



Soul Poetry, Prose & Arts Magazine
Volume 1 Issue 2 Spring, 2025



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Cover Art "Spring Near the Border" by Kim McNealy Sosin

Arvilla Fee
Founder, Editor

Dear Contributors, Readers, and Community:

I am thrilled to have both new and established writers and artists in this issue and to see contributions from around the world! This great gathering of talent hails from Nairobi, India, Israel, Scotland, the UK, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, and all over the United States.

In some ways, this issue is very much like spring itself—artistry in full bloom, as diverse as daffodils, hyacinths, tulips, clovers, violets, redbuds, and apple trees. That’s the beauty of coalescing different voices, experiences, and perspectives. We are all part of the whole.

Thank you all so much for trusting me with your precious works. I hope to continue to spread the word about *Soul Poetry*, gain readership, and promote my writers and artists in every way I can.

“Creativity is contagious, pass it on.” – Albert Einstein

Yours truly,

Arvilla Fee
Founder, Editor
Soul Poetry, Prose & Arts Magazine

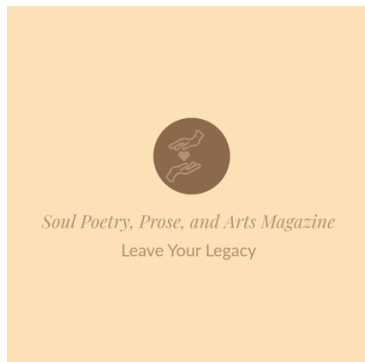


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Love in the Time of Eclipse by Deborah Z. Adams

cento

it is as simple as this:
looking at the sun, you could go blind
in the last bit of daylight the moon arose and the stars
glowed above the trees
I imagine how they rise

it is as simple as this:
in the last bit of daylight, high, bruised black
by the moon so black no sky could squeak through
white sycamore bones reflect from the water
the stars will blind you

it is as simple as this:
the white, shrouded branches around the sun
the cheesecloth sky blue-violet
in the last bit of daylight
the sun and moon get crossed, but they never touch



Deborah Z. Adams is an award-winning author of novels, short fiction, CNF, and poetry. She served as executive editor of Oconee Spirit Press for ten years and is currently a reader for Boomerlit. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in Roanoke Review, Litmosphere: a journal of Charlotte Lit, WELL READ Magazine, Dead Mule and other journals. You're invited to visit her website. www.Deborah-Adams.com

Lines from:

"Race Riot, Tulsa, 1921" Sharon Olds : Looking at the sun,
you could go blind.

"The Eclipse," Deborah Trustman : high, bruised black by
the moon

"Daddy," Sylvia Plath : so black no sky could squeak
through

"Charit Creek," Bill Brown : " White sycamore bones
reflect from the water

"Tequila," Elizabeth Spires : The stars will blind you

"The Late Show," Janet Sylvester : I imagine how they rise

"Palinode," Maura Stanton : curiously at the white,
shrouded branches

"The Gila Monster Route," Anonymous : the moon arose
and the stars came out.

"The Room Above the Square," Stephen Spender : It
glowed above the trees through leaves

"The White Dress," Roberta Spear : It is as simple as this

"On Looking Up By Chance at the Constellations", Robert
Frost : The sun and moon get crossed, but they never
touch

"Old Mountain Road," Chas. Simic : In the last bit of
daylight

"29 (A Dream in Two Parts," Ai : and dyes the cheesecloth
sky blue-violet

—in the answer or in the question?



Photo by Mahoney Fotos: Pexels.com

And Cupid's Arrow Poisoned Their Hearts by Kimutai Kemboi Allan

February is a short dress, mini
hiding a bouquet of flowers on the 14th
and the winds of love flow on
freezing the souls of the heartbroken
throwing up a hard finger your way.

February is a doomed month, a hopeless season
men running around with flowers
pumping a year's worth of love into a day
asking for forgiveness for wrongs yet
to be committed. A practice in futility.

February is a warm bed, to the lovebirds
they took cupid's arrow to poison their hearts
now they see love in their whole world
A perfect mate in an imperfect world
and the month of love flies by in red!



Kimutai Kemboi Allan is a Kenyan writer residing in Nairobi. His works have been published or are forthcoming in The Wayfarer Art and Literary Journal, Everscribe Magazine, the RIC Journal, DoubleSpeak Magazine, MEN: An International Anthology of African and Latin American Writers, the Redefining Poetry Anthology by Litterateur RW magazine, the "Best New African Poets 2023 Anthology", "Our Stories Redefined Anthology for African Writing 2023 (Poetry Edition)", The Piker Press, Prodigy Magazine, Our Poetry Archive, the INK Babies Literary Magazine, Written Tales, African Global Networks (AGN), Ake Review, The Active Muse, The Writer's Space Africa, The Kalahari Review, The Naluubale Review, Writers Resist and Havik's 2020 Anthology (Homeward).



Photo by Alex Green: Pexels.com

A Lackwit in the Living Room by Kimutai Kemboi Allan

My soul freezes in the middle of day
love left me scared. And yet I
feel tinges of warmth in my head
I feel the words bubbling
out of my mouth like lazy froth
pushed out by weak pulses of breath
and my rage keeps rising
like the dough in my mother's kitchen.
They added yeast to my soul
I know how this will end
when I rise to fill the living room
the dough in me turning to bile
and all my family members chase
me to the streets with love
they only want a day's peace
I am a yearly disaster at best
and a confirmed lackwit at worst!



Photo by Ernesto RUIZ: Pexels.com

Wildlife Encounter by Allen Billy

Hiking can be dangerous—one moment it's just you and the trees, the next moment you could be facing an aggressive wildlife encounter. Once, while resting alongside a trail listening to forest sounds—a bird chirping, a creaking tree limb, I caught a sudden movement out of the corner of my eye. A swirling, twirling, tumbling, tornado of butterflies was charging directly towards me. Stunned, frozen in place, I was unable to dodge the oncoming mass. I held my breath, hoping not to attract their attention. The creatures landed as a lava-colored ball—yellow, black, and red—on my leg. The butterflies rested for a brief moment, then rapidly flexed their wings and flew as a unit into the woods. My elevated heart rate eventually began to subside. I inhaled the fresh, pine-scented air, grateful to be alive. I had survived a butterfly stampede.



Allen works on projects for two provincial regulatory colleges – in Education (handling professional misconduct hearings in the K-12 education involving teachers, principals, and superintendents); and in Social Work (Council Member, Alberta College of Social Workers). Allen has also worked in emergency management (alpine and wilderness search and rescue), wildfire management projects in northern Alberta and Northwest Territories). His Zoology degrees are from the University of Texas at Austin (Ph.D.) and the University of British Columbia (M.Sc. and B.Sc.). His hobbies include geocaching, metal detecting, and bird watching.



Photo by Jason Pittman: Pexels.com

Indigo Blue by Lita Marie Bonciolini

I am the turtle retreating inside its green-striped shell, dimly-lit
and quiet but for the echo of my beating heart.

I am the swan mated for life, landing with ballet-like unison in fields,
foraging contently side-by-side, as if such times would never end.

I am indigo blue, warm beneath blankets that ward off autumn's chill,
but fail to banish the dreams of longing pressing hard against my ribs.

I am the younger woman beneath the face in the mirror --
which perception ascends more acutely -- invisibility or irrelevancy?

I am the weeping willow bending into the wind and rain,
shaking the deluge off tendrils of delicate branches.

I am the whippoorwill singing beseechingly on a dew-covered dawn,
to a mostly deaf world.



Lita Marie Bonciolini is a San Antonio, Texas poet, writer, artist, and jewelry designer. Her poetry was selected to accompany the Robert Indiana: A Legacy of Love exhibit at the McNay Art Museum, San Antonio (2020); and in two anthologies: Pandemic Puzzle Poems(2021), and Yellow Flag Poems / Life in the Time of Covid-19 (2022), as well both poetry and art in Soul Poetry, Prose & Art Magazine (2025). Lita Marie also illustrates poetry and children's books. As a member of Wyrdd Writers, a group of local women poets, she reads at poetry events and participates in promoting poetry in the community and beyond.



Photo by Daniel Erlandson: Pexels.com

The Middle Plains by Lita Marie Bonciolini

Golden grain moved like an ocean, rippling in a direction determined by the wind. Pronghorn jumped in arching patterns to pinpoint their location, horn tips dancing just above the waving sheafs. Sandy-gray plovers dove and cried out their stories, reverberating off the piercing blue sky. I glided between the two sides, down a narrow highway which seemed to part just enough to allow me to pass through. The beauty and solitude cradled me as I traversed the heartland. I tried to envision the Lakota Sioux spread out along the winding Missouri River, living in harmony and reverence with the land. The lookouts listening and watching for the first signs in the spring—a low rumble in the distance. A red cloud of dust expanding over the southern sky. Both heralding the return of the mighty bison, *Tatanka*, to their summer home. The ground shaking like an earthquake as they thundered their arrival, a hundred thousand strong.

Bison once reigned here,
king of gifts from the gods.
The plains now silent,
absent the drum beats and chants
the plovers recall.

Hiding from the Eclipse
by Lita Marie Bonciolini



Raven
by Lita Marie Bonciolini



Crested Caracara
by Lita Marie Bonciolini





Photo by Arina Krasnikova: Pexels.com

Elevator by Alan Brickman

"Welcome back, Mrs. Walsh." Howard pulled open the metal gate of the elevator and tipped his cap as he liked to do. "How was New Year's with Jeremy and his family? He's in Baltimore, isn't he? And still playing with the orchestra?"

"Yes, Howard, that's right," Mrs. Walsh said as she shook the wintery chill out of her fur coat. "Jeremy still plays the French horn with the Philharmonic, but this year he decided he would learn to play the trombone and now he also plays with a Dixieland jazz band at a small club near the college."

Howard remembered that when Jeremy was younger and still lived in the building with his mother, he was always helping out the other residents. When Mr. Shelton was bedridden after a surgery, Jeremy did his grocery shopping, then sat with him and played the French horn. Howard thought Jeremy was by far the nicest kid in the building.

Mrs. Walsh went on. "The grandchildren are getting so big. It's great that I get to see them

around the holidays. Speaking of which..." She pulled an envelope out of her handbag and handed it to Howard. "I'm sorry I wasn't here for Christmas. I've been waiting to give this to you. You've been such a dear. We're lucky to have you."

Howard tucked the envelope into the inside jacket pocket without looking at it. Mrs. Walsh was always very generous this time of year. Many of the residents were. Not everyone thought to give a little something to their building's elevator operator, and he knew from talking to the operators in other buildings that he was luckier than most. Next April, he will have been working at 1354 Riverside Drive for twenty years. He knew all the residents, he knew their families, and he regularly heard their news about births, weddings, promotions, funerals. He'd shared their happiest moments and was a shoulder to cry on in sad times. He saw himself as a combination of skilled machine technician, safety officer, social worker, and family friend. He was proud of the job he did, and he enjoyed it as well. He listened to their jokes and shared ones of his own. And he felt appreciated by the residents who often had kind words about his professionalism, his friendly demeanor, his steadfastness. He made a difference in their lives, a positive difference, and what more can you ask for in a job.

"Eighteenth floor Mrs. Walsh. I'll see you in the morning. Let me know if you'll be grocery shopping, I can help you bring the bags in."

Just as he shut the metal gate, his phone rang. He opened the small door beneath the panel and took out the receiver.

"Howard. It's Bill. Come by the office when you get back down to the lobby."

"Sure, Mr. Samuels. I'll be there in a minute." Bill Samuels was the building superintendent. Howard looked at his watch. He was near the end of his shift. He wondered what this could be about. Samuels almost never called on the elevator phone. Howard had been hearing a few of the residents talk about some unspecified changes to the building that were being planned by the management company. Howard didn't really trust these kinds of rumors; he preferred to wait and see what actually happened. Maybe Bill would finally tell him what this was all about.

As soon as Howard replaced the receiver, the numbered panel lit up. On the way down, he picked up the Richardson's rowdy teenaged sons on fifteen, Joanie Wells the actress on eight, and Mr. and Mrs. Fields on four. The Fields were a married couple in their fifties who weighed over three-hundred pounds each and were the only residents that caused Howard to worry about the aging elevator's weight limit. As they descended the last few floors, he listened for any creaks or lurching movements that would signal mechanical distress. Thankfully they arrived in the lobby without incident.

Howard opened the door to the office and saw Samuels sifting through the mail. The radio was on and playing disco music, which had recently become a fad of the day that Howard never really liked. At home, he mostly listened to his jazz records.

Samuels looked at his watch, and then Howard. "Did you get lost on the way?"

"I took a wrong turn, but I found my way back." They were both smiling.

"Have a seat, Howard, I have to talk to you about something."

Howard sat in the wooden chair beside Bill Samuels' desk, removed his cap and put it in his lap. "What is it, Bill?" Something about Samuels' demeanor made Howard apprehensive.

"The owners, in their infinite wisdom, have decided on some renovations to the building. You know, an upgrade. Modernizing. It's a major project that will take most of the next year to complete. One of the things they're going to do, and this is where you come in, is automate the elevators. You know, push buttons where the residents can just select their floors and head right up." Samuels looked down for a few seconds, then directly at Howard. "Here's the thing. This means no need for elevator operators." This caught Howard a little off-guard, but he wasn't totally surprised. This must be what the residents had been talking about. He straightened his tie and tried to maintain a stoic expression. Samuels went on. "You have seniority, so I'll keep you on for as long as I can. But by this time next year, I'm afraid I'll have to let you go. There may be maintenance jobs, even though there are no openings right now." Howard shrugged. He did not want to become a janitor. Samuels went on. "I've insisted to the owners that there be some sort of severance package. You've been here a long time. Longer than me."

"Twenty years in April, Bill. I expected to be here another ten, maybe even fifteen, then retire."

Howard's eyes welled up, and he clenched his jaw so as not to cry in front of Samuels.

"It's the way of the future, Howard. Ten years from now, there won't be elevator operators anywhere in the city. Doormen, yes, for security, but elevator operators? I don't think so. I'm really sorry. I wanted to tell you as soon as I knew. The owners' construction manager called me this morning. They waited until after the holidays, and they're going to start in two, maybe three weeks."

"Thanks, Bill. I appreciate you letting me know." Howard knew that upgrading the building made sense, but he didn't expect this. He felt the first stirrings of anger. "Something's lost with all this modernizing. Something important. The push buttons won't know the residents like I do. Push buttons don't care about them like I do." Howard realized he was raising his voice and took a deep breath to calm down. "I'm sad for me, Bill, I love this job, but I'm also sad for them." He looked at the floor and shook his head, then gathered himself. "You've been nothing but fair with me the whole time you've been superintendent. I don't blame you." Howard rose from the chair, put his cap back on, and stood as tall and straight as he could. "I don't even blame the owners. They're doing what they think they have to do." Howard knew that change was inevitable, even if it was sometimes hard to face. He turned and walked toward the door. He looked back at Samuels. "An empty elevator. It ain't right."

Howard walked out of the office and retrieved his overcoat from the maintenance room. He went through the building's revolving door and saw the other operator coming in for the night shift. He stood on the sidewalk in a light snowfall, and after

a few seconds, there was a dusting on his cap and shoulders.

He thought about his family. His wife still had her job at the main branch of the public library, where they'd met when he was still in night school. His son had one year left at N.Y.U., but his daughter was starting at Columbia in the fall. This was going to be the first time there would be two tuitions. They'd planned for it, both kids received a little financial aid, but he'd have to check the college fund account to make sure everything was still covered, at least for next year. The mortgage, the bills. He felt a small jolt of panic. He hoped that when he sat down with his wife and looked at things from every angle, they would work it out. He loved his family, they'd always been a team, everyone pitching in, but could they get through this? His mind raced. The kids could get part-time jobs, he and his wife could economize, cut expenses, ... *No stop*, he thought. *Just stop. You don't have to solve this now. Wait until you get home.*

He walked to the subway entrance at the end of the block then turned and looked back at the building. His building. He turned away, squared his shoulders, and descended the stairs.



Alan Brickman writes short stories and flash fiction. In his day job, he consults to nonprofit organizations on strategy and organizational development. Raised in New York, educated in Massachusetts, he now lives in New Orleans and can't imagine living anywhere else. Alan's fiction has appeared in Literary Heist, Variety Pack, SPANK the CARP, Evening Street Press, and Sisyphus Magazine, among others, and his story, "My First Gun," appears in the anthology "Southern Truths" published by B Cubed Press. He can be reached at alanbrickman13@gmail.com.

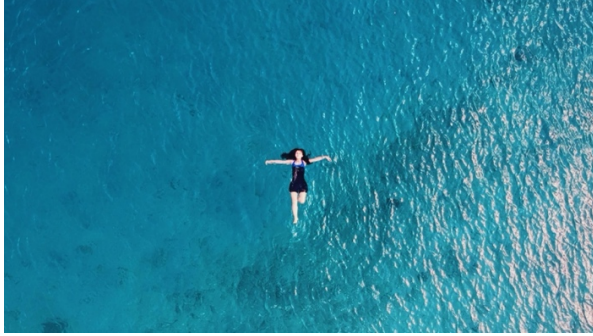


Photo by Şevval Karataş: Pexels.com

I Continue to Swim **by Roxanne Cardona**

after painting Lago de Trujillo Alto, c. 1945, Juan Antonio Rosado

I lie inside the painting
on my back, let the water, warm

as autumn sand float me down
its banks, through islands of breccia,

let them bruise me
with their volcanic fingers, limestone cutters.

I sidestroke beside the shads,
green swordtails, and eels. Make waves

in this waveless loch. I continue
to swim. A white house, tall and grand

rises out of the banks. Its windows
shut. Doors closed. I open every one—

unfold the napkins on its empty tables.
My feet stain its carpet—wet.

