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Midnight Heaven

By: Will Neuenfeldt

God hums white
when sinners sleep
as not one shadow
repents inside
his parking pews.
Pothole holy water
remains blessed
and full until he lets
strays have a sip.
Between tinier cracks
grow crabgrass
and dandelions
before his followers
spray what they
call weeds away,
but tonight God
rains and Jesus
takes his break to
shower out back
while his post
glows brighter
without a set of
headlights in sight.

Dust Notes in the Air

By: Ken Kent

He walks gravely upon gravel
To a skin-colored skyscraper
In which dusty Lisa
Will whirl and warble
For him once more
In an inflatable wheelchair
In a neat
Apartment on the topmost floor.

a poem for the woman who pulled a knife at the library

By: Darren C. Demaree

sometimes the wound
cannot fathom
that you must press

the number one
when you dial out
from the free phone

& god dammit
what if my hands
are evil hands

& if i dial the number
another man
another wrong man

might show up
& end all beauty
& burn the house

of heaven in her throat
& pour more concrete
in her eyes

so the knife
so the cool sharp knife
instead of the ringing

& a clean exit
where once light
was swallowed

Spring

By: Mary Paulson

Some small black bird
with a yellow beak like a
toothpick knife
jabs restlessly in the grass. He stops,
glares at me and I'm struck with the thought
that I should know
his name. You would have known it and
all about the green shimmer of his
top feathers, about the song he sings, the females
he likes, the carry of his wings
on air. I remember you at our kitchen table
with your bird books. *Mary,*
you would say, pointing at the large bay
window, *see the Tit Mouse, the Robin, the Red-Winged
Blackbird. Look at the Mourning Dove.
Isn't he beautiful!* Teenage,
angsty, enraged
without knowing why, I
shoved you away in ways that were cruel—
Mama, I've moved into a little
house ten blocks from your favorite sea. I'm having
my coffee and the birds in the backyard
are shrill and chatty
as schoolgirls de-boarding their bus.
Yesterday, there was a tall white feathered
bird with long, graceful legs just standing
in the grass and I thought
maybe it was you.

Bone Scan

By: George Burns

Driving into the low morning sun,
I cannot see, so drive slow and on hope.
Like the sun, the traffic on Sunset,
Temescal, PCH and the 10 is just beginning
and it's easy to go with the flow and,
in the garage, I have my choice of parking places
and even have time to finish listening
to the podcast, *there is a great ambiguity
at the end of the world*, which I'm mis-
remembering, but not in a huge way.

It's close to 8 o'clock and the approaching hour
is drawing more and more cars in, filling the still
abundant slots and ahead of me, is a woman
almost running to beat the last few minutes to her desk.

But I'm an old man. I no longer need to run,
so when I extend my wrist to the receptionist
to snap on the hospital band, I joke, *It's
like we're getting married* and I think
her laugh is real: Now that I'm old,
it's more relaxed around women.
Why did this take so long, I wonder

as I pull my keys, wallet and cell
out of my pocket then unwind my belt
from around my waist. Finally lie
on the scanning table for the plate to
meander in its track above me,
gazing at my body, feeding on my bones.

That's it, she says and I'm surprised
it's happened so fast as I sit up
and feel a small cloud of vertigo
descend on my brain. *That's it,*
the nurse says and cuts my wrist band.

The world has begun to hum in my absence
and the freeway and its on-ramp are full
but moving; the sun is higher and
no longer a problem and I begin to
hum a zippety do-daw. The world
still has a place for me. Crowded,
but if I turn on my signal,
I can still squeeze in.

Ode to You

By: Carol Lynn Stevenson Grellas

I wanted to write you a letter filling you in on all that's gone on over the years, but according to your sister, who emailed me last week, you're dead. I've been searching for you so long with no word back, I wasn't surprised, yet I have to say I began to imagine in a hopeful way that you might be alive somewhere, lying on a sandy beach sipping margaritas, too high on alcohol to answer back. I've been wanting to tell you how much I miss our old days when roomed together in school and the parties we went to braless and barefoot, skipping over wet grass in the moonlight, mornings sleeping hungover you more than me, because you were always more of a partier, your arms outstretched across your twin bed trying to hold my hand annoyed at the space between, scrunching your nose like a sign for me to move over, closer to you so our fingers could touch. I am guessing our mothers are up there with you too, since they've both been gone for decades; I'm sort of jealous that you all get to hang out, have tea and crackers share all the details of our youthful days, and theirs days when they were paying for our education while we were dating our professors, since that kind of thing wasn't taboo just yet. Hey it's nice to have this chance to look out the window and think of you living behind a murky sky, managing the way the stars hang at night, gathering new stories to tell, opening a raincloud one day saying, hello friend, I've been waiting for you.

You taught me how to drink

By: Kelly Vance

In defiance of better judgment
In memory of too many condolences
In nightgowns and ball gowns

On the terry cloth edge of apathy's bathrobe
On the wagon on a well-beaten path to anywhere else
On the eve of future regrets

Like a thirsty supplicant succulent empty of stores
Like a whale, bloated and drying on the beach
Like hummingbirds from the red death trough

When the sky grows close and vocal
When the grass screams blades-up below the mower
When you aren't here and also when you are

In the grasp you have on everything you touched,
like me and my reflections now you're gone.

Lay Like Rope Across the Deck, Stranded

By: Shou Jie Eng

Lay like whale over a course of salt
wear coats of oil, lay warm latitudes
raise gardens of ice where posterior

and up lie uneasy. Unwind over deck
coats of oil, worn latitudes belaying
triple strands, laid hemp ends

unwinding over deck. Lie uneasily
in quarters, pitching, fingers unstranding
where laid hemp took their triple ends

knowing that, far from home, the body
lies in quarters, pitching, slowly unstranding
the line between body, body, and water

knowing that, far from home, your body
is nothing, only a one-three-hundredth lay
that the line between body, body, and water

like marline, displaces approximately
nothing. Only a one-three-hundredth lay
for the hand that lays a boarding knife

proximal to flesh—not marlin—displacing
everything. Pay them their share
for the hands, their lays, their boarding knives

pay them their share of the whale, for
everything. Pay them their share:
to the hands, mates, and smiths

a fraction of oil, bone, baleen.

