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Beverly A. Jackson
Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf

Wayne Russell
The Thieving Magpie

Time is a thief, such as
the magpie, we wink &
open our eyes, life's little
blip upon a radar, then gone.

The magpie will rob another
bird blind, like the grim reaper,
they will devour their young
hatchlings and eggs and anything
that they can get their selfish beaks on.

The thieving magpies will even mob
predators, like owls, cats, and hawks,
denying them a meal, like the reaper
deprives one's life, like a flash mob
deprives one of having a dull moment.

Shelley Davenport

Anthologia

I: Riddles

A woman from Virginia meets
A man from West Virginia.
They wed in Maryland, and together
They make a Pennsylvanian.
Curious, how
The somber blue river and the
Strict gray river when blended
Create an amiable
Green torrent, which
Rambles through the hills
Talking to itself
Until it runs itself out in the Tidewater.
 It never returns to the mountains.

II: The Facts

All his life he will be loved.
All his life he will yearn for rivers
All his life—

III: Ode

Dark cliffs dive directly into
The river, golden and rocky;
Divots and pools like honey pots
For floating, face to the sun,
Weightless in worship.

IV: Sounds

A train heads west, singing,
A train heads east, howling.
The guns salute,
Bracketed by bellows.
Birds startle off their branches
And cry.

V: Evidence of a Crime

The cracked window allows
The warmthless March light in.
A pistol shot echoes down the years
To a wife's screams,
As scarlet blossoms upon linen.

VI: Bookcovers

Along the streets in serried rows
The faces of houses
Red brick, blue stone, white wood
Handsome book covers to conceal family secrets.
At dawn in the armory a rebel is hung.
(A gilt-edged page asks: Did he deserve it?)

VII: Tryst

Down by the river willows,
Beneath the old wall
The branches arch,
And slants of sunshine
Light upon ferns and shallows.
Tokens taken, tokens given.
Hands brush, feather light.
A little bundle,
Sweet rose, aster, and daisy,
Tuck together in a crevice.

VIII: Eschatos

Stone steps climb
Stitching the layers together, like
Seams in a crazy quilt.
All lead, remorseless, to the grassy,
Hilltop, broke-tooth cemetery.

IX: What Came After

One robin's blue egg,
Apples from a gnarled old tree,
The ruined church filled with wildflowers,
Each ensures, all promise:
The story will not end.

Sean Ferrier-Watson

Snake Hunting

we whittled the spears ourselves
sticks found along the lakeshore
brittle driftwood

 hardly fit as walking sticks
clutched between our fingers
like sacred weapons

we are snake hunters
 so we tell ourselves
and set out down the shoreline
the brown water churning
in Texas heat

our father jokes
 Lake Lewisville has killed more
than any cottonmouth
 but we take no notice
poking sand and clay
with our makeshift spears
eager to hunt

our mother gave us the snakeskins
 tied around our waists
some fishermen had given them to
 her the morning before
caught the mocs while seining
 cut and skinned their hides
they itch like rough sandpaper
 across our flesh
 the stiff parchment
of our childhood

a fish jumps near us
 our sticks crash to the sand
stilled poison
 on bare shore
our hunting finally at an end

Paul Smith

Girl From Mohave County

There was a girl from Arizona
I didn't think much of
she was rather ordinary
short hair
square shoulders
you wouldn't give her
a second look

She really wasn't from there
neither was I
we found ourselves where
our lives took us
away from universities
and libraries full of books

We had eager conversations
about Being And Nothingness
and being in Kingman
and looking for wallops
on weekends
with the main drag calm and still
the silent sidewalks napping

One night when things were quiet
we climbed this thing
behind our building
whatever they called it
a hill, outcrop, rise or butte
we pulled each other up
till we stood on top
as far as we could see
jackrabbits, scrub and Oatman
sandblasted majesty

I was the first to pull the plug
an offer far away
so embarrassed
it took a week
for me to say
some words all neatly stacked
that I wasn't coming back
and headed
where tall buildings climb
and the streets all bustle
all the time
her insignificance was hard to bear
as I found town after town
I once set out to find her
but she was not around

Nora Hickey

Universe

I've stared at my dog's
asshole for years. A cosmos
contracting—
or expanding? The dilation

of time. She exposes
pink and gray tissue
of life—which is also, of course,
death. Maybe when
I'm gone, when all of us are wiped

blank, we will exist in the
universe of a dog's bold
pucker. I wouldn't mind. I don't
think shit is the opposite

of verve. Not when it's warm
beneath my plasticked
hand, closer to my senses
than the moon (why so
many odes to that

cold, distant effacement?). The snow
makes an untouched field of wax,
moved by her euphoric jounce. It seems

Hickey

as if thousands of geese
open overhead as my dog
bows down to drop
her radiant work.

Nora Hickey

After the 2nd IVF Consult, I Wonder

why does the body
when running

long to walk?
The easiest desire

to satisfy
is the one

that comes in
the moment of

giving up. I no longer want

to try: the needles
round the belly

button like a clock. Tick
tock, the hours ooze

on. The ovaries age. I place
(shove) one more pessary

to an unknowable, dark place. I try
to warm my fingers with my

own flesh—but my body is
faulty in this, too. The ice

doesn't melt. My cold digits
manipulate the cordless

mouse, navigate the cursor
to linger over a small

box. I can't tell what
wants me to say

“Yes,” but I agree to
whatever is next—more

blood accumulated, money
too. How would it

feel to just knock
off? To be

the bird that lifts
free while its circle

continues to feed?

Nora Hickey

A tree's dried leaves—

almost as if stenciled on,
a children's picture of what a tree should be
when dying
when in winter
the tree not yet ready to surrender
the architecture of its work—

looked heavy as gold
in the bath of streetlight. I had turned

back early from the walk—my dog's limp
turned up. The veterinarian had

said "\$250" on the phone, to prepare
me for Monday's extra cost. My dog held

her leg up, there in the night, her
fur the color of expensive teeth. What is

valued? I thought, the air taut and precious
around me, this being the tip

of the year following our hottest. The leaves
like something molten, they rattled

with import, and I wanted them to release.
They had clung on so long. The tax

Hickey

documents were starting to arrive. The CDs
advertised at good rates. I couldn't

do the calculations, my dog's exquisite leg
lifted like a crooked branch. What is money

in its divine form, if not a warm furred
body, full of the clearest love?

Nicholas Grooms

Descansos

There is a retching ache within me
a split seam cave where the birds
have started to nest.
A hangman's gallows for the bats to cling
and escape into the night,
Screeching simps to the utter black.
I hear the wind whistle through,
Like a werewolf's howl
exiting its own silver bullet wound.
Increments of space that maroon me
with lagoon level creatures.
Blacker than highway ice
where the reaper prefers you drive.
I am counting the crosses
up the interstate. The flowers
and faded pinwheels, turning.
Counting those who couldn't
master the art of slowing down,
be they the victims
or the victims of.
It's things like this
that make me recognize
I have been ripped wide open,
but not ripped away.
Though each breath may hurt,
I am not yet without it.
The rips and tears
can be sewn and mended.

Grooms

It is okay
to reach into that pocket,
That devoid space within
and hold my heart in my hand.
Tonight, I was brave enough
to peer through the hole
in which I have been cloaked
and served myself some grace.
I started by looking
my speedometer in the face
and slowly letting
my foot off the gas,
removing my hat
for the dead.

Nadia Arioli
Poem for Frances

(even though you are not yet hatched)

I hope you walk on water,
not like Jesus but like a duck-
ling. A willful miracle for those who know
where to look and ungainly in a way a machine
could never. No need for grace.
You, always a storm, even before your arrival.

I had thought these metaphors and similes
were ways to know, synapses by which we think.
I wrote a paper about it my youth,
bloated by its own fat assuredness.
Perhaps I am just tired, but now I feel like enough already.
We get it! Things are like other things!
But, O, you are helping me posit something new,

something will be formed as it arrives,
my duckling. My belly has gone to strained
egg, omphalos wriggling and inverted. In the
end, it's not about knowing, it's about hope.
It's about sticking your beak out and saying *Hello,*
the world has something to offer, and I to it,
that is why I am making the connection.

Metaphor: to carry across.
Feet across water, knife across paper.
You carry yourself, the thing with feathers,
May you always go, propelled by your own force.
May you, daughter, always perform and be the miracle,
kicking in the corners of my world.