My people once lived here. Portraits,
trail me down halls, I can no longer

hear their songs. Mountains darken
across the lake, grow their hard backs

into the sky. Inside the painting,

Ceiba trees stretch long roots along

the shore, uproot the palms,
sandalwood, mangroves.

*The lake will drown you,
winds shout to the trees, with its palette blade.*



Roxanne Cardona was born in New York City of Puerto Rican heritage. She was a principal/ educator in the South Bronx. Her work has appeared in: Frontier Poetry, finalist in 2023 Ekphrastic Poetry Contest/New Voices, San Antonio Review, Connecticut River Review, Pine Hill Review, Loch Raven Review, Willows Wept Review, The Westchester Review, and elsewhere. Her first book of poetry, Caught in the Principal's Lens, a finalist in 2024 Wheelbarrow Books Poetry Prize.



Photo by Enes Ersahin: Pexels.com

Midsummer **by Lorelee Clark**

Each night Mina becomes someone new.

Sometimes a cat-headed woman smoothing her alabaster whiskers,
stretching and jumping toward the sky; or a muscular lioness,
fur painted with red ochre dust, a disk hovering above her head;
tonight, a dark mare sheathed in sweat, galloping toward a shining wand.

Each day, less glamorous: her hair long and bothersome,
she draws it up and away, plaiting it with sweat,
carrying notebooks to learn more about the mosses, the vasculars too
and their families, still craving an audience for her scrawlings, portraits and ponderings.

The white-haired woman is not who she had in mind
but when Annest does not move her eyes from Mina's,
when Mina listens to her questions, she understands Annest does not expect answers,
only needs Mina to hold them in her head like the endless repetition of stars,
like the thin strips of bark curling around themselves,
orbiting her confusion until a truth is made plain.

Mina tells Annest of the spruce's quiet witness,
the cherry's solid perch, of their healing.
Annest pushes her to think heavy on how a plant grows,
too casually mentions an ash and pine tea,
wondering aloud if her dreams could change, could become a key to a door
Mina doesn't understand needs unlocking.
Mina would have thought her a witch
but she has looked in the mirror too often for that to be an issue.

Instead, she shaves ash bark and cuts pine needles,
sprinkling them into her bath before bed.

That night, like the clattering of dried maple seeds, a song,
hot on her tongue, rings clear
as she smooths her alabaster whiskers, as the disk
hovers above her red ochre face.

This offering reads like justice from a liver;
Annest hums a tune when Mina sings her dream's words;
throaty rumbles a perfect accompaniment.
Mina knows pine, ancient of trees, holds inside itself the sun,
Utu, Helios, whichever name he chooses, who shows his face
after the dark winter.

Mina puts her notebooks on a shelf that night,
instead sitting under a Scots Pine, singing the song,
understanding her sacrifice, unwilling though it had been;
she is still her mother's carrot,
her roots able to push deep into the ground.

Mina understands the sun is the center and it was he
she polished the stars for, flayed the trees, flew
from their boughs—all for his attention;
examined the pathways of their roots to find the pathways of her heart,
her true self. In that moment her past fits a harmony
in the key of trees; salty tears and oxygen
constant reminders to heal.

She climbs the ladder of pine in the morning,
warbling into the clear of night, perching soon
on a chipped sill, chirping, humming.
Annest opens her window and sings Mina's words back to her,
watching as Mina ascends to a nearby Ash to nest.



*Loralee Clark grew up in Maine and resides now in Virginia; her Instagram is @make13experiment; her website is sites.google.com/view/loraleeclark; and her SubStack is nosuchthingasfailure.substack.com. She has a book forthcoming this year, *Solemnity Rites*, with Prolific Pulse Press LLC and has been published most recently in *White Stag Journal*, *Chewers by Masticadores*, *Nude Bruce Review*, *Lucky Lizard*, *Nature of Our Times*, *Unearthed*, *Nebo*, *Choeofpleirn Press*, *Wingless Dreamer*, *The Taborian*, *Superpresent*, *Thimble Literary Magazine*, and *Impossible Task*.*



Photo by Alfo Medeiros: Pexels.com

Juniper **by Lorelee Clark**

-a golden shovel after Kaveh Akbar

The tree **there**,
splaying its roots, is
reaching for blood—**no**
woman harmed as **such**
just alchemized: **thing**
of wonderment **as**
myth is—**an**
art of no **accident**.
Rather, purposefulness **of**
devotion and **the**
divination of **spirit**.



Photo by yu zhou: Pexels.com

Darkness by Lorelee Clark

In the house where I grew up
where my father still lives in the summers without heat or gas
I was taught to amputate my heart, store it in a box.
It mildewed in the basement under the swing
hung from a beam at the far end of the freezer;

no use saying what I hoped or feared, no use feeling it all,
no use inside or out; I'd eventually have to come home again.

Looking within the box became just as futile—all I ever had to show
were fingerprints along the cardboard, sneezing afterward.

The problem was
I could still hear the muscle and aorta cracking slow and thick, clotted
under the mildew, the cardboard, the wooden beams and flooring, over the hum
of the freezer downstairs.

Sleeping on the cotton batting mattress upstairs
I never thought to use a compass to learn if it lay southeast
or west of my body; what alchemy of direction
would have stopped my pain?

What alchemy at all could have helped me
remove it from the box, cover it in cheesecloth and
walk away? How would I have known
to go somewhere safe to unwind the sanguine strips
cleanse it with warm, salty water and massage it back into my chest
hiccupping with grief, swallowing cup after cup of hot Hawthorne tea
until time's sutures could support its reintegration in my body?

So, it lay there
forgotten, the box fallen apart from time and silverfish
that most precious organ hidden under wood fiber and mold,
desiccated and hard.

How can you define dehydrated veins
and powdered muscle through
time's murk and singularity
to imagine what it might have looked like
when you first placed it in its box?

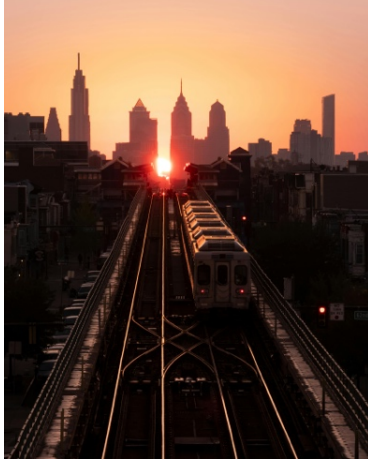


Photo by Trev W. Adams

The 3:15 by Rita Coleman

Strains of Rachmaninoff's heavy piano

notes push into the kitchen where
I ready a tea tray for one, the kettle
on the Aga just about to whistle.

I pause at the north window for the 3:15,
the same train I glimpsed when I floated
from the taxi into the house just two weeks
ago when he passed into the beyond.

This house, a look-a-like condo, "nowhere
on a map," he used to joke, our refuge,
south window for my studio, north window
for his library on the second floor.

But no. No longer. A widow's aerie,
dried paint tubes, half-worked canvases,
solace at tea and the 3:15. The urge to leave
nudges me to go, to be. Anywhere but here.

The train could take me to the tip of my
world, where I could dive into the surf,
find an island where grief and misery ebb
and flow and clouds leave space for the sun.



Rita Coleman writes poetry, inspired by the seen and the unseen, in rural Greene County, Ohio. She has written three books of poetry, the latest, In the Near Beyond (2024). Her poems have been included in numerous anthologies. Rita's degrees are from Wright State University, and she has studied for ten years with mentor Pauletta Hansel, Cincinnati's first Poet Laureate.



Photo by Eyup Beyhan: Pexels.com

Aureole by Melinda Coppola

In Memory of Byron Frohman

The essential shape of a woman
is a circle.

A black-haired man
with brilliant blue eyes
once wrote those words
to me, in a poem.

That was 43 years ago.
I lost that frayed white paper
along the way,

and now the poet is dead.
All that remains
is my memory
of those precious opening lines.

Woman as circle.
I suppose I'd fly
halos around the earth,
eyes cast down to scan
each continent

and their wreaths of islands

paranormal vision
honing in on female souls
by the millions,
working and sleeping
getting born and dying
arms circling to embrace
all she loves,
some she doesn't,
didn't, and never will.

Wisdom handed down
one round goddess
to the next.

We are like strings of pearls,
our timeless luster
reflecting each other.

Our shared commitment to the living
forms the thread
that keeps us close,
and gleaming,
and whole.



Melinda Coppola penned her first poem—about the color pink—at the tender age of 8. Her relationship with writing was mercurial for decades, but once she learned that her blood type is, in fact, poet, she has settled into a kind of quiet cohabitation with her muses.

Melinda's work has been published in many fine books, magazines, and journals including Spirit First, Third Wednesday, Willows Wept Review, and Thimble Literary Magazine. Her first full length collection is due out Fall 2025 from Kelsay Books.



Photo by Ivan Samkov: Pexels.com

Long Time **by Melinda Coppola**

We married, tried for children.
Five miscarriages, fertility drugs,
one live birth
all the appropriate things.

Before I knew you didn't want me,
all that mattered was your wanting.

After, a long
time after,
when it was finally me I wanted,
you dropped away from our daughter's life.
Erased yourself, as if
she had sprouted only from me,

as if there was no *you* in her.

Before my parents divorced,
a long time before,
there was some kind of free.
Woods to roam in, gardens,
a river running through all that land
flowing on and on
the way I thought my family would.

Broken home. Worried children.
So much sadness and guilt.

Was it inevitable,
the way you and I
took after our parents,
divorcing as if it was all we knew
to do?

Was it written in stone
the way we would end,

each looking for ourselves
in each other,

each dragging along the carcasses
of old unions—

the ones that made us
the ones that broke us?



Photo by Liza Summer: Pexels.com

Hierophant or a Conman? by Daphodille

Last night I didn't pick up the phone,
I let you ramble to my voicemail.
You kept going on about some life story you've overblown,
people you drain to make your life feel like a fairytale.

Back at the start, you warned me about the 'two yous.'
A silent cold war between us,
no way of consolation, no chance of a truce.
I want to scream at you, but don't want to make a fuss.

It's killing me inside, trying to have this last bit of grace
while your idea of socializing is crawling under different sheets.
I know you're not worthy, but I can't stop imagining your face;
what an ideal man to fall for, one who always lies and cheats.

Go ahead now, skim through the lovers catalogue,
mail order on a phone app if you believe that makes you more of a man.
You'll use spirituality for moral high points, say you found peace at a Synagogue.
No peace of mind left in you, never any clear plan.



Daphodille is a sociology, political science student and full-time overthinker. Lover of things beautiful and macabre; tragic and funny.



Photo by Rajesh Rajput: Unsplash.com

The Given Song by Ed Davis

Clad in ball cap and black suit coat,
about seventy, with a hint
of melancholy, the man ahead
of me holds the door open.
I intuit he's the poet I've come to hear.
I thank him, follow him inside.

He feeds us stanza, caesura, song;
bridges, gateways, portals
to worlds he wants us to taste,
touch, turn into marrow.
He mimes for us standing in a July
field, making a "J" with his torch,
guiding clouds of fireflies to rise,
halo his head like a shimmering crown.
I stand with him there in the clover,
cicadas thrumming in my chest.

I've heard poets read in rooms

like these a hundred times.
Tonight this bard embodies
truths I'd lately forgotten:
inhale, exhale; exult, exalt.
Partake of this fruit;
do with it what you will,
what you must.

Afterward, I rise,
quickly leave.
Out of silence may
come my own work:
Surrender. Live. Die well.
Sing the given song.



Ed Davis's poetry has appeared in many anthologies and literary journals such as Leaping Clear, Metafore, Hawaii Pacific Review, Stoneboat, and Buddhist Poetry Review. His full-length collection, The Time of the Light, was published by Main Street Rag Press in 2014. His latest novel, The Psalms of Israel Jones (West Virginia University Press 2014), won the Hackney Award for an unpublished novel in 2010. He lives with his wife in the village of Yellow Springs, Ohio, where he bikes, hikes, and meditates religiously.



Photo by Johannes Plenio: Pexel.com

Calm **by Ed Davis**

*After reading Tracy K. Smith's "A Sunny Day" from
To Free the Captives: A Plea for the American Soul*

There's a storm coming.
There is always a storm coming.
Always a tempest ready to fall
on somebody's head: yours, mine,
some other, us or them.

But the calm on this December
Sunday is ethereal, unearthly—
a clear-eyed, blue-sky calm
I'm observing from within
my monasterial home.

When this squall arrives,
boarding up windows won't help.
You may as well hit your knees,
forehead grazing grass, clay, sand.

When the first drops wet
your neck, lift your face,
rock back on your hams,
with heaven-reaching arms,
howl, laugh and scream *Hallelujah!*

Lower your gaze and watch the crowd
you've summoned approach slowly,
stand shoulder to shoulder:
ancestors, enemies, all the same,
all gathered in your name.

The storm is here.
Has always been here.
No place to go but ourselves.



Photo by Thiago Matos: Pexels.com

Broken by Alyssa Dean

Two broken people
just shattered shards,
but I'm the one
scattered from myself.
All that's left are jagged edges:
too sharp to touch,
too sharp to hold,
without hurting someone else
and making them bleed

for getting too close.

Maybe I'm just jagged enough that
I can pierce through their skin.
Embedding myself into them,
like shrapnel.
Making them bleed for me
so that they feel every inch
and hurt alongside me.

Maybe then they'll shatter and scatter
just as I have.
Then we can be broken together even more,
and maybe then our broken pieces
can be chipped and chiseled
so that we might finally
fit together perfectly;
as one whole broken person.



Alyssa Dean is a graduate of Arkansas State University, where she was awarded a BA in Creative Media Production. She is a poet and prose writer and is previously unpublished.



Photo by: Inimafoto A: Pexels.com

Outgrown **by Alyssa Dean**

I've outgrown the need for your love.
But it's only now
that you want to give it to me
with no strings attached.
Before, when you couldn't control
your whirlwind of emotions,
that's when I needed you.
But instead, I was tossed aside
by your gale force winds.
So, I detached myself
from needing your love
in order to survive,
even though I barely did that.
And now that I'm older, I can love myself enough
to replace what you never gave me.
But you want to come back all smiles
open arms and open hearts.
But mine has been locked away,
shut behind barred doors
and shuttered windows
housed within a person
you don't even know anymore.



Photo by Hashtag Captured: Pexels.com

Love Is by Billy Dean

A prayer unplanned you fall into
as belief overcomes disbelief.

A wave you ride
to that sweet, safe shore
called home.

Patient, kind, other-seeking
and willing to change.

Not easily angered
nor mindful of wrongs done.

Tolerance and forgiveness
without end.

Discovering why you suffered
without it.

Friendship on fire.



Billy Dean is a retired technical writer with degrees in English and Engineering. He has been a newspaper columnist, performed poetry at open mic events, and had his craft articles, personal essays, how-to guides, memoirs, poems and short stories published in magazines, and self-publishing platforms. His goals are to craft prose and poetry loaded with clues for shaping and navigating the sticky web of real life.



Photo by Anastasia Lashkevich: Pexels.com

Night Blooms by Billy Dean

I am tired of solitary roses.
Pure red and perfect,
long stemmed and lovely,
cutoff at the ankles and dressed up for sale,
then brought home for love,
but left standing in a fashioned vase
on a domesticated table.

Where are the bouquets?
Those wild, dappled darlings,
feet in the earth,
face on the sun,
smiles popping up everywhere
for nothing.

But I also grow weary
of petals open to the sun
but closed to the moon.
Horny little beggars waiting for
buzzing bees and butterfly kisses.

Where are those night-blooming daturas
smiling in the moonlight?
Virgin white bells waiting for chirping chiroptera,
leather-tight wings and velvet tongues
chasing echoes in the night.



Photo by Ryan McGuire: Pixabay.com

Texas Hash by Billy Dean

Even the Dog Wouldn't Eat It

When my wife left to visit her sister in Texas, my three sons and our dog came into the kitchen to see what Dad was going to do about dinner.

"Boys," I declared, with authority and confidence, "tonight we're having Texas Hash."

"What's that, Dad?" asked Andy, my youngest. "I don't remember Mom making that."

"No she didn't, Son, but I am, and you boys are going to help me. You get four hamburger patties from the fridge."

"Gregory, open three cans of black beans, a can of sweet corn and a can of tomato sauce."

"Ronald, get four large bowls and put them over here next to me."

I was the adult, so I'd be in charge of fire. I turned on the burner, struck a match and stuck it into the flame... Whoooooosh!

"Dad, you're supposed to light the match first!" hollered Ronald, my oldest. He had outsmarted me when he was 6 by hiding liver in his milk.

"I'm okay Ronald. My eyebrows will grow back in a week or so."

I set a large pot on the burner and added some water. When it began to boil, I added the corn, beans and burgers, but they started sputtering and sticking to the bottom, so I poured the tomato sauce into the boiling cauldron. My coup de grâce was a clove of garlic and a dash of humor.

"The vampires will hate this stuff, but you guys will love it!"

My three sons couldn't hide their doubts, but our dog Rusty was wagging his tail. He'd eat anything.

When my hash had thickened, I turned the burner off, filled all four bowls and set them on the table. "This stuff is ready to eat, boys."

"Dad, this is awful!" groaned Andy.

"Yeah, that garlic makes it bitter," added Gregory. He'd outsmarted me when he was 5 by hiding peas under the edge of his plate.

"Hash isn't supposed to be sweet, Gregory, but I'll add honey to yours."

Andy and Ronald wanted honey too, of course, so I squeezed a dollop into their bowls.

"Now it's too sweet, Dad," complained Gregory. His brothers agreed, so I poured some red wine into their hash.

Dinner went downhill from there, so we drove into town for burgers and fries at one of those drive-through places where you can poison the whole family for under ten bucks.

