting down

on the cool bruised
cheek of the earth.

Walking the Earth

1.

A path curving
Into deep woods.

A silence so thick and ancient
it swallows trees as I go.

2.

The path twists
And thickens,

two-hundred year
hemlocks surround me,

a stand of native
beech saplings shiver.

In the darkest of these woods
I empty myself of seasons, turn

to the mute quivering lives
each silent step divides,

knowing myself neither
shunned nor needed here,

here in the depths
of a presence so strong

my breath is but a dampness
it takes back and gives,

a flower unfolding
each finger of grief,

unfurling in the mist
of whatever hush there was

before the earth knew itself
in my name,

before I walked these woods
carving myself in the wounds of an ancient tree,

relieved when finally the new healing
wood came to curl

over each slow
darkening letter,

knowing somehow it was
better this way,

wordless, covered,
walking the earth without a name.

Cousin Steve in Vietnam

for Steve Melnick

1.

When the full dressed
soldier showed up

at your mother Mary's
door that day

she lost God
in half a minute,

collapsed into
a grief so deep

the family priest didn't dare
meet her eyes.

2.

After the brutal burial,
after the empty echoes

of the gunshots
in the graveyard,

we reconvened at the house
where things quickly spun apart,

there being no center
to hold,

your girl bent
screaming in the kitchen,

animal anguish
so naked and pure

it stunned
everything into silence.

3.

At 22 you'd left
the States

like many your age,
never to return.

The sniper's bullet
took you

a week before
your tour was done.

In the only picture
we have of you from that place

you're grinning lightly in full camouflage gear,
a small monkey chattering on your shoulder.

4.

The black granite wall
in Washington holds your name now,

one among many
in the too long list of the dead.

Chiseled by human hands
your names will endure

perhaps a couple centuries
in the rain.

In the rain
another aunt, Eleanor, said

it looked as if the stone itself
was weeping.

Birth Song for Iris

1.

In the face
of such stark naked miracle

Your folks
must have choked

on the utter
wonder of it all

That moment
they first saw

you crowning
from your mother's womb.

The midwives
must have gasped

and danced in tandem
to your perfect beauty

that hour you first emerged
bloody and bawling

ultimate gift of the gods
themselves astounded

by all that pink
grasping flesh of yours

new blood-rich being
swimming startled into warm arms

Iris wet and welcome
Juniper there beaming in her own skin

2.

The cold hard world
can be set aside tonight

that old bitter Dylan
put on hold forever.

Instead from his tower
Leonard's calm hallelujahs

jai on endless repeat

your mama's sweet milk
spilling on your tongue.

3.

This morning you are the only
being here on earth

Your father's loveliest poem
dreamt at last into flesh

baby borne swaddled
in soft arms forever

your memory that song
your mother hummed you to sleep

in the womb all those nights
you tossed on your inner seas

your old dog Sophie finally settling now
with a grunty sigh on the front mat

her long watch finally done.

Melancholy

Autumn, of course
is its season, dusk
its time of day.

Anything fleet
and vanishing,
footprints

the red fox
etched an hour ago
in the morning dew.

It ripens into
the darkest of grapes,
into the deepest merlot,

sweet tears spilling
on the banks of regret,
that blessing you forgot
to give or receive.

Nectar of the poets,
empty nest still warm
in love leaving,
night train headed
through our bones in the dark.

Thumbnail moon
against a cobalt sky,
distant buoys tilting
to a foghorn out at sea.

All we love
or have loved in this life
tugging its sweet sad saxophone,

each riff a play
on time past
and time passing.

Late Prayer

Sometimes late at night,
lying wide awake
with you on the far edge of sleep,

all at once I feel your whole body
shudder, shifting through the slipping
transmission of dream,

as if something
deep inside of you
were breaking.

At times I get suddenly
frightened, pull myself
to you a little tighter,

wishing somehow
I could wake you
or pray,

or that, closing my eyes,
I might open some secret
other eye.

Sometimes that day in the rain
returns, and I remember thinking how
this should be enough—

the matted leaves shining on stone,
our history a small black cat
that shivers and settles between us.

Tonight, after work,
let's talk to each other,
huddled in the dirty afghan.

In the dim light let's close
the tired book between us,
imagine a new kinder ending
we'll work on tomorrow.

Daniel Sinderson

Glued Together then Burst Apart, the Pain Between Our Teeth

We wake together and see ourselves
as fractions, infinite geometries
boiled into ratios of space and time—
locked eyes, dawn-warmed sky,
i-love-yous from phlegm-choked throats—like a simplified bit of
crystal
where we hope to find a me and you and us,
but we know that somewhere else along this surface
a living dog is eating a dead one,
and somewhere else is our microwave
or uncountable stars choking on iron.
Even outside of time we are stuck here with everything else.
Even considering questions like ‘who is happier?’ and ‘what is true?’
living an examined life seems like a wash.
How can I live with you and love you and want you
while feeling dissolved—like Cantor’s Set or a sugar cube
drowned in black coffee. We wake together and see
how we become us
choking and in love
with a few bright slivers
and another clogged holy book paged with floods.

Snapshot Under Vesuvius

Chinese takeout half eaten.
Cat's head half inside the box

behind us. Bed sheets
crushed and messy. Fingers gripped
and cast in ash.

Our clothes tossed off as the sun cracked.
Lost for a moment. Then scorched.

Cracking Open, I think of Dido; Using My Flesh as Surface to Bind some Sense of Me as Mine in this

I saw it again, the drowning
everywhere. Inside, we are not one thing,
but an endless ascension of ever more total
disasters. We stay for
the show—the cheers the tears the bets—
like it's not our ribcage in this dream

between the sphinxes teeth. A few years
between psychotic breaks and counting. I hear

those words too loudly sometimes—echoed through the theater
until my ears grow claws, until I want to eat the world away and
into me
except I am already full and leaking and finished
with all those hallelujahs from the back row.

Imagine that you and I are alone
like everything else. Imagine that the water is high
above our heads in a wave. Imagine everything

is a shrieking mouth, a light, a blade, a perspective
crawling past the shadows into snow.

Like a Bit of Harp and a Far Off Twinkle

I'm told it happens all the time
in Heaven after the parades pass—our hands

sucked up into prayer, our organs
opened or replaced. That's where

the music comes from—not harps,
but all that living caked up inside us

cut out and torched each morning.
The newbies enter freshly scorched,

not knowing yet that rapture means
a careful and eternal incineration.

Even in Heaven, death is routine.
As here, where the sun dries us out.

Where we smoke too much and
lose our voices and our fathers

lose themselves
one popped cell at a time

where we wrinkle and burn
and scream and cut ourselves

out of ourselves—half wild half nothing—
and all the knives and gas and radiation

ever do is simmer against the edges
of each fresh day as we smolder.

Those Tooth-Bright Lights Ahead of Us

From something sharp in us, our eyes water.
Our mouths open, our throats quake

a few cracked sentences to keep
these flimsy cities of ours from starving.

Still, we're no good
as singers. What held us is leaving.

