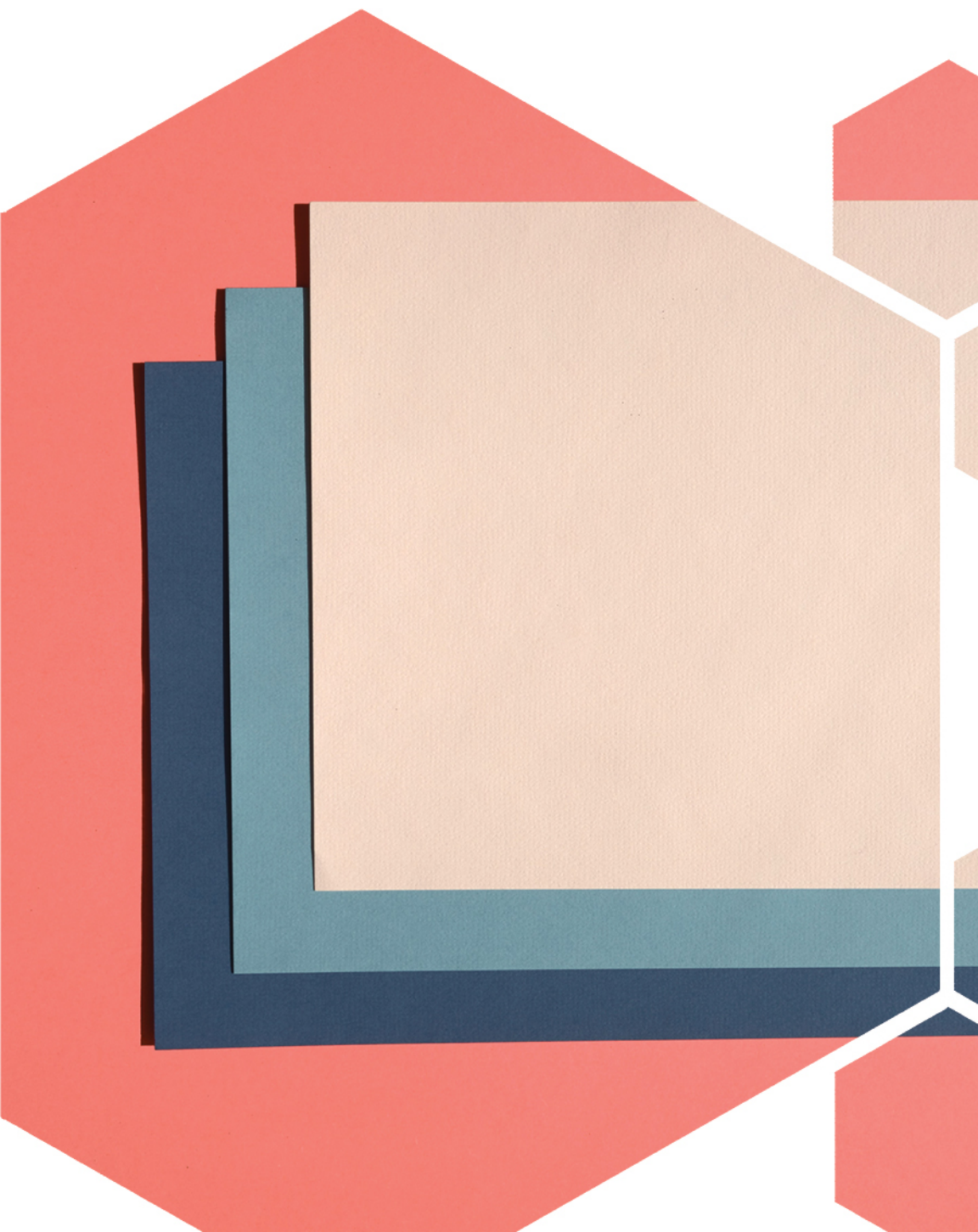


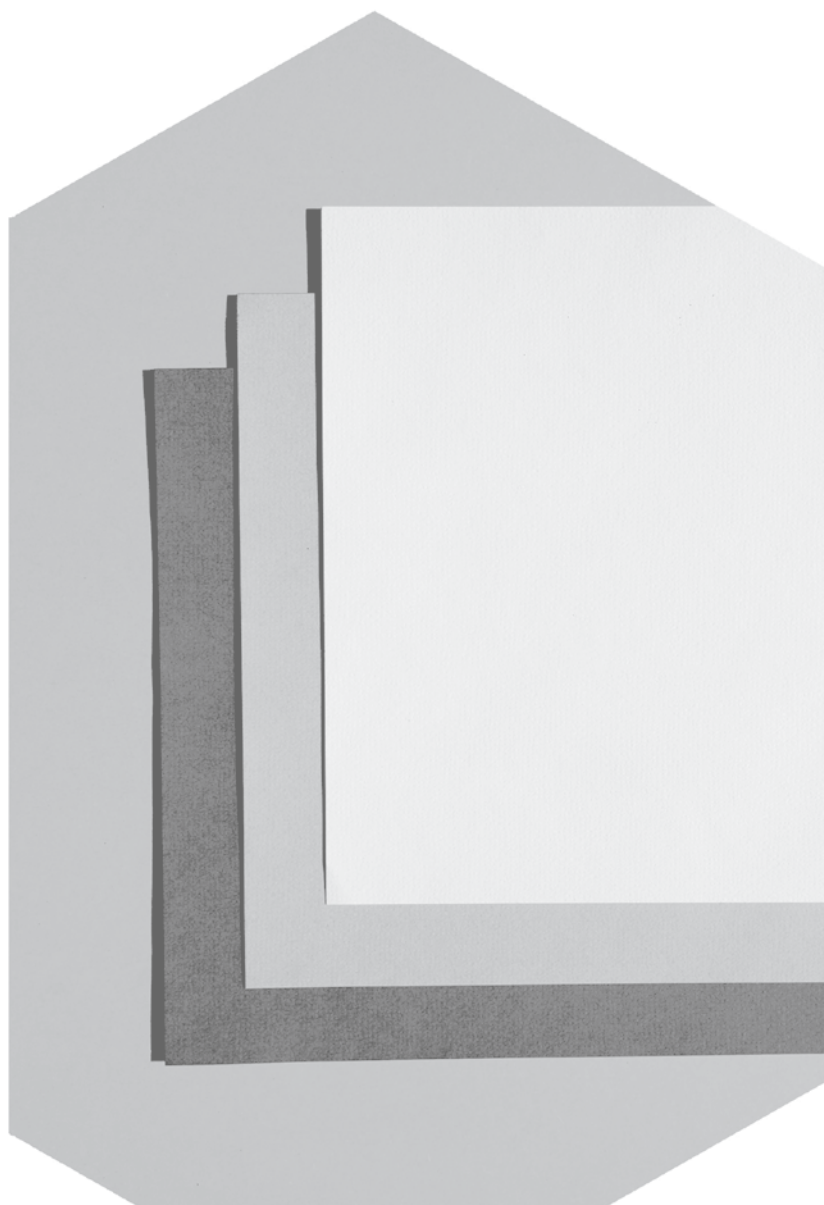
SIXFOLD

POETRY WINTER 2021



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

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

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Laura Apol

Photo of my Mother at Eighteen, Seated

I want to lean into the woman
in the white Adirondack

as boldly as she leans back, dark lipstick
and pincurls, sleeveless pale blouse,

slim arms wrapping her own waist—
and her smile. That irrepressible smile.

She is Fourth of July fireworks,
sunflower turned toward the sun,

and I am somewhere deep within her,
swaddled in a future so far off

she can barely dream it. She is
so goddamned happy, and so young.

How long before her beautiful cells
will begin undoing themselves,

myelin dissevering, nerves ruined and raw?
When is the outset, the unseen scarring

before the scars? There will be decades
between this Adirondack

and the electric-powered chair—
years when she'll roll down

her socks, roll up the waist of her skirt,
make the world hers, until one day

she no longer feels pain
and the sole clue to *too hot* or *too close* or

too much is the smell of her own flesh,
scorched. Those glorious arms.

I want to lean into this stranger
in the white Adirondack,

head-thrown-back laughing—
so goddamned happy. So young.

I Take a Realtor Through the House I've Lived in for Twenty Years

*Once again I was there and once again I was leaving
and again it seemed as though nothing had changed
even while it was all changing*

—W.S. Merwin

Windows that wouldn't open, a door
that wouldn't close; the worn-carpet
room of my son, cobalt
room of my daughter, flowered-over grave
of the backyard dog. Sump pump,
shingles, emergency contact and every shadow
a ghost. Up these stairs I was young, filled
with tomorrows as I took
lovers and lit candles; sang
with my children and prayed
for my children,
and wept and bled each month

and it is all past. The laundry off the line.
Pears rotting beneath the tree. Fireflies
and maple leaves, lost cat's print in concrete
like the stories I read aloud
to my daughter before bed, my son
at the piano, Rachmaninov
in his sleep. New stove, used fridge,
all the dishes I washed, lunches I packed;
push mower, extension ladder, gutters cleaned
spring and fall. Wisteria and weeping
cherry, heights
penciled on the painted
frame of the door, painted over.

And now? Siding and ceiling fans,
hard-wood floors and fencing;
trees that fell
—as nothing, as everything,
changed.

Rebekah Wolman

Greetings from the Mezzanine

I'm writing from the mezzanine
where I've been put
in a vocabulary lesson
from my older brother's fifth grade teacher
who suggested to her students
that they warn their younger siblings
*If you don't stop procrastinating
I'll put you on the mezzanine.*

I like the mezzanine seats.
The view is good
in a middle ground
happy medium
Goldilocks kind of way
not too close to see the whole stage
not too far to see the musician's faces,
not so steep that it's vertiginous.

Or it's the mezzanine of a department store
where I've been put
and the furniture is just as just right
a couch stuffed full but not too full
a small upright piano not quite in tune
but good enough
and a well-stocked rack
of magazines for browsing.

I may stay for a while
inhabiting this story between stories
this liminal pause
considering my defense of procrastination
that it's germination
or hibernation
both natural phases
in this cyclical living.

There's a small café
with Sacher torte and Linzer torte
with linden tea and a sundae served
in a glass goblet with a dimple
where the bowl joins the stem
and the melted ice cream pools.
The final drop is never quite retrievable
but I'll be here for a while, trying.

To-Do List, Items 1 & 2

1.

Rinse poems, it says.

I've soaked this poem in multiple changes
of water like the greens from last night's
dinner prep, so much peppery mineral-vegetal
growth for each pale mud-caked moon
of turnip. I've given away the grit that sank
to the bottom with each discarded draft.

You can eat the cabbage aphids on the kale
and I've read that they have superpowers.
They metabolize the bitter compounds of their hosts
to fend off predators, and while the females wait for males
to fertilize their eggs, they manufacture clones
of their tiny round grey selves that clone themselves
in turn, up to thirty generations in a single summer.
They stay alive all winter clinging
to the frozen stalk until it thaws
into a long-awaited meal. It's just as well
they're too persistent to rinse off, I guess,

and is the rinsing my poems really need
the kind that some art can't be made without—
rinsing off the acid from an etching plate
when it has reinforced the lines and marks
you've carved in ground to open them to ink
or rinsing the chemical coating from paper
you've exposed to sunlight to reveal
the ghostly image of whatever you laid on it
floating in its sea of Prussian Blue?

2.

Send out poems.

Send them out for
their 5000-mile service,
front-end alignment and new wipers.
Send them out on an errand.

Send them out with a list:
milk, eggs, butter, chips, lawn
and leaf bags, mousetrap.
Send them out with the mouse.
Have them release it from the wire
jaws of death. They won't mind
the darkening drop of mouse blood
drying on the wood. Make sure
they wash their hands
when they come back.

Send the poems out to cool off.
Tell them they can come back in
when they are ready. When they've given
what they did some thought and are ready
to apologize. When they're ready to focus
and can start again.

Send them out for coffee
and tell them to keep the change.
Get a little something for themselves
or pocket it for later.

Grateful

I'm not a grateful person,
I told Darcy at the post office
when she asked if I might want
the Thank You stamps, but I was joking.
I am grateful, I assured her. I just didn't like the script
on the Thank You stamps, and I really wanted
the Raven stamps, the Western Wear stamps
with the faux woodcut cowboy boot complete
with star-shaped spur or the Ursula K. LeGuin
commemoratives, all the new issues
that hadn't come in yet. But truly
I am grateful and I was that day.

I bought the Sun Science stamps, the full sheet
with six different solar phenomena, four each
of the coronal loops and holes, the solar flares
(royal blue and teal versions) and the plasma blast,
and one each of the sunspots and the Active sun.
I've learned just enough about all of this to know
that I am grateful for the Quiet sun
and its predictable stream of steady light,
a flash of which shone through the fog
when I went back out into the street.

At the bookstore, I found a copy—used—
of the book I wanted—the extraordinary *Olio*
by Tyehimba Jess. (You should read it if you haven't.)
Two women were squeezed in with me in the narrow aisle
between Poetry and Spirituality, and I couldn't help
but overhear their conversation. “My friend's husband,”
one said, “was telling me about this book.
The writer starts each section with a thank-you note
to someone in his life and then goes on
into a meditation.” Then they started talking about Rumi

and I asked if they knew his poem
about the guesthouse, the one with the lines
This being human is a guesthouse/

Every morning a new arrival. . .
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows. . .
Be grateful for whoever comes. . .
They didn't, and I couldn't find it in the book
she had picked out but I told her she would find it
if she did a search for "Rumi guesthouse"
and she was grateful.

