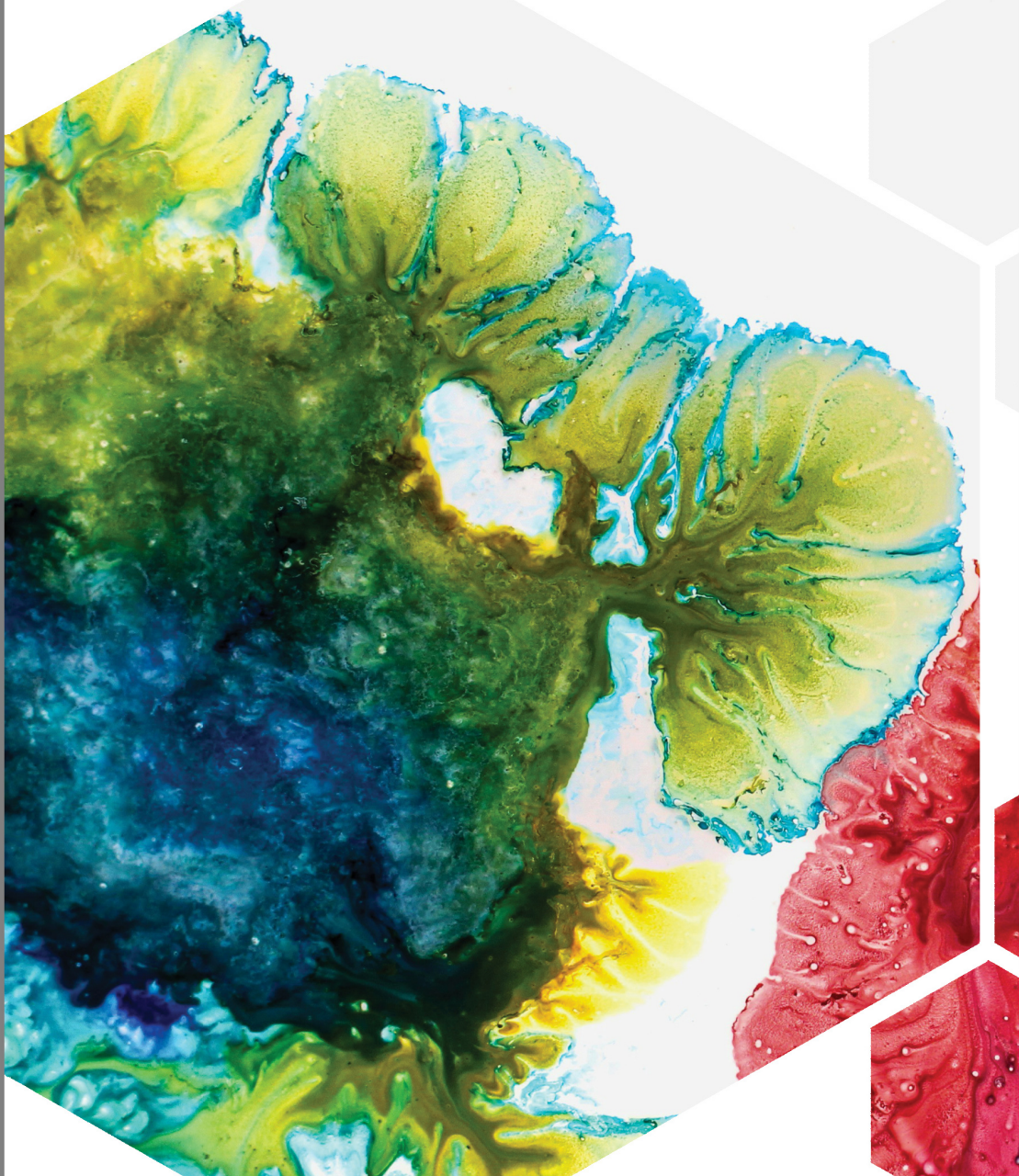


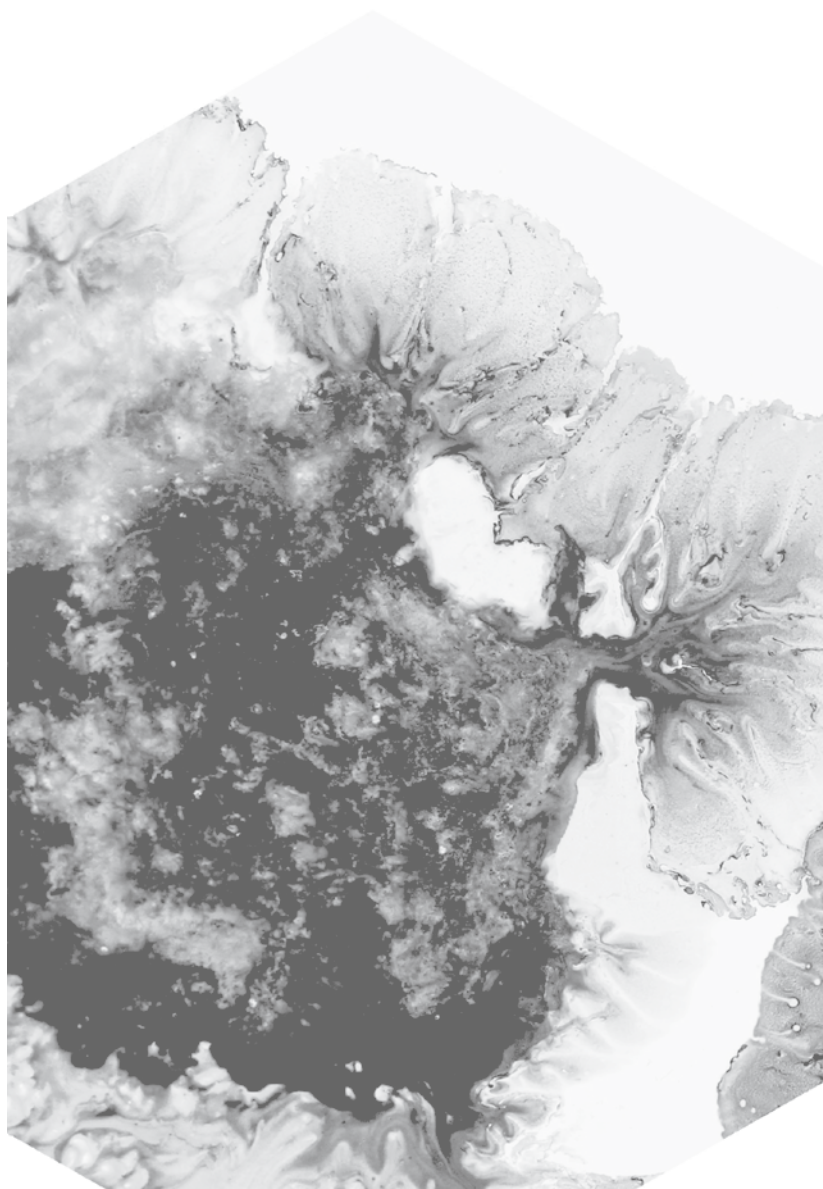
SIXFOLD

POETRY WINTER 2023



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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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Selena Spier

Raspberry

Nothing comes to life until you name it.
Just as it took saying light to make it.
What's left over drifts
through the mind's sieve
and sinks to the bottom.

Coats the tongue like an afterthought,
but can't survive on its own outside the body.

Bright world, there you are—
thumbing through magazines, waiting for me
in the lobby. The bone-white pills
I cradled in my palm. The drive home silent.
In the new snow, fingertips shining
with sugar and grease, the heating pad
pressed to my abdomen. Bright,
bright world. How the knot of fear unraveled
at the sight of what had left me: blood.

Just blood.
And a pale clump of cells,
no bigger than a raspberry.

Playing Dice with the Universe

You won't find me in your matrices.

You should know that—haven't you searched
for a woman in her body, and found
neither woman nor body? I will not yield,
I will not take the shape of your container.

There are two variations of knowledge:
you cling to the one that is stored in the body,
is prone to the body's distortions.

I sing the body dialectic.
I am kinetic, I am chemical—

I am the die and the hand that casts it,
the faces, the dots and the sum
of the numbers they signify.

I am your black luck and resurrection,
god-headed chance,
the act of measurement.

Red from the West

A halo circumscribed the place
where the little beast
sank its teeth in. We waited days,
a week. No symptoms, no fever.

None of our terrors bore fruit
in the end. Flickering shapes
on the brain scan turned out to be
tricks of the light. Candles left untended
guttered out. We left the oven on all morning once,
came home at noon to a hot house.
And the years began to repeat themselves.
And everything reminded us of something else.

So summer shrinks from the surface
of the skin—the air goes brittle—

the wide fields overtaken by milkweed
and goldenrod.