Michael Dwayne Smith

Life or Death

nothing like storybooks, no, closer to sleepwalking through an infinite stream of repetitious, connivant videoclips day to week

to month, as does Matías, who since the crash routinely rides past our old adobe flat on a sturdy Azteca I bequeathed him for

graduation, majestic, walk-trotting to Desert Home of Peace for another heart-to-heart. It's the white horse that enchants, and my

brother's tears trailing, while I linger behind tombstones or trees, seeing him double as man and child, my voice caught in this im-

passable veil, rippling air, but he can hear only breeze, see only beneath, me dwelling between, too low to catch a passing cloud.

He believes talking to the dead can matter, like in flicks where the dead come home, from *It's a Wonderful Life* to *Poltergeist*,

though for the love or doubt of all that is holy, what's a death but a movie about tiny films some version of your self is busy

re-viewing in the warm, cloaking dark of a weathertight room.

Martha Clarkson

Babysitting

we were paid almost nothing
back in the 70s
and seemed destined to have brats
who fabricated facts
(with admirable persistence)
about candy and bedtimes

I once threatened a child
with a knife
albeit a dull, rounded
butter knife
(and of course I didn't mean it)
things just got to that point.

Martha Clarkson

*Sunday School Mornings Afloat in the Red
Backseat of the Old Chrysler, My Stomach
Knotted Up*

as I braced for the boy I'd been told
to stay away from

around the basement classroom
he lumbered

in his suede Lederhosen
looking to bite or scratch

unprovoked, he screamed
between Moses and a bulrush

his face red as raw steak
he ate paste and stomped crackers

we scooted close to the teacher
a nervous rustle of corduroy and petticoats

his skin returned to flesh-tone
he spoke briefly in a normal voice
about a trip to Germany, a pet turtle

then he curled into a lower cupboard
bare knees to chin
pulling shut

Mark Strohschein

At Big Beaver Pond, an Eagle's View

Perched atop a Douglas fir
an eagle cried—
the sound resting
upon each lily pad face,
one million strong
at Big Beaver Pond.

He saw
how sunlight painted
the tree line gold,
how the trunks & shade below
became the dark hush
dissolving into mystery.

At this time of night
the wind sang gently.
Across the pond
camas flowers bounced,
fluttered, as if asked
to dance an uncertain jig.

The eagle, the watchman,
saw a duck descend into the calm,
then the white-capped bird vanished
into cover of night,
into ancient gnarly boughs,
into leaves that held him so dearly.

Mark Strohschein

To the Praying Mantis

I tried to save you,
stoic, static creature
back of green tarpaulin
royal palanquin frame
limbs like sewing-needles
by hoisting you on
stem of spent
Queen Anne's Lace
into the shoulder's arms.

Yet, when I returned
I found you again
tempting fate: middle
of asphalt road.
Uncamouflaged. Still.

Your plan all along:
to cross into wild
thickets north no matter
who deemed deviation
necessary for your survival,
trusting
your antennae tips,
your alien eyes,
perhaps even prayer
as you pin-drop paraded
to your next kingdom.

Marisela Zamora
The Werewolf

was getting old & so was every full moon.
Her soles failing to keep up the
stretching, the tearing—the whole
dramatic event of an animal erupting into
itself. She stood below layers surrounded
by godly redwoods, baby blue jays dreaming
of homes, cryptic effects of lunar cycling.
Ago she noticed a starved tempo inside her
cuticles; break-dancing a cadence of unity
toward the unknown she yearned
to love & the first night changing meant always
making space for fear to follow. Overall,
guidance of witches, shamans, sorcerers,
priests—to repress & once: in a cage
to minimize dead creatures apparating
with sunrise & very quickly a deep sorrow
alienating her; she compromised meats
within her human diet, first as a joke.
boils deep across canine limbs—awaiting
painful morning: unbendable & throbbing on
Earth floor. Now on all fours, the wind
speaks—You look old. The Werewolf—And
you must be? ready to greet the rest, even
the redwoods, even the blue jays,
to seep & become them too; even the wind.

Lynn Fanok
Elementary

I have a recurring dream of riding my bike
past your house, you sitting cross-legged
on your porch.

I wave, drop my bike. We string a cat's cradle,
sing pat-a-cake rhymes, weave chain bracelets
from red clover.

It was your idea to pledge our friendship
by sharing a stick of bubble gum
you pulled from your mouth.

In this dream, we play hide the thimble.
I search room after room. Find you
hidden in plain sight.

Chad Sullivan

Brief Summary of a Worm Reawakened

A worm recently reawakened in a lab after 46,000 years frozen in permafrost. One of the researchers associated with the project said that the worm was proof that *(o)ne can halt life and then start it from the beginning.*

This is every addict's dream, to begin anew.

Cryptobiosis is the term used to describe the ancient worm's prolonged metabolic dormancy. It refers to an indefinite stasis between life and death.

Half my life has been lived in an indefinite stasis.

It's assumed the worm awakened without memory of its previous environment,

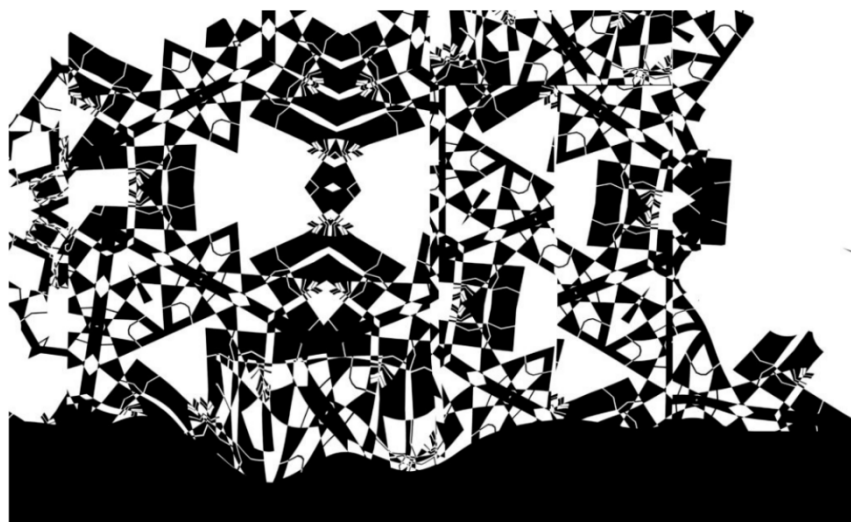
I hope so; otherwise, it's writhing bored in a Petri dish, thinking, What the fuck did I wake up for? I often ask myself the same question now that I'm sober.

the woolly mammoths and sabertooth tigers it hosted on to survive.

I once dated a waitress who kept her tips in a make-up bag. I'd steal cash from the bag, and Xanax from her nightstand. She never said anything, but she knew. We dated for a year. She ended things one December, having already bought Christmas gifts. I left with an armful of vinyl, some cash, and a few pills—parting gifts for our time together.

Conservation biologists wonder if the worm might provide clues to the preservation of species impacted by a rapidly changing environment.

Shame is highly adaptable.



Edward Michael Supranowicz
Life Becomes Mechanical

Patty Somlo
The Sign

The color appears red but on closer examination, more like wine—a Cabernet, not Burgundy or Chianti. At that place, tall trees create shadows, causing the color to darken more.

When walking, I can see the sign a good five minutes before I reach the spot. It juts out toward the sidewalk, where a narrow driveway leads back under the trees to a parking lot. After leaving the house and walking up my quiet street of midcentury modern houses to the busy avenue, I look for the sign, trying to decide if I should cross to the opposite side of the street or not. There's only one traffic light between my house and the sign. Since so many cars travel that stretch of Sonoma Avenue, it's dangerous to cross at any point other than the light.

They claim women will regret the decision later. Decades have passed since I made the choice, and I have never regretted it. Not once.

Like many women in my generation, I did not want my mother's life. A stay-at-home mom, Jane Somlo had the bad luck to marry a man in the military. For my mother, this meant an exceedingly lonely life.

My mother raised three daughters, often alone. She also had to pick up and move at a moment's notice, going to a state, or even a country, she had never been before. Our old living room rug was a metaphor for my mother's life. In some places we lived, the pale gray-green rug was too small, leaving a bare floor obscenely showing around the edges. In other apartments or houses, the rug ended up too large,

and my mother was forced to roll up the edges and hide the unsightly lump behind the couch.