At the ice cream shop, the flavor of the week
was Golden Milk, salubrious tonic of ginger
and turmeric, almost too good to be true.
And when I stopped at the community garden
to finish the melting frozen Golden Milk,
the evening primrose was in bloom, a crown
of watery yellow blossoms atop each spire
of layered upturned leaves. The leaves are all
that has emerged so far of the evening primrose
in our garden, and now I know what I have

to look forward to.

In response to being told *I admire your poems*

I want to say that I too feel a tender kind
of admiration for them, meaning that I *wonder*
at them, that I *regard* them *with pleasant surprise*
and maybe even *marvel* at them as if holding them

out at arm's length from my body and lifting and turning
them gently or walking around them tilting my head
slightly or squinting to take them in from all angles
these things I've made but think may not be all of my own

making, like the domed and golden loaves I mix and knead
but whose chemistry of sugar, yeast and acid is only partly
in my control, or the garden in its prime that I planted but am not
the rain or sun for or the wind or birds whose visits scatter seeds

and make surprise revisions; and meaning, having entered
the atmosphere of admiration, that I see them as a kind of miracle
I can't quite explain or that like mirages they may not look
exactly as I thought they would when I get closer

and you may not see in them what I see.
I aspire as we do with those we hold in high esteem
to the qualities of their small inanimate selves, nerveless
but also nervy, brave and unapologetic in their presence

on the page, and when I say *thank you* for admiring them
I am thanking you on their behalf for your attention
to them but I want to thank them too, say *thank you*
to them for their patience while I dawdled and left them

waiting and for letting me catch up or find them
in their hiding places, and *thank you* to the other poets
the steady shower of whose voices sings and soaks
deep to the roots of the poems, and I want to say

thank you to the burs of language that catch
on the trouser legs of my mind as I wander
across the fields and stumble through the thickets
of my days, *thank you* to the poems for their willingness
to not just take but be small leaps of faith.

How I Want My Body Taken

I don't want a horse or car
to carry me. I want to be brought
in the arms of some beloved, held
tenderly and passed from friend
to friend, warmed against each heart
around a circle or up and down each row.

And then I want to be taken
by the weather, the way our friend
was flung, his son perched
on a steep hillside with tears
of afternoon sun and cold wind off the Pacific
in his eyes despite his squint
as he opened a white container,
tilted it to the air and swung his arm wide,
casting his father out to sea, his father
blowing back at him in sunlit motes
and drops of fog and settling
on his hair and shoulders,

or entombed like a Viking in a ship
I'd traveled in alive, my grandfather's
heavy but fragile wood and canvas canoe,
the grey paint and shellac cracked
but still watertight for a final paddle
through a beaver creek at sunset,
the full moon rising at the other end
of the lake, and then buried under layers
of pine needles and rotting aspen leaves
in the Northern Ontario woods.

But what I really want is to ride
in a wire basket on the handlebars
of the bike I dreamt I was riding
the night I learned how,
my being still tingling with the thrill
of letting momentum take me,

the perfect balance of stillness
and motion, of abandon and control.

I want the night to be as dark
as it was in that dream, the streetlights
cycling off, streamers flying
from the bar grips and the rider
pedaling hard, then harder,
building speed and with it levitating,
the bike ascending at a slant
above the trunk of the last parked car
and then leveling off at its cruising altitude
taking flight over the whole row of them,
and leaving a wake of light behind it.

Devon Bohm

The Roosting Heron Turns Her Head to See Me, Too

Today, a heron flew
low over the man-made
pond in Elizabeth Park:
his plummy feathers,
his long, sleek body,
his apology to the wind
for leaving it behind.
My hair is turning over
into grey, silver, really,
weaving through the dark
like tinsel or the light
early morning off the water
we chose to place here.
I believe myself hardened
to this world until I see
flowers growing askance,
bowed by the weight
of their own wilderness,
dew pearled on their faces
reaching up to the sun.
The wet of the grass
has soaked me through,
lying here to try to
remember what it is
to be sated, listening
to the hush of petals
whispering their way
through the sky as pale
pink snow, as white hairs
grow in thicker, like
fishing line, as a reminder
as why and how
to stay alive.
I remember reading

a story about a fig thief
punished, his head
chopped off in
yellow-brown sand.
No jury, no trial,
no one to stand up
for him or mourn him
and that's just the way
the world was. Is. Still.
I know how he felt,
some days, to hunger like
that, to simply want
something against your
mouth, tongue, inside
your body where all
the pain is hiding,
the inside of the fig
as blood and tissue
fading out to the color
of the—last look—
the sand. Almost casually,
I watch the heron huddle
in the reeds, maybe she,
maybe warming a clutch
of eggs. The earth's
crust shivers delighted
and I try to sleep, just
until spring is done
trying to become.

Which is Now

In the interim (which is now,)
I will leave my cravings
undefined and simply recognize
the myriad hunger. I will
remember terror is a word
meant to describe angels.
I will be as dust on an
orchard apple's skin
is called a bloom.
I will herald in an era
of being kinder to myself.

The Word

I have no words today, so I try
to let the world provide them.
I listen. I learn that nothing out
here is monotonous, is vacant.
Everything is alive and breathing,
lungs of the wind rustling the petals
of the peony, the dog's fur in furrows
down his back. The sky is getting
ready for rain, its mouth closing
ruthlessly, all colors chased off
for the steely grey I can almost see
my reflection in. I don't know when
I realized how much of my life
feels like waiting, like I'm hoarding
up the time where I'm living and
the rest renounces itself, retreats,
holds its own knees against its own
chest. A hawk cries out, high above
me, louder than a human, blue murder,
but hawks don't have words like that,
rituals like that, cowards like that.
You can't be a coward if all you're
trying to do is survive. I wonder if
the beets are ready to be dug from
the ground like dirty hearts or if they
need more time to become. The pears
are already falling, making soft, wet
collisions with the ground and the air
smells like cider. We could call this
misadventure: it isn't going how I need
it to, I needed answers or something
like them, I needed help. The tines of
the trees reach up into grey and the first
drops of rain kick up dust, make new
hieroglyphs I can't read as they move
the fresh green of the leaves. I have no
words today so I asked the world to give
them to me. The world said, *I'll give you*

one, the rest you'll need to gather yourself.
What is the word? Come closer, I'll
whisper it. The word is simple, the word
is nothing but: *listen*. I'll be quiet now.
I'll be waiting. I'll do it world, I'll
listen.

Tupelo and Honey

I wanted to be good.
I never wanted to go
to anyone on my knees.

But to know joy is
to know all aspects
of living—even, especially,
the painstaking ones.

I don't know what
I think of ideas like
god God god, but I do
know this:

My worship, near silent
and shuffling its way
through the Pine and
Sweet Gum Tupelo
rings out in the still
air of August,

paws at the ground
and the sky as if
to say *I am sorry*
for ever believing
I didn't owe this world
anything, when the truth
is more complicated.

I owe it simply
my whole, beautiful
life lived on my knees
because I am joyful
and praising
and unafraid.

The Long Year

Woke up
into the flickering
of the sun's
unbrightness—
day blotted out
into a red gloaming
by whatever new disaster
this year has decided
to unleash.

I sat down
among the fireweed's
incandescence
in the field
and remembered
how to pray.

It's only
two words,
if you want
to learn.

Ready?

Just say:
thank you.

Just say
thank you
and then
do the work
of learning

how to mean it.

Gillian Freebody

No Longer Useful

In the predawn push of rush hour traffic,
the open-eyed doe on the highway shoulder
meets my eye as if still taut and breathing,
her soul already abandoning
the heavy cage of her body
as she rests like a shattered statue
on the side of the road,
and I, late to work, swarm among
the masses trapped on this thoroughfare
of horns and flashing lights,
streams of people surging towards
what exactly—
fast and tumbling, restless and rolling
as a river over rocks.

Her forest is lost somewhere far beyond
the steaming asphalt,
flaming stoplights,
screeching sirens,
peeling tires,
belching exhaust
when her sudden frantic stride
toward safety
meets with metal
and a crushing thud—
spine on hood and legs
briefly a ballerina's
against a moonless sky
before spiraling off
to the side, breath breaking
like a dam emptying into its source
as I bridge the exit ramp curve
to witness the moment after.

Her black disks still catch light,
throw it to me before the sun spills
its way over this pulsing street,
crawling across her heaving
breast, holding the slightest sliver
of recognition before flattening black
and unseeing, utterly abandoned,
so if I move her to the grass,
she will still be warm, perhaps
a second heart beating
inside, and I think of the phone,
the police, the raging rush of emergency
to cut her open in the last release of blood
through veins quickening with cold before it is too late—
why her eyes flickered to me, begging me
to stop, to weigh what she asks,
my own womb empty but for futile bleeding.

But on this side of our human hell
where every thrust of traffic poisons us
in swells of smoke, we gasp like animals
called to our deaths much too early,
can I pull over? Save what remains
so I can tell myself I did everything
I could before it all rots, decays,
must be carted away by thick-gloved men
with unshaven beards wordlessly arriving
too late in a rusty pick-up piled with blood-stained
shovels saved solely for this purpose -
this disposing of what was once aching beautiful
lost now somewhere under an overpass
on a cold curve of highway where things
no longer useful linger until finally slipping away

as if never there at all?

I am late and do not stop.

The Right Kind of Woman

Here is the hard truth of it:
the bitch who lives in my skin
has carved her way into my heart
claws sharpened to pristine points
that glint and sparkle when dragged
across the frozen terrain of hesitant
beating muscle

Yesterday when your hand brushed mine
on the sun-dappled gravel trail
she bucked and slammed into my rib cage
like a wild animal trapped in an attic
throwing itself against walls and windows
until blood puddled deep enough to leak
three floors down to the dirt

I have always been a bird shit marble bust
my body: a betrayal of near-boyhood,
breastbone curved outward like the bend
of an archery bow so any alluring swells
fell into the cavern of my chest, eliciting
apologies and red-faced shame.
Sharp-fanged braces, dried-out perms,
stub-toed feet that next to yours look
like fish fins. *I'm sorry, so sorry*

I learned that loving men is a live minefield
a white-knuckled life and death dance
I enter into with teeth bared like a rabid tiger rushing headlong
into a battle of torn flesh and shattered bone.
Love me anyway, I'd beg as I stripped naked for shock
the skinny-dip not to be denied, all the flat planes
and deadly edges hidden in darkness and the shadows of water

And as I'd kneel against the night sky, it'd drink itself down
to cloak me, my head heavy as a wrecking ball
how can I touch your hand in the innocent curve of
can-we-start-again when I always thought

I'd be the right kind of woman: the loving, loyal wife
not this wicked hag, this blackened pearl, this broken-winged
crow beating itself to death on the side of the road
the same thin-hipped girl who grew faint from starvation
veins pumped with revulsion, rejection, a self sabotaged by hate
but as you turn to face me now, eyes filled with forgiveness,
fingers gently placed in my bleeding palms,

instead of wondering *WHY?* in the screaming rush
of vulnerability laid bare, I whisper *how?*
as you apply the tourniquet and lay me down

Layout from the High Dive

When my father launched a layout
from the high dive, the lake drew up its heels—
sandcastle constructions, splashing contests,
lifeguard training runs, can't-put-down beach reads,
utterly forgotten.

Hands palm up in supplication,
in communion,
in the hard steel confidence
of man at his most powerful,
he'd pause before the pump upward,
his toes on the board,
the crouch before take-off,
and I'd suck in my breath,
hold it like a secret when his thighs,
chiseled as a marble god,
extended up so his raised hands reached
to catch clouds playing chase, hopeless
in the face of his IT, while the full extension
of his body against the sky's blue canvas
made its own shadow on the afternoon,
a spread-eagled savior on the cross
as his perfectly timed arc brought his feet
around toward the water and he sank
without a splash, water swallowing him
as time resumed its ceaseless surge forward
and I watched for his break through the surface.

I'd exhale when his otter body emerged,
ebony hair soaked and sparkling in the sun,
light playing off his shoulders and spine
as he'd stroke freestyle to the ladder.
And as he climbed onto shore,
the beach found its voice again,
laughter and splashing, shouting for
ice cream and ever-lasting summer.

But people peeked beneath their
squinting lids, shaded their eyes
with sun-dappled fingers to glance quickly
at the man who caught the clouds
in their race with time, who,
in his miraculous found-freedom,
etched himself on the sky
for the briefest of moments
before sinking down.

Settling, The Hudson River Valley

Before Wiltwyk and that great walled stockade that defined our borders,
we worshipped the confluence of creek to river, flooding the banks
with fertile ferns and foliage, ripening crop beds, emboldening
the oxygen in shared veins, one native, one settler,
our mothers' skirts pulled up and knotted at the thigh.
One white, one brown, Dutch and Esopus,
making twig dolls in the grass, chins dribbling the juice
of Macintosh, Empire, Granny, and laughing,
open-mouthed, teeth sparkling like ivory stars
in night sky mouths that know no difference,
no color, no trade but sweet sap sticking to
grimy earth-dusted fingers, envious crows
circling overhead like macabre halos, harbingers
of thunderheads in the West, the mad scramble
for cover, for soil, for the throne at the head of the table.