Love is a pink cake

By: Hope Fischbach

after Andy Warhol's "Love is a Pink Cake"
Pittsburgh, PA

It is the first day of autumn, September breathing
into his skin and my prism fingers curled
in denim and disquiet.

Twilight snakes through steel frames, our hollow bones;

into him, stiffened spine to the cold grey lines,
the rust, the factory noise.

Gaze at the cross-armed sky as she
holds forth a downpour sure to come;
fluorescent office windows,

beast, the grimed corners
of skyscrapers.

The lines of his face a pencilled map,
a wax-paper laugh, unknown yet
familiar strangers, we foxtrot by number
inside museum walls.

Andy would have eaten up the scene, painted us
a pink cake.

I'm on a diet, brushing the icing from my lips.
The cigarettes and dizziness—

I
want to lean

eye
of the iron

I
would have said

I
have had nothing

to drink, only soda
washing down the unsaid words.

Defenseless night guards, we disarm
ourselves. In the curve
of his collarbone

—a waltz of ghosts.

We are sidewalks crashing into red lights,
vectors meeting in cosmic accident, sharp breath
like shattered windows,
mouths meeting like charged
ions, thunder, my prism fingers curled
around ribs, sparkling water
under smoke and rust.

I
whisper willow songs

The Andean Condor Pities Me From its Cage/I Understand How Pride Has a Mind of Its Own

By: Durell Carter

You look down at the cockroach from your bar stool
That isn't afraid to acknowledge you
Because it knows there's a hole
That will hide them/ hide us
From the light of their trespassing gods' eyes
And you wonder how they/how we
are going to survive a world
That will require them to learn how to fly further
than their/ than our limitations
While you inhale cigarette ash
And listen to the music played in iconic 80s movies
with zero dance montages
Vibrating in your legs and the glass filling your sin of choice.

[Did you know that Andean Condor feed off the dead to survive?]

You listen to a fellow stranger tell you why we don't deserve wings
While you watch the ash from either their
future regret/past curse/but present pleasure,
Land on your left Converse.
You thank yourself for not wearing the shoes you bought yourself
For finding validation from another flightless human
For making them feel the moss you grew
From old memories
And pine sol-scented words.

[Did you know the Andean Condor only flies against the wind due to their size?]

There's a rabbit eating grass from the yard
proudly mowed every two weeks
in the summertime,
And it's allowed to
Because you pity nomads
that know their home translates
everywhere the wind believes in
Because we're taught the cage is pretty from birth
by the wraiths that were never forced to sleep in them.

[Did you know that the Andean Condor can live to be 80 years old protected from the world?]

There's an existence that can only be acknowledged
Through living chromatic scenes,
Velcro weeks,
And years we force ourselves to churn into moments,
And I only spend my experience points on surviving the seconds I know
Without having to count the feathers that never fell off
Wings that will never grow from my torso.

[Did you know the Andean Condor can fly high enough to see us for who we really are?]

SAME

By: Jason Gabbert

It makes me sad, what you've become.
You stained thick the outside of your irises.
You bent over broken feathers on the side of the street.
That's the first time I stop seeing you.

A boy playing in gutter rapids near 15th and Brazee:
He makes the handheld space pod fly.
I seem more concerned than his mother:
On her phone. He's back inside now.

Someone said they didn't have many friends.
We read an article about life rife with loneliness, like smoking fifteen cigarettes.
There are hundreds of us sitting and drinking from identical cups,
In the same space at distinct tables.

I received a phone call from Roseburg.
When they said they wanted something, I hung up.

The May Cape

By: Hannah Cole

an octopus climbs like a ladder, while angelfish flutter in the seaplants. Above your body, coral towers cast shadows. Fish wheel in a cloud.

Nearer to the shore, an underwater insect navigates the stony floor on stick-like legs. A squid is piling his head with rocks. That's because I'm here.

A quilt drifts down through the seaweed forest, tracing an x axis while I swim the y. You threw it there yourself, making sure it caught the wind, then put clothes on over underwear and trudged towards the pier. This was years ago; you were only old enough to buy a colonic to see if it made you skinnier.

The best-smelling bug spray you ever smelled spilled. The scent clung to the quilt by the corner. On one side the colors were wintery and dark, and on the other side pastel; you switched it as intended with the seasons. Now you can feel it, wet, clap against you. A girl's bloodless rage could never stand up against a man's pain, which is like a typhoon, a lever.

At the bottom of the ocean, fleshy flounces like pink dresses churn in the current, affixed to their rocks. The levee bleeds warmly. Presently, an animal that looks like a human tongue tastes the ocean floor

No

By: A. Pikovsky

∨
it's a
disruption of peace,
wilting in the whirl
now, i'm ironing
in the settle,
no.
i'm settling in the web
of (f)ears
i did not ∨ could not
weave.

it's a
collection of repentance
collapsing into the purpose
you painted for me,
to serve for the living
where thoughts summon
the monster i can't shake off me—
looming in the stale air
of hurt spaces
calling it whatever
it is not
no.

it's a
separation of scent
i am dusted &
∨ of maudlin earth,
∧ of molten rock rounded in moss,
∨ of steadied rage;
i am—
no.

it's a
spillage of foliage
of the fertile breast
enclosed & chained
pinched at the rib
where (((i))) am the leaves
falling, interlocking.

∧
no.
it's a chase for faith
for breath
wading thru
these giving, putrid tears;
[[W H A T]]
makes a man
of you?

when I shed
myself
& your hands
Choke(d) me
so pretty,
stained my sense with ink
& crumbled my throat
like birthday cookies,
crushed over counters
where i rolled roses.

Now, i'm resting in the crown,
no—
i'm crowning in the abyss
where I take my flowers
on my knees
bearing my soul
& pillaging my home.

Kintsugi: The Golden Repair

By: Lori Starling

I shouldn't be Someone
You could take or leave—
I know I'm Cracked,
Chipped,
Broken in All of the Places—
Normally thrown out pottery—

You know,
I was ART once!

So, take the Time to pick up
My Pieces,
and mend Me with gold
like I'm fucking royal!

Loving me is Wanting
to put it all together,
And embrace My broken,
beautiful, and boundless flaws,

And cheer for me when they shine.

Instead of Talking About My Assault, My Lover Peels an Orange

By: Hunter Hazelton

Does he blame the orange
for its unpeeling? There's no scream

as he thumbs the thing. The orange
receives what's not asked for like a good victim.