What holds us
today seems much the same. Lost time,

old skins, everything slinks away
until all that's left is a summer's eve of fireflies—

wet nights walking
through brush, chasing wisps

to catch a bit of light in our hands
and crush it—streaking guts

beneath our eyes, like burst stars;
killing for a symbol in the night.

Sam Hersh

Las Trampas / The Traps

as if by chance
you are drawn down a whisper path to a forest cove
where a strand of vertebrae marks the entrance
to which crows anticipate trespass

and there in a hollow
lie cream-colored catkins
wild rose hips awash in miner's lettuce
oyster mushrooms ripe with maggots
hazel buckeye black oak bay
and ways blazed
by foragers

don't go there

even now, amanita ocreata
destroyer of what was and is
craves your kiss

don't go

she will tempt you in twilight
to kneel on a pillow of death and duff
and reap overtures of golden chanterelles

don't

*be still
very still*

still, you won't see it coming

Meme Quarantine

Remember
that time when
I thought outside the box?

That's a great question.
So glad you asked.

Let me help
unpack that for you.

Basically,
it's technical, isn't it!

Not so fast.
What he just said, not so much.

It's like, truth be told,
trending now.

Trust me, you people.
That said, say no more. Right?

Black Bread, Rye

I nearly forgot how sour salt caramel
crust and crumb can lap the tongue
or how caraway and wild spikes
of fennel can seed a grin.

I hadn't savored that black bread, rye
from who knows where
since butter churned, someway
south of Houston Street.

The month after mother died,
my son baked bread that obeyed gravity,
my daughter rekindled ancient grains
and my wife drew back the curtain.

Winter fell, we took note,
blindly tasted and closed in,
on a collision course with an elusive hearth,
bygone, though not forgotten.

A good story ends
with sheaves of wheat or slashes
that score the surface, living proof,
maker's marks.

We give rise, break bread
and leave the pointed end
for someone in particular.

Do Not Disturb

Darling, please wait
until rap rusts out,
Reali-TV is wrong, gone
and Cryogenic Relaunch goes 2.0.

I can wait until euthanasia
bears your imprimatur
so don't be a brick shy
 more rest will do me good.

Before waking me,
cue that Bach cantata
you know, the one
we played, come Sunday.

Best wait and wonder where or when
the here and now became the there and then.

Going ...

after David Alpaugh's double-title form

Just as I came up
on the inside
of a fleet-footed thought
a honeymoon of a poem
segued by

going easy, casual as a coyote
vanishing at the crossroads
scribbling something
it chanced *upon*
along these lines, then

... Gone

Margo Jodyne Dills

Babies and Young Lovers

Babies and young lovers
kiss in much the same way.
Open mouthed
receiving
full of love
and willing to
take in everything.
When does the face seal up
to stop the flow?
Why do we become guarded,
judgmental?
We begin life,
love
and lust
with submission,
rolling onto our backs,
exposing the soft flesh of our bellies.
Then we turn to jade,
slowly,
a process that involves
little murders
and colored lies.
We die,
tightlipped,
underwhelmed, secrets buried;
our goodness tied up in old photos,
winners' ribbons,
perfume tainted with age.

The Fruits of Life

My skin betrays me in its apathetic rage
While I face my future with a sense of doom
I cannot deny although I detest my age,
I'll hold beyond arm's length the sight of tomb;
Though witness conceited youth with heaving sighs
And those I nurtured at now withered breast,
Weary sit with elbows propped on tired thighs;
Watch while autumn sun drops in the west.
Some think and perhaps are right that I am mad
But I think suffer from a simple case of blues;
Cast away all things laced, buttoned and plaid,
Shuffle to meet you in my orthopedic shoes.
Make one thing clear, Ponce de Leon must not fail
To send me drops of elixir in the mail.

Bouts-Rimes constructed as a Shakespearean sonnet, anagrammatically using Frost's The Silken Tent.

I Am White

I am white.

You are also white.

But you have a palette of colors I do not have.

We all come from Mother Africa but you have precise genes to document your claim. Mine have been washed away over decades, centuries, travels and time.

Danish butter rolls through our veins, you and me, and you have Norwegian, making you more of a Viking than I.

Your skin is the color of honey . . . well made bread . . . fine sand, ground to softness by tides controlled by the moon.

My skin is old now but when I was younger, it was taut and inflexible. Now it gives you something to tease me with.

You were born blue. Your eyes were black like the depths of an underworld cave, and sparkling like an ancient fire.

You turned pink within moments of your arrival and later began to take on the tone of an Egyptian Queen.

We are Cherokee, you a little more than I, making you braver, more stealthy and able to lean into the wind.

We are French, English and maybe a wee Irish and German. We are many hues.

In our bones, we have the ability to break chains, sail tall ships, write ghazals of love, wipe tears off the face of defeat, leap in the name of victory, count stars and follow comets.

We are connected, like a fragile feather to a mighty wing.

We are the threads of a tapestry and we are here to protect the colors.

For Mila Simone

I Saw a Friend of Yours Today

I saw a friend of yours today;
He called to me across the way.
He doesn't know my real name
But I answered just the same.
It wasn't 'til I walked away
That I thought of what to say.
Isn't that the way it goes?
When caught up in surprise hellos.
I wonder: what with good intention
If he will think to mention
That he saw your old friend today
And called out across the way.
You'll know it's truly me he saw.
He said my name with his usual awe;
The cryptic name that you once used
So you couldn't be accused
Of knowing what I'm really called
That was simply not allowed.
I could have said to say hello
But then I thought of long ago;
The way in which we said goodbye,
And so it was I could not lie.
Goodwill greetings I could not send
Brought to you innocently by your friend.
Let him say he called my name
And then perhaps he'll also claim
That I am well and looked good, too
And did not say hello to you.

The Secret Life of Jasmin García Guadalupe

Halfway down the steps close to the church
behind the *mercería*
where she bought thread in late afternoon
after she tells *papi* her stockings need mending,
Jasmin García Guadalupe
spreads her skirt into a fan,
folds it across her behind
first left, then right,
this for a little cushion
keeps her tender skin
from the dusty, cracked cement.

Her lips gather the corner of one small plastic bag
filled with water, nectar, *jarabe*,
sucks like a baby.

Leans her cheek on warm rough wall
watches buses rumble below,
going places she will never know.
Jasmin García Guadalupe
dreams of a seat
in the window
of the big blue bus . . .
Jesus painted on the back
arms spread wide
oversized palms
with rusty centers.
Jasmin would say
if anyone asked her
that the Bus Jesus says
“Why follow me?”
eyes rolled up to heaven
oily black smoke blowing out his feet.

Lovers steal kisses in shadows;
Señora Diego leans out her window, pulls at her moustache;

niños plucking mangos over a broken fence . . .
juice runs down their chins, between fingers,
laughing, cussing, shoving, “*Ánimo!*”

Ignacio makes the knees of Jasmin García Guadalupe tremble;
bent weary, he comes up the stairs,
work shirt thrown over shoulder
dangling from wiry hanger
he keeps it spotless 'til he gets to the sizzling café.
Ignacio's undershirt with soaking armpits
so white the sun lives in it.