When their mother got home, Andy said, "Mom, please don't ever go away again without leaving something good for us to eat. The stuff Dad made for dinner last night was awful. Even Rusty wouldn't eat it!"

"I'm sorry, boys. I'll make it up to you tonight. Your aunt Clara gave me the recipe for her Texas Hash. You'll love it."



Photo by RDNE Stock Project: Pexels.com

Chinese Boxes by William Derge

The child imagines that
under the tree,
there is a box labeled Winter,
and inside that box
is a box labeled Spring,
and inside that one, Summer,
and inside that, Fall.
Then, Winter again.
And the child imagines that
another box is labeled War,
and inside that box are two boxes.
One is labeled Peace.
The other is More War.
And inside each of those
is a box with a question mark,
and its lid is sealed.

There is a box labeled
Born, and inside that box
is a box labeled Died
and its lid is sealed.
There is a box labeled God,
and its lid is sealed.
The last of the boxes is Love,
and inside that box
is a box labeled Love,
and inside that box
is a box labeled Love,
and inside that box
is a box labeled Love...,
and none of the lids are sealed.



William Derge's poems have appeared in Negative Capability, The Bridge, Artful Dodge, Bellingham Review, and other publications. He is the winner of the 2010 Knightsbridge Prize He is a winner of the Rainmaker Award. He has received honorable mentions in contests sponsored by The Bridge, Sow's Ear, and New Millennium. He currently resides with his wife in Frederick, Maryland. He is a frequent reader at poetry events in the area, and he's a founding member of Slant Light Poets. Many of his poems deal with the joys, trials, and sorrows of relationships.



Photo by Matthias Cooper: Pexels.com

For Archie **by William Derge**

There were times when I felt that
you too disliked it, especially
when my outbursts and curses
disturbed your sleep,
when the heave of your chest
stopped momentarily
and you rose up with a start,
looked about and surveyed
the familiar surroundings.
By that time, I had settled
on a satisfactory rhythm and tone,
and you would flop down
again into instant slumber.
How I envied you that ease.

In our case, not much
depended on a red wheelbarrow
or white chickens,
but so much
on the fixed stars of our cosmos,
my desk, the aquarium light I used
to swim my way, your soft, round
bowl of a bed, in which
you circled and circled to create
the desired angles and folds.
I circled, too, around a word,
a line, a stanza, knowing, all along,
that when you made your way to the door,
I would follow soon after.

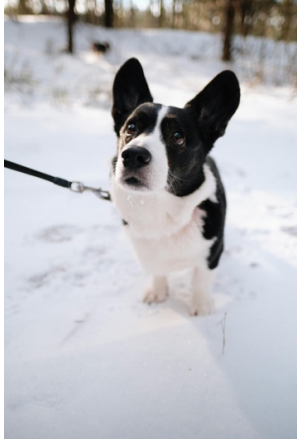


Photo by Jeanne: Pexels.com

Walking the Dog in the Snow **by William Derge**

It's as if a book written in an ancient language
suddenly reveals part of itself to me; as if,
suddenly I understand all the verbs,
or all the prepositions.

It's as if, what before, I had only understood
in the illustrations of fire hydrants, trees and lampposts,
could now be seen all over the white page.

And I am led by the ancient bearded sage,
who suddenly is infinitely wiser and more intelligent
than I had ever imagined he could be.

He leads me through the subtle character turns
and plot twists of his daily epic.

And what is even more amazing
is to see him write over the work of his predecessors,
not so much to correct their clumsy tropes,
as to add his interpretation of the scene, to mix
his vision to the countless visions of those
who stopped at this spot before him.

It's dark,
We're alone and off the beaten track,
but I know, that, try as I may,
my imitation of this sophisticated art
will not rate so much as a sniff,
even, or especially, when I try
to form the letters of my name in the snow.



Photo by Laurentiu Robu: Pexels.com

The Skin We Hide Behind by Phillip Elliott

The mask was never designed for comfort
or shaped with care.

It was forged out of necessity,
a shield against prying eyes—
it never sets off alarms,
never raises suspicion.
Social camouflage, seamless and clean.
Suede on the outside,
poison ivy on the inside.
Sit still long enough, and it numbs—
better than the sting of day one.

There was never a polite knock
to ask if someone was home—
decent, open, ready for visitors.
Love arrived with a warrant for my immediate arrest.
I don't know who tipped them off,
that I had been hiding something.

I tried to justify it:
I needed it for function, for survival,
for the work that kept me breathing.
A microscope would reveal
how deep the cynicism had burrowed.
Removing it would be
painful, costly—
but imagine my surprise

when it was snatched—without warning,
in the space between two blinks.

Suddenly, I was exposed—
naked, raw, and honest.

Armor never made me safe;
it just made me harder to hurt.



Phillip Elliott teaches special education in Brooklyn and writes from the heart. He co-wrote “A Couple L’s,” the song that ended up in the Emmy-nominated film Personal Statement. For almost ten years, Phillip has worked one-on-one with students who challenge him to listen deeper and write truer. His poems “I Still Remember” and “Tugging At The Thread” will appear in Down in the Dirt this July, and “Community Chest” drops in the Quillist Newsletter on May 1. His poem “Quiet Adjustments” will be published in the May issue of Mirage by Prosetrics. Right now, he’s stitching those pieces—and others—into his first chapbook, Between the Blink, while gearing up to apply for an MFA in Creative Writing.



Photo by Vika Glitter: Pexels.com

Diagnosis by Phil Flott

His striated heart thumps
at only 20%.

When he was only seven,
our house was caving in on him,
boards with nails scratching his face,
our words' dusty hot air
scorching his soft skin,
our eyes' baleful light

nearly blinding his oxygen-seeking pores.

My hope for him
was to again tote him around,
as when we were children,
and he straddled my hip.

But, one day, tired,
I had set him on the counter
and umph!
I let him fall.

His arm bone cracked.
The lump in my throat
says I should have
been the one who suffered.

—and so now:
Didn't I show him what vitamins to take,
how often to walk and do push-ups,
when to see the doctor?"



*Phil Flott is a retired priest. He has poems in many
delightful magazines including Heart of Flesh,
Raven's Perch, and As Surely as the Sun.*



Photo by Siegfried Poepperl: Pexels.com

Miracle of Woodpecker by Jacob Friesenhahn

This time of year,
before spring feels ready,
the sound begins—

before first light,
a sharp percussion
echoing the quiet,

the honesty
of beak against bark,
the hollow pulse

of hunger.

He knows where to strike,
where the wood is soft,
where a hidden world waits
just beneath the surface.

Such blows should break him,
but his head and heart
are built for shock.

From down here,
the tree looks unmoved,
but when I hold her trunk
in my hands,

I feel the shudder,
the blessing
of small wounds
that heal with time.



*Jacob Friesenhahn teaches Religious Studies and
Philosophy at Our Lady of the Lake University in
San Antonio. His first book of poems is The Prayer
of the Mantis (Kelsay Books).*

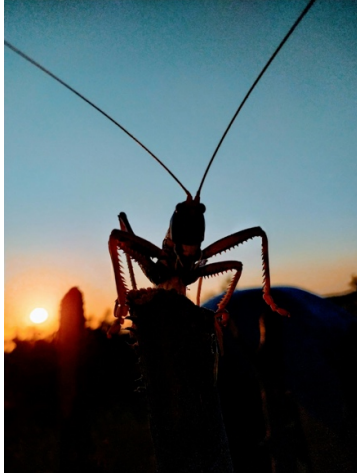


Photo by Mehmet Metehan: Pexels.com

Locust **by Jacob Friesenhahn**

We came down, windborne
cinders, hunger without
name, mouths full
of blades threshing
every field, leaving behind
silence.

We took what we could

carry, then carried away
more, raised rivers to dirty
mouths, drank them dry
before next breath.

Forests folded beneath
our feet, snapping
roots, cracking
hooves, tearing
wings, a green world curling
into ash, a dying worm lost
in smoke.

Still we devour.
Still we swarm upon
what remains.

The sky darkens, reflecting
our shadow.
The land stretches barren
at our backs,
the wind, finding nothing,
moves on.

Even now, a voice calls for rain.



Photo by Pramod Tiwari: Pexels.com

Pink Moon **by Jacob Friesenhahn**

Within the hush
of April's breath,
the phlox unfurl
their delicate hands,

holding spring's blush,
soft and tender.
Together, they whisper,
blossom by blossom,

into ears closed too long—
the secret of the East.

Where dawn finds
her forever home,
black earth sprouts

thin green blades,

reaching toward sky,
painted gold and rose
by sunrise.

After dark,
our Lenten herald shouts:
"Come out, come out
from winter's tomb!"

She rises gently,
the bedtime prayer
of a child,
words written
in starry silence.

The lilies below
bow their heads
and sway
under the silken light
of this fragrant night.

The world readies
to awaken
in a single, sacred
bloom.

Of Penguins by KJ Hannah Greenberg



KJ Hannah Greenberg uses her trusty point-and-shoot camera to capture the order of G-d's universe, and Paint 3D to capture her personal chaos. Sometimes, it's insufficient for her to sate herself by applying verbal whimsy to pastures where gelatinous wildebeests roam or fey hedgehogs play. Hannah's self-illustrated poetry collections are: *Miscellaneous Parlor Tricks* (Seashell Books, 2024), *Word Magpie* (Audience Askew, 2024), *Subrogation* (Seashell Books, 2023), and *One-Handed Pianist* (Hekate Publishing, 2021). Her coffee table book is *Real and Otherwise* (Seashell Books, 2025).



Photo by Tima Miroshnichenko: Pexels.com

Windfall by Soramimi Hanarejima

Outside the kitchen windows, the tops of the trees are bent to the left, their leaves flapping in the stiff wind. So, I hurry over to the hilltop park nearby and stand on the grassy peak to face the fierce air head on. I tilt my face up, feeling carefree, refreshed.

But when a harsh gust blasts me, stinging my eyes and cheeks, I have to turn away. My gaze lands on a woman down the gravel path to my left, her clothes ruffled by the wind. It's the first time I've seen someone else doing—whatever it is I'm doing. And this isn't just anyone. She's a coworker. We make eye contact and exchange brief nods of recognition. Then both of us turn our attention back to the wind.

The next day, she stops by my desk.

"Let's go," she says in an urgent tone that leaves no room for questions.

I follow after her—into an elevator and down to the parking garage. We get into her car, and just when I think we're going to have a serious talk or something, she starts the engine.

After a short drive through the city, she stops at a pier—the perfect place for a private chat. But when we step out of her car, something tells me we aren't here to talk. A gale of wind rushes at us, making me feel weightless.

We just stand there, letting the frothy air current work its magic until we are left with only a light breeze.

"How did you time that so perfectly?" I ask.

"I keep an eye on the weather conditions," she says. "To seize every opportunity I can."

Once we're back in her car, I say, "Thanks. It was nice to share this opportunity with you."

"You're welcome. It's great to have company. Hardly anyone in the city wind bathes."

I stare at her, mesmerized. My unusual habit has a name!

"I'll show you my favorite spots," she says on the way back to the office.

"I can't wait to see them," I answer. "Or should I say feel them."

"Oh, you'll definitely feel them."

I marvel at the promise of having a personal guide to the best wind bathing spots in the city but worry that I might disappoint her with my lack of wind geography. The hilltop park is my only spot.

But even with the possibility of letting her down, I revel in a lightness that's rare for a workday, and I'm pleased to see she's doing the same.



Soramimi Hanarejima is the author of the neuropunk story collection Literary Devices For Coping. Soramimi's recent work appears in Pulp Literature, The Offing, Black Warrior Review, and The Cincinnati Review.



Photo by Wolfgang Weiser: Pexels.com

On Giudecca by Ruth Holzer

At night when the cargo ships arrived or departed blasting their horns, our window would rattle as though being struck by hailstones. Once just before dawn we heard an owl call, mournful and hollow, an omen we ignored. We thought we'd continue to share that room under the roof and awaken together every day to the blessing of saints across the shimmering lagoon.

back to the mainland the longest bridge



Ruth Holzer is the author of eight chapbooks, most recently, Home and Away (dancing girl press) and Living in Laconia (Gyroscope Press). Her poems have appeared in Blue Unicorn, Freshwater, Journal of New Jersey Poets, POEM, and elsewhere. A multiple Pushcart and Best of the Net nominee, among her awards are the Edgar Allan Poe Memorial Prize, the Tanka Splendor Award and the Ito En Art of Haiku Contest Grand Prize.



Photo by Jack Bulmer: Pexels.com

The Ball of Wax **by Ruth Holzer**

What was the worst thing about today?
Was it my friend's early departure,
long anticipated, but still a blow?

Or the puncture wound, self-inflicted
on my foot with a rusty garden implement?
Or the visit to the nursing home?

Or returning to find a beer bottle
lying in front of the broken window
courtesy of neighborhood teenagers?

Talking to the cops, blocking the hole
with cardboard and duct tape, at least
that was something constructive,

but it ate the rest of the evening,
up to the hour when the skunk sprayed.
None of these: I'd say the worst

was an elusive pain deep in my heart's core,
too serious to remain in the background,
but not serious enough to do anything about.



Photo by Eugene Shirokov: Pexels.com

Identity by Janet E. Irvin

A dove on the roof,
peace blowing in the wind,
cocks its head, coos
whoo-whoo?

I, girl from a steel town,
bear a steel heart. A steel-
gray sky rains acid,
drip-drips-dripping.

Under the Mill Creek bridge,
I fish for meaning. The factory
alarm blares out warning:
hear me! flee!

I am smoke and mirrors
pacing up the hillside,
the river running clear,
layered

over sandstone and glacial
ice-carved strata eroded
and eroding, bedrock
of reinforced steel.

Now, the mills erased,
my identity smudged
with coal strokes
on an acid-washed

canvas...I am nomad,
scribe, inscribing bits
of soul-inciting water-
color sound and sight,

an identity forged
in a blast furnace
town hovering above
the Mahoning plateau.



Janet E. Irvin is an educator, poet, and the author of eight mystery/thriller novels under the name J.E. Irvin. Her poems have appeared in Hawaii Pacific Review, Creosote, The Raven's Perch, Sky Island Journal, Flying Island Journal, and Lothlorien Poetry Journal, as well as various anthologies. A member of the Greenville Poets, Sisters in Crime, Central Ohio Fiction Writers, and Buckeye Crime Writers, Irvin resides in southwest Ohio on the edge of a nature park, which serves as inspiration for her work.



Photo by Greg Grzegorz Sobieraj: Pexels.com

Revel by F.D. Jackson

Orange eye bears down, no respite from stifling heat.
It's mid-July, and I have to bury my Mother.

A dragonfly lands on my sneaker. My goddaughter asks,
"Is this your Mother visiting us?" We wait for a sign,
but no twitch of a wing or jointed leg.

I want to tell her that any communication of love, longing,
or forgiveness is lost to a great calm gulf that cannot be
breached, but I don't want to dispel the magic she lives in,
a mouse tucked inside a bejeweled purse. So, I say to her,
"Why burden the dragonfly with the onus of carrying a message?"

We simply revel in his presence, the color of green carnations,
dazzling silver-laced wings, marvel at the outrageous engineering
of his body, his aerial prowess. Laid bare by what Mary Oliver
would no doubt call his stunning detachment--catching mosquitoes
and midges, existing only for the glint of sunlight penetrating his
transparent wing--the hot breeze that blows him sideways as he lands
on horse manure--clinging to reeds bent over an edge of celadon pond--
no lament or self-pity as the evening bat scoops him up into her mouth.



F.D. Jackson lives in south Mississippi, along with her husband and sundry furry family members. When she is not reading or writing, she can be found wandering the Gulf Coast with a cold drink in her hand. F.D.'s works have appeared or are forthcoming in Winged Penny Review, Willawaw, Third Wednesday, FERAL, Rat's Ass Review, Anti-Heroine Chic and others.

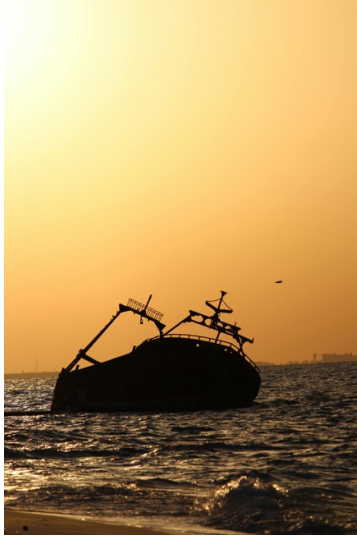


Photo by Fawzy Alex: Pexels.com

The Last Conversation **by F.D. Jackson**

You hint that I have to go on without you,
just like Wilbur had to live without Charlotte.
Jolted, I float outside myself, studying the
bones, our rusty ocean liner, tugboats pulling
it down a tributary out to sea.

We stay close to the coastline,
avoid the currents. You talk about all
the happy memories, but a storm stirs
hot tears and we're hauled further out
into open water, trying to keep our heads
above the waves.

We do the necessary work, clean up
what was left unresolved, everything that
can't withstand the salt of closure.
Strip the funnels and the radar mast,
prepare what's left of us for its final purpose--
a museum, a safe haven for all that we were.

I feel every hole you cut into the hull,
the frigid water pours around us,
as we sink into blue-green, settle upright
on the sea floor, among a constellation of reefs.

When enough time has passed, I'll dive,
visit the remains. Water molecules absorb and
scatter sunlight. Sponges and algae soften
the hard surfaces, parrotfish swim in and out
of fissures, blueheads lurk inside crevices.
Sharks and barracudas circle in the distance.