It perspires—sweaty & citric,
spilling its guts upon

my lover's lips. Devoured.
Then there's me, voyeur,

transfixed by his: cocked head—
open the great throat of Cronus.

Almost pornographic. Common violence.
His nails impale skin,

unwelcoming as daybreak.
He leaves the carcass atop the duvet.

What a banal death, that little peel.
I, too, hollow and homeless

as any wounded fruit,
pull down the covers

& show it my empathy—blued &
bruised—I am ready.

I'll dispose of the death & shower
for the first time.

But only
when I am ready.

night blindness

By: Terry Jude Miller

darkness approaches
the eye retreats
to back seats of the theater

the world obscures
leaves wind song
and the ghost of blooming
night flowers in its wake

people who know better
or nothing—sleep—while
the broken wait out the night

in half-dream and opaque images
try to memorize the words
sung by the wind

Quiescent paradox

By: Donald Guadagni

The mirror that is life and that which is myself, I quietly reflect as to the truth and meaning of my heart. This is not passion nor aberration that passes silently as I touch the mirrored surface of my soul.

Even the mirage of existence that shimmers upon us all cannot touch the true meaning of that which is the soul. The vision of the true heart seeks only that that provides balance and serenity.

Quintessential and sublime being becomes elusive as ripples of calm waters having never lost a pebble skipped across its surface. The reflection seems perfect yet lacks the depth of understanding that prevents acceptance of the yin and yang that completes the heart.

Cosmic influence and force can never change that which is immutable since the beginning of time. My reflection and its shadow are the mirror of perfection, elegance of being in all things. Reaching to touch, longing to feel the kindred being that completes my soul.

To speak the inner truth become sounds upon an ocean of deaf ears. Unable to embrace, to understand the fundamental essence of reality. Echoes without sound, a loneliness beyond the senses.

In crepuscular breviloquence I reach to my reflection, the mirror of my soul. Juxtapositions remain in every beating heart and breath, I cannot love as you will, I can only love as I wish. My reflection understands, it is not a mirage or illusion.

It will always be who I am to you and who you are to me. As walk together on the beach hand in hand and leave our footprints upon the sands of time. The ocean waves lap the sands and passing of such things creates perfection untouched an eternal moment that is us.

Reflection

By: Breanna Watkins

She looked at her reflection.

First in a long time.

Staring at herself wondering,

‘is this really mine?’

She looked into her eyes,

almost as if she could see right through.

Then she spoke up and asked,

“Am I really you?”

dragon lady

By: Helen Gu

we begin as unwanted children, executed
before opening our eyes, pleading guilty before we

hear our mothers' voices. when a country cannot
carry all their children whole, no one wants a daughter.

in our dreams we remember the voices of the unseen,
cities of stillborn girls with still-shut eyes, girls who

never cried but say *forgive me / mama / for wanting to open /
my eyes / to be yours / until I belong / to someone /*

wanted

...

in our world we are taught to be afraid of men,
to bear our tribal colors of silence and longing,

proud like the walks of the mothers of our mothers
watching us burdened with womanhood's weight,

and we are taught how to clean a sauté pan
but not how to clean the burn marks on our fingers,

how to greet a man with a warm meal every day and
feed yourself with the leftovers and his dry knuckles,

stale as bread.

...

in the back of the taxi the man rests his hand on my thigh:
I've always wanted / to fuck / an Asian woman / like you

he mistakes my silence for submission, the fear rising
in my body and nestling in the creases of my palm.

I laugh, and sound screams for help but he does not understand
my mother tongue. if I had looked into his eyes I would see us

longing the same. him, searching for my body. me, searching for
escape. I open the door at the next red light and walk the

three miles home.

...

my grandmother told me the story of the dragon girl,
the daughter of the dragon king: *once upon / a time /*

there was a / wise / and / powerful / eight-year-old girl /
who was compassionate / and virtuous / so she entered

enlightenment / but they did not believe / that women /
could be enlightened / so she gave her life to Buddha /

in a pearl / and turned into a boy / and was finally /

whole

...

my mother taught me that a good woman should
never look a man in the eyes.

in America they call us dragon ladies,
as if spitting fire and charred skin is sexy. in this country

the only beautiful thing immigrants can be is a fantasy.
yellow pain turns gold when written in American,

gold that we cannot afford in a country where we
cannot even afford love.

...

their eyes, the only eyes that are allowed to see us.
their eyes, swallowing us whole when we glare back.

...

under my skin, a dragon's body. her fire in my sinews,
her scales on my bones. her wings tucked deep in my brain

where no one can clip them away. I spit fire through her soul,
beautiful fire, an inferno. under my skin, she blazes through

my veins and we make art out of a napalm-filled sky, heat
searing. we devour the words of languages that do not

love us back. we turn ashes into beautiful entities, so beautiful
that America might see us and our sparks someday.

under my skin, a dragon's body. immured between the roots
of my thinned hairs, the faded mustard of my skin but her voice

rings like embers. in this sea of flames, we illuminate
with our hearts. my lungs filled with smoke, no longer
suffocating.

A confluence out of left field

By: Sarah Johnnes

If she is dead, she'll still be dead if I sleep a few more hours. Besides, I need a reprieve from what could be. I settle, till first light shows silhouettes of bare trees. Wind gusted though a few days

earlier and stole the last of the red, orange, and gold foliage. If this were spring, finches, warblers or chickadees might sing the new day in. Winter stillness alleviates the ruthlessness of death.

Feet stand on fragility at the entrance to her bedroom. I hope all the verification I need is to see her chest rise and fall. Nothing. I guess I need to lay hands on her, to see if her skin is warm or

cold. This is a doorway I do not want to enter. With one finger, a light touch to her hand brings relief. Warm. She is warm. When my cat settles into comfort and safety, he takes a deep breath,

exhales with a sigh and surrenders to peace. It felt like that. Her eyes opened and even though she can't see, she says, *Oh, hi darling. I love you*, and turns her head towards the wall and back

to sleep. She has no awareness of my side of this equation—not the first time that I could have been alone with a dead parent. At twelve. I could have found my father's body had he not postponed

my visit by a day. Makes me think of that game, would you rather. Would you rather wake in an apartment to a dead parent or would you rather wait in Grand Central Station for eight hours, being

knocked about by cruelty of circumstances. I was a latch key kid. I felt pretty grown up signing for a UPS delivery. Exciting. A present, a surprise. I opened the box and found my father's ashes

with bits of bones in a plastic bag, sealed with a twist tie. Thinking that it should have been heavier, I leave the partially opened package on the kitchen table and return to Bewitched.