Still Life

The doorway to that bedroom coincided
with the outer edge of time. It was always
as you'd left it: crowded shelves
and books with broken spines

prostrated on the desk, motes of sunlight
drifting back and forth,

back and forth across the unswept floors.
And in the summer, when the heat
began to stay the night, the ladybugs returned,
forewings clicking like metronomes as they settled

on the windowsill, the sheets, congregating on your arms
and legs as you slept. And nothing changed
except the distance from your feet
to the foot of the bed. And the room became
a mirror

in whose smooth impassive face
the passing of your life became apparent.
Step back, and the image resolves. Clear
and clearer. Until one day you step backwards
over the edge of your life
and fall.

Waiting for a Letter

How colorless the world became,
every sensation known only as pain
or its absence.

Dirty plates stacked on the radiator
and the blinds drawn.

No hero's journey after all.

No dream of perfect order
to console me. Only grief,

the new milk souring
overnight, grief that hung
in the folds of unworn clothes
and came apart in my hands
when I tried to hold it.

I can hold it now.
It visits me sometimes. It likes the mornings.
Like a cat it is, always coming and going.
I'll go to the sink to rinse my mug
and when I turn it's gone again,
and my mind begins to populate
with other things—windows and pollen,

small talk and how to avoid it,
laundry receipts, international stamps,
the bathtub drain that wants unclogging,
bagels from Zabar's, the rent check,
the subway, my romantic prospects,
strangers running to make their trains
with jackets draped over their arms,
clutching greasy paper bags,
clutching paper cups of coffee.

A white spot appears at the base of my nail.
Drifts closer to the edge each day.
My mother used to say
that when the white spot
reached the edge,
I'd get a letter.

Pamela Wax

Talk Therapy

“Oysshprekhn—”
my husband said
once, when I recited
my poems aloud
again and again
for breath
 and sound
 and meter,
to trim the fat
and carve them
lean—

“after the camps—
the ones who talked
to themselves.”

He was not impugning
my mental health,
nor theirs. It’s how
they healed
themselves, he said.

“You remind me of them.”

Lightning Rod

for Jill

1.

My friend gets her hands dirty
in the public square, in tweets
and frays to the editor, stands
her sacred ground against liars
in wait, who phony up science
and rule of law. She absorbs bolts
of mobbed dissent, megaphones
our moby whales of grief,
echolocating, so we can hear
each other's dirges
through acoustic fields of vision.

2.

In her private square, she plunges
to her elbows in honest dirt,
an asylum as cool as caverns
where stalactites drip; the moist
that earthworms inhale through skin,
so they can justice the plants
she's mercied into pockets
of paradise. Outside the eye
of the storm, her field of vision
eclipses dirge. She can hear
a breezy hint of hum. It sounds
like whale. It sounds like bee.

Ana Reizens

Honey water

Our lives change in the simplest of ways.

A butterfly, perched on the trellis.
I let it climb onto my finger,
carry it out of the rain.

A paper towel, damp with honey.
A carefully plucked flower.
It sips sweetness with its infinite
tongue as I write, each of us
learning each other's beauty.

The sun stretches.
The windmill stills.
I carry it back outside,
watch its wings blink
and unfold.

When it finally leaps into the sky
it takes three laps around me:
one for honey, one for rain,
one for flowers, each
a different form of wonder.

Ripples

Climb with me into the river-wide arms of
the apple tree in May, when the chickadees

pick possibilities from the blossoms and the
bullfrogs call like foghorns across the pond.

We'll wrap our arms around each other's
branches and talk about the rain and whether

it'll ever fall, the way the caterpillars cling
to the ridges of the reeds, how thoroughly

the black-winged kites sweep the sky. We'll
eat sandwiches packed with our mothers'

memories and laugh at every passing bee, every
wish-shaped cloud, how the sheep leap over

the neighbor's fence and the gray collie
lies sleeping beneath the willows.

*Maybe, you'll say, there's more to us
than skin and bark,* but a bullfrog will cut in

with a croak that sounds like *home*
and we'll lean back and wonder where

the damselflies go after sunset. Later
I might agree that maybe there is more,

that perhaps all of us are just ripples
across a pond. Perhaps the damselflies

are the refractions of stars and we're all
just fractions, which means nothing

is ever as bad as it seems, is it?
The little mouse skips between

the dipping blades of grass
and the adder still hasn't caught it.

The sheep graze. The collie stirs.
The fields ruffle as we pass hope

back and forth between branches
like notes, like apples, like rain.

The daffodils, the melody, the rain

Who we really are is
everything:

the whistling green hills,
the silken sea foam.
The rain that gathers
beneath the streetlamps
in silver streams,
the leaves.

We are everything
that has ever been touched
by the sun and everything
that has not: the grass
and stones, the daffodils
and wingbeats.

We are silence
and whispers
and birdsong
all at once,
the blissful beating
of a distant drum.

Mark Yakich

On Aging Gracefully

Neither an early
nor a late

bloomer
having never

met the criteria
of a flower

Insomnia

On the desk lay
a pencil Dad
sharpened

with a paring
knife forty
years ago

there are
no words
for it

Necessary Hope

The armless
woman

will want
to play

spin the
bottle

don't be
afraid

of the kiss
she will

blow
it

Bridget Kriner

A Few Lies & a Truth

At my first confession, I said what I said, meaning
I only said things that meant nothing to me, meaning
I lied. I stole skittles & a cherry lipstick from the drugstore,

kicked my sister under the table, peed on the floor
& blamed the cat. I denied it, mostly denied
I liked it—the feel of a lie in my mouth, a triumph

of evasion for all my small evils—how even then,
I knew who I was. So, the priest could not absolve me
of my real truth & the lie, it was still inside,

blossoming quietly. It's true I was lurking in the bushes
at my friend's house down the street & I was scared
of her dad with the beard in the car pulling into her drive

& while it made no sense, it was real for me.
He was a coroner, arriving home from his day
of finding out about the dead. I hid, then crossed

the street alone when no one was watching & ran all the way home.
Later I lied to the priest about the lie because of the shame
seeded in the ground of my body. Years later, when a car hit me

in a crosswalk, I did not see it coming & still I knew right away
it was the old lie come back around, snaking up like smoke rising
into my lungs until I can no longer properly inhale. See the car

hit me & I just knew it was my penance for the street-crossing lie
I told when I was seven, a bill come due after 20 years, dormant
virus triggered in my depths until I found it wasn't that lie

that mattered at all, but the lie I didn't know was a lie
back then—someone had taken my voice & believed for years
my silence was saving me, when all along that was the real lie.

On Being Home Alone & Watching Serial Killer Documentaries on Netflix

Supposedly, we are stronger in broken places,
ruptures reinforced, seamless skin obscures

one truth of what happened. For others, the duct tape
of healing is threadbare, its adhesive degrading.

Still others are frozen, pregnant with fear, a calcified
fetus lingering invisible inside. Because fear lives

in the body & the night has a thousand eyes, latent
as a half-buried wick catching a flame just before

the match expires & sulfur swims up your nose.
You switch channels, warm by the fireplace TV station,

roaring as if warmth dwells in the mind, not skin. Your
unease escalates on the sofa, whistles through the window,

where the empty eyes the night stalker—two embers
smolder through his worn balaclava. You want

to unknow everything about his hunting. You want
to rewind the night back to the spark, bury the wick,

blow out the match, unsee how his face takes shape
in the fake fire, while you just know someone, maybe

him, is just outside, towering like the century-old
aspen in the yard, watching.

Birds Aren't Real

—Once a preventative cause, our initial goal was to stop the genocide of real birds. Unfortunately, this was unsuccessful, and the government has since replaced every living bird with robotic replicas. Now our movement's prerogative is to make everyone aware of this fact, birdsarentreal.com (Peter McIndoe)

On the viewless wings of drones, light as a thing
with feathers you can't sing this tune
without the birds. It was evening all afternoon,
& the only moving thing the eye of the drone,
always watching, eyes in the sky, perched

in the soul. My mother would be a falconress
aloft with liar pigeons and hummingbird assassins,
spearing targets with their long needle beaks.
Sparrows, swallows, nightingales & peacocks,
while behind all those birdy eyes are cameras.

And I was of four minds, thinking a robot
could only be a metallic machine, thinking my fear
would subside, remembering that I am a human,
wondering how many birds were killed. Then the drone
said nevermore, the lie and the bird are one,

flying in a lucid green light in inescapable rhythms,
soaking up data for an indecipherable cause.
The only way to properly explain is with birds.
I am part of the pantomime. This never
happened. Wake yourself up from the lie.

Keegan Shepherd

Most Times It Was At . . .

night. Dad's alcohol and sports radio
swimming thru the waves
of Oklahoma summers in Big Four.
Are my feet not like cleats
clinging to the red dirt and withering,
stomped grass?
I noticed he was gone
from dinner a long time.
I'm uncertain where I'll find him.
This time, he's in his truck, idle in the driveway.
An attempt to wake him from deep sleep,
so I open the door.

He says he doesn't know me.
I say he never really has.