The pitch-pine oaks and rush of river over stone
smoothed the storm of resentment for days,
so that fires burned in rock rings and muzzles
hung cold on breezy barn doors.
I know we were not afraid, not yet, in that valley
of Rondout's swell into the Hudson.

The Gray's Sedge and Wild Rye pushed
through the cracks of our floorboards
and Silver Maples canopied our games of tag
and skipping stones, the stretch of afternoon
that knew only women meeting
in the stream's apex, trading secrets, stripping pelts.

Look at us there in the 17th century, our feet
filthy with the dust of another's land, appeasing
our stabs of guilt with fine white linen, the copper glint
of tea kettle, mortar and pestle already ground down
to flawless bone.

But what of trade and its mutual bounty that wanes
like sunlight over a stone wall? The river's heaving heart

pulled up as the men took sides, stood on opposite banks,
demanded concession of the water, of each other.
And when the current would not bend, massive stones
were hauled up the hill we once tumbled down like rabbits,
drilled so deeply into the dirt, my hand on the cool husk
of shale catches the same light it did then, skin so pale
it is nearly transparent.

See how the bones meet there at the wrist, each finger
a branch reaching from the same trunk, the same rush
of water, the same river bed where lives pause and swirl,
however briefly, without seams, without colors, without skin,
greed hushed as the water surges forward,
washes over us, baptizes us anew

until.

Anne Marie Wells

Portrait, 2020

our father sits / on my shelf
a portrait on a prayer card
between two paper weight
giraffes / gilded memories of
a trip to the zoo a younger
version of himself once took
with his two daughters /
one lies curled on its side
looking up into our father's
face / the other stands /
neck curved / bowed like the
heads of the dead sunflowers
that haven't been thrown
away / hunched sentinel
behind him / with their
furred petals weeping in
silence one after the other

Gravestone Flowers

I paced my father's hometown cemetery as he pushed and pulled his lawn mower through the overgrown grass, planted marigolds at strangers' graves. I ripped dandelions with the savagery of a child who was Anne with an E and who pretended to be the one from Green Gables, who didn't care to understand what it meant to be dead. I held the bouquet like a bride and trampled the wild blades, wondering why my dad cared at all to tend the plots of those decaying for a century. Now, with a longer life of collected memories, I know he'd always been the man to shovel his neighbor's driveway in December, to walk at night with lightbulbs in his pockets to replace anyone's burned out porch lamps while they slept, and he couldn't let his parents' bones lie in a graveyard replete with Jumanji canopies taking over the signs that someone once inhaled this town, that someone once exhaled this town.

Now I adorn my father's grave with seashells, arrange them in a circle around a ceramic frog. I carry his funeral flowers like a baby in my arms, lay one at a time across barren graves near his. And maybe visiting strangers will be touched to see a lily, even desiccated from the sun, atop their loved one's grave. Maybe this was my father's sentiment too. Maybe he thought not of those who passed on, but of those who would pass by; they would know someone cared enough. Or maybe they would think it was their ancestors' way of saying hi from the other side. And maybe, when you think about it, it was.

Let me know about the pieces butchered in front of you, the wild and gamey breath, the scent that blends into every shirt and every sheet, the shit not suitable for sensitive stomachs, censored in front of your mother. Let me choke on my sobs for someone else. Let me feast on your grief instead. Let me gorge on the pain you never dared to share with anyone else, the awful tastes, the sour flavor of violence, the muscle and sinew shredded by knife and fork one slice at a time. I have practiced not looking away from the body brutalized, split open. I can smell the blood, and I'm hungry for your grief, for the gaping rot in your marrow, for your intestines to unravel at this table. Let's share this meal together. Let our flesh decay holding hands. Let the mice steal our teeth.

Let the Crows Fly Away With Our Eyes

Laura Turnbull

Restoration

Give me back my summer. I don't like orange.
Return my aqua, coral, yellow. Let me squeeze
more lemons into sparkly water and spill
foamy waves and oily grit on baby toes. Let me taste
more tomatoes split into stars—I am not hungry
for the dark dirt of soup. Not yet. Let me sweat.
Give me strong thunder from a green warning sky—
five seconds between flash and clap, and cue
curtains to dance. Give me a new pair of sunglasses
and easy hours to lose them. Let me squint at clouds
and blink, and let it still be summer. Cast haint blue
with torches after midnight. Give me more time.
Give me more light. More life. Grant me bright
noisy nights to prove it: seventeen-year-old alarm
clocks, chanting frogs, neighborly cocktails
laced with sharp pink ice. I'm wary of the wiles
of blankets and easy chairs. Give me back the fireflies.
Let them land and stay.

It's not enough

rondeau

It's not enough—a house with air.
Invite the dirt, and leave it there.

Emancipate the child's excess—
all joyful splotches, every mess
in candy-coated disrepair.

Let tiny palms hold worlds, and tear
apart what they've assembled. Rare—
these sweetest days, without redress.
It's not enough.

An instant twinkles past, then where
it travels next, we do not dare
conceive. Inside of our best guess
we breathe our air, we whisper *yes*,
for one more footprint on the stair—
It's not enough.

Beats

Authors, it is said, are read,
and writers get paid
(when it's not pretty).
So, who gets laid?

What can the poets have?
The sound masters
The syntax musicians
The meter-minding
drummers of words?

We raise our hands and
wait to be called on.
Is it always the quiet ones?
I'll sit with Charlie Watts.

Brains aren't bones

Here are ways to mend a break:
copy, paste the mistake
and change the rhyme. Everyone:
make past tense present. Convert
liquid to gas. Press the pedal to the floor
if you can reach it. Pull back on the yoke
and fly higher. Crash. Breathe
thin air until it gets dark, unless of course
there's rain. It can always look like rain.
It might be a good idea to stay broken
for a while longer. Stand in the rain. Watch
for lightning. Wash the wound. Wish.
Brains aren't bones;
you will heal differently this time.

Afterward

Afterward, feel gross and regret it like you knew you would.

Pretend to get a text from a friend. Pretend you're in a hurry. Forget your keys when you leave. Go back for your keys.

Afterward, pay with the card that earns miles. Buy a bottle of wine. Order a pizza. Eat half of it and go to bed early. Wake up at midnight, sweating. Turn on the overhead light so you can see to change the sheets. Feel better in three days. Don't tell anyone for almost four years. Never tell your mom.

Afterward, shake hands with the veteran who played taps. Blow your nose with the napkin you found in your glove box. Think about how you never have tissues when you need them. Decide that keeping ashes on the mantel is creepy. Think about how much water humans are made of. Don't think about heaven.

Afterward, take him to see your new house. Show him his new room. Show him the attic where he can make forts and build Legos. Try not to think about how sad his dad is. Show him the yard and the lemon tree. Take a walk to the ice cream shop. Know he's trying to be brave. Watch him for signs.

Afterward, meticulously design all the possible outcomes in your head. Settle on one. Wonder why you're like this.

Andre F. Peltier

The Ebullient Signpost

When Deputy Don rode
into the sunset
with a song and a smile,
we wore ten-gallon hats
& sat side-saddle
on the arms of our father's
Lay-Z-Boy recliners.
When we clanged pots & pans
with neighborhood dogs
as the boys of summer
won another pennant,
when the young willow
twisted and tangled
the septic pipes
into new & disgusting
contortions,
we dug deep in the field
& covered the hole
with grass to trap bears,
tigers, marauders,
the old woman
from down the street.
She fell into our trap
& twisted her ankle.
We laughed as she
limped away.
Fair warning:
"Walk our trails—
face the consequences."
Like Robin Hood or Zorro
or Grizzly Adams,
we hid beneath
the Queen Ann's Lace,
beneath the monarch
butterflies,

& laughed as
she limped.

We tromped through
the woods
with stolen Marlboro Reds,
white Zebra Cakes,
& warm Labatt's Blue,
we climbed the tallest tree
& peeled the bark
to reveal the true grain
of the giant beast.
From our perch,
we could see the rainbow
sails of rainbow ships
upon the rainbow bay.
Sunlight glistened, reflected,
blinded us,
but we never averted our eyes.
When the fireworks of three towns
filled the sky,
we never averted our eyes.
When the shaving cream
& water-filled condom balloons
splashed our faces,
we never averted
our eyes.

With popcorn, cold pizza,
warm Faygo Rock n Rye
for midnight snacks,
we played five-card draw.
The French-Canadian
poker chips
had been tucked into
Great-Grandmother's dresser,
behind her knitting,
her teeth, her hairbrush
& her forgotten
ninety-three years

of horse-drawn dreams.
They emerged to settle
our scores.
We watched Joe Bob Briggs
& Count Zappula.
Imported Italian erotica,
black and white horror trash:
signifiers of adolescent
rebellion,
the ebullient signposts
of the freedom
of youth.

Words from Clay

We carve words from clay.
We breathe life into the lungs
of the sentence,
and we wash away the filth.
For forty day and forty nights,
I carry my poems
in the bosom of my ark.
Two by two,
they wait.
Two by two they rise
to see the rainbow.
When the dove returns
with the olive branch
and the vessel rests atop
the Mount Ararat,
the words lift their hearts
to the sun and sing the songs
of a brand-new day.
The poem follows
the brightest star
in the heavens
and gives birth in all
the mangers
of all the worlds.
Surrounded by lambs, goats, llamas,
sewer rats, tarantulas,
and the common garter snake,
I send the sentences out
to wash away the filth.
With flames in their hair,
the words speak in strange
mad tongues;
they call out to distant shores
and remember the war of
Cain and Abel.
They remember the pillars of salt
and the burning bush.
The bush, too, spoke in tongues.

It said, "You are latent
with unseen existences."¹
When the Red Sea split open,
I split it with song.
And the burning bush said,
"I think heroic deeds were
all conceiv'd
in the open air."²
The poems themselves
were conceiv'd
in the open air as well.
The clay rose forth from deep
within the soul of the planet.
The soul of the planet sighed
and all seemed beautiful.
The soul of the planet
is rude, incomprehensible,
but never silent.
When the soul rises,
when the rainbow compact
allows for rebirth and rejoice,
it allows only as I wish.
Only as I carve words
from clay.

¹Whitman, Walt. "Song of the Open Road." *Leaves of Grass*. W. W. Norton and Company, 2005.

²ibid.

I Never Heard the Ocean Sing

Beautiful, bleached shell
hooked to the fluke
but sat by our
television
for decades.

Gently, while home from
school with fevers,
stomach aches,
migraines,
I would hold it to my ear.

Air currents
through
the coils
were supposed to sound
like the crashing
waves of
Egmont
and Longboat, The
Azores and The
Maldives,
but there
was only

silence.

Cast Me Skipping

You spend your days
staring at the stones
beneath your sandals.
The water, a mirror
to your soul,
still with perfection.
You find me between
the boulders and the beech.
Your long, delicate fingers
wrap around my curves.
Like Satchel Paige
or Dizzy Dean,
you reach back and let fly.
I skim across the surface,
sliding on the silver glass.
“Five, Six, Seven,” you count
before I sink below the seas.
After winter storms,
I will wash once more
upon the shore
to fly again.

A Fistful of Ennui

As the Sergio Leone score
floats through
the Mall of America
and we collectively
price ourselves out of
a new pair of Jordans,
we bow our heads
and tuck our thumbs
into our “Keep on Truckin’”
belt buckles.
Few can recall how
far she fell
down, down, down
before she lodged
in a West Texas well-casing.
Baby Jessica sang her songs.
Baby Jessica sang
“Winnie the Pooh,
Winnie the Pooh,
chubby little cubby
all stuffed with fluff,”
and the world sang with her,
but she wasn’t
all stuffed with fluff.
She lost a toe to gangrene
and we lost our innocence
to the covers of *People Magazine*,
Time, *Redbook*.
And to the stories in *The Daily News*,
The Washington Post,
and *The Petoskey News Review*.

As “The Love Theme from
Switchblade Sisters”
floated through the halls
of the Satellite of Love,
we wore our Nikes
and waited for redemption

behind Hale-Bop.
When the UFO arrived,
we boarded with
our utter anxiety
and our silly dreams.
If Nike only manufactured
clown shoes,
we would have been
the perfect emblem of
democracy.
The sign relationship as a whole,
flying around the sun
and back to the icy darkness
of the solar system.
While Hale-Bop glowed
in the northwest sky,
we knew salvation
was at hand.

As “We Built this City”
floated through
the bowling alleys,
pool halls, video arcades
of our junior high blues,
we had them ol’ junior high
blues again, mama,
and we filled our void
with quarters for Galaga,
Pole Position, Q*Bert,
the chill of Northern Michigan
returned;
we pulled our faux fur collars
close around our necks.
Thank God it’s Thinsulate.
Our ears, red with frostbite,
listened intently for distant
signs of agency.
While Q*Bert forever fell
from his pyramid,
we fell too.

We toppled towards
The Bear River rush
and towards the frozen
water wonderland.

Peter Kent

Reflections on the Late Nuclear Attack on Boston

In the dark hours—tucked
within a crease of nubbed mountains
that once reached upward like cathedral spires
—rest betrayed me like a dozing guard
at perception's door, and I missed
your annihilation. I should at least have
witnessed the illumination that marked
the passage into incoherence
of every creature I cared for. Instead,
it was the alarm of birds, startled
by an instant of out-of-sequence dawn,
that woke me. I knew you were gone.

