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Table of Contents

David Lynch Has Died 5
Adam Vanhee
EQUATORIAL 6
Julie Benesh
Assimilation 8
Emma Alexis Woodard
Ketchup Bottle 11
Karin Henrikson
Vilnius Trilogy 12
Lina Buividavičiūtė
napalm on my hands 15
Leelah Holmes
construct 17
debora Ewing
Dead Grass 19
Eleanor Krauss
Loving a Pavlov Dog 21
Rachel Whalen
PTSD 23
Bri Nerud
Death of a Friendship 24
Matthew Feinstein
Lesbos Melodrama 26
Brittany Richter
Holy By No Other Name 29
Clover V. Gislason
Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Coconut as a Foreigner Living in Thailand 30
Anna Buynova
The Desert Of The Skull-God 33
Yucheng Tao
What My Soul Knows, I Cannot Remember 34
Renee Mies
Sweep the floor 36
Anna Nikoula

Finis Fraternitatis 39
Matt Pasca
Dazzle of Dementia 41
Rick Adang
Falling 43
Raymond Hoffman
Streetlamp 45
Ayush Dadgale
Litany Redux 46
Laura Iodice
The Stars and Who They Leave Behind 49
Benjamin Lloyd
River Dogs 50
Nicole Bagley
The Paradox / New York City 52
Meredith Aristone
Of the poor little baby F.D.R. 55
Eric McNeill Rummelhoff
Always the Line, or a Poem Written to Sleep 59
Grace Nunamaker
HEAT 63
Benjamin Green
Something about Pennsylvania & the Holy Word 65
Haley Green
echos to nantong 66
Ruisi He
Where Is My Id? 69
Maya Dally
"Shady Valley, Tennessee" 71
William Rieppe Moore
Unappreciated 72
Katerina Canyon
Hold, Please 75
William Wang
What To Do When No One Loves You 76
Hallie Havican

David Lynch Has Died

By: Adam Vanhee

You're the secret muse, one who feels things
the very same way that little old I do.

While our eyes meet across cups of bitter coffee
only David Lynch could capture the sparks that fly.

There was a time that spark could send me
on endless quests to reach your bed,

Undress your shame and meld into me,
the moment we long for comes, if only in dreaming.

Put me in a coma, so I can dream that way of being,
living in a world with your naked truths.

But then in another moment I remember David Lynch has died.
Those white picket fences surrendered to the coughs.

And I won't press my luck,
while still reaching for your cock,
damn, that's fine.

EQUATORIAL

By: Julie Benesh

On a tropical trip with my estranged husband
because why not: the tickets were bought,
it cut him off from his other woman,
and Illinois winter improves no one's mood

Red Wine played, but I wasn't drunk that night
just weeping in rational self-pity in the ladies' room

stall, devastated when the security guard
asked if I was OK because he didn't care,
and what good was it to be young, in love,

and rich enough, by association, at least, to be at a resort
where no one loved me back, one man away from home-

lessness, my marriage a waning chink of light
between two vast dark eternities?

I knew where I was going: nowhere good; all nuance
obscured by honeymooners in sarongs and slick singles

looking to change their luck. No place
for me; even the Divorce Support Groups
back home were for parents, just like the Grief

ones I'd tried when my mother died; my trivial tragedies,
seasoned with shame, were no one's cause but my own.

I'd feel like that again; don't think I wouldn't.

But figure and ground transpose a till aerates the earth
something sinks then lifts with the tide. Pity becomes sorrow
sorry returns as empathy first for oneself then for the world
and all its pitiless merciful wounded and wounds.

Assimilation

By: Emma Alexis Woodard

My hair was long and thick and coarse.
It sat in braids.
It stayed restrained.
It stayed down and made itself small.

It was thinned.
It was straightened for length,
perfumed,
colored.
No—not that color!

There are wrong colors?
Iron out my kinks,
tear the knots from the source.
Never fix—
simply change,
and change,
and alter.

A half step closer with a small root job,
a touch-up.
Make me look better.
Make me look pretty.
Make me acceptable,
passable,
palatable.

Shape me, gel me down,
stay in the place you need me to be in.

I wish I knew how I let it all get so long.
I know, I know—
I did it wrong.

Again, it's a cut,
a prod,
a dye,
a curl—
not those curls—soft waves!
Whiter brighter curls.

Strip the dull locks to bring the light,
wear colors to tint the water in your eyes.

The green is not yours.
That brown and tan not either.

Be whiter.
Be brighter.
Be straighter.
Be nicer.
Be more ladylike.

Speak when spoken to;
let social graces bury your screams for comfort.

Ketchup Bottle

By: Karin Henrikson

An empty ketchup bottle sits in my refrigerator,
A giant plastic vessel
Taking up space meant for the future.
It's been empty and unopened for
Longer than I can remember.
When you gave it to me,
It was full of ketchup,
Used every Independence Day, every Labor Day.
I see only a drop of condensation inside now,
Left over from the cleaning, perhaps.
Or is it my tear?
Perfectly preserved
Inside a bottle that has guarded my heart
Against the absence of you.
In it I keep my memories,
My hopes and dreams that can never be,
My prize for living without you.
I hold the bottle,
Examining the slightly faded, peeling label.
Time has taken its toll.
Another tear escapes.
As it rolls down the side,
For a second, I watch the two tears
Become one.
Quickly I take the bottle
And hurl it into the big, blue bin,
Leaving it to be melted back
With my heart,
Then recreated and filled up again.