He comes to where the girl sits
whose father would like to kill him
and stops to find his breath.

“You are the delicious peach.
I think to sink my teeth into your skin.
I think to lick your seed.”

Ignacio passes,
Jasmin shivers,
church bells clang.

Nicole Anania

In Secret

My mother ran her fingers through my hair,
fever coating my cheeks, sweat beads at my hairline.
She dispensed cough drops and bandaids,
a cool hand against my forehead.
She was an open pair of arms,
a soft chest to bury my face in.

If she cried it was in secret,
in the early predawn hours,
as we slept in twin beds.
Behind the closed bathroom door,
beneath the roar of the toilet.
If she cried it was alone,
in the small moments,
between drop and pick up,
homework and dinner,
laundry and dishes.

Now my mother cries in the supermarket
between the aisles of canned soup and bathroom cleaner.
I stroke the hair she carefully arranges,
trying to hide its precipitous loss.
But still, slivers of white scalp cut through,
like thin fish in a dark river.
Her back curves, arms swinging down too heavy to lift.
I dispense cautious massages and little pills.
I help her undress,
slight movements making her shudder.

If I cry it is in secret.
If I cry, it is alone.

I watch her chest rise and fall,
wondering when we switched places.
Never admitting,
I wish we could switch back.

Meat

Your skin is usually the color of roasted leather,
rawhide left to bake in the sun.
But suddenly the light switches off,
the soft husk sapped of its warmth.
Your small, sweet gut disappears,
your stomach flat and sallow.
The weight falls away,
an insidious symptom we only notice,
once the sharp lines of your skull
jut out, like mountain ridges.

Check the gums.
The computer screen glows,
white rectangles reflected in my pupils.
Pale gums spell doom.
Blood trickling somewhere,
incessant and slow,
a leak in the basement.
You clutch your side,
violent spasms twisting
your shrivelled face.

When they find it,
a mass hunkered down inside you,
silently expanding,
I imagine cells black and toxic
multiplying,
until you are filled with a vile tar.

The hospital is filled with an assault of smells.
Soiled bed sheets and dry meatloaf
linger below antiseptic and clean air
pumped through the building,
trying to cover up the sweet decay
of fresh flowers and inert bodies.
You are a twisted line in the stiff white bed,
and you nod towards a styrofoam cup
filled with tepid water

and a floating green sponge.
You are not allowed to swallow,
so I place the wet sponge
on your eager tongue,
watch you bat it around
your dusty mouth.
I am reminded of the horses at the petting zoo,
their long gummy tongues
maneuvering sugar cubes from my hands.
Pain wracks your skeletal frame and I think,
you are only flesh and bone,
a hunk of meat rotting away.

To the Dying Man's Daughter

When the chaplain enters the room
resist the urge to speak in tongues.
Resist the urge to ask him
where the fuck his God went.
Instead, let him place his broad palm
on your father's clammy forehead.
Let the soft, murmured words
cradle him to sleep.
Accept that this stooped stranger
is cutting up his veins,
pouring life into the vessel,
attempting resurrection.
Take in the blinding white collar
against the blackened cloth.
Think of a moving metaphor,
and write a useless poem.

When your cautious friends call you,
do not let your pain twist
into red-hot roiling rage.
Do not swallow their support,
like rotted fruit
you are trying to keep down.
In fact,
do not answer the phone at all.

When the morphine starts to do its job
and his burdened breath begins to slow,
do not think of when he carried you
on his sturdy, mountain shoulders,
of airplane rides on sunken couches
his smile widening below.
Do not think of playing catch
when the sunset turned him golden,
of painting birdhouses in summer
of the thin hand you are holding.
Do not think of long car rides
the wind blowing back your hair,

of cigarette smoke and chewing gum
the future far and fleeting.
Do not think of falling asleep
in the crook of his arm,
of feeling safe and sure and loved
of how it's all gone.

If you think of all those things
you will be crying too hard
and you will forget to kiss him,
even though you hate goodbye.
You must leave then
before they cover up the body.
You must remember
it is just a body.

Spider

Smoke curls in the orange street light
as your hand crawls up my leg,
a thick-legged spider
with a dozen black eyes.

Evaluating
the broken veins on my thighs,
the soft swell of my stomach.

Deciding
if I am good enough
to pin and devour.

I am praying you won't care,
about the acne scars and rolls of flesh.
Knowing that if you voice disgust,

I will push you off
with an outrage so pure,
its heat will pucker your skin.

I will wrap myself
in a blanket of contempt,

I will invoke the anger
of a thousand women,
deemed too ugly
to deserve decency.

Leave you on the porch
stung and unsatisfied,
while I stomp my way
up four iron flights,
the sound vibrating through my boots.

But as my door swings shut,
my fury will quietly dissipate,
until only slick shame remains,
like dregs
at the bottom of a glass.

So please,
don't run your rough fingertips
over the missed patch of stubble on my knee.

Don't sneer at the stretchmarks,
translucent lines that litter my whole body.
Please don't.
Because I've been here before,
and I'll be here again.

The Big Girl

It's hard to say when I started noticing
how much space I filled.
It might have been a revelation
brought on by a collection of disgraceful moments.
Squeezing through the maze of a crowded restaurant,
pressed between chair backs,
blood rushing to my cheeks
as I knock a glass off a table.
Twisting out of clothes
beneath the hot lights of a dressing room,
trying to free myself,
like a trapped animal.
On the outskirts of a party
magnetized to the wall,
holding my arms tight against my body,
willing myself to shrink.
Being big
you're both invisible and conspicuous,
your form calling attention
and then dismissing it.
They assess you
and then look away.

I lose pounds
and suddenly people don't look away.
They look me right in the eye.
Suddenly people are a little kinder,
their smiles last a little longer.
They don't believe I was that big.
Their mouths drop open,
putting on a show of shock and awe.
Wow, they say.
You look so good now!
It goes unsaid
that the big girl
would not have been their friend.

At first I don't notice,

the shadow that follows me.
Its edges extend too widely,
threaten to swallow me whole.
The big girl follows me,
and sees all the people she will never talk to,
all the fun she will never have.
Guilt chokes me even as I laugh,
and pose for a photo.
The big girl pinches me,
stunned and betrayed.
The big girl was never in a picture,
pouting in a filtered selfie,
grinning in a group shot.
The big girl is behind me,
breathing down my neck.
She whispers,
Isn't this what you wanted?
But I didn't think it would feel like this.

Like the big girl in the corner locked eyes with me,
and I looked away.

Lisa Zou

How to Begin a Song

Begin with sight: the electric blanket of a sky in the seconds before a storm. This time you leave the umbrella at home, surrounded by the antiques your grandmother left; you learn to knit scarves. *The whole day through, just a sweet old song.*

Begin with smell: the blood vapor of rusting metal. How you can sense dust before it exists. The earthy aroma of old bookstores; the essence of a child's room. This time you'll forget to spray the perfume on your jacket, leave the door open.