Maple and birch remain cloaked
in festival-bright reds and yellows.
Though now their leaves fall like burnt scraps
of skin, becoming a blanket of muted color
unable to offer comfort. Neighbors
up and down this dirt road to nowhere
come together, speaking in whispers, as though
reverence in this church of the inconceivable
might persuade the phantom-taloned vulture
of fallout to pass on toward Canada.

Our favorite table at Algiers was any one that
serendipitously became available. Though,
I liked best when we could sit near the steel wizardry
that manipulated beans and water into beverage.
Your face by lamplight remains a medallion
beyond value in recollection's battered vault.
A shared slice of apple pie, bulk of winter coats
across the back of chairs, notebooks filled

with hapless words . . . all a prelude
to despair.

Remember those bitter Februarys
when we could race out onto the Charles
in boots and parkas that Admiral Perry
would have admired? The wind sharp as a slap,
the snow sifted and shaped like frosting.
We never went far from shore—uncertainty
heaving like a bellows against our confidence
in the ice's underbelly. Your fingers were always so cold.
Flesh seemed to hold you in discomfort, as if
it were impossible to keep such a being for long
in corporeal form. I choose to think that you rode
the crest of the blast, singed but soaring into
those hidden dimensions where frost and warmth
meld like the memory of a walk down Marlborough
Street on an October evening.

The power is out, and panic is rising like a fever.
The forests groan like prisoners freed
to seek out those who hacked away their liberty
to colonize these hills. Nature never needed us.
There are gunshots in the distance. All those
shadowed militias that trained for this
are now marching in lockstep with mayhem
to finish us.

In the catalog of lunacies this must seem an inexplicable entry.
No random asteroid or comet did this. The vaporized creatures
built and triggered the very devices that ended their existence.
We're trying to harvest food from refrigerators and freezers,
and realizing we don't have enough insulated coolers to hold much.
How do the rest of us perish? Starvation is a more subtle violence,
and perhaps it's been reserved for the least worthy
and unlucky.

Vanity's a victim, too. No more pomade for my hair,
nor toothpaste. Though, I suppose I'll wear my contact lenses
until my supply's exhausted. Deodorant's destined to dissolve
into the distemper of vaguely remembered indulgences, too.
And, of course, what will become of entertainment?
No Netflix or HBO. Though, one supposes our satellites
will orbit like tombstones for a long time without us.
Perhaps poetry will reemerge as the preferred diversion
to recall and carry forward what it's like to huddle
about a fire on nights that growl with radioactive beasts
and spirits we hope are the ones who once loved us.

Gasoline is fool's gold, and we are frenetic fools.
It will take longer than we have to adapt. No one
here has a horse. Ivan—odd and cranky—has his yurt,
and he's likely our candidate to survive the longest.
We've agreed to give chainsaws priority. Even green wood
can be coaxed to ignite if one's desperate enough.
We're presuming that a standard winter will knock on
our doors initially. We confer like cattle in council,
stupefied and unable to assert reason
to untangle the dilemmas of obliteration.

And where, I wonder, are you now? Are you
knitting new skin over the cut on my forearm?
I was clearing a blowdown from a trail and didn't notice
the stob on the still standing tree beside me. Clumsy.
Do you see me stopping beside a brook that bends
into the woods just beyond comprehension's reach,
striving to become stoic as a bear seeking out a den
in which to endure survival's sanctuary, searching
for clarity in a land of shadows, working still
to harness meaning to words? I trust
that your voice is twinned with the wind,
trying yet to fill the cup of my ear
with a hymn of solace.

Carol Barrett

Canal Poem #8: Pondies

Dear canal, child of the river, child
of one who led ancient trees to mill,

rolled clipped logs in all manner of wind
and weather, floated them toward destiny:

well-oiled saws cut them to planks
and boards for book shelves, post office,

church, fruit stand, mortuary, school.
Your legacy, one of transport, the rising

of new towns with old names, settling
the land with sheep and cows, holly hocks,

porch swings creaking a dusty song.
My friend Rita has lived eighty years

in Bend, says here it was the “pondies”
brought to harvest, long-needed pines, wood

nougat sweet, a bit like licorice when cut, bark
peeling away, layer of dark almond chocolate.

Lumber men ran the logs, rugged boots
rolling them along, steering a gangly

roped-in procession down river, poles in hand.
At ten I got to spin a log in Spirit Lake, wearing

sneakers, not cork-lined boots with spikes.
Falling: an icy splash, pummy stone crunching

underfoot. In your shallow bed built of lava rock,
only an occasional branch tumbles down. But

it remembers what has gone before, the fate
of forefathers, desecration of owled forests.

So many birds flew to their deaths in wildfires,
so many more after the logging stopped, heat

rising ahead of the blaze, dry brush without
shade, ready kindling. The floating branch and I

honor your long history, living tributary,
lineage of noble fir and water, blackbird stream

on high, calls piercing this lofty desert air.

Canal Poem #10: Horizon

Some say the Deschutes was born to bring
a watering hole to wild horses, manes tangled

in the wind, hooves keen on deceiving cougar
or human snares. They're out there still, beyond

your trickling bid, thundering across the vast
prairie on and off the rez. Near Prineville, a rider

took her steed down a remote mountain trail,
suffered catcalls from revved up Harleys,

afraid they'd spook her horse, more worried
about the throw than what they'd do to her,

bucked off saddle once too often, back askew.
But the wild horses saved her, defiant

challengers rising up to pummel the bikes,
leaving a tame sister to run back to camp.

I've never been that fond of horses. My sisters
loved to saddle up, canter in the open field

beyond the corn and barn. What I liked:
the smell of oats in the bin, the warm nuzzle

after handing over a humble carrot. They had
gratitude down. In this world, the wild horse,

a conundrum, symbol of freedom, grazing
the desert grass, silhouette on the horizon.

Some say they trample too many vineyards,
deprive cattle of lush growth along the reservoir,

kick over stone settings for barbed fences.
We must decide what to contain, what to let

roam free. Who can bear witness to their cause,
to the cloud that dares defy the skies? We know

this tension: rules of grammar, or poetic license,
the sermon or the song, news story, or naked memory.

I offer a block of salt for wild horses neighing
in the distance, pray the cattle don't get there first.

Canal Poem #11: Hides

The history of the world lies—may I be so bold—
in a duet of vacillating poles—scarcity, its gong

lean and gaunt, and plenty, chimes twinkling
in the heart's balm. Therein we know

the changing tides, the axis along which we align,
claim the canal's abundant flow, or lobby

to shut off the source, curtain drawn on this era's
channeled chords. Water, like life, is a shifting

discourse. Take the gray wolf, trapped and pelted
almost to extinction, then saved by law,

transplanted from the tundra of Canada
to Yellowstone, the steppes of Idaho and Montana.

Five breeds have grown to love this land:
coats of white, black, brown, cinnamon

and gray, a range not unlike our human hides.
Ranchers rally to change the rules again,

permit free range shooting, save the cows,
fatten bulls for market without lurking shadows

drawing down their weight, their yield.
Wolves raise their young in acres of buffalo grass,

call to mind another hunt. Scarcity. Plenty.
Playing out again, the gong, the chime.

I watch your free form waves traverse
a tender slope, helicopter humming overhead,

stirring the warm air, tourists on board
for the lava caves due south, where

they'll descend, trade high noon for the mystery
of deep cold. I wonder when these whirring

blades will sport a gun to clear the land,
wolves in hiding once again, two-legged brethren

in pursuit, yet another round of plenty.

Canal Poem #17: Sinkhole

In May, horror movie in Deschutes River Woods:
while wildfires caught the zip lines of dry grass

further west, you sucked yourself down and out,
steep sinkhole wide as my living room. What

were you trying to say, collapsing in on yourself?
They shut you off at the source, drove backhoes

to fill your dark cavity with rock, then gravel,
grated finer as jagged walls received

their layered fill, the morass finally topped
with a smooth blanket of cement, cured

24 hours to handle the held-back flow.
Customers, assured the break in service,

short-lived, could even watch the repair
in real time. Your history eulogizes injuries

we should have been the wiser for: 1947,
the original flume of untreated lumber

gave way to the risk of rot. Crews bellied up
to a steel flume banked by creosoted timber,

concrete base, remnants of the old Crook County
office in Lytle footing the cost. You rode high

above the earth, air-born river, rumbling
through the lofty dry desert, bellowing

your deep-throated glory song. Now a chorus
of cousin flumes shares the wind, the crows'

calls: *Suttong, Fry, Huntington, Slack,*
Stennick, Billadeau. Hopeful, I open the door

to walk your restored path, but shut it hard
this early September morning, choking

on smoke. Air quality on the purple monitor,
only one digit less than the days of a year.

One hundred, putrid enough for porous lungs,
burning eyes. By evening, throats swell

indoors. We have run ourselves underground
with careless excess—gas, oil, plastic, coal—

where was it we thought we had so urgently
to go? A sinkhole of unsurpassed gluttony.

Canal Poem #18: Requiem

Last night's rains have rinsed the air's burden
of charred smoke on this twentieth anniversary

of the twin tower siege, Pentagon aflame,
a field in Pennsylvania laden with splintered

heroes from flight 93. Devoted Diane Sawyer
has gathered the babies of 9/11 first responders

and top-floor waiters who, alas, succumbed
in the rubble, now twenty, reunited in New York.

How they resemble their determined fathers!
Mothers cultivate memories of those they never

knew. I walk the canal again, cherish the sound
of what tumbles over rock, overcoming dark

obstacles, flowing toward the unity of hope.
The aspens flutter, tip their boughs to nod.

At the pond below the Bridges, the outer circle
of lily pads yellows in the warm September air,

while inner leaves float their green vibrancy.
Blooms punctuate the rippling surface.

I find a requiem of color, movement, grace.
The song of death is long this day. Lilies raise

their petaled arms, praying for deep repose
of the souls of the dead. Whatever wind

prevails, they revel in the moment granted.
I take their cue, await a call from my daughter

in Manhattan, seven when the towers fell, now
contending with Ida whipping her tangled hair.

So much is scattered, broken, leveled,
crushed. Vigils fill the streets. Candles light
my daughter's island home. The spirit of geese
calls overhead. Ducks nestle in grass. *Amen.*

Alix Christofides Lowenthal

Spring Passing

A mystery of frogs green but flat
silhouetted action-figures
all eight legs spread leaping
on slate edging the water;
dispatched carefully into
earliest spring still-sere grasses,
their bier a small shovel.

Ceremony:

wash the stone and rinse
tang of decay, scrape skin bits
so no trace remains, only a
shroud of pond water.

Hoping for frog eggs.

Waiting at a busy intersection
directed by high-vis vested policeman
flashing lights and firetrucks
then line of lights-on cars
hearse escorted onto the highway
vanishing into noon's glow.

Clearly one of their own fallen.

Ritual:

somber prayers for the heroic corpse.

Way back—clear road, no sign
that death ever passed.

Traffic flow wipes procession clean.

Hoping for peace.

That night, the moon waxes gibbous.

First peepers' thready trills
ascend in delight.

{Errata}

for Tony Hoagland

Where it says delete
read small bird footprints.
Where is says dream read
small wooden benches painted in
bright gloss like hard candies.
Where it says message read pebble.
Where it says: “cough now,” read lighthouse.
Trees should remain trees until further notice.
Where we read misery it should say
fresh baked bread and a cool fountain.
For fingernails read sand
nesting slate stepping-stones,
and, for dried oregano, read memory
trailing along the heart.

What Part Does the Storyteller Play?

You know how stories go:
the princess must suffer or sleep,
the prince goes on a quest or is put under a spell.
Lovers must be separated and reunited.
Birds can speak, and trees can sing. Good souls
may be saved from evil or catastrophe.
People, transfigured, must turn
into rocks or horses or fish.
Loose ends snipped off, plots hemmed up
as if by the most skilled seamstress.

Once upon a time, in the middle of a story,
a jarring kh-thump! of glass striking feather and bone.
Atop its icy mattress, feet in the air,
black eye blinking intermittently
in disoriented code: *picoides villosus*,
black and white striped stylish perfection,
long beak faintly opening and closing.
Rushing out with a small towel,
I wrapped up the woodpecker and turned it over,
weight imperceptible in my hands.
Later it stood and soared, my heart reveling after
high into the snow-dusted maple.

One long ago night, a muffled thump, a crumple,
car overturned in the road below.
On the sloping bank in dry leaves, a young man trembling
sat with his knees up, arms wrapped like wings.
I hunkered next to him, pulling him to me while we waited.
He couldn't speak, he just sat blinking, transfixed.
The paramedics strapped him in,
took him away, and asked me nothing.

Neat stitches with my sharp needle:
bird to sky, man to home, bird to man.
The end comes with a blink,
a denouement of branch and ambulance.

Abortion Clinic Waiting Room

The goddess Demeter welcomes them to her field:
faded festivity cocooned by wheat-sheaf wallpaper
forest green carpet marked out with a grid
asbestos ceiling tiles ringed by a rose-spangled border
sunny illumination from fluorescent panels,
while “Save the Last Dance” plays quietly on a wall-mounted screen
providing the choral *parados*.