After years of single motherhood and moves, my mother steadily sank down. At night, she drank one Seagram's Seven and ginger ale after another, sitting alone in the dark den, the TV giving off weak light.

Not becoming my mom meant avoiding alcohol. I also understood that getting married and having children would trap me in a miserable life. Since this was what I had known as a child, how could it be otherwise?

I live in a small city in Northern California. The weather is perfect for walking, as well as growing grapes for world-class wines. My snug one-story house sits a mile from downtown. Days I want some exercise, I hoof it to and from the library, instead of getting in the car. Unless I cross the street at the light in front of the French-American Charter School, I am forced to pass the sign.

I never wanted children. Now that my fertility ticking clock has stopped, I still haven't changed my mind. Though I don't regret not bringing children into the world, I do wish I'd had loving parents. If that wish had come true, my feelings about children might have been different.

It took decades for me to understand what I missed, growing up with parents who weren't exactly on the job as nurturers, mentors, teachers, and even friends. It took decades because you don't know what you don't know until you step out of your tight little box.

As far back as I can remember, walking has been my therapy. During these meandering strolls, I am sometimes so lost in my head, I don't

notice much around me. Other days, I take pleasure in the gardens bursting with fiery orange poppies and red roses, and the lavender with its myriad slender green stems, tipped in purple buds. If I'm in the mood, I concentrate on a Buddhist meditation I learned years ago, in which I repeat two short phrases – one when I inhale and the other as I let out my breath. Because the meditating clears other thoughts from my mind, I can see my surroundings as if I've slipped strong lenses over my eyes.

Some days I cross the street at the light, to avoid passing the sign. Other days, I take my chances. The sign is far enough from the light that I can't get a good view of it until I've walked at least a block past the school.

I used to fear that my anger would burst out if I walked that way, and I wouldn't be able to contain it. After a time, when I considered whether to cross the street or not, I started to refuse to let them force me to the other side.

Like most women, I'd taken chances and had my share of scares. By my thirties, I wondered if I might be incapable of getting pregnant. Maybe this question caused me to find out.

It's impossible to know what was running through my mind that warm night. I was in the lovely colonial city of Guadalajara, after a brief stay along Mexico's Pacific Coast, sleeping in a palapa, overlooking the stunning white-sand beach and shimmering turquoise water. For some reason, I didn't pull my diaphragm out of its blue plastic case, before my boyfriend Carlo and I made love.

Moments after Carlo and I returned home from the airport following the flight from Puerto Vallarta, he looked at me and said, "I think we should take a break from each other." I had feared this was coming for some time, and knew this would be a permanent break, not a temporary one.

The day I got the news, I debated whether to call Carlo or not. I hadn't talked to him for over a month. Though he no longer wanted a relationship with me, I felt he had a right to know.

Before dialing Carlo's number, I considered what I should do. Even before starting, I knew my options were limited. I was a freelance writer, with an unpredictable income. I shared a house with two roommates and didn't own a car. At the age of thirty-four, I still didn't know how to drive.

The women who plant themselves in front of the sign are old, long past when having children might be an option. One who appears slightly younger wears her unkempt gray hair long. It falls past her shoulders and gives her the look of a hag in one of those ancient fairy tales I read as a child. She carries a sheet of thick white cardboard, with messy handwritten letters scrawled across, that says something to the effect that all babies should live. She holds her cardboard aloft, as she marches up and down the sidewalk in front of the sign. The older woman sits on a folding chair close to the curb. Her message is intended for people to read as they drive by.

In white letters at the top of the Cabernet-colored sign, I read PLANNED PARENTHOOD every time I walk by. I tend the anger that rises like indigestion from my gut. I'm also forced to look at this old woman, who thinks she has the right to tell other women she doesn't know how to make one of the most personal decisions of their lives.

It wasn't until I received the results of my pregnancy test at the age of thirty-four that I understood what a difficult decision, whether to have a child or not, is for a woman. That's what causes the bile to collect in my throat, when I see the gray-haired woman marching with her sign. I want to scream at her, "It is every woman's right to decide. What do you know about other women's feelings and lives?"

Somlo

I walk, even in bad weather. If I come to a point in my life when I can no longer do so, I might need to push myself down the sidewalk in my wheelchair. Getting outside to hear the songs and calls of the birds that perch in the trees and atop telephone wires and poles, nearly always cheers me up.

If I have been hurt or disappointed, a long walk soothes me. As I get into an easy rhythm, a calmer, caring voice emerges. When I'm overly distracted by worry, I can pull my thoughts away by repeating a simple chant in time to my breath and steps.

I used to let the women's presence, when I could spy them in the distance, force me to cross the street and walk on the opposite sidewalk. Lately, I have stood my ground, even walking toward the long-haired woman and looking her in the eye. At these moments, I still hold onto my anger, but I won't let it out in the sort of explosion of rage I used to worry about. Instead, I tell her silently with my mind that we are each entitled to our choices, and I haven't experienced a moment of regret about mine.

P.A. Farrell

Moment of Truth

Sunlit days bring no joy for Jeffrey, who hurriedly and carefully ties his scuffed shoes with the thinning laces. The apartment was cold last night and he wants to dress quickly. He looks down at his shoes once again.

His mother has expressed some degree of relief that his feet don't seem to be growing like other children's. Shoes are expensive. Now, he stands up unsteadily in the shoes. The soles tip him forward like rocker rungs from too many half-soled repairs. It saves money. Another day lies ahead of him.

The morning in class is uneventful. Jeffrey was called to the board once to diagram a sentence and he did it well. But he knows something awaits him in the school lunchroom.

After class, head down, he makes the short walk down the green-walled corridor to the old iron staircase, occasionally slipping on his rocker-soled shoes, and begins to feel a change in his heartbeat and a steady rise in a temple pain.

Once in the smelly, overheated lunchroom, Jeffrey lingers at the tail end of the line, his empty tray in hand. He knows it will remain empty. His eyes widen in anticipation. Softly, he urges his classmates to pass ahead.

The final student receives their meal. Jeffrey approaches the steam table. The absence of a lunch ticket is turning the air thick with uncertainty. Having pushed the tray along the metal shelf toward the two women manning the steam table, he jingles in his pocket three nickels he received from returning deposit bottles. But it's not enough. He knows it.

Behind the counter, the white-uniformed women engage in an intense exchange, their faces revealing a decidedly different nuanced dance; one compassionate, the other firmly adhering to the rules.

The smiling woman motions to provide the boy with a free lunch. Her eyes, like windows into a generous soul, have a sparkling glow. The other woman, a stern figure, arms akimbo, stands firm, insisting on payment.

The women's voices, now a less-than-delicate symphony of discord, rise above the ambient student chatter. The first woman, her face now an effortful display of frustration, brings forth a poignant reminder—a past act of kindness, a loan given in a moment of shared humanity.

“If I hadn't given you that gas money, would you be at work today or wondering if you'd have a job tomorrow? How many lottery tickets did you buy, anyway?”

The question lingers in the air.

Jeffrey, a passive observer turned unwitting participant, stands at the epicenter of this human drama. The lunchroom, once alive with the hum of youthful banter, stops, as though a heavy curtain has fallen into an uneasy silence as students turn to watch.

Amid the tense tableau, a resolution. The second woman, her heart responding to the weight of memories and a selfish need for future acts of kindness, nods in reluctant acknowledgment. A gesture, a silent agreement, and the boy moves forward, his tray now a vessel for shared sustenance without a lunch ticket.

Seated at a table, he exchanges a fleeting but knowing glance at the woman who had championed his cause. The lunchroom, once fractured, gradually returns to the shared experience of lunchtime. A sense of unity restored.

Farrell

But tomorrow will bring another shoe-rocking trip to the lunchroom with perhaps a few more nickels in his pocket after a hunt in the empty lots near his home. Today, after school, his shoes will pick up more scrapes as he scours the neighborhood for the all-important beer bottles. When returned, these garner a nickel each. Two more bottles and he'll pay for lunch. He knows where to look.