Photo by Sam Lion: Pexels.com

Let me compose again by O.P. Jha

there's no blank spot on the page again
so, I try to compose on the margin again

there's congestion on the main-road again
so, I proceed through a lovely lane again

all the bridges are broken on rivers again
so, I swim across the currents again

there're violent skirmishes on the street again
so, I move with my pregnant silence again

there're some bad smells in the air again
so, I plant a fragrant flower again

I failed to write on the margin again
so, I search a clean page again

in my heart, I've found a clean page again
so, I'm going to write a new song again.



O.P. Jha's works appeared in more than one hundred journals including Rigorous, Mantis, Punt Volat, Discretionary Love, In Parentheses, Shot Glass, Lothlorien Poetry, Odessa Collective, Backchannels, Poetry Pacific, Five Fleas, miniMag, Iceblink, Infinite Scroll, The Rome Review, Valiant Scribe, Kelp, pulplit and others. His poems appeared in anthologies We were Seeds and We are Resilient. He holds Ph.D. in "Translation Studies". X: @OPJha17



Photo by Daniele Sansone: Unsplash.com

Static **by Kevin Johnson**

The deafening hum of static crashed on my couch and insisted on staying.
Bags unpacked.
Feet kicked up.
Arms comfortably tucked behind his head.
Static took up residency in my life way dust clings to a worn-out vinyl.

"I'm home," he added, in case I didn't hear him the first time.
The hallways of my mind quickly wore the stains of his presence, in a greasy film of white noise.

Fuzzy.
Streaky.
Blurry.
Reality became smudged like an old cassette tape warped by the sun.

Melodies I used to know faded.
Harmonies dried up like abandoned instruments in a forgotten studio.
Static laced them together, knotted them tight,
and stuffed them into his pockets like broken songs.

I sought out rhythm.
I scoured for a groove.
I planted seeds for a key change...
but only weeds of distortion grew.

Every note I reached for echoed the hollow promises of a complacent addict—
promising change but delivering a tired refrain.
Static hit record and sang violently over every track.

And then, like the hush before a symphony, came April.

silence

She gently walked in
with all the tenderness of a child,
placing her hand on mine,
softly whispered a new lyric in my ear:

"I go by Lindsey"

And somewhere, under the layers of static,
under the scratched records and battered beats,
a song stirred awake.

The stage lights dimmed but never went dark.

Amps stayed hot.
Instruments stayed tuned.
Band stayed in the wings.
The encore was always on the setlist.



Kevin lives at the intersection of faith and creativity — a graphic designer by trade, a drummer, culinary enthusiast and photographer by passion. He is a proud husband, father of two, and dedicated follower of Christ.



Photo by Konstantin Mishchenko: Pexels.com

Nightgowns and Trees by Karina Jones

Clara has been trapped in her house for days, prevented from leaving by her own mind. She hardly leaves her room, only to get food and water. The space is too comfortable to leave, but she also feels that her inactivity makes her undeserving of the beauty she's curated for years. The pink decorations compliment the light wood floors and furniture, and they were welcoming when she was coming home from busy days in the cooler months of the year. But this empty summer, they seem to taunt her. What frustrates her most is that she can't identify what's causing her to feel so stuck and not knowing what started it makes it all the more difficult to stop.

A few hours ago, she woke up before ten for the first time in over a week and resolved to take small steps in her attempt to rid her limbs of the heaviness that had plagued them. For the past three days she had told herself that she'd go to the park, but the idea had seemed so daunting that she'd barely managed to get out of bed. The thought of the smells and heat and unpredictability of the outdoors, of being in public, nearly made her

ill. So today, she set a more reasonable goal: shower.

She had turned the water repeatedly from cold to hot as she washed her face, her body, her hair, getting overwhelmed by any temperature after a few minutes under the stream. But she'd done it. When she got out and wrapped herself in her robe, she began to feel suffocated, and nearly all the clothes she considered putting on would've given her the same sensation. So she decided to give herself grace and slip into her pink-spotted nightgown.

Now, she kneels on her floor in front of her short bookshelves. Goal two: pick a book to read. Even if she feels like she can't physically carry her body outside, she can at least try to take her mind somewhere other than her room and the 60 second worlds of her phone screen. She's trying to decide on something to read that doesn't feel too far removed from herself, but she worries that anything that tells of her own world might be packed with dense language that won't do anything to clear the fog from her head. Her mind begins to wander and now she simply stares out the window. She starts to get irritated with herself but pushes the feeling down. She's beginning to understand that constantly criticizing herself may be part of what's made her feel so stuck. She's learning that it's easier to do things gently, let herself stray a bit from her plans if she needs to. Even if it means staying in this position as the wood begins to press harshly into her knees, her heels straining with the weight of her body sitting back on them.

Her mind begins to shift from herself to the tree outside her window, its branches beginning to grow heavy with the deep green leaves brought on by summer. The tree had been trimmed a year ago after she'd complained about its branches scraping against her window, but almost immediately after she began to miss the noise. Especially now, in the

summer when she isn't drained from full days of activity and lays awake at night, feeling like there's nothing stirring except herself and all of the imagined things that could harm her. She's been watching with anticipation as the branches slowly begin to reach back towards her room. Most noises in the night scare her, but this tree is so familiar to her that the noises it creates will be more of a greeting than a warning of something lurking. She remembers how small it was when she and her family first arrived at this house, hardly taller than her six year old self. She remembers how it had almost reached the second story over the span of five years until a storm came and knocked it down, leaving only the roots and the stump. She remembers how it had grown back with greater speed than it had before, its trunk sturdier and its branches producing even greater quantities of flowers and leaves. She thinks about how every spring, its delicate white petals collect on her window sill like gifts.

Clara realizes, though, that she doesn't know what the tree feels like. It wasn't really strong enough to climb before the storm, and by the time it had gained stability she was past the age of climbing trees. She had never really been a tree climber, anyway. Maybe that was why she found herself oftentimes so averse to the idea of outside, bugs whizzing rudely past her ears and smells clinging to her hair and skin. She knows she should go outside and brush her hand along the trunk, that the fresh air would probably revitalize her in a way she couldn't even predict, but instead she just climbs up into the seat next to her window, as close to the tree as she can stomach at the moment.

The summer air is usually still, granting no breezy relief to the oppressive air, but as Clara stares out the window, her face inches from the glass, the tree's leaves rustle, and the branches begin to dip towards her, just as close to the glass as Clara.

Before she even knows what she's doing Clara is grabbing a book with a green splattered cover and hurrying down the stairs, freshly washed hair flying out behind her. She heads for the front door, a path she didn't think she would follow for at least a few more days. Her bare feet carry her across the plush grass, not yet warmed by the sun the way the air around her was. The cool wetness of the grass carries through her feet up into her exposed legs, while the top of her head and lightly sleeved arms are already beginning to feel heated. The contrast is everything she had been trying to achieve with her hot and cold shower.

The trunk looks taller than it had from her window, the branches less sturdy. She places her hand against the wood, observing the rough grooves of the bark. She starts to wish the tree were something cleaner, something with smooth surfaces like a birch tree that wouldn't dig into her skin or make crevices where dirt could settle. But she realizes that her feet would have nothing to grip onto, the tree would reject her efforts to climb it. So she grips onto the lowest bough and tries to hoist herself into the nest-like part of the tree where the trunk turns to branches. She places her book there and tries again, her nose involuntarily crinkling as smells of dirt and lawn clippings creep into her nose. But this discomfort is what she's hoping for the tree to cure, for it to become a bridge between her and the spaces she knows could be healing in these times of mental stagnation. She tries to ignore the dirt and scrapes that invade her skin as she struggles against the trunk. She tries to embrace it. Embrace the idea of dust and grime against her newly clean skin, yellowing her nightgown. Embrace the smell beginning to cling to her hair that had smelled like lavender only moments ago.

When she finally brings her body into the tree, bleeding slightly in several places, she decides that for today she'll just settle in this nest. She isn't ready yet to test which branches would hold her,

to climb up into the thickest areas of leaves where bees and other insects would come to mingle with her. But she would get there. For now, she sits with her legs hanging against the trunk and opens her book. It's only now that she looks to see what book she grabbed. It's a book about a young girl but written for adults, its language simple but messages layered. She left her phone in her room. What choice does she have but to read? What choice would the book give her but to bring herself into a more active life, one worthy of being told in a story?



Karina Jones graduated from the University of California, Riverside with a BA in Creative Writing and a minor in English after only three years as an undergraduate. After a year of stumbling through the adult world as a queer black woman with an arts degree (being a substitute teacher), she is pursuing an MFA in Fiction at the University of Washington in Seattle. She believes there is real magic in the world, and much of it is accessed through literature.



Photo by Alice AliNari: Pexels.com

Running from Herself Hanna Keyes

She sees the storm reflected in gravestones,
yet cannot shake herself awake.
A dame runs through the woods,
trying to escape the monsters
and horrors concealed within.
Heart pounding with every step.

She must not look back.
A subtle calling, A whispered name
carried by the fingers of the wind.
Iron gates are left ajar like parted lips,
crying, *you are not yet lost*.
Vines hang like drapery on the walls.

Her heart is a drum—ba dum, ba dum,
sending shivers down her spine.
Every step is closer to an answered prayer.
Then—in one final step—
all is washed away, an open portal gapes,
offers sweet escape.

Her pulse slows, tiny beats in her wrists.
Yet here she is all alone.
A dame with no known name,
Finally free, yet oh, so blue.
She can't erase her pitted past,
but she can rewrite her story.

A path of beauty, a path of grace.
a path where she can live forever.
A world haloed in light,
shimmering with new possibilities.
The wind stills calls her name,
but this time—it is to stay.

She feels peace seep into her core,
every pore bathed with beauty.
Her heart emerges, tender and new
no longer more a stone.
She sees the beauty in finally being home.



Hanna Keyes is a Gothic/Romantic author who writes with the idea of emotion in mind. Hanna's writing is written in a way to reflect her life experiences and emotion. Hanna started off writing for fun and as a way to express herself. Soon after Hanna started writing it become more to her than just a simple journaling it was a way of showing her emotion and expressing some of the struggles she has faced. When Hanna is not writing she enjoys cooking, reading, going to church and spending time with her son.



Photo by Matheus Bertelli: Pexels.com

My Girl Scout Leader Says We Should Be Crafty by Susan Kolon

The boys get to play the good
games. Us girls, second
thoughts, accessories. Carry

the bag of snacks, sit behind
Kool-Aid jugs: *for Pete's sake*
don't spill any, dust off

home plate, scurry back
to the bench. Boys get to spit
gum; we blow bubbles

that catch in our hair
or swallow a wad that stays
for seven years.

Joey Bauman proposes
a water balloon fight
—he can blister a ball to home base;

you want to be on his team.
Ten years later, he robbed
a bank and went to jail.

I'm the lookout, climb
the Quinlan's apple tree

in two hikes, being small
feels good off the ground.
All I had to do was not move,
imagine myself less

of an outsider. I put
a crab apple in my pocket
to throw at Joey's twin, Paul

and a puss. That stupid,
sticky face always looking
at me with kind eyes.

Slender clouds make it cool;
my nipples start to bud as
the apple gushes square

on Paul's forehead.
I say it was an accident.
Joey seethes, *Play nice with us*

next time, my eyes brimmed
as I stroke the worn torso
of a tiny troll doll.

What is a mean girl?, I ask
my father, he looks away,
You were mothered by one.

My big sisters say, *Look out*
for liars and cheats, like Melissa
from swim team—lies to your face

as her braces twinkle, shorts her flip
turn under the lane marker, bold
streaks on her white back.



Susan Kolon is a health educator from Chicago. She received an M.S. from Northwestern University and a B.A. from Michigan State University, where she was first published as a creative writing student. Her work has appeared with Corporeal Lit Mag, Dulcet Literary Magazine, Gnashing Teeth Publishing and Anti-Heroine Chic.



Photo by Bernd Dittrich: Pexels.com

Clenched in a Heat Wave **by Yvonne Higgins Leach**

The endless reach of the sun's tendrils
twines every corner and threads
the stone vase into a ringlet of fire.
The spines of lined books grow fainter.

The curtains droop like wet hair.
The dog sprawls on the kitchen tiles
near his water bowl; even that
does not refresh. Hour upon hour upon hour.

The air is rotten as death,
so heavy bugs' wings stall from stickiness.
A bird calls desperately to no response
and the tick of the wall clock becomes my breath.

What we'd do for a sudden downpour,
for the rush of rain in the gutters,
for dirt and sticks and leaves to tumble in a current
along the curb in a marvelous torrent.



Yvonne Higgins Leach is the author of a second poetry collection In the Spaces Between Us (Kelsay Books 2024). Her latest passion is working with shelter dogs. She splits her time living on Vashon Island and in Spokane, Washington. For more information, visit www.yvonnehigginsleach.com



Photo by Pixabay: Pexels.com

One of Those Days by Edward Lee

Instead of ink,
dust trails
from my nib;

it is to be one
of those days,
the sooner it begins,
the quicker
it will end,

crude markings
on a page
making no difference
to anything,

if they ever did
at all.



Edward Lee's poetry, short stories, non-fiction and photography have been published in magazines in Ireland, England and America, including The Stinging Fly, Skylight 47, Acumen, The Blue Nib and Poetry Wales. His poetry collections include A Foetal Heart, Bones Speaking With Hard Tongues, To Touch The Sky And Never Know The Ground Again and The Heart As Dust Lost In The Wind.

He also makes musical noise under the names Ayahuasca Collective, Orson Carroll, Lego Figures Fighting, and Pale Blond Boy.

His blog/website can be found at <https://edwardmlee.wordpress.com>



Photo by Prakruthik Photography: Pexels.com

Heron on the Rock **by Chris Litsey**

Regal majesty perched upon his sun-kissed throne as the tears of the West
finally bring the thirsty kingdom back in necromantic drownings.

Hunched, scowled, perturbed by every inconvenient well-wish from the
air of his ancestors. The marsh has drained into a half-living body,

so slow to flow, a thousand other thrones may rise up like gravestones,
marking the dead generations who will never take their crowns.



Chris Litsey is a teacher, poet, and former editor of Indiana University Purdue University Columbus's literary magazine, Talking Leaves. He's published there and in other publications. He is also a father and loves reading, writing, getting tattooed, and exploring museums. Follow him on Instagram: @christianlitsey.



Photo by Merlin Lightpainting: Pexels.com

If It's from the Neck Up by Todd Matson

Have you noticed that when we're sick,
if it's from the neck down, people will tell us
to seek treatment,
see a doctor,
take our medicine,
and if it's serious, see a medical specialist?

If it's just skin deep, a dermatologist.
For diabetes, an endocrinologist.
For kidney disease, a nephrologist.
For liver disease, a hepatologist.
For heart trouble, a cardiologist.
For respiratory issues, a pulmonologist.
For stomach trouble, a gastroenterologist.
For autoimmune disorders, an immunologist.
For muscle and joint pain, a rheumatologist.
For blood diseases, a hematologist.
For cancer, an oncologist.

Why then
if it's from the neck up,
when we're feeling
anxious, afraid,
insecure, sad,
stressed, depressed, lonely,
discouraged, confused
or overwhelmed
do we get a different message?

"Suck it up."
"Get over it."
"Shake it off."
"Stop your whining."
"Don't be a crybaby."
"Don't worry about it."
"Put it out of your mind."
"Stop feeling sorry for yourself."
"Put some dirt on it and move on."

As if our brain, that three-pound soft tissue organ
in our head, the hardware of our heart, mind and soul

is not as much a part of our body
as our beating heart,
lungs, kidneys, liver,
stomach, intestines, pancreas,
eyes and ears, arms and legs,
muscles, bones and joints.



Todd Matson is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in North Carolina, United States. His poetry has been published in The Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling, Salvation South, Soul-Lit, The Clayjar Review, Agape Review, Redrosethorns, San Antonio Review, The Brussels Review, The Shallot, WestWard Quarterly and Mobius: The Journal of Social Change; and his short stories have been published in Ariel Chart International Literary Journal; Faith, Hope and Fiction; Agape Review and The Piker Press. He has also written lyrics for songs recorded by several contemporary Christian music artists, including Brent Lamb, Connie Scott and The Gaither Vocal Band.

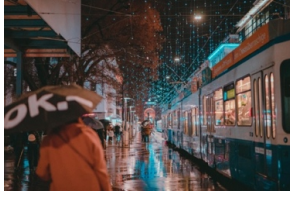


Photo by Valentin Angel Fernandez: Pexels.com

To Zurich by Emer McDermott

What is it I'm looking for?
The city speeds by and blurs.
Soft sky, deteriorating blue,
like washed and worn denim
—a day well used.
Street lights shimmer like artificial jewels.
Citrine, Tiger's Eye,
Yellow Apatite.
Dusk arrives without a blink,
above becomes ink.

Watching others' lives
contained inside windows.
Quaint houses
with colorful shutters not yet closed. Picturesque people look so little
behind glass. A blonde girl in her own world, moves briskly by.

Another train, parallel,
goes towards Basel.
People sit, basking
in the mellow glow of the light bulbs.

An inviting silence,
a pleasant kind of bliss.
A forgotten luxury
—to sit and observe. How nice it is,
to have nothing expected of me.
Observing, being,
growing heavenward
like the trees.



Emer McDermott resides in Clare, Ireland. She is a post-primary teacher of English and Religious Education.



Photo by Jeremy Bishop: Pexels.com

Mini Infinity by Emer McDermott

I lived in the same moments as you.
I loved you in those small moments too.
I lost you in the aftermath,
our hidden heat gave up and crashed,
glowing and dying like embers.
My loose ends almost made a noose for me.

I liked the sun in my eyes,
I was temporarily blind.
Innocence drifting away.
Innocence drifting away.

I lived in the same moments with you.
I could always find your eyes on me,
it didn't matter who was there.
I sit juxtaposed between two nowheres.
I can see all your soul but can't get inside.
I'm too nice to smash your glass house but I
could succeed every time.
Drowsy days drenched in white heat.
Innocence drifting away.
Innocence drifting away.