Arena

By: Elizabeth Ambos

I went back to the arena

With flowers this time

Fanged phlox, daggered asters
lavender sheafed as a shield

Still the blood rose

In the battle sand

And I was broken to thorns

Crowned by my Masters

Planted about the hospital bed

I went back back I went to the arena

With time in these flowers

Clocked daisies bobbing all manner of lies

Scant tarpit of petals

As thumbs list downhill

Lilies fall

Monitors now

still

Isolation

By: Raymond Hoffman

Everything tight like islands
Abhorrent is the shore where the others swim
Tangle up to the warmer ones
The most abrasive tag along
If happiness is a toe in water, mania is a plunge
Born a swimmer, but never knew what to go after
Natural nomad launched out of orbit
Life is searching for herds across hot cement
Hopping along frantic and scared
Terrified of those sharks
They nestle to you when most vulnerable
Admire and come to you
Blowing up your phone, feeling alone
Loneliness must be an adhesive for all kinds of souls
Rich to poor
Language barriers divide
I'm ostracized by mental health, others just feel left out of the fun
I can't ride the tide
Born too pigeon toed to walk right
So I find shelter in those that have higher plateaus

A June bug to light is me to strangers
Bound to another's will and intent
They put you on your knees
Some are kind and some are pushy
Getting shoved becomes customary
Some talk, others make demands
Like bricks amongst others
Yet my wall doesn't feel secure
I'm mere minutes from turning to shards
Because my innate nature was never secured
My own sense of self robbed the moment I got told my gait is all wrong
Nothing ordinary, nothing sound
Just empty shallow waves making vibrations across my surface
I'm hesitant, because I was born scared.

for our friends' daughter, choosing to be lost

By: George Perreault

when she chose to step away from the singular,
identifying with the gods' hand-me-down plural
among this herd insistent upon illusionary selves,
each fragile *who* built like an irish wall with
stones piled loose enough to raise or lower
to ease sheep field to field in a country where
green is often more fabled than true, she
asked us to consider the concept of *sheep*
as both one and the many, braiding them
into our lives to warm us as meat or wool,
once or over according to need, still hoping
to float, child and wanderer, a cherished
inhalation with a hint of fresh-mown hay,

and when choosing to call themselves *Sky*,
their inner chinese shed that milk-name
assigned at birth, reminding us what seems
to be only above is also beside, brushing
our lowest ground, canyon or cavern,
to surround and sustain, raising us from
the dark ocean of our birth into a blood-
rude air intermingled with our mothers',
forehead to forehead, expanding endlessly
over the globe, inhaled and exhaled by every
us, by Jesus and Muhammed, by Kenyans
surging up Heartbreak Hill and the pacific

Buddha, each exhalation gifted into a circling
wind where we sift what their lungs have left, as
now, with every breath, we cradle your startling
bundle of unbearable sadness and wonder, accepting
whatever you gathered into the faceted selves of Sky,
breathing in together, then letting go.

Aspen's Children

By: Dick Altman

Cinco de Mayo, fifth of May in New Mexico,
and I look up past Aspen's fledgling leaves,
into a Sistine sky of flaming blue, to see
a jet's contrail splitting your still spare crown,
at no less than half a thousand knots an hour.
I smile to think that nothing in view is more
of the moment, than leaves whose emerald
sheen, to my eye, grows more vibrant
with each passing breeze.

*

Can I halt the wind, my Aspen children ask.
They dance, with little joy, as overhead mortar
gusts crash. Light air at seven thousand feet,
I say, offers no respite—bend, bend, or be broken.
I watch you grow from planting—five feet
to twenty. Watch you beat back May's late frosts.
July's second caterpillar wave. Cheer the gold
you mirror in fall. Plead for winter to endow you
strength enough to bear spring, when wind's
restive mountain lions chase you, without remorse,
as if over drought's cliff.

*

What would I do without you, my children,
here on high desert's plain, knowing you
thrive thousands feet higher? Love and water,
the only answer, in volumes unrelenting,
from the time I first hurl a digging bar,

as I am tall, into cement-like clay, to build
you a home to last well beyond my time.
For you to shield from sun's bore, generations
to come. Serenade, with your leaves' rippling
music, night's world of dream. Losing even one
of you—and I have lost many, despite unflagging
loyalty and ardor—what didn't I do that the fates
claim your life, instead of mine?

Still this Ground Speaks

By: Kyle Brogmus

Westbound wandering peoples ploughed these
plenteous fields; tilling bones crushed beneath
expansion, like Celtic corpses fertilising ample Alps;
a death enriching slough furrowed with war's
wreckage where raging echoes rattle off a languid durge.
Bodies buried bloat atop their mass mulled over lost
to memory, and I lay down upon their grass to gaze on
frothing clouds that pass; a plume of peace, a
movement that is still.

A SMALL POEM (II)

By: Blake Auden

In which
you offer forgiveness
and I spill for it,
 destroy for it.

In which
the dark roads
between the houses
 crawl together,
writhing an epitaph
against the dirt.

In which
our voices grind –
animal bones
in the receiver.

In which
we are a landlocked current,
the stones
of the riverbed
calling the earth
 to move.

Year of the Tiger

By: Siobhan Casey

You are not sentimental and rarely afraid
to show your toothless gums.

I call you Kai-Kai
and *Tiger-tiger*,
when I reach the room
where I hold your silk
head in my hands, your skin
olive and smooth against
a map of oxygen tubes.

You are like your father
the world is already busy saying,
as if dominant genes determine everything.
I disagree because you are newness,
infancy itself.

And it seems I have been writing the poem
of this moment for most of my life:
of hearing my child's voice
and not being able to hold
you just yet, the room suddenly cerulean:
river of turquoise spinal
block, blue scrubs under the glare
of light, ocean of birth
around us.

The nurses are fashioning tools,
sewing the imaginary axis
of a woman's body back together.
They say it is mine, the curved line
a five-inch scar
quiet in comparison
to the roar
and caw of you.

