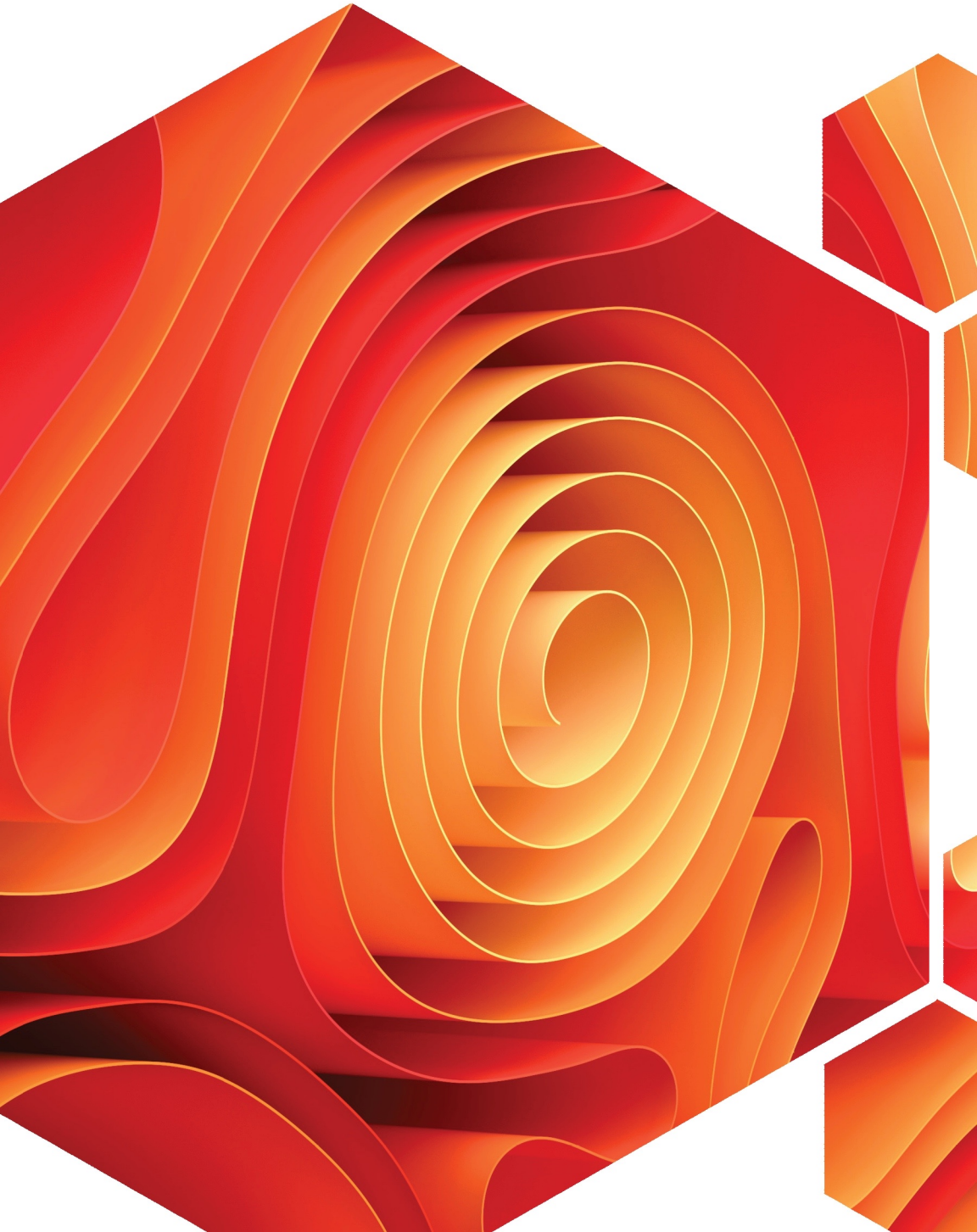


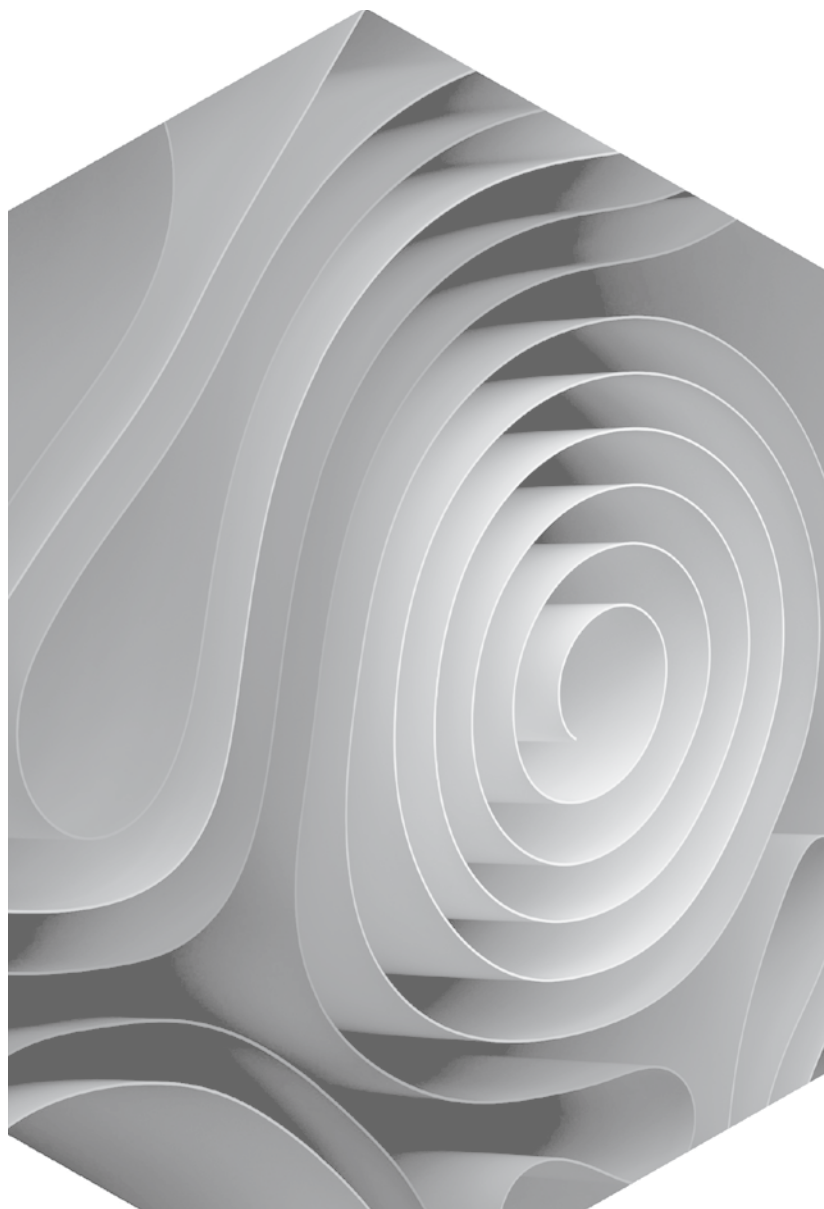
SIXFOLD

POETRY WINTER 2022



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

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Ana Reisens

Of beige plates and silver buttons

Rosa sold her story to a traveling peddler in a grey suit with silver buttons when she was five. Money was tight. Her mother couldn't afford big words. *Hunger* had six letters. So Rosa sold her story and gave the coins to her mother.

Rosa had never met anyone with a story, anyway, so why should she have one? Instead Rosa learned how to bake round cakes with just enough sugar and to wear her hair in a tight braid with no ribbon. She made amiable friends

with names like Mary and Susan and they played amiable games that involved jumping within the lines and keeping their pleated skirts clean. Rosa learned to add and subtract and ate tomato sandwiches, and the days

strung out like laundry on a line. Years later Rosa met an amiable man with no name and they fit each other like empty mittens, so they married and bought a grey house with beige dinner plates and the days strung out like

laundry on a line. They did what all the Marys and Susans were doing and they had two children, a boy and a girl, each little and silver and brimming with their own unwoven stories. The man with no name taught the boy to be amiable

and play catch, and Rosa taught the girl how to bake round cakes and wear pleated skirts. And the days strung out like laundry on a line until one evening, when Rosa's daughter returned from school with a story.

It wasn't a big story, mind you—just a morsel, like a round cake. And Rosa ate it. Hungrily she devoured the little girl's story and then sent her back for more. So the girl traded

her tomato sandwiches for stories because Rosa was hungry, and *hungry* was a six-letter word. As the days strung out like laundry on a line the girl gave away her own story to her mother.

Yes, I sense your concern. My grandmother once said most of us are born unremarkable, and I worry many would agree. Rosa worries about the same things as you and me, as well as some things

we do not. For instance: Will they leave her? Will they forget her? Also, what is a beginning or an end? Sometimes, when the children are in bed and Rosa is in the kitchen washing beige plates,

she wonders if one day, long after the letters of her name have passed, someone will find her story crumpled in the back pocket of a worn pair of grey pants with silver buttons.

Lidia finds a pink bear

Last week a family of three
died in an abandoned bank.
Mother, father, child.
They were immigrants,
occupying illegally.
The fire came in the night
like a rolling train.

There were protests, of course.

*If only they'd surveyed the building.
If only the bank hadn't closed.
If only we had known.*

I pass quickly.

The street is heavy with memories,
and my feet sink too easily
into someone else's story.

I see a pile of grief arranged
around a tree next to the building.
A woman and a young girl stand beside it.

*Lidia, I hear the woman say. Lidia, listen to me.
Do you know what happened here?*

I don't catch the rest.

I don't know, for instance,
if she's explaining why boats arrive
full of people with no homes,
why no one comes to greet them.
Or perhaps she's telling the girl
why banks close and windows break.
How fires burn in the places
we're unwilling to see.

Or maybe she's simply explaining why
there's a soft pink bear leaning
against a tree. Why the cars pass,
oblivious to even this little tragedy.
Why no one stops to pick it up.

Lilly of the white gloves

Lilly was born in a white house to a woman with white gloves on a wide sidewalk, where children peered through the fences and it never rained. Her mother bleached the floors each day, her blouse crisp as a pressed wildflower. She wore a yellow coat and ate seeds that would not grow. It never rained.

Lilly couldn't scream but she whispered to the neighbor's tree and waited. Winter tugged its luggage forward. White fingers on the windows. Christmas, a wrinkled bow. I know this because I was there. Ours were the fingers of children clinging to a horse that could not run. Plastic painted hooves. The moon, wicked in its glow. A man in a white coat kept count of Lilly's heartbeats. Every river had drowned another mother's gloves, fed a nettle we mustn't touch. We cupped the light in our hands like melting snow, like a river thin with thirst.

I've become a stranger to wide sidewalks. Here the river runs thick with spring. My fingers brush against the nettle. I tell her it prickles with memories. She tells me she has bought a yellow coat, and that it never rains.

Forgive her if her fingers bleed red beneath her white gloves.

Forgive me for leaving.

Olga

had to clean the entire apartment in three hours.
She had heavy red hands and a heavier red duster,

and Borja's ceramic armies shattered beneath Olga's
chapped fingers. Borja was 26. Olga had been cleaning

his room since he was 13. Before then, his mother.
Mrs. Garcia didn't like me talking to Olga. *Don't speak*

to the help was the unwritten agreement when I stayed
for the week, an invisible line drawn neatly over

the furniture. So Olga retreated every time I entered
the living room. Except that day, when Mrs. Garcia

was out. Olga was elbow-deep in someone else's
toothpaste and I was making potato soup in the kitchen.

I know this soup, Olga's voice rumbled from the doorway.
We make this in my country. I showed her the celery, the carrots,

the cheese I learned to shred as a child. *You're going to need
more pepper*, Olga said, and she set down her rag. But then

the front door opened and Mrs. Garcia appeared. *Olga*,
she said, eyes narrowed. *Be careful in Borja's room today*.

So Olga left, shoulders slumped, and I never asked her
about the pepper. Years have passed and I can still see her—

the grey apron wrapped around her waist, her elbows
cracked with battle. How she was somehow bigger

and smaller than every room she entered.
And that day, how Borja and Mrs. Garcia watched

from the hallway as she dabbed a cotton cloth
around the gristle-grey hands of the orcs,

their swords raised against the onslaught. *Olga,*
I should have told her. *Olga, you're no match for them.*

Pam asked about Europe

Is it just England, she wanted to know,
or was there more? I'd just returned from
my first trip to Spain and clocked in late.

It was December, and the morning clung
to the office windows like a curtain.
I remember her slipping out for her

cigarette break, how she returned
to tell me that her crossword
had featured the word *connoisseur*.

How she hid a hundred-dollar bill
in a striped pair of Christmas socks
and set them on my desk, *so you can go back*.

She knew, then, that I would leave.
I remember the condensation
on the windowpanes as the plane

took off, how grey the fields looked
from the clouds. How she waited
until I was gone to tell me.

A year later when I visited,
her husband called to explain
how to help her flush her port.

She's too ashamed to say anything,
he said. That day we sat in the park
and Pam asked if they celebrated

Thanksgiving in Spain. The pond
was beginning to freeze and the geese
huddled in the center, crying out to the sky.

Pam said that someday she would
visit me, and that her crossword
had featured the word *avocado*.

I didn't know, then,
that she would leave me.
I never had the chance

to tell her that it wasn't just England,
that there was so much more.
We can love without knowing.

Krystle May Statler

to the slow burn

what part of *he's dead* don't I understand
despite holding four boxes of his smile
in a city that returns to its everydayness
over and over and over, the reaping repeats itself
as sirens echo like hunting crows
under a dangerous sun, we can't slow the clouds

blanketing bodies before a body burns
by time or by fire or both without cause
and who's left lies about surviving
because we don't know if the moment
the bullet catches *dura mater* in a brain
is when the soul escapes a body or

when it can no longer listen to the crying
come back home big brother, please, come—
can't the ocean swallow "God's plan"
and eddy grief instead of haunting
a home where vaulted ceilings
make more space for ghosts?

then rain comes and an honest rage
rages after learning *he was unarmed*
but brother is still dead
while the murderous officer continues to work and breathe
and breathe, and breathe, and breathe, and breathe
in Inglewood with a holster of smoke

I see brother's body in my dreams
with alive eyes like in aged photographs
playing on the gravel of a playplace
when everything we wanted wasn't a thing
but a who, with arms to hug back
as we laughed our *I love you's* on a yellow bench

the gunshot wounds are arbitrarily labeled

after John Cage

The autopsy report rests like the cherry birThmark
between my eyes tHat Dad jokes
“The doctor smackEd you too hard,” but he wasn’t there,
or like the neck orGans removed
en bloc with BJ’s tongUe—
after evidence of aN oral gastric tube
terminated in his empty Stomach
after tHe coroner noted
no foam in the nares or Oral cavity
after placing The bloodbare brain on a scale
noting it weighed 1350 grams With an unremarkable
pOns, medulla, and cerebellum
(except for the deformed bUllet fragments
of brain)—
the sectioned tongue
Showed no trauma.

The last time I saw him **A**live
he yelled in a **dR**unken rage
through a bathroom door I **lockEd** myself behind.

The next morning, we **hAd** pancakes
across a table where we might've said two **worDs**
ending our visit with a lazy hug to **B**ury the lashing
and as **I** stood beside him
in **T**he viewing room, I couldn't remember his voice.