Vilnius Trilogy

By: Lina Buividavičiūtė

Dedicated to Tove Ditlevsen

We are different, but sometimes our mornings are a time of hope,
And the days are a disaster. Homes are sometimes only in paper –
Unhappy mothers, each unhappy in her own way.
Can a girl be comforted by the knowledge that all this is
A classic, long since described in novels?
I often hear the phrase that the best
Poems are written in the mind. But can a girl be
Comforted by the knowledge that next to the kitchen
And children's butts she can write in her mind late at night,
A lifetime? No, it can't be enough, it won't be enough.

It is okey not to want more children, it is okey to make a firm decision
Lying on your boyfriend's doctor's table – look: the cold glares
Chromium – what sterile, distant starlight!

I don't know if we can talk about writing as
About the altar on which we sacrifice relationships, family,
Health, peace of mind? Can a girl be comforted by knowing,
That she will always be the accused no matter what would she do?

The void is sweet, the void cuts like a cobra, it
Sweet as drugged milk and blood, mingled
In the spout of a malarial mosquito.
There's poison coursing through your veins, little Van
Gog, you only need one ear to hear
All over the world, and there's no need for a line about
The grief, the moans of unborn children.

You are my consolation, my sweet excuse,
Even though I am not Sylvia, I can write as myself.

napalm on my hands

By: Leelah Holmes

big fish? fry pan. mind bubbling
like hot oil; i've got a high smoke point.
burnt my whole hand taking bacon
out the oven, blistered like a rope burn,
pink bandaids on my napalm,
it was a winter of hand injuries.
wrap, wrap, wrap, trying to package
fingers for sale, tap on the beige tape,
look on the beige walls. water at the
bedside, dipping my raw wounds.
in my room? in our room, shared it,
for so long, ate it, the drywall.
napalm on my hands? on my hands?
on my hands a killing.

construct

By: debora Ewing

blanket of leaves firecrackers blues
a raw vibration of vacuum tubes
& a quiet troubadour
outside his dancer's window

my chess set of collected things
the pieces have no flesh or touch or taste
if a constructed scent cloys to each one
you'd smell like centuries

does a disc replicate your skin
is phantosmia a lie? a memory
or is the measure of what's real
my neurons writing your shape

indelibly

on the back of an envelope

Dead Grass

By: Eleanor Krauss

Do you burn?
Your mile long stare
And her honeysuckle eyes.
The sound of the banjo
And running over dead grass.
Does it hurt?
The smell of paint on the wall
And the realization that she's gone.
How do you stand it?
Do you think about her when the singing starts?
Mouth numb,
head down.
Did you ask the moon to tell you about her?
Did she have nice things to say?
Do you understand why I'm asking this?
A merry go round of dead curiosities.
Does it make you miss her?

Loving a Pavlov Dog

By: Rachel Whalen

Nothing is simple, but some things
are governed by rule: taxes
and death, Marx's use value, Newton, apple, we all
fall down. Nothing is simple, and I have long hoped
to suffer the right suffering, to bear a wild
truth (Socrates' wit; Joan
bucking at the earthworks; the one the winged
beast bends over and says you you you you). Nothing
is simple. That summer I carried the dog
water just so I
could own something, just to make
him mine. I thought
I am small king. I thought none of it
is my fault. And table-
spoon by tablespoon
he drank.

PTSD

By: Bri Nerud

I bring with me
years of shrinking
skin buried
in the salt of a race i do not remember
winning

the ships
i sank
at your command
my heart kicking and screaming
under feet unburdened by compassion

in waking light i watch these ghosts
wander
softly shifting
hissing cautions to every small liberation
to every new wonder

my knees are no longer raw
from an undeserving altar
I run my fingertips over
scabbed mountains
a reminder

digging holes between
my grains of hair
these small graves
i tend to with an unrecognizable care
the truth is

i just want to bring
my dead everywhere

Death of a Friendship

By: Matthew Feinstein

We made our home in sitcoms & inside jokes
before life left us to dry-heave
in the bowels of adulthood.

Gone the days I'd drive you with flames
in your head, press a wet rag
to your pineal gland,
ask, are you burning? *Do you need me stay?*
& you'd say yes. Again, I'd ask. Again, yes.
& we'd do this question-answer dance
for hours
until your room no longer your room
but some bunker in hell
where even Lucifer
could not find us.

Gone the days I'd saw off my limbs
before letting you sleep blanket-less
at the bus stop with no streetlamp
for miles—no people for miles—
except for decayed men
praying to a false god like religion
is a magic trick.

& the strangle. God's glorious strangle
of your neck
because it knew you needed something
to touch you.

The September we stopped talking,
I befriended my upstairs neighbor.
A traumatized girl from Russia's
rough maw.

After screaming
with her boyfriend,
she'd sit on my patio, tell me how dogs
eat teens in Moscow
because it's negative degrees
& they're starving
& they're animals
like us.

& when she marveled at the feral cats
roaming the streets of Long Beach,
how at night,
you can hear the yowls
& the fighting & the death,

I saw in her every broken thing
I could not fix.

I saw you.

Lesbos Melodrama

By: Brittany Richter

An anguished recalling,
of my final words,
apologizing for your depravity,
companion to your savage nature.
My autobiographical eulogy, signed in blood.

A winged ache,
escaped from my mouth,
barrelling at your ear,
in opposition to my command.

A feral plea,
in covenant with those
who've dealt in,
affliction of the heart.
What contemptuous atrocities,
abandoned upon myself.

Shards of your warped condition,
sever my limbs.
Dangling -
blood coagulating with damnation.

A sorrowful scream for Aphrodite,
insisting she enact a God-like treaty of our souls.
Hyperventilating your name, on all fours,
collapsing into your indisputable death.

Not death of your skin and organs,
but death - one of the many
fictional protagonists,
you morph into.
A cliche at best.