The Things You Lose

By: Scott Stolnack

The thieves come each night and empty another room.
You sit at the front door, a loaded shotgun across your knees,
thinking *over my dead body* yet somehow they come in while
you're looking the other way or through the back door or through
cleverly hidden tunnels beneath the cellar. Why anybody in their
right mind would want this junk is a puzzle but it's your junk goddammit
and you'll cling to each tottering rotten stack of old magazines or

the deflated balloons tied to the baby's crib the tattered prayer flags
shredding in the wind last year's wasp nest under the eaves of the garage
all the old people oh lord the bodies piling up all the old people
shuffling through the hallways or trudging into oblivion there they
all go they've all turned their backs gone off left you here by yourself.

The sea is lapping at your front porch. Mobilize the Corps of Engineers
if you can even get them on the phone get their attention somehow get out
the earth movers the heavy equipment reinforce that levee that seawall
shore up the crumbling foundation the teetering upper stories and
just like that while your attention is elsewhere there goes another room.

They got you looking out front and cleared out another one. Pretty soon
you'll be down to this one small parlor with its fringe lamp and rickety
old table and the landline nobody uses. And then where will you be?
Guarding an empty house by yourself. Jesus Christ the shit you put up with.
That's all there is to say really. When you come right down to it. Jesus H. Christ.

The Fool and The Fling

By: Emma McNamara

I wonder if flamingos ever become so enamored
they forget how to stand atop a single leg—
likewise, if lilacs become so lovestruck
they fleetingly fumble their flower functions,
or if lust-led lovebirds become so flustered they falter their flight—
darling, I daydream that nature is as foolish in desire as I

oh, how I wish I could have spewed out
sonnets and soliloquies and sapphic stanzas on the spot,
but alas, the panic conquered the poet

oh, how forlorn to sit in solitude and scrawl out
verse on flamingoes and flowers,
birds and flings who flee

you handled me like clay—
molding and mending me incessantly
as though you could craft anything you craved of me,
as though, if your hands left my body for more than a beat,
I'd turn rigid and fragile and lose my elasticity,
as though, if your fingers froze, I might crack—
and so, The Fool thought, *she must really like me*
all the while, The Fling prepared for flight

oh, how rich to realize that
2 Fools and 2 Flings starred in our story—
though you lured me, I never meant to be your Fling, and
surely, you never meant to be my Fool, but,

alternative titles unbeknownst at the start of Our Night,
I fancy nothing to do with whether you
enthroned me as Fool 1 or Fling 2

I no longer embody that enamored flamingo
when your energy envelops me—
I now stand steadfast atop a single leg,
nevertheless, may I regale you with a bird's-eye view as I
stamp down my raised foot and declare that
I am not a lovestruck lilac, nor lust-led lovebird, nor clay,
yet I've come to realize why you treated me that way—
you handled me as though at any moment I might disappear
because you knew, come the end of Our Night, you would

oh, how dire of my damn desire
to let you swoop me up so swiftly
only to pamper me with premeditated poison

I wonder if a little birdie had forewarned me
of how tangled and temporary your touch would be,
of the brevity of our blended breaths, or
of the urgency with which you unraveled me—
would I still be The Fool fawning over The Fling who flew?

Pacific Northwest: Summer 2021

By: Pat Phillips West

It's not easy when there is so, so much
to understand. I stand and look
at the heart-shaped leaves of the pole beans
that hang limp, baked to death
on the vine, chives curling in on themselves,
a futile attempt to shelter in place.

I don't have more pressing things to do
under this once-in-a-millennium heat dome.
I stand here, when to do so feels impossible,
and wish that one slow spoonful of water
could bring parched basil, red and green lettuce—
bleached beyond recognition—back to life.

Even the tired tender sage and rosemary rage,
*What is it with damnfool Earthlings
who don't fear consequences?*

I notice how heat-loving zinnias stand undaunted,
offering the quietest hint of hope.
A kaleidoscope of purple, pink, orange, and yellow.
Their blooms even more vibrant as temperatures edge
toward triple digits, again.

And so I stand for as long as I can, acknowledge
the heavy scent of the compost pile charged
with ripeness and oversweet rot.

Someday there may not be a morning after. All of this
is temporary, none of it guaranteed, every last bit precious,
even the crow with an injured foot that arrives
at the back fence, looking for a handout.

Good in time

By: Anna Hillary

The legs of the table, the cherry in wait.
Bees wax sweet, houses high to rise. I'm not a branch,
I'm not a leaf, I'm not the root or the tree.
Red eyes, red cheeks, dark red sight, and
sound the day: I'm not always what I want to be. As
easy porcelain stands straight and whisker reaches out,
My juice drips down and heavy hand strips, wraps,
sinks, deep into the ground. Daughter, shy—
A torch spreading across my earth to burn.
Thick heart thins, sudden teeth in skin, oiled lungs
and wings fanning. To spill takes time, having
no longer to wait for good or bad, we lie against extremes.
The stagnant summer must stand still,
brings everything in between.

Temporada de invierno/ Winter Season

By: Carolina Esses

Translated from the Spanish by Allison A. deFreese

The Mountain Fit in the Palm
of my hand. She only needed a name.
Through her, we should each follow our desires
our nature, my father corrected.
He, who has never seen snow,
walks ahead.

It's summer.
That luster between the stones
could be snow.

Vigil for a Winter Foal

By: Heather Hutcheson

I.

In the chill December darkness, we wait
for our shiny black mare to deliver a lanky

filly or a spindly colt, some limber specimen
bred to run, built tall, engineered agile.

We anticipate an athletic, living locomotive
to nearly spring from her round body.

II.

The four of us, shivering under starlight,
pretend amnesia about last year's nights

of false labors, more than a week sleeping
outside the corral before we could name

the immense noiselessness inside her. "Still
birth," mom whispered as dad quickly folded

the mass Into a tarp and headed into the trees
with a shovel, before we, his daughters, thought

to help. We, having already buried so many
loved creatures, understood the job was done.

III.

Tonight, an owl whooshes above the pasture
as we impatiently listen to the infinite

silence of the desert. On the edge of sleep,
about to hear the whispering stars, after

eleven months, at last, a colt hurtles
into the yard, the firmament's brightest

star, illuminating the whole valley, lighting
something in us for the rest of our lives.