Begin with sound: the sewing machine's melodic hum, the light switch in his apartment. The crackle of thunder, the buzz of bees with Sinatra in one ear, and Elvis in the other. The spilling of apologies. This time you won't listen. *Georgia.*

Begin with touch: the structure of the human body—the way skin becomes a rainbow of pink, purple, green. How your veins stretch like roads, bumpy and convex. The viscosity of honey, the weight of wrapped vinyl records.

Begin with taste: the syrup of summer, the lemons you saved for winter—now overripe! Oh, the bruised peaches—how nothing worth keeping will last. The snow does not show signs of melting and you knit. *The road leads back to you.*

Forget the distance between the missed and the mist.
This begins with you—my road has always led back to you.

Fission

You grow a beard, check the mirror,
notice you are forty years old, the next
morning, you shave it off, find you are
sixty. But life is like that, suddenly
everyone you know is dying and they
still visit you with your back turned to them.
One day, you took the school bus
and you earned a gold star for answering
the last question right. Now, the nurses
on night duty ask you *something* which
you can't open your mouth and respond to.
All you know is that someone switched
off the light and you don't know how.

Under the Parlor

Under the Q-switched laser, the dragon
blisters from skin to dough. The navy blue

having stayed with me for decades—
I got inked too young, too full of hell.

How the lines resemble
well trodden roads, now burned by the

side of banana peels and the newspapers.
How the therapist said I was a slave

to perfection, suggested I wear
my mistakes like a crown.

If

The boy took
the other road and
stopped by
the bookstore and

purchased a book—
of any cover. The man
he would have
become is now dead.

Blind Mammal(s)

Scientists in Honolulu have uncovered
a primeval tortoise long alleged as extinct.

The blessed creature stumbled out of my sink
in the company of toothpaste patches

and last Wednesday's soap suds but
now this no-eyed sea resident with three fins

is on a trip to the lab in Maui, traveling on a boat
rather than below it. This morning, the newspaper

announced that he is not native; how many miles away
from his motherland we clearly cannot fathom.

Hazel Kight Witham

The Week Before

Tonight we shimmy galactic
under strung constellations
beside fertile citrus
the desert a kind of starship
flinging us far from all we know
our tiniest torments
all we've left behind:

the boy, three years old,
the one we longed for
over two long years of clockwork trying

and then,
~can I say it?
when the crush
of parenthood smothered all,
how we forever longed to escape him
for just
a breath,
a minute,
a small visit to the old life
we were so determined to leave.

This desert night we shimmy, sway, swing,
and I pretend
the globe of my belly
full of a surprise second baby
is meant for
dance after dance
songcall summoning me to my feet
again, again, one more
even as my lungs are broke with bursting

six months is still babymooning time,
six months is still second trimester,

all energy and fine,
so much time still left
you have to
shake it while you can.

My man and I,
the new life before us
a new world between us
slung dizzy with orbiting only each other
for this one night when we are
fearless and wild
manic and mischievous
summoning the teenagers we once were
those kids who never met
until out here, all night,
broke with bursting,
like there is nothing to lose.

Hoofbeat Heartbeat

These four days are crowded and lonely
nurses quiet chaperones to a new world
I am citizenized into, restrained by

thick tape pinchpulled over IV needle
oxygen monitor jawsnap on my big toe
legcuffs inflating to remind blood to flow
blood pressure cuff sighbiting
on its own accord first every fifteen,
then thirty,
then sixty minutes

All feeding the story of me, of us
to monitors that remind me regularly
of how my body is failing us both—
my swimming boy and me

Belly circumscribed by the fetal monitor
forever slipping from the spot where
it can listen in on the loping gait
of my tiny boy's frantic heart

I learn to adjust it myself before the
nurses rush in to find the song of him again
I learn to heave
my beached broodmare body alone

when his heartbeat slows
because if I don't they will do it for me
fevered and fast,
turnover turnover turnover othersideothersideotherside!!

I want to listen
because I need to know he is here

and so the soundtrack of these four sudden days
is the *bah-bum, bah-bum, bah-bum*
of his fast foal heart,

and I close my eyes and listen to him
hooves pounding some beach
we will someday run

bah-bum, bah-bum, bah-bum
a promise, a presence, an *I'm here*, and *I'm fine*
sure and steady most of the time

those hoofbeat heartbeats
that doubletime mine

the only thing that offers
any kind of comfort
in the empty open night.

First Visit

My feet braced on silver flips
my legs covered by hospital issue cloth
my sore everywhere body
still leadened by that
miracle metal magnesium
because, they say,
for two days after birth the risks increase

We twist through the halls
and we buzz for entry
into a hushed place
where I first stop
and stoop at a sink
peel back a sterile soap sponge
little plastic scrubbers
made to make me clean

two minutes I brace
new-seamed, scar-tugging
hunched against the pull and pain of it
watching a clock tick down
the seconds until I'm done.

Clean, seated again,
they push me in to the open-air pod
four babies four-cornered in the space,
he is in the back corner
beside a big window
that offers a view
that should not soothe:
a building,
all twisting pipes and mammoth machine
spitting steam into the dark night
as here, all around me,
space-age monitors attend to
the story of too-tiny babies
in numbers and sounds

and then

there

he is

closed in his new womb
bathing under violet lights
they say his skin needs to adjust
eyes cloaked by gauze sunglasses

all of him so tiny

my body clenches at the sight
so skinny, swathed in only
a diaper the size of a dollar bill,
too big for this tiny life

and oh, the lines:
through his nose,
into his arm
patch monitors sticking to thinnest skin
ET O2 toe glowing red,
a tangle of modern medicine
so different from soft simple swaddle

he sends a shatter through me
all over again,
and when I am told I can touch him
I am electric with fear

but I open the latch
to the portholes
of his small ship

I talk to him
and hope it's true about voice,
that they know it from always,

and I reach into the warm cocoon
scar-stretched across my
own aching skin
to touch
dark damp hair
wonder-soft over spongy skull
all of him still forming
my whole hand
cupping across
the small globe
of all he is

My other hand finds his wildly
precise feet, the biggest part of him
all one and a half inches,
toe tips tiny rosepearls
and I press, gentle and still

and so

here it is

our first embrace
my arms bracing against ovals
my head leaning against plastic
my heart trying to leave my body
to enter that small humid universe
where everything

suddenly

is.

how to become unraveled

cut your seroquels in half
those pills that quelled
sleeping beasts
but made you sleep
just too deep
when rising at 3 am
has become part of your day's
unceasing song
and you thought you'd
give your broken self
a little more pep
in the thinly threaded
night hours
when no one is up
but you
and the unquenchable thing
you strap yourself to
eight times each day
to make milk
to bring to the tiny baby
you only see
when you visit
the locked ward
for a clutch of hours each day
where he lays
every day
since he came
three months early
untangle the knots
and count the days
he's been there
—53—
count the days
until he comes home
—no one knows—
count the ways
your life no longer
knows you

untie all of it
stack the to-dos
til they tower before you
and your stomach
twists new knots
and your body
won't have sleep
it shakes you awake
to shake hands again
with that old
undoer anxiety
and you know
you know
you should probably
be under the care
of an expert in these things
before you go
halving your pills
but its all so tangled now
and you can't imagine
how you'd unfurl the mess
to some expert
and it's been so long
since you were in
your own locked ward
that you've earned the
title of expert now
but a baby—
especially one that comes
three months too early
and just in time
all one pound, ten ounces—
can do things
to unravel
the knots of a ladder
you so methodically tied
you are the expert now
and you aren't sure
you'll listen
to someone who

cannot hold all the threads
anyway
and besides,
you tried
you made an appointment
they just didn't have one
for three months
three days after
his original due date

and So

you gather the threads
in those
fraying indigo hours
and braid them again
into something
that might hold
and hope
to hold on
until then.