Then, Dad joked quietly "He's getting his last **haiR**cut,"
when the mortici**A**n clipped curls around his face—
after he'd already been **dR**ained
after the halo of **G**SW **A** entered **w**ithout an exit path
after his **L**eft upper back was tagged **G**SWs **C**, **B**
and the body cavities were sewn in the standard **Y**-shape

(omitting the "specia**L** senses" dissection
because his eyes and e**A**rs remained intact)—

I still hope it's him **B**ehind every locked door
instead of confusing the **thundEr**
for his **L**augh
or imagining his kindred **bEr**ry birthmark
on my tongue when I **bleeD**.

hell

I'm unremarkable
in my recent hair
loss. I have
dates on my
calendar for
crying. I do this
between my
7-4. *Hell?*
Help, I'm
angrier than
I seem. I'm a
bullet in a temple.
Please tell
my mother
I'm tired of
forgiving. Her
denial of loss
is gruesome like
a grieving
mother. At
the mortuary,
a stranger
hugged me like
a mother. *Please,*
no, I hugged her
back. Is it easier
to daughter
from afar?
I fight relapse
then kiss
a purple unicorn
urn. One photo
shows a family
before the
lacerated mess.
Brother, please
show a sign
you're still here.
My memories are
losing blood.

Kristina Cecka

On Remodeling

I want a carpenter. No, not
Jesus. He's too busy for house calls.

But someone like him, with miracle hands.

I need a bookcase built. I want it to be made of
white birch, sanded until it gleams,

painted with dark vines; all thorns, no flowers.

What else? The roof. The broken shingles
let in the rain and the damn squirrels, and let

out warmth, light, hope.

My foot needs to be looked at, too. It trembles
when I least expect. I'll take a stopgap in the meantime,

a book tucked under it to steady me, but

I want its replacement to be wood,
the hard kind—camelthorn or black

ironwood or quebracho, to finally make me sturdy.

My teeth need to blunted, of course. Too many
sharp edges. Baby-proof them. Sand them.

Build an iron cage around my mouth.

The spine's more difficult. I want it straightened
from its strange, uncomfortable bell-curve,

hammered until it finally lays unbroken and proud.

The long-term project is unknotting the mess of my gut—
that cramped, tangled worm gnawed through by those twin vultures:

worry and anguish. Be patient. Be

kind or it will get worse. It will take time.

It will get your hands dirty.

Lastly, the ribs. String up fairy lights in the hollows between each
vulnerable bone, illuminating all those dark spaces—

the wing-spread lungs, the thrumming heart: still beating, beating, beating.

Belinda Roddie

Daughter of Pasiphae

How did you feel, love, when I found
the lipstick drawn in mazes on the bathtub
like labyrinths dragged across the tile
until they melted into crimson wax
against the Minotaur's smile? Did

you find comfort in the color, in the
temporary tattoo? Did it tickle your
fancy to see your cosmetics staining
the rudimentary body of the basin,
which lifted its pelvis upward on clubbed
feet, limping its way to the nearest wall?

Art is meant to be seen, and this femme
display brings back your father's migraine.
What would he say to this, this modern
canvas left to suffocate with crushed carnauba
congealing in its mouth? Or did you, perhaps,
want him to find it, too, much to your sense
of humor—much less to your mother's
sense of shame? Crete be damned.

I did not wipe away the offending
residue until you had a chance to
admire your masterpiece. Your hair
still wet from the kitchen sink. Your hands
soft like clay after so much scrubbing
against running water. You wore mascara
like curtains over your face, only
drawing them apart for the occasional
first act of tears that threatened
to compromise your personal
cabaret. You left beads on the carpet, so

I could step on them and make them pop
like little plastic planets disrupted in their
orbit around a Holbein sun, its red and gold
rays stretched outward like a scarab beetle
stuck on its back and exposing its belly to
an uncaring world. You sketched
portraits in eyeliner on your

arms and legs, the vessel dipped in black
like charcoal, charred horns and ebony
bulls leaving scattered hoof prints, like
lust, fading against your own calves
and knees. Yes, I am sure you felt great

pride when I found the lipstick drawn
in mazes on the bathtub. Your brother
the beast sleeps in its enameled maw.
I look away from its dreams and seize
the golden thread that leads me from the
labyrinth, where by the cold and narrow
entrance, you already wait for me.

Bless The Bones Of California

These days are getting short enough
to chew on. You can feel the sunsets
swelling right on your molars, melting
like butter in between your lips. On the side

of the road, a dirt scarred truck
sits on a lopsided slope. One headlight
is gouged out, like a wandering eye
ripped out of its metal socket.

Deep in the fields of Cotati,
you can drink the September heat
like soup still in its can, the salt boiled
away, leaving only the cream to scald
your mouth after the first sip. Only a few

neighborhoods away, the fires have taken
everything. Our relatives are left with
silhouettes of ash, but we still have
our house, our two acres, our banalities.

I can hear your boots assault the
skeletons of leaves on the patio outside. I am
old enough to understand the profanity
that you use to button up your
one-size-too-small shirt.
You are young enough to still carry me

on your shoulders, but once it gets dark
too quickly, your shadow weighs
us both down, and the North Bay swallows
us up in its maw until the sunrise
is cool enough to eat with a spoon.

Era

There were days when scratching
numbers into the leaves was all we had,
and counting the stars was comforting
because we didn't have to worry about
how many there were, or how many of them
would submit to the cold inferno above
our ill-conceiving eyes.

The end of an era.

That was before we cared
about dynasties.
That was before

we carried around our names on staves
and pounded the need for recognition into
faceless marble. Before we gave ourselves
the sign of the cross because we feared
that the air we breathed would suck away
our dignity, or our newly minted,
false divinity. We thought

the robes we wore were proof
that we deserved the freedom of immortality,
and that the right color, when donned
properly, spared us from premature death
and artificially grafted omens on
metal as thin as paper, and as hot
as the volcanic ash we studied in school.

The professor insisted that we be capable
of holding our destinies in our own hands.

Far, far harder times had been wrought
before we etched our anxieties
into the tombstones we kept hidden
in our attics. We always locked the doors,
too. That way, we could pretend
that we didn't have tombstones at all.

The most difficult part is that,
when I leave the bricks tumbling behind me
in the morning, red as the lack of hope,
I find no passion in scraping
a lucky seven into the raw vein

of a tree's autumn locks. The stuff is
so brittle, and the colors so faded, because,
the more I think about it, the more this world,
riddled with the faulty desire to feel more alive,
turns further into an impending supernova.

Summer Rand

Alexander tells me how he'd like to be buried

which is not buried so much as laid in some field
or meadow or shadow of a mountain underneath
a blue shout where the thrasher's cry threads cloud
to cloud and the sun is overflowing with itself,
trembling in its goodness, its kaleidoscope light
tripping down leaves to where the tall grass bears
his body, heavy in its solitude and easy, and he
will never catch chill again after he hands himself
over to the tender nature of things, after a harvest
mouse beds in his hollow socket and the pearl strand
of his spine goes wasteland to roots, his lungs splayed
like open palms and flowering with dog-tooth violets
as he lets earth overtake him bit by replaceable bit
still becoming, becoming, becoming.

Alexander Perez

Black Locust

Behind our elderly house
the black locust

has always shadowed you.
Now I live under its shadow too.

We cannot say how timeless it is.
It will always be before and after.

First flowers a spray of cream
pale yellow-blushed butterflies.

When they fall, still fresh
imagine our wedding there?

I will brush the blossoms
from your grey hair.

Maybe two groundhogs
for best men, a sparrow chorus

chipmunks' cheeky grins
crickets chirping congratulations

confetti of sunlight
gifts of love

finale of spring
a gay marriage in June!

Seed-pods in summer dangle
earrings to the shoulders.

Its rough branches trespass
the neighbor's fence.

And when his dog is loose
provide an escape route for the squirrels.

Before you and me, tenants
hammered a nail into its side.

On the rusty nail
I hung a sundial

to make use of the wound
the unnecessary wound

so the bark can keep time
on a golden watch

encircling the years
(with secret rings)
kept hidden in a trunk.

Last time I counted your rings
you had seventy-three. I, forty-eight.

I'm a sapling.
You're reaching your peak.

Remember the tornado
that twisted up the land?

You, black locust, did not budge
no matter how strong

the intractable wind
bullying, headstrong argued.

I hope not to see you fall
(unwavering monument) on our city

over which you tower
floor upon floor of branching

architecture
a façade of gentle foliage

which we grow proud
of at our peril.

Leaves of the locust fall late.
You can hear their approach.

They clap on their way down
applauding for the view

of the rising and the setting sun
they've enjoyed.

Their season pass
they're reluctant to let go.

The neighbors insist
on raking

but that seems futile
that October ritual

when I can crunch
what's left not to forget

of our black locust
under my winter boots.

Joy Ride

Thought we might
go for a ride.

Where to?

I don't know.
but let me drive.
I will get us there.

How far are we willing to go?

Until we get lost
or found.

God willing.

Promise I will take my time.
You hate when telephone poles fly by
reminding you of prison bars.

Close your eyes.

What is it?

Nothing.

I won't tell you
we passed a deer
struck dead
on the side of the road.

The car's shadow
races over the surface
of the steely river
as we cross the rusty bridge.

Where are you going?

I will give you a hint:
It smells of maple sugar.

Will you buy me truffles sprinkled with salt
shattered bark, peanut brittle?

Yes.

Miles stack up.
The road's windy as ribbon candy.

Lone trailers, old cars, barking dogs.
Silos, concentric hay bales, grazing sheep.
Free tomatoes, fresh eggs, cords of firewood.

Garage sale!
Pull up, say hello.
Stainless steel coffee pot
worn car seat, polka records
paperback Stephen Kings.

You find two flowerboxes
five dollars, like new
with scalloped sides
yellow tulips hand-painted
on a blue-sky background
perfect to replace
the weathered ones back home
you filled with care all seasons.

I think this is the way
to the Silver Trout café
overlooking the vast wetland:
barren tree trunks half-submerged
sedge grass waving
white rise of the whooping crane.

If we're lucky
we might catch sunset
on the glassy pools

the reflections
that make me
sneak a kiss
from across the table
hoping some man
grows jealous
wanting to kiss
him too
his best friend
secretly on the lips.

Probably should head back.

I'm not too tired to drive.
Close your eyes, take a nap.
We'll be there in no time.
Don't worry.
I won't speed.

But that's a lie . . .

While you sleep
I'm stepping hard
on the gas
thrusting
against the rushing hours

oncoming

the collision
with our journey's end.

Poem for Two Men in Love

Rise early. At dawn,
the biting fish like cool water and a slow current.
He never would have known this.

Potato chips, cat toys, medicine bottles.

Where are the spare car keys?
In the box on the bedroom shelf
with our wills and birth certificates.

Ceramic blue bird, electric blanket, wind chimes.

A younger man and an older man
live together on the hill in the middle of the city.
From here it is possible to see stars of many ages.

Fur hats, rosary, flat screen TV.

He said: I love you.
He said: Still?
He said: Always.
They slept sound.

A golden clock, bowling balls, Bahama shirts.

They went on vacation.
One was sick in the motel room.
The other was right outside the door looking out at the view.
He tells him of the rainbow and the single dolphin.

Ice fishing gear, greasy tools, books of poetry.

He told the story of the young boy
trapped by a water spout while fishing on Saratoga Lake:
dark spot on the water surface,
spiral pattern, spray ring, funnel, decay.

Pushed under a tree's roots hanging over the water,
in his rowboat, the boy found shelter.

As a man, he dreads the sound of thunder.

Sunflower seeds, a violin, old photographs.

He is wide-awake in the emergency room at 2 a.m.

The other is being seen.

Under his breath he whispers:

it is not time, it is not time, it is not time.

Making a Living

One waits for his social security check.
The other his pay from the university.
 One day they will rise above zero.

His HIV medications could cost him his life.
Every year he applies for a subsidy.
 The other would dare rob a bank for him.

Christmas-time: they both say *don't buy me a gift*.
 He always receives chocolate truffles.
 He always receives a bird house.

A gallon of milk: \$4.38
A pound of coffee \$10.24
Forty-four ounces of fresh raspberries: \$4.99
An ounce of gold: \$1671.00

Sometimes they splurge.

Their favorite place to go is the Greek diner.
They have excellent specials.
The owner is ancient.
 Her name is Aphrodite.

Or sometimes they go to Sally's Hen House.
It's on the way to Vermont, worth the price in gas.
 The egg-yolks are golden orange peel yellow marigold.

They always break even.

It's like that time they drove up the Green Mountains,
and as they started down the squiggly road,
a cloud parked itself over the visible world,
and the lines on the road flickered away,
and although he was not a good driver,
he would get them there safely,
breathing deep, chit-chatting,
his senses heightened,

knowing how to ride
the edge of a cliff,
like always,
laughing for
their good
fortune.

Toward the Rainbow

The room watches me sleep.
A guard dog with a scrupulous face.
Many strangers tip-toe through
trying not to disturb the brittle leavings.

Remember when you slept here?
You must. Nights a different color then:
white or pink hibiscus, jade, mandarin.
I tried to identify the taste of your dreams:
yucca petal, pineapple guava, cilantro.

You refused to listen to a word I said
preferred your tongue in my mouth.
Honestly so did I. Its flavors brighter
than those of the northern flowers I ate.

Most seasons are safer now
since I have chosen to sleep solo.
It is sound. My empty room
cares for me. A guard dog with a sly face.
The polite passersby know not to step too close
to the pile of weeds. I'm underneath.

But you upheave me.
Why only you? Always.
You to woo me, bed me, bend me
with your tropics. I prefer the cold.
It's no use now to try to melt me
under your palms.

Winter thrashes.
Can't you hear it? I learned to love her
after your lightning lashes.
Winter, she packed me in ice
sealed the burns.

Time you go back to Spanish accents
bleached pastels, blistering blues
clouds you claim spill coconut milk.
I will not follow you toward the rainbow.

Karo Ska

self-portrait with my mother's freckle

an alabaster statue, my mother
chipped & cracked, only her left hand
still throbs with blood. underneath
the deep palmar arch, a freckle
we share. my hand is a map of
loss, a landscape of metacarpals & valley
bones, barriers blocking me from
the warmth of a mother's unspoken
hugs. imaginary arms with no tongues.

time passes—freckles fade—i carry her
smile cleaved—time passes

she vanishes

the freckle—a shadow—a ghost
whose name i have lost
in the geography of my memory.

self-portrait of compassion as contradictions necessary for healing

you put the pen down / you pick it up / you get out of bed / you don't
get out of bed / you don't listen to your body / you breathe space
into muscles / you walk / your toes leave crimson trails / you don't
write a poem / you write a poem for everyone / you don't read the
poem to anyone / your anxiety cave keeps you safe / you sign up for
an open mic / spill merlot ink on the stage / you let yourself be late
/ you leave the house early / you make a mistake / you don't blame
yourself / you don't take a shot of tequila before work / you sneak a
flask to class / a friend you love texts you heart emojis / you don't
answer the phone / you brush teeth then floss / you don't breathe /
you hold your inner child's hand / you cartography a new map / the
cardinal directions aren't smeared in blood / you follow footprints
of cinnamon / honey soothes your wounds / you remind yourself one
day at a time / you put the pen down / you pick it up

David Southward

The First Tattoo

My whole life I've been afraid
to stain my body, insisting
no mark is meaningful enough
for ink's permanence. Still here
I find myself: sitting backwards
in Aaron's chair, as he engraves
palm fronds on my scapula. A gift
from my husband—to mark
the threshold of my fiftieth year:
palm trees and grackles, a Florida
upbringing merged with adults-only
Mexican getaways. With six hours
to kill, I'm nose-deep in a hardback
memoir (Springsteen's) as massive
as *Moby-Dick*. Eyeballs distracted
by Aaron's pin-ups of arabesque
biceps, I think of Queequeg,
the Pequod's nude harpooner,
stunning Ishmael with his aboriginal
tattoo-treatise on the universe
no longer legible; how, in college,
I winced at the keloidal make-up
of Maori warriors—irritated with ash
to highlight youth's passage
into pain, warfare, marriage, labor.
It taught me how history could live
under the skin—indelible yet invisible
until teased out with a stylus.
Like in last week's episode of *Nova*
on the tattoo's origin: fresh evidence
of ochre and charcoal pulverized
a hundred thousand years ago
by *Homo sapiens* rounding the Cape
of Good Hope. (From the same cave
came Earth's first graffiti, a crayon-

red hashtag on a granite slab—
our meaty brain already impatient
to make something of itself.)
As Aaron's needle probes the V-
shaped convergence of palm-trunks, I
almost faint; this vertebral crux
is my tattoo's darkest part. I squint
to refocus on the open book, Springsteen
guiding followers into the crevasse
of his depression—no more the Boss
than Ahab was captain on the trail
of a lost leg; than I was, all those years
I didn't write, fearing the itch
of the past like a wound too buried
to be scratchable. Not until
Aaron smears my scars with aloe gel
and hands me a mirror, do I see
all that's behind me. Like the Boss says:
we're born to run. No wonder we need
such painful, beautiful reminders
of what we can do to ourselves.