You declare innocence,
an embodiment of your narcissism strangles our oath.
Debilitated by your settled belief of,
appropriate relationships.

Conformed to a man,
your entombment inflicted by a woman.
Death gazed - astonished,
grossly intrigued.

A devilish courier,
Charon, signals all aboard.

The murky river,

a pulsing vein into Hades.
Fogged in darkness,
the river dissolves, as flames approach
our voices, still heard echoing,
humming our last hymn,
in homage of our ghosts.

Holy By No Other Name

By: Clover V. Gislason

we are all born in blood
brothers in black
they held my hands
they knew fear, evil
I am evil by another name
I ran from the burning church
by the light of the hellfire I walk
a damned beast with no master
down the narrow path I found it
I knocked, screamed, begged
but heaven never opened her gates
the road to heaven is empty
bodies piled at the gates
to crawl over them into heaven
I see them now, the holy ones
those brave enough to speak, rebuke me
even in death, man knows only hatred

I wasn't born pure
they prayed for me
blessed my corrupted soul
they mourned the child who wasn't
but I fixed everything, changed myself
I wonder this world
searching for heaven
but earth is no place for a lamb
I found the pearly gates, built for those like me
I prayed to every saint to open the doors
I was born only to be turned away
it is my right
lambs are meant for the slaughter
I prayed to get to heaven, where I belong but
the saints ignored me, they didn't open the gates
I forgive them
after all they are pure and good like me

Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Coconut as a Foreigner Living in Thailand

By: Anna Buynova

I
It was summer all winter.
Nostrils filled with vapor and heat.
A coconut sat on my kitchen counter,
unopened.

II
My son taught me that coconut is maprao.
I know twenty Thai words.
The rest is birdsong.

III
At the sight of a Thai woman
slicing a coconut open with a crunch
even Jiro Ono
would cry out in delight.

IV
When I stab a coconut
to open its sweetwater,
the moist wood
just explodes in splinters.

V
I learned to press palms together
and bow my head in greeting.
I learned to do it with one hand too
when the other is holding a coconut
in a plastic bag.

VI
Which is more tragic:
not knowing where we came from,
or where we are?
Scraping out the last of coconut meat,
or just before?

VII
A piece of coconut candy
stuck to his molar,
stayed for four minutes,
then dissolved.
He could now taste the elusiveness
of joy.

VIII
A dry coconut
lay on freshly cut grass.
It was part of an old metaphor.

IX
A coconut tree stood black
against the sunset.
Among its fluttering leaflets I could discern
the needs of my soul.

X
He drove under coconut trees
doused in cologne.
Once, he passed a Thai on a moped,
four children in his metal sidecar.
Everyone smiled.

XI
I know creamy clam chowder
and sweet borsch.
But I also know that coconut curry
could feed me for months.

XII
A pickup full of young coconuts
crawled down the main road.
Behind, it left
not a single fallen fruit.

XIII
Monsoon rains pummeled the darkness.
Above my window, a coconut trembled.
I could not see it, but I knew.
Like I knew my mom was asleep
in another country.

(After Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird by Wallace Stevens)

The Desert Of The Skull-God

By: Yucheng Tao

In the dry night — bodies, everywhere.
The Skull-God brings fireballs
like falling suns. People,
one by one they sink into yellow sand
turning into crimson dust.

My scream cuts
through the vast silence of the heart,
as the wind roars
fiercely across the dunes.

Some lie frozen,
like the Pope in Bacon's canvas,
slightly twisted in trenches
dark as graves.

My fragile skin
almost burns from flames.
My eyes
almost blinded by gas-kisses.

The Skull-God harvests skulls
from both sides, for his game.
This is war.

When men gaze at bees and blossoms.
When hatred subsides, the Skull-God
will vanish and the desert will no longer
trail long, bloody tails like a lizard,
nor will the Skull-God flash
a grim smile on the barren stage.
I drag my heavy gun,

turn to my comrade, then say:
"Peace is the poison that the Skull-God fears."

What My Soul Knows, I Cannot Remember

By: Renee Mies

There is something just beyond the edge—
a whisper in the bones,
a weight in the blood,
a door left ajar
in a house I have never entered.

My soul knows the language of the wind,
the names of stars long gone dim,
the scent of rain on forgotten earth
where once I stood,
barefoot and unafraid.

It remembers hands I have never held,
voices lost to silence,
promises made in lifetimes I do not recall,
but feel—soft, insistent—
like a dream dissolving at dawn.

My soul has danced in rooms
my body has never seen,
wept for loves my mind has never met,
prayed in temples turned to dust,
sung songs the world has long since buried.

Something calls from the space
between heartbeats,
a knowing without words,
a story unfinished,
a thread waiting to be pulled.

I do not remember,
but my soul does—
and it is waiting for me to listen.

Sweep the floor

By: Anna Nikoula

rest your arms on kitchen table
stripped of white
nails scrape wood core
been there since
Mama read fables
every night before shuteye

gap between tiles and little toes was wide
now, legs do not dangle anymore
pressed hard into floor
made up of chessboard squares
stained pink with beetroot
years of borscht splatters
I hate and love
looking right at her
staring into simmering red
not like when Tato left the stove on
and fled

unsettled black dust
always comes back to him, it must

We're lucky to have a home, you say
but to me, it's just a house
a difference you don't seem to understand
and I wish you'd rip it apart

instead, you ask me to sweep, and I start
knowing you'll soften
dreaming of a chestnut tree

like those in Kyiv
meant to outlive you and me
but that was before
before skies rained rockets
and chestnuts fell to floor

every day is hard for you
I know it, I know
this is your first life, too

I step closer

Anna, you're missing spots

your back still turned
the soup won't burn

but what about you?