Nicola Brayán

<3

I sign his birthday card with a heart next to my name. A love-heart, two lopsided curves arcing into each other. I can make the same shape on my keyboard; <3. I fixate on the defibrillator sign opposite me on a train in Japan as he and I hurtle from one city to the next. That same symmetric shape is one of the only things I recognise, the only clue I have to the machine's purpose, and it looks nothing like the organ it represents. The heart that beats in my chest is lopsided, pulpy, plugged into my body with veins and arteries. Were it to stop on that train, the machine that could save my life would be branded with a caricature of it.

Most of the humans who have ever existed had no idea what was inside of them. They felt pain in organs they could not identify by sight, lived and died because of mechanisms hidden under their skin. The shape we know as a love-heart is peppered throughout history, in art, in jewellery, in coats-of-arms. Historians speculate where its shape came from: perhaps its curves resemble breasts or buttocks, or a fig leaf, or a seed once used for contraceptive purposes. It was first used to signify love in a drawing accompanying a fourteenth century Italian poem, in which Cupid stands naked atop a horse, showering a crowd of people with arrows. The artist's intentions have been lost to time; I do not know where he conjured this shape from, why he chose it to mean love. Perhaps, to him, love was the rounded shape of a female body, or the curve of a seed used for pleasure, or the silhouette of a leaf that symbolised loyalty. Or perhaps, when he placed a hand on his chest and felt a pulse beneath it, this was what he imagined beat within him.

In a different drawing from a hundred years prior, a man extends a red shape to a woman. It is rounded at one end and pointy at another. To the best of contemporary European anatomical knowledge, this was what a heart looked like. Over time, with the softening of norms around corpses and the advance of scientific implements, anatomists were able to sketch the heart with more accuracy. Artists like Leonardo da Vinci scratched ink into paper, cross-hatching the contours of the human heart after hasty excavations from the chests of recent cadavers. A dense, fist-sized red muscle with chambers, the number of which was disputed, attached to the body around it with veins and arteries. This heart is fleshy, messy, intertwined with the other organs it fuels; far from the neat shape inked by the Italian artist years before.

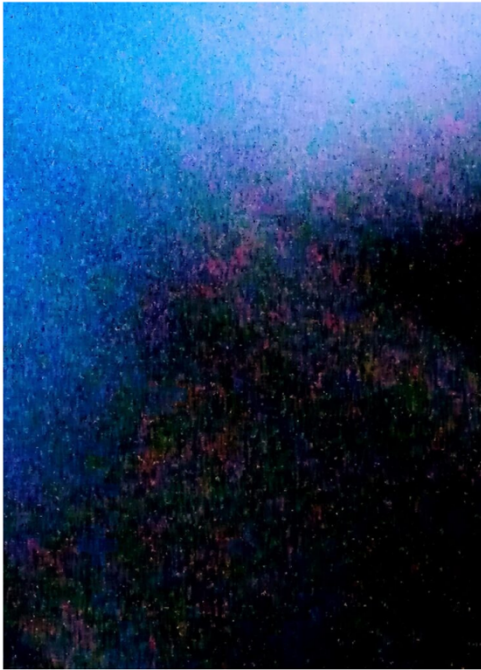
The purpose of the heart has long been associated with life force. Ancient Greeks considered it the hub of activity in the body, the originator of intelligence and emotion. Aztecs carved the hearts out of sacrifices with a flint blade, believing the organ to be a relic of the Sun as well as the captor of an individual's essence. Ancient Egyptians believed their hearts, representative of a person's soul, were weighed against a feather from the goddess of truth in their journey to the afterlife. Confucius pinpointed the heart as the origin of mind, governance, and morality. It is unsurprising that a vital organ has so historically been associated with vitality, especially one that functions so transparently — its beats resonate in the chest cavities of the living and are eerily absent from the dead. In the absence of deeper scientific understanding, of course one would conclude that the essence of humanity are our hearts.

I think back to the man in the ink manuscript, shoddily rendered heart in his outstretched palm. The artist, fingers cramped, tracing the best outline they can to represent the muscle that keeps them alive. The raw tenderness of that offering; I do not know quite what force keeps me alive, it seems to say, but whatever it is, I give it to you.

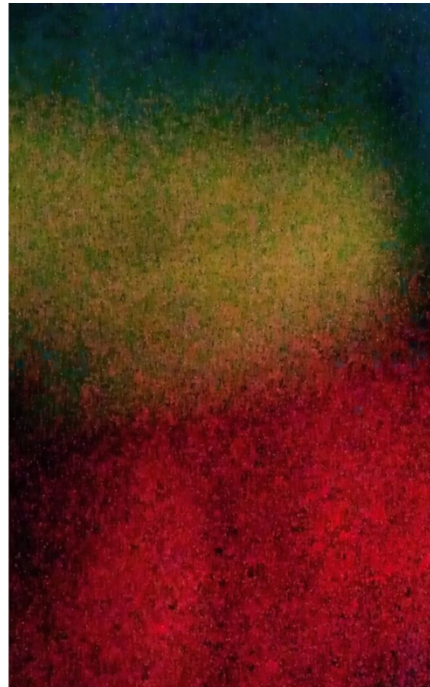
Metaphor tends to temper over time as it becomes culturally ingrained. Startling imagery — butterflies in stomachs, iron fists — sanded down to mundane notions by the rough tongues of decades of speakers. Seeing a t-shirt emblazoned with “I ♥ New York” is perfectly normal, and yet the idea that one would feel so passionately about a city that they would devote their most essential organ to it is absurd. I wonder about the people who first coined the metaphor of heart representing love. There is poetry to the urgency of it; love is life or death.

In the minutes before we unfurl and drift off to sleep, he and I lay tangled in each other every night. It’s an unspoken ritual, a gentle brush that sweeps the border of waking and sleeping into a soft haze. I lay with my ear pressed to his chest, tha-thud tha-thud tha-thud punctuating the silence of the night. If I muster the energy I can imagine countless ears pressed against countless lovers’ chests, an infinite tempo cupped in the warm place between bodies. But in those moments, the only lovers I can think of are me and him, and it’s as if his heartbeat is an original thought. I envy the first people to describe their hearts as loving. Perhaps I could have written poetry unburdened by syrupy cliché, the kind of poetry I hear in his pulsing heart. It stutters out syllables: I live for you.

In the course of his anatomical studies, da Vinci said, “The heart, of itself, is not the beginning of life, but is a vessel made of dense muscle vivified and nourished by an artery and a vein, as are the other muscles.” There is nothing preternatural about the muscle which pumps in a person’s chest, and yet its pulse is considered by some as the inception of a foetus’ personhood. It fuels the flush of a rosy cheek, the warmth of an embrace. The cartoonish, symmetric love-heart is not an anatomical heart, but the heart has more significance than its anatomy. The heart makes us human. Oh, to be the poet who loved deeply enough to attribute to it their humanity.



Andrew Graber
Untitled



Andrew Graber
Untitled

Matthew Slocum

Thirty-Four Hundred

Cauliflower. That's the word that came to me when the mushroom cloud bloomed over me on the silver screen. Another word. Fractals. In the vegetable, buds are nested within florets, which are nested within ramifications, and these fork from inflorescences, and then branch, until finally you reach the stem. But, while the explosion had the same recursive nature, with its vapors and fumes and billowing clouds, it had, of course, none of the charm of that vegetable that grew in the far corner of your garden. No, it was like a cauliflower grown to feed a titan, a cauliflower grown on x-rays. It was the embodiment of the spirit that pummeled the boxer's ear.

I avoided pictures, news stories, and films about the bomb. When making conversation, I dodged anything that might lead to discussing it; I did not mention commies, the military, the situation in Eastern Europe or China, or the arms race. In Japan, a crazy movie had just come out featuring a gigantic lizard somehow brought to life by the damn thing, but I did not talk about it.

But Patty was a Hitchcock fan and told me she wanted to see *Dial M for Murder*, and I could not resist any request made by those graceful, curved lips. So, I took her to the Roxy, arriving by taxi over rain-sheened streets. I opened the door and she stepped out—like the unfolding of an origami swan—and as we strolled through the crowd, I felt all that a man feels with a beautiful woman on his arm. During the newsreel, I learned I had successfully avoided knowing anything about the H-bomb tests on Bikini Atoll.