Margaret Dawson

I See the Future in Your Mouth

There in the X-ray—your five-year old skull
a premonition of itself in the grave.
Behind each milk tooth the grown ones loom,
Tombstones askew, vying to be first to break
the gum line and mark the lost babies with no remorse

for making crooked the clean straight rows
measured as the meter of nursery rhymes
that trilled across their white surface.
Pressing your tender-smooth cheeks
I try to feel the harbingers of adult-hood,

of the cutting ahead, some ghost braille
cells that spell your story, code I
cannot read. More solid than flesh they will lie
with you long after I stop sharing your pillow.
They will shape the words you form

your life with, language I only hope to understand.
Unkind reminders, lucky gatekeepers
of your breath. They will know you—
blood and bone, better than I—I who grew them in you
while you grew in me—
they will guard your secrets, daughter, cradle to grave.

The Cert

My grandmother's blue raincoat takes me by surprise
Here is her closet behind dry-cleaner's plastic, the rip
In the pocket finally fixed. I remember her eyes

Finding me crouched behind the darkness of her perfumed
dresses, my lip
Bit, eyes clenched (instantly invisible), broken beads ready to rain
From my clutched hands. But, innocent now, into the cuff I slip

My hand to find her—smooth nails, rings, the pillowy veins
She hated, wishing gloves still a must in ladies fashion. I tear
The clear sheath and look for missed stains

That might map the course we traveled—that root beer
Spill from lunch at Friendly's is now just shadow.
I press my face to the wide lapel but don't find her there

Either. Guiding my arms through the sleeves—too short—though
In the mirror I make her move again, feel her low
Voice in the warmth of the upturned collar,
In the pocket, a Cert, half-way to powder.

Daylily

I inspected the buds at night with my dad
to see which might bloom by morning.
Still I was always surprised by the red
or peach that burst forth from the heart
of the blossoms and enlivened the quiet
green bank. We made sure to get a picture;

they were only there for the day, but the picture
would last much longer. You think of becoming a dad
when I come home today as we sit in the quiet
kitchen smiling. You make toast in the morning,
ask how I feel, say you love me with all of your heart.
I laugh at your doting and ask for the red

raspberry jam, but you say there's no red
only black. I look at my belly, try to picture
how it will pop out and how the little heart
beat will get strong. I've been watching, like my dad,
for the daylilies, but it's early yet, only May this morning.
The green swords protect the roots, but the top's pursed lips are quiet.

I leave the radio off and enjoy the quiet
drive to work. The coats of the thoroughbreds
steam; the rain has hushed the morning.
At lunch I go to the library and leaf through picture
books, ones I had as a child. A young dad
guides the scissors as his daughter cuts a heart

from pink paper. *It's an I Love You Heart*,
she beams to her father, forgetting the rule about quiet.
He puts a finger to his lips, and I see you as a dad.
In the bathroom I find a bright red
has filled the bowl. At the doctor's they scan another picture,
but there is no longer shows the pulse of the first morning.

The blood comes heavy in the night, and in morning
you're still awake by my side. I lay my head on your heart,
am soothed by its beat. I think of the small paper picture

and the glowing shape that was its center. I stay quiet,
hold my hand to my belly and wait. We watch the red
blossom on the sheet; *Someday, you'll be a great dad.*

I remember the morning you thought you'd be a dad,
a picture of the future as clear as the coming red
or peach daylilies, before the heart went quiet.

James Wolf

An Act of Kindness

We are not who we say we are. We have severely failed to provide anyone the opportunity for fulfillment. Stethoscopes, ballet slippers. Crayons, pastels, and fingerpaints. A floor riddled with exit wounds, the foundations quenched by spilled milk. Ironically, you can't hear all the shouting pouring out from the four walls of this tiny universe. He said, she said, she pushed, he fell, no he didn't—bit by words more fanged than the mouths from which they came.

I'm starting to mistake our voices for gunshots. Please stop pulling so many triggers at once.

We take small steps. Less like who we say we are, less like who we should be. Unsteady if we're lucky, fumbling backwards, awkward and accidental. Still no control over the momentum we generate for ourselves, surprised by all the tumbles (seeing the forest for the upside down trees might be all the perspective we're going to get).

I have propped myself up on siblings who might still be bruised from my own growing pains. I have fashioned spare limbs from the words of friends who indulge me in moments of nonsense. Today, in the tenuous safety and dusty nebulae of four walls, I tried to put on McKenna's coat (she's two; she loved it). Tomorrow, I'll teach an eight year old wrist locks. There may be bruises. There will never be shouting. We are more than that. That's not who they deserve to be.

And that's not who I will let them become.

Monument

Dear, (and from the start, written with too much heart, a clumsy greeting, and the deepest sense of don't in his chest)

I wish you'd stop reading books like crystal balls as if they could foretell your future. As if the crinkled mirrors they contain aren't worth gazing into (look at all that gorgeous lettering—you could mistake the lines of your face for typography). Your reflection should fall apart at the monument you are, despair whenever you walk away. Most people don't remember what wild, wonderful faces they made seeing how beautiful they were for the first time, but somehow we grow up learning that our only value lies in our reflection? Who looks at ANYONE and thinks *well, aren't you hideous?* Listen (and when I say listen, I mean you steady your shaking everything, twist your expression into something uncomfortably spectacular, like your first reflection, and find this letter like a mirror).

When I say every experience
is the same kind of overlap you find
in all of those pages you turn.
You offer up so much of yourself to their pleas,
and they need you to forgive.
(What is forgiveness?)

When I say covering declarations
of your beauty
with too many adjectives
would weigh it down.

When I say this won't last. Every word is truth, regardless of your own admission or the escape routes you've considered. Those hollowed caverns in your chest stand on scaffolds. A lesser body would not carve out the walls of its own future, or push deeper in despite fear of collapse.

You are a monument.

To Tiger

You have thumbtack claws. A roar that travels in circles. Sometimes, simply standing near you is to place my head between your jaws. It's no metaphor—I've felt teeth. You wouldn't be the first to nip at a provider, back bristling for the contest as the two of us inch the volume up on our growls, snarling warnings and tweaking the slant of brows into granite intimidation. Yours is a force set to self-destruct as easily as it could demolish. A cub behind bars, steadily adding to a collection of scrapes both reckless and incidental. All that thrashing, all those tears.