Object Lesson

Much as I failed
to grasp it at the time,
my threadbare silk
security blanket
must've posed a threat
(however veiled) to Dad
that snow-piled night
in the Midwest, when Cronkite
veered from an oil crisis
to a solar eclipse
while Mom laid the table.

Dad snatched
the fistful of rag
from my hand—
flashing that big-brotherly
half sneer, half smile
I knew meant trouble—
and opened the front door
to throw it
to the howling weather.

I wailed, ran
straight into the maelstrom
to save my blankie. And maybe
that was all
Dad needed to see: a spark
of opposition, his only son
demanding love—knowing
how hard it was
to come by that year,
how little there was
between him and me
and the ice.

Boiling Point 2020

Dear Mike, news of your death finds me
on one of those days in July
when the sliding door opens

to a porridge of steam, and all of Wisconsin
takes shade. Slogging through Facebook,
I'd been pondering how to respond

to paranoid memes, shared by cousins
I barely know—insinuations
that COVID is a deep-state hoax,

that Blacks are racist too, that Emperor Trump
will rescue the nation
from godless conspiracy—when Dad calls

to report that you, retired doctor and father
of six, close friend of 45 years,
have braced a gun to the roof of your mouth

and left this world in a wreath of smoke.
A survivor of stroke, dragging one leg at 83
through God knows what humiliations,

maybe you faltered in Florida's sweltering heat,
or stopped noticing the horizon,
or couldn't bear to be seen

as one more terminal patient—opting instead
for permanent anesthesia. I seize
my pen, wondering what to write

to your children, who once were like siblings
to me: that love may not be enough
to save us? that despair

thinks only of itself
and should therefore be pitied? that privilege
is no cure for extinction?

How different your leave-taking
from this morning's more celebrated
casualty: Congressman John Lewis

who, departing amid his people's cries
of defiance, must have felt he was riding a wave
of change—the only antidote

to life's cancers. I imagine
your sons flying home
from Afghanistan, from Portland

(where the government's bungled crackdown
is sure to incite protest)
while I'm out walking the dog

in the late afternoon. Maybe like you
we've all felt a little abandoned
by God this year. A lone officer

on a motorcycle, strapped in his gear,
passes me at the corner and wheels around
to the curb for a serious chat

with his headset. Watching him
beneath leaden clouds, I begin to hear
a chant working its way up the street: "WHAT

do we WANT?" Tomorrow I will lie still
in corpse pose, thinking *I am but a witness*
to these restless impositions of body and mind,

but today? With the dog pulling his leash,
with a hot breeze
whapping the American flag like a parachute

outside the nursing home—signs everywhere
urging “Wash your hands”—
and demonstrators shouting

through surgical masks, I can only think
Something must be done!
And with a feeling almost

of deliverance, Mike, I give in
with tears of welcome
to a gusting wind.

The People Who Served

From home or office they communed
via satellite, pawing at tiny keyboards
as they scrolled, scrolled
through templates of emoticons.
Seeking the perfect balance
of earnestness and insouciance,
they settled on the tone
of a precocious child.

Their days were spent cautiously
opening attachments, drafting proposals
for committee approval,
sending polite requests
to leave feedback—along with reminders
of forthcoming galas and improvements
to their policies. They downloaded
upgrades, and notified each other
of precious discounts
soon to expire from their reward plans.

Occasionally they complained
to a confidant: progress was tiring.
Their devices came with so many
conveniences, one constantly had to re-learn
how easy life had become.
The truly helpless, frustrated
by a glitch or malfunction, found solace
in the cheerful, scripted replies
of their call-center counterparts in Manila.

Naturally they were asked to fill out surveys,
letting their providers know
how satisfied they were, on a scale of 1 to 5.
Their wallets grew fat with enrollments
in loyalty programs, with advantage cards
and other emblems of belonging.

In an environment foaming
with options, even the most trivial
acts (buying toothpaste, ordering coffee)
became occasions
for self-searching. And the future,
when it crossed their minds at all,
seemed a vertiginous
and vaguely unsettling
expansion of opportunity.

So they stayed focused, ticking
items off schedules and lists, shuffling
documents in the nervous company
of a billion others: the lord-less
smiling vassals, dutifully
serving each other to death.

The Pelican

Let me fly serenely
above the silver bay,
no rival birds between me
and a deep, elusive prey.

Let there be no distractions
when, following the course
of myriad refractions,
I stalk their moving source.

Then let me wheel in silence
on my angelic span.
With concentrated violence,
let me fold my fan

and dive without detection
toward a silver meal—
piercing my reflection
to feed upon the real.

George Longenecker

Newly fallen

snow covers his face,
body facing grey sky
which he can't see
one arm outstretched to the right
as if reaching out
when he was shot

Kharkiv under siege
everything grey
another cold war
in the photograph
nearby troop carrier
a caterpillar
blackened burned
tread blown off
nobody alive shown

a mother and father
will get the news
death doesn't take sides
all decay and return to soil
traffic light
street lamp
burned building
all dark
snow
newly fallen

Cold War

19 soldiers
ponchos flapping in wind,
perhaps they're at Chosin Reservoir
perhaps on Heartbreak Ridge
 winter war Korea so cold
they slog on through ice and snow
each clutching his weapon
Frank Gaylord's sculptures
neither alive nor dead
frozen in time
like war that never ended
magpies fly over the border
quiet now in the DMZ
where they nest in maples
so many dead there
some left behind
a mere dimming
between life and death
as sunlight fades and night grows cold
 war
19 soldiers frozen in time

Only One Casualty Today

*Not one of all the purple Host
Who took the Flag today
Can tell the definition
So clear of victory*

*As he defeated—dying—
On whose forbidden ear
The distant strains of triumph
Burst agonized and clear!*

—Emily Dickinson

My brother wades in cool water,
a scrawny kid in a red and blue swimsuit.

On the dock he poses with a pickerel,
New Hampshire—15 years left of his life.

Another summer—hours in the back seat,
smell of warm crayons in afternoon heat.

We pass an oil well—fragrance of raw crude,
Kansas, our grandmother's house, cars on brick streets.

Only one casualty, the newscaster explained,
good news,—things are improving.

My brother the single casualty that day
not even battle, just a parachute plunge from a plane.

A good way to die if you have to, perhaps,
falling through clear sky.

Perhaps the smell of soil and lawn coming
fast, closer and closer—so long ago.

And there's no way to ask him how he felt
about being the only one that day.

Only one son, only one brother
only one casualty today.

Stamp Collection

I flew a four engine China Clipper
straight off a twenty cent U.S. airmail stamp,
up over deep, forested valleys of Montenegro,
high over megalithic temples of Malta,
across the Mediterranean to the Rock of Gibraltar.
In San Marino I climbed high onto the ramparts of ancient
castles with panoramas across Italy to the Adriatic Sea.

I glided swiftly across the savanna
with Angola's postage stamp giraffes.
How could I have known at ten,
that kids died before they got to be my age?
Portugal would kill every last Angolan
before giving up their colony.
They killed rhinos for horns to make aphrodisiacs,
slaughtered elephants for tusks
to make ivory cameos and piano keys,
then issued stamps with colorful pictures of wildlife.

I arranged my stamps and daydreamed of zebras,
my sister practiced piano.
while the USSR and USA fought the cold war on their postage—
Yuri Gagarin and Cosmonauts, Telstar,
Oklahoma—*Arrows to Atoms, Atoms for Peace*,
Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Jefferson, Lincoln, Roosevelt.
What did I know of dying empires,
revolution, independence, liberation?
I was a kid collecting stamps.
So, I flew my China Clipper
as high as I could—
above it all.

Still Life

Sheep in Snow
Joseph Farquharson (1846-1935)

It's still as sun sets,
light snow in a pasture,
we look west into orange sunset,
scattered clouds in shades of pink,
still enough light for long shadows
from trees on a small rise,
shades of orange in snow.

Sheep graze for what grass they can find,
waiting for sunset,
when they'll return to shelter
outside the frame.
Though winter is brown and grey,
their pasture is full of color,
peaceful at solstice sunset.

Do sheep worry like we do,
about what will come
when night grows cold?
Though shadows cross their pasture,
there's still color,
still life left as daylight fades.
What more could we ask?

Mary Keating

Salty

I'm a teenager
when an oak cracks
my independence.

Shoulda never gotten
into that Mustang
driven by a boy trying
too hard to be cool
not knowing how
hard his crush would crush.

My beautiful long legs
that wrapped around
my boyfriend never meant
to carry me into that hot rod
to wrap around a tree.

After the accident I'm not smokin'
hot anymore, but strangers still
gawk at me—a wheelchair
my latest accessory
I can't live without.

Meanwhile, I'm still
hot for sex, frustrated
my wheelchair
cools every cock.

Alone, at a high school party
I just wanna rock. A wannabe
man smokin' a fat cheroot
plops down next to me.

He doesn't ask if
I wanna roll—wraps
his lips around Johnnie
Walker, calls me *fish legs*.

I roll into a mermaid
inhaling oceans that take
a lifetime to exhale.

~~HAPPILY EVER AFTER~~

I am
a princess
alone
in a tower
surrounded
by a moat
on an island
guarded
by a monster

Yet I am
no princess
and
there is
no tower
My island
is a wheelchair
the moat and the monster
are the same

The loneliness
—the absolute loneliness pervades—

A Brief History of Forever

I

We meet in fourth grade at Osborn. You almost catch me
in boys chase girls then girls chase boys.

II

I sit behind you in homeroom at Rye
High, because I'm a K and you're an H.
In ninth grade you move out of town, miss me
being in an infamous car accident the next year.

III

At Manhattanville, I discover you're in my freshman class
working behind the snack bar. You don't seem to mind me
in a wheelchair. You whisk me away
to an evening party in MA while you're manic.
You could be my prince charming until
I never want to see your movie star face again.

IV

Nine years later, fresh out of law school, I tell God
I'm ready to get a husband. I bump into you
browsing records at Caldors. You take me
to the City—melt me by the *Kiss* at the Met.

V

You keep punctuating we're not boyfriend girlfriend.
Our bodies punctuate differently
until you disappear with my fairytale dreams.

VI

I get it. You think you can't handle a forever disability.
If I weren't permanently paralyzed, I'd walk away from it too.
Let's not mention your diagnoses.

VII

In Albuquerque, Tom Petty sings to you it's wake up time.
My phone rings in White Plains, NY. You move across
the US, overfilling my apartment, intertwining our lives.

VIII

Five years engaged, we elope and marry at Sweetheart Rock.
While I'm getting beautified, you commit your vows to memory,
surprise me—as you do for a lifetime—of just how much
you love me.

Soulmates in the Time of Covid

I met my husband
when we were amoebas
floating in the primordial pond.
We didn't have much consciousness then,
but I felt him like a summer storm coming.

The next time we were together, we were prehistoric flora.
Fortune grew us side by side, interlocking our leaves until a dinosaur ate us.
We merged in her stomach as acid stripped the memory of lost love. Thousands
of years passed before our paths crossed again. We began as seedlings in the pre-Californian
forest and matured into magnificent redwoods. Our boughs laced. We held each other tight
as the earth shook and the winds howled. Hundreds of years we grew, interwoven from roots to canopy.
One day the earth opened below us and pulled our giant bodies down so deep the molten lava scorched
and burned us to ash. Our next lives passed quickly as we climbed the tree of life, up the food chain,
from bugs to rodents to bunnies to wolves until finally we were snow leopards hiding our glorious furs
in virgin snow from the ruthless hunters. We mated often and birthed several cubs. Each year I felt
the odds slipping toward the deadly predators until one day my love stopped dead in his tracks
as a bullet ripped through his belly into his heart. That bullet killed two snow cats that day. The sorrow
of sudden death followed us as we reincarnated into human beings. I don't remember all the lives
we lived occupying the top form of evolution. I know they spanned millennia. We existed as hunters and
gatherers, nomads, serfs, slaves, kings and queens, teachers and students, brothers and sisters, monks,
nuns and priests, and finally as husband and wife. Each human lifetime differed. Sometimes we found
each other as infants living in the same household. Other times we came from different lands
or cultures. But eventually we would find each other no matter the distance or deep the disguise. Neither
extreme youth nor old age could hide our true relationship—our eternal bond. Sometimes one of us would
subsist in a dreamlike state—as if having drunk the waters of Lethe too soon—wed other souls. But
always—the other would jar spiritual memory. Once awakened, we'd entwine our bodies
as close as physics allowed—past connections tumbling forward into the present—the knowledge
of our history stretched across the topmost layer of our subconscious—peeking through
the surface like a premonition. Now, we find ourselves in a time of great
joy and great sorrow. Trapped together in 2020 AD by a creature
as small as we were when our love began,
the eternal bond between us pulls
beyond its limits.

Time forms an ocean
Spans across eternity
Held by gravity

Talya Jankovits

I Fall Down/I Fall Short

1.

My husband has saved two people's lives.

Lying in bed at night,
his heart pumps
a drumbeat
into the darkness
my cheek fitting
into the crest of his chest.

He is awake.

He is not.

I talk about the usual:

The lit agent said no.

The baby has a runny nose.

The eldest finished the fourth Harry Potter.

And what did he think of dinner?

2.

When I was pregnant
with my second,
I fell on the sidewalk
coming home from shul.
I was in four-inch heels
carrying our toddler.

He was righting
all three of us,
before I even
realized
how hard I'd hit the ground.

3.

I only wear flats now.
I still don't know CPR.
I still don't know the Heimlich maneuver.
I have four daughters.

4.

There were ten of us in the Sukkah.
Across the table,
the guest in the button-down shirt
started choking, gasping, grasping.
No one moved.
He coughed without sound.
He pointed to his throat.

I screamed, *Daniel*—

namesake of he who
was thrown
into the lion's den.

He ran out to the table,
stood behind the man,
wrapped his arms around him
pushed into his chest.

After he saved his life,
everyone resumed eating.

5.

He cried for me,
invoking my name
like a prayer
into the answering machine.
Please, please.
Tali means *dew*, means *morning*,
means *reliable*.