Finis Fraternitatis

By: Matt Pasca

On Friday, I wished you a happy 49th
On Saturday, we cut our losses, wished

each other well & pushed the pickup
of our brotherhood into the pond

I am sorry I do not think of you
Sorry we loved but rarely liked

Even our best pricked like plexiglass—
a stranger's shirt in the laundry pile

I am sorry I took root in the heart of a mountain
in the heart of a world of moss & red-cliff ripple

You were seldom kind &
I ran out of shields

We are a sick man's casualty
a picturesque ruin on the coast

I wish you stretched canvases, full
tubes of phthalo blue, strong tea

the right amount of lime in your guac
& a Jasper Johns to hang over the hole I left

I wish you clocks drained of tedium
full passports & no curiosity about my passage

May your heart's pantry be stocked
with friends & love, a healthy son

every good thing but me

Dazzle of Dementia

By: Rick Adang
(for Pattie Leo Krohn)

Bernadette the aging sage
took her pet turtle
to visit the ducklings
at the golf course pond.
She read random passages
from her iconoclast's bible
and embraced all of the feeble.
Overwhelmed
she wandered in the desert
for forty years
or forty days
or forty hours
(time so unhinged)
and lay down with the slithering ones
until the hand of God
and a police helicopter
brought Norman
her mountain of a husband
to the rescue.
As he guided her home
she rested her sun-baked head
on his shoulder and whispered
pleasure now memory later.

Falling

By: Raymond Hoffman

Prince got his head cut off
Stuck his head out like a dog to catch the wind
Ego a syringe straight to the veins
Lost his crown when he placed his mouth on life's exhaust
Pig in hand to be dropped off again
Through the sand to the pit
Abrasion of clawing at the walls
Karma a lotus as a watchtower peeking around
Legs ricochet at the edge of a diving board
Perpetually falling
As I get lost
As confetti
As napalm

Streetlamp

By: Ayush Dadgale

You've seen the hole in my coat sleeve,
my breath a frayed hymn in the cold.
Moths orbit your fractured glass—
like the night I laughed here, wine-soft,
or wept when the phone went dead,
my shadow dissolving where your light bled.

Summer or storm, you hold your ground,
gilding gum wrappers, unpaid bills,
the ache I stuff deep in my pockets.
That chip in your dome? March's hail
tried to break you. I swore you'd die—
but you hum, steady as my mother's sigh.

We don't speak. Still, you know the ache
of glancing back, the bus pulling away,
how some things stay, though rusted through,
like your light, and the things I never say.

Litany Redux

By: Laura Iodice

You were our bread our butter.
The empty glass and the milk.

You were our bread and our butter.
The empty glass and the milk.
You were the bugle that woke us at dawn.
And the shuttered blinds at dusk.
You were a starchily pressed uniform
Strutting about on an eagle's wings.

However, you were not the iron or the board,
The clothesline in the yard
Or the coffee pot percolating in the kitchen.
And you were certainly not the fresh scent of bakery buns.
There is just no way you were the fresh scent of bakery buns.

It is possible that you were the stolen kiss on the stairway,
Maybe even the banging pots on New Years Eve,
But you were not even close
To being the Valentine perched on my mother's pillow.

And a quick look at your lonesome letters will show
That you were neither the scent of Musk
Nor the flashpoint on my mother's sheets.
It might interest you to know,
Speaking of catastrophic imagery
That I am the egg you left with the hen.

I also happen to be the Transylvanian gypsy,
The tired Italian in steerage
And the first to dust both from my feet.

I am also the shovel and the dirt
That buried your ashes.
But don't worry, I'm not your bread and your butter.
And you are still not my bread and my butter.
You will never be my bread and my butter,
Not to mention the empty glass and – certainly - the milk.

The Stars and Who They Leave Behind

By: Benjamin Lloyd

It is not clouds but stars,
Which cry and bring rain.
For it is in them, shining afar,
I see the remnants of your pain.
And it is not for me that they cry
But you, who, on that day,
in the moment he died,
Slept, with no goodbye to say.
And it shan't be him to see,
If they make up their mind,
And choose to shine on me,
But you, Dear Mother,
whom he left behind.

River Dogs

By: Nicole Bagley

Victoria says *it's a*
doggy dog world.
I go to correct her,
but March taps me
on the shoulder

and points to
the river, the skyline
making watercolors
while we tap ash at
a picnic table.

So many have loved
here, carved a part of life
behind them in the crevices
where we sit. I know
Kate and *Paul* and *Terry*

like we are them; me,
Mateo, and Victoria.
Dirt careening to our
beat up Nikes, the
Earth's embrace.

Rocks walk on water,
the small children on
the bank laugh, I laugh
at all the years—
where do they flow?

Mateo is explaining
quantum physics and
Victoria studies the
stars, how we're all
made of them

and I think this is what
it looks like, everything
I've ever wished for,
because two terriers
run by an old couple,

the spotted one stops
to see what we see—
the sky, the water,
the names, the rocks,
the dirt, the years.

The whole time his
brother waits, waits
and runs back to him.
They'll catch up
eventually.

Everything humane
is not human. I smile,
March at my lips
now.