A man in Yankees cap and shirt, his pigeon-toed mate in sneakers,
her long blond hair *so many shades of sorrow* over her lip-biting;
another, waiting for his girl Maggie in his Mustang tee shirt
nervously picks his pant legs, thinking there’s *nowhere left to fall*.
Two buxom, big silver jewelry, gum-chewing teary-eyed women,
maybe sisters—*Ooh, say what? Say what? Say what?*
Yankee guy gets on his cell phone,
the rest thrall’d by filmed catharsis
where despite challenges and death, dance generates love,
and love triumphs over adversity.
So many different reasons, but are they really true?

Some say the soul has no desire, only memory.
Some say the soul has no movement, only recognition.
Perhaps the soul is purely *pneuma*, breath of the cosmos
animating ferns, heroes, horses and olive trees.

The soul infuses into cells at the moment
of conception. Or does it arrive later?
At quickening? When the microcosm has begun
to build muscles and dance about the womb?
Just as the feather cannot fly without the wing
just so the soul inhabits the body.

Blood is Heavier than Time

“What does blood do?” he asked.
We looked at each other
wondering how to explain to a four year old.

I tried to conjure up
that film that had fascinated me
in middle school: “Hemo the Magnificent”
animating the hidden mysteries of the body
through a stylish superhero.
I’d love to see that again,
but I wouldn’t want to be back in gym class
where I endured the agony of public showers,
the new hair on my body
like sphagnum patches on a moor,
and where only the fifth grade girls
got to watch the Kotex film on menstruation
as the boys snickered in the hall
rattling the locked cafeteria doors
in their excitement at being excluded from
“the natural processes.”

You say: “Blood is a system
that carries oxygen through the body,”
as I try to shush you, panicked that we
are somehow introducing blight into
the bud of unknowingness.
He looks up at us, a small frown appearing
beneath his curls as we all fall quiet.

“Blood is full of air that we need,” I try,
but I see that even the mere mention of air
in his body makes his eyes glaze over.
“Blood is like a river,” I say. “It travels
where we need it to go. It helps our whole body.”

Oxygen, veins, systems, flow—
none of these words have meaning to him.
We take a breath and decide what to have for snack:

toast with butter, or cashews and raisins
on the special blue and white plate?
As I push his chair close to the table,
I feel his earnest heart thrumming steadily,
another light on the strand of our bloodline.

Latrise P. Johnson

Remembering with Dad

While riding to the Big Star
Dad would tell us stories
About making soap
With lye in the fireplace.

In the store
I chose my customary Golden Flake Cheese Curls
Denise made claim to a bag of Doritos
Standing
Watching
In awe
Imagining Dad as the boy
His two little girls

Soap was here on a shelf somewhere
But not on Mom's list today:
onion, tomato, ground beef, sugar, ketchup
She made spaghetti for dinner

What I wouldn't give for another story from Dad
Him remembering soap
And us
Being amazed.

My Women

For "Mother" and Ma

I come from ol' cussing ass women
Women who laugh deep
with hips and cigarettes
My women
trade beer for ice cream
for their kids
Sometimes they send their kids
to live with their fathers
My women
don't cry
They lock themselves in rooms
They Sit quietly.
And sleep.
My women
watch cars go by from their upstairs windows
They call just to say hey
and to tell you that they made stew
that didn't turn out right.

The Hardest Thing about Loving Night

I will sleep underneath my moon tonight.
I will kiss light upon your skin
You will fall in love and into a deep sleep
My light
Just for the night

Another moon
Your moon
You belong to your world

I long to be in your sky

I belong with you.

I am here
Always

I know.

I am too
Shadows of time
Memories
Fossils
Histories
Footsteps
Whispers

What is and what was.
Eternal and fragile we both are.

Lay with me until we are full
Take my light tonight
Let it touch
Let is last

This is all I get.

It is all that I have.

Better Half

I can always tell what parts of you that you love the most.

The parts that make you more
Half this
Part that
Shine lights on those parts
Point to those parts
Put frames around those parts
Place them carefully on mantles

Revere those parts.

The parts of you that aren't like my parts
The dark parts
Curly parts
The parts that are wide
The parts with roots in Alabama
And Africa

Quiet those parts.

Half Black
Part that
No light to shine there
No frames for me
No mantle for mine
No worship of the parts that made me
That make me

In our body
Light and shadow
Honor and shame
Remembering ways to forget
Loving the ways we hate
What made us

Just to be better than Black.

Pasts, Present, and Futures

I've read skies
Sunny
With thick clouds
And
Blinding blues
Birds fly and mock
Ground dwellers
who squint from below.

I've watched skies
Stormy
With dark clouds
Where rain falls
On
Bowed heads
that watch the ground and
walk in circles.

I've waded skies
Flowing
With clouds made of silk
Drank them
Deep
While dreaming
Of new kisses and the possibilities of
You.

Brenna Robinson

provisions, these

provisions, these. expired
as they are, they remain,
a tattered blanket over
icy toes: better than
nothing. a can of tomato
soup, rusty at the rim,
admired and retired
to its place of honor:
the back bottom shelf
abutting the water
heater. how many
false prophets it lived
through, it deserves
to outlive one more.
preserve this historical
monument, simply too
good to eat, aged to
perfection since reagan,
yes, a useful reminder
to rotate our stock.

maybe someday we'll fill these tunnels in

this is the passage where
I tunneled out from my dread,
never believing it wouldn't
collapse. *this is where I
learned my fingernails
aren't strong but brittle*, I say,
as I lift the bottom of your
shirt and touch my calloused
nubs to that soft skin you
never show the sun.

I don't know if I met you
down here in the catacombs
or if it was when I emerged
under the star-specked sky
that I first saw you standing
right where I needed you
to be, but we come here
sometimes to remember
what it was like before.

I say, *look, this is the alcove
where I stopped digging,
rolled myself into the fetal
position and slept for weeks.*
you say, *see, this is where
I sat staring at my own knees
until I heard thunder above
me, and then I cried
thinking of all that mud.*
what a privilege it is now
to be a visitor, to go home
together, with you fitting
perfectly into the crook
of my arm, soft and warm

repurposed

she knows what it is to make a pantry
out of a storm cellar or declare a bomb
shelter nothing more than a hole

this is somewhere her fears wanted
her to be, and she was so focused
on winning against them she forgot

they were built for real dangers

It was the left, though, wasn't it

*And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out,
and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for
thee that one of thy members should perish, and
not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.
—Matthew 5:29*

You stood with us, rosebush adjacent,
crooked head, nothing if not asymmetrical.
Parts of you were absolutely missing, I
couldn't fail to notice, your connection
to us: tenuous. Their mouths said I
could trust you, their eyes were not
so sure. Your eye: alone and lonely.

Did you merely get born again or exorcise
the part of your brain that made you
a guy who'd beat his wife nigh to death?
I knew: grandfathers were supposed
to have workshops, farms, apple orchards,
were meant to give presents beyond
Bible verses. They should have something
to offer besides a heavy sense of unease.

may panaguiton

i. honorata

my *lola* ends each call with the same farewell:

‘be good, remember to pray’.

my goodbyes are mechanical affirmatives that don’t bear truth
because i haven’t been to church since the last time she was home.

and honesty on my lips: if she was with me, i wouldn’t mind.

but the thick, hazy air; the heat and stick of waxed wooden pews
against my sweaty skin;

the oversharpest sibilants hissing like knives through

old buzzing speakers as the old priest proselytizes;

a sensory nightmare, a green headache born in between my brows
that only dies

when i bury my head in her stomach and press my forehead against
her chest.

i want to be eight again, i want to kneel by the blankets we called a bed,
i want her hands, too cold, thin and dry, to guide mine through the
rosary.

my mouth shaping the automatic ‘i believe in god, the father
almighty . . .’

before she leads us through the glorious mysteries.

her eyes were always sharp as my little fingers fumbled through the beads
hoping its colors could catch my attention longer than the
monotonous red in hers.

“*I am with you all days*” she would say before making me mumble out
a slurred ‘hail mary’ three beats too late.

it was like suffering once, reciting words i didn’t understand or
believe—

promising myself between the countdown that i would never do
this again.

and like she could read the growing vow on my face, she would slap
my calf

to stop my slouching and continue when my back straightened.

my ire would fade by the fourth iteration and we would settle into a
call and response, her words sure and reverent echoed by my
clumsy lips.

“*Blessed are you, daughter, above all women on earth*”

“Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee . . .”
she must’ve known i never prayed—that my servile days bedside
contemplating the mysteries of mother mary’s life were long over.
she witnessed the birth and death of my beliefs, cultivating
 most with her bare hands,
but this eden fell each time i waved goodbye to her plane
 floating back home.
the last call i had with my *lola* was tragic in its normalcy;
her mind going through tangents i couldn’t follow,
her slips and mistakes, unable to recognize my voice even after
years of choral repartee, weeks of midnight masses, and
 hours of passing
a worn bible between us.
but even this i was comfortable with, accustomed to my
 lola’s wandering mind;
oceans away, i tease and correct her, she laughs—still the
 call ends with
‘be good, remember to pray’.
and i hold onto that familiar sentence, careful and loving,
like she once cradled my face after i fell and scarred my knees,
young blood blessing her blue peas and wax plants.

when the corpse was buried, the body was stiff and wrong,
 an imitation of the cogent reality.
but in its hands, her rosary was red.

**lola—the Tagalog word for ‘grandmother’*

ii. quiricus

a child martyr was perfected today,
a reward for cracking his head across the final steps.

for his love, for his mother, for the god who let him die,
for the men who stepped in red as they threw his body out.

but i heard his bird bones splinter and watched rigor mortis
set among the remains of murderers and thieves.

his eyes were open and held wide, leaving brands of guilt
to everyone who met its sightless gaze.

he laid like a small reminder as his mother sobbed with
hooks in her sides and the tip of a sword in her collarbone.

he died in the snap of a broken neck and she died
with a cut off choke, gurgling and begging.

one stroke and her head rolled to rest at our feet.
we looked into her eyes and held our lips firm.

that night, there are no angels, no forces of benevolence;
only bloodless faces and missing limbs.

we carried him with his mother's head on his chest,
a last comfort we scarcely afforded in the morning light.

we kissed his eyelids before tucking him into the earth
and closed his mother's screaming mouth.

"good night," she said into his hair.
"goodbye," i said into his palms.

iii. mama, give me time—i can make more space

mama goes to work, and i do too, a pail and knife in hand.
i don't go into her room until they're gone,
a dodging look over my shoulder i learned young,
and start filling the holes in the wall.

sheetrock breaks with eighteen pounds of pressure,
the momentum cracking drywall into neat divots,
into patterns of dust and paint chip polka dots,
and i've perfected the art of fixing mistakes in less than a day.

i did this for my father too—slipped into the garage and took
from his supply of sandpaper to perfect the look.
it was easy then to match the grain of the wall with the shade of the paint,
creating invisibility with tiny competent hands.

spackle would stick under my nails and dry out my fingertips,
and i would cough dust into pillowcases before i slept.
but it was a price paid for penny silence, gossamer peace for
another week.
only, i was happy to stop smelling old paint and ammonia.

when the nausea subsided, when my eyes stopped its paranoid track
through the dark corners of my room,
i would sleep with the belief that this was a good deed.
at least, at least, at least, i fixed the break.

he isn't my father but the holes are about the same.
and i cannot provide the same quality my mother expects,
i'm older now, my limbs are tired of the rote.
i'm sadder now, my lungs can't handle the work.

but i can't stop in the middle, not when the spackle takes an hour to
dry and
the paint won't apply, smooth and even, on an unsanded surface.
only once, i asked why.
“at least it wasn't me,” she said. “at least it wasn't me.”

iv. MOON KILLER

—A CONVERSATION I NEVER HAD WITH MY FATHER.

i see me.

i see you.

but also i see you.

yes, i do too.

i don't want to see it.

i've seen it since you were a child.

even then?

**i knew it early too, saw it when you threw
your tantrums, heaving rocks into the
pond—your eyes were gleaming as you
watched the carps struggle for their lives.**

no, that doesn't sound like me.

**and yet, i can still hear your screaming; high
and whetted, digging your fingers into the
flesh of unripe mangoes. ripping, ripping,
ripping.**

i don't remember that.

or maybe you wanted to forget.

no. i would remember. i loved that mango tree, i loved eating
its fruitful harvests right at the base, safe in the twisted roots. i
named those carps, knew their spots and speckles better than my
own face, i fed them, touched their scales, i loved them.

**your love guided them under, i buried three
by your mango tree.**

you're lying to me, you're lying. i loved them, i loved them.

**you did and it wasn't enough and it was
immense and it was unrestrained. don't you
trust me?**

not really, not anymore.

i see me again; we are like overlapping

**waves, back and forth, push and pull, crash
and covet, returning into blue. i am my
father's child, *anak*.**

then, he too -

yes.

then. me too?

yes.

then i will be alone. then i will be empty. then i will be barren.

you would stop the movement of the ocean?

i'll kill the moon. i'll kill it and the night sky will be dark, yes, but
the ocean will rest while the world sleeps.

violent.

it's all our family knows.

and selfish.

i don't want to hear that from you.

**it is your birthright, passed through fingers
of the blood who came before me, we are a
banking fire. your stone must be next.**

i will die cold and stiff then, let the maggots eat my eyes and
carrion birds pick through my chest. let the sun bleach my bones—
it will be the only warmth i need.

stubborn. i see me again.

i see you too.

i see my father. bullheaded. obstinate.

i see my sisters. i see my brother. i see me.

perhaps they will—

you don't exist in them.

and thus the line ends with you?

no, it will end with you.