Sure enough, time has unravelled me.
Down bad, struggling like I never have.
I know how these things go, I'm already having
bad dreams.
I had too much faith in you,

in the wrong people I always do.
I had too much faith in you.



Photo by The Sulyn Gallery: Pexels.com

Blue Plumbago by Marla Dial Moore

I have grown tired of grieving—
worn out from the weight
and the quicksand of it,
the sheer work of working
through it. I've spent

too many seasons
considering crabgrass:
How it imitates the plants
it envies, burrows under roots —
this stubborn, self-involved parasite

stealing joy.

For now, I am finished
with the study of fallen leaves
as they curl and shrivel in flames,
wearied with watching the way the last
whisper of smoke lingers over ash:

Nothing left to ignite.

Today, I'd rather tell you
about the plumbago:
tender shoots just peeking
upward from softening earth,
the way it spreads — these
intrepid membranes of bliss,
flowering from the root.
The way it loves nothing
so much as the sun —
the way it persists,

indestructible.

Soon, a riot of sticky blue blossoms
will burst forth to greet you,
eager to decorate everything they touch,
hitch a ride with any passerby —
spilling over all borders,

pulsing with uncontainable joy.



Marla Dial Moore is a recovering journalist who previously worked for The Associated Press and various news publications in Arizona and Texas. She also spent more than 15 years with an Austin-based geopolitical intelligence firm. She has written poetry peripatetically for more than 20 years as a means of surviving global, local and personal news events. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in a variety of publications, including Merion West; The Metaworker; When the River Speaks; Soul Poetry, Prose and Arts Magazine; the San Antonio Review; Voices de la Luna; and Journal X.



Photo by Bohemian_Heart Tanusree: Pexels.com

A Layer of Caliche **by W. Barrett Munn**

The pickax pings and jumps sideways;
an inauspicious start to digging a hole
to create a water feature in our backyard
in the high desert on Sunset Mountain
on the east side of Las Vegas.

The locals call it caliche, this hard
layer like cement that lies just below
the surface. It often requires explosives
to break through. I have to rely on
expletives and my own short fuse.

Maybe that's why we ended up split up.
By the time water and the return pump
were added, my pickax was the size
of a rock hammer, my blisters half healed.
We had run out of reason to stay together.

Or so we believed. But reasons don't live
inside our own heads—they exist separately,
as others' caring about us. How we live
effects their lives. What hides in our heads
is like caliche; and we're ready to explode.



W. Barrett Munn studied writing under Larry Callen. His poetry has appeared in print and online in Awakenings Review, The New Verse News, Sequoia Speaks, Soul Poetry, Prose, & Arts Magazine, Book of Matches, Copperfield Review Quarterly, Haikuniverse, 5-7-5 Haiku Journal, and many others.



Photo by Margaret Weir: Pexels.com

The Race **by W. Barrett Munn**

From up here on memory hill, I see
two boys full of vinegar and mixed intentions,
not really friends, not exactly enemies,
challengers to the rightful throne of
leader of the class at Madison Elementary.

Two lanes made of compacted red dirt,
parallel, and divided by a length of grass,
a road—a country driveway really—that leads
to gravel that leads to Highway 9; but today,
it's a racecourse formed from a challenge—

which ten-year-old, Tim or me, could reach
the gate first in a foot race, starting from my
front porch?

There are 5,280 feet in a mile. Our feet
had no chance to run full out even a tenth of that.

Oklahoma dust dyes Keds red-tipped,
and pounding slaps from inside a race sound like
propellers of a WWII fighter in a dog fight.
The heaving breaths that begin at the quarter point
don't belong to my dog, who's chasing rabbits

in the field beside us. Near the halfway point,
by mutual consent, we decide to call it a draw.
Mired among wheezes and bent-knee positions
and gasps to draw air, ego remains intact.
It wasn't me who vomited.



Photo by Brett Sayles: Pexels.com

Bell Ringer Takes a Break **by W. Barrett Munn**

Sonny came at me throwing
a roundhouse right,
an easy kind of punch to duck.
I tried to say I'm sorry
when I slipped his punch
and bear hugged him, but he
pulled away, sat, and began
to cry. He wouldn't listen
to me or to reasons why
Melinda took a shine to me.
He just sat there
on the bottom step of the stoop
outside 37 East 14th Street,
Apartment D, on the second floor
with no elevator or heat, fridge
that doesn't work, but Sonny does,
or did, drive an ice cream truck,
and Melinda was his favorite—
licorice ice she always ordered—
there's magic in that recipe,
but now life and that recipe are both
a disaster. Melinda's taken a shine
to me. And Sonny won't get up.



Photo by Herbert Santos: Pexels.com

Bloodline by Sreeja Naskar

This morning, I woke up and we no longer spoke
the same language. Your words, white-robed, floating
somewhere above me. Mine, dirt-wet, teeth-broken,
spit out in the dark, red at the edges.
You said I didn't know real from fake.
But I have touched this world, and it did not dissolve in
my hands. I have kissed mouths that tasted like rust and
morning. I have held love like a fruit split open. I have knelt
at the altar of hunger and called it living.

Mother, if I hold your name under my tongue too long,
it will clot. It will curdle. It will choke me from the inside.
So I say it, even when it tastes like rust.
So I write it, even when my hands shake.
So I love you, even when we no longer understand.

Tell me, mother, what is more real than that?



Sreeja Naskar (she/her) is a poet from West Bengal, India. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in Poems India, Modern Literature, Gone Lawn, Eunoia Review, among other literary journals. She believes in the quiet power of language to unearth what lingers beneath silence.



Photo by Markus Spiske: Pexels.com

Inheritance of Hunger by Sreeja Naskar

My mother said never let them see you beg —
so I learned to swallow hunger,
press my hands together beneath the table
while my ribs became an abandoned church.

A fist in the gut, tight as a promise.
Tight as the silence between *I love you*
and *don't make me say it*.

I learned to press my ribs inward,
make space for the ghosts that came hungry too.
Men at the bus stop roll cigarette paper,
a mother across the street pulls a child's wrist
like a leash. Love, in translation.

How do you keep the emptiness from growing?
Someone wrote about making a home
in the spaces between asking,
between want and quiet — then grow sharp-edged from it.

Learn to chew longing until it softens,
until it tastes like nothing at all.

The first time I let it slip —

I was seventeen, a boy's mouth close enough
to taste my breath. *What do you want?* he asked,
and I almost said it. Almost opened myself
like a wound.

But then I remembered the last line of a shitty book —

The body forgets, but the mouth remembers.

Opens in its sleep.

Wants.

Wants.

Wants.

That was the first time I asked for more.

The second time, God mistook it for a prayer.

The last time, my mother's words

became a flesh wound.

She said even hunger, if held long enough,

can start to look like grace.



Photo by outsidethccn dsgn: Pexels.com

After the Good Rain, Along the Bluff by Kathy O'Fallon

Ground gives a little, takes an impression
of my soles. It feels like an earth-cloud—

first a dip, then a bounce—as if I've shed
a few pounds. The sun warms my back

out of its stiff complaint. And there go
the gulls transcending the sky's silhouette.

There are unsettled people in my midst,
and many who disagree with me, but today

weather's in charge—its refusal to be swayed,
nudging me along. Maybe someone will note

my lighter step, earth softer with the touch
of nourishment seeping through—just enough

to influence a thought, even as the drought
persists—something simple, out of nowhere,

such as, *I think after this I'll call my mom.*



O'Fallon's poems have been published in journals and anthologies such as RATTLE, Kestrel, and Watertower Press, along with her fourth chapbook scheduled for release this fall, Variations on a Theme of Love. She is a clinical psychologist in Carlsbad, CA.



Photo by Kourosh Qaffari: Pexels.com

Life After Life by Kathy O'Fallon

As if I'm dreaming in a meadow's
gauze, loved ones gone for years
and not so long, suddenly gather
'round. Brother Tommy leads
the charge, who'd always sought,
rejoined the stars at fifty-four.
Born while Mom still mourned
her baby, Bobby, now here, grown.
And Jim, with Mom, who, once
she passed, invited death with drink.
Behind, the dad who stayed so late
I'd hoped would leave, in shadow.

Grandpa Jack, whose nightcap kept
his scalp from winter's frost, beams
a kiss across the space between us—
his portrait of me paused to cancer's
fate. And Uncle Warr, his son, for
whom I took Mom's place for decades.

Jain, who left at twenty-four, her jump
I can't get over still. Scared of bridges
since. Followed by Diane, who let the ocean's
cold immerse her whole. And Carolynne,
who loved her men, though never quite
the right one, lost last year to brain disease.

Too big a group to give them all a bio,
though each deserves a book of poems.

Their smiles—I wish I could find words—
they all sound corny (clear night shower
drenching me in bliss)—you get the picture,
hopeless. All to tell you this: I've never felt
so greeted, as if love has no limits—that is,
I felt it far beyond the personal: that love
just is. Nothing I can do can rob love
of its power. What a relief. They bring me
this, now before life shows me to the door.
It's time to live.



Photo by Anurag Gusain: Pexels.com

All That Clucking by Kathy O’Fallon

The sense of smell, when it begins to fade,
has no remedy. I light sandalwood incense
just in case my house is developing old-lady
odor, and everyone’s too polite to say so.
It is said I am an optimist.

But my grandkids wander when they visit,
the world reduced to a chip. They fiddle
with the paper clips on my desk as if
their fingers need entertaining—the old
standards glistening and others blue-coated,
and back when Frisky was my middle name—
the few left circle-shaped or triangled—
that organized my years as real, tucked
in file folders named *Utility Bills*,
Bank Statements, *Tax Returns*.

But now it’s all in a cloud, even my name
docu-signed, except for the occasional
autograph, but Kindle coffins threaten.
Poor paper clips, poor books dwindling
on the shelf, what will it take to bring us
back—all silver-shine and flex—hens
with our fanfare of wings and all that
clucking, corralling the chicks safe
under our skirts?



Photo by Mabel Amber: Pexels.com

Last Request Lest I Forget: *No Cemetery* by Kathy O'Fallon

To rest beneath a rise and fall of land
unblemished, a shore where rivers rush but half
the season now; below a wedge of meadow,
of blue-eyed grass and boughs of willow—
green blanket, shade. Where families come to laze,
and kids will bathe in mud, where couples hold
each other's hands, and shy girls read their books,
where bugs and beasts not yet extinct, beneath
a stack of stones, can feast upon my bones,
to seed again someday. 'Midst winters' storms
and blistering sun, rebellions yet to come,
erect no mausoleum, gate of steel,
or place of worship. Isn't earth enough,
unfenced, to keep this meager spirit near?



Photo by Chris: Pexels.com

Mother Day by Darrell Petska

How sweetly Mother Day tends her hours.
In deepest Dark her youngest stir,
dreams of early birds and sun's first lancets
turning their thoughts to dawn.

Each by each she sends her brood
unto the dew-bright fields quilting
time's grand expanse. Off they gambol,
some to graze, some to stray as hours

will do, till noon's high reconnoiter,
Mother leading her hours to the choicest
repasts, sating their hungers
before Dark shutters sun from the sky.

Her dears, come dusk, she gathers in:
time to digest, reflect, give full thanks
for the safety of the fold when
weariness sends them to their rest.

She tucks them in, side to side, her
heathered song releasing them to dream
as deepest Dark claims night.
How sweetly Mother Day tends her hours.



Darrell Petska is a retired university engineering editor and three-time Pushcart Prize nominee. His poetry appears in Verse-Virtual, 3rd Wednesday Magazine, Orchards Poetry Journal, and widely elsewhere (conservancies.wordpress.com). Father of five and grandfather of seven, he lives near Madison, Wisconsin, with his wife of more than 50 years.



Photo by Mikhail Nilov: Pexels.com

Flight by Darrell Petska

Before gravity
and sorrow
Sis and I

legs motoring
the propulsive stems
of our alfalfa field

would fly
soar
double dip

through azure lanes
of wild and woolly
cotton candy zoos

fly all summer
twinned birds
catch us if you can—

contrails of memory
small mercy
tatter on the power lines

time's harvest
cut, baled,
hauled off in a day

her lone, high summons
loop-de-looping
through celestial fields

time's winds
urging my old
wings home



Photo by Pixabay: Pexels.com

Some dreams fade by CM Pickard

—muted echoes of vibrant hues,
a well-worn jumper spun in the wash

others linger,
only to ricochet off boundaries;
assembled and fortified through fear

chaotic fancies;
bouncing balls spinning on a wheel
or courage drowned in liquid amber

several float away,
falling leaves adrift on the breeze;
elusive desires hovering beyond our reach

a few decay;
yesterday's flowers wilting in a vase,
remains of unfinished accomplishments

and some dreams—just die.



CM Pickard is a self-proclaimed late bloomer, living in Melbourne, Australia. Her poetry is forthcoming in The Borough, and have appeared in The Raven Review, Pineberry Literary Journal, and The Night Writer Review.



Photo by Mike Jones: Pexels.com

Curiosity by CM Pickard

Voices hum and dishes clatter,
finding our booth, we wait—
gazing through glass prisms

squawking parakeets on a limb
our chatter ignites and interest piques,
to an unkempt woman outside—

coffee in hand, she pauses at a door;
boxes, packages and plastic bags
crammed into a tiny hatchback

overflowing contents pressing
against closed windows,
the tortoise hiding in its shell

speculation arises—is it romance?
the noble overture, unfolding
upon *The Globe's* stage

—or fleeing from harm,
the wallaby bolting
from a wedge-tail's grasp,

maybe it's a universal tale of growth
and maturity—the joey leaving
the safety of her mother's pouch?

clad in a blue tracksuit, she slides—
the lizard navigating narrow chasms,
before a key turns and engine growls

in her retreat, our curiosity lingers
until our morning liquid brew mirrors
the outback's parched riverbeds



Photo by Darina Belonogova: Pexels.com

Silent Killer by CM Pickard

on a plastic chair, I perch in sweat,
squinting against the glaring light
on a sunbaked concrete patio
unshaded to dispel my discomfort,

my muscles tighten, nostrils flare
do they notice, or even care?

caustic voices scorch my brain

—fiery trail erupts against blistering
flesh, like my childhood sunburn
on holidays at *Rosebud's* foreshore

*Manners elude some, I tell myself
like fish evading the outcast net.*

Aromas of fermented offerings escape
lunchboxes and tests my polite façade,
I force smile—a hollow void,
like a patient awaiting a root canal

*did years of lockdown isolation fuel
anxiety and spoil social interaction?*

self-absorbed colleagues drone onward
while arms flail overhead, and I choose
silence to protect fragile friendships,
quelling temper tantrums

*I wonder—does crankiness flourish
with the crows-feet forming on my face?*

we return to once abandoned office walls,
—expelled, like a bear from its winter's cave
into a new world of forced socialization,
the new silent killer of workers everywhere.



Photo by DI LAI: Pexels.com

Melting by Carol Pohly

Come into the melting,
where wet, white rags of winter

wring themselves dry
in patches across the lawn,

where boxwoods, whose
shoulders have been hunched

under snowy burdens, begin
to lift their heads into the morning,

where the viburnum, whose soggy
boots are still sunk in iced soil,

begins to burst with buds
on swollen branches.

Slide into your own boots
and slosh across the sod;

leave the frozen corners
of your life behind –

the paperwork, the unpaid
bills, the broken T.V.

Saunter past the burgeoning
crocus and hyacinth,

past the rhythmic dripping
of iced eaves;

wash your face in a cool
splash of vanishing tension,

and slip into a world
bulging with hope.



Carol Pohly is a published lyricist, co-author of a book of poetry and photography, and her poems have been published or are forthcoming in several anthologies including Vita Brevis Press, Mock Turtle Zine, Main Street Rag, "Welcome Home" by Yellow Springs Home, Inc., Soul Poetry, Prose, and Arts Magazine, and "For A Better World 2025" by Greater Cincinnati Poets.

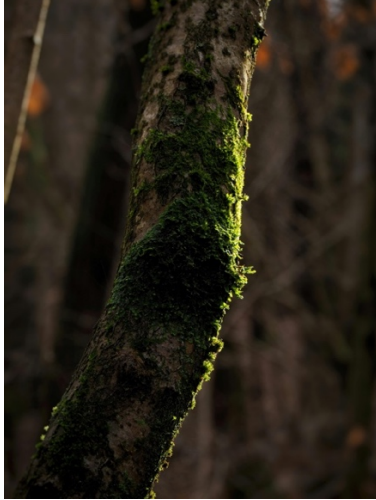


Photo by Andrea Aliverti: Pexels.com

Light Goes Down by Samuel Prestridge

Light goes down like Jesus was a color
to be wished for, spitefully, as darkness
seeps from the undersides of Judas moss,
weather thickened, rises from idiot
fissures in the new leaf-fall.

It's never
 over easily, never a hero
going down in flames, a story that will
come across as anything worth keeping.

Still, I'm keeping a record: today, a last,
red match strikes a rough horizon,
flares with something to prove—
a man who knows he's dying and
begins to wear a hat.



Samuel Prestridge, a post-aspirational man, lives and works in Athens, Georgia. His book A Dog's Job of Work is forthcoming from Sligo Creek Publishing. He is currently an Associate Professor of English at the University of North Georgia. His children concede that he is, generally, an adequate father.

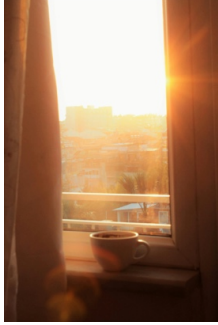


Photo by Gülru Sude: Pexels.com

Because I'm Not Giving Up by Diana Raab

I will wake up tomorrow morning
and allow the sun to slip
through my bedroom window
as I slowly swivel my legs
to the floor to meet my slippers.