The Paradox / New York City

By: Meredith Aristone

If I ever go into spiritual psychosis
Just know it's not you, it's the vanity plate
That I saw on my way home from being drunk and hopeless
Though you make me see God in a plethora of ways

I've always been a girl of mad superstition
Flip the lucky / pour the salt / burn the paper and pray
Divine timing, poetic precision
It wasn't an accident that I'm this way
For all the hurt that I grew out of
Screaming matches with the Harlem rain
Coors light in the bathtub
Wet matches on the dirty pavement
Crying on the train
Blue shadow on my face at 3 am

Too tired to stand, imbibing a crumb cake in bed
Before I drift off to a more sacred place
With my one night stand tracing circles on my shoulder
Knowing in the morning we're gonna part ways
Infinity in my abdomen

Existentialist rosè
I almost couldn't fathom it
The life of a tweaker
Personal movie theater
I was unhinged and novelistic

No one does it quite like me
Shit faced through the Ivy League
Like a triptych
So cryptic and torn in three

And now I'm praying at the gym
I miss the simplicity of the mountains
dreaming like I'm
beneath you behind the foliage on the water fountain
And the world's a sculpture garden
Kissing feels like dying
You're antique yet you're brand new
And I'll never stop trying
These days I'm always guilty
An amalgamation of my worst habits
I ditch one for the other
90 days and a key chain rabbit
So I let live and I let die and I lost you for a minute
Got a stupid jack-o'-lantern tatted since I abandoned sinning

But I didn't, not for real, turns out that I'm still in it
I put something down and I swear that I quit it
But you're so good at making me finish
Like our love
It's a paradox
But you're so hot
Telling me you're gonna remind me who I belong to

keep a rosary on the dash, sure hope i stay awake
getting kinda low on cash, spirits high as the stakes
driving by motels at the shore, places we never stayed
loving you was torture but there was poetry splayed
in the cracks
eating crabs by the bay on your day off from waiting tables
your beat up car had a lot of heart
u write about me like im a villain
but I love a good fable
smoking indoors in Philly
eating pasta watching cable

Of the poor ~~little~~ baby F.D.R.

By: Eric McNeill Rummelhoff

After Bertolt Brecht

1

I, fatty dimwit ratslayer, come from Silicon Valley.
My mother drug me into the foothills
While I was a parasite in her belly curled. And the heat
Of the chaparral will be with me to my death.

2

On Umunhum I'm at home. Always
Regaled with places of refuge (Haraway 2015):
Bags, and baskets, and a flask (Le Guin 1986).
Sincere and frenetic and sad to the end.

3

I am cold with people I meet.
I wear colorful cloths while they wear black
I say: They be wonderful, strange lockboxes
And I say: No matter, I will open my heart.

4

Above me in the vacant apartments live
Three old, retired pensioners.
I stare them down, heated, and say to them
In me you have one on which to build.

5

At night I meet with women and
We gossip about the new crushes we have
They offer to help clean up after dinner
And say: See its better with us. And I ask: With whom?

6

Mornings in the fog the gasoline in the fresh air
Intoxicates their epiphytes who whine about school.
At this time, I brew some Joe, breathe deeply in,
And hop, skip, and prance to the tram.

7

We convene, as a community,
In the woods, that we reckon fragile.
(Just so we made El Gran Chaco meek
And the rainfall acidic on seven continents).

8

From this slash and burn comes
A total stillness that confronts us
As the planet happily becomes our mirror and fills.
We know that our debts continue.

9

For the kindred coming, I will bitterly leave
My dystopia out of a love as
I, fatty dimwit ratslayer, had done to my mother
Before under the peak of Umunhum.

Always the Line, or a Poem Written to Sleep

By: Grace Nunamaker

You told me to let the poem take up space.

so I do.

This thirstness,
stone encoded.

From the recoming,
all denied sounds form.

Appear.

Pure stone,
This great calcification we plead the trees to petrify!

Naught but a formed eye-trick,
that death himself plays hands of bleached
tongues.

Come,
it was. rosy syllables
in water together light.

Better ink inked,
better dedication.

To see the plane that syntax shakes.

Undeclared, it is always unobstructed.
Unto language made.
Owed?
A return to you,
though.

Our gaping need warmly encircles
speech.

HEAT

By: Benjamin Green

The garden statue—
I think it *was* a Buddha—
Flakes, crumbles
And wears a skirt
Of lichen.

The sage bears a spike
Of purple;
The prickly pear offers a bowl
Of yellow, orange—
Full of bees.

Question: What does it mean to grow old?

Answer: That I drive to the millyard,
Load firewood, unload and stack;
On cold mornings, carry
To the stove, light, kindle, and feed
And feed and feed....

Time is a function of heat.
Past and present exist,
At least as I perceive and know them,
Because heat transfers.

Something about Pennsylvania & the Holy Word

By: Haley Green

If I do not roll over onto my back soon Pennsylvania will be the closest

I'll ever get to heaven I feel her in the night The willow tree's tendrils

cradling my neck like that of a wounded bird An open window

acting as an offering Something far & tender having a proverbial

patience in its breast Something about the past being woven into us

like the Holy Word Is the Old Testament finished?

Has the New Testament begun? Can forgiveness be the same as

absolution or will the taste always be in my mouth? Is it up to me?

I have been decidedly sparse with the mercy I have offered

myself I do not want it to be me when to be loved is to be

put to bed so tenderly

echos to nantong

By: Ruisi He

great great grandmother's fingers bled
weaving silk in candlelight till dawn--
porcelain needle clicking against thumb thimble
diamond dot silver circle, sharp cloth
until lotus and peony and orchid bloomed from pain.
chrysanthemum fingertips, silk dyed and aged with time

ambition is a garden of
dreams planted in salt-soaked soil, of confucian teachings buried
between piano arpeggios and the 2 stringed strum of an erhu
golden medal, jade polished voice spewing ancient wisdom
smoothness until the tongue grows heavy with
copper tasting inheritance, of blood, salted.

cross the yangtze when dusk falls,
paper-thin hopes melting in nantong mist, transparent
huddle against fate and sense a spectral
memory that hugs the sampan, watching
haze clinging to shoulders like ghosts, claiming.
this is how we learn the value of survival.

roots crawl from my family's feet, one
underneath every step but its iron and not
earth. anchor to the future, daughters lost to history—
great (great) grandma weaving her silk, my
mother with a phd in chemistry, and me
at the end, quicksilver and free.

cranes circle overhead, carrying prayers skyward on paper wings,
silent witness to what we've become, what we've forgotten.
they were messengers to heaven not that long ago.