Are you okay? You have thumbtack claws. I swear I see them dragging tallies through the dirt most days, trying to puzzle through a maze of steel wire. We all do it, or so I hope. Some scope out finish lines and sprint, others are heavy-footed with little foresight. You just had the 1 in 80 chance of being forced to navigate in the dark, not to mention the collision of echoes that comes with it. There are stretches—days, weeks—when they can only sit back and watch you take the same right turn over, and over, and over.

So there's whiplash. Eruptions. Things come to blows. I keep tripping on the line between hug and straitjacket.

“Tiger, stop!”

“Ooops,” the tiger says. “Tiger is sorry.”

Two beasts, mangled, panting, fur in knots. The linoleum is hard on both of us, emaciated as we look. Why doesn't this ever end up on the carpet?

“Read to tiger?” But tiger reads to me, and I find myself wondering which of us is more comforted in this moment, hoping that we are both stronger for it.

Nostalgia (Time and Teeth)

Count teeth like oak rings
dazzling,
mouth of a lion,
freshly satisfied
wide,
with all its heart set on showing off
what came before, or how much is left.

I dont really know if an extra year means much
until you get to the last one.
“Look at all the shit I should’ve done by now,”
hours questioned,
breath withheld.
Someone hasn’t given you enough attention.

Up until now, I’ve only been crawling. The arms shift, the
legs rock one after another, limbs so careful to keep you
balanced and on track. Someone put Big Bird on a coffee
table, six inches out of reach. He’s soft and grinning, and
that plush beak is teething’s best friend. Scratch that,
second best. The dog strolls by. Greetings in kisses.
Gaping, toothless jaws from the both of us, indulging in
sensory overload.

Hey, help me out here.

Watching, blindly
the clock at midnight.
And a voice that makes noise loud enough
for the ghosts of cathedral towers
to remind us
this day, we give it a lot of weight. That we aren’t
alive.
Not yet. I still have so much to do.
I’m getting old.
I’m too young to understand what that even means.

Death on the lookout,
vague sense of medical vigilance,
financial necessities,
who I have been,
and who I will be.

I spent a lot of time with that dog. Now I chew things
over longer than I probably need to. Before today, I had a
major at a university. Rewind some more, find me braver
than I know myself. (“Meet me here this afternoon. I’ve
got a surprise for you.”) Decisive moments, late nights
with friends (growing security in dank smells), sleeping
on roll-out mattresses with no a/c. Nostalgia is just the
reminder that we are already living. Ageless, beautiful rows
of moments strung together out of sequence like teeth lining
the jaws of a lion.

That grin alone forms lifetimes.

Jane A. Horvat

the sky is falling, LOUDLY

When I was hatched
my mom had to pick away the eggshells,
break the film between my oasis and the noise.
It were as if I knew beforehand how loud the world would be.
Even then, eagerness to be overwhelmed was not part of
my genetic makeup.
I had hoped my down feathers would muffle the sounds
or that my wings could carry me into
a vacuum of sorts.
Yet, one morning I woke up to the screech of
the rusty clipping shears
and knew I'd be walking to Radio Shack
to buy a pair of noise-cancelling headphones.
I wished for hearing aids
so I could have the ability to turn them off.
I learned to speak with my hands
so I could stop listening with my mouth.
Once upon a time
they asked me
"What came first,
the chicken or the egg?"
but that question is irrelevant
when you were born a chicken
but identify as a deaf-leopard
hiding behind her spots.

Same shit different day

Today I told myself,
“Hey, it’s just a day.
You’ll put on a white blouse,
Tuck it into your pencil skirt,
And catch the metro.
Some business man in an
Expensive suit will upend his
Gourmet coffee on your shirt
And grumble, exasperated,
About his bad luck
Without telling you he’s sorry
Because he doesn’t have time to be sorry
And you won’t have time to change
But you’ll stop by the Gap
And rip the closest cream-colored shirt
Off its hanger and it’ll be rung up
And on you before you realize
You needed to buy white not cream.”

All in all,
today could be worse.

But I sighed
because I told myself that yesterday.

Blank Stares Don't Create Fairy Tales

Is there a message to decipher or lines to read between
now that I've paused?

Before, everything was encrypted, sheaves of allegories lay strewn,
graphite and wood shavings littered the bottom of the basket.
I lived in tornado alley and new twisters swept through every
weekend.

I would hide in the cellar, tie myself to a pipe, and create.

Chaos and angst spurred the gradual bulge of my forearm muscles.
The cacophony of never-resolving arguments was my vinyl-encased
soundtrack.

I twirled 'round and 'round while maintaining the stunning lines
'rinas must keep
but only when the winds were whipping past at 70 mph or more.

I locked myself down there as limb-ripping gales tore through
foundations.

Countless scribbles left ridges on the walls, the floor, my eyelids,
everywhere.

Streaming hair fanned out mid-spin. Should've snapped photos it
was so picturesque.

Perpetual despair looked beautiful on me. Occasional pleasure
reapplied my rogue.

Now my mail arrives at a different address and contentment
accompanies me
as the rungs of the high-backed chair bitinglly remind me I'm
stagnant.

I no longer pursue the same utensils.

My creations would weep if they weren't already extinct.

Can't craft a code or spin a yarn woven with illusion, not when I'm
submerged in smiles.

What does that say about me?

My current queries don't spawn stories or sonnets, just a frightened
preponderance

of what this conundrum entails for a future in fairy-dust
and freedom.

Is it even worth pressing play if there is nothing to watch?

Psychedelic

When I find myself in the colors
I drown in a pool of lavender.
A pedophile skips stones
across the surface.
Each plop sends
a ripple of turquoise spreading out,
but when the jagged rock
scrapes my forehead, fuchsia
drips down the side of my face.
When the droplet collides with
the gripping lavender
a shimmering silver portal
opens and transports us,
the pedophile,
the Vacation Bible School group
decked out in matching
tangerine T-shirts,
and I
into a silent movie
where it's raining black and white
and my mauve screams
meet the dead air
and my head goes under
the grey water
while the pedophile's cream whistle
is meant to keep his mind
off the pink pigtailed
on my side of submerged Saturn.
Mint smiles turn towards
the smoothness of his distraction.
I notice them
with my violet eyes
and they pass over my flailing
until everything fades to black
and we are all just swimming
on opposite shores of Lake Eerie.

Pretty in P!nk

Looking in the mirror is how you and I play Russian roulette.
Looking over our shoulders is how we take a break from playing
dumb.

You twirl me around after to our wedding song,
But I'm wearing a blood-splattered negligée,
And you're sporting a ripped oxford and multiple stab wounds.

God, I hate how much I love you.

When people ask us how we're doing
We smile with our mouths closed and say,
"We're so much more than fine."
Never lying, just burning down and freezing to death in the same
breath.

We were smart enough
To avoid purchasing the glass house,
Despite the realtor's insistence of it having
The perfect backyard of sand and cacti.

We are not black and white picket fence people.
No, we are black and blue bruises people,
Pink and green-eyed monster people,
Purple hearts for bravery and run-through-every-yellow-light
people.

We continue to try even though we've gone colorblind.