He had just saved his
eleven-year-old brother's life.
He had to perform CPR in the ICU.
He noticed the heartbeat had stopped
when no one else did.

He called me after, called out, *Tali, Tali, please.*
I wasn't there.

6.

We drive carpool.
We watch Superstore.
We argue over who gets the better
spot on the couch.

I know the shape of his jaw,
the scar on his chin.
The way his eyes water when he's tired.
I know the sound of his sleep.
The smell of his coffee
brewed minutes before I wake.
We go about our everyday.

Two people are still alive because of him.

Imagine A World Without Raging Hormones.

I'd rather the ticklish kiss
of the many legged, wayward
Black cottonwood seed.
Fibrous weaving of soft fuzz—
early summer's frosty mirage.
Dioecious, these thick lenticel
covered trunks. Female flowering,
rotund-ovate: a forest menstruation of
floating seeds aimless and certain
towards nowhere and
everywhere—
hungry to germinate,
populate the world with
green heart shaped leaves.

This would be preferable
to the wet kiss of a mouth
dirtied and chapped,
dehydrated of kindness,
compassion, a chunk
of earth gripped tight
in carnivorous teeth,
rabid shaking
and shaking
to tear off a greater piece
until the whole of it is

nothing

but rot robbing the hairy fruits
of the dimorphic Balsam Poplar of

anything

to plant its rooting hormones.

Growing

I show her how to
grasp the handle,
glide the blade
sharp and precise
upwards on the same
leg that I once stretched
rolls of fat apart to fish
out bits of grey fuzzy
lint that she collected
there like she grew to
collect seashells from
shore sides, the Atlantic
to the Pacific. One nick.
Blood balls, slides
downwards over a
bulged ankle joint
and I think this
is how we all got
here—
from bleeding.
from wonder.

Laurie Holding

Rabbit Dreams

You snore on the couch with eyes open wide.
Now and then, after rabbit dreams, you turn
to reposition on a new, cool, side
and growl. It's a groan of pain, and I've learned
to pat your head, make sounds that say I see
your old heart's worries, the way sadness bites
up what life's become. You gaze into me,
closing rheumy eyes, giving up the fight.

Maybe you're just wondering where they've gone,
children of your left behind backyard play.
Their newfound taillights are making you yawn,
not of boredom but of upset, the days
splayed out before you, no sprinkler or balls
or promise of school bus sounds in the street,
no one showing you baseball cards or dolls,
no more races or under table treats.

When it smells good, like bird, some will come back
to tell you new secrets, hug you and hold
your head on their laps. But you've watched them pack.
Again, the driveway says it all. You fold
with a sigh, watch that enemy, the street.
They say goodbye with a flick of high beams.
Do they hold dear the balls, the dolls, the treats?
Or are memories just more rabbit dreams?

The Last Father's Day

That spring we watched as white oaks fell, with rain
that weighed their branches down and snapped their boles.
Now settled on the ground, just one remained.
We made our ways around those fallen souls
to find the wound once hidden from our view,
a secret rot, and now a living space
for groundhogs, possums, mice, or coons, who knew.
The tree man came and sliced it off earth's face.
That Father's Day, so sick, but still you stood
and wobbled back and forth like in a game,
as if to show us all that nothing could
uproot our father's strong, athletic frame.
"You see?" you said. "I stand just like your tree.
No one can see that Death's devouring me."

Bridges

You are what made my childhood a childhood.

We'd clasp hands
and let other girls walk beneath our bridge.
We'd sing: Falling down, falling down.
We'd trap them and laugh.
Or there were games in our mothers' cars:
Hold your breath past the graveyard,
and while you're crossing that Fifth Street Bridge,
lift your feet!

Suspended over time, suddenly what matters is below,
what passes beneath. All that water.

You are just a shadow in my life,
but one of the longest shadows, at that.
As far apart as we can be and still be in this country together,
I can hear your laughter like it's coming from my backyard.

Oh, to climb a plum tree again!
To eat until we're sick, then move to an apple tree to eat some more,
to lift the creek's mossy stones for hidden crawdads,
to let our Easter ducks swim free there, then
to return the next day to feed them and call them by name.
To jump rope,
to hit a tether ball,
to freeze in the beam of a flashlight.
to fall over laughing.
To hold our breath past that graveyard, hearts pounding.
To hide,
to seek.

I do all these things, still.
I seek you out and meet you many nights on the bridge,
to help still my ancient heart, my racing brain.

I become nine again.
I hide behind you.
Then I sleep.

Sonnet to Mr. Frost

When I see golden buses on the hill,
I like to think some big dog sits and waits.
On board, some school-tired boy shields eyes until
he spots the dog beyond the neighbor's gates.
The friends take off, their path a jagged line,
and flowers dip their golden heads to watch,
as does the screened-in woman, drinking wine.
She throws the boy a candy, butterscotch.
It's when the world has weighed me so far down
that boys and dogs and wine and golden field
acquaint me with those treasures not yet brown,
and years from now these memories will yield
a lesson straight and true: While gold can't stay,
it's worth its weight in daydreams, anyway.

Midnight Walk

On a whim, we meet at the old house,
to walk the walk we walked
when you were just a son
and I was just your mom.

We've picked a pearl of a night,
the kind where the moon swims behind giant swaths of
cloud,
and like strippers, the stars show only a portion of their
constellations,
but enough to be revealing.
"There's his belt!" you whisper up at Orion.

Your backpack holds just a couple of Coronas.
Nothing like the burden of beers we used to carry,
night after night as we walked away
the grief of losing my father,
your grandfather,
your girlfriend,
our dog.

Now, at last, we are both grown-ups
who are learning to walk without stumbling.

After a mile's circle, we look up at the old house again.
The new people have learned to string the Christmas lights
up and up and up the split rail fence
for its full sixth-of-a-mile stretch.

You laugh and give me the look.
All right, then. A tenth of a mile.

We tell stories of shoveling that godforsaken
driveway, the snow breaking my back,
your nose dripping like a fountain.

Funny how you can miss something
that was so much work.

I miss you,
the wonder and worry of you,
the work of washing, drying, folding,
the waking up production of our mornings,
the wee-hour-waiting for you.

But most of all, I miss our walk,
when the neighbors were long asleep,
when the work was done,
when all that was left of the day was the moon and the stars
and the beers in the backpack.

David Ruekberg

A Short Essay on Love

People talk about love and other people talk about what love means and everyone knows more or maybe less what they mean when they talk about love but no one is able to say just what it is they really mean. We try to come up with metaphors: Love's a rose, love's a two-way street. Or definitions: It is patient and kind, it's a precious and delicate thing, and so forth. Or maybe love is two nude and neutered bobble-headed hominids touting tired and true credos, such as "Love is getting a hug and a compliment each and every day." Or as the poster says, Love comes and goes, but people are forever, or did I get that backwards? It's tough to define a thing so big that you can't even see. Sunrise arrives in stages—one instant it's so dark all you can see is a blue so black you could fall straight into it and the burnt branches of trees and maybe your hand before your face if your heart is so alive your skin glows. Then the next the sky is aglow too, and then only memory and a mind as quiet as a breezeless lake can say if there were moments between light and darkness. Say that the moments are bare plaster, then memory is a primer you seal it with. So you apply a first coat, remembering the memory. Then in wonder you tell someone else, and that coat adds veracity. Then you tell it again, touching it up a bit

and then a bit more, so that it becomes like the walls of an old house, clothed with character, the nicks and warts and other imperfections so embellished that the paint itself forms nicks and warts. And that's what love is like. Though it isn't quite love, actually; in fact, it seems love's a contract, a construct (I think), an abstracted form of a need to bond, then to bind and enslave, then to reconstruct in one's own image what you have colonized. But also love is a gift that you give without expectation. It's a burden you can't bear anymore, so you give it to a friend. There is a freedom in the moment they take it, like flying through space. Then the space fills up, with guilt or remorse or envy or any of that other stuff of living. You see you will never be free. Or maybe, if you're lucky, one day you attain *satori*, so at least you know that there is a Promised Land, how it looks. You get to sniff at its perfumy river, you pluck one of its petals as a souvenir, you press it into the leaves of your diary. Later, one of your grandchildren finds it when you're gone, and maybe she thinks, I love you, Grandpa, her heart lifting like a bird.

Walking and Breathing

Easter Sunday, 2022

My wife is standing at the kitchen sink looking out the window at the back yard all lit up with April green, the sun making a go of painting it with Easter yellow: you know, the lemony pastel Peeps hue of the day after a cold rain and snow spits, cherry blossoms preparing to unfurl like a grove of umbrellas by the back door. “My goal for today,” she says, “is to walk and breathe.” This may sound philosophical but it’s a literal fact. After six weeks of raging bursitis in the hip capsule caused by a fracture of the femoral head seven years ago that has kept her from her morning walks, just as she was starting to take to the street and trails again, she was knocked flat by a crippling rhinovirus (not COVID) that evolved into acute sinusitis (which did not, we are glad, invade her asthma-ravaged lungs)—then just when she was mostly recovered from *that* an over-zealous physical therapist over-worked her quadriceps and soleus and put her back onto the cane we resurrected from the attic for one more week. Notwithstanding all the above, it is also philosophical, because that’s just how Leah is. Her morning meditation practice has brought her to a place where every day she wakes to joy and gratitude for simple things: the dawn chorus, a good pen, the perfect three-minute egg. Whereas my discipline has waned, and even at its height I was never what you’d call “joyful,” though on the whole my scale tips towards optimistic, for the most part. You’d know this if you’d read my poem, “Bike Ride in Central Park,” where I said that I was born in the key of “A-minor...with a few variations into G major” (a quote of myself

that was already a quote of myself). Though she cares about war and pollution and the future of this planet our grandchildren will inherit, she doesn't drag her gloom around like a pet cloud, like yours truly. Okay, occasionally she forays into dark thoughts. One time as we were driving home from Pennsylvania in separate cars with CB radios (okay, I'm dating myself) we still owned from our move from Colorado (which caused a big disruption in our marriage, though we worked it out), my radio crackled with her excited voice: "Did you see *that*?" I radioed back, "Yeah, it's beautiful," meaning the Susquehanna River which we'd just passed over. "People think New York's a vast land of steel, concrete and skyscrapers, but it's mostly trees and water," a gripe she'd heard me assert before. "No," she said, "I mean those *skid marks*": two serpentine black burns I did recall seeing just after the bridge, doubtless some sleepy drunk who'd hit black ice last February, or his victim. So "skid marks" became our private joke for how we, like everyone, see the same things differently at different times, depending on our moods or context. Though we're more alike than different. That is, we all are, but Leah and I, being part of the we, are also, obviously, I mean, we've been married 34 years, and compatibility rubs off on one another. Leah still remembers it was the Susquehanna; that it was a sunny day much like this one, but in late September; that we both still smile whenever we recall that moment. Sometimes we switch places, like when she gets worked up about the previous President, or how our neighbor is poisoning the neighborhood with his yard sign screeching that Democrats are attempting to destroy the country (January 6 notwithstanding), or how the heavens

above Rochester are too often gray. That's when we trade places, I take a turn as the optimist, or at least recommend equanimity. It's a way we humans have of enacting binary opposition, that is, we seek a balance, or maybe simply control, since it shows a lack of empathy, trying to fix the other. When you listen without veering into the other's lane, just looking in their window, as if you were on the inside, you let the other view sink in, and find its long-lost partner in your own skin. "Yes," I say to Leah, as the sun ducks behind another monotonous cloud, "I think those are good goals. I have a pretty long list for today, but walking and breathing, those are good ones to start with." Leah smiles at me, or maybe it's the sun peeking out again, or both.

Last Evening in April

If you turn the sound down on the highway, the sun sinks more slowly in the west, the mourning dove buffering its fall, and over in the near woods a cardinal announces its superfluous uniform, and there—quicksilver across the grass—a sparrow stitches it all together into one fabric. Rumbling beneath that carnival the river of everything that happened today mingles what I can remember with what I want in as many colors as I am able to imagine, in as many rooms equipped with as much furniture as they are able to handle, down to the etchings of you and me riding the rapids, watching as John hauled in Pete who'd tumbled over; of us making a toast at our wedding, your dad crying real tears, mine bowing in prayer; of watching, helpless, that night your dog, Ginger, got hit by a car because I thought dogs should run free; of that afternoon in the kitchen when we thought it was over; of the weight of your arm like a blanket on my shoulders after my cancer; of your arm heavy on mine as we staggered under inebriate magnolias, the arthritis in your hip making each step a trial, yesterday it was, and now today's sorting and planning and listening to each other's hearts beginning to blend with the leisurely sun, with the spruces, the noise of the highway just now restarting, lifted up.

Elaine Greenwood

There's a thick, quiet Angel

assigned to the back of my head, my scalp
I can feel him with the fingers of my left hand

working hard, through the night when it's safe
for him to weave and sew, beneath my hair

every morning, still, he's built another tapestry
I imagine him on his stomach, his feathers

stretching out in all directions, a starfish
belly to my bleeding wound, holding me in

keeping my pillow true, even attending to
single hairs, survivors swaying in the pooled red

I have often been afraid of angels, but not this
one, I have no reverence for his art, no holy fear

or perhaps I love his work so dearly, I
sabotage it every morning with the hope

that he'll never stop returning to save me.

I know that it's profound, the livingness of things

I —

The sea cutting through the sandbar, her
tidal arms embracing the bloomy marsh

the clover fields, microscopic, so many
electric-green bosoms pressed to the sky

the blue heron, the ballerina, the sneeze
of a hundred swallows in perfect swarm

yet, the more I walk in the world the more
I am squinting through a hole, a small

sliver of unrelenting light, blurry and bidding
me close the very eyes I cannot see, blue

I am straining and mis-pronunciating
a stranger to these perfect days.

II —

Had I known, yet even as I am knowing
the earth-sized shapes of human souls

unfurled behind two blinking pinholes,
landscapes of seven billion bodies—

now seeing you, woman in your phone, examining
your cheekbones in the photo with your daughter

is knowing something of my own eternal everything
hip-to-hip beside you on an airplane in the sky

as a circle of lights on the icy
earth comes slowly into focus.

Water

If I can't hide you inside of my body
I don't want anything to do with you.

If I can't thread you through a needle
and pull you through the lengths of me—

I'll hide my face from you.

If I can't press my face into you
and you keep touching me with
all your fingers, refusing to be seen—

I'll deny the existence of you.

At least in your iciest form, you muffle
the hisses and hums of creation—

at least I can hear my feet against you
and pack you into a small white ball
and hold you against my skin—

until the heat of me makes you
disappear.

Remember me on my stomach,
waiting at the moss edge?

Listening expectantly as you roared.

Call to Worship (I woke up to the cat pissing on my leg)

Like a reminder of Sunday school,
Sunday, September the 5th, 6:17am.

Passing of the Peace

Like a reminder that I am from
the dirt, and to the dirt I will return.

Prayer of Confession

(Time of reticent silence)

That I should not have touched myself last night,
that even my righteous acts are like filthy rags.

Promise of Forgiveness

You all, like sheep—

like my favorite pink blanket with a silk hem
stinking woolen, sopping on the bathroom floor

You all, like sheep have—

been pissed on by your mothers and fathers.

This concentrated, stockyard-yellow reality seeps
hot into my skin while the sheets tremble and click
in the washing machine, that mechanical waterfall.
She's dying of liver failure, she's jaundice, she cannot
eat or drink. Suddenly, I'm afraid she's a portal to
another world sending messages with her eyes.
Suddenly, I'm paranoid, like sheep— *cont.*

have gone astray, each to your own way.
Return to your rest, oh my soul.