It Is The Sun That Reminds Us

It's the magic of small moments—
walking you out the door
off into the October sunset
how the dulling rays collide
with every bit of blonde
atop your head to remind me
what light myself I walk toward.

*Are you the sun
I wait for
every
day
to rise
and
to fall*

cyclically?

Without regard, you stop
turn to my eye and smile to
remind me:

Yes.

Silver Queen

Ghost October tour of the night
twenty standing outside talking
the dead unease lingering within
that hotel silver queen.

*It was bad luck for the min(or)ers
to talk to any red-haired woman
the day they leave
for work.*

From what I understand, she was
rather famous.

Back in those old Comstock days
Rosie operated her business
out of room eleven.

She's evidently never checked out,
having made countless appearances
in the decades following her
suicide.

*The established ladies of Virgin-
ia City were lonely wives
who, of course, looked down upon
employed women such as Rosie
and you can't help but think it was
something about riding that gleaming,
bladed edge, in the spots that cut
deepest,*

that makes some desert town worth staying
for a silver queen.

Perhaps It's Written On His Bones

I often think of his flesh and bone—
my father's in another time zone.
and the state of the zero phone
calls, and the way words may
not be enough to say what we both need.

I need him.
The rules, the structure, the stern.
What would he say? What does he need?

I think anger can be
like an X-ray,
and I can blast back the bullshit
that's clothes, and boots, and jobs, and titles
narratives of parent and child
and like an X-ray
shows us the point abnormality in the structure,
I can just point at it and say *that's wrong*,
pick up the phone and dial.

“What you want to say is written on the white of your skull
and I want to see it, liar.
Come on,
 jump out of your liar skin.
Look at my nowhere skin.
I've no defenses.
I've no fear.
I'm wide open.”

Come on,
 old man.
This tall tree:
Look at my bones,
count the little rings.
Get to know me.

My Friends, The Ravens

Familiar caws calling me
upon the time of dinner
from my friends of black
feather there on the roof
eyeing me from away
and waiting for my spoils.
They eat spawned gossip
from my most horrid mistakes.
They flock behind my back
in frequency enough
to make me believe
there is conspiracy.
My friends, the ravens;
treachery and unkindness
exist in the worst of this
rave. My friends, the ravens;
somehow selfish and self
aware at the same time. I
scatter pieces of my dried
heart across the concrete,
watch my friends, the ravens

flock

peck

& eat.

Alaina Goodrich

Saving Seeds

Amazing, how a little seed
can turn a girl into a wise woman.
I look closely, at all your possibility
and perfect form

and see the past, your mother
that perfect sunny day I worked the earth
loosened the dirt
added the manure
and placed her with the others
in a perfect circle, a five point star

covered her up and added water
to start the transformation
to tell her the ingredients were right
to reach out into the earth
and pull in pieces to weave into herself
to take earth and air and make something more than a sum of the
parts.

I look at all the seeds she gave me
from just one large orange fruit
some now covered with oil and salt, pepper, paprika, and garlic
roasted and ready to become part of me,
some raw and drying, waiting for next year.

I marvel at the magic of the multiplication
makes me raise my hands, my head, my heart
makes me dance as they go down, the roasted ones
makes me want to make tea
and a poem
and light a candle, my ceremony for inspiration.

Makes me think of my mother
and the magic she makes

how she heals me, every time she feeds me
how she takes common ingredients, lets them simmer
and finishes with something more than a sum of the parts.

Makes me think of your grandmother, or great grandmother
I watched her grow, as a child
and helped her become
as she did me.

I remember the way my heart leapt when she first emerged
like freedom, and heaven, warm and wild
remember the sting of mosquitos if I watered at dusk
remember the reprieve from the world she offered
a timeless space, where everything was right.

They taught me how to work with the earth—our mothers, and
grandmothers
taught me how to be quiet and listen
how to stand tall
how to receive
how to take common ingredients, like these words

and make a masterpiece.

Transformations

I can almost feel
(I can feel)
the skin of my face
sitting a little lower than it used to.

And I can almost hear
the earth
calling
for this body back
singing

gravity is love.

Someday, Earth Mother
take me back
into your womb
and make me new again.

Let me simmer
close to you
and grow like a good poem
not forced
but fed
with hope
in my own time.

Brush your long hair
and dream of what I will become.

Warming Up

I like to inspect my pencil before I write
to see the way the light shines on its dark tip
on its many curves and angles of
sparkling graphite.

I like to feel the soft fuzz of its shaved part
to slide my fingers up and down the length of it
so hard and smooth that I giggle at
this Cra-Z-Art.

And I wonder who else has touched it
and if anyone has ever looked at it the way I have
with thoughtful doe eyes
curious for its story
of where it's been and how it came to be.

I notice so many markings
a large gouge on one side, and two smaller ones
exposing the flesh colored body
beneath the orange coat of paint.

And I feel its depressions, little valleys
and I wonder what forces it caved under.
I see its silver cap is a little misshapen
a little bit scruffy.

It's almost free of its #2 label
that has all but worn off
and its surface has many lines, some deeper than others.
I add 3 lines, in the shape of my initial.

I cannot help myself, but to leave my mark on him also.

This wise old man has many secrets to tell
like me
so I take him in hand and begin
to write.

Pearls

I wonder how pearls are made
as the oceans in my eyes rise
too full
trickling tear shaped pearls when I close them.

I wonder what ingredients the clam takes in.

And I suppose when he is open
he takes in the whole ocean
and maybe when he is closed
is when he makes the magic happen.

I picture a clam
burying himself
in the sand
under the weight of all that water
in all that pressure,
making a rare treasure
layer by layer
on a vexation stuck inside.

I wish that I too could bury myself
beneath the ocean
away from the world
and maybe make some magic happen.

I think about the hard things stuck in me.
The pains of loss; of empty cages,
and desks,
and hearts, *who trusted you.*

A small yellow gecko body turned bones
mouth wide
screaming into death
alone.
A classroom pet who knew not about quarantine,
cared not about missing keys.

A 13 year old boy
with red hair and freckles and work boots
and a smile that hid desolation.
There is so much I could have told him.
So much I should have asked.
He asked for a broom to clean the dirt he brought in
but was given a test instead
on his last day to live.

A horrible fail.
A deep, defining, horrific fail
of a teacher who did not know about making a right decision
instead of a right decision.
He knew not about cells,
he knew about hopelessness.

Despair and confusion on the faces and voices of 20 children
times 5 classes a day
day after day
staring at the weight of empty at that desk, and in the cage, and
their hearts.

They trusted you
and you did not save them.
Even your own heart
put on hold, year after year, still making the right decision
instead of the right decision.

I go over this again and again,
all the what ifs,
until I cannot hold it in.

And I think about the women
who dive for pearls
whose whole livelihoods depend on it
who trained their bodies to hold their breath for 6 minutes
or more.
And I think about the pain I am polishing
asking me to find a way.

Sacred Conflagration

I turned the light on
in my soul
and inspected my pencil:
cedar wood, graphite core,
place of origin—obscure
(but Earth, I’m quite sure)
and lit my candle, “made in the USA” stuck on its front.
But the flame—not of Earth, other worldly
it crackled
and danced
and said:
“The alchemist, inspecting her wand
found the light
reflecting
from the many facets of its tip
as she spun it, slowly
and pushed back its sheath
of wood.
To bring her fantasy to life,
to make a little magic,
they needed each other
her heart and the rock, in the wand,
to transcribe
to translate.
She held me closer
with soft eyes.
I lit up her face
my reflection dancing in her eyes
she closed them and breathed me in
held me to her chest
tipped her head back
and opened her heart—
where I met my maker—
a sacred conflagration
roaring
like a lion
we merged into one flame
dancing together
hoping the whole world
would catch on.”

George Longenecker

Two Tents

sag under snow,
at a picnic area a mile out of town,
home for people who have nowhere else to go.
They've camped since summer
in this patch of woods
next to the Winooski River,
which rushes by but says nothing.
Morning traffic passes,
school busses, commuters,
skiers on their way
to slopes or second homes.
300 feet from their tents,
a brown house with river view,
ten rooms, three car garage,
fireplaces, bright Christmas lights.
Winter night comes early
for those who live in tents,
snow blows, rattles pines,
cold river rolls over stones,
bones turn to ice.

Birds Without Borders

A dozen gulls feed on fast food scraps,
rest on a tractor trailer
at a New York Thruway service area;
soon more gulls join them,
beaks pointed west,
maybe they know this truck
is headed toward Lake Erie,
though they'd rather fly,
than cling to the top of a trailer,
as it roars down the thruway,
unlike refugees from Honduras,
who must cling to boxcars across Mexico.

The truck roars away beneath their wings,
and twelve gulls ride wind currents,
northwest out over Lake Erie.
Canada geese, redwing blackbirds, a few flickers,
fly south with cargo ships and fishing trawlers far below.
Flocks cross back and forth,
borders, customs booths,
walls, fences, guards with guns
all irrelevant.
Memory passed bird to bird,
their celestial compass
of flyways older than nations,
as old as these lakes—
wings over water.