Where Is My Id?

By: Maya Dally

There you are: sitting on pantry floor
looking up at spiderwebs collected
in the sharp, cupped hand of darkness,
guessing what its lace must taste like.

I find you here most often, feeling
a bit peckish and licking confettied
spice from countertops and biting
your nails down until eureka.

When it swells through you like a ship
in danger, you imagine picking feast
from your teeth, chattering crumbs
and fibers down to atoms exploding

on your atrophied tongue.
At night, you suck your fingers
and picture saltines in love,
photosynthesize disdain and gulp

ruined creekwater like full belly baptism.
In your first college class many years
and lives later, a girl says she'd never
give in to the expanses of hunger,

never cannibalize given avalanche
or cave collapse. The body remembers,
starvation embossed into you like gold
leaf instinct, but it would have been

strange to argue. Instead, you sit in
your new belly, precious baby fat
returned and listen to its silence,
prayers answered.

"Shady Valley, Tennessee"

By: William Rieppe Moore

The mountains were at auction
that summer—they brought bank

notes from every state, flooded the
yet unflooded places like TVA did

Watauga Lake—where poplars got
weak trembles and Holt's hidden

casket floated up and furnished fibs
from New Butler to Bitter End.

The baby, she would walk and say
Nantakee-uh, too, and even *Oo-ah-oo*

when that rooster *Cock-a-doodle-*
dooed on summer days that

had change and life as a cushaw
leaf has life, which will synthesize

the bloom. August was the time
I'll look back on and sigh,

The bantam was shootin' blanks,
but the hens were doin' fine.

Unappreciated

By: Katerina Canyon

My dear love, we departed outcry
after the doors closed.

Black dirt freed from purple-hulled onions,
and from the crevices between my fingers.

Water dilutes beneath my eyes
as the stiff layers wash away.

When clouds blast the windows,
like sunlight, I learn the truth of identity—
how it lingers beside the dawning gateway.

We are unaware of the tranquility
we stand in while we complain
about insubstantial things.

After the fence breathes,
my eyelids crease
without their slowed shutter.

You avoid the door,
in the same way
you avoid conversation,
decided on never.

You obliterate fate with logic.
The hulled onions
standing in the sink,
against the cloud-blasted windows.

You are immune
to my excuses.

The blazing tranquility—
suspiciously vanished—
surprised the fence
into a gasp.

My momentary escape:
suppressed.

Bitter as my toes,
and just as impeded.

Hold, Please

By: William Wang

A fermata is a hold
is a pause

A musical comma
splicing sounds
before—
and after

A musical comma
splice, once invoked—
enticing
begging
breaking
our regular rules
of song
of hope

Of how we long
for more time
on this tiny dot
of the Earth

What To Do When No One Loves You

By: Hallie Havican

1. Know someone loves you, but they might be dead.

2. Ask "How do I grow to love myself?" over a bucket of cherry blossoms. Fix your eyes on the delicate pink quartz sunset, the spilled bouquet of strawberry ice cream. Lower your face all the way in. Feel attention brushing your cheeks and singing how it loves no one else but you.

3. Hold love as the devotion of a dog's fruit-by-the-foot tongue ceaselessly licking; mirrored lips whispering your flowering and facets to hairline; your form processing birdsong; you stroking your face, tingles lingering on palm and cheek.

4. Digest it with cones and capillaries; through pores and organelles; each throat bob; the basins of toetip whorls; your conch shell, dream-swelled heart. Every cell sustained by love cradling in membrane.

5. Blush at the softness as you curl into a vulnerable pocket, an underbelly of undeniable longings — pangs of what you'd feel if you let yourself uncoil with each sunrise.

6. Play a game of cry and seek to touch the sticky hurt. Red rover call over surrender to break through finger-laced hands and pulse into the body's codex of knowledge.

7. Hug the strength passed down your matrilineal line. Squeeze the purer the love, the sweeter the trust juice: an easy puddle of warm grandma breast, she lost the other to cancer and one is enough.

8. Watch fire whipping long enough to project in a timeline when consciousness knows love as place. Lead a crossing back to absorb love-place, rhythm a channel. Make a packing list: a choice to presume the best in people, free passes for error, and room for uncertainty.

9. Open into love's generator; it's opportunity, the opposite of "to fix." Become a field of cherry blossoms for others to scoop blooms in buckets divining how to love.

In Order of Appearance

Adam has a BFA in theatre performance and was nearly killed while crossing the street near his apartment in New York City. Many years of recovery have passed and Adam now finds himself studying poetry in Portland, Oregon where he lives with his husband and their two cats.

Julie Benesh is author of the poetry collection INITIAL CONDITIONS and the poetry chapbook ABOUT TIME. She has been published in Tin House, Another Chicago Magazine, Florida Review, and many other places, earned an MFA from Warren Wilson College, and received an Illinois Arts Council Grant. She currently lives in Chicago and holds a PhD in human and organizational systems.