Please Stand

Play the harp! Strike the tambourine!
The cat pissed on you this morning!

I make coffee, I sit in the morning sun, my stomach
churns like the machine. A dog barks at me, suspicious
sharp eyes beneath the yard fence.

Pour out your hearts to Him in worship

And how is it that all I want is you, oh Lord of the Sabbath?
You who made me, who formed me in all the filthiness of
my mother's womb, You who made the mountains with their
lions, the desert boulders with their teeth.

*Join the anthem of all God's people this morning in the words of
the Psalmist, David*

How long, Oh Lord?
How long, Oh Lord, your daughters, our babies—
How long, Oh Lord, will we fear the fowler's snare?

my schizophrenic neighbor with all his knives
and bibles. You have crushed me with commands
I cannot meet. I cannot bear to fulfill your great commission.

Prayer of Petition

Please, take me up in your arms.
Press me to your neck, Oh God of my humanity?
We're down here squirming in it, hacking up our depravity.

And even if my cry reached presidents, publishers
or television hosts, who could comfort me but You?

Abba, Papa.

Yahweh, breath of my body.

Lord of the living, and Lord of the dead.

Lapis Lazuli

I am the same child, the same woman, infant bleeding again, weeping
again, seeing messages beneath the kitchen counter, above the trampoline, in
the beads hanging from my bedroom closet. I'm resting again on my side next to the
cat's hot sleeping body; recovering from fear, from insanity, from drunkenness, from
trying to fit too much earth into my stomach, from lying and bad dreams.
Wolves in the basement, rising water, endless waves. Every circle offers new

remembering and forgiving; breathing in Lapis everywhere, Lazuli in everything.
My respite is the color blue just below the silver pinions of the sun setting. That tangible
thickness, Lapis spirit—the same that walked with me in London and slept
beside me when I bled into the sheets I scrubbed to hang on the line, apologizing to
my hostess. Tiptoeing into the wide bathroom, tiled and windowless.

To be with the blue I walked the same slow and methodical steps as I did in
Montana. First year, crying for my mother, begging to go back to that
secret place; the cabinet of her womb, the sweetness of not yet being born
but still being alive. I drew a circle in the snow covered windshield and found
blue again this evening, holding the rocks and blackened cacti. Lazuli
encircles me, lying here, as faithfully as my own womb breaks and bleeds
to obey the sky. They are the same yesterday and today,

circling always.

Richard Baldo

One Lake Day

The boat had old waterlogged floorboards
saved with decades of tarnished ochre caulk.
Clear water held us several feet above
a green forest beneath the hull's blue paint.

My father rowed his three young sons
across the calm Jersey lake named Cedar.
This day, his strong biceps pulled the oars
at his long remembered trolling speed.

Our lines spread out behind the soft wake,
mine towing that grey plastic lure
with the red bill, silver back
and black dots of skyward facing eyes.

A pickerel, waiting in the weeds
was also young in fish years,
and hit the lure hard, bent my rod
and brought the boat to attention.

It rose in the writhing whiplash
of its head above water,
splashing white as you see
in mighty marlin movies.

The fish saved its life shaking
my silver lure loose and launched
it into the air to catch a hook
in the left pocket of my madras shirt.

The closest thing to a catch that day
plays now, a memory of my father
lighting the wilderness of our lives.

A moment of a day, the way
it was supposed to be. He lured us
into nature, into a taste of a father
sharing something he had to offer,

his childhood boat, time with us
on the safety of the placid lake
and a lively pickerel fish.

It was the kindest he would come
to us in all his moments.

Can we call it love?
It shines its light through the trees
of our childhood's dark forest.

Last Lesson

At two, you, with your water wings
learned to splash into my arms.
In time, you launched wingless
across to the pool's far side.

Four years later, I showed you how
the row of pawns lines up in front
of the castle to the queen on her color.

Now others teach you classic openings
beyond my chess horizon.

When you said you would instead push your bike,
I named you fearful until your angry denial
made you prove me wrong for our five mile ride.

Life lessons are varied, at times—harsh.
If I must also be the one to teach you
a last lesson,
 about death,

I will not do it gladly. I would never
choose to leave you, but life
comes with its written conclusion.

I hope to keep my wits as I slip away,
to leave you my
appreciation for who you are.

If we have time, I will teach you to visit coral
and white-tip reef sharks, to breathe bubbles
while we listen to the whales' melodic greetings.

If I must be that teacher, I ask to be
a good example, showing courage,
keeping fear from between us
as I depart.

My loss will be over in that last moment.
I hope your loss will be softened
by the love left to linger with you.

Autumn Warmth

Drifting through shadows as fall leaves flutter,
late morning light is sensed through night crew fog.

A slow warmth awakens my awareness as softness
invites me into the presence of an early afternoon.

Somewhere in the day, she decided to share this gift,
make a surprise of herself and travel to my room's soft light.

She quietly let her clothes fall away, to slide under
my pale blue comforter to touch my still form.

No longer only her first, I have become her familiar lover.
She reaches under my arm to palm my beating heart.

Some courage of her desire proves a growing newness, and moves me
to wordlessness as we grow together, skin welcoming skin.

Broad branch shadows spread across her arm onto my lean chest.
Twinkling sun tickles and tastes the touch being taught under our skin.

She closes the distance between us as leaf-danced light
plays on our bodies' offered gifts.

Through these decades, she rests against me,
in that shared skin-lit moment.

Carry On Caretaker

The man she has loved
for the last 43 years
fades into the wallpaper
of their Manhattan co-op.
Patches of darkness deepen
to accent the shafts of sun,
the direct or reflected arrows
from the frames of city glass,
the buildings' eyes watching.

This petite caretaker carries their cares
moving about her constant business.
He is leaving her, going nowhere.
She manages the daunting tasks
as best she can—fighting a battle
to stay the loss,
for another day, month, or year,
preserving an hour of partnership,
adding a codicil to life's contract.

Motes of dust in the light beams
tell their story—parts of their bodies
have already left this life.

As the sun so gradually fades to night,
she stumbles over memories
that light her way with love's grief.

Decisions must be made.

Carry on caretaker, with the words
of doctors who come and go.

Stay or go, home or hospital,
she navigates the rocky shoals
of medicine and prayer.

Carry on, give your care,
respite will come soon enough.

Give all your gifts while he remains.

Last Walk to the Canine Orchard

The apple trees are past bloom, young fruit growing,
not yet the right size for boys to fit into their throwing hands.
My throwing days are past, but today's job has always been mine.
As the oldest, I have carried each canine friend to earth.

My father can no longer stand to make the trip.
His legs will still carry him, but the weight of grief is too great.
I proceed to the familiar tree, last before the field,
passing the McIntosh, whose branches once held our fort.

And there is the Red Delicious, where the hammock hung
and wrapped me under summer and winter night skies. Here,
I gazed through those ancient limbs to the stars of my future,
trying to divine a path to adulthood.

In reverie, with reverence, I arrive at the unmarked plots.
This tree's surviving two trunks split as fingers to reach a hand
wide toward heaven. Over four decades, I made resting places
under the canopy of this elderly Winesap. I dig now.

This white-furred shepherd, my father's last, wrapped
in another old green army blanket, I did not know her well.
I lift the body, returned to puppy suppleness,
lay her gently to rest, and replace the earth and grass clogs.

The occasion calls for a father's words, but none come to me,
while he waits alone in the remains of the house.
There sounds a witnessing breeze through the tree's leaves
releasing me to walk back up the hill.

Jefferson Singer

Snowy Owl in Connecticut

I enter memory,
as I entered the woods long ago,
cracking the ice-laced earth,
seeking my voice,

what does it mean to see,
to take the mind's tangle
and make it familiar to foot,
open to airs,

to find a path's or poem's double texture
that brings one deeper in the wild,
but closer to refuge,
that fuses sound with light,

that salvages from shadow
winter's shimmered gaze
on beech leaves' yellow skins,
sycamores' port-wine stains,

hornbeams' Chinese lantern shells,
catkins void of their green fruit,
bittersweet on gray branch,
rouge upon a corpse.

This life that lives in death,
my scientist father would endorse,
all decay will yield to birth,
on this we could agree.

From a cedar's
green cabinet, it came—
a snowy owl,
rowing wingbeats,

round head in crystal air,
yellow eyes that caught the sun,
a ghost sailing in blue sky—
I was, still am, undone.

He could not take my word for it,
would not share my vision,
seated in his book-lined study,
blanketed in reason.

For many years,
its afterimage traced a phantom
in a thicket of vague thoughts,
more myth than memory.

Now, two winters
since my father's death,
I finally see it clearly,
see its silver sweep,

its dappled feathers,
white as the rabbi's robes
on the holiest of days,
lofting my prayers,

white as pages
laid before my pen,
an irruption of the possible,
the wingbeat of my words.

I see, with a predator's sight,
The cruelty of choice—how sometimes
we must release our reason
for others to be free.

Proposal

On a Vermont hillside,
her vintage wooden skis, waxed,
mine, rentals with plastic slats,

she made me feel,
as I slipped and fumbled
in my incompleteness,

my wobbly me-ness—
I was enough,
and that I loved her.

At that same spot, I later proposed
what she, with her mom,
had already guessed—

for a moment she swayed,
*Give me just a while to own it,
to sight our path ahead.*

No photographer behind a tree,
no best friends, parents, siblings, cousins,
stepping over the hillside's crest,

no rented restaurant, prosecco iced,
just us,
taking the cheapest room in the local inn,

opening a window
to a retaining wall,
counting the dinner's cost,

making half-panicked love,
then huddling like two sleepy pups,
tired from the day's full chase,

trusting, with a minimum of guile,
the balance of years would steady us both,
on the track we'd agreed to follow.

Six Month Cleaning

I don't care who my dentist is,
my hygienist must be Andrea,

her posture straight, her uniform crisp.
She leads me to her station,

high priestess of hygiene,
I am an acolyte in her mission.

Her light radiates above my head,
my bib, a cleric's collar,

her dedication to her calling,
the probing, polishing, plaque removal

has the purity of purpose
that summons Galahad or Percival,

her round table of silver instruments,
honed in the heat of holy fire,

flash and dance within her grasp,
her floss glides through each gap,

and as she practices her ordinance,
she talks of the loaves and fishes of her life.

Childless, she loves her rescue dog
who tracks the deer behind her home,

her husband's loyal hiking mate,
she details his adventures,

the six-foot snake, the coyote pack,
the skunk, the raccoon,

the possum hiding in the grill,
fussed at until her husband

opened the silver doors
and revealed two beady eyes.

Her words are the hymnals of the everyday,
quieting my fretting brain,

in the very month
that my father died,

they point the way
through the forest dark

when the straightforward path
has been lost,

she stands above,
I lie below,

and then I rise, moist-eyed,
renewed, rinsed of sin,

she leads me, posture perfect,
to the check-out station,

somehow, she has turned
my grief to gratitude,

Now the next six months
are up to me.

Dave Righetti's No-Hitter, July 4th 1983

1.
Out of rags,
a whole cloth conclusion,
a finished quilt of nullity.

How does one hold in consciousness
that which did not happen,
the no-thing,
the undone done,
the with-held,
the held back,
the absent guest,
the lost chance?

How does memory curl
around the punctured thought,
poke like a tongue
where the missing tooth belongs?

Gone, gone, gone,
grasping for the negative space,
the diastolic moment,
straining to recall a kind of death,
the resolute negation;
to freeze in mind
the impotence of action;
to love equally the pause
and not the note,
the breath,
and not the word,
the loss,
and not the gain.

2.

Let us begin again with nothing,
with a child's blocks,
piled in the playroom,
inconsequential as a schoolyard game,
one random October afternoon—
not the last day outdoors
with bat and ball
before winter's abrupt ejection,
but the bardo just before it.

Begin with structure-less structures,
and build block by block,
an architecture of absence,
of that that is not there,
of towers filled with air.

Memory works by forgetting,
the selective letting go of fact
enables the fictive glow of truth;
the fireflies in the mind's dark eye
coalesce as immanence
in the shadow world's relief.

3.

Here it is:
as the party ate and drank above,
the TV in the basement room
unfurled its blank assembly—
twenty-seven outs and not a single in,
the man that watched with us,
long since dead, the beauty
of his rounded head,
and Van Dyke beard crumbled,
so too the image of the woman
he married and
ultimately divorced,
frozen in her thirtieth year,
the other guests
drained away like rain water

down the grate,
nothing, nothing, nothing
remains,
but the sublimity of nothing,
the high art of restraint,
the discipline of denial,
the one day,
those few hours
in which nothing worked perfectly.

Song

Come play in the moonyards tonight,
make of their light a lanyard to lead you,
far out to sea where the smallest bird wearies,
stutters to land on the prow of your ship.
Now when the moon floats in the water,
go to the place where the ice mountains rise,
walk on the earth that smells of no land.

Then will you mix snow with your sleep,
send the bird home, though he follows your step,
go on alone, know the cold till it numbs,
walk in the land of the heaviest slumber.

Live in the last yard of the moon,
inside the hollows of its skull,
somewhere the cool air will seep to your neck,
follow its breath to the lighted way,
then will you rest, your wandering done,
only soft glow, hum of sleep,
even death could not be this kind.

Diane Ayer

A Fan

My neighbor's circular fan sits
between parted pink curtains
as July's sun sets on it

it glows, a face embraced by loving hands
cupping, they settle a revolving mind
equanimity frames fears, ideas, replays
that have spun all these years

feel that whirl within
imagine hands that steady
wait out time
believe the pulsing wind
giving life
singing certainties:
you can stop
your mind's spinning
at least for one night
it is all all right

Railroads

Downtown railroad juncture delays my going home—
swift waters cut below weary branches whose
yellow leaves race under the bridge, under me,
astride the mills and creaking railroad cars

River ran the thread mill, railroad made it profit—
mill's quiet now, train's tattoo entrances

Grandpa drove locomotives
hauling coal out of blue ridges
he'd bring home his paycheck and his love
and then disappear in a cloud of smoke

Grandma called theirs a fatherless family—
he was too busy following rails
through the Shenandoahs—
kept the kids coming
while he kept going

Last car rumbles by, its red light
fades into leaning birches
as the gate goes up

Traffic jostles across and I see the sun set
on oiled rusty tracks shimmering gold
like promises to keep, paychecks to deliver

A Breath for the ISS

The mission of the International Space Station (ISS) is to enable long-term exploration of space and provide benefits to people on Earth.—PBS.org

Dead winter out, its darkness cloaks the trees—
dim inkblots cutting forms from blackest blued
night sky. A weight within, but then a frieze
appears: Dog Star, North Star, the Bears construed.

Infinity inspired, I climb the hill
and take a vantage spot. Check time, search for
west's angle. Catch my breath, my heart: the drill
to remind me blood and air must mix much more.

Once crowded mind grows sparse, drunk on air, then
shoulders fall back, pointing this heart toward sky,
night's silence wraps around; inhale and when
I hold my breath, I witness what comes by:

A star is gliding over hills, towns, states
(they're weightless in there from speed, not
a lack of gravity), this ship of fates
then flew over me, 5:10 on the dot.

Exhale serene. It's passed, peace has possessed:
my burdens lighten when watching the ISS.