**anak—the Tagalog word for 'my child'*

Elizabeth Farwell

Red Brick

On my walk in the neighborhood tonight I saw a house
red brick, with wooden boards on the side
it looked just like mine.

I paused, seeing it for the first time
on a street I had walked,
but had never seen the sign

The more I studied it, the more I saw my own
Crumbling, broken childhood home

I wondered who the people in this house were, inside.
When was the last time they cried?
Were they anything like my family?
Or was their domestic bliss easy?

The architect, surely,
must have been
the same,

And I had to hold myself back from the door, as I stood
wondering what could have happened in my house
on a street
with a different name.

. . . .and you can say things
very well may have completely gone
the exact same.
But I demand
acknowledgement of this other place,

somehow in this house, there's more space,
living here would have given us any ounce of grace.

I turned my back to the house,
into the cold wind as it blew across my face,
for, like the memories I had begun to chase,

the moment was over,
gone, without a trace.

illness

I'm tired of hearing you cry, Mom
so late into the night, Mom.
Your troubles fall into tears
which tiptoe down the hall,
past his room
into mine
where I wait by the door

Collecting them into a bucket
adding to the bank of reasons why I have to act, to run,
something must be done, before the dam bursts

I'm tired of him making you cry, Mom.
You don't deserve to suffer, Mom.
I know he is your own flesh and blood
the diapers you changed, the red hairs
you nurtured through
as if you grew them upon your own head

little league games, boy scouts, middle school, licenses,
fist fights, drugs, detention, suspension, retention, hopelessness

when he was old enough—
backs of police cars, the mind hospital
a Thanksgiving where our family ate two turkeys, one on a
cardboard tray in a visitors' room,
surrounded by strangers and their families
and my beloved little brother, too old for that place yet too
young to belong with adults,
trapped and miserable

another turkey long dead and cold,
delicious, at home, on a glass plate,
consumed at a table with one vacant spot.

But Mom, you grew him
and he is now
rotting the same roots
which brought me into this world

loving, kind, providing
the very same diaper changing,
blonde curl brushing, soccer watching,
graduation day clapping,
cut and scrape cleaning
hands
now held up to your face

I cannot sit idly by and watch
your branches produce liquid leaves,
to hear you sob until tears run dry
any longer.

Unjust. But what can be done?
As I sit, behind my door

holding your tears
to my heart
with my hands.

Not justice, but grace

At a certain point in time,
I realized the ultimate irony in seeking justice is
regardless of someone being put away,
the situation has already been lost
on both sides.

It does not matter, it did not
ever matter to me
what became of the man responsible
for my brother's murder

For my brother was already
irreversibly, unavoidably gone
from earth.

I'd never know him again in this lifetime

So what was the point
of taking a lifetime
of knowing and seeing
away from the man
who took it from me?

For that man, I learned,
also had
a brother.

The question I always come back to

You're there, aren't you?

In the space in my heart
that hasn't stopped aching
since you left

You're there aren't you?
In the hole, in the cavern, in the pit of my stomach
which gnaws when I think of
what your fate was.

You're there aren't you?

In the glimmers of the water, on the tops of
the trees, in the notes of the music
in the background of my life,
notes only I can hear,
waves only I can see,
a rustle in the wind sent straight to me

watching from a shrub,
looking down from the clouds,

You're there, aren't you?

The Life That Scattered

Grief is the Big Bang,
an explosion of galaxies
an alteration of life as you had not known it,
something some still deny.

The death which erupts from the stars lit on fire,
sets forth new life
galaxies, planets waiting to be discovered.

I hope to die many deaths in my life.

I will so many Big Bangs, each one
bigger and louder than the last

for on the other side of the scattering pieces,
the cosmic eruption, and destruction of What Once Was

is the unthinkable, the frontier of What Will Be.
The new order of the galaxies, stars, moon, and tides

all created

from the dust

of the stars left behind

From the life

that scattered.

Bill Cushing

Three Acts of Oedipus Rex in Cinquains

After
answering the
Sphynx's riddle, the young
Oedipus swears he will escape
his fate.

Hubris
overtakes him
as he commits the first
case of road rage on the journey
to Thebes.

Zealous,
his search to learn
the truth reveals that he
killed the king who was also his
father.

Pelicans

Slowly circling,
the pelican

drops like a stone
into water.

Then climbing the
air, he stops, and

with a single
motion of wings,

glides on the wind.

Playing Ball in the Hereafter

As children, Henry Aaron and Don Sutton
grew up in towns three hours apart
and learned the game between fields of cotton;

then the hitter moved east, the pitcher, west
as they took paths to opposite coasts.
Two All-Stars, they became among the best.

Upon dying, Sutton arrived first and may
have used the time to loosen his arm
while warming up on the clay

waiting for Hammering Hank's arrival.
As they play, now in eternal prime,
Celestial fans admire erstwhile rivals

and wonder, from where they sit,
what is the most wondrous display:
the sweet pitch or power-driven hit?

Two Stairways

The first greets those who promenade
through the foyer to a sunken

living room; its steps—wide with
carpeted tread—ease beneath gilded panels

lined with portraits of staid patriarchs
long dead. Bright red lips brush fair cheeks,

besitos de cultura alto,
as these elegant guests parade

through the living room past a massive
dining table and walls affixed

with innocuous ceramic buttons,
doorbell fixtures to summon the help

from the kitchen hiding a second staircase:
steep, jagged, and above all concrete.

Servants—rough hands wrapped in skin darker
than the mahogany furniture

they rub to a high shine—trudge between floors
carrying the weight of meals, loads of laundry,

flutes of lemon water, and whispered curses,
triggered by constant buzzing commands.

Meanwhile, quiet worms of hate burrow, deep
yet imperceptible, into their hearts.

Richard Baldo

A Note to Prepare You

Be nice to me even though you know
I will leave you on an unscheduled flight.

Make our bed warm for me when I can't shed the chill in my bones.
I will leave you and melt through the sheets to drip into the earth
by morning.

Murmur to me, just a whisper to remember those times I was a
good man.
I will leave you before the falling star strikes the earth.

Stroke the side of my right cheek with your wrinkled fingers;
I will leave you alone in the soon cold sheets we still share.

Say you remember when I brought alive that wet passion within you;
I will leave you a map to your pleasure etched with the pain of
gentle endings.

Say the sun still shines through the French doors of our life.
I will leave you the echo of my footsteps climbing to our bedroom.

I will leave you a legacy of faded shirts to fly as kites
And signal your remembrance of my arm across your shoulder.

As I leave my life, I leave you the rest of your life without me.

The Position

Assumed when we start the night,
my left elbow rests on her left hip,

the curve of her bottom presses into my stomach.
My left arm curves around her torso to cup her right breast.

Her right nipple rests in the relaxed space
between the thumb and forefinger of my warm left hand.

In the night we break apart,
mitosis that allows for reunification.

When we awake, we listen to the rhythm of breaths
to read our mutual state and retake our position.

She likes her left leg on top of mine
to make a stack of ankles.

I hate the king bed where our darkness
can create distance between the sheets.

Those nights we drift apart,
we can become lost to each other.

As the alarm goes off and dreams fade,
we reach to resume the position or,

practice other skin-tight moments.

Borne from Our December

Our cold breaths make words freeze
and shatter between us.

The cold window shines white frost
from the ice moon.

I want to walk into the winter wooded yard,
lie down between the trees and shrubs,

let the roots and earth enfold me
to drink love's blood
and devour dried bone.

Maybe in spring,
something she can love
will grow.

Love's Truths

You know she loves me.

She makes idols to my mysteries.

She worships
the quicksand I walk on.

She looks up to me
from above.

You know
I love her.

I stroll on the banks of her muddied flood zone.

I hold her light before me
to devour my darkness.

I stand under her sword
hanging from a thread of truth.

She hides her tears
in the clouds.

I hide my fears behind
an arrogance of trust.

And the differences
between the mirrors we hold up

light the fire of passion
we escape into.

B. R. Foster

Roar

A good party is a fishbowl
on the high shelf. Hungry
tom cat pacing the pine floor below.

You have to remember to open your eyes. Have to remember the walls
are still there. You can use the glass
to pull the pruning tips of your
fingers tight again.

This room is a stock pot. Hear the clicking
clicking, clicking. The whoosh.
Everything is warm. The air hangs on our shoulders. Presses.
Flattens. Kneads.
Relax. Relax.

Everyone here is blush & bashful. Everyone is gilded paper dolls
skin stretched thin by
lapis & opal & emeralds. Everyone's a satin teddy bear. Bedroom
tearstained—mommy sutures on the foot. Across the throat.
Right down their bellies.

It's too hot here—too hot.
Everyone here is gorgeous
no one here is ok. The air thickens, sour smoke
& pheromones
fill lungs like sweatshirt cotton,
silent smiles fall to the floor.

The room is a barbecue pit—smoked thighs,
spare ribs, briskets, bellies, wings. Meat.
Are you the herb or the brine? The acid or the incisors? Gristle &
tendon & bloodline.

Everyone here is small plate
shareable. Full of dirty, double dipped, quick

piss—unwashed finger marks. Everyone here tastes like unbrushed
teeth &
cowboy killer mourning breath.
Everyone here is gorgeous.
& no one is ok.

Aubade from the Coast

I read once that time & gravity have
an inverse relationship. Don't confuse
this for magnetism. The 2 sides of every coin
are opposites. Forever.

But it makes sense that when you compress
the calcium & marrow &
muscles of your fingers into a fist—the daylight
goes skittering behind the horizon.
Clock hands chase their tails. It's almost cute.

But I guess that's what makes the butterfly
beautiful. In the end, it ends. There's no
returning to the warm gooey center
of its chrysalis. There are limits to milkweed
& honeysuckle.

But, I'm not saying this is a cocoon, or that I
am in any way a king. I'm saying I like
the light & the heat—the ghost story in me
feels at home by your campfire.

But when I look in the mirror I see a lighthouse.
& it's always raining.
& I lose track of which way the tides are
going. I just sit here with the rocks
& the rotting rib cages
of shipwrecks, singing my stupid little song,
stay away stay away stay away

But when the film comes back from the
darkroom. Those same fingers, clenched fist
from before,
are a crab claw—clamped on the top bulb
of an hourglass. Did I tell you how I read about
time & gravity being the opposites that don't attract?

But what if I'm strong enough to break this glass—
spill a million galaxies worth of seconds
across the ground & make a beach right
here?

Aubade in the Mist Ending in a Practical Lesson on the Surface Tension of Water

After Hanif Abdurraqib

There's a rule in stories that says, if you
put a gun on the table in the beginning—it
has to go off before the end. Here,
we can start in the middle. In this ramshackle house they call friends.

The first rule of a footrace—take off running after
the gun goes off. This is that middle
of the pint melodrama, where they try to convince you every ending is a
beautiful beginning. The last sentence closed
with a period.

The next beginning with illuminated filigree, open & hungry
like a venus flytrap.

I didn't think you'd run so fast. Never thought I'd taste
the dust kicked up in your wake & wish
for the texture of sludge clogging my throat. You know,
with enough mud & sun & time
I can make bricks?

& those bricks
will build a house that I will call me. While the person
frying eggs in the kitchen isn't you.
I'll take a walk along the beach.

Do you want to know what kind of gun was on the table?
It's small & cold & fits
in almost any pocket. It can shoot 5 times before
giving out. It's never killed a man.

I point it at the sun. I count to 5.
There is no coughing. No thunder clouds. The puffins stay in their nests.

Instead, I skip a stone into the tideline. It

takes off like a flying saucer & I
turn before the crash landing.
Did it sound like a gunshot,
to you?

Litany of the Best Ways To Be OK with Everything

After Jamaal May

Look—what’s this in my hand? Playing card
ace of clubs. Shed snakeskin—broken
condom, book of matches. It’s empty now. See
what it says here? *I wish I knew you
before
you ripened.*

Fold it over.
Now it says,
can you tell me how it feels to be a flower?

Fold it again, pop of black powder spark &
whisper of smoke, it’s
gone now.

Once upon a time, I met someone who said
she should have been born
an ocean. Said, she was sick of the
ash & soot in her feathers. Sick of the
stale air up here, sick of the greasy showers, sick
of the cold
eggs & potatoes & onions.

Imagine, swallowing a
star
every night for dinner.
Giving it back to the world every morning. I told her

that in a past life I was veal.
Served as sweetbreads to monsters with green skin
& no mouths. In a past life I needed to be
deep fried to be enjoyed. In a past life I fell from the
branch, tart &
ready to be reduced. To be compote.

Look—what's this behind your ear? Gummy
bear, piece of candy
cherry cough drop. The garnish at the
bottom of your cocktail.

Once upon a time, in a past life,
I would tie
myself into knots. Thinking there's something
settling about sailboats on a smooth ocean
at sunset; & something
sexy about a stem tied between
your teeth.

Water Moccasin

After Silas Denver Melvin

The first time I walked on water
each step
felt like building a sandcastle
on a slack tide—there's a full moon tonight.