Of course, on the screen, the cloud was black and white. But my mind readily supplied the colors, having seen a real one just short

of a decade ago. The light, flashing chiaroscuro on Patty's lovely face, was painted in by the physicist in me. In oranges and crimsons. In blood. My lungs felt compressed, their air forcefully expelled, as if by a blast wave.

When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, I had just graduated from Princeton, and was the perfect age to go to the front. I could run an eight minute mile, and I wanted to go. But I had that rare combination of being both good at math and good with my hands, and so I was sent seven hundred miles south to Tennessee. There I worked in a different kind of Manhattan. I directed a team of mostly young women, fresh out of high school. Together we transposed matrices, and calculated Eigenvalues and partial derivatives. We figured the strength of the Lorentz force, so we could focus our beams and optimize our voltages. In this way we worked my calutron.

One percent. That's how much of the total required material I had made, by the time it was all done. And I did the rest of the math. I could not help but do the rest of the math. One percent of three hundred and forty thousand is thirty-four hundred.

Thirty-four hundred shadows burnt into the concrete. Thirty-four hundred people vomiting and bleeding from their orifices, before dying of organ failure. Thirty-four hundred...

I looked at Patty. She looked happy. She would not understand why, tomorrow, I did not return her call.

Marie-Eve Bernier

At Dawn in Kraków

7am in Kraków is calm before commotion. The crisp morning air is chilly, contrasting with the warm morning sun. As I catch my breath, I realise that I just made it in time.

Vendors are already set up in Rynek Główny, the town square. There is a sense of urgency as Easter is just around the corner. I can smell the delicious aroma of obwarzanek Krakowski, braided bread rings, wafting across the square. My stomach is begging for breakfast, but I don't want to miss this. Around me, market stalls are filled with Easter goods. Locals keen to beat the rush are already purchasing cards, flowers, decorative wooden eggs, chocolates and colourful Easter palms. Easter is an important celebration, no expenses are spared. Tourists are starting to shop for wooden musical boxes and amber jewellery as souvenirs. They stand out amongst the locals who are focused on their Easter preparations. I see a long queue of women forming outside St Mary's Basilica holding beautiful baskets lined with delicate lace, filled with a sample of their Easter food, patiently waiting to have it blessed by the priest.

But this is not why I rushed here. I am facing St Mary's but more specifically at the bugle call tower. At the very top, I can see a small window opening. I smile because I had thought it might not be true and I am comforted that there is still such humanity in a world that can at times feel lonely. The sun hits a golden trumpet that emerges from the window. An enchanting melody then commands stillness. The moment so perfect it takes my breath away. Finally, the trumpeter stretches out his arm with an exaggerated wave. I wave back, my heart ever so full. I wonder if he can tell what I haven't admitted

yet. He then repeats this in the windows facing east, south and west, each equally touching as the last. I have just witnessed the 7am Hejnal Mariacki or the trumpet call in English.

The call is performed at every hour every day. What was once a warning call against foreign invaders is now a warm welcome to outsiders like me. Originating in the 14th century, this call has now become a beautiful tradition undertaken by the fire brigade. Poland's history casts a dark shadow but its beauty and rich culture is brighter. In that moment I am so thankful to see Poland for what it truly is. The horses pulling carriages filled with tourists are trotting over the cobblestones and the crowd is steadily growing but I am still in the moment. I feel so connected to the trumpeter, a stranger who has just unknowingly cheered me up. I wonder how many other people smile because of him, what their stories are and what brought them to the trumpet call. But mostly I wonder about the trumpeter's own story and who makes him smile.

What a perfect time to be in Poland.

Elizabeth Rosen

A Good Neighbor is Not a Choice

When Maggie rings my bell, I open the door wide and invite her inside. She takes the only stand-alone seat in the room and sits on the edge, straight-backed, hands in her lap. I take the couch and wait.

I know what this is about. Yesterday, we all saw her daughter, Maya, out removing the elaborate cursive *A Child Is Not a Choice!* from the narrow path that runs behind our houses. Several of us were already watching our kids' soccer games in the mowed field when Maya came out with a bucket and brush and began to remove the slogan she'd chalked colorfully on the tarmac the day before. Texts had flown up and down the houses in our usually bland subdivision. We'd come to our windows. We stepped out into our backyards and raised hands to shield our eyes from the sun. We turned from the referee whistles and our own children's attacks on the ball to watch the red-faced twelve-year-old scrub the graffiti from the pavement. We saw Maggie, too, standing in her backdoor, arms welded tightly across her chest as she watched. There was steel in the woman's posture. Then, and now.

"I wanted to come by and apologize," she begins. "When Maya asked if she could draw something for Right to Life Day, we thought she meant on our driveway, not on the public path. You can imagine our shock."

I don't need to. None of us does. What I am confused about is why Maggie should be the one going door-to-door apologizing. And why to me? I don't think we've talked politics once in all the years we've lived next to one another.

"We made her clean it off during the soccer practice when the same people who'd had to walk over it would also see her removing

it,” Maggie says, tucking one ankle behind the other, knees perfectly, elegantly, aligned. “But I’m also going to all the neighbors on the path to personally apologize.”

So not just me. I have to wonder what she stands to gain by making her child’s humiliation her own. It seems a step too far. It feels a bit martyr-ish. Particularly since her blue eyes are alive with purpose and resolve.

Maggie has not looked away from me once, not in embarrassment or to gather her words. She looks as put-together and pretty as she always does, a bit tired, yes, but glowing with single-mindedness. This is a woman who has always returned to her pre-pregnancy weight after six months, a woman who still wears mascara, no matter whatever else is happening in her life, and I notice that Maggie has nothing with her. She has walked out without a sun hat, or a set of keys. I wonder at that kind of trust, not locking the door behind her, not thinking that the sun will burn. But maybe, with all her children coming and going, a locked door wouldn’t be practical.

I glance down at my mom jeans, note the layer of dust on the TV screen. I know that if I were in Maggie’s house there would be no dust. Her Tupperware would be perfectly nested. I’ve seen it myself.

“Of course, we are proud of Maya for the strength of her opinions,” Maggie says, bringing me back from my thoughts of kitchen storage, “but we want her to understand that it isn’t right to make others feel uncomfortable with them.” I see her eyes slide to the dirty glass on the coffee table, see her putting theory into practice.

I pretend to be brushing something off the toe of my sneaker to hide my eyes. Maya tried to convert my son about a year ago, telling him that if he would only come to Jesus he would not have to worry about things. At the time, I was more concerned with what he was so worried about, so I never mentioned anything to Maggie about it.

I want to tell Maggie that coming by wasn't necessary, that her point was more than already made. I want to touch her hand, to reassure her that she is a wonderful neighbor, an admirable parent, that we all think so. When I look into her face, though, I wonder if I have the right to tell her something so intimate. I wonder if we are friends, or just two women who share a French drain.

So instead, I tell her how much I appreciate her stopping by. I can't think of a single topic to segue into, so for a moment we sit without speaking. Finally, I rise and lead her back to the front door. I watch her make her way down my driveway and head to the next house down the lane where she will go through the whole act of contrition again.

I know from experience that this thoughtful woman and her children, Maya included, will appear on my front porch in a few days with the Hamentaschen they baked for us to acknowledge our holiday. I will accept their gift graciously, because I know my children are watching, and I, too, want to be an example of what a good neighbor looks like. I will smile warmly at Maggie, and I will politely ignore the look of resentment on Maya's face as I reach to take the plate she holds out. We will stand, briefly, on the porch and talk about the weather and the summer trips we are planning to the shore. The children will hang back, staring nakedly at one another. None of us will mention what Maya did, how it was corrected, or Maggie's visit. We will, all of us, be good neighbors.

c_zientek

Atlanta

She called in sick. This was unusual for her to do—normally, she would just ghost an employer, but she liked her boss and the crew, and the state-mandated wage kept the pile of bills on her thrift-store kitchen table to a minimum. Besides, cleaning was a no-skill, no-stress McJob anyway.

Cleaning up. That seemed like all she ever did nowadays.

The divorce cost her almost a month's rent. Leaving that situation was probably the bravest thing she had ever done. They had drifted together passively and two years later just as lazily drifted apart. It was mostly ok. The periodic fights were intense and mutually bloody, but tolerable. Towards the end, she began to realize she needed a change, though she wasn't sure what.