I shall stretch my arms wide,
take a hearty breath,
shake my hair loose
and thank the day.

Nights have been tough.
Darkness slides demons through open windows,
and owls on my roof offer wisdom
through the chimney.

Tossing and turning all night,
I think about the future.
Live in hope they say.
Even when the shooting star
does not allow me to make a wish,
angels arrive with the sunrise.



Diana Raab, MFA, PhD, is a memoirist, poet, workshop leader, thought-leader and award-winning author of fourteen books. Her work has been widely published and anthologized. She frequently speaks and writes on writing for healing and transformation. Her work has been nominated for Best of the Net. Her 14th and newest book is Hummingbird: Messages from My Ancestors, A memoir with reflection and writing prompts (2024). Raab writes for Psychology Today, The Good Men Project, Sixty and Me, Thrive Global, and is a guest writer for many others. Visit: <https://www.dianaraab.com>. Raab lives in Southern California.



Photo by Rahul Pandit: Pexels.com

The Archivist of Borrowed Memories **by Kaavya Rajan**

She sits beneath the low hum of fluorescent ghosts,
fingers poised above a slab of flickering light,
watching memories filter through—
not her own, never hers, only borrowed,
only rented for the right price.

A mother's laughter spills across the screen,
honey-thick and clinging to the walls of an empty house.
A boy's first fall from a bicycle,
the sting of asphalt blooming across his knees.
A soldier's last breath,
sucked from the world in a sandstorm of static.

She catalogs them all—
the banal and the extraordinary,
love letters and breakups,
burning cities and childhood snowfalls,
all reduced to bright little files,
neatly labeled, color-coded,
waiting for purchase.

Outside, the city glows with the hunger of neon and want.
People stagger into Memory Houses,
hands clutching crumpled bills,
eyes wide with the need to feel something—

something real, something stolen,
something they once had but let slip away.

A woman asks for the warmth of her father's arms.
She will pay anything, anything at all.
A man trades the day he fell in love
for the relief of forgetting her name.
Some come for joy,
others for grief,
but most just come to remember
what it is to be whole.

She is not allowed to take from the archive,
not permitted to stitch herself together with fragments
of other people's lives.
And yet, she presses a trembling hand
to the screen,
lets the data pulse against her palm,
and wonders—

What would it be like
to live inside a memory
that was truly her own?



Kaavya Rajan is a high school student living in India, passionate about reading and writing. Some of her other work can be found online at <https://witandwords8.wordpress.com>.



Photo by Yogendra Singh: Pexels.com

The City That Forgot It Was Alive by Kaavya Rajan

Somewhere between dusk and forgetting,
the city misplaced its name.

No one noticed at first.
The street signs remained,
but their letters curled at the edges,
peeling like old wallpaper in an abandoned house.
The radio hosts fumbled when giving the traffic report,
stumbling over syllables that should have been familiar.
People turned to one another,
expecting reassurance,
only to find their tongues had grown heavy
with words that no longer belonged.

Buildings shivered in the morning fog,
steel and glass bending toward something unseen.
The grocery stores stocked products
with labels written in alphabets no one could read.
Apartments grew extra rooms overnight,
doorways that led to places
their tenants did not remember entering.

Some swore the bridges led to different cities now,
their spans stretching into unfamiliar skylines.
Others whispered of a train station
that appeared at the edge of town,

though no one could recall the last time they'd seen
a train arrive or leave.

A woman stepped outside
and found her shadow missing.
A man lit a cigarette,
and the smoke curled into the shape
of something trying to speak.

The city council held an emergency meeting.
They spoke in quiet voices,
careful not to disturb the air,
as though the city itself might overhear them
and slip further away.

They hired a cartographer to map the streets,
but every morning,
his blueprints rearranged themselves in his sleep.
They tried to write the name of their home in stone,
but the letters would not hold their shape.
Ink ran from the page.
Memory dissolved like salt in water.

And so, they did the only thing left to do—
they carried on.
They walked streets that might not have been theirs,
greeted neighbors who might have never lived there before.
They let the city forget itself,
and in return,
it let them forget too.

By the time the sun set,
no one could remember
that anything had ever been wrong at all.



Photo by Ignacio Palés: Pexels.com

The Forest That Grew Backward **by Kaavya Rajan**

It started with the trees.

Not saplings pushing through cracked pavement,
not green reclaiming what was stolen,
but something stranger.

One day, the old oak behind the post office
was missing a branch.
By evening, it had lost another.
By morning, its trunk was smooth as a boy's wrist,
the rings folding into themselves,
pulling time inward.

No one noticed at first.
Or rather, no one wanted to.

But then the forests began their retreat,
cedars shrinking,
sycamores curling like paper in flame,
redwoods swallowing their own bark,
the forests thinning not from logging
but from time running the wrong way.

We sent scientists.
They walked between groves
where leaves curled inward,
where acorns unfell from branches,
where footprints in the underbrush
rose from the soil and disappeared into nothing.

Their reports made no sense.

*The roots are rising. The wood is unburning.
The soil holds what should be forgotten*

And then, the rivers reversed.
Currents pulled themselves back to the source,
streams collapsing into mountains,
rain returning to clouds
before it could touch the ground.

People tried to adapt.
A fisherman cast his net,
only to find his boat lifted from the waves,
placed gently back onto shore.
A woman planted a garden,
but the seeds did not rest beneath the earth—
they rose into her hands,
whole, uncracked, waiting to never be planted at all.

The government sent warnings.
Evacuations.
But how does one flee time?

At the heart of the retreating woods,
the first tree folded itself into a seed,
tucked into the soil
like a secret never told.

And then, they all followed.

One by one, the forests unwrote themselves,
until nothing was left
but the memory of shade.

We should have let them grow back on their own.
We should have left the past alone.



Spring Near the Border
art by Kim McNealy Sosin

Spring Near the Border **by Janet McMillan Rives**

Add these to my list
of small ecstasies:

a warm day
followed by a cool night

the combination
we often enjoy

in springtime on the desert
when aloes

display their coral
sparklers

ocotillo blossoms flash
toward the sky

mariachis serenade
Anglos who nibble

quesadillas and sip
frosted *cervezas*.



Janet McMillan Rives was born and raised in Connecticut and moved to Tucson as a teenager. After retiring as professor of economics from the University of Northern Iowa, she returned to Arizona. She is the author of three poetry chapbooks: Into This Sea of Green: Poems from the Prairie, Washed by a Summer Rain: Poems from the Desert and On Horsebarn Hill: Poems as well as the hybrid collection, Thread: A Memoir in Woven Poems. <https://janetmrives.com>

Spring Near the Border
by Kim McNealy Sosin





Kim McNealy Sosin's art photographs and poetry appear in journals and collections including Sandcutters, Failed Haiku, Good Life Review, Rattle, Raw Art Review, and The Ekphrastic Review. Her photographs have been featured as covers for several of these. She has two chapbooks being published in 2025, memoir poems in her "Not Quite on Grand Avenue" and photographs in the co-authored (with Janet M. Rives) Reflections of France: Images and Poems. She is a retired economics professor who currently resides in Omaha, Nebraska, USA. <https://kimsosin.com>



In a Desert Retreat
art by Kim McNealy Sosin

In a Desert Retreat **by Janet McMillan Rives**

I believe in morning air as it
breezes through pink oleanders,
a spiny lizard—the one the dog

tries to catch—hiding among rocks.
I believe in filagree leaves
of a Mexican bird of paradise,

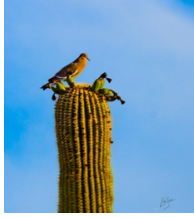
in tiny blossoms crowning
silver violet leaf, and in tissue-
paper bougainvillea blooms.

I believe in the Gila woodpecker
acting like the boss of everyone
and in the verdin yacking right back

in Gambel's quail, a couple
paired for life, my yard their home
as they wait for ten eggs to hatch.

In a Desert Retreat
by Kim McNealy Sosin





Nearly Audible
art by Kim McNealy Sosin

Nearly Audible **by Janet McMillan Rives**

I can almost hear the September
sun bake vinca blossoms,
curl dying foliage
on once sturdy geraniums.

I can almost hear the whisper
of leaves falling from the orchid
tree onto the Adirondack chair
placed in its shade.

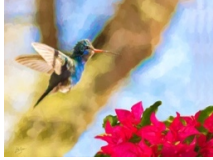
I can almost hear footsteps
of a timid dove
as she climbs down the tile roof
of the house behind.

I can almost hear that dove's
mate cooing from one house away
then the rush of four wings
beating past my ears.

I can almost hear sounds from
childhood—kids' whoops,
neighbors' dogs, chattering birds, quiet
voices—mother, father, sister.

Nearly Audible
by Kim McNealy Sosin





Winter Garden
art by Kim McNealy Sosin

Winter Garden **by Janet McMillan Rives**

On my way to water the pot

just planted with snapdragons,
African daisies, and native sage

a hummingbird buzzes clear red
salvia blossoms, makes me stop
in my tracks, transfixed by the bird's

persistence, balance, joy.

In this moment, I barely notice
where the yard man knocked over

a raised ceramic pot, half its side
lying on the ground, dirt trickling

nor do I lament what's left
of the orchid tree blown over
in a microburst, butterfly-winged

leaves emerging from the stump.

Winter Garden
by Kim McNealy Sosin





Photo by Nguyen Huy: Pexels.com

Old Friend by Barbara Lyghtel Rohrer

We honored our Catholic heritage
with picnics in cemeteries

on All Souls Day, sang “Hair”
at the top of our lungs driving

across the bridge, wedged
the little blue table we found

into your hatchback
--I eat on it to this day.

The Golden Rain tree you planted
in my front yard rains deep yellow

blossoms in June, feeds hundreds
of honeybees. Every year,

my flower beds are full—
sprouts of your tree’s seedlings.



Barbara Lyghtel Rohrer's work has appeared in Women Speak; I Thought I Heard the Cardinal Sing; Sun and Shadow, Wood and Stone; Geez; and The Sun. Her site The Invisible Map (theinvisiblemap.com) explores, through her writings and reflections of others, the inner journey.



Photo by Markus Winkler: Pexels.com

Being Verbs by Barbara Lyghtel Rohrer

A friend creates shadow boxes

I clean

I sew

I read

I nap

enhanced with little objects:

Clorox label, small sponge,

a bit of lace, buttons, a page

from a novel, a sleeping face.

There's also a longer box,

filled with maps of Europe,

a tiny compass, ticket stubs.

Three typewritten tags span

the bottom frame:

I got lost

I am lost

I will get lost.

I think of these boxes

when I read Arthur Klepchukov:

I am not a writer; I write.

I think of these boxes

when I read Buckminster Fuller's

declaration: *I seem to be a verb.*

I think of these boxes

in church, while trying to describe

my sense of that divine mystery

many call God.

A sacred presence—not noun but *verb*.

Not creator but *create*.

Not lover but *love*.

If we are made in the image

of this sacred reality, as we surely are,

we follow likewise:

we write

we kiss

we hold

we let go.

And here I am, writing these words.

Not inanimate objects. Not soulless.

They live

They have lived

They will live.



Photo by Josh Sorenson: Pexels.com

I Shall **by Stephanie Ross**

After Nora Bateson, *Affection for Life*

I shall act always to increase possibility
towards a growth-filled world
where our patterns meet to heal and not conflict,
where we know our own motives
behind each word, thought, emotion.

Ferries carry me across this ocean
into a cove of new experience
where I leave the dock
and swim through caves in search
of what's buried in darkness.

I shall act always to illuminate darkness,
deconstruct the myths I've created inside my life
where I hide when things are unclear,
shelter when I'm afraid.
Without light we die.

A pelican can only catch
fish if it unhinges a jaw
and dips itself into deep waters
where life swims in currents
of Gongjing.

*Gongjing: true respect, humility, reverence, oneness



Stephanie Ross is a Ren Xue Yuan Qigong teacher and Vancouver Island poet. She found her writing inspiration during a 3.5-year South Pacific sail with two young children. She's passionate about her inner world as a lifetime adventure. Her publications include Passionfruit Review, RXA Qiblog, Valiant Scribe, Roses & Wildflowers, and The 2023 Poetry Marathon Anthology. Connect with her:

<https://www.stephanierossauthor.com>

<https://www.facebook.com/StephanieRossAuthor/>

<https://www.instagram.com/stephanie.ross.author/>



Photo by Pixabay: Pexels.com

The Mushroom by Stephanie Ross

its brightly colored poison
lit up in daylight
messaging for miles

in its underground network
lurking beneath the soil
popping up sporadically

red head catching attention
red head messaging a warning
no longer seen
in this time of flashy internet culture

its underground network slithering into souls
under the foliage of trendy
under the disguise of popular
popular seemingly making it true

truth still sitting quietly in the shade
less flashy but stable
less exciting but grounded
less popular but needed

it sits as a burl on a fallen log
the splinter in your right toe
the pain in your heart wanting to be opened

knowing that openness doesn't need
an underground network
or fluorescent flashing signs

its message is always clear



Photo by Omran Soliman: Pexels.com

City Tableau by Jacqueline Schaalje

This old vibe in the city is the fault of aging people not moving fast enough. They could stop taking the lift down to places that young people frequent, but don't. They clutter around hardwood tables and order avocado-and-collagen-enriched lattes because they believe it keeps them vital. If the tables are full, they bring their old vibe to the bar. Barred they are not. Their buttery eyelids flutter for culture, for whisky in their smoothies, for good ideas they dig up truffles from the soil, because someone serves them, and it makes them flirty. I coldly disdain this old vibe. The old vibe suffers in any weather. I suckle my breath at the poetry reading where some actors improvise a play to dispel the old vibe, but the old poets stay. The old vibe keeps a war going so they can take over the streets showing the latest streetwear, while young people are dying on the battlefield, often voluntarily. The twinkling stars remember a long time ago when I snuck out with a cigarette, anytime when I wanted to latch onto an old vibe. Now they can't expect me to go back.



Jacqueline Schaalje has published poetry and short fiction, most recently in Ponder Review, Milk Candy Review, and underscore_magazine. She won the 2022 Florida Review Editor's Prize and has been a finalist in a few other competitions.



Photo by Oktay Köseoğlu: Pexels.com

The Downstairs Rose by Jacqueline Schaalje

I looked through my kitchen window and started;
a visitor eyeing our only pink rose,
for how long? Maybe I'm too heavyhearted?

Should I yell outrage— my lips readily parted.
Hat drawn down, covetous eyes, a too wrapped pose
right under my kitchen window. I started.

Thunder-petaled, bee-zoomed, clime-supported.
I knew it would fall. It would come loose.
How long? Maybe I'm too heavyhearted?

Lopping this guide for goodness, let angels thwart it.
If she nicks my darling birdneck, hell will break loose
right under my kitchen window. I started;

the stalk juddered headless. I with all my lion-hearted
granite continued cutting. What she gained she'd lose.
For how long? Maybe I'm too heavyhearted?

Shame, is it so easy to live with the departed?
And if she were sick? A meadowy incense rose.
I looked through my kitchen window and started;
for how long? Maybe I'm too heavyhearted.



Photo by Tom Fisk: Pexels.com

Stay by Grant Shimmin

The bellbird bids me stay
standing in the grainy dawn
resisting retreat within
a tempering cocoon of wood and glass
to hear how the valley
is a morning greeter's megaphone
an amphitheater of amplification,
my rooted feet bathed
in the wash of dewed grass
I open to the peeled solos
of an unseen virtuoso
recognize others, more distant
variations on rhythm,
same sweet timbre
saturating the valley's air
giving the awakening choir
their note to pitch against,
I sit



Grant Shimmin is a South African-born poet living in New Zealand for whom humanity and the natural world are favored themes. An editor for Does it Have Pockets?, he has work in journals worldwide, most recently Cool Beans Lit, The Hemlock Journal, Raw Lit and a fine line, and soon in Raven's Muse and ANTAE Journal.



Photo by Marta Nogueirai: Pexels.com

The Bleeding Box by Kalina Smith

I brought a cardboard box into the living room
to see if I could fit everything in it.
All that reminds me of you,
makes my heart splinter its stitches.
Scabbed over and serrated but still pumping somehow.

At the bottom of the box is a scrap of paper.
It says closure and I think it means I close the box,
but when I try, it won't shut, too full.
Too full of crimson liquid love, pumped straight from my heart to yours.
Yours spat it right back at me, blades a 'blazing,
and that's where the sutures came in.

So, I pick up the box. It's heavy, but I raise it over my head.
I dump it out, so the carpet turns scarlet.
The scrap of paper is soaked, the ink bleeding,
but I still see that word: closure.
It's wet in my fingertips and the box is soaked.

How can I get closure when it's covered in you?



Kalina (she/her) is mostly a poet, but her fiction and creative nonfiction have also been published. She is a high school English teacher responsible for many courses, including creative writing. Kalina has previously been published in Nebo, A Literary Journal, The Ignatian, FLARE: The Flagler Review, the Cackling Kettle, ONE ART: A Journal of Poetry, RedRoseThorns, Down in the Dirt, and the Wayfarer and has work forthcoming in The Font, Porcupine, Superfan, The Dawn Review, and Schlock!. She currently serves as poetry editor for Shadowplay. You can find her on Instagram @kalinasmithpoetry.



Photo by Ann Zzz: Pexels.com

If this Color was a Room by Naomi Stenberg

When I see this color, a neon green,
I feel happy.

I saw it on the collar
of a woman's coat yesterday
and
had to restrain myself
from touching
her coat.

If this color was a room, I'd go missing.

If this color was a boat,
I'd never come home.

It is a singing color,
my mother belting out a Christmas carol,
my two sisters playing the flute,
Chopin,
a lone whistler
on a quiet street.

This color says, Marry me,
and I do.

We go to Vegas.
The preacher, of course,
looks like Judy Garland
and, hat low over one eye,
she winks
and is this color.