Emma Alexis Woodard is occasionally the name of our poet. She has a lot to say, but no idea how to say it, so it comes out in various shades of anger and sadness in prose. She's 31, a west coaster, and a double Aquarius. Emma Woodard doesn't have a favorite or least favorite thing about herself. She's a big proponent of eating your waffles slightly burnt with creamy peanut butter. There are not many impressions she does well, but she does do a startlingly astute impression of a 30-something with their life together. Maybe she's born with it, maybe it's Fluoxitine.

Karin Henrikson lives in Northern NJ with her husband, two children, and a brown and white labradoodle named Finn. She is an accomplished freelance writer, however writing poetry is her passion. Her poetry spans many topics, but some of her favorites explore experiences from her countless hours on the courts and fields playing basketball, softball, tennis, and more.

Lina Buividavičiūtė is a poet and literary critic. She is an author of three poetry books in Lithuanian. The poetry book "Dark ages" will be published in Spain this year. Lina is a Pushcart prize nominee and two of her poems won Honorable mention at Writer's digest competitions.

Leelah Holmes lives and writes in Brooklyn. Some of their poems appear in new words {press}, Chariot Press, Beyond Words, The Dewdrop, and Touchstone, among elsewhere.

debora Ewing writes, paints, and gardens in Annandale, VA. She's the design & layout editor at Igneus Press, peer reviews for Consilience Science-based Poetry Journal, and writes for FolkWorks.org, for whom she's also on the board. Find deb's work at Jerry Jazz Musician online, in print at Beyond Words and San Pedro River Review, and elsewhere. Follow her on X and Instagram @debsValidation and into seedy pool halls but maybe not dark alleys.

Eleanor Krauss is a junior at Windward highschool in Los Angeles. She is a member of the Holocaust Museum in LA's teen leadership board and was a production manager of the Fir Acres Writing Anthology.

Rachel Whalen is a translator and writer from Buffalo, New York. She has an MFA from NYU and currently lives in Mexico City. You can find more of her work at rachel-whalen.com

Bri Nerud is a former Oregon track and field athlete who recently completed their MFA at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, NY. They are originally from Long Island, but with a deep affection for the PNW. They love their family, their rescue dog Akira, dancing, music, coffee, and of course, poetry.

Matthew Feinstein is a poet and writer who grew up in Tracy, California. He holds an MFA in Poetry from Randolph College, a BA in English - Creative Writing from CSU Long Beach, and an AA in English from Butte College. His poems have appeared in HAD, Heavy Feather Review, Inflectionist Review, Kissing Dynamite, and elsewhere. You can find more of his work at www.matthewfeinsteinwriter.com

Brittany is a writer and poet who grew up in Mississippi, where silence often held more weight than words. She began journaling at twelve, not just to record life, but to survive it. Writing became the only space where she could be fully seen, fully honest, and fully safe. That need to be heard, to give voice to what was buried, still fuels everything she creates.
Her early life taught her what it means to be both invisible and hyper-visible as a queer child in the South. She carried those contradictions into adulthood, through her years serving in the U.S. Navy, and later into classrooms as an educator. No matter the environment, she has always felt a deep, unshakable calling to protect those who are oppressed, silenced, or made to feel small. She writes for them. She writes for the version of herself who couldn't yet speak.

Clover V. Gislason, he/him, is a queer hospitality administration senior at Stephen F. Austin State University in Texas. He has been published in HUMID18, Periphery Journal, new words press, Half and One, Washington Square Review LCC, Wingless Dreamer, and The Word's Faire.

Anna Buynova has spent most of her life between Russia, where she was born, and the US, where she lived for many years. She is now based in Thailand with her husband and two sons. Her work has been previously published in the Beyond Words Literary Magazine, The Dewdrop Literary Magazine, the Wildsound Writing Festival, and the "Swept Away in February" anthology by Wingless Dreamer.

Yucheng Tao is a Chinese international student based in Los Angeles, where he studies songwriting. His poetry and fiction writing have appeared in Wild Court, The Lake, Red Ogre Review (UK), Cathexis Northwest Press, and NonBinary Review, where he was also interviewed. He was named a semifinalist for the Winds of Asia Award by Kinsman Quarterly. His work has been featured in over twenty journals, including Yellow Mama, the Mixtape Review, Apocalypse Confidential, The Arcanist, Waymark Literary Magazine, Down in the Dirt, Academy of the Heart, Synchronized Chaos, Ink Nest, Spillwords, Poetry Potion, Literary Yard, and others.

Renee lives in the Chicago suburbs and is part Pastry Chef, part Poetess, and part Patient Advocate at a Cancer Hospital. She is a hobby Poetess and lover of Greek Mythology. In her free time, she enjoys hiking, camping and keeping up with her husband and four children.

Anna Nikoula (she/her) is a Ukrainian-Canadian emerging writer based in Ottawa, Ontario. She fell in love with poetry at a young age and it remains a source of calm and healing. Her work often explores the emotional undercurrents of everyday interactions.

MATT PASCA is the author of two full-length poetry collections—A Thousand Doors (2011 Pushcart nominee) and Raven Wire (2017 Eric Hoffer Book Award Finalist)—and work that has appeared in more than 50 publications. As a New York State Teacher of Excellence, Pasca has taught Creative Writing, Mythology and Literature since 1997 and advised his school's award-winning literary-art magazine, The Writers' Block, since 2003. Pasca also works as an adjunct professor at Adelphi University and co-hosts a monthly poetry series, Friday Night Fire, with his amazing wife and fellow author Terri Muuss. Pasca was named Long Island Poet of the Year by the Walt Whitman Birthplace Association in 2022. www.mattpasca.com @mrpasca (IG)

Rick Adang was born in Buffalo, New York and graduated from Indiana University with a BA in Psychology and English and a Creative Writing Honors thesis. He taught English as a foreign language for many years and is currently living in Estonia. He has had had poems published in many literary journals, most recently in Eclectica, Big Windows Review, Panoplyzine, Willawaw Journal and Hamilton Stone Review.