Pizza in a Snowstorm

Snow falls on their outstretched arms
outside a convenience store,
finally someone gives enough
for two slices and a large coffee,
which they share on a park bench,
one warms their hand in the other's pocket,
snowflakes alight on pepperoni and onion,
crystalline stars which quickly melt away;
they pass coffee back and forth,
eat pizza with tattered gloves,
two crows circle and caw,
hoping for a scrap of crust—
scraps of two lives
reduced to one shopping cart,
a ragged tent,
and what's left of their pizza—
they toss crusts to crows.

Full Wolf Moon

On New Year's Day the moon is full,
Abenaki people said wolves howled in hunger
outside villages on the first moon after winter solstice,
some years people were hungrier than wolves.
Now there are no wolves left here,
but there are still those who howl with hunger,
though not from the forest behind my house,
there are quieter cries from the village,
where there's a food shelf in a church;
when the blue moon rises
on the last day of January,
people will be out of food again.
From Earth we can't see the moon's dark side,
from the other side of town, we hardly ever
see those who come after work or school,
so they can have lunch or supper.
Some come in moonlight
so they might not be seen,
or better still in darkness,
when a cloud passes over the moon,
ashamed that it's come to this,
that they must come in hunger.

Those Who Hunger

The hungry eat lunch in a church basement,
come to the food pantry each Saturday,
those who seek refuge
are torn from their children at the border,
those who hunger
ride trains for days seeking sanctuary,
the hungry come
across seas on flimsy boats of flotsam,
some will die on their journey,
many will be turned away,
by angry men,
but someday,
as Bach said in Magnificat:

*Esuriéntes implévit bonis:
et dívites dimísit inánes.*

*He filled the hungry with good things;
and the rich he sent away empty.*

Hailey M. Young

Minutes And Ours

As hands meet at noon,
I dust off your morning coat,
place it around a cold heart.

The sun in winter
makes a subtle dance,
between mountains and flowers.
It leaves petals of light
down the aisle to my heart.

And like the waves,
you break,
leave the same way you came in,
the door left splintered from your touch.

As hands meet at midnight,
you enter with snow lining your lapel,
face grey under shade of darkness.

The moon, half risen,
shows its cheek
peeking through the poplar.
It knows the key to crickets and frogs,
horror and sleep.

Achilles and Patroclus

All I saw was the blurred crimson, his blood
falling onto the soil, creating a red sea.
And in that puddle, I began to see a piece
of my own reflection,
the rippling of my arms
around his still body.
And as he lost all semblance
of the boy I once knew, I could do nothing
but hold his head in my bloodied palms,
stretch like honey around his abdomen.
I beg his body to give me a sign
of life, of love. Move, please.
I call to a God I once believed was true,
lay his body at the altar of that higher being.
What is the point of invincibility
if I can feel my blood boil and churn?
A heat like lava that leaves
my heart burned and charred.
I can feel his heart slowing in my ear,
hear the beat lose shape,
lose its weight.
And I wonder if this is what the end
of a symphony feels like,
the moment when every instrument
ceases to play.

Ball Room

I dream of angels leaving the room and here's
the last tuck, into my arm and into the space
between my legs I let you sit, criss cross man spread
a homecoming, witness me making history
outfit changing to tuxedo / dress / music to my ears
I declare war on holy ground,
that space where breast meets bone,
left unprotected from the sharp blade
adorned with gold and silver,
I mined for jewels and compliments,
I paint your face with blood.

Mammy/Sapphire/Jezebel

Nurturing the body,
I place my head
upon your shoulder,
I work for you, work on you,
laying hands and arms
around the body,
the grind of my teeth
forgives my very nature,
the fire burns,
the garden grows,
I am not servant
or serpent,
my body's been working
hard
to please you
I take the red of my eyes
and place it in my cheeks
I smile,
knife in hand,
I cut the tension
with a *yessir*
and a cakewalk.

Effeminate Nature

*Mother dear,
what is life without martyrdom?
Skin wrinkles between her brows
from when she frowned at me, rings
around the trunk to signify age.*

*Mother dear,
do you feel yourself being drawn into other bodies?
She brings me inside, where she washes me
and my clothes of dirt, the daughter and the dawn,
both rising steadily from their beds of grass.*

*Mother dear,
when's the last time you cried?
In the thunder, I came into her room and snuck in
between her arms, and when she awoke, she turned to face me
and asked whether the rain would ever end.*

*Mother dear,
did you ever dream?
They laid out our path with wood chips,
and we walked, branches bending in the wind,
our feet eventually finding their own syncopated rhythm.*

Sébastien Luc Butler

Aubade

smell of almost rain dust
green wood lightning bug

pinning above flotsam pollen
spooling in the river

sphinx moth nuzzles foxglove's
speckled interior i didn't know

i was real before you touched me
the storm comes rain

a path of memory so deep
it hardly resembles memory

the veins in your eyes when you looked at me
the first time before

words to witness
before one knows how

Aubade

i am a poor witness out walking at night
when streets dream only

of themselves broadside of a farmhouse
white paint scuffed as the bar of soap

i sometimes get to wash you with your valleys
hard then soft more often

it's my own hand running across
my skin trying

to figure yours the night is cold
enough for snow but

there is no snow the wet tips
of my hair harden crinkle

like the dead grass dawn is impossibly
far & its song of you

proper stage for my lament since when
did i assume it worked that way

during is so short
& ever

Aubade

Mornings I balk
awake into aubade. Default

mode: entropy in green
& blue. My blues, my love,

without you, filling out
an ocean. What's new?

An ocean in your touch.
Your skin's salt-lick, briny

caper of days you come
to visit. Diver's bends

in the blood, I wave-
break against your back's

mussel-pink muscles, your
spine's rosemary rosary,

the rosary your name
makes my throat, tide-pool

of wet flame. Outside,

sap suckers pepper
cedar's bearded bark

for each nectar-sleeve, crepe
myrtle shatters itself

over red earth. Months I forget

to be with you, long
longing of watching pasta water

wait to boil while cooking
for one yet again,

thinking how
after slow dancing

we picked bits of thyme
from between our teeth.

Aubade

crows gather vortex in hundreds
the leafless tops of trees scavenging

wind how i wish i could say
it's nothing like hitchcock made them

that would be a lie i don't know
what they bring other than

another winter without you
a selfishness i have no defense for

it's said crow memory is so strong
it could count in a defense trial

they remember all who were cruel
who showed grace some claim

they can even learn to speak i turn
to say as if you'd be there

winter without you i know that song
play it again if you remember how

Aubade

i've been reading too much charles wright
i take a walk expect a poem

just as somehow i expect you
as if i were owed you owed

the starlings again their ring
around the rosey their dusk

coronation sweet murmuration
no poem just a line—

once in a stark turn sun splashed
their understory alark

into a thousand eyelashes
who would believe me if i said

i'd seen your eyes just so in bed
a private history we're consigned to

precious falsehoods we bought
will never return just like a poem

i feel you above my left eyebrow
invisible shard in which there's light

Savannah Grant

All My Lovers Wrens

And you scare them away
the part of you I let live in me

I leave you in no particular order

I sold one lover's necklace for \$25
and all my friends for a living room alone

I want to steamroll
over some collection of bones within me and start over

I wake up in my teenage bed
flowered wallpaper and a peeling window
after midnight and all the lights are on
and you're awake
and my door won't close

in my dreams lately
there's a way out of the house
but you always find me before I escape

all my lovers wrens as I am a wren full of bird bones
and they only love me if I am seed or suet

my sister's father a bird hunter

30 years and I only ever got
one foot out the door

mother, I am your lamb, you slaughtered me
sister, you are favored, your father spilled my blood in the long
grass in the back forty

and wouldn't talk to me in the car
and bellowed as the auger twisted into the pine by the compost pile
and built graves for all our dogs

To Paint a Black Drapery

To paint a black drapery is not
vine black squeezed from the tube, but lavender
shaded with olive
and so I saw in *The Magpie* the snow all but white
rose and ultramarine shadows

read Flannery O'Connor, she said, April
is the cruelest month, do you have any idea the damage
you did to your sister? and that I continue to do
driving you to the ocean or the Pioneer Valley

like my father picking Japanese beetles off the neighbor's lilacs
all we wanted was more than two days
to finally make it west where the Nevada desert and I
held each other as cliff-sides and yellow grass rolled through
July's herald

like a screen door we tear
harboring promises that should have been easy
and I didn't know the word for it
until that bend in the road

eighteen years he'd been waiting
when the Pacific was the farthest I'd ever been from her

all we asked was two days, another eighteen years, sister,
she made me wait for you