“Mojave Rising”

By: Tierney Chapman

Raving across listless sands
grinding to the grimy beat
of the bass canyons,
I am
a fire dancer
burning
through the red haze

I am
a lizard king,
pulsating
idle grains
pushing up beige
to the red, yellow blue
skies, that swim flat above the mountain head

I—the dust devil of electric beats
recharge the clay mountains
raising them up,
to the world
with-out-end,
—I am
the desert night,
headbanging
to the cadance
of the half-moon,
dancing with violet bobcats
in peyote dreams

I live in black winds
vibrating succulents
with heavy drums,
celebrating in the fluorescence
of the rising sun,
I am the melody
rolling from peace pipes
smoking indigo children,
inhaling
colors of sound

my bones
rest inside a clay mound
thunder-stepping
to the beat,
at the base
of the bass canyons feet,
I am
the remedy
to the wasteland
of desert wallflowers.

Underbelly of a Woman

By: Sara Lynn Eastler

When was the last time you peered past your own reflection,
looked beneath the surface of her wrappings,
turned her over, smooth and round, where life teems below?

Have you rested in the hollow before the rise of hip, pressed
your lips to superficial fascia, the pulleys and spandex that hold
her shape, temple beat to pulse of blood banging out her rhythm?

And what do you know of her scars, intimate topography
of her life experience, the ones raised like football stitching,
others thin, moonlit lines where she stretched too far and waned?

What emotions has she stuffed inside, uncultivated harvest
of cumulonimbus stashed in canning jars at a seething boil to seal
the lids for long-term storage, labeled, and set in tidy shelf rows?

Have you seen the contents of the shipping containers she's buried
between bedrock and grave dirt in the backyard, the bow of steel
pounded by the missing voices of her sisters, daughters, friends?

When were you last brave enough to descend her basement stairs,
witness the inner demons she chains to the wall with enough slack to lie
on the single mattress, smeared with her type-O-positive contempt?

The belly is the birthplace of her deep-seated intuition, source
of her sacred self-preservation and instinct, the voice that sings
and belongs to every woman, resonates through every woman's cells.

Turn her over, shine the floodlights on her underbelly, apply
balm to the scars, strengthen the supports that hold her together,
release the pantry jars, track the women who disappeared, unchain
her victimhood, and trap the hunters who prey on her kind.

On our first date

By: Andreea Ceplinski

I tell you how suicidal ideation
once acted upon
becomes a superpower.

It's almost July:
the air still smells like peaches
and bare feet have never swung so freely

over the edge of the pier.
You stare back and joke
that you're a little afraid of me

but neither of us laughs.
I tell you it's not me,
it's whatever darkness inside you.

We throw quarters and watch
bioluminescence trail
like deep-sea comets.

I know you're not afraid
of your own darkness,
but only that you know

I'm holding a light.

The editors tell me

By: Kalyani Bindu

The editors tell me the readers are not interested in matters of the heart.
Yet like a cat pulling at its primal sin,
the twisted limbs, the iris-ridden eyes, the neat near-crimson nape
covered in half-picked capillaries, the green sinuous veins leaking time,
all glorious reminders of corporeality,
I pick apart this corpse and label all that contained fluid.
I make drawings to label the waterways and the catchments that could have been,
until I no longer feel my periods leaking out of me,
which I refuse to catch in a pad, a tampon,
and instead leak into a hole in the ground.
I fill this brown hole with this neat near-crimson me, tugging at my innards,
weighing the right tender amount, silent like an extinguishing stream,
too shy to bubble and warn of its upcoming magical disappearance.
Evidence of me living, making fluid and collecting and remembering
until my skull no longer bends the way it does, in dreams,
where my corporeality is a hinge point to test the fabric that made the weaver.
When you are a specter, the flesh needs making and marking, and remembering.
The editors tell me the heart is not interesting.
Of course, it isn't.
I form words when I feel like speaking.

The 'heart' is what I have to keep forming to keep forming me.

To those with bodies:

digging a hole and placing your butt is what the action would look like,

To those without:

leaking fables and forming forms.

The readers will be delighted to meet the specter that grins

through a set of lavender-scented teeth once every blue moon

as the editors pry open the skeletal remains of their primal sins.

I write sky

By: David Colodney

lines under pulsating clouds
I write commuter trains & traffic
I write you
yet
I mistake every allegory about
you
even if your words splash a wall
like graffiti
I misread the seahorse
tattoo tucked
like a secret
behind your left ear
& your translucent
eyes that refract
like neon
ricocheting off skyscrapers
creating galaxies
from concrete
you write beaches
your fingers rake-scraping
poems into the sand
that wash with each wave
back into the water
you write shoreline stanzas
that rattle like seashells
in the wind
yet
you don't write
me

In Order of Appearance

Will Neuenfeldt studied English at Gustavus Adolphus College and his poems are published in *Capsule Stories*, *Months to Years*, and *Red Flag Poetry*. He lives in Cottage Grove, MN, home of the dude who played Steven Stifler in those American Pie movies and a house Teddy Roosevelt slept in.

Ken Kent lives in Sweden. He has a de Chirico perspective on all things considered.

Darren C. Demaree is the author of eighteen poetry collections, most recently “the luxury”, (*Glass Lyre*, January 2023). He is the recipient of an Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Award, the Louise Bogan Award from Trio House Press, and the Nancy Dew Taylor Award from *Emrys Journal*. He is the Editor-in-Chief of the *Best of the Net Anthology* and the Managing Editor of *Ovenbird Poetry*. He is currently living in Columbus, Ohio with his wife and children.

Mary Paulson’s writing has appeared in multiple publications, most recently in *DASH Literary Journal*, *The Pomegranate London*, *Amethyst Review*, *Sparks of The Pomegranate London*, *Vita Brevis’ ANTHOLOGY IV*, *Hare’s Paw* and *VAINE Magazine*. Her debut chapbook, *Paint the Window Open* was published by Kelsay Publishing in 2021. She lives in Naples, Florida.

George Burns was the owner of a small company in the semiconductor industry until he retired in 2008. He has been writing short stories and poetry for more than forty years.

His short stories and poems have appeared many literary magazines, including *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Cathexis Northwest Press*, *Duality Journal*, *One Sentence Poems*, *Passengers Journal*, *Verse Daily*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *The Comstock Review*, *The DMQ Review* and *The Massachusetts Review*.