That is to say I'm sitting here in
a litter box packing clumps of
ammonia & cat shit into a
cracked hourglass. That is to
say—this too can't last. Did you

hear the one about the old man &
his bologna sandwiches? Sat at the kitchen table, chatting
to his potato chips, side
of pasta salad. He says, *this too
can't last*. A boy sits at a small bent legged
card table, he giggles, he

rattles his pockets. He asks his bologna
sandwich, *do you have
the time?* That is to say, a boy
makes himself into a rattlesnake. Turns
every hourglass on its side, & laughs.

That
is to say, a boy
makes a sandcastle on
a slack tide, under a full moon, counts the seconds in his
pockets &
thinks to himself, I
can make miracles.

Bernard Horn

Glamour

Don't look at her walk now,
her tiny, sidling flat steps,
neither crablike nor direct, falling
her permanent companion, between rooms,
on the bottom stair, even from her bed.
Rather remember how she swept into a room,
beautiful and engaging, her lovely
son and daughter, her husband
and Max her Great Dane in tow. Perfect
is how you saw them.

Don't think about her hand trembling,
her mind as analytic as ever now crippled
by forgetfulness, the passion still there
sullied by despair. Remember how
Boorfield her Basset would come skittering around
on unclipped toenails
as she effortlessly called to mind
decades of actors and performances,
Dusty and Bobby and George Scott,
whom she read scripts for, and weigh each one
with savvy and irony.

Keep her at the center of engaged
conversation, and remember
Pompey her Jack Russell and the "ah"
of recollected pleasure or beauty,
so clear and generous, it was as if
you had been there
or would have felt as she does
if you had. Keep her
in her pleasure in company,
her roast legs of lamb, her grace.
Her glamour.

June 19. Against Transformation

She lay there in her own bedroom in a hospital bed,
diminished, barely responding to word or touch,
lucid for an instant, then lapsing back into silence,
the visiting hospice nurse having recognized
and announced that this is a “new stage,” a “crash,”
and that the son in England should come right away.

Masked, we stand at the foot of the bed,
my wife touching her foot, as the daughter, all patience,
cajoles a sip or two of water. The image is recalcitrant.
It simply will not budge. Frail as she is,
all the forces of remembrance are impotent
to produce and sustain even a translucent superposition

of how she once was, say, lifting a whole leg of lamb
from oven to serving plate on Passover
and hauling it to the kitchen table to be carved,

that image from long ago bursting into flames,
then consumed from the outside in,
like a piece of movie film projected onto a screen,
curling up, melting, dissolving,
revealing beneath it the powerful and frail body,
thin limbs moving listlessly,
the shallowest of breaths.

June 25. Litany

Why you woke at 6:00 am, somehow tuned
to the last breath of our friend, as Ann woke
across the continent at 3:00, I don't know.
Whether the dying woman heard any of us,
husband, daughter, son, friends of fifty years,
speaking tenderly, inches from her ear,
during what we now know was her last day,
I don't know. Whether the haphazard motion
of her arms and legs and whispered no's
the day before that were signs of discomfort,
pain, despair, or something else entirely,
I have no idea. I still have a hankering
for the notion that there is some connection
between how a life is lived and how it ends,
a drop of meaning perhaps, even revelation
or virtue, despite the lesson of Auschwitz,
Hiroshima, or Covid-19, that there is no connection
at all unless it's to humble us, to teach us the horror and folly
of dragging our most intimate private needs
and passions, Lear-like, into the arenas
of public life, and I remember, six months ago.
We were walking with our friend in a park
by the water, when suddenly her legs were giving way
and it took all the strength the two of us
could muster to keep her from falling
again. That was the moment our bodies
first registered the seriousness of her decline,
which we did know.

August 20. Mattresses

Today is the day of the hauling of the mattresses,
our eldest and youngest daughters and youngest granddaughter
having departed for Brooklyn and Tel-Aviv
after a month's visit: the futon up one bending flight
onto its slats on the third floor; the pair of lumpy
single mattresses up a different flight
to the ancient stiff-sprunged sofa bed
in Linda's office. By the third mattress,
our middle daughter, just in from a year in Austria,
and I have it down, the lifting, the twisting
in the staircases, the care not to knock down
paintings, the sliding, dusting, the lifting again and
and the lowering: There's something ceremonial
about it all, as the two of us working together, mostly silent,
barely mention the three who are missing,
after the permanent stain of masks and quarantine,
the new rarity and unfamiliar carefulness
of our exchanges, and the echoes of
one hundred seventy thousand of our people
subjected to the cataclysm of dying alone
has unsettled our access to the everyday joy of family
we've always tried hard not to take for granted.

Harald Edwin Pfeffer

Only if you lie very still

Only if you lie very still,
Breathe calmly in the dark
Will you become aware
Of motes of gold,
Moving in the shadows.
And only if you will,
You can dance with them
In a flaming rapture
With the fire torching
Your mouth, scorching
Your tongue. A voice
Speaks a command,
Incomplete. A longing
From the dark side
Of the moon pulls
Your voice to sing
To an unknown tune.

Let there be

Let there be star-filled galaxies,
Oceans filled with plankton lessons
Bubbling up from the deep, dark sea.

Or more wanton: Four-leaved clovers
field-full for luck, dappled light,
Flowers, flight,
Known and unknown
Faces, another life.

Also terrors best forgotten,
Fangs and fur, tearing teeth,
While you sleep
In a skin on skin embrace,
Tangle of limbs.

All will Be clear. Be careful
What you take.
It comes with you
When you awake.

Still stiff with morning cold

Still stiff with morning cold,
The hinge of the season
Is about to creak open
To let in spring.

Green lances from bulbs
Are tipped with flaming daffodils.

The wind changes direction.
Through the door a scene
Of blues mixed into blue
And air so clear, that soon

We will listen to every breath
And everything will sing.

One day

One day you or I
Will wake and reach
For what was ours
And touch emptiness.

A landscape between us,
As familiar as our face
Will have only
A vaulted grey sky,
Hours of lead
Times of snow.

Grief will enter
Eye and nose
Sharp as mace
Or the memory
Of a warm embrace.

I know it is only temporary

I know it is only temporary,
Like taste dissolving
With the ripe fruit
On our tongue,
Like the colours
Of dawn or sunset
Like the smell,
The soft-shaped curves,
Voice, breath and shudder
Of us wrapped and entangled
In this warm bubble,

But the happiness, the joy,
Lingers, lingers.....

Nia Feren

Neon Orange Tree Trunks

My focus oscillates
between my coffee's lazy steam swaying,
and three tailored spheres of dust-coated
leaves—either side of a rustic wooden gate—
guarding the grand mansion
deprived of human touch.

A forced garden on a painted pavement stands, autumn's
touch goes unnoticed—
All grey, grunting ghouls
in and around six little sad trees.
The yarn of caffeinated vapor endlessly,
pirouettes and prances
veiling, then unveiling the trees.

Something bright! Something ablaze!
Fiery orange spews out the trunk
with a curved spine, they rest as though sculpted,
outside the soulless mansion. I see only them—

The drenched laborers taking shade
under the fishnet shadows in their neon
orange vests,
no more drilling infinitely into the pavement the merciless
sun demands
a quiet sight.

How loud their minds must be?
If only my hearing range fits
within their frequencies. I know
not of how long,
or how far they've come only
to nest under these fishnet
shadows.

I know not if the man with
the missing tooth misses
his children,
or if he has a family at all?

I know not of the man
with eyes shut, dreams in
color
or black or stoic white.

I know not of the story
behind the scar
disappearing into
his vest's hem.

I know not if they live
grieving the death
of a life they inched
towards, but never lived . . .

I walk towards them,
my hands cold from carrying
chilled mango-juice bottles;
I place them in each jagged palm.

Them and I,
may have different stories with
snowflake shaped scars, tongues
rolling into languages that don't mix
and races that are miles
apart. Yet, I felt
the warmth, the love, the
gratitude,
that sprouted out of their
crinkled eyes, with gap
toothed smiles louder than
the drilling of all heads
combined,

“Thank you, beti,”* smiles the one with the missing tooth.

**Daughter*

White noise

after "A Rose from Jericho" by Omar Singer

I lay down in the middle of
the garden in protest the
storm stirs, I stir,
in detest rain slaps my body down.
Ten minutes. Only ten minutes
before her eyebrows frenzy at her grand-daughter cosy, under
the cold, pouring rain.
Ten minutes before she yells,
'Are you crazy?', convinced fever would find me.

I seal tight my eyes, the video from Gaza on repeat: Beneath
an anxious roof, an anxious family sit; Missiles fly and
fragility reeks.
I wince at the gasp of the little girl's voice—scared
blue eyes scavenge safety in her toys her father
scoops her, rosary beads sprint chanting so loud
but the war cry wins!
Dying a thousand deaths before their house crumbles until
voices replace thuds-
a command, an unmusical roar, bang! The
53-year long cycle repeats
I hear it all in white noise, lost in 'technical' translation. I hear it
all sizzling, hot inside my head.

I hear it. I collect myself, "Stop crying, be
grateful that it's not you instead!" Eyes
flaming, I paralyze in helplessness. Will
withers, whimpers at this thing called
humanity—
the white noise wrapped in sweet silence.

Birds chirp unaware, the cows moo in reply . . .
The earth invites me, tossing the
honeyed serenity from tree to tree
away from desolation, closer to doomsday I lay,
peacefully in my mossy casket listening to the

conflict being retold
in thousand different voices,
in thousand different media strains. I
listen, and I listen. I hear static.

My grandmother finds me—she
yells, like clockwork.

Everett Roberts

A Mourning Performance; or, Prepared Remarks

If I'm guilty
of anything,
It's that I slip easy
into elegy.
The words incurred,
the notes I wrote:
Responses ready
When mourning's heard.

While you devoured
each breath you stole from death,
Checking borrowed time
on a broken watch,

I went along. I hummed
the song, even if I didn't
know the words.

I still don't think there's time to learn.

Vesper

Did you think you'd leave me
Unmarked?

Or don't you remember,
Together, in the dark,
The sigh upon your lips
That I devoured?

How you poured yourself
Into me?
Long past sunset;
The fragrant evening, and
night's descent

Remember how we spun onyx
Into the hours?

Vigil

Did you miss my light?
I waited up for you, hours past
When I should've slept.
I spent each minute just like the last
Enveloped in the lambent night,
Lamp light, my promise kept,
The quiet house, my easy breath;
I know the roads and know the route
Your loosened tie, the wrinkled suit
But even in the dream you don't return.
Even here a candle can't forever burn.
Silence as the dishwasher's cycle comes to an end.
My ears don't strain. I still pretend.

Alaina Goodrich

Song Lines

I light a fire in my heart
A torch
I am looking for something
Listening for something
The songlines of my ancestors
The wisdom
Of who I am
And where I belong in the world

Anger and hurt in my heart
For the break in the chain
Who left the wisdom behind
In this shallow culture
It is 2am
And I cannot sleep
I am like a child
Shedding tears
For the lullaby that I can't hear

I clear my mind
And listen
Awareness on my heart
But all I can hear are the crickets
And the bullfrogs
Singing their songs
Simple songs
But simple creatures
Who know their place perfectly
Where they belong in the world
Living in harmony with all of life
Taking only what they need
Not trying to change the world
For their own good

So wise
Those small beings
Singing through the night
Their songlines for all to hear
Let's hope we listen
Listen
Listen

Amidst this harmony I hear lyrics
In my mother's voice "let me call you sweetheart, I'm in love with you..."
And in the voice of my father: "you are always on my mind..."
And my grandmother: "you'll never know dear, how much I love you,
Please don't take my sunshine away."
Love.
The common thread
Though so unraveled
Not all is lost
Love remains
Pass it on

Wrinkled Up

It's past our bedtime
but the sunset was so delicious
I wanted to bathe in it
to make a bathtub of light
bent enough to cradle us
or a sailboat to carry us

back to the sun.
I'll take a flagpole
to claim my plot when I get there.
I'd take a flag for the whole earth
if there was one
someday...

I'll put my life in my backpack
and make the whole earth my playpen
my raincoat on my waist
so when it pours I can continue to play

until He calls "come inside"
Father himself
then I'll open the door
and greet Him
(when I am old and wrinkled up)
bathing

in the beauty of this all
one more time
a wick fully burned
ashes to ashes
to stardust all return

and I will try, as mother says
to take only what I'll use

Rumi's Moth

I think everything is a model
or a mirror
I look into my teacup
and see my porous body
my self dissolving
telling me to let go
and give thanks
for even the hot water
for especially the hot water
extracting my flavors
for the whole world.
They can have them.
Pour it on me;
the pain
of rejection.
I gave you my all
but I couldn't force you to take it.

I surrender to the fire.
What good is a dry tea bag?
It's like dry eyes-
the lesson's stuck inside.
Don't waste it.
Don't hold it in.

I chug my tea
and take my eyelashes outside to dry.
I see the earth has done the same
each blade of grass glistening in the moonlight
washing my bare feet
giving gratitude
for the dark night.
Nahko sings "Wash it away"
and I dance down my moonlit street
my cell in hand glowing above me
casting light
I wonder who sees me waving?
A shooting star near Orion

burns up
like Rumi's moth
finding heaven
on a moonlit street
while the whole world sleeps.