In the Time After Pestilence We Spin Fire

In the time after pestilence we spin fire on the lawn. The cops roll by and we all troop inside, dressed as pimps in late November, a month I used to hate. The party is good, I don't get any of their numbers yet, but it's okay, I wasn't around before, even just this August. *It happened in college. You leveled me. I wouldn't speak anymore, if I did, it would be all I could speak about.* (I barely remember the names of everyone who won't know I ever sat at a table with them. I wish it hadn't happened that way.) But this party is good. Someone in a pink mustache-print scarf agrees that the Apocalypse part of the Bible is terrifying. He is sober now, too. At the bar I draw an eight-eyed, eleven-winged angel: don't think I never had these mundanities of friendship, I just couldn't keep them after you. I think it's worse that way. In the time after pestilence we all get our third eyes stuck on by a girl's thumb. They quiver around when we laugh. I try to remember the names of everyone whose shoulders I decided not to lean on. I don't yet know the names of everyone who doesn't know about you. *The cops rolled into your driveway. It was early August. The lights echoed around me into November, I cried on the steps. I cried on the steps.* (A girl held out my laundry bag for me, trying to help. I wasn't all there. I grabbed it away, washed my hands again and again. I don't remember her name.) *You were drunk and I held the bathroom door shut with my foot. The lights in my dreams never turn off, it all comes from your room. If I eat the pomegranate, I will remain in hell. You sit at the edge of my bed and your jaw falls open. For eleven years you contaminated everything*—In the time after pestilence I go to sleep and dream about you on the edge of my bed and when I wake up no one is here. I take my foot off the door and it is morning. I go outside and we spin fire on the lawn.

Start Over

You asked me who was walking beside you
and, in July, I did not have an answer

it is August now, they all say you are over

but I am biking under apocalyptic sun, hazy and pale
yellow like the violets found only in one place
on one mountain
in one town I'll never go back to

I am wondering if I miss my grandfather
or just that one corner of his yard
past the creek the water cut
from which I could see the high school
where I taught art to teenagers before leaving my mother for good

and she followed me all the way to you
oh the ways I've been left on the floor

I am asking for barriers against grief
and getting none of them

I am in the ocean surrounded by moon jellyfish

I am in the woods again
with a shotgun and shoes not fit for climbing over logs
echoing over flagstones

I am living a life without you, with you
I am shedding skins
I am admitting my love

I am eating again
I am leaving when I can't sleep and never
been happier to drive home

I am spring peepers at night
I am renovated

I am in line at the grocery store
knowing full well I am unfurling with the violence
of daylilies in summer

Ever Since (v.2)

Ever since, and I cannot pinpoint
the exact time when it became you
but ever since
I've been dreaming

of accidentally setting my bedroom on fire
and it can't be smothered; it smolders
under the carpet and in the dirt under the windows

I was never an option and I mourn that
you'd never mourn that

I am a body on your couch just like I wanted
but not how I wanted: you lift me away

and smile so sadly, as you do, daybreak eyes
the same way you did in my dream when you said
not for a while

and moved your hands to a different girl
as if you'd announced a death

I find a white moth in a windowsill and keep it in my pocket:
a reminder
of what I can never have

with you
I'm not protected from anything

there is no why
there is only is

when you dug your teeth into my spine
when you twined our fingers
gentle
as fuck

and told me to go home

when you calmed me to my core
I believed you

grace (logan)

Where does love rest?

Love is that moment when
The body softens into the soul
And the mind turns into rain pattering from the gutters after a storm.
Dripping onto the pavement
That may be saturated;
But the streams fall into the cracks,
Where the worms rest beyond eyesight.

I file up the walkway when you're away,
Open the door and
You're the light switching on at the end of the night.
You're the shadows under the staircase as I creep to bed.
You're the thoughts in my head as I'm getting undressed asking myself
"What's next?"
You're the feeling of safety as I wrap the sheets around me.

You're the fire in my belly as inspiration hits.
Hours pass when I should have been asleep.
You're that relenting acceptance laughing
"You can think of poems in the morning."
But my mind is stubborn
I go into the Notes App and write a line so
This one
Isn't lost into the ether of night's end.

You're the Sun waking me up on a day I don't need to set an alarm.
Through the cracks in the curtains
You still seep in.
Reminding me the bed is cozy
But the world is waiting—
Not for me—
I'm waiting around to take part in it.
Because this is the most beautiful time of day
Beauty where you don't have to say anything
When you hit the leaves and glisten like a chandelier . . .

Damn,
Wait:
Am I idealizing?
You are not my light
And I am not the darkness you fill.
Not only is that dependent
But,
Frankly,
It's a simplistic dualism.
You bring balance,
But I am not an extreme.
It's a disservice to the both of us
To make you the in-between moments—
The ones that glue life together—when
You're the times when I marvel at the force of the monsoon
Instead of intellectualizing my way around it.

But I am soaked.
I need to get home before I catch another cold.

You're in each moment—
The underpinning—
The tether that reminds me of who I am and where I came
 from without seeing it.
No map needed:
Left up ahead.
Looking through the window from the outside
I realize I left the light on.
The shadows creeping show me you've come home.
And the door is unlocked because you saw me running up.

You meet me in the doorway exclaiming:
“Why didn't you bring a rain jacket or check the weather?”
“I was floating . . .”
You laugh in that way you're giving space,
Not taking it.

So,
What's next?

Fresh clothes and a few hours explaining our days.
We weren't there for either of our respective moments
But with the distance gained
In our words and nods
We are cultivating
An us
Between where our eyes have met.

Not the in-between
But the resting place.
After laughs and tears your head rests on my chest with silence.
You don't know how my past felt—
Nor I yours—
But we listened in the present.
Is that my heartbeat melding with yours or is thunder cracking?

Even when the rain gets louder
And down a bolt comes knocking trees,
And the lights start to flicker
Until they go out entirely,
I'll start holding your hand as we find the candles.
Because this may be fleeting
But you remind me
Life exists with both my feet on the pavement
And we can create something step-by-step
In the soft mud beyond eyesight.

Dynamic

The desert isn't desolate:
A western idea to assume
If processes aren't obvious
They're unimportant.

The saguaro isn't stunted
Because it grew a few inches in ten years.
It's gradual—
Not incremental
Like 2050 goals in a twenty-year drought—
It's emergent
Like the blooms fruiting then falling to the ground without harvest;
The wind carrying a seed to the safety of a Palo Verde's canopy;
One monsoon balancing a summer of 110s.

An ecosystem's interactions are not superficial:
Microbes beneath the soil mean as much as the Sun.

Integration

False scarcity:

A learned habit of always looking for purpose outside of me.

Who knew all this time

Abundance was the current inside that underpinned this life?

But

Not mindlessly expansive to no end.

This isn't a buzzword to excuse

Unhinged individualism.

Abundance rests in the learned responsibility to live every moment

Unhindered by grief,

Or, really, giving the room to also let love and trust in.

After the breeze softens

The grass continues to

Oscillate and when it

Nears a stop

A bird lands on a stalk to peck at its capsules.

Personally, I've been learning thoughts create action,

And with a reorientation I am

Examining what it means to feel worthy in place.

I'm letting go of second guesses—

I pose the question then

“One two three GO!”

What was that first thought?

Quiet and unsuspecting before drowned out

By a loud

“Should have.”

Actions then create habits,

So I am reevaluating

And challenging my lack of trust that bred self-destruction—

With a few motions to go—

I contemplate sober behind the remnants of smoke.

“It's not as bad as it used to be!”

There goes a rationalization

Lacking compassion towards grief.

I am recalibrating to step into the careful consideration of
Forming discipline—
Self-awareness embodied in self-assurance.

Habits reap character,
And although fundamentally unchanged,
I have shedded much of the armored exterior.
Trading flight for settledness—
If I stop running,
If I savor this moment instead of extrapolating it's a memory,
I'm sure the landscape will have details I couldn't have noticed
Inferred from quick glances out of my peripheral vision.

Character then forms a destiny—
Predetermined?
That doesn't define me.
Accumulated . . .
I am trudging through the high grass
With gentle steps to not disturb the poppies.
I want to smash their centers but,
Deep breathe,
That's a story for another poem.
The silence has seeped into my marrow,
But I've heard that's the most nutritious,
When it simmers into broth.
I'm not defined by what's been blown through my body,
I'm impacted by residual remnants but—
God damnit—
I am releasing the tension and
Making a feast to transform the harvest.

So now, I'm ready to look outside—
I stop on instinct—
But I am no longer hiding behind inhibition:
Let intuition lead.
Patience to see the robustness of the hues playing with the tips of
 South Mountain
Rather than tapping my foot viewing it the Sun's obligation to
 touch the horizon.
I am ruled by vitality,

Not autopilot,
But there's still this funny balance
Of having enough self to feel centered
And a lack of that sense to feel connected.

“When does internal scarcity end?”
“When you allow yourself love.”
Then the pupil opened
And I could finally see
All that I didn't trust in, out, and beside me.

Untitled

It gets hard when sustainability floats
Used as a buzzword to prove a makeshift point.
When Tesla becomes sustainability
We are so completely and utterly fucked.