Occasionally, just to get out of her subsidized flat, she would ride on the free bus that the city provided for inner-city residents. The ninety minutes or so that it took the bus to loop back to her block gave a fair summary of the city. From the gumbo of nationalities just outside the business district to the generic blocks of bland urban revitalization at the city's edge—all of the region's sins were on display through the grimy bus windows.

It was the cusp of September, and the air conditioning on the bus was out of service—again. Hoping for a breeze, she positioned herself towards the middle of the bus, one seat behind a smashed-out window. The previous night's rain left a small puddle on the faded, pale green fiberglass seat beneath the vandalized window. Or maybe that was the sweat left from the cumin-scented man that sleazily

brushed himself against her as she stepped up into the bus. Or was it fresh urine?

She resisted the urge to clean a corner of the window next to her with a crumpled scrap from a discarded city paper and a bit of spit. It really wouldn't improve anything that she saw during the ride—so why bother?

A faint chorus of sirens started to wail a few blocks away. The sound crept in the broken window and grew like kudzu until it filled the interior of the bus with migraine intensity. A small parade of emergency vehicles stopped alongside the bus, waiting for the traffic to clear. The flashing lights, overlapping sirens, and stench of diesel fumes exploded in her head. She reached up, pulled the frayed exit cord, and stepped out onto the cobblestone street.

As the noise drove away, it took her a few seconds to clear her head and realize where she was. She smiled to herself and reached into her knapsack to find a small, tattered spiral notepad she had stolen from a drugstore rack a few months back. That kind of petty thievery reminded her of her happier tween years. Not a care in the world.

Recently, the city bigwigs and the news media had announced that the art museum would offer free admission on days that the temperature reached 90°. She had never been to a museum, and earlier in the week, she carefully printed “go 2 musecom” into the notebook. She reached back into the bag to find the stub of a church pencil and put a big check mark next to the words. She was pleased with herself and her accidental accomplishment.

The building's interior was dimly lit and chilly, like the frozen food aisle in the corner bodega. Walking through the mostly deserted halls and galleries, she wasn't moved by the paintings, antiquities, or the modern art. She couldn't make sense of any of it—everything looked like props she'd seen on TV shows or movies.

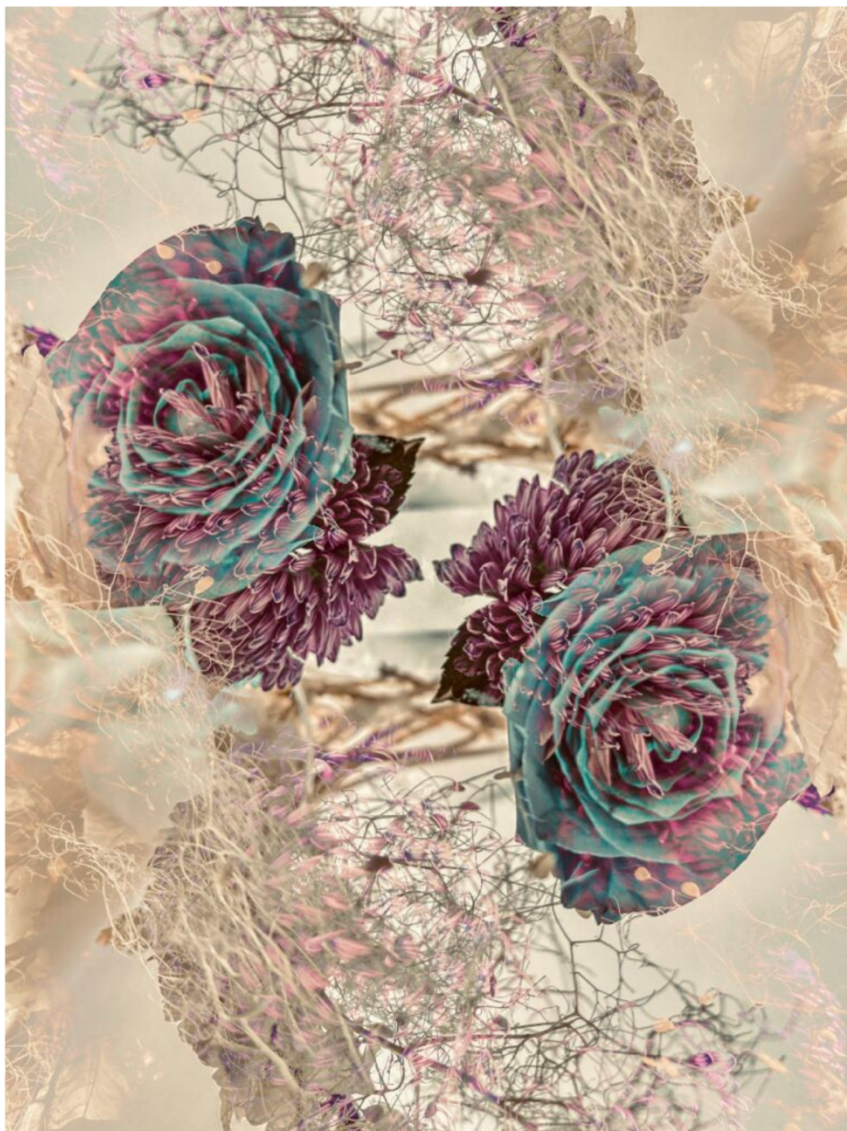
Letting her thoughts wander back to the divorce, she continued walking aimlessly until she found herself in a dark green, circular room. A few small portraits hung in the shadows on the walls. But in the center of the space, a large marble sculpture on a dais was bleached starkly white from an overhead skylight.

A small placard mentioned something about pagan beliefs and old religions, along with the name of the deity and the artist. Ignoring all that, she locked eyes with the life-sized, partially robed female figure reclining in front of her. It wasn't the defiant stare or unashamed nudity that stopped her cold. There was something about the pale, solemn, realism of the stone that kept her frozen in place for what seemed like an overtime work shift.

Then she glanced over her shoulder, abruptly fell to her knees, leaned forward, and slowly licked the goddess's sun-drenched feet. Her tongue slid over the ridges of the toes—five toes up—then again—five toes up. The cool white surface felt like a flavorless ice pop.

Recovering her senses, she stood up, looked around again, and was relieved to find the gallery still empty, except for the paintings that now seemed further recessed into the dark walls.

She shook her head and clutched her bag closer to her pelvis. Her hair, which had been loosely pulled up because of the heat and humidity, tumbled down to her shoulders as she hurried out of the room, out of the museum, and back out into the noisy hell of the august city.



Andrea Damic
Perianth

Betty Dobson

Fifteen Minutes

She listened to his car pull out of the driveway and counted to ten.

At one breath past ten, she pulled down her suitcase from the top shelf in the bedroom closet. He wouldn't be gone long. Five minutes to the bank, another five to get through the line-up, five more to get back home, unless the bridge was busy—but she couldn't be that lucky. Fifteen minutes, tops. If she couldn't leave in fifteen minutes, she never would.

The curtains shifted, and she felt a new chill in the air. The morning sun no longer shone through the bedroom window. Where had the clouds come from?

She grabbed a handful of underwear from the top dresser drawer and tossed them into the suitcase. T-shirts and a second pair of jeans followed. No need for dresses or silk blouses. No need for the feminine trappings he always demanded.

Light rain dotted the window. She blinked away the threat of tears and rummaged through the remaining drawers for anything that might still hold meaning.

Their wedding album, still crisp and white, glared up from the bottom drawer. A little white lie. Half-forgotten vows echoed in her head. She let him lie to her for so long and lied to herself even longer.

The gentle patter of rain shifted to the sound of bouncing marbles. She went to the window and watched as hailstones dropped

through the air and careened off trees. Thunder clapped in the distance. She'd never be able to walk to the bus station in a hailstorm.

Perhaps she should stay. He had the car. He had the money. She had nothing but an ill-formed plan. Another thunderclap, closer this time, but the hail gave way to rain again. The sky seemed broken into thirds, a shortened rainbow of blue, white, and gray. Damp leaves glistened in the sun even as the rain continued to fall.

She dried her swelling eyes and tried to swallow her doubts with a deep breath. Only scattered raindrops fell. She pulled off her wedding band and set it on the windowsill.

She heard a distant rumble but couldn't tell if it was coming or going.

Anna Kolczynska

2:22

You have been driving around aimlessly for what feels like hours.