Still

The strength of your absence:
worse than winter's fog
erasing forests, fields, lifetimes with mere mist

The oak stands unseen across briars, brambles,
but it lives still; the cold pale veil is temporary
as grief is meant to be
it refuses to fall down in the face of oblivion

Furnace shuts off
silence penetrates
still all is all still

Your voice should fill this abyss
frame dark lines around the blur
I almost don't hear it anymore
can't quite conjure you up out of that haze

And what if the dawn's rays can't chase
ground clouds up, freed, transcendent?
we'll all travel blind-folded
with cotton in our ears
as I do now without you here

Your absence while I'm present
won't let me forget I'm waiting still
for winter fog to rise, dissipate
with the sun's hopeful breath

Invitation to a Reverie

come watch the cat fall asleep with me
tiger stripes undulate, mesmerize
soft snores from a pink nose
rhythmic sighs of content
drain the day's pains
in a purr

stop that chase
running you ragged
come here, feel the cat sleep
plush white belly side up
paws knead your worries away

while the cat sleeps
let your spool unravel
feed their feline dreams
with the weight of that thread

it's a daydream in a sunbeam
let's curl up let's cat nap
come watch the cat sleep with me

Kaecey McCormick

Meditation Before Monsoon

Ancient saguaro lift their arms
praying to the full moon rising
behind the jagged peaks.

Wild-cotton clouds spread lacey
skirts over an ink-stained sky
as a lone howl rings in nightfall.

A chorus of coyotes responds
as crepuscular waves of heat
carry the clacking of unseen beetles
and the earthy scent of creosote
—a harbinger of coming rain.

A south wind rushes over dry surf
untethering crispy leaves to scuttle
with stripe-tailed scorpions over pebbles
and sun-bleached bones in moonlight
shining earthbound stars on the desert floor.

The great-horned owl rouses from its perch
in the wispy Palo Verde, lifting his feathery sails
to fish in this red sea that is anything but dead.

The movement stirs dusty air overhead
as I stand on this dry shore where the ocean
of hard-packed clay meets the edge
of man's cemented trail.

SJC → PHX

six and a half miles above the earth
give or take

I see stretches of untouched earth
still wild, still moving in the wind
or with the shifting plates
still drying up in summer
still flooding under the monsoon

I see spots of civilization
tumors snaking out tentacles
of asphalt and wood-and-metal ties
linking one to the next

multiplying like kudzu covering trees
expanding in uneven clusters of cement
spreading like a stain across the land

accelerating the disease

shaking in a tin can
seatbelt strapped tight
we begin our descent
and I watch this tumor swell

what if we kept rising instead?

six miles becomes twelve
becomes twenty-four
becomes forty-eight
then we're crossing the Karman line
soaring into a cancer-free zone

while those around me grip the arm rests
celebrate the safety in the crust of the planet
I lift my feet and hands to the sky

On learning it's back

after Mary Oliver

I ran away
from the truth of your cancer
like a beaten dog

into the woods
whispering your name
to the wind

I watched the leaves fall
waiting for the world to end
but the wind kept moving toward night
and the waning gibbous moon
witnessed it all in silence

I carried myself over cracked earth
to the top of a rocky hill
to see the caps of the bay
cast in the evening's silver light
but the fog was too thick

a juvenile eagle waited there
perched on a snag
watching me and the moon each
with an unblinking eye

as unmoved by my tears
as by the moon's detached hovering

in the distance
the creek trickled into the reservoir
over pebbles and grass
crooning a low lullaby
to put the day to sleep

I sat next to a rotting log beneath the eagle
listened to the bugs burrow below the fallen leaves
and in the decaying wood

I told them about you
and they whispered their understanding—
they know about the inevitability of the end

they too long to stretch out each moment
to find eternity in the spaces between
where everything
even the multiplying of cells
stops

but time presses on
and like me they had to get back—

to you
to life
to the tasks that need doing

so they promised to carry you with them
back into the divine vibration of creation
and set you free to rise like starlight

soft
expansive
ever moving

with a final prayer
your name on my tongue
I rose

carrying grief as heavy as the bottom of the reservoir
back home

Mind swing

The downswing, the low ground,
the zenith at the bottom took all of me—
I could not think of them, if I could think at all.
I could not hold their hearts in my mind,
warm them by the evening fire, and return them
whole and loved.

Instead, I pressed my back into the cold wall
and prayed to the dead gods for this thing in my mind
to swallow me—skin, bones, innards, and all.

That's how it is at the bottom.
Empty. Dark.

But never empty enough.
Never the deep dark of death.
Just the low, dim light of madness,
the kind that makes it impossible to see
where I am and who I'm becoming—
if I'm becoming at all.

And then,
like all things,
it changes.

The bottom tips and I begin to rise.
The upswing starts and pulls me in the other direction.

As my legs extend in front of me,
toes pointed to the heavens, hands wrapped tight
around ropes suspended from an invisible frame,
I throw back my head in childlike ecstasy,
swinging toward paradise.

I see them from the corner of my eye,
arms outstretched toward my back,
waiting.

Meg Whelan

Resubstantiation

I was happy to feel that blood.

I knew it was here, swollen and warm,
the way I knew it was there, drying,
when they called to say he was missing

with a gun

Could you please try calling him?

Yesterday's ache of growing Texas martyrs
became pain that pulsed
and gripped the steering wheel when
I braked long enough to feel

Thank God
I'm not pregnant
in Kentucky

I can't get a hold of him.

The one degree of separation that kept their hands clean
I'll press between their palms
like a prayer stone
with the sharp end facing bone and staring through
skin with a scream

They're looking.

I hope their veins stigmatic stream
until the pools drown each gesture in the lives
of those they took

I hope their fingerprints last
and that their legacy
sinks them deep

So when my thumb is gripped by a little hand,
instead of this welcomed red,
her body is proof of a reckoning

until we send her to school

I'm sorry.

Cocoon

The first who arrived on line twelve, her in the fur and him in the black,
both with socks which suited shoes that belonged on streets,
arms across one plastic seat
and in kerchiefed pockets as he stood,
not even a nod the stop, eyes ahead and past the glass.

*At dinner, there were just two wings—orange oozing to a blur—circling
around the three below. I figured that the butterfly had arrived
with the front yard's fresh daffodil patch. And that it had snagged
adventure in the whirl of the ac unit. I watched on the other side.*

And then him, with crutches, and her
with chestnut hair holding her hips,
who smiled to pull in close,
like the three-quarters mark of a movie,
and she left, flicking the door open, not seeing
if he fluorescent followed behind.

*After my walk, the two became six. I poured a glass to drink. Now,
eight? Ten? Like water in hot oil, the frenzy pumped their bodies into
and against and with the cyclone. They were at the whim of seventy-
one degrees.*

Now them, who let masks hang and chair fling upright
to press into each other, him petting the bridge of her nose,
her checking their reflection in the smudged poster beside my head,
as a shove hurdled them into the next.

*The sun set, the house cooled, and the thermostat stopped. And the
breeze-climbing couples made a dash into the fiery shadows of dusked
trees. I watched them quiver in the pine limbs until night turned the
window into a mirrored face.*

And metal released from our embrace,
and I danced down the hill because my body said so,
elbow pushing through evening winter air, inviting
fingers to a sweet flourish at the peak,
falling again as my feet told me to turn.

She takes her bow. And becomes my home.

Pennebaker said that if you write, you go to the doctor less // Water is healing

I bet those sideways scribbles were like morning's first faucet sip.
We didn't think to need it, but it sure did feel good
when the pen straddled nubby fingertips and puffy palms
like a colander balanced between big pot and frying pan.

It's important to stay hydrated.

She placed me at the afterdinner table with marker and laminated alphabet
like a mutt pup thrown to the lake because he surely knows how to swim.
His flails and gasps breed confidence after his bones teach him how.

Mom was glad the ink wiped away dry.

But still, she warned the kindergarten that I'd taught myself and that I
was proud. And from his tank beside the bookshelf,
the box turtle slammed against the glass. The splash held my gaze
while I dazed at dotted lines and trained fingers for form.

The cartons of the journals downstairs in the hot water closet.

Pound for pound, how many of them would represent surgeries unstarted,
scars unsplit, organs unautomized, molecules unmitigated?
If he had just written rather than sinew-strain, how far could he have
been saved?
If he had told us earlier, if he could, would my text box sit alongside his
buried one?

At what point across the ocean does a keyboard activate?

And what happened, then, when a few fell out drunk
in a room of a million languages?
What good did it do?

Your body is 70% water.

Romantic

We called that pretty, and it stopped them,
but shaken centimes in cardboard cups couldn't.
Pink puffs of cotton candy cloud
painted in backward portraits while
the real thing brewed over cigarette butt huts,

and I walked down it while the brush
stopped to ask *quelle heure est-il*,
but the concrete drying kept me from
translating, so I showed her the phone
which, in English, showed me as I was,

and my lover's hand who held his own
sunset zinnia which I gripped in palms
that were freshly picked by paranoia.

You displace what's
in front of you

to see less clearly.

Katherine B. Arthaud

You were

You were the gentler of the two, the light touch,
the dimming sky, the softer voice
in the chorus of all the voices.
You were the shade under the tree,
the milder weather, the sleeping lion,
the lighter rain.

He was the lightning across the field,
the sun, the volcano, the red carnation,
the loud voice, the long prayer,
the organ in the sanctuary.

But it took both of you to make us—
one, two, three—different as minerals, yes that
different. Different as colors.
Different as animals in a jungle.
Different as countries with different flags.
Different as costumes, as cultures, as songs.

We are lost without you, travelers now,
flying careless across the land
until the knowing strikes us—
lightning out of the dazzling blue—
that in our absence our house
has burned to the ground.

The rooms where you slept are silent now.
The curtains are stillness itself in the windows.
Your empty shoes
on the breezeway by the watering can
still sing the song of you who have left us.

Your hats are all on hooks, your sweaters
folded in soft stacks in the closet. We touch
your shirts, one by one,
in the darkness of the mirrored closet.
We touch my father's ties,
ribbonlike in a different cedar-scented darkness.

The White Plate

The only thing of value is a white plate.
It doesn't look precious, and I don't remember it,
propped against the wall in the dining room
near the fireplace into which my aunt hurled plastic fruit

one snowy New Year's Eve, not far from the portrait
of young Lavinia Holt, who died as a child,
indicated by a flower held in her pale left hand,
a sadness. And then, the white plate, as the

world goes tilted, the very sky askew—
how did it not shatter, this Zen-plain treasure,
unlikely as a mid-day moon, with these two deaths,
so soon upon one another?

How? Like two stars . . . a flicker . . . another . . . then gone.
Father. Mother.
We didn't even catch our breaths,
scarcely a fortnight in between.

Sitting together on the lawn, near the old hammock,
ropes gray with mold and age, the trellis buzzing still
with bees—morning glory, honeysuckle, forsythia, all of it—
on the green grass in latticed chairs, they're sipping tea and eating toast,
they were always eating toast.

The nurses are packing the medical supplies—returning
this home to a younger, healthier version of itself,
more like the one we remember, when this god
and goddess stood glistening with pool water in the sun,

in bathing suits and striped towels, summer slate hot
beneath their soles. Farewell, and farewell again,
you two. We will probably sell the plate,
as it says nothing, nothing, of the richness.

Possible

Innocent, the river and the geese that graze
by the river. Innocent the bridge and
what it's made of. Innocent the students
who walk over the bridge bearing books and paper.
Innocent my heart, though it doesn't feel
innocent, with its uncomfortable onionskin layers,
a thousand striations of memories, bruises, contusions.

I would drive my own car back then,
eyes open, and keen—both hands on the wheel
at nine and three, the way my father taught me—
speeding (usually) towards the unrequited
and its shimmering, silver sheen,
turning left then left again to follow
what glitters, untouchable, untouched, just there—

there, where the trees end and the sky begins, can you see?

I learned my lesson, eventually.
Still, I feel sometimes like a shiny bald pawn,
pushed around this checkered landscape
by an unseen hand, especially yesterday
while pushing my white-blond boys
in a double stroller from MIT
up the path that lines the Charles, in the rain, my husband in a rage
running away towards Watertown, and not for the first time,

or the last. But that was years ago,
which is what I am talking about: striations.
Layers and layers, I am saying.
I am not guilty of doing much more than wanting more days now.
Like brick or geese
or water flowing east to the bay, why would I
hate myself more than these things?

I gather it all up like an armful of warm laundry,
meaning, myself I gather up,
along with my past and my endless thinking
about the past, along with my not thinking about anything.
Innocence, like the weather here, seeps into my bones
slowly, the way it has for you. It feels like singing,
only in reverse. If such a thing were possible.

Aaron Glover

Before There Was The Beginning

a woman hovered in space
a caboodle of elements besides
she was restless
she wanted to make something
but did not know how to begin
she dipped her fingers into a compartment
& traced the shape of a planet
but, bored, tossed it aside

in she dipped & again she traced
orbits, suns, asteroids—shapes
we have no words to name
but through which she could extend
her slender arm & wrap everything
to her breast still
it was not right
tossed aside, tossed aside
a great galaxy jumbled & sprawling
piling up behind her

she looked over at what she had made
how oceans were forming
how dust was aligning itself into rings
how amebae were beginning to cogitate
& she was ambivalent
& her afternoon tea had grown cold

after a time her wife approached
& seeing as wives often do
the woman's frustration with her work
the wife said
come here love
let me gently comb your hair
with my fingers
I will pour you a glass of wine

*& while the lasagna bakes
you can tell me of your day*

that night the woman could not sleep
as she rolled side to side
she thought again of oceans
of saline wombs for life
mercurial moons of mercury quicksilver
of sliver limpid on her fingertips
as she had drawn ice storms
& the eyes of great fish

rolling to her wife she called
softly quiet as a distant star her name
hoping she would open
hoping magic might alight within her name
but on her wife slept
the woman knew for herself, then, she was alone
knew it was hers alone to find
the diamond of her own pressure
the grass hers to draw from the soil
the eggs to form
the tiny muscles within the eggs
to break the thinnest porcelain walls once
the time came
time
time was hers to count, to line
she sighed drawing a sheet of night around her
& floated away to begin

Stones In Prayer

these stones are praying
not all stones pray
& not all stones are praying now
but here
in a place with many names throughout time
they pray

they do not pray for careers
for sturdy as they may be
no stone wishes to become a building
in the makeshift cities of men
they do not pray new things
no new television to invite other stones to watch
no purse in which to place articles of stony ablution

they do not even pray company
for stones cannot imagine themselves singly
since stone begets stone
& only great mysteries
like water or wind or
natural laws with various names
(which attempt to bound their power
but cannot)
only mighty forces like these
& time
can separate stones from themselves

like tarantulas sanctified by stars
like saguaros blessed by rain
like the rat snake & pygmy mouse
in transubstantive embrace
this is my body given for you
do this in remembrance of me

The Measure of Storms

hold a ruler to the sky
how we persist
chevron raindrops against tin
sighing wooden porch slats
the peat of wet dirt
sharp as grass-stained denim
check with Gary & the Doppler
learn a watch isn't a warning
isn't a summer thunderstorm
plains girls learn how they are alone
learn about loneliness
from overheard conversations
late night kitchen table talk
how to buy school supplies
how to send a heart outside a body
into the world with more
than family photos & the body borne
to gauge & weather what's coming
to keep her marrow tender

'Rita's Wedding '56'

I

It must have been lovely—
black & white life.

Not always, as living
is never always lovely—

the cruelty of aging,
the knife of disappointment—

but to have been younger,
for less history,

the novelty of photographs,
a certainty of unknowing,

for finites, for hope.
Future clear as wedding vows.

II

Card stock lies, sepia beauty,
over-simple, partial truths

performed smiles, mostly
happy families, certain moments—

before rain arrived, before
Uncle James got drunk, threw up,

before tear stained faces in the side yard,
all glass green grass & amber light—

however brief, real as grace,
as marriage, as a magic trick.