The Way I Wander

I want to write poetry
the way I wander
through the forest
alone
following my fancy,
the critters, and their signs

The way I want to worship
the way my dog does
100% adoration
Max gazes up at me
and I see myself- in his eyes
a vision of who I aspire to be

The way God sees himself
in my eyes
when I wander
adoring creation
the way Max looks at *me*
his fountain of love overflowing
he sees me, as I am

The way I see my son
when he asks
“Will you tickle my side pork, *just a little?*”
when he is supposed to be sleeping
“My side pork *and my neck pork?*”
my heart, hungry and full, I cannot resist
I could eat him right up
forever

The way I can't stop looking at him
when he's finally asleep,
I know he'll rise again
I know death is not an ending
I know this moment is fleeting
and forever
but still my heart aches

for the passing of time.
I know time doesn't really exist
but innocence does
and it too seems to pass
and I know my heart aches
hungry and full

I wanted to write this poem
about a picture I drew
in the snow
 sliding around on the pond
like a child
 in wonder or worship
 my boots unstitching the blanket
uncovering the water
 that was already frozen
 anyway

But there came a desperate squeaking
“Mommy!?”
I wheeled around “I’m down here you guys!”
It came again, a moaning
from the trees, suddenly alive
cracking from the cold
I would have loved to linger
listening

I left
my picture unfinished

And wrote this
the way I like to wander
and come back home
with my heart
hungry and full
alone
but never *alone*

Still Burning

I wrote this one for you
dear Sixfold poet.
I suppose the other ones I did too
but this one consciously
pulled back the curtains of time

between us.

I played you a tune
on a Tibetan bowl
listen and you'll hear it now
ringing in your heart.
I sent a whole lot of love
and I hope it made it,
So many vibrations.
(Can you feel it?)

I poured some peppermint tea
and lit us a candle—
“Stay Awhile Vanilla,”
it's container badly broken
rough glass edges
wax exposed
but the wick doesn't seem to notice.
I suppose that's the way a soul is.
It doesn't mourn a broken body
it just keeps on burning.

I had to reheat our tea
so I'm thinking of my grandma
she always drank it slowly
conversing while she knit.
I'm not much for knitting
it's this poetry I burn for
soul seeking, heart speaking
that keeps me alive
what I'd like to leave behind.

I still have a lot to learn
thankfully
I enjoy the burning
for freedom, wilderness, the wonder of it all.
When I do finally go out
it won't be for lack of fuel.

I hope you're burning too?
Whether in pain or pleasure
fully engulfed
a fervor for life.
I don't mind the pain
it makes me feel alive
but I do prefer the pleasure
We ARE on a trip around the sun
Baby let's burn together

Olivia Dorsey Peacock

beady bead blues

tightly coiled tufts
fall on cold linoleum tile
for a moment suspended
aghast at
their forced separation.

it's my fault
often content letting
roots remain tangled
introducing wide tooth comb
coercion only
when nimble fingers
could not ease away
fragile strands

never was there
time to nurture them

and when did I
start to value
weekday 9 to 5s
over my own cultivation?

will my daughter
take after her mother?
Lord knows I was tender-headed.

commencement

to the girls
who made me squirm
inside the rawness of my cocoon
conducting marionette dances
early evening late-night sleepovers
the droning of quick buck, rebel just because skater-girls

you taught me
how light pancakes
quickly brown turned burnt
in Georgian sun,

who was icky and
dirty and stinky and gross,
how to be one of few,
and those who could not

and how no matter how many times
itchy scalps scab drowning in lye pools,
my hair would never bounce the same
that when white boys called me,
it was to see what it was like
to be with someone of a different shade.

I grew through bravado
willing my esteem to bare
through citrus husks
in the hopes that one day
apathy would will itself,
flowing, burning through clenched fists.

how to lose a clarinet solo

it began gradually
forming in status inherited
on a high school football field.

I was loudest out of self-sacrifice
petite stature
unafraid to bulge cranial veins
free notes from wooden cage
if it meant our instruments
being heard

the moment was to be brief—a retreat of brass
a whispering of woodwinds
letting me soar
high above the unkempt grass

I emerged alone.
caught my parents' eyes first
across the 20-yard line
aware of the freshmen,
peers at my back
expectation-filled and hanging—

this was seniority.

I was act four.
it wasn't more than 8 bars
quick, crisp perfection
pounded into memory, fingers
clicked metal
night, day

but chipped reeds, rotted padding
formed my shell of confidence
fumbling musical spew reached short of
that single high A
the catalyst for its fracture

silence born from the keys
mere exhausted puff
failed to connect

I submitted myself
tears and sweat streaming
down polyester jacket,
crumbling back into the uniformed mass.

the iron maiden and other adornments

incessant self-criticisms remind me to wrap the unreachable enough
in gauze mummy-style tight around my brittle frame

I carry myself as slippery ceramics
that fall between butter-fingered grasp

I grind details into the ground until ash
loop indecisions into infinities
think too much, talk too much and too little
blinded by what I don't know

my flaws have become the pyre,
those who are better than myself, the ropes
self-deprecation, the eager match

desperate, frantic,
my last words were—

trust me my thoughts will follow through this time and
I'll perfectly balance strategic spontaneity
on bird's nest head
hold my weight confidently as voluptuous pillows
not twigs and flat bottom
I'll unpack the densest lines into a single thread of continuity,
find my competence—

if I sacrifice my ego
on this altar,
what will remain?

Contributor Notes

Laura Apol is a professor at Michigan State University and the author of five full-length collections, most recently, *A Fine Yellow Dust*. She is a two-time winner of the Oklahoma Book Award and silver-medal winner of the Independent Publishers Book Award, and from 2019-2021, she served as the poet laureate of the Lansing area in mid-Michigan. Her current work focuses on the therapeutic uses of writing and literature in response to trauma.



Richard Baldo has been a clinical psychologist in private practice and only recently started developing his craft in poetry. He was raised in New Jersey and attended Trenton State College, University of Idaho, and University of Nevada Reno. He has returned to study at the creative writing program at UNR. He met his wife in Minsk, and their first date included an English/Russian dictionary. He believes he has been blessed in his career and life.



Carol Barrett coordinates the Creative Writing Certificate Program at Union Institute & University. Her poetry books include *Calling in the Bones* (winner of the Snyder Award from Ashland Poetry Press) and *Drawing Lessons*. Her creative nonfiction book *Pansies* (Sonder Press) was a finalist for the Oregon Book Awards last year. Carol is a former NEA fellow whose work appears in JAMA, Poetry International, The Women's Review of Books and elsewhere.



Devon Bohm's work has been featured in publications such as *Labrys*, *Spry*, *Necessary Fiction*, *Hole in the Head Review*, *Horse Egg Literary*, *The Graveyard Zine*, and *Sunday Mornings at the River's 365 Days of Covid* anthology. Her first book, *Careful Cartography*, was released in 2021 by Cornerstone Press. Follow her on Instagram @devonpoem or @devonbohm, or visit her website www.devonbohm.com to learn more.



Bill Cushing lived in several states and the Caribbean before moving to California after earning an MFA from Goddard College. A retired college instructor, he lives in Glendale with his wife and their son. Nominated for two Pushcart prizes, Bill has two award-winning poetry collections, *A Former Life* (Kops-Featherling International Book Award) and *Music Speaks* (New York City Book Award). His new poetry chapbook, *. . .this just in. . .*, became available July 2021.



Olivia Dorsey Peacock is a creative technologist from North Carolina. Her poetry has appeared in *A Garden of Black Joy* and *Sixfold* (Summer 2018). She holds degrees in Information Science from UNC Chapel Hill. When she's not writing poetry, you can find her researching her family history, experimenting with new ways to share underrepresented histories, or eating good food with her husband.



There exists a time capsule from when **Elizabeth Farwell** was four. This year I want to learn: "how to read," she answered. And she loved to read so much, she eventually wrote her own words that could be read. 21 years later, Elizabeth has a degree in English, a day job in tech PR, and now a poetry collection. Writing has saved her life, her sanity, and helped her to find magic in the world.



Nia Feren, a 19-year-old aspiring Indian poet, is currently doing her bachelor's in English Major, Journalism and Psychology. She writes poems, short stories, articles or any piece of writing that comes her way. Writing for her is a release; a sort of prayer, to say the very least. Being published in PoetrySoup's anthology (2020) and having won inter-collegiate poetry contests before, she looks forward to publishing an anthology of hers soon.



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B. R. Foster lives, works, and writes in Portland, Maine. Foster graduated in 2016 with a bachelors in literature from Central Michigan University. His work is largely informed by his experiences surviving a pancreatic cancer diagnosis in his mid-twenties, and often focuses on the transformative qualities of both overwhelming grief and resigned optimism. His work has previously appeared in *Sun & Sandstone* and *Train River*.



His debut chapbook *Shriek*, was released by The Midas Collective in 2017.

Gillian Freebody is a veteran writing teacher who dedicated the past twenty years to encouraging student writing, both academic and creative. When the pandemic hit, Gillian found herself returning to her own writing as a way to cope with terror and isolation. Silver linings do exist. Gillian tries to find them everywhere every day.



Alaina Goodrich is a barefoot walking, wonder seeking, lover of all things wild. Those loves include her two children, her husband TJ, her 7th grade science students, nature, poetry, playing music, and extreme sports. She loves her Northern New York community where she was born and raised and still resides. Rumi, Mary Oliver, and Emily Dickinson are always on her nightstand. She has poetry collections she is pleased with

but has not yet pursued publication.



Bernard Horn's new collection of poems, *Love's Fingerprints*, has been praised by Carl Dennis, Major Jackson, and Prageeta Sharma. His first collection, *Our Daily Words*, was a finalist for the 2011 Massachusetts Book Award in Poetry. His translations of Yehuda Amichai's poetry have appeared in *The New Yorker* and other magazines. He is the author of *Facing the Fires: Conversations with A. B. Yehoshua*, the first book in English about Israel's pre-eminent novelist.



Latrise P. Johnson is writer/scholar/mother/teacher who works as an associate professor of literacy education. Her scholarship examines the literacy practices of historically marginalized youth and how writing can be used to compose oneself into the world. Her writing explores personal histories, experiences, and relationships and seeks to illuminate how the everyday is beautiful and worth exploration. In addition to writing, she enjoys yoga, music, and traveling.



Peter Kent's poems have appeared in *Cagibi*, *Cimarron Review*, *Greensboro Review*, *Lullwater Review*, *New Millennium Writings*, *The Opiate* and other journals. He lives in Boston, Massachusetts.



Alix Christofides Lowenthal has loved reading and writing for as long as she can remember. Now retired, she was a teacher of English, drama, and art history at a Waldorf school in suburban New York for 25 years. Now she is relishing more time to reflect, read and write.



may panaguiton (she/they) was born and raised in the Philippines; they moved to the USA in 2000. *Sixfold* is her first experience sharing poetry with an audience made up of actual human beings and not just her two dogs. Their poetry explores dysfunctional family life, domestic violence, abuse, and grief. Their goal in 2022 is to write a collection of poems about love or a poem about yarn.



Andre F. Peltier (he/him) is a Pushcart Nominee and a Lecturer III at Eastern Michigan University where he teaches literature and writing. He lives in Ypsilanti, MI, with his wife and children. His poetry has recently appeared in various publications like *CP Quarterly*, *Lothlorien Poetry Journal*, *Provenance Journal*, *Lavender and Lime Review*, *About Place*, *Novus Review*, *Fiery Scribe*, and *Fahmidan Journal*, and most recently in *Muleskinner Journal*. In his free time, he obsesses over soccer and comic books.



Harald Edwin Pfeffer Austrian parents, born and raised in South Africa, trilingual (German, English, Afrikaans). Living and working in New Zealand since 1987 (M.B.;Ch.B.,FRNZCGP) Married to Desiree. 2 daughters Astrid and Ingeborg. Loved reading and writing poetry since high school. Started submitting poetry to competitions and journals last year. “Stars in an endless sky” is my first published poem in *Comstock Review* (Spring/Summer 2021).



Everett Roberts, 33, is an award-winning poet, polyglot, technical writer, and former sanctions violations investigator living in Washington, DC. His work has appeared in *Sixfold*, *Beyond Words Literary Magazine*, and the *Write Launch*, and his cleave poem “John the Baptist” won the 2021 Oberon Herbert Poetry Prize.



Brenna Robinson is originally from Holland, Michigan, and has a BA in Creative Writing from Knox College. She resides in Indiana with her partner, three cats, and an iguana.



Laura Turnbull lives and writes in Berkeley, California where she works in independent school administration. She is deeply grateful for the *Sixfold* experience and especially for all the kind words and helpful observations from everyone who took time to read and respond. Laura shares some poetry and a blog at lauraturnbull.com. She's also on Instagram, [@short_longhand](https://www.instagram.com/short_longhand), and she'd love to meet you there, too.



Anne Marie Wells (She | They) is a queer poet, playwright, and storyteller navigating the world with a chronic illness. She is a faculty member of the Community Literature Initiative through the Sims Library of Poetry. She earned the 2020 Wyoming Writers Milestone Award, the 2020 Jackson Hole Rising Star Award, the 2021 Peter K. Hixson Memorial Award, and was nominated as a 2021 Wyoming Woman of Influence in the arts.



Rebekah Wolman is a retired educator living in San Francisco, on the unceded ancestral homeland of the Ramaytush Ohlone peoples. Her poems have appeared in *Essential Love*, an anthology of poems about parents and children, and in *The New Verse News* and *Limp Wrist*. She is a 2021 winner of *Cultural Daily's* Jack Grapes Poetry Prize.