Raymond Hoffman has a background in political science and Southeast Asian Studies. He has taught in China for many years and currently is a 988 operator in the Midwest. Poetry writing has been used by him as a coping mechanism for bipolar disorder for over a decade now, with previous publishing in Beyond Words Literary Magazine, Stardust Review, Sad Girls Club literary blog, and Humans of the World Literary Journal.

Ayush Dadgale grew up between two worlds—India and Milwaukee—where different cultures, languages, and stories shaped him. His journey is one of learning, change, and quiet strength, marked by the search for belonging and understanding. Through his writing, Ayush

explores identity, connection, and how simple moments can hold deep meaning.

Laura Iodice was born and raised in the Bronx. In her early twenties, she and her husband relocated to Central New York, where she taught high school and college classes in literature, composition, rhetoric, and cultural constructions of race and published professionally about these subjects.
Recently, she has turned her attention, more exclusively, toward crafting creative nonfiction. Her writing has appeared in The Dillydoun Review, Griffel Magazine, The Syndrome Magazine, The Furious Gazelle, The Balkan Press, Litro U.S. and Litro U.K. and Crack the Spine Literary Journal, among others.

Benjamin Lloyd is a Kentucky native who studies literature and philosophy. He enjoys reading and writing poetry, long walks on the beach, attending Black Mass in the dead of night, and feeding wildlife from the palm of his hand. Benjamin wishes for nothing more than nutritional sustenance, intellectual stimulation, and a few cigarettes here and there.

Nicole Bagley is a poet from Revere, Massachusetts. She graduated from the University of Massachusetts Lowell's Creative Writing program. Her work has previously been published in The Offering. When she is not reading or writing, Nicole enjoys finding new music and spending time with her dog, Thor.

Meredith Aristone holds her MFA in creative nonfiction from Columbia University and teaches writing at Atlantic County College, Camden County College, Chestnut Hill College and Rowan College. In 2021, she received her BFA in Creative Writing from Pratt Institute. She is the first place winner of NYC Poetry Contest (2024) and her poetry is published in NYC Poetry Magazine & Wax Poetry and Art Magazine. She is the author of "Excessive Sodium: A Collection of Poems For The Troubled Soul," writer/director of "Psych-Idyllic (2015)". Her creative nonfiction work is featured in Pink Disco Magazine, as well as "Stained Glass & Thunderstorms," for Girlz, Interrupted: An Anti-Lifestyle Blog for Crazy B*tches," & Go Magazine (NYC). She is currently working on her memoir: "Girlhood Is The Monster Under My Bed: A Story of Femininity & Vice," and is passionate about writing music, teaching, and working on films.

Eric McNeill Rummelhoff: writer, scholar, and a gentle man. currently working on a dissertation at bielefeld university. slow like the bison herds.

Grace Nunamaker is an undergraduate student of Linguistics and Creative Writing at Boise State University. She also translates from both French and Spanish.

Benjamin Green is the author of eleven books including The Sound of Fish Dreaming (Bellowing Ark Press, 1996) and the upcoming Old Man Looking through a Window at Night (Main Street Rag) and His Only Merit (Finishing Line Press). At the age of sixty-eight, he hopes his new work articulates a mature vision of the world and does so with some integrity. He resides in Jemez Springs, New Mexico.

Haley Green is a 22-year-old Appalachian-born poet currently residing in the rural Northwest with her cat. Her work can be found in the online literary journals The Word's Faire and Sand Hills Literary. Alongside reading and writing poetry, she enjoys tending farm animals and sewing. Instagram: @softproserpina

Ruisi is a writer studying in Shanghai who lives with her stupid cat named Dog. When not in anguish over poetry, she can be found anguishing over her life decisions instead. Her works focus on a wide spectrum of things, but she likes writing about culture and the random thoughts she has at 3 AM.

Maya Dally is an early career writer and graduate student who is pursuing an M.A. in Writing while teaching first-year composition. She grew up all around the Midwest and the South, and has been writing poetry since she was a child.

William Rieppe Moore is from Richland County, South Carolina and moved to Unicoi County, Tennessee with his wife. He resumed teaching high school English after earning an MA in English from East Tennessee State University. Moore's poetry has received various honors including Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominations and second place in the George Scarbrough Prize for Poetry. His poems appear in Driftwood, Blue Earth Review, Appalachian Places, James Dickey Review, Terrain.org, and most recently in North American Review. His work is forthcoming in River Heron Review.

Katerina Canyon is a poet, activist, and the Executive Director of the Peace Economy Project. A 2021 Pushcart Prize nominee and Cave Canem Fellow, her work explores the intersections of memory, identity, and social justice. She is the author of Surviving Home (Kelsay Books, 2021) and Changing the Lines (Luchador Press, 2023), and her poetry has appeared in The New York Times, Cultural Daily, Waxing and Waning, and the Meniscus. Katerina holds a Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy from Tufts University and is currently pursuing her MFA in Poetry. She lives in Jersey City, where she writes between moments of resistance and stillness.

William Wang is a scientist and poet living in Austin, TX. He holds graduate and undergraduate degrees in Chemical Engineering, as well as a law degree. Mr. Wang enjoys kayaking and learning to play the piano.

Hallie Havican is a psychotherapist, poet, and psychic medium residing in San Jose, CA with their wife. They live for interdimensionality, exploration of the unknown, and the wild, grounding intelligence of plants and animals.