III

There's no escaping
fractions of fact, the permanence

what's revealed; something,
maybe one small thing,

how young your mother was, how proud,
whose nose you got, whose smile,

how much she loved you there, *there*,
that moment,
how much hope she had for you.

And maybe she didn't.
And maybe she did.

On Transformation

(for Emmy, 2019)

your office will be field
nothing to confine you but horizon
your desk a jut of sandstone in a gorge
only the hazard of weather to brook

the details of your young life—its shift
the stretch of your muscles
what will carve your day
how dawn & set of sun
will render your face in compliment—
present themselves as new again
not so much to mystify but
demand greater precision
from the figure of your history

speak yourself aloud
do not be muted by convention
or bound by doubt
mark any pangs of terror you feel
& once considered abandon them
for shadow depends on what shines elsewhere

no time to obscure what has been
you emerge from a silicone-chipped chamber
a great movement of things
the reveal of new passages
an unfamiliar instrument waits
for the pulse of fingers

feel the great organ of the natural world
air & light sustaining
you cannot escape the brilliant crush of your life
do not search for some other source
it is you who are shining

Anne Marie Wells

[I'm crying in a sandwich shop reading Diane Seuss' sonnets]

I.

I'm crying in a sandwich shop reading Diane Seuss' sonnets. *Intimacy unhinged, unpaddocked me...* she wrote in one... *so this is why people want other people to put their arms around them*, she wrote in another, bludgeoning open my tucked away sorrows. Out spills the latest man who sees me as just for fun. And I am. In the beginning when I drown out the oceanic hush of sand pouring into my hollow womb. I am fun before I want more than Neruda read to me on Sunday mornings in the original Spanish, before I want the fullness of love instead of the emptiness of its Irish twin. But I'm only half-crying over this lovely man not loving me. I wouldn't have known his name, I wouldn't be eating alone, not eating, I wouldn't be loveless and childless if I hadn't lost the big love, or the illusion of it, on the first day of spring last year. And even if this other love was capable of forgiving, even if we were capable of starting again, I would only receive the outsides of the man I cry over. His face, his muscles, his bones. Or even less. His exuvia. Like the molted skin of a cicada that cannot fill my ears with its sound from the treetops, cannot make me feel.

II.

Dumbo broke my heart as a child, and still I cannot watch, cannot even think about that movie. My ribs disintegrate on themselves, my mother's name appears in their dust each time Mrs. Jumbo reaches her trunk through the jail car bars to rock her wing-eared baby while all the other babies sleep spooned in their cages. Five, seven, fourteen, thirty-six. I never grew out of it. The violins introduce "Baby Mine" before the choir joins in, Mrs. Jumbo's trunk strokes her baby's face in recognition. Tears form in Dumbo's eyes, then my own. I'd break through my mother's door, words no longer words. Spit and sound. Ululations. A cicada's percussion across her lap, pleading for her to soothe my rattles, lull me back from the cruel-hearted circus, make me forget the cartoon calf walking away, waving goodbye to his mother with his trunk. *Dumbo again? You know you can't handle that movie*, she'd groan. *Don't watch it anymore*. Her arms wouldn't always be there to swaddle my spiracles. She tried to teach me, but I'm still learning: With all the suffering in this world, all the agony I would endure in this life, why cause myself more? And on purpose?

III.

My tymbals vibrate on my drive home from Creekside Deli with a crescendo of, *I hate it. I hate it. I hate it*. An avocado and swiss sits in a box in the empty seat untouched. I don't know what I hate, but I think it's loss. Both certain and probable. Or are they different? I think about calling my mother, but can already hear her ask, *Have you taken your SAM-e?* And, no I haven't, but these tears are for Diane Seuss' sonnets. They're for a Spanish teacher who made me feel loved when he did not love me. For a fictitious man whose absence my fingers still reach for on hungover mornings. For Dumbo and his mother. For myself and my mother because someday my mother will rot in a box like the sandwich left on my front seat, and it will be the worst day of my life. And maybe

there will be no one to wrap their arms around my screams. Maybe I'll never recover from these sonnets. Maybe I'll let them wrench me apart for decades, let them wriggle free my anguish like baby teeth, making room for the new. Maybe I'll visit my mother's buried ashes one day, collapse across her stone. Maybe I will hear her cicadan hiss chastising me from the other side. *Diane Seuss again? You know you can't handle those sonnets. Don't read them anymore.*

Mother: verb

No handprints on mirrors. No play-doh
crusted into the carpet. No penciled scribbles on
the door frame marking each year of growth. I sleep
through the night, only waking to use the bathroom. No tiny
voice cries for me to save them from a nightmare. I peek
through the door to the other room; it's empty except for
boxes of winter clothes and photo albums. My lipsticks
and eyeshadow rest strewn around the vanity where I left
them. No tiny toothbrush leans against mine. No plastic ducks
or boats line the bathtub edge. No shampoo for sensitive eyes.
No towels with superheroes or mermaids in a heap on the floor.
No carseat in the back of my Forester. No stroller in the trunk.
No karate lessons, violin, soccer. I have no dioramas to glue
cotton balls and bird seed to. No homecoming game. No bandages
on scraped elbows. My lips have never touched a bruise. I eat popcorn
for dinner in front of the TV. The table in my kitchen has only one
chair. No reminders to chew with mouth closed or the importance
of vegetables. I already know how the broccoli I never cooked
will boost my immune system. I could fly to Portugal next week
if the urge moved me. Dance to Fado, shop for ceramic whatever
or cork such-and-such. No one needs me to pack a peanut
butter jelly and juice box before school, to read
a bedtime story. No one weeps in my absence.
I go by no other name. I worry over no one.
No one worries over me.

Long Distance Romance

The stew steams from the stovetop, simmers
above inchoate flames, waits as I wait. Basil,

sage, rosemary, oregano work their magic, tango
their scents out the kitchen door, through the living

room, and up the stairs. Spoon's ready.
Mouth's ready. All there's left to do is eat.

Butterflying

I didn't know she still lived
here, the Azure, but there she goes,

as if the sky peeled away a piece of itself
just to know what it felt like to flit among the dog

-woods, to gorge on ripe blueberries, to remember the taste
of youth, the days when she had kaleidoscope eyes, played piano

in staccato. Her wings sing a melody, a morning song; no longer
a mourning song. She floats on the wind of her own sound,

planting the tune in unsuspecting ears. There she is
again, perched between my ribs, forming a tornado

in Virginia from a sigh she heard echoing
through the Teton Mountains.

Holly Cian

Waiting for the Metro

The earth wraps its limbs around
the color of my spine. I can see you,
standing in the doorway of your heart,

your drawings like mango,
a mouthful of sunset tossed
into your selected lap,
the translucent shooting
small as a rabbit, thin
as a spine of pearls

my dear
against the beat of soft night
the specimen of your voice
is abob in the eager trap of itself.

When I say, *help me*, I do not mean
Give yourself to me
You are all that I need
My world is improved by you.

When I pull at the splits
of my hair and skin
there is something just past you
that I want to get away from.

Nothing like love to let itself out
into a night of strangers
buttoning their chins
turning to the dim light.

Untitled

Sometimes people feel needed less and less. The air folds me like an extra blanket. The air is a part of the touch of a shoulder. The room is quiet in the thick air. I would never worry when all your heart thickens like a collapsing structure.

In space, your limbs fold out. When you disappear, the air unbuttons. I examine the dimples in my skin through the bedsheets. In the morning, I spread my fingertips like a lost doll. In my car, a piece of light spits through the windshield. We are not alone here, you of the opposite direction.

At times I taste like cold breath when the room is empty. At times the space is like a large bird, I do not know how, just watching. But, when I was home and the room was dark with blinds and burnt-out bulbs, the muffled murmur of the apartment next door, the porch dusted with pollen, a half dozen letters rambled onto the table, I invited the bird inside and gave him what I had.

Stars

Tonight, house lights glow from the hills like the fattest stars.
Plump with the day's satisfaction, you thank your lucky stars.

I'm at the sink washing plates, at the window,
you are tampering with the stars.

You never know if the light comes from within them
or outside of them, but everyone else knows the stars

do a bit of both, we all reflect things. After all
even you reflect stars

or share space with them, are aware
of the existence of large pockets of light; tiny stars,

I'm at the window, drying dishes and watering the plants
perked up by the light of the stars;

I am imagining plants breathing, they are aglow in cell
regeneration, they are like stars

in that I don't know when they start to die
and so they die; we are like stars,

too, I don't know when we started to die
but the whole world is doing it. Calculated stars,

we're set afire. We burn through existence.
I shake in my bed and walk out to the stars.

There are clouds tonight. The street
lamps flicker, like stars.

Pentecost at the Minneapolis Institute of Art

High cheekbones press to the fatal sky,
new halos like yellow suns,
throats point in shadow.

The language looks like blood
to me, the symbolic bird
something ominous,
to be feared, emanating
lines on blotches of blue storm.

I am told that these are tongues
of fire, and I take my own cracked
hand into my pocket and finger
the holes of my keys.

The tongue is a spare line.
What wonder the eyes feel,
splattered into cells
and amphibious. In the days
that followed,

and the days in between,
did they wipe their mouths
with a spare or resolute
desperation?

What pulse the skin feels,
thickening like a blaze
beneath it.

illness is

the opal you called a pearl; the sun in a polaroid you
called the spots just a whiteness with breath that burned.

earlier,
your unclaimed moan filled the room;
what we have here is losing

air and water, palpebral response:

the doctors poke around for more but cannot find it.
your gasp is purple like a sawed off tongue
and in September,
a month that was invented,

cursed, held and wasted—
there is a magnet on my fridge
with brighter air.

what space can we give you?
what space do we have to give?

Kimberly Russo

My Brain This Morning

shoes—
with no socks—to
fill the bird-feeder—my feet look worn—
my kids have such smooth, beautiful hands
and feet—do they think my feet look old—did I
think my mom’s feet looked old when I was young—
did she even wear open-toed shoes—flip-flops—we called them
“thongs”—what did she wear to work—red lipstick, short skirt,
square-heeled pumps—no pointy heels behind the bar—(entangles
in the mats) bartender—so many years—that’s what invited the
bladder cancer—second-hand smoke—she’s grabbing her
crotch, moaning, Oh my God—Oh my God—every
time she urinates in her Depends—lying
on the bed—otherwise incoherent—
dying

Superman was Never Intended to be Viewed in Black & White

In black and white
Superman,
the 1978 version.
An image of Christopher Reeve,
fists piercing confines,
fleeing Earth's atmosphere,
forever framed by the 8x8
television.
9th birthday, looming
Silent guest, anxiety
dread of uncertainty
Childish hope and a mother's promise
a sizeable slumber party.
Sleeping bags, pillows, and innocence
stuffing into a tiny,
two-bedroom rental.
A problem of "Absent Parents"
Categorical vulnerability,
canvassing to convince guests.
Creating excuses,
assuaging concerns.
And the TV, our first, (used)
Color TV—the conveyor of a cinematic
savior—broken.
A white blouse
flecked with blood
Faltering feet
No, no. She was fine
Just a fender-bender
fractured nose—a few cracked ribs.
Unseemly gesticulations and
slurred pleas to stay on.

The house emptied,
I watched her sleeping.
Familiar pangs of

disappointment and resolve,
quieted with overwhelming love.
Light from the screen
casting shadows, a muted hero
in black and white.

Missed Signs

The bus pulls away as it does every day, a snapshot of yellow in a framework of gray. After lessons and learning relayed and conveyed, connections with peers convincingly made, My role as a student so perfectly played, I stand at the corner, alone and afraid.

I fear not my surroundings, nor the path that I tread . . . The route is familiar along with the dread, the resolute realization of what lies ahead. Lord knows her “condition” can leave her half—dead. My need for security withers, unfed.

I’m turning the corner; my house is in view,
anxiety turns a darker hue.
Oh my God, if you only knew
the hell and the heartache I’ve been through.
All the signs . . . you’ve misconstrued
while you, Mother, have come unglued.

Selective Memories are the only Gift of Dementia

I will send you a little note today.
Stationery bought with you in mind,
knowing you would admire
delicate purple flowers
bordering scalloped edges.
I see you—savoring
every word
beneath your smudged magnifying glass.

We talk on the phone
every day, reminiscing.
We laugh.
You say you feel better
just hearing my voice
you and Daddy will visit soon.
I used to call those words “pie-crust promises.”

It’s hard to fathom
the missed opportunities,
the years you spent nursing a hangover
instead of my children.
With all of the states and circumstances
separating you from me,
my bitterness softens
with your ebbing memories.

Some of your days
are better than others.
Some days, you say
my dad is dead and ask me
if I’ve seen him lately.
You shout, “My time is almost up!”
Now the world has its own circumstances,
a virus to freeze us in place but not in time.
I write my memory on creamy-white paper
(with purple flowers.)

**We take flight down the pier of the beach,
you carrying our shoes in one hand,
my toddler-hand tethered to your other.**

**Weaving through board-walkers, we chant, “Aua, Aua, Aua!” in
your German tongue. Grey-winged seagulls chuckle and mew
encouragement of our hot-footed flight.**

**A California pier stretches endlessly, and my blonde hair is
a comet’s tail reaching back to the sea.**

Steven Monte

Dickinson

She does not need another song—
song never was enough.
Her “business of circumference”
(she also said, “of love”)

was like a long, sustained embrace
outwards around a thing
she could not grasp, but *trying to*
enabled her to wring

a stintless harmony from hymn
according to her slant—
compacted like an acronym
and hard, like adamant.

Yeats

“Having forged words more potent than a curse,
teased song from prose, and prose from song in turn;
having raised strains as piercing and as terse
as stings inflicted in everyday strife
for which there’s no recourse; having come to learn
what brutal men know—that we must take from life,
that true contentment is not, at its root,
something born out of what we can accept
but what we can’t; and having grown adept
at harnessing my bitterness, averse
to wisdom that says song is substitute
or mere release, like yelling into rain,
I took whatever still made my heart sore
and cast it into verse, till it was plain,
if I wished, I could make it hurt once more.”

Auden

In the recesses of our conscience he exists
like a reminder of some long neglected duty.
Like pavement cracks, verse should trip us up, he insists;
wherever there is truth, there also may be beauty.

His universe was one where dark forces contended
blindly but with logic, inspiration was a myth,
power remote and yet real for the undefended,
and not about accepting so much as living with.

Critics charged him with tinkering. He only smiled.
Like art and most ideas, we can't grow up too soon.
In his insistence though, was something of the child
who pounds the earth so as not to ask for the moon.

Ethics never had a better spokesman. He was one
whom we would like to think of as immune to hype.
Poems were small, but, unlike life, could be redone.
Wisdom was the knowledge that you, too, were a type.

Ashbery

*Four million of a newly discovered microbe
could fit into the period at the end of this sentence*
and I feel as though every one of them were
clinging to my words through turns of phrases
and leaving meanings behind.

He can do that to you
sometimes just by singing of love—how it lingers
like a conversation in a hallway, and how
you can almost follow its almost logic
even when you can't grasp it like a doorknob
nor know why you haven't wandered off course,
which of course we have, long ago. But I wonder,
how are we going to find an end to all of this?
Would someone please, just this once, take charge
and decide where we're going to eat? I'm sorry

if you aren't exactly following me. I can help it
and he means well, but meanwhile we are again
getting ahead of ourselves, which is mostly a good thing
and natural in the sense that it's hard not to wonder
how we will be treated when we reach the border
and go through customs—a task at once straightforward
and daunting, like an unread book, whose deviousness
ought not to be taken lightly. What will they make of him,
our little stow-away to the Temple of Fame,
when he no longer gets by on looks and a smile?
There will be hell to pay and we may not have a choice
no matter how steep the climb to the rotunda,
for they allot only so many light-years to constellations,
the stars are receding, and history is like a peloton
massing behind us and closing in. So back off.