“I have shit to do tomorrow,” you told your mother over the phone the night prior.

“Then get up early and get it done before the storm,” she said.

How pointless, you thought, for there were always storms.

Yet, you listened to her and now you’re passing from city, to town, to orange grove, to swamp, back to town in every direction possible, all in hopes of getting those mindless errands fulfilled. Today, having driven around in giant squares and circles, you have seen it all—so many billboards for the damn tourist attractions that you’re internally questioning pretty much everything about monopolies and capitalism, and so much of the same geography and landscape that you’re beginning to forget the reasons you went for this drive in the first place.

Central Florida has a few hills, and your Subaru just conquered the steepest of them. Your mother used to tell you on long drives that these were the beginnings of the Appalachian Mountains. Your father would argue with her that they were the end of them.

From your spot in the back seat, you never bothered getting involved, nor did you mention that the Appalachians technically start-slash-end in Georgia, according to most everyone.

Despite being in a populated area, your radio continues to fade in and out, like it did in the more rural areas of your journey. Soon, the interruptions of the crappy Top 40 music become more frequent as you pass the tiny white church with the red door and enter another stretch of undeveloped land and cross over a shimmering, eerily still lake.

There are lots of lakes here, many of them named after dead old women.

More abandoned churches, small ranch homes, and tents selling farm fresh produce are your only views along the way, and you begin to embrace the sameness—not unlike you did when you first moved to this sweltering state.

Driving for God knows how much longer, you thirst and make a last-minute decision to turn left at the first sight of buildings after undeveloped land had sprawled along your window.

At the near end of a strip mall stands a solitary building. It is painted a faded indigo, decorated with turrets more suited for a cheap excuse for an amusement park than a random town's random store.

You remember these gift shops well, despite never having stepped foot in one. The weird, but nice, but quiet boy who sat next to you in Algebra II talked about them whenever he decided to speak. He told you his dad owned them all—an inheritance he'd gained, though he never told you when, or how, or why. You always wondered how far back these shabby stores went and how far into the future they'd last.

When you step out, it's drizzling, the raindrops sticking to your eyeglass lenses.

Seabreeze collision, probably—an almost daily summer occurrence in which storms off the Gulf and storms off the Atlantic embrace violently somewhere over the center of the state's peninsula, leading to an onslaught of severe thunderstorm warnings.

Looking towards the horizon in some direction that you can't quite gather in your post-drive weariness—but you suppose is slightly north—you see the orange glow of the theme park lights permeating the dark clouds. There they are. The clouds seem to be gathering, and growing darker with each fleeting moment, so you enter the gift shop.

The store is practically empty—no one to browse its dusty, unending aisles of knock-off Orange Bird merchandise—save for a small family of tourists speaking in hushed voices, an obviously (and ironically) lost tour guide in a green soccer jersey with the flag of Brazil sticking out of his backpack as a marker, and a group of local pre-teens mucking about with nothing else better to do.

(When you were a pre-teen with nothing else better to do, you mucked about on the streets, sucking on candy cigars with your friends around a rusty green utility box, or you waltzed dangerously close to the retention pond on the outskirts of the far-end of the neighborhood, where no one else dared to roam. Then came the incident with the boy from the magnet school down the road, and no one mucked or waltzed about again, let alone said his name.)

“Storm's getting bad,” the manager semi-shouts to those roaming his territory. “I think it's best we all lock up and stay here 'til that there funnel cloud passes over.”

You look out across the street at the dark sky beyond the colorfully-painted abandoned condos on their rotting stilts and trees decorated with Spanish Moss that line the small lake also named after another dead old woman. On the horizon, the clouds have gathered themselves into the shape of a thin, wiry thing reminiscent of the limbs of the daddy-long-legs that perpetually lives in your parents' mailbox.

The television atop the shelf behind the counter continues to blare a red alert to take shelter immediately, but you know this place and days like these. It's nothing you can't handle.

“I’m just here for a Tahitian Treat,” you say, throwing down a bill, “and then I’m hitting the road.”

“I don’t think so,” grumbles a voice behind you. The manager has inexplicably moved from behind the counter to the front doors in the blink of an eye, placing a large piece of plywood between the door handles before locking the doors and jiggling the deadbolt shut.

“Alright, everyone, get to the back. It’s the safest,” he barks.

People—even the kids—listen to his commanding tone without question and abandon their various activities. As the crowd shuffles into the stockroom, you look over your shoulder and notice the dark funnel cloud has widened by a magnitude, now making a touchdown and veering onto a path on which the gift shop is dead center.

You know you’re dead meat when you hear the train coming, your Uncle Tom explained wisely as you hid in the bathroom from hurricane winds the summer before fourth grade.

You tried to shake it off. You’d heard plenty of train whistles and engines since then and survived—a few of them from storms, and fewer from actual commuter rail cars. Most of the ones you heard, however, echoed across silent swamps at midnight or among the dewy green of golf courses at sunrise and had no discernible source. A ghost train, Tom had called them. The whistle that wants to warn you.

Memories of your long-gone uncle are the last thoughts to cross your mind before you hear the loud noise erupt from the spinning clouds now quickly approaching. Covering your ears instinctively, you stumble into the dim room—you’re the last one in—and bump into a box as someone slams the door behind you. You quickly scout out a spot away from anything precarious or tall, then crouch down with the others, just waiting, hands splayed out atop your head to protect your skull from whatever debris may rain down.

The sounds of this train howl like no other ghost train you've heard before, and just as the building begins to creak and your ears start to pop, you take one final breath and close your eyes.

Maybe Tom was right. Maybe you'll finally get to tell him that.

Instead, you notice yourself inhaling sharply and coming to again. When you open your eyes, things have settled. A needling feeling deep in your gut tells you that something very bad has happened to you and that a very long time has passed, but when you check yourself for injuries, there are none. When you look at the cracked clock on the concrete wall of the shabby stockroom, it has only been two minutes and twenty-two seconds since the gates of hell opened up in the sky above Magic Castle.

Someone opens the door back into the storefront, and things look exactly the same as they did two minutes and twenty-two seconds ago. You push past the tourists and even the kids—all of whom appear too unbothered—to get a glimpse at the outside world through the just-as-dirty but undamaged floor-to-ceiling windows.

There are cars on the highway, driving as carelessly as ever. The mourning doves and egrets mingle in and around the mossy trees. The sky is a crisp, clear blue without any sort of cloud in sight.

Just across the highway, and around the bend from the condos, cars wrap around in the Chick-Fil-A drive-through. The line is probably a quarter mile long, as if it's lunch hour on an average Wednesday and not mere minutes after a terrifying early morning thunderstorm. Conversations carry on again. The television plays a cheery slapstick cartoon that cuts to a theme park commercial.

You need to get out.

You return to your Subaru, which is covered in lovebugs—some creeping up the windshield in a singular fashion, others bonded together and making the climb as a pair. They seem to have come out of nowhere.

As you open the driver's side door and settle into your seat, you push down the uneasiness in your stomach as best you can, gulping, breathing in the damp, lukewarm air. As you pull out of the gift shop parking lot, kids emerge with Orange Bird figures and the manager waves gleefully through the window.

Turning away from town and veering onto the old highway, you don't look back—you can't—instead focusing on the steady stream of vehicles ahead and the endless orange trees dotting the distance.

You realize too late that you forgot your Tahitian Treat.

Kelley White

Where Joel S. Coffin Died

—*Denver Public Library Special Collections*
Rocker, Richard A., 1911-1994
1945

Just a flat wasted field, a few patches of snow, left behind by the long winter; there might even be a little life, a bird, perhaps a crow, or field mice, ants, coming out into near spring sun. The gear, a small back pack, a mess kit, are surely not his, but someone else's, perhaps Richard Rocker's, or perhaps they belong to another travelling companion. It was important to find the place, though it differed little from any other, just a place where the soil received a young man's life, kissed with a little of the spirit of his beauty of face, of body, of courage, of light.