But with driverless electric cars
We can jack ourselves off without even needing to look at the road ahead
of us
Or even admire the scenes passing.
We can fill up without the smell of gasoline tinging us with guilt
because—
Rest assured -
The emissions are coming from a grid that's on the path to integrate solar
By the time the sea reaches here.
And the battery burped out the emissions a gas car does
In one manufacturing.
Polluting waterways on lands we will never see
That were never ours to own to begin with.

It gets hard when sustainability floats
Through words that turn bandaid solutions into a stitched answer;
Spoken loudly by someone who, say,
Gained unimaginable wealth from their parent's apartheid emerald mine.
So if it floats it's hollow.
Let's lull ourselves into complacency to not feel the heaviness,
The weight of a hope becoming a "someday" without a strategy to reach it.
Because we cannot belong to a strategy,
Only a culture.
Indulge until all there is to see are our hands.
Survive by using each finger to pay the bills
And after
The palms can have penciled-in me-time.

Because looking at the deeper issue seems a little too pointed.
Accessible, free public transit is just a symptom
And so is the lobbying power of oil and gas
Talking about our car-centric culture with bike lanes in the middle of the
road is getting a little closer

Because at the end of the day it is fueled by the idea that

I

Deserve to get in

And go wherever I please

On the highways that go anywhere

Over the buried houses of lives and families.

And after a day of surviving

I

Deserve to treat myself

And not look outside to the heavy root

We have abandoned because the twist and turns

Have turned into a tangle, not a web.

I need the rest when I have been out there in the nooks

Or in this Tesla I am too fragile in these four walls to feel the crannies.

It gets hard when

The built infrastructure regurgitates

The soft kind.

All those norms and assumptions

That go unquestioned

But are constructed into trajectories

Because

I

Am comfortable with what is known and seen.

When graffiti under freeway underpasses

Become a nuisance to property

And not a beautiful resistance

There is a missed opportunity for the unseen symbolism

Of claiming space to say

“I was here”

In a home that was never ours to own to begin with.

If it floats

It's probably on a wire transfer

Receiving the notification on the Tesla dashboard

Just as we finish in the handkerchief.

When indulgence becomes placation,

When my life becomes separate from yours

And our intersections are constructed on a groove that takes

Efforted steps to get out of

We will listen to the woman's voice
(Is it generated or recorded?)
Instead of looking around for ourselves to know
"You are approaching . . ."

How hollow our world has become.
Led to this layered beige box with four walls
Pulling into the garage to our assigned spot.
And in our assigned chairs
We don't look each other in the eyes
And even if we did
We will be that fake kinda happy in the iris' glaze.
Because
I
Am doing great.
I am doing swell.
Floating instead of thinking
Or intuiting
Or connecting
Or hoping for anything beyond grasp.

Shift

I think my fire has gone out.
It sure feels that way
When flames have turned to embers
And embers have faded into smoke.

I think my fuel source is changing.
Before
The fire sure felt alive
When I was throwing pine needles
A big flame conflated with healthy maintenance
Maintaining stagnancy and a smoke blowback
I inhaled instead of dealing with the ash collecting under
the embers.

I think I need to blow in a different spot,
Rather than poking at the same ember until it crumbles.

I haven't stopped trying
I am rekindling with consistency
I am expecting nothing but patience
As I lay each stick in an intentional place.

I think my fire has a different definition.
It sure feels that way
When growth has been embodied in new action
And action is fueled with authentic dynamism.

Samantha Imperi

A Poem for the Ghosted

This is a requiem for
the first fly I dismembered,

pulling limb from thorax and how easy it was to
separate round-body from spindle-leg. It is

difficult to catch a fly, it requires
patience, a steady hand.

Watch as I hold the gossamer
wing, disconnected at the joint

refractive shimmer glittering in the
florescent light, I wonder how many

pieces I can remove before it expires.
I imagine that I can hear it

screaming. Without legs and wings, it is not
a fly. It is a shining, metallic green-gold

shell that decorates my shelf. Without
legs or wings, the fly is both alive and dead.

If I loved anything, I would have
slid my thumbnail between the thorax

and head, severing the connection.
Certainty is a luxury. If you

want to know if the fly is dead
you have to kill it yourself.

Always.

I find you in my empty spaces.

I find you among the fallen leaves.

I draw you in the back garden.

I find you with a knife in hand.

I taste you in the salt and sugar.

I find you in bodies of water.

I find you in my empty spaces.

I see you with the blackbirds.

I empty you into a shoebox.

I dissolve you in a glass of gin.

I find you running in the darkness.

I hear you in the creaking and the groaning.

I find you in my empty spaces.

I find you in the dark corners of my closet.

I find you on a dusty bookshelf.

I wash you out of my hair.

I find you in the sand.

I toss you into the ocean.

I lean against your shadow.

I find you in piles of dirty laundry

I find you in all of my empty spaces.

I eliminate every trace of you, but still,

I find you.

2022

Kilgore Trout turns off the television after twenty solid hours of CNN

He opens Twitter to a stream of feminist liberals complaining about the legislation being written about women's bodies.

He puts his phone down.

He takes out his laptop and writes a story about an alien who is raped and impregnated by a human male.

The alien returns to its home planet where it gives birth to the first human/alien hybrid the planet has ever seen.

The child grows up to be a great leader on its planet, but after learning the truth of its origins, it orchestrates an invasion of Earth.

The aliens kill every male on Earth.

Earth's women are left with the sperm in sperm banks to artificially inseminate themselves to create a new generation of men, raised exclusively by women.

Women are finally allowed to make decisions about their own bodies.

No one ever reads the story.

Eliot Rosewater is long dead.

This is how I find you:

naked in the kitchen cracking eggs into a pan.
I turn on Saturday morning NPR and sit
at the kitchen table in my robe and watch you.
Time is a car I drive
from one memory to the next
and I pause at this one long enough to take a picture,
to remember you there
with your hair a mess
and your flaccid penis inches from the edge of the hot stove.
Your God followed you
from the bed to the kitchen to the table
with two plates in hand
and made you beg forgiveness before breakfast
for the sin of loving me last night.
I believe instead that the Tao will nourish me but so will
these eggs.
From them I am born and to them I will return.
So says my god: I am one with everything
even you and your flaccid penis.
Turn off the radio, I say lets go back to bed.
But you leave it on.
You want to love me to the sound of Peter Sagal
and a live studio audience.

Later, at the grocery store,
I buy butter, bread, milk, more eggs.
I forget this moment.

I'm fine

(CW: Rape and Violence)

She says

*Rape is a piece of rotten meat,
devoured by flies. Did you know that
flies that bite you are just trying
to eat you? We're all just a breath away from
rotten meat.*

She says

*I still don't know what it was.
He loved me. He was angry. I had hurt him. He said I
deserved what I got. I know that's bullshit but still,
I never said no.*

She says

*good and evil are a
spectrum: what's the inherent evil in the act
of reading the newspaper versus raping
your girlfriend? Who got hurt? I'm
fine.*

She says

*every knot he tied
to bind me after that was a noose
strung to an ancient oak tree. He never
knew because I never told him.*

She says

*our intimacy became a pile of dead things
on the floor of our bedroom. I hated the feel
of his spit on my lips, the taste of his breathe in
my mouth.*

She says

*you know, he stopped on
his own, when he realized he was hurting
me. How does an angry, volatile man
draw the line between kink and rape?
What if I was afraid of him long
before he decided that an
invasion of my body was an
adequate punishment for infidelity?*

She says

*I still don't blame him. I don't
blame anyone. It's just a thing that happened
a long time ago. Like I said, I'm
fine.*

Corinne Walsh

Poems Without Birds

I dare you to find one that doesn't
just take off on the wings of words,
a poem
that doesn't just twitter at the sky.
Poems without birds travel much slower,
step much lower. Their earthbound
aspirations forge a path through
a pathless woods.
Poems without birds
often need us to carry them
and when they find their way into our pockets
we tend to forget about them
until much later
when we find them crumpled
and shrunken in the laundry
deformed after the fact
—newly furrowed and maybe a mystery,
paper roadkill in the lint trap
like the remains of old sales receipts
for things we no longer possess.

Limerence

Part I

I caught her like the Covid virus
unexpectedly
unfamiliarily
with no remedy

Then I almost died
of her
It started with a stabbing pain inside my chest
from carrying her around in my heart when she
wanted out
Pounding blood
like thunder
Muscles tightening
Heart beating
and
unbeating.

Then a flood of silence like the end
but not the end
No end came.
No end comes,
only empty stillness
in long miles of
loneliness
like sunlight hiding in the high grass
anticipating the sunset
blinded by the golden bands
of outstretched arms
reaching but never holding
Then darkness
and some things you can
not touch

not even when they get closer
Maybe in death
but then the choice is not yours entirely.

Abscission

Look it up, search, find abscission.

There is a name for everything:
Platitude, petiole,
Pythagorean Theorem.
So many things and so many names.