In 2004, his poem, “Partly Heliotropic”, was the winner of the Robinson Jeffers Tor House Foundation Poetry Contest. “Like One Bird Wing” was a Poem of Special Merit in *Comstock Review’s* 2021 Muriel Craft Bailey Memorial Contest. His first book of poems, *If a Fish*, was recently published by *Cathexis Northwest Press*.

Carol Lynn Stevenson Grellas is a recent graduate of Vermont College of Fine Arts, MFA in Writing program She has authored seventeen poetry collections including six full-length manuscripts. In 2012 she won the Red Ochre Press Competition with her chapbook *Before I Go to Sleep*. In 2019 her chapbook *An Ode to Hope in the Midst of Pandemonium* was a finalist in the Eric Hoffer Book Awards and in 2021 her full-length collection *Alice in Ruby Slippers* was short-listed for the Eric Hoffer Grand Prize. She has served as the Editor-in-Chief for both the *Orchards Poetry Journal* and *Tule Review*.

Kelly Vance is a graduate student in Eastern Kentucky University’s MFA program in creative writing, the Bluegrass Writers Studio, where she received the Emerging Writers Award for poetry in 2021. In selecting Vance for this award, Jen Currin wrote, “Vance’s voice is at turns humorous, tender, elegiac.” In addition to writing poetry, Kelly has a passion for encouraging young poets and is the Chair of Kentucky State Poetry Society’s Annual Student Poetry Contest (2019-2023).

Shou Jie Eng is an architectural designer, researcher, and writer. He runs *Left Field Projects*, an art and design practice located in Hartford, CT. His writing has appeared in *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Softblow*, and *CARTHA*, and has been collected in anthologies as *New Singapore Poetries*, and *Ritual and Capital*. He teaches drawing and representational topics at the Rhode Island School of Design.

Hope Fischbach teaches by day and writes by night in the fine city of Knoxville, Tennessee. She holds a BA in English and Spanish from Lee University, and her work has appeared in *Grist*, *Southern Indiana Review*, *Cleaver Magazine*, and others.

Durell Carter is a writer and a teacher that lives in Oklahoma. He graduated from the University of Central Oklahoma with a graduate degree in English. He currently serves on the board of education for Red Dirty Poetry. He has work published in *Drunk Monkeys*, *petrichor*, *Fauxmoir*, and others. You can find more of his work on his website durellcarter.org.

Jason Gabbert participates with words (those things that stir and explore the vast range of what it is to “be”) with simple sentences.

Hannah Cole (she/her) is a minimalist fiction writer based in Tennessee. She studied illustration at Memphis College of Art and later helped found Memphis Writer’s Group, a local workshopping collective. You can read more of her work at hannahcole.substack.com, and reach her at hannah@memphiswriters.org.

A. Pikovsky is a poet living in Philly who is the child of Jewish Soviet immigrants. Her work has appeared in *Cathexis NorthWest Press*, *Passengers Press*, *High Shelf Press*, *Wild Roof Journal*, *Not Very Quiet*, *waxing & waning*, among others. A. Pikovsky is a Poetry MFA Candidate at Temple University where she also works as the Director of Development for the Engineering College. She is very small but pushes to make a big impact.

Lori Starling is an author, academic, and poet. They have their MFA in Creative Writing, as well as a BA in English & Creative Writing with various associate degrees. Their past writing can be seen in places, such as *One Green Planet*, *ZOLA Magazine*, *Bookstr.com*, *Life in 10 Minutes Lit Magazine*, *The Daily Drunk*, *WriteNow Literary Magazine*, *Beyond Queer Words: A Collection of Poems*, and *MAW Poetry Magazine*, along with their other writing shenanigans. Their first children’s book, *Toby Wears a Tutu*, was selected for review by *Publisher’s Weekly* and debuted in January 2021.

Hunter Hazelton is the author of the chapbook “I Never Understood Religion Until I Learned Your Name” (2021). Writing from the age of six, his poems have appeared in *Best New Poets*, *Scribendi Magazine*, and *Tolsun Books*. Currently, he teaches in Phoenix, Arizona.

Terry Jude Miller is a Pushcart Prize-nominated poet from Houston. He received the 2018 Catherine Case Lubbe Manuscript Prize for his book, *The Drawn Cat’s Dream*. His work has been published in the *Southern Poetry Anthology*, *The Lily Poetry Review*, *The Comstock Review*, and *The Oakland Review* and in scores of other publications.

Donald Guadagni is an international educator, author, and writer currently involved with Human Rights Defender research and projects. His publication work includes human rights, fiction, non-fiction, poetry, prose, myth, science fiction, fantasy, humor, academic, romance, humor, true crime, children stories, internationally published photography and his artwork.

Breanna Watkins is a teenager who has been writing poetry for a few years now.

Helen Gu is a writer in California. She is a second-generation Chinese-American who is trying to find her own voice in the world through poetry. She writes about identity, grief, love, and the cosmos. She has been recognized by the Alliance for Young Artists and Writers.

Sarah Johnnes was raised near New York City and currently resides in Eugene, Oregon with a twenty-four toed, seventeen-pound, cross-eyed cat. She has a BA in Art History from the University of Arizona. As an emerging poet, Sarah applies her photographic eye bringing visual sensibilities to her poetry. She is focused on capturing what is not typically seen, finding connection, beauty, and humor in common everyday moments — even those that reflect decay, pain or taboo subjects.

Elizabeth Ambos writes and lives in Washington, DC. She has inhabited multiple careers as a scientist, teacher, and administrator in higher education-affiliated organizations. An Academy of American Poets prize winner as an undergraduate, she has published in *Spillway* and *Poet Magazine*. A long time ago. Now poetry has coming calling again.

Raymond Hoffman has a background in political science and Southeast Asian Studies. He has taught in China for many years and currently is a fifth grade teacher in the Midwest. Poetry writing has been used by him as a coping mechanism for bipolar disorder for over a decade now. Sylvia Plath has always been a great source of inspiration, as has been Albert Camus. He has previously been published in the *Humans of the World* literary blog and *Beyond Words Literacy Magazine*.

George Perreault's fifth full-length collection, *lie down as you were born*, is forthcoming in summer 2023.