Your embrace is holding a hand warmer
And drinking cinnamon whisky apple cider until
Your embrace is fire ants colonizing under my skin
And tequila torching me until I'm a charred mannequin.

I'd leave you so fucking quick,

But my embrace is snuggling under down blankets
And having no obligation to leave the warmth of our bed until

My embrace is a chokehold with a side of asphyxiation via pillow
And your throat is the acrid dessert awaiting the monsoons.

We break each other and then practice our tourniquets.

You rip my clothes off, emphasis on rip,
right before throwing me on our broken mattress
and kicking my legs apart.

You trail soft kisses down my belly
As I pull chunks of hair from your scalp
And leave claw marks on top of the invisible scars
From years of verbal abuse in our brick house.

I don't know why you haven't left either.

We sling insults over breakfast,
Throw dirty looks during lunch,
Play hot potato with pin-less hand grenades between dinner
courses,
And exchange kisses between bites of dessert.

I throw your clothes out the windows.
You throw chairs at the walls.
We throw our hearts down the garbage disposal,
And stand, front to back, looking in the mirror,

Wondering how we ended up here.

Bill Newby

Warning Light

(Waiting Room Notes during Auto Repair)

Whether on my side or back
with a half-height or full pillow
the warning light in my shoulder
fires at the lightest touch.

It glows in the dark before sunrise
and flickers as I roll out of bed.

I dress with caution,
open the back door with care,
and turn each page of the morning paper
with a newborn caress.

But regardless if I sit, stand, rush or stroll,
it pulses down my triceps,
across my elbow and into my wrist.

I'm scheduled for annual maintenance
but might need some tweaking sooner.

I hope it's just a bit of misalignment
or will respond to a quick lube.

I'm attached to the original equipment
and would rather not have to install
even the best replacement parts.

First Ladies at Ruby Lee's

The first ladies stay there all night.

Their skin glistens red near the Exit sign,
and their eyes lock on the lead singer
as if taking vows.

“You are mine, and I am yours.
Take me now. Take me please.”

The floor crowds with dancers,
but they hold their turf.

One hip-sways and leans
into a shoulder shimmy,
then back in a syncopated pause.

The other bounces
in search of each rhythm
that her feet never find.

The decades pass in familiar choruses,
as we rock in our seats
and lip-read comments.

Swirls of energy devour our waitress,
and Sports Center replays populate the screens.

Hands shoot to Love Shack thumps,
as dancers twirl, jump and swim.

But when others drop, wet and exhausted,
the first ladies refuse to sit.

“He’s got to see what’s in this dress,
and I’ve got plenty of time.”

Touring

We step off the bus
lugging the Ten Commandments
and the accumulated weight
of western civilization's struggle with brotherly love
tucked in our back pack
next to another plastic bottle
of cool, filtered, spring water.

Our Lowe, REI, and Merrell boots
provide arch support for our modern egos
and protect our feet from the dust, stones and debris
still lingering from Pol Pot's house cleaning.

Far beyond the moat,
backlit across the skyline of harsh mid-morning glare
lays the silent silhouette of Angkor Wat,
small, black, symmetrical lotus bulbs cut free from the jungle
to provide power for a tourist economy
annually outpacing last year's records.

Shaven, saffron draped, Buddhist monks
move wordlessly in the shadow of a neighboring pagoda
while we make electronic records of ornate stupas

then pause at the southern entrance for a group photo
before joining the flow of sweltering gawkers
walking the surrounding corridors

where thousands of patient artisans
chiseled stone reminders of the painful damnations
born of infidelity.

The actors wear different masks—
snakes, dragons, phoenixes and turtles,
farmers, fishermen, servants and soldiers—
but the plot is as common as yesterday's Times.

Our shirts cling and sweat oozes across our cheeks,
but our air-conditioned bus is nearby,
and we can wash before lunch.

La Cuisine Novel

Tonight's menu is freshly printed
on crisp ivory paper with a bit of weave,
and our waiter, Jackson, is pleased to be serving us
and will return in a moment to answer all of our questions
and get our drink orders.

The view from our seats by the window
stretches for miles across the Appalachians—
ridge lines and forest faces falling into hidden valleys,
mounds that say, “another, another, another”
and invite our imaginations to reach and roam.

And when Jackson returns,
we learn not only about his favorites,
but also the Italian village where Hunter, our chef,
honeymooned with his wife, Jewel.

Each dish is complex beyond belief,
but Jackson can walk us through each sauce
and around every chop, swirl, dip and dollop
that he describes as if watching an inner movie
that never fully projects on our screens.

And every dish triggers another story—
how Hunter experimented with Peruvian peppers,
butchering today's whole hog,
the ice cream sandwiches Jackson's mother awarded
so she could sleep when he and his brother rose early,
the punishing rainstorm last fall
when he first tasted Jewel's escargots.

The room rebounds with stories and laughter.
Glasses are raised. Silver is replaced.

We wait and wonder if our meal
will live up to the press.

Pre-Concert Rituals

The tree frog orchestra tunes up slowly.

They refuse to play in the lingering twilight
and concede the stage to barking dogs, passing cars,
the birds' ongoing conversations,
and a whistler baiting a hook for another try.

A distant ambulance wails its mission
and sings a fading aria in the wings,
but the tree frogs sit silently

and wait for the light to dim
and the breeze to take a seat
before they get going.

Jennifer Sclafani

This Is How Dreams Start

Without a proper beginning.
no curtain, no applause:

At a kitchen table, a father and son are arguing.
“How much does it cost?” the father asks.
Papa, we will not barter.
We will pay the rate like normal people.
“Normal people get the best value,” the father replies.
“Only a fool accepts the first price.”

In a bedroom, a wife nudges her husband.
“Turn on your side,” she groans.
“I can’t sleep while you snore.”
Sleep on the couch, then.
I can’t dream while I’m awake.

In a field, a bird catches the worm.
“Bring it home,” I tell her.
“Your babies are hungry.”
The bird doesn’t respond—
she takes flight
and I soar
by her side
into the sky
anxious to see
those tiny swallows—

Until my wingless body
catches up with my
weightless dream
and brings an end
to that which never began.

Speak Volumes

The words come to us
shouted by birds:
buzzards
not finches—
amplitudes
in feet
not
inches.

Mating calls hunt
primal fears
and
swallow
them
up
whole

then spit them out
into thin air,
vapor to smog,
dream
to
dust

like a silence that deafens the senses,
like the flutter of the monarch butterfly.

Hindsight Twenty Twenty

Was I a better teacher
when I couldn't tell the truth?
Was I a better lover
when I couldn't fall in love?
What did I do to earn the love
that made us one of two?
What must I undo to become
a mother for all of you?

The children sleep. I can tell:
their eyes, mouths, breath, heat.
They dream of dragons and octopus
and race cars chase their spindly legs
around their school yard world.

They wake me
after midnight
before my alarm:
I want to cuddle.

Without my glasses
I cannot see
where
the bed ends and where
the nightstand
begins or where my
glasses rest—
for only they rest tonight—
or whether they
are weeping
or giggling.

Never mind.
Come to bed.
How dare I waste these
wee hours?