Not long after we are born we learn
everything has a name

and we begin to say them,
call things by their names to
bring them magically to us.

The stem that holds the leafy part to the tree
owns the name of petiole.

Maybe it doesn't matter so much the name,
until you feel the inexhaustible pull of the world
and realize the impossible strength
it takes to hold on, and stay connected
through the changing seasons and all the changes
in the weather: wind and rain, and hurricanes.

A petiole subsists.

Things that make such a difference

have names you want to pronounce correctly
to teach your children, whom you have named.
And when the fall arrives and the petioles
take their part in the leaf abscission,
we stand in wonder at the changing colors
admiring the emptying trees as they
accept their loss almost as if they had a choice.

Fledgling

I will
follow your
lead:
Flapping
Fluttering
Falling,
Failing!
Flying.

Until
I do not
need to
follow you flying
any longer.

Kayla Heinze

Remember Green

Everywhere in Canada there are fires
And the sad truth is we've mostly given up

Everywhere in my mind there are also fires
But the kind that have already burned

And so it's just ash and empty
Like all the people had to leave town

Here in Montana, where the smoke fled,
I'm running right on the edges

Of puddles, like I'm daring the world
To get me wet again, soak me

All the way, from sock to bone to soil,
Rain until we can remember green

Stop checking the score . . .

I dropped my blue mug yesterday. And I am hearing that the last of the ice will melt soon. I fear we've lost the recipe. Those stupid pigeons I see every day. How do they manage iridescence against so much gray? The gas station sign below them. Its face that rises and falls. Neon ocean economy waves. I haven't had the patience for puzzles in a long time. I think it started with a flat tire on Valentine's Day—maybe this is all that the world will ever be—near the coast of Maine. A cloudy sunrise over the Atlantic.

I've been promised that vultures find use for even the dead. That there are billions of bacteria in my gut, and just as many stars, digesting the dark matter and passing it along. In that room of magic, I can hear the plants starting to talk back to me. You know what, some days you really piss me off. Maybe that's it. The last straw that is also the first.

More good days than bad days says my great grandfather.
More good years than bad.

Bring the Water

When I was twenty
I spent the summer working on a dairy farm
I didn't know what else to do

I fed the calves
and they would suck on my fingers
before I slipped in the bottle
See, they hadn't been born with a taste for rubber
but that was what we had

In the mornings I drove the back roads
My engine an alarm
cutting sharp through the sleeping fields
The workers are arriving
It's time to wake up
Be somebody

All summer I lugged 5-gallon buckets
back and forth on the ATV
Wore knee high muck boots
and I was not qualified for any of it

West Coast Ivy League
Great Plains manual labor
A lot of miles in between
Asking myself where to pull over

I still have clothes that reek of cow shit
The same questions on my mind
You can spend years chasing profit or purpose
I've done it
I've also stood alone in the middle of miles of alfalfa

I'm not telling you what to choose
I'm just saying,
Someone has to bring the water

Fly fishing

Invoke osprey
Catch fish
How many ways
Does water flow?
Stop and look
Then go
Oceanward
Deathward
Lifeward
Onward
Big circle back
Home
Circle of eye
Bright iris
Fish come home
We go to fish
Invoke osprey
Come home

Tree of Life

Here a single leaf bulging with green and yet
so thin it's almost transparent in the evening's glaring
Rays running straight through its flesh as if
its existence were merely a suggestion
and I have to touch it to make sure
it's real or maybe that I am

Where we meet, I feel the fractal bumps
Her branching veins like an ode
to the rising limbs of her mother and all
her sisters are hushing me with their soft
dance of crushing delight
A thousand wings and she can't fly
Anywhere, but wouldn't you want
To lie in the sun your whole life too?

Richard Baldo

Chasing Through to Dawn

These seeds of poems
demand my consideration
before they return to obscurity
in the chaos of the monkey mind.

My wife sleeps in the quiet—breathing,
her leg astride mine.

I weigh the chance
of waking my love
against the risk that these thoughts
will never come again.

Can I reach to pull the phone
under the sheets with us?
Her unwanted intruder.

I concentrate on the fading words.
Are they important enough tonight?
So many lines lost.

Even such moments of indecision
shift my emotions out of focus.

I become the drowning man
batting away a life ring
dropped by some god
into the ocean of lost thoughts.

I hide the dim light of my mistress phone.

Not seeing what my fingers do
as spell check makes gibberish,
slaying ideas, their graves
discovered the following day.

I compete to hold my thoughts above
the rising waves
of sleep . . .

*Now, Ozymandias sits with me
in the Dresden Gallery,
a dreamscape of fields
fertile with such losses.*

*These shattered statues,
half-buried under the sand
remind us of our arrogant audacity.*

*We find again,
that we are only
two more futile stone breakers.*

Just Write

Plunk down the flour and butter; Add as much salt and sugar as you dare.
You're not going to make any real dough at this anyway.

Roll out this lump however you want. If it gets too sticky, add more flour.
If it gets too sweet, add some sour. Maybe spaetzle it across the cutting board.

Feed it through the pasta maker, or hunt up your favorite cookie cutters.
Make strips with the knife you love to feel in the grip of your hand.

You may need a spoonful of vinegar or a glass of fine wine.
It will knead you back if you give it the right kind of love.

Toss it against the wall of your heart to see if it sticks.
Feed a bit to your friends and watch their mouths to pucker.

Drop a surprise in the middle, something like one of Freud's dreams,
Or the Far Side Cartoon about Cow Poetry.

Put yeast in and let it rise overnight in your lover's bed.
Let a cup sour for a week so the starter blooms through your keyboard.

If you don't like it, chuck it out with the other failures in your life.
Start fresh and just write until your muse saddles you and rides you home.

Fulfilling Requirements of Love

I gave her the kiss
because love required it.
My lips were not moved.

So,
I moved them.

One with the Gang

Orange soda in draft beer glasses,
Saturday morning, sunlight warms our backs.
while my brother and I play at a kind of manhood.

Grandpa and the guys of his age sit adjacent
along the long edge of the bar, reaching deep
into the darkness of the room.

Our legs don't reach the stool's rungs,
but we are included,
allowed on the edge of the gang.

Their rules include us even if the law
says otherwise. We are learning
the ways of men.

From the Widow Walk

The soon-to-be widow
of the young whaler prepares,

before she knows for sure,

to step up to the place named
for her walk of tears.

They will dry on her cheeks
and a bit of shirt she saved
with his already fading scent.

Impatient hunter, he killed a calf
with his harpoon hand when
she did not follow her mother deep.

They drowned
in the twists of lines
before that witness sunset.

Who says that the grief
of a mother humpback
is smaller than those
of weeping whaler women.

Alex Eve

Saved

Save a ladder against the wall,
A candle perched upon a rung,
Save a distant magpie's squall,
The room was empty,
It held no one.

Save three drawers, three doors,
The radiator pipes that sing.
Save some time—a gentle pause,
The room was empty,
It held nothing.

Save six panes along one edge,
And myself with memories some,
Save my secret, vital pledge,
The room was empty,
It held no one.

Save these things that I have said
—and some paint around the rim.
Save the wooden double bed,
The room was empty,
Yet held something.

A Moment

The wood let out a gentle sigh of smoke,
 Which inched out and into the air.
It's tail still held by the log's blackened maw,
 Flanked by white, chipped teeth.
The sigh began to twist and twirl and snake,
 Ever rising upwards, until it wriggled free.
It knotted up—vermicular,
 And teased apart, again and again,
Until its form flattened, faded, withered,
 Dispersed upon the winds,
As a dwindling grey zephyr.
 A gasp.
 A sigh.

First Impressions

Still

I remember that night
You stood there, glassy-eyed
Wearing a look I've not seen before
Or since

A look of curiosity
Of intrigue
Of delight
Like I was a puzzle
You couldn't wait to solve

Turning on your heels
You headed back to the crowd
And disappeared in the throng
Leaving me puzzled
About you

The Middle Place

Behind me, yesterday's full moon hangs festive,
Bathing the buildings and trees,
In faint, gentle memory.

The future lies before me,
Concealed by shadows cast by tomorrow's sun,
As it rises from behind the hill.

I urge to turn towards that familiar moon,
Which, now, is quickly dimming into obscurity,
and vagueness.

But the long grasses are blown over,
Like abatises,
As if to discourage retreat into nostalgia.

I can see tomorrow clearer now;
Some features on the bank illuminated by tomorrow's sun,
And as I approach, it becomes now.

You Are the Sun

You are the Sun,
Whom everybody loves,
Bringing joy and warmth and light.
I, too, love your rays on my skin,
And am sad to watch you go, each night.

But, sometimes, it gets too much for You.
For, although you're the biggest thing to me,
The Universe exerts even bigger forces on you,
Invisible and ominous,
Beyond my comprehension.

Such cosmic pressures tear away your skin,
And I see Your truth.
A rush of unbearable heat,
Causes my skin to boil, burn, blister.
Too hot to bear.