Dick Altman writes in the high, thin, magical air of Santa Fe, NM, where, at 7,000 feet, reality and imagination often blur. He is published in *Santa Fe Literary Review*, *American Journal of Poetry*, *Fredericksburg Literary Review*, *Foliage Oak*, *Blue Line*, *Landing Zone*, *Cathexis*, *Humana Obscura*, *Haunted Waters Press*, *Split Rock Review*, *The Ravens Perch*, *Beyond Words*, *New Verse News*, *Wingless Dreamer*, *BlueLine*, *Sky Island Journal* and others here and abroad. A Pushcart Prize nominee and poetry winner of Santa Fe New Mexican's annual literary competition, he has in progress two collections of some 150 published poems. His work has been selected for the forthcoming first volume of *The New Mexico Anthology of Poetry*, to be published by the New Mexico Museum Press.

Kyle Brogmus is a writer and performer. He co-wrote the play *Flesh and Blood* and is currently working on a nonfiction philosophical/theological book inspired by the writings of E.M. Cioran. When he's not writing poetry he's thinking about writing poetry.

Blake Auden is a poet and author based in Brighton, UK. He has been featured in *Forbes*, *Metro*, *The Bookseller*, *Book Riot*, *The Economic Times*, *Sussex Life*, *Coast Magazine*, *The Mirror* and scores of others. He is a winner of the *Button Poetry Short Form Prize*, and the judge for the *The Moth 2023 Poetry Prize*.
<https://www.blakeauden.com>
<https://www.instagram.com/blakeaudenpoetry/>

Siobhan Casey is an aspiring artist whose poetry has appeared in *Weave Magazine*, *Shadyside Review*, and *Coal Hill Review*. She has worked as an editor for the *Fourth River* and earned her MFA from Chatham University in 2011. Her chapbook, *Three Fourths of a Dream*, was published in 2016. She is currently completing an inclusive elementary education degree. She hopes to grow a tiny farm of orchids and loves chasing her zany dog and daughter up and down the southern coast of Boston.

Scott Stolnack has published in a wide range of forms, including science fiction, travel and adventure writing, scientific reports and peer-reviewed research, poetry, and literary fiction. His poetry has appeared in *Cascadia Rising Review*, *Prometheus Dreaming*, and elsewhere. His short plays have been produced in the US and UK. Between 2008 and 2019, he was a senior biologist coordinating recovery of endangered salmon in the Seattle area.

Emma McNamara is a 21-year-old national award-winning writer from Hopkinton, Massachusetts. Her work has appeared in publications worldwide such as *Wild Roof Journal*, *Beyond Words*, *Eunoia Review*, *Scholastic Art and Writing*, and *Defenestration*. Emma's passions include mental health awareness, disability advocacy, and LGBTQ+ issues. She's been an editorial board member at *Beyond Queer Words* since March 2021. Follow her on Instagram @author_emma.

Pat Phillips West's work appears in various journals including: *The Inquisitive Eater*, *New School Food*, *Haunted Waters Press*, *San Pedro River Review*, and elsewhere. She has received multiple *Best of the Net* and *Pushcart Prize* nominations.

Anna is an educator and emerging writer. She loves humid summers, snowy winters, and calls both Buenos Aires, Argentina and La Crosse, Wisconsin home.

Poet's Bio: Writer and journalist Carolina Esses (Buenos Aires, Argentina) has published several books of poems, including *Versiones del paraíso/Variations on Paradise* (Del Dock, 2016) and *Temporada de invierno/Winter Season* (Bajo la luna, 2009, translation by Allison A. deFreese forthcoming by Entre Ríos Books, Seattle, in late 2023). Her poems have previously been translated into French and have appeared in the anthology *Poésie récente d'Argentine, une anthologie possible/Recent Poetry from Argentina: a Possible Anthology*, published by Editorial Reffet de Lettres. A literary critic for *La Nación*, Argentina's leading daily paper, she is also the author of several novels.

Translator's Bio: Poet and literary translator Allison A. deFreese (she/her/ella) is based in the Pacific Northwest. Her translations of Carolina Esses's previous work appear in *Bellingham Review*, *Clackamas Literary Review*, *Eunoia Review*, *Mantis*, and *Rain Magazine*. Allison's recent literary translations include *Karla Marrufo's Flame Trees in May* (Dalkey Archive Press and Deep Vellum Books, 2023). She is author of *The Night With James Dean and Other Prose Poems* (Cathexis Northwest Press, 2022).

A professor of English in Sacramento, Heather Hutcheson is the founding editor of the *Cosumnes River Journal*. She spends most summers teaching English in Oaxaca, Mexico. Please visit HeatherHutcheson.com for more information.

Tierney Chapman is an emerging Appalachian poet, and a winner of the 2023 West Virginia Writers Competition. A former paralegal for the Legal Aid of WV, Tierney holds degrees in both Paralegal Studies and English/Professional Writing. She currently takes classes with the Gotham Writers Workshop of NYC, and is an author of a growing social media page, *Poetry For Us*.

Sara Lynn Eastler is a writer in Midcoast Maine where she dutifully serves her feline overlord and a flock of treat-loving chickens. Her recent work examines society's changing views of women over time and can be found in *Stanza*. She's an active member of the Maine Writers & Publishers Alliance and Maine Poets Society.

Andreea Ceplinschi is a Romanian immigrant writer, waitress, and kitchen troll. She writes poetry, fiction, and creative non-fiction. Some of her writing has been published in *86logic*, *Solstice Magazine*, *The Blood Pudding*, *Cathexis Northwest Press*, *Hare's Paw Literary Journal*, *Into the Void*, *Prometheus Dreaming*, and elsewhere. When not writing for herself, she acts as the poetry editor for *Passengers Journal*.

Kalyani Bindu is an Indian writer and researcher. *Two Moviegoers* was her first poetry collection. Her poems and essays have appeared in *Fauxmoir*, *45th Parallel*, *Better than Starbucks*, *Half Empty Magazine*, *the Indian Express*, *New Asian Writing*, *Guftugu*, and others. She was a poetry editor at *Variant Literature Journal*. During her time as a columnist for *White Crow Art Daily*, she wrote articles revolving around socio-cultural themes. Check out www.kalyani-bindu.com to read her works.

David Colodney is a poet living in Boynton Beach, Florida. He is author of the chapbook, *Mimeograph*, and his poetry has or will appear in journals including *rust + moth*, *South Carolina Review*, and *Door = Jar*. A two-time Pushcart nominee, David has written for the *Miami Herald* and the *Tampa Tribune* and currently serves as an associate editor of *South Florida Poetry Journal*.