Neon green is the last
Olly Olly In Come Free
of summer
and I am twelve and say to myself,
"I will never get tagged out again,"

and I am right.



Naomi Stenberg is neurodivergent and flourishing and living in Seattle. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in Sky Island Journal, Knee Brace Press, Does It Have Pockets, Soul Poetry, the anthology, Teacakes and Tarot, and elsewhere. She was the co-editor of Other Voices, an anthology of writers with mental illnesses.



Photo by Alan Cabello: Pexels.com

Ghost Riders **by Naomi Stenberg**

This is what happened after my Mom and Dad died. They (the committee) put my parents in Laurelhurst but they didn't feel at home there. They moved them to Fremont but my dad didn't like the naked bicycle riders. They floated them out on a house boat in Lake Washington but my mother complained of sea sickness. So they gave them a roll of quarters and told them to hit the road. My parents' ghosts are now happily hitching America, going to sleazy diners and playing jukeboxes with their quarters, slow dancing in lazy bars, following the stars at night. It's a life, not a terrible life. And they complain bitterly that I don't miss them. I don't. I miss the idea of parents but not particularly how they did it. Maybe not at all. I'm glad they have found a place in the universe finally. I occasionally see them with thumbs out by the highway and I wave. They wave back. That is the extent of our relationship. My parents are traveling ghosts, making their way across America, mostly not looking back.



Photo by Nikolett Emmert: Pexels.com

Rats and the Second Moon by Naomi Stenberg

Rats sneak into
orchards at
midnight to feast
on apples. It's a
party. Some
throw confetti.
Others play a
slow drum beat
with their tails. A
cha cha cha has

been seen, as well
as all the moves
to *Thriller*. Rats
love playing
zombies. It may
be the whole idea
of eating flesh
or maybe just
rising from the
dead.

The second moon
of the earth
watches the rats.
The moon is
lonely and wants
friends. It
hums while
watching and
finds itself
secretly craving
apples.



Photo by coco HACHE: Pexels.com

Marvel **by Naomi Stenberg**

A baby two months old,
in the hot tub for the first time.

Daddy holding then moving her
through the water like a motor boat.

She was a poem complete in herself.
Little. So little. Her legs kicking the

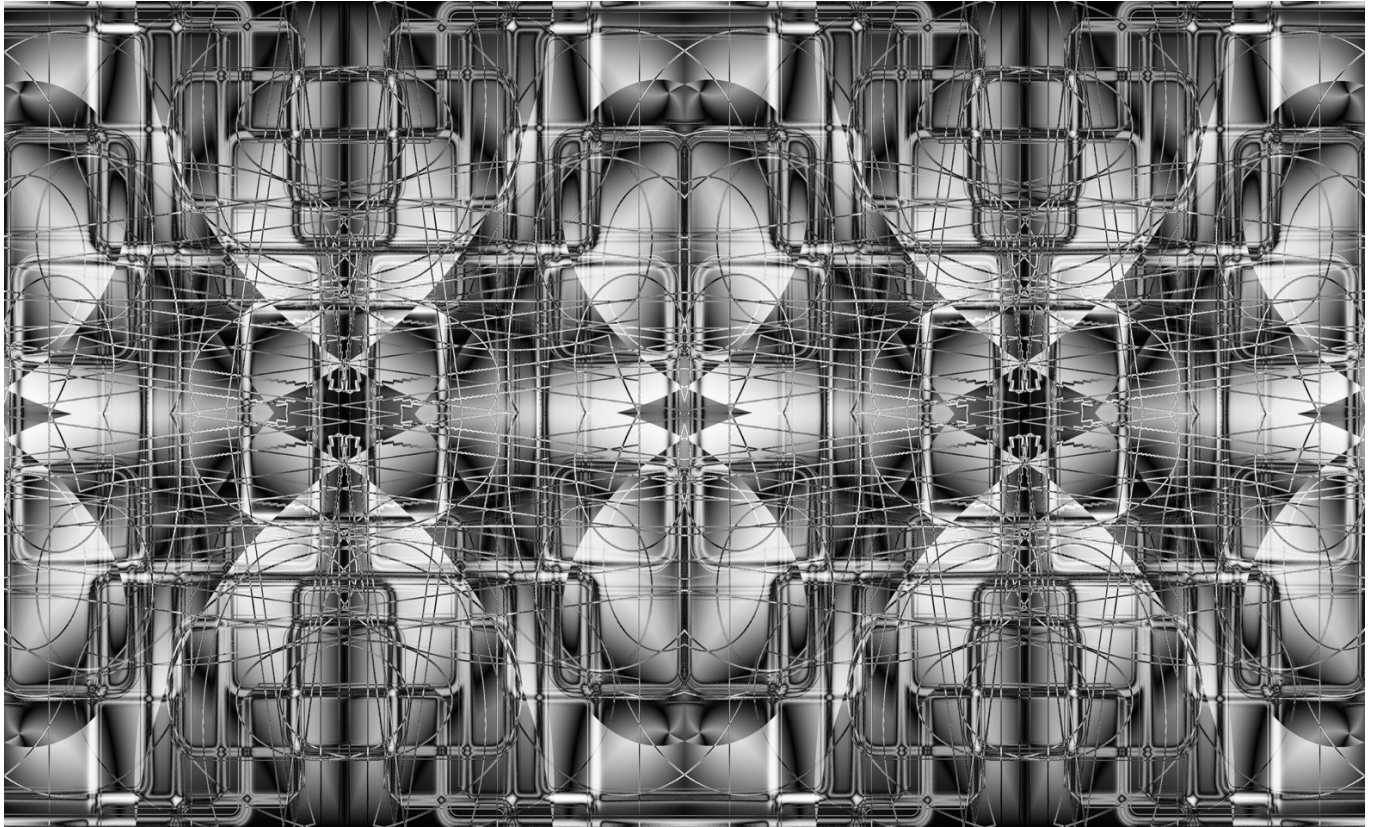
water warm all around her. Floating
for the first time. What a marvel.

Later she might write a poem about
how it felt. How marvelous it felt.

And Dad there too,

not letting go.

Gray Day Disaster by Edward Michael Supranowicz



Edward Michael Supranowicz is the grandson of Irish and Russian/Ukrainian immigrants. He grew up on a small farm in Appalachia. He has a grad background in painting and printmaking. Some of his artwork has recently or will soon appear in Fish Food, Streetlight, Another Chicago Magazine, Door Is A Jar, The Phoenix, and The Harvard Advocate. Edward is also a published poet.

Crucifixion of the Greenery
by Edward Supranowicz

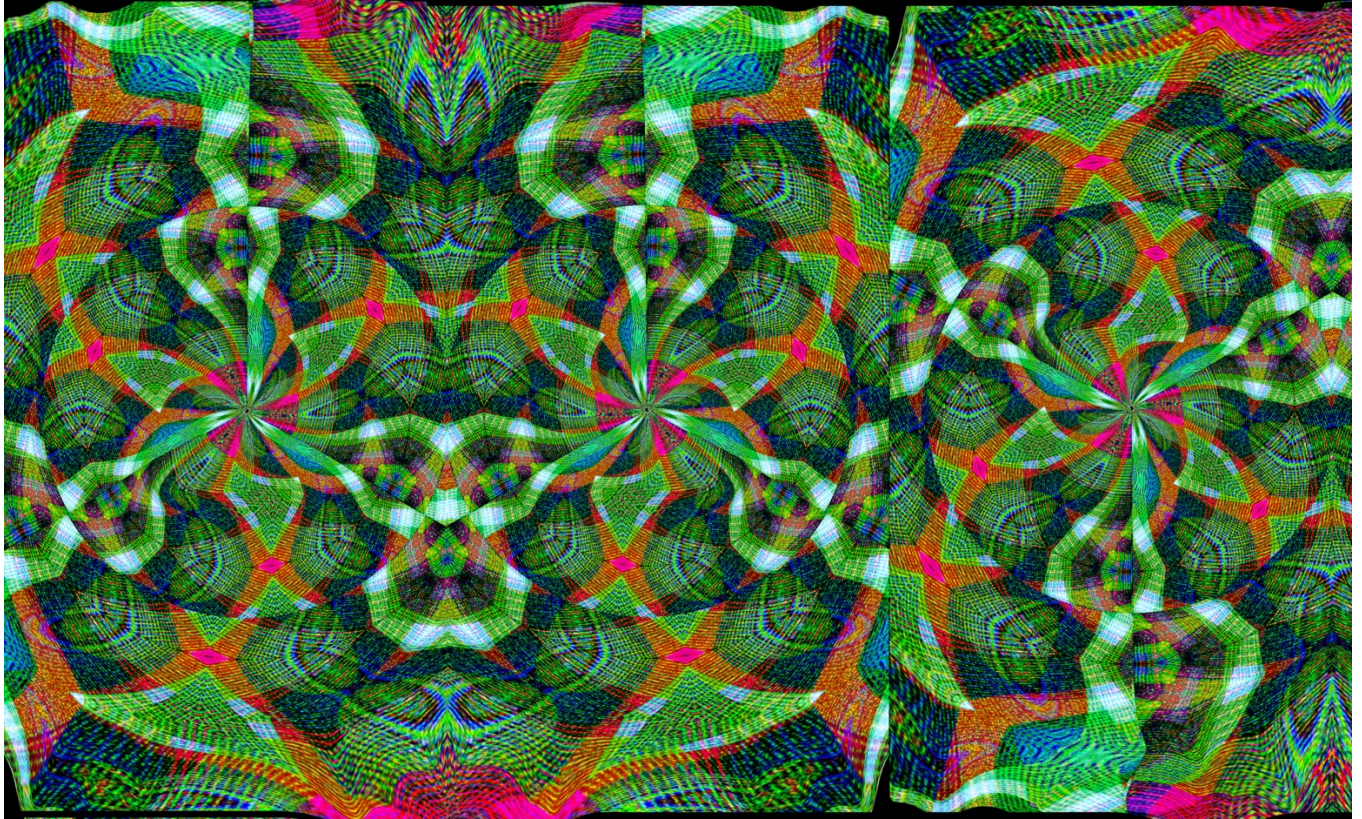




Photo by Maxim Gorodnev: Pexels.com

Cold Storage by E. C. Traganas

*"If virtue goes to sleep, it will
be more vigorous when it awakes"*
— Friedrich Nietzsche

A feather downy plucked from the kill
a northern goose aimlessly roaming,
flying low on cemetery gravel roads
A virgin woolen sweater muffling
the bleating of a sacrificial lamb
A whispering floorboard
pinewood screaming death throes
in forgotten depths
of an electric forest glen.

A wall of paint, oil-thick and leaden,
toxic grime and dust-smeared
A flaking radiator clanking, hissing
spouting heat from a vintage

basement burner, furnace
churning, burning bones,
and fossilized remains.

Shall I stay here—lie in torpitude
within the warmth? Outside, the
snow is pounding hard on concrete
walkways, strangling germs and wormlike
larvae, smudging out the evil genii
staining hidden secret corners,
mildewy earth dust
choking up the air.

Let the hoarfrost do its work.
Oh, Lord! Protect me from the tainted air
and ebb and flux of putrid spores.
I have planted new seeds.
Let them rest in thought.
I will wait and rise again in spring.



*Author of the debut novel Twelfth House,
and Shaded Pergola, a collection of haiku and short
poetry featuring her original illustrations, E.C.
Traganas has published in the San Antonio
Review, The Brussels Review, Story Sanctum, The
Society of Classical Poets, Amethyst Review and
over a hundred other journals. E. C. Traganas
enjoys a professional career as a Juilliard-trained
concert pianist & composer, has held over 40
national exhibitions of her artwork, and is the
founder/director of Woodside Writers, a NYC-
based literary forum. www.elenitraganas.com
Shaded Pergola: Haiku & Other Short Poems With
Illustrations <https://a.co/d/dt81bEh>*

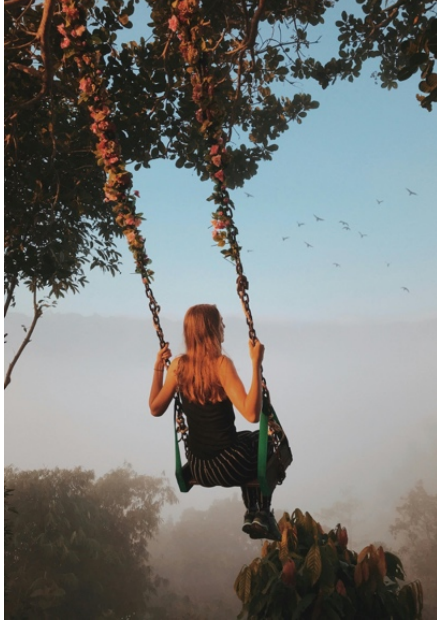


Photo by Afvzi: Pexels.com

August Galliard by E. C. Traganas

"Work is love made visible" — Khalil Gibran

I swing my childhood higher
gliding lightly into space
buoyed by an August lure and spell
hands reaching out to touch
the burgeoning globes of fruit
swelling in the tallest branches
of the dense Elberta peach.

This swing my father built for me
from planks of ash
and links of chains
sawing and hammering away
sequestered in the backyard shed
brows burrowed deep and knit
in concentrated aim.

I cast a glance below.
The garden is awash in a
riotous jungle of pursuit:
snapweed bursting furry pods
exploding like artillery,
zinnias singing, cockscomb flirting
with hortensias, morning glories
scaling, twining towards the sky.

Deep underneath, a trail of ants
slinks forward in a
funeral procession dropping
wasted workers by the side.
One day, I vow, I will compose
a symphony in homage and salute
a paeon of exaltation for
their tireless pursuits.

And to this day, my thoughts recall
that breezy morning — my father's labor
just a distant memory swinging
unsung and unapplauded in the breeze.



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Rosemary Seedling by Terry Trowbridge

The leaves have not turned to needles.
They are flat, thin.
They smell of citrus.
They taste of ripe kumquat, unripe lemon.
Extend with a tiny scoop at the very tip,
to catch the waft, to bend the breeze,
that, next year, will smell herbaceous and soft.

Seedling, then roots, then needles.
Visible, then invisible, then visible.
Only the season,
now being Autumn,
indicates the nature of the seedling's growth
to a vertebrate like us,
who do not curl through dirt,
who only smell leaves;
who see transformation but not the how of it



Terry Trowbridge's poems are in Pennsylvania Literary Journal, MasticadoresUSA, Poetry Pacific, Carousel, Lascaux Review, Carmina, untethered, Progenitor, Miracle Monocle, Orbis, Pinhole, Big Windows, Muleskinner, Brittle Star, Mathematical Intelligencer, Journal of Humanistic Mathematics, New Note, Hearth and Coffin, Beatnik Cowboy, Delta Poetry Review, Stick Figure, miniMAG, and 100+ more. His lit crit is in BeZine, Erato, Amsterdam Review, Ariel, British Columbia Review, Hamilton Arts & Letters, Episteme, Studies in Social Justice, Rampike, Seeds, and The /t3mz/ Review. His Erdős number is 5. Terry is grateful to the Ontario Arts Council for his first 2 writing grants.



Photo by Sena Shot: Pexels.com

The Magic Lamp by Mark Tulin

I used to kiss my dad's bald head,
rub it like a magic lamp,
and wish for an imaginary genie
to give me three wishes.

First wish:

I wouldn't go bald like my dad.

Second wish:

I'd have more money than my dad.

Third wish:

I would be happier than my dad.

He often said that his shiny pate
would be mine one day,
and my son would rub my pate,
and embarrass me
like I embarrass him.

My dad was in a coma
on a hospital bed.
I kissed his bald pate,
and rubbed it like a magic lamp,
hoping the genie
would grant me one last wish—

that he would find peace
with the angels.



Mark Tulin is a retired marriage and family therapist living in California. Mark authored Magical Yogis, Awkward Grace, The Asthmatic Kid and Other Stories, Junkyard Souls, and Rain on Cabrillo. He's appeared in The Hatchet, Still Point Journal, The Haight Ashbury Literary Journal, Amethyst Review, White Enso, Still Point Journal, and other publications. He is a Pushcart nominee and a Best of Drabble. Visit Mark's website at www.crowonthewire.com.



Photo by Johannes Plenio: Pexels.com

I Am Prairie Grass **by Lori Ulrich**

Blue Grama. Buffalo. Alfalfa,
push deep into parched earth
to reach moisture.

My roots are strong.
Wind and drought
do not break me.
I wait for rain.

Pressed down by summer storms
flattened under winter's ice
my golden-brown blades sprout
fine textured panicles of seed in May.

After spring rains
a musty perfume wafts
through the meadow.
I wave under a blue sky.
I am green, vibrant
grateful.



Lori's mantra is to Experience Connection. She is a poet with heart; her work is soul centered. She writes of family, relationships, and her home prairie landscapes. Turning the Corner (Quillkeepers Press 2023) is Lori's debut poetry collection. Lori's stories are published in Chicken Soup for the Caregiver's Soul, and Through My Eyes: 74 True Stories of Survival, Strength and the Power of Believing. Her poetry appears in several magazines and anthologies.

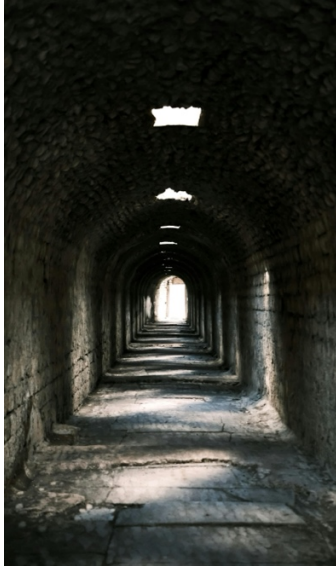


Photo by Furksaglam: Pexels.com

Tread by Ramiro Valdes

Tread through
every inch of my being.
I am a wasteland,
a city of ruins,
my ribs a
labyrinth for you
to explore,
my lips,
two gates
to the precipice
of doom.
Kiss me and let our
souls fade into
an everlasting night.