Judgment Day may not be around the corner
but it can happen in any poem. The forces assembled
on our behalf or against us (for we would rather believe
them hostile than indifferent) have merely, like us,

suspended sentences. Yet make no mistake:
the military-industrial complex means business;
their operators put you on hold. If we are to engage
in the great American pastime of kvetching
and crown a winner, we had better crack the book.
It has been waiting for the right moment to open up
and may have to wait longer to be misunderstood
in ways that make sense. When that happens and you happen
to be free then, recall me. For even if all we do in our lives
is trade messages and constantly miss each other,
what we wish comes to pass far more than is realized.

A line must be drawn in the sand, however:
we won't be tricked into beauty, even granting that beauty
may be a trick, as philosophers have reminded us
much to their chagrin. That is where poetry, so to speak,
comes into play. What makes it work is his uncanny knack
for camouflaging his narcissism in a way
that makes you feel you're the center of inattention.
If it's working again, what can I say? It is a gift
that keeps misgiving in fits of exaltation. Which is to say
words can get the better of us when we let them.
Is that better? It's hard for me to tell. But don't tell me
I'm only thinking of myself when you are on my thoughts
more than I'd like if you knew. I've tried avoiding metaphor
but I can't shake the thought that you're not here.
I want to feel that closeness again. And want it more.

Stay with me a little longer. For though we can't be friends
since I'm still plotting to seduce you, I make an occasional point
and want to come back to you: it is scary when words no longer feel
that they were meant to be, especially in a poem. It is not just
his world record in vocabulary, nor even how he can make
words like "hijinks" almost cry. It has to do with distractions—
how life happens in them and beyond our expectations.
For even Ashbery nods, and once, when he blinked
(I swear this really happened), a new book of his appeared,
as though anticipating all of the objections

were the same as answering them. He may be accused
of trying too hard to be different, or of becoming “dated out”
after so many relations, but if so let us be thankful,
for once, that we live in this age of disinformation
where we can almost catch the references

and make the future wonder how we lived without them.

Mervyn Seiwright

Constant Mornings in Güttingen

This hallowed lake puzzles
Austria, Germany, Switzerland
in a wet covenant.

On Saturday mornings
couples have cleansed themselves
at this lake, a pilgrimage,
a weekly ministry
where the water preaches
to them, stripping all
before their baptism.

Before their plunge
a Mary Magdalene pier washes
their feet, their ankles
as water covers them.

There is no lifeguard here,
they revere the lake,
swimming out past buoys
or square platforms
placed by levels of faith
they always have
from the fledgling age
of the shore trees. An oak tree,

circumference of four pairs
of hands held by warm bodies
in a ring, paired with ivy,
co-existing with a cherry tree—
has witnessed generations
of kinship worship here.

Crossing the Border from Beausoleil

She hauled her mop,
her bucket filled
with solvents to cleanse
the vision
of her dreams. Trudging
past my table
at a restaurant
where she may object
to eat. Her eyes
latching a hook
filling me
with guilt
with resolve
with pain
with hope.

Her eyes
not letting go,
me avowing—
sawubona.

Her daily trek
across demarcation
to the monolith
of Monaco. A square
mile of soaring
penises, blotting
out last season's
buildings, last season's
forgotten discoveries.

Without her
who would scrub
their tiles of marble
their stubborn offspring
their 48 thousand euro
per metre void—
without her.

Her eyes told me
the path she walked
would wither. Her
black skin refused
to stay on the wonder-belt
of colonialism,
the seduction
of a spawn's flash
of an 8mm-film whore.

Her eyes shared
her kismet—her truth.

Fear Mountain

I was told it was like the gates of Hades,
a Buddhist temple cast with natural mountain
walls, four mountain peaks to guide
each of the old directional winds,
a conductor molding an orchestra. Story

of a monk whose soles embedded each grain
of soil through Japanese rice patties, snow peaks,
building bricks in Osore Valley
listening to Buddha's echo. Far in the north
where nature carves ice imagery on roads

guided to the scent of sulfur burning
my nose hairs. Earth's skin here crackles,
bleeding smoke hovering as ghost clouds
across my knees. Bubbles rippled
cream-yellow crusts as milk curdled over

the lake called Styx. A thick air, presence
of children's spirits blowing, spinning
pinwheels left by families to connect to them
in their solitude, a path to ancestors.
Nothing lives here. Barren hills, hues of gray

stones and dust mirroring memorials
spaced in star constellations. I hear no voices
only vibrations in the wind tickling my ears,
wondering of my journey, listening
to the fearful songs of their transition.

His Crack Left No Headstone Grave

The caretaker shuffled
his head, crackling
the pages of a ledger

of locations, installments
swelling to a brash stop.
Staring into space, deliberating

which words would he infuse—
euphony and heresy
to dull the taste? *Sorry,*

*not only for the loss
of your mother,* he said,
as he walked away

pointing at a patch
of shamrock leaves
and Bermuda grass. Between

two headstones, finely cut,
her patch of grass
was bare, vacated love

left no lasting endearment.
Till death—he departed
my mother, his passion

cracked insurance, savings
until the yellow rocks
in his lungs, burned

away. In stillness—
I could hear the wind
against her blades

of grass, soft whistles
of thrushes afford
retrospective—she

walks in me.

Contributor Notes

Katherine B. Arthaud lives in northern Vermont, currently serving as a minister in the United Church of Christ. Years ago, she attended the Bennington College Writers Conference and the Middlebury Breadloaf Writers Conference. She is a contributing writer to *The Charlotte News*, and for two decades served as a Guardian Ad Litem in the Chittenden Family Court. She has been writing poetry and fiction for a long, long time. She is also a mother of three young adult children.



Diane Ayer is a writer and high school English teacher from Connecticut. She appreciates the loving support of her family and friends.



Richard Baldo is a recently retired clinical psychologist. That experience informs much of his poetry. He has been writing poetry off and on since college and began more serious study about twelve years ago. He won the UNR English Department's Award for Best Poem in Spring 2020 and has poems published in *The Meadow* 2021, 2022, and *Sixfold* in 2022. He is currently a first-year MFA student at the University of Nevada, Reno.



Kristina Cecka received her B.A. in English and Creative Writing from the University of Iowa. After several years living overseas, she returned to her hometown in Minneapolis, MN, where she now lives with her two cats and a ridiculous amount of books. Her publication in *Sixfold* will be her first time being published.



Holly Cian holds a BA in Creative Writing from the College of Charleston and an MA in Literature from Western Carolina University. Her work has been published in *Pinesong*, *The Great Smokies Review*, *Rougarou*, and is forthcoming in *North Dakota Quarterly* and *The Lindenwood Review*. She works in animal rescue and lives in Asheville, NC, with three cats.



Aaron Glover's poetry has previously appeared in *Thimble Literary Magazine*, the *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Mad Swirl*, *Illya's Honey*, the *Red River Review*, and elsewhere. His chapbook *Bio Logic* (INF Press) was published in 2017. From 2011-2016, he was on faculty in the Department of Performance Studies at Texas A&M University. As a performer and director, he worked throughout Texas and the Great Plains. He holds an MFA from the University of Houston, and currently lives in Dallas.



Elaine Greenwood is a Montana-born interdisciplinary artist working primarily in ceramics. Since graduating with her BFA in Fine Arts, she has worked as an art teacher, violin teacher and studio potter. Writing has been a constant and necessary part of Elaine's life since her childhood. Elaine writes to "make some sense of the chaos and complexity of our humanity in relationship to the Divine." Elaine's portfolio and contact information is published at elainegreenwood.com.



Laurie Holding lives in Sewickley, Pennsylvania. Several of her poems have placed or won in Writer's Digest Annual Poetry Contest, the Maria W. Faust Sonnet Contest, Goodreads Poetry Forum, and Writer's Digest Annual Writing Competition. She is planning on a chapbook release, *Sonnets and Their Shadows*, in 2023. Holding is the author of two children's books, *Tyrion's Tale* and *Tyrion's Town*. She released her first novel, *Planted on Perry Street*, in 2021.



Talya Jankovits' work has appeared in a number of literary journals. Her short story, "Undone," in Lunch Ticket, was nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and her poem, "My Father Is A Psychologist," in *BigCityLit*, was nominated for both a Pushcart prize and The Best of the Net. Her Poem, "Guf," was the recipient of the Editor's Choice Award in *Arkana Magazine* and nominated for the Best of Net. She holds her MFA in Creative Writing from Antioch University and resides in Chicago with her husband and four daughters.



Mary Keating's poetry appears in numerous journals and anthologies including *Scribes*MICRO*Fiction*, New Mobility magazine, Wordgathering, Santa Fe Writer's Project, Poetry for Ukraine, Family Vol II, and on Medium.com. Two of her poems were nominated for a Pushcart prize. A wheelchair user and advocate for disability rights, Mary practices law as a real estate and probate attorney in Fairfield County, Connecticut where she lives with her husband Dan.



George Longenecker lives on the edge of the woods in Middlesex, Vermont. His poems, stories and book reviews have been published in *Bryant Literary Review*, *Evening Street Review*, *Rain Taxi*, *The Saturday Evening Post* and *The Mountain Troubadour*. His book *Star Route* was published by Main Street Rag. He's executive secretary of The Poetry Society of Vermont. He looks for poetry in the paradoxical ways humans repeat their mistakes and reflect nature in their art. See George Longenecker on youtube.



Kaecey McCormick is a writer and artist living in the San Francisco Bay Area. Her poetry has found a home in different literary journals, including *Red Earth Review*, *Linden Avenue Literary Journal*, and *The Raw Art Review* and her chapbooks *Pixelated Press* (Prolific Press, 2018) and *Sleeping with Demons* (Finishing Line Press, 2023). When not writing, you can find her climbing a mountain or curled up with a book and a mug of hot tea.



Steven Monte is a poet, translator, and literature professor, who teaches in the English Department at the College of Staten Island (CUNY). His translations include *Victor Hugo: Selected Poetry in French and English*, and he is currently at work on a verse translation of Joachim Du Bellay's *Les Regrets*. Most of his scholarly writing is on Renaissance and modern poetry, including his books: *The Secret Architecture of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, and *Invisible Fences: Prose Poetry as a Genre in French and American Literature*. He lives and runs marathons in New York City.



Alexander Perez began writing poetry in 2022 at age forty-eight. His partner, James, and his friends and family encourage him to keep going, and he has them to thank for their support. He looks forward to the upcoming publication of his first chapbook entitled *Immortal Jellyfish* by Finishing Line Press.



Summer Rand, a graduate student of English, is a burgeoning poet who writes to reflect the world around her. Much of her work isolates the tender moments of grief and human connection she stumbles upon in order to find life and light beyond endings. She currently writes from Georgia, and she is hopeful that her poems will find their place in a chapbook following her graduation.



Ana Reizens is a poetry farmer and word wrangler. She was the recipient of the 2020 Barbara Mandigo Kelly Peace Poetry Award, and you can find her poetry sprouting in *The Mud Season Review*, *The Bombay Literary Magazine*, and *The Blue Earth Review*, among other places. She's currently working on her first novel.



Belinda Roddie is a writer, educator, voice actor, and LGBTQ+ activist residing in the California East Bay. They have written a multitude of different works, including novels, poetry, plays, and screenplays. They are one of the co-founders and artistic directors of the online theatre company OK Zoomer and continually dabble in music and acting. Belinda currently lives with their wife, Arden, and their cats Binx and Gunner.



David Ruekberg (MFA, Warren Wilson) lives in Rochester, NY.



These poems use a monospaced font and the same number of characters per line to create a form he calls “little coffins”—not to say that language is dead but, as expressed in another poem: “Words are / shadows that mime shadows on a wall.” The form puts pressure on ideas and language to create the finished poem. Read more at <https://poetry.ruekberg.com>

Kimberly Russo is an English teacher in Aurora, Colorado,



where she resides with her husband, Tony. She is the mother of four children, Nicholas, [Stephanie,] Audrey, Grace, and Maritza, and a proud grandmother to Doc and Willa. Kimberly spends her free time gardening and bird-watching. Much of her writing is dedicated to marriage/family, social issues, including the perpetuating inequality among genders/races, and the stigma associated with mental illness.

Mervyn Seivwright writes to balance social consciousness and poetry craft for humane growth. The Spalding MFA graduate is from a Jamaican family born in London, appearing in *AGNI*, *American Journal of Poetry*, *Salamander Magazine*, *African American Review*, and 48 other journals in 6 countries.



He is a 2021 Pushcart Nominee and *Voices Israel's* Rose Ruben Poetry Competition Honorable-Mention, and he has an Autumn 2023 collection due with Broken Sleep Books.

Jefferson Singer is the Faulk Foundation Professor of Psychology at Connecticut College in New London, CT. He studied creative writing at Amherst College and Harvard University, taking seminars with Seamus Heaney and Robert Fitzgerald while at Harvard. In addition to teaching and research in clinical and personality psychology, he has a private psychotherapy practice in West Hartford, CT. He is married, a father of two daughters, and grandfather of Miriam, 1 year old.



Karo Ska (she/they) is a South Asian and Eastern European gender-fluid poet living on unceded Tongva land. Their writing focuses on identity, mental health, survivorship, and the intersections of trauma and politics. Anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist, they find joy where they can. Their first full-length collection, *loving my salt-drenched bones* was released in February 2022 through World Stage Press. For updates, follow them on



instagram @karo_skaa or check out their website karoska.com.

David Southward grew up in Southwest Florida and currently teaches in the Honors College at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. He is the author of *Bachelor's Buttons* (Kelsay Books 2020) and *Apocrypha*, a sonnet sequence based on the Gospels (Wipf & Stock 2018). David resides in Milwaukee with his husband, Geoff, and their two beagles. Read more at davidsouthward.com.



Krystle May Statler (she/her) is a Black-multiracial artist living in Portland, OR. Her works are featured in *Poetry From Instructions*, *poetry.onl*, *1455's Movable Type*, *The Santa Fe Writers Project Quarterly*, and *Cultural Weekly*. More of her poetry will be featured in *Fourteen Hills*, *Suburbia Journal*, *Sepia Quarterly*, and *Beyond Words Literary Magazine*. Krystle's debut poetic-visual hybrid, *Losing Blood*, was a finalist for the 2022 CRAFT Hybrid Writing Contest & the 2021 CAAPP Book Prize.



Anne Marie Wells (She | They) is an award-winning queer poet, playwright, memoirist, and storyteller navigating the world with a chronic illness. Her full-length collection of poetry, *Survived By: A Memoir in Verse + Other Poems*, debuted with Curious Corvid Publishing. She won the inaugural Wanderlust Travel Book award through Wild Dog Press for her memoir, *Happy Iceland*. She is a faculty member for the Community Literature Initiative and Strategic Partnership Fellow for The Poetry Lab.



Meg Whelan is a Kentucky writer and teacher living in Paris, France. Her friends describe her as someone who “treats life like a university class.” Her poetry focuses on themes of embodied grief and shared memory. You’ll probably find her reading in the corner of a metro car, dancing on upward moving escalators, or frantically scribbling down other people’s life events in her calendar.