What will I do
when I awake
from this day
dream
of you?

Mot Juste

To write in my native language,
If only I could remember what that was:

Vowels that floated fluidly, before I learned
Enunciation.
Sonorants that straddled song, before I learned
Distinction.
Words that were all mine, until I was given the
Right Words.
Simple truths I told, before I masked them in
Metaphor.

My voice, before the audience arrived:
Was it sweet or somber
full of wonder or worry
of the raven or the wren?

Courage in finding a voice,
or courage to look for sense
in the cacophony of the voices?

The fire from above and the fire from below
And the poem lies somewhere in between.

Contributor Notes

Jim Pascual Agustin writes and translates poetry in Filipino and English. He grew up in the Philippines and moved to Cape Town in 1994. He won the Grand Prize at *NoiseMedium* and the Gabo Prize at *Lunch Ticket*. His books include *Alien to Any Skin*, *Sound Before Water*, and *A Thousand Eyes*. His eighth book of poetry, *Wings of Smoke*, is forthcoming from Onslaught Press (UK). He condemns the murderous Duterte administration. He blogs at www.matangmanok.wordpress.com



Nicole Anania is a writer based on Long Island. She enjoys writing both short stories and poems, and is currently completing her MFA at Hofstra University.



Melissa Cantrell lives in Guthrie, Oklahoma with her wife, Stefani, and a passel of rescued dogs. She has worked in fields ranging from theatre arts to public service to animal rescue, but has always felt the stubborn tug of writing, and has continued scribbling words between bouts of earning paychecks. Thanks to the disordered tracks she's made so far, and a penchant for reading, she's a fantastic trivia partner.



Paul W. Child is Professor of English and Director of Graduate Studies in English at Sam Houston State University, where he teaches classes in literature of the long eighteenth century and the early English novel.



Martin Conte is a devoted citizen of Portland Maine, where he tinkers at writing, reading, walking, editing, and educating. His work has appeared previously in *Sixfold*, as well as in *Words & Images*, *Glitterwolf*, *Aurorean*, and others. The above poems are a part of an unpublished chapbook of “body” poems. Photo credit: Savannah Leaf.



Margaret Dawson teaches English in New York City. She lives there with her husband and two children. She studied literature and poetry at Columbia University and Middlebury College. When she is not teaching, grading, or shuttling the little ones about, she is working on a collection of poetry about the big meaning in the little moments.



Margo Jodyne Dills is a member of PNWA and Hugo House Seattle. She works as a guest blogger, editor, and travel writer on both sides of the border. She lives in Seattle and travels to her little home in Mexico as time permits. She stays busy working on a getting a novel published, writing poetry, dog-sitting and hanging out with her extraordinary grandchildren. Poetry is her passion.



Michael Eaton grew up in Littlefield, Texas, and ran around with Waylon Jennings little brother. He writes poetry to stay sane in a sometimes insane world.



Michael Fleming was born in San Francisco, raised in Wyoming, and has lived and learned and worked all around the world, from Thailand, England, and Swaziland to Berkeley, New York City, and now Brattleboro, Vermont. He's been a teacher, a grad student, a carpenter, and always a writer; for the past decade he has edited literary anthologies for W. W. Norton. (You can see some of Fleming's own writing at: www.dutchgirl.com/foxpaws.)



Debbie Hall is a psychologist and writer whose poetry has appeared in *San Diego Poetry Annual 2015-2016*, *City Works Literary Journal*, *San Diego Writers, Ink Anthology* volumes 5 and 8, *Serving House Journal*, *Swamp Lily Review* and *Tuck Magazine*. Her essays have appeared on NPR (*This I Believe* series), in *USD Magazine*, *The San Diego Psychologist*, and the *San Diego Union Tribune*. She is currently enrolled in Pacific University's MFA program in writing.



Lawrence Hayes is a writer, arborist, and deer fencer living in Pawling, NY. He studied with the poets Charles Simic and Mekeel McBride at the University of New Hampshire, where he received a Masters Degree in Poetry Writing in 1981. He has had his work published in *The New York Times*, *Water Street Review*, *Aegis*, and other small magazines.



Sam Hersh, a lapsed psychophysicist, lives at the foot of Mount Diablo, with his muse, Jan, and plays at beaches beginning with letters, SAN. By day he figures in the Valley of Heart's Delight. By night, he rewrites poetry, twists porcelain and refreshes lactobacillus sanfranciscensis to perfect sourdough. His poems appeared in The Ina Coolbrith Circle Gathering, *Monterey Poetry Review* and the *Scribbler*.



Jane A. Horvat is a poet and short fiction writer from Rockford, Illinois. An undergraduate student at the University of Notre Dame, she is pursuing a degree in English and Romance Languages and will be studying in Bologna, Italy for 6 months. She believes that the world's various truths are best expressed through creative writing, and she is currently working on a collection of poetry and short stories.



Alexandra Kamerling grew up in the Alaskan interior and currently lives in Oakland, CA. She is a writer, dancer, and choreographer. She received her B.A. from Mills college in English Literature.



Alexander McCoy lives in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts.



Bill Newby worked at Shaker Heights High School (Cleveland, Ohio) as a high school English teacher and administrator and at Cleveland State University as an academic advisor and instructor. He now lives near the ocean, golf courses and friends on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina. His work has been published in *Bluffton Breeze*, *Ohio Teachers Write*, *Whiskey Island*, and the Island Writers' Network's *Time and Tide*.



AJ Powell is a once and future teacher who raises her children, serves on a school board, and attempts to write in the wee hours of the morning with varied success.



Jennifer Sclafani is a sociolinguist who teaches at Georgetown University and conducts research on language, culture, politics, and gender. Her nonfiction has appeared in *Scientific American*, *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, and *Language in Society*. She is currently writing a book on the language of recent US presidential campaigns (Routledge, 2017). She lives in Virginia with her husband and twin daughters. This is her first poetry publication.



Daniel Sinderson is a high-tech mechanic and a happily married man. He writes often, deeply enjoys puzzles, still listens to punk music, and mostly wears pants out of consideration for others.



Hazel Kight Witham lives in Los Angeles with her husband and two young sons. She teaches English Language Arts in a big public high school, where her students offer constant inspiration. Her work has been published in *Rising Phoenix Review*, *FlashFlashClick*, *NonBinary Review*, and *Bellevue Literary Review*. She loves how poems can transform the smallest moments of her day into revelations, and help in the slow slog toward kid bedtime.



Aspiring teacher and sometimes writer, **James Wolf** was born in Anchorage but raised mostly on Maryland's eastern shore. He has a degree in Early Childhood Education and works as a teacher's assistant in a pre-kindergarten class, using the quiet of naptime as an excuse to write things in the dark. His work has been featured in "GFT Presents: One in Four" and, with some luck, will eventually find its way into more.



Lisa Zou currently studies at the University of Pennsylvania and has previously been recognized by the Poetry Society of the UK, National YoungArts Foundation, Sierra Nevada College, Johns Hopkins University, and Rider University, among others. Her writing is forthcoming in the *Lindenwood Review*.