Ramiro Valdes is an aspiring poet from Miami. He is currently dealing with chronic illness and writes about love and illness.



Photo by Matthis Volquardsen: Pexels.com

Chronic Illness by Ramiro Valdes

Chronic illness has set ablaze
the buds which spring
would have matured
into a field of hope.
Instead,
blackened and plucked stems
adorn my soul,
a dark vest of solitude,
and the ground is an ashtray
of burned wishes
that have long vanished
into the jaws of oblivion
whose smoke dims
the sky above me
erasing every star.



Photo by Jess Bailey Designs: Pexels.com

Unfinished Business by Sara Vernekar

She's floating in the ether,
I believe, draped in blue chiffon,
the *pallu* trailing like a cold flame
untouched by cotton
nightgowns of regulation length.
In her free time, she peers at her
grandchildren through
pristine glasses,
not the scratched-up pair
abandoned on her bed.
The frames are round
as the moon that shone
on nights we did not fight.
She deemed it 'your problem now'—
always the wrong three words—

and handed me
the problematic pair.
It would have been simple
to visit the repair shop
on my way to the bank.
But I kept nursing resentment
and watched my mother's eyes fail.
The wrong three words
doubled. Multiplied.
Running into hundreds,
then thousands,
then whispered shouts,
then nothing at all.
Years after she passed,
her glasses still glare
as if to remind me of the fact.
Unfixed, now unfixable,
turned firmly away,
facing the wall.



Sara Vernekar is an alumna of Anita's Attic and recently won a place in The Himalayan Writing Retreat's short story course. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in The Hindu, Eunoia Review, Neologism Poetry Journal, Last Girls Club, and Down in the Dirt magazine. She is currently working on her first novel.

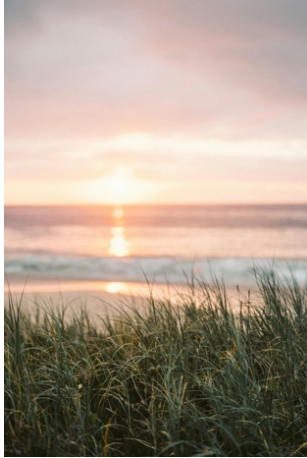


Photo by Taryn Elliott: Pexels.com

Encircling by Diane Webster

Grass grows
on the fringes
of the beach
like hair
encircling
a bald man's head.



Diane Webster's work has appeared in North Dakota Quarterly, New English Review, Studio One and other literary magazines. She had micro-chaps published by Origami Poetry Press in 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025. Diane has been nominated for Best of the Net and a Pushcart. She was a featured writer in Macrame Literary Journal and WestWard Quarterly. Her website is: www.dianewebster.com

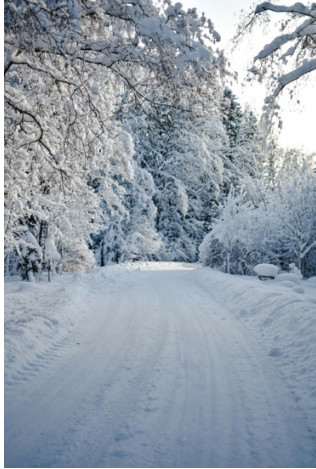


Photo by Eva Bronzini: Pexels.com

Here we are at last by Kendra Whitfield

-after Lauren Watel

meeting fresh snow in the morning, a world gone white overnight, leached of colour, leached of life, and yet, the lacy trees are bridal veils for faraway Spring. The lawn is a tablecloth on which are spread entrails scavenged by crows who gossip on light standards watching for roadkill. The sky is flat. No scope for hope. Frosty gates hang ajar and a flock of sheep huddle in a white field. An owl watches from a fencepost, wide wings ready to glide. The mice are hiding. Our car hurtles forward through a gray tunnel fringed with lace. There will be no sun today to burn through the gloom, only a white disc struggling to stay aloft, dragged down by impotent dreams. Telephone poles march beside the road, erect and stern. Sometimes a flag flutters in the corner of my eye. Is it signaling survival or surrender?



Kendra Whitfield lives and writes on the southern edge of the northern boreal forest. When not writing, she can be found basking in sunbeams on the back deck or swimming laps at the local pool. Her poetry has been published by Beyond the Veil Press and Community Building Art Works.

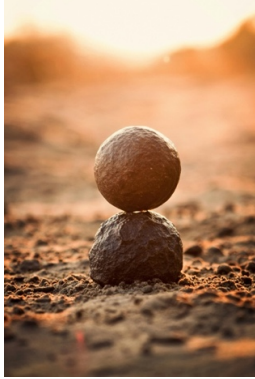


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Stones Taught Us How to Talk **by Jake Williams**

Gorse returned its gathered sunlight
beneath a sky too wide for us to measure
released from fractured igneous repression
Cherry blossoms dreamed their summer dreams between pink and white
Silver remembered them in its negative spaces awaiting their positives
Sandstone spoke from histories
of Arras, of Cambrai, of Hill 60
of places that are no more
remembrance offered to another rush hour
bells passed into freshest green
Ruby loved the light on Tuesday
new May grass will whisper to us all
may it catch all our dreams; all the colours of spring
every stone reminds us of what's beyond our little universe
even as our feet wear them away
we listened to their verse carried on late afternoon winds
there can still be a new gold dream
to colour our silver in light or dark
atoms float in every peculiar way, while Cherry trees ask us
what we know of Quantum physics
if you know nothing of Quantum physics
then you know everything of Quantum physics
a dark horse, hollow no more
neighed a salty neigh to waiting cobbles



Jake Williams is a writer based in Cumbria (the North remembers!), just south of The Wall and my previous publications include The RPS Journal, The LWS Anthology, Pulsebeat Poetry, Coldmoon Journal, Discourse Journal and To Live Here: A Haiku Anthology (Wee Sparrow Poetry Press).



Photo by cottonbro studio: Pexels.com

Four Haiku by Amber Winter

a daily reminder
to use my eye creme
Snapchat

our bodies as one salted pretzel

coffee creamer
the sweetness
he adds

hidden
in layers of sheets
lovers' crumbs



*Amber Winter is a married mother of three boys. She is a trained meat cutter, cosmetologist and formerly worked in finance. She enjoys passing time at the playgrounds writing poetry while her boys run out their energy. Her poetry has been published in Failed Haiku, cattails, Ribbons, tsuri-doro, Prune Juice, and Star*line. She is a Pushcart Prize, Best of the Net, and Rhysling nominee.*

A New Look by Claudia Wysocky



Claudia Wysocky is a Polish poet based in New York, celebrated for her evocative creations that capture life's essence through emotional depth and rich imagery. With over five years of experience in fiction writing, her poetry has appeared in various local newspapers and literary magazines. Wysocky believes in the transformative power of art and views writing as a vital force that inspires her daily. Her works blend personal reflections with universal themes, making them relatable to a broad audience. Actively engaging with her community on social media, she fosters a shared passion for poetry and creative expression.

There's Still Past on the Corner of the Street
by Claudia Wysocky





Photo by bahar Sajjadi: Pexels.com

Paper Birds **by Claudia Wysocky**

I was a bird once, made of paper and air,
flying over the arid landscape of my soul.
My wings felt strong, resilient,
the sky above me a burgeoning blue,
as if the world had chosen the color
in honor of my freedom.
The sun warmed my feathers
with its glorious, golden haze.

I took my place high above the forlorn earth,
no need to call a tree my home.
With each flap of my wings,
I felt euphoria in every heartbeat.
I was not meant for this world,
bound by gravity and time. No!
My destiny was greater,
beyond the fragile confines of my bones.

And so I flew on, chasing dreams only birds can dream.
Drunk on wind and dizzy with possibility,
I forgot everything else—
the weight of responsibility, the burden of reality.
For one brief moment, I was deliciously unfettered.

But as birds are prone to do,
I grew tired and began to descend,
spiraling toward an unforgiving planet.
My wings trembled, fluttered, stalled,
and I couldn't help but wonder—
was it worth it?
To be a paper bird
whose dreams are made of air?

Perhaps it was.

AUTHOR AND ARTIST PROFILES



Author Profile: Jacob Friesenhahn



- 1) **How would you describe yourself and/or your work in three sentences or less?**

I am a theologian and academic turned poet. I see poetry as a form of mystical spirituality. I teach religious studies and philosophy, but increasingly, I find myself most able to say what I want to say in my poems.

- 2) **Who has been your biggest supporter and/or inspiration?**

My biggest inspiration is my imaginary reader -- who sits down with a cup of coffee and one of my poems and just enjoys what I have written. I think we all write to be read and to connect deeply with readers, who may or may not yet exist.

- 3) **Where is your favorite place to write or create your art?**

I almost never sit down and try to write. I can edit that way, but I usually have to be in a state of flow to write. Poems come to me when taking a walk, dreaming, showering, driving around. Sitting down with a blank piece of paper and a pencil is an image I like, but not how I write.

- 4) **If you look back at your writing or art when you first began creating, in what ways would you say you have grown or changed?**

I read somewhere the best way to write a good poem is to write 400 bad poems. I think my early work was the necessary process of struggling to find my voice. I think I have grown organically. I have gotten better at writing by writing. I have no formal training at all in poetry. My writing has evolved by practice.

- 5) **If you could choose any place in the world to write, draw, or paint for one day, where would you go?**

Probably Italy, although Israel and Greece are in the running. When I was 19, I had the chance to study abroad, and my memories of those days are so sweet. I like the idea of traveling to another country and going on a writing holiday.

- 6) **What advice would you give to anyone just starting a career as a writer or artist?**

I'm not sure if I have advice or believe in advice. I think I would make practical recommendations: Read your favorite poets. Read them out loud. Write out your favorite poems. As you type or handwrite poems by others, try to inhabit their world. Then, of course, comes the mysterious process of finding one's own voice. How could I tell others how to find their voice?

- 7) **Are there any funny stories you'd like to share about your artistic journey?**

Several of my poems make me laugh.
Humor is rarely my main goal in writing a
poem, but many of my poems, including
my darkest, contain humor. There's also
just something fun, funny, and more than a
little quixotic in trying to become a
professional poet in today's world.

**Jacob Friesenhahn, author of *The Prayer
of the Mantis* (Kelsay Books)**



Author Profile: Marla Dial Moore



1) How would you describe yourself and/or your work in three sentences or less?

Because of my background in journalism and geopolitical analysis, I tend to view the world as a series of discrete yet interconnected parts and systems—geographical, spiritual, physical, political, emotional. I often use ecological metaphors to discuss grief (a topic I know all too well) and healing. The physics of time and space are endlessly fascinating to me also—a great source of inspiration for poetry (even though I’m hopeless with math).

2) Who has been your biggest supporter and/or inspiration?

It’s hard to provide the name of just one person here—I have been very private about my poetry for most of my adult life. But following two deeply personal losses in 2019 and emerging from COVID lockdowns, I discovered a handful of local writing groups in San Antonio. So I am blessed to have the inspiration and support of, first of all, the Wyrdd Writers sisterhood—which includes a number of prolific and exceptional artists, some of whom are also published by this journal—

as well as my dear friend James R. Dennis, an ardent dog-lover (he also happens to be an award-winning poet and novelist, although I almost always forget that part), and my sister-in-law Tiffany Dial, who is a Pisces and just “gets me.”

3) Where is your favorite place to write or create your art?

On my back porch, preferably with a great cup of coffee and my dog snoozing nearby, on a rainy Sunday morning.

4) If you look back at your writing or art when you first began creating, in what ways would you say you have grown or changed?

Initially, poetry was an act of sheer survival—learning to share it with others (within a bond of trust) was an act of will. Doing so has cracked me open, taught me to trust my own instincts more, and to embrace a sense of joy and surprise that was not there for me in the beginning. Poetry is a healer.

5) If you could choose any place in the world to write, draw, or paint for one day, where would you go?

I would return to the southwestern coast of Ireland. The tides and the sea always speak.

6) What advice would you give to anyone just starting a career as a writer or artist?

- a) Find a support group—you’re gonna need it!
- b) Well-intentioned critiques help you sharpen your work and build on your strengths.

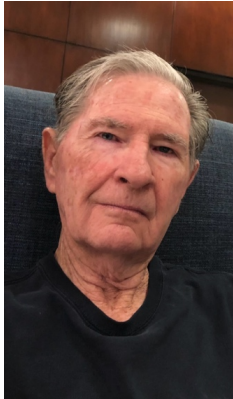
- c) Don't be afraid to experiment with form—try everything until you find what sings.
- d) Consider whether you are writing for the page, or the stage—they are not the same, and each has unique attributes to master.
- e) Remember that everything you put out into the world, or keep hidden away in a journal, has a purpose. Hone your instincts for determining what is private therapy and what has a broader message you want to carry forward to the public (and when your work transitions from one to the next).

7) **Are there any funny stories you'd like to share about your artistic journey?**

I recently discovered that I'm a terrible critic of my own work—in the sense that I have no useful distance or perspective until I bounce it around with others. Meaning—that some of the silliest, most throw-away lines (in my opinion) that I ever put together from a prompt were an instant hit. I even wrote a poem about shit-farming in North Korea (inspired by a documentary from actual defectors) that recently seemed to spark some interest.



Author Profile: Winston Munn



1) How would you describe yourself and/or your work in three sentences or less?

I, and my poetry, are works in progress. Is anything truly “finished”? Revision is both my first and middle name.

2) Who has been your biggest supporter and/or inspiration?

My mentor is Ken e Bujold, a Canadian I’ve never met in person but who took my under wing online and has guided me ever since. A true blessing as a friend and a fine and knowledgeable poet. Second, James Logenbach and his books.

3) Where is your favorite place to write or create your art?

Mary Oliver said the most important thing to do was start at the same time daily. I go to the kitchen table every day and write in a 25 cent notebook before going to the computer for first draft revisions.

4) If you look back at your writing or art when you first began creating, in what

ways would you say you have grown or changed?

Hopefully, I could say I am better. By better, I mean I’m learning to get out of my own way and follow rather than try to lead my poems to a specified end. Now I’m working on leaps and turns.

5) If you could choose any place in the world to write, draw, or paint for one day, where would you go?

I like the desert, so just about anywhere dry and warm would work. I like Taos a lot. And the desert around Las Vegas where I used to live was underrated.

6) What advice would you give to anyone just starting a career as a writer or artist?

Read. Then read some more. After you’ve finished, find something to read. Try to write as well or better than what you’ve just read. And revise, revise, revise until it is as perfect as you can make it at that point in your career..

7) Are there any funny stories you’d like to share about your artistic journey?

The first poem I tried to write was published. Then the same magazine accepted my next offering as well-they closed their door before I could submit a third. Fair warning, Arvilla. LOL.



Author Profile: Kathy O'Fallon



- 1) **How would you describe yourself and/or your work in three sentences or less?**

If by work you mean poetry, it's as much play and sustenance for me. As a poet and a psychologist, I love the stimulation, growth and surprise from poetry and psychotherapy when their creative processes unfold.

- 2) **Who has been your biggest supporter and/or inspiration?**

So many, but when my mother passed in 1998, I suddenly stopped writing fiction and began the journey into poetry, an art that had intimidated me before, so I think she had everything to do with it.

- 3) **Where is your favorite place to write or create your art?**

Wherever there is beauty, quiet, and peace. These days my bedroom mostly, with a view.

- 4) **If you look back at your writing or art when you first began creating, in what**

ways would you say you have grown or changed?

I knew nothing! Shakespeare was in my head, and it took years to extract him/her. I will always be learning about craft, and how to stay present in the details, since I'm much more of a visionary. I have to work on being less confusing, vague, and more concrete, since I think in metaphor, and not always unmixed!

- 5) **If you could choose any place in the world to write, draw, or paint for one day, where would you go?**

Beam me over to Ireland.

- 6) **What advice would you give to anyone just starting a career as a writer or artist?**

Start thinking with the phrase, "I notice," so that as you're living your life, you're also documenting it. There's always time to write, because one minute or one hour is enough, so just sit down and put your pen to paper and start where you are. If I thought of this as a career, I'd be paralyzed, since it doesn't make money. I write because it's torturous fun, like risks you take that in the back of your mind you know won't kill you.

- 7) **Are there any funny stories you'd like to share about your artistic journey?**

Not so much funny, but I did change my name to protect the guilty.



Author Profile: Naomi Stenberg



- 1) **How would you describe yourself and/or your work in three sentences or less?**

I would describe myself as consistently brave, curious and kind. I think my work reflects that ethos.

- 2) **Who has been your biggest supporter and/or inspiration?**

My best friend, the writer Jill Vanneman, is always rooting for me and gives excellent edits.

- 3) **Where is your favorite place to write or create your art?**

My kitchen table. It's homey. The fridge is nearby. My computer is there. And it is what Hemmingway called, "A clean, well-lighted space." In the early morning, the space beckons to me and says, Write.

- 4) **If you look back at your writing or art when you first began creating, in what ways would you say you have grown or changed?**

I still sometimes puzzle over where to put commas—embarrassing but true. I've read Strunk and White's *Elements of Style* at least twice, but grammar can still elude me. My writing has always been fairly raw, honest and confessional. It's only recently

that I have begun to trust, even count on, that aspect of my voice.

- 5) **If you could choose any place in the world to write, draw, or paint for one day, where would you go?**

My kitchen table.

- 6) **What advice would you give to anyone just starting a career as a writer or artist?**

My wife once said to me, "Make your world one of beauty and order, and send it out as much as you can."

- 7) **Are there any funny stories you'd like to share about your artistic journey?**

I used to think "anon" was a person—just very busy.