I plead for You to stop,
To shield me from the radiation,
That pours from Your core.
Like bug bites, like bullets,
No, like cannonballs.

When I show others,
My damaged skin, barely healing,
They only remark how,
You bring them warmth, not pain,
Nothing nuclear.

I know, someday,
Your fire will consume me,
Because, some days,
The worlds don't revolve,
Around You.

Robert Michael Oliver

Prison Ball

Wire defines the outfield.
The door to the Yard leads
to the Diamond, with brick
the color of the backstop.

From atop the embankment
across Route 35, I witness
bare muscled men in grey
T-shirts, cagey base-stealers

with black toes, country boys
with antelope legs, scowling
forearms that can snap a bat,
and a guard playing umpire.

A homerun bounces on tar.
The centerfielder thanks me,
when I, the Warden's son,
toss its horsehide back

to his leather-bare glove.
The horn sounds; players
line up, not in teams of skin
and cotton but in an algorithm

known only to convicts
as they roll like shadows
across the Diamond and
vanish into iron.

Before Prison

On a hard floor,
cheeks blubbing
bubbles of pout,

I stare up the long
staircase at Momma,
cigarette like a gun

aimed at her coffee.
She kisses Father
goodbye, dancing

to a chorus of metal
mugs and fierce chants.
I know his absence.

I suck the air: silence
is my pacifier thrown
in a tantrum against

a white wall. I know
only the smudge left
as it falls to the floor.

James, the Trustee

On the day I broke the cup,
I discovered him, an obelisk—
tall like my Dad but black.

The dappled glass lay in ruins,
or so my ears informed me,
on tiptoe at porcelain's edge.

I had lifted the chalice above
my head—a sacred rite,
a sky not pierced but saluted.

The man I wanted to become
placing it blindly—shattering—
guilt strewn in a basin.

James raised each shard
like a wafer placed on a tongue
and never acknowledged.

My calamity, he promised,
his voice too callused to cry,
would ripen into rough hands.

Over green beans that evening,
the cup, I said, parents listening,
had dropped into forever.

Prison Hounds

Across the road,
bloodhounds weep
for a pulse:

a shade scurries
across asphalt
into oblivion.

Howls erupt.
Poplars shake
their gnarled limbs.

I wait on knees
bent at my bed
till high school.

On Mondays
the prison gates
swing open.

Father rides
downhill
to purgatory.

I listen for
the chatter
of inmates.

I hush myself
with prayers
wagging my tail.

Sunday Slaughterhouse

The priest sanctifies love
in absència—the gold
doors of the tabernacle
cloak a breathing Jesus.

I visit the slaughterhouse
behind our State dwelling,
atop the hill next to the gully
where the Dogwoods bloom.

I push the wooden gate
open onto a passage—not
labyrinth—spiraling inward
toward a crucible of flesh.

My little soldiers dance
on tiptoe among the globs
of spattered red matter. I
hop over pools of dung.

The cattle are not there—
they are funny that way,
disappearing like shades
into mud with a single thud.

Hearing my daydreams
screech, I want to pray
for the convicts who, with
stunners, blast cattle

into dark pastures, but
language fails, for nothing
suffices to quell the roar
of what I once loved.

Contributor Notes

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 a 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 Poetry* 2021, 2022, 2023. He is currently a second-year MFA student at the University of Nevada, Reno.



Sébastien Luc Butler holds an MFA from the University of Virginia. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming from *Narrative Magazine*, *Pleiades*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Southeast Review*, *the minnesota review*, *Four Way Review*, and elsewhere. The recipient of the 2021 Hopwood Award, and a finalist for the 2023 Black Warrior Review Poetry Contest, his writing can be found at *Fifty Grande*, *Foreword Reviews*, and *West Trade Review*. Hailing from Michigan, he resides in Brooklyn.



Alex Eve trained as a research scientist and now works in the academic publishing industry. Based near Cambridge, UK, he writes as a form of therapy. His poetry is about secrets; things desperate to be communicated but must remain unsaid.



Alaina Goodrich is a nature loving, wonder seeking, music making mama and teacher. She has had poems published in *Sixfold's* Winter 2021 issue; she is grateful for all who participate and give such meaningful feedback. She loves noticing the miraculous in all things and contemplating existence. She is excited to see where this wild journey takes us all in the coming years.



Savannah Grant lives in beautiful and serene western Massachusetts and cleans houses around the Pioneer Valley full-time. She is also a printmaker and poet, and has art hanging in several downtown galleries and has been published in *Sixfold* twice before. Her debut poetry chapbook, *at the end of gospel*, was recently published by Bottlecap Press, with more collections on the way.



Kayla Heinze (she/her) currently lives in Missoula, Montana, with ties to Minnesota and the Pacific Coast. A recent graduate holding a B.A. in philosophy, she now works in environmental communications, telling stories about the relationships between people and wildlife. To nurture her newborn poetry practice, she spends as much time outdoors as possible. You can follow her work at kaylaheinze.substack.com



Samantha Imperi is a Ph.D. Poetry student at Ohio University. She received her MFA from the NEOMFA program at the University of Akron in 2023. Her work can be found in *Wild Roof Journal*, *The Great Lakes Review*, and the *Festival Review*, among others. Follow her on Twitter and Instagram @simperi08 or visit www.samanthaimperiauthor.com for more information.



Bridget Kriner (she/her) is a community college professor in Cleveland Ohio. Her work has appeared in *Rattle* (Poets Respond), *Book of Matches*, *Shelia-Na-Gig*, *Thimble Literary Magazine*, *Whiskey Island* and *Split this Rock*, where she won First Place in the Abortion Rights Poetry Contest in 2012. She has two children, a dog, and a cat.



grace (logan) received their Masters in Sustainability Solutions from Arizona State University. Slowly but surely, they have begun to unite their reflective prose with their academic training. This is their first publication of poems. They feel honored and humbled to be included in this issue, and to have received wonderful feedback from fellow writers. They live in Tempe, AZ with their partner, a fluffy brown cat, and plans to pursue a PhD.



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*, *Asimov's Science Fiction*, *The Saturday Evening Post* and *The Mountain Troubadour*. His book *Star Route* was published by Main Street Rag. He looks for poetry in the paradoxical ways humans repeat their mistakes and reflect nature in their art. He's glad to make his seventh appearance in *Sixfold*. See [George Longenecker on youtube](#).



Robert Michael Oliver I call myself a Creativist: a person immersed in creativity regardless of activity. I am a poet, educator, theatre artist, playwright, father, administrator, screenwriter... With my wife and creative partner Elizabeth Bruce, I co-founded The Sanctuary Theatre; I founded The Performing Knowledge Project. My first book of poetry, *THE DARK DIARY in 27 refracted moments*, was published by Finishing Line Press. Currently, I am a Co-Host of the podcast Creativists in Dialogue @ Creativists.substack.com.



Ana Reizens is an emerging poet and writer, and you can find her work in *The Bombay Literary Magazine*, *The Dry River Review*, and *Chanel*, among other places. She was a special mention for the 2023 Kari Ann Flickinger Memorial Prize for a chapbook and the winner of the 2020 Blue Earth Review poetry contest. Her work has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net.



Keegan Shepherd has built a holistic relationship with writing—making it a personal, professional, and academic pursuit. He is an underground Hip-Hop artist by the name of Keeper of the Universe, and his music features on Spotify, Apple, Soundcloud and YouTube. Keegan studied writing at the University of Nevada, Reno, and earned the DQ award for Poetry in 2020. He is currently employed as a Copywriter and is studying for his MA in Rhetoric & Writing Studies.



Selena Spier is a graduate student at Columbia University currently living in New York City. She has daylighted as a waitress, a bartender, a nude model, a farmhand, a baker, a line cook, a newspaper columnist, a tutor, a rock climbing instructor, a suicide hotline counselor, a carpenter, and a painter.



Corinne Walsh earned a Pushcart Prize nomination for short fiction in 2006. Then paused writing to raise her family. The devastating isolation and loss brought on by Covid19 brought poetry back into her life as a magical muse. Her poems have appeared in *Abandoned Mine*, *The Bluebird Word*, *Acropolis Journal*, and *Tiny Frights*. She is currently working on a full length book of poems.



Pamela Wax is the author of *Walking the Labyrinth* (Main Street Rag, 2022) and *Starter Mothers* (Finishing Line Press, 2023). Her poems have received several awards, as well as a Best of the Net nomination. An ordained rabbi, Pam offers online spirituality and poetry workshops from her home in the northern Berkshires of Massachusetts.



Mark Yakich lives in New Orleans.



Hailey M. Young (she/her) is a poet from Princeton, New Jersey. She graduated from Brown University with a degree in Literary Arts and Africana Studies. When she's not writing, she is usually reading, watching sitcoms, or teaching. During the 2023-2024 cycle, she was also awarded a Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship in Botswana.