Karol Olesiak
Homegoing

they raised me on folk
history of ukraine&pogroms
 bolsheviks&russians
ukranians&nazis ukranians&soviets
flight to poland fighting
imperiled constant flight only
storied occupation&flight
I am not from ukraine
that is just a tall-tale
it is built on top of my home-
land: lvov before it was lviv
not here to argue about old borders
mind on the front lines with folk's
wheat ghost of memory
 kalashnikov's
butt-end meets grandfather's forehead
 but that was later
not my memory either
nazi collaborators: lvov my
grandmother lived with parents
polish-lithuanian city
jews&poles before
pogroms&after bolsheviks
I am trying to let go of hereditary
memory everything taken
by the soviets after the germans
lost and the west gave the poles

as a parting gift to stalin
Rudolf Weigl tied boxes of
lice to the legs of a teen girl
that was my grandmother for
extra rations from the occupiers
for her platelets that were now
immune to typhoid some of
her platelets were smuggled
into concentration camps by
the resistance after the bolsheviks
some of her platelets smuggled
for vaccinations in ghettos
made lice&blood-paste
louse-feeders avoided camps
lice fought over landscape of skin
the germans spread propaganda
linking bolsheviks&jews: ukrainians
collaborated with nazis
stepan bandera organizing
students at the polytechnic
genocide starts on college
campuses where students
round-up polish&jewish
professors with bachelor hands
bandera craved sovereignty
polish interior minister assassination
banderistas will come and get you
stuff of stories told to scare children
like my father at the orphanage
I have learned to forgive ukrainians
when the soviets came they
lived in my grandfather's family
home with their feet weighted
on hand craft furniture where

Olesiak

bourgeois tea cups used
to sit now replaced by vodka
& boot tread sullied with earth
they hunted-down bandera
I have learned to love the bomb
and not hate all the russians

Julien Griswold

War

I am fortunate only now to learn the color of fresh death. Pallid. Parched, even when waterlogged like bread chasing butter. Once my sisters and I dropped tiny brine shrimp into a fishbowl and called them primates. A step on the evolutionary branch swelling, I watched them wondering if people were ever so small. My father removed them limp with a slotted spoon, but they remained brimming and pink. This boy is different. His mother wipes dust from his forehead. She will bury him, gray, without a name.

Jimmy O'Hara

The Rat is Myth Unspoken

I startle as the city rat darts gingerly past.
This shrewd, cunning figure; this trickster
imposes her shadow upon the rancid alley
where our waste is her treasure, her relief,
a plentiful bounty to feed her children.

We jump as vermin slither into the concrete void,
threaten to pounce and bite. We say: these crooks!
We say: how dare these burglars lunge toward
our closed doors; how dare these demons haunt
their own neighborhood, the gardens they comb
and pluck beneath the cloak of dusk.

To us, rats are vile; the plague; the spineless nark
selling us out; that ever-present nuisance lurking
in the dank sewers, the urban tunnels underfoot.

Rats are the troublemakers shaking pipes
between cafes and nightclubs, rowhomes
and corner stores, empty food pantries,
basement fridges stocked year round.

Rats are thick-skinned thieves who stash crumbs,
leftovers, our excesses; who collect expired produce
in the damp air pockets between luxury flats
and penthouses, banks, unused office spaces,
the walls parting our fluid and mutual dreams.

A rat is an outcast; the class reject, shunned.
I've never met a rat who stole a thing.

Rats strike, organized; they scavenge our streets
for rations of grain, for seeds and tossed scraps
because they are the parents of children starved;
because they labor and build, hunter-gatherers
punished for hunger, for moving with the mischief—
with life's magnificent unfolding ever outward
and back upon itself, curious and balanced.

The rat is myth unspoken,
a fable cast forward and sideways
about the stories we tell ourselves—
that visceral reflection we learn to fear
and other, recoiling callously.
Rats crack shards in the nightly mirror work
linking our fragile and distant and tightly woven lives.

Jimmy O'Hara

Exchange and Return

The urban mouse toils overtime
to put scraps and crumbs on the table
and I wonder if her work has meaning,
how she endures double after double,
night shifts, all the sacrifice it takes
so that her offspring might eat—
steered by and ever spinning
the fecund wheel kept whole
and round; always providing
for the progeny, as her mother
and grandmothers once did;
as their kind has long done
and must go on doing.

I would not allow her into my kitchen.
I would not welcome her into my bed.
But she is free to prowl the front yard,
set up camp, reap the rewards I bring
the mice, the insects and soil and city trees—
my partners in compost, our common ritual,
the ancient fine art of exchange and return.
I gift her soured greens, peeled fruits overripe
and rotting; I offer the last two slices of bread
we so often skip over, first unwanted then stale.

O'Hara

Always by the next morning, I see the gifts
are gone, offerings borrowed and given back—
a reminder of the vital bond, linking process
to substance, two vines materially braided
and ever turning. There is no rodent in sight
but I know she lurks near, considering me;
her fellow vermin on guard, at the ready
for another night of honest work
beneath the waxing moon;
of rest and dancing unified
if they are lucky.

I wonder if she watches as I bow.
I wonder if she senses my skin,
warm and rising;
if she can sense my reverence,
what it means or doesn't mean.

Jeffrey Thompson

Sequel

Though you think it can't it does
sneak up on you
while you're reading or making love.
Breathing through a mask,
mere craftsman,
not even co-star,
it slices you
from your next move
and creeps off.
Then you wait, lost,
not seeing yourself, anything,
as you did, till your orders arrive.
You'll start at the bottom,
of course, an extra, propless
but for a few bad memories.
Perhaps you'll render
your relatives' lives miserable,
upending things without conviction,
without ambition, at first;
or the young couple in the old house,
perhaps teaching them a lesson,
moaning outside the door
with a restlessness
you'll never outgrow.

Jaylee Marchese

Ripe

When it has all passed and I am fifty years older,
body cracked like a pomegranate in hungry hands,
the stain of me on everything,
I'll peel back the skin of my life.

Say here it is,

pith and all.

Wasn't it worth it?

James Croal Jackson

Observation (October 29, 2022)

This matches the atmosphere of pre-pandemic Ineffable Cà Phê—
seated at a mahogany table stealing vibes from strangers. Ahead:
a Jennifer Lawrence doppelgänger wearing monotone, who types
quietly in a portrait mode of cedar wall & soft lights, spooning phở;
next table over, prospective homebuyers: a Kyle Wolff in
a psychedelic Dixie Cup shirt alongside his partner, crumpled over
with a realtor who holds printed-out pages of wanted foundations.
The agent leaves and they scroll Zillow; there is a void where you
used to be; October sixty degrees spent inside, no regrets this
Halloweekend. I spy on everyone. Nebby is what Pittsburgh calls it.
I look up to see a white bowl covering a face, noodles dangling
off lips chased with chop sticks. The amber light's flatness inspires.
Indie Interpol playlist a throwback to spending days at Muggswiggz
in Canton with Tony, soliciting strangers on Myspace for randomness.
I haven't changed as much as I wanted. Crumbs from the bread
of my chicken bánh mì, scattered across my laptop. I swipe them
away, but dislodge more in the keys the longer I type.

Gillian Thomas

Bronze Dragon

It's a winged trinket; he bought it for our son.
An early Valentine's Day present from one without
A father to a smaller version of himself. A miniature
Of might and fire you can almost touch, emoting
In red puffs; its angry mouth a vessel molded from
A heartless breast. The wingspan crests upward, wide
Across; the texture of feathers muted thanks to the bronze
Paint. It wished to be a warrior but the artistry weighs
It down. Now it will attach itself to a post, just be
A figurine or a plaything to a child. Ghosts
Of what could've been glide in the air, but it's late
And plans cannot be changed. I'm dressed; I'm making up
My face. Laying blood red roses on the table, he complains:
Twenty-five fucking dollars for flowers, he cries.
They'll die in a week, and they don't even fly.

Gillian Thomas

Talking to My Father's Urn

Some of the things I say
are I'm sorry, I should have tried harder,
and how could I be
so stupid as to choose a container,
sealed, without opening, so I can never
touch and feel what remains, even if
bony and broken
sharp and shattered
cutting and jagged
piece by piece

I know you wanted more for me
or at least better, I say
and you know—somehow
without ears you hear the truth
through the tears and you know
that I mean him
You know I am sick
You know I can't leave
Some of what I say is an apology

You without eyes, square and golden
You shiny and pearl-like
You a metal box
You who used to be
gray, round in the belly
joined at my hip

for breakfasts and *Seinfeld*
and nine-thirty movies back when movies
required a car ride and tickets

Me telling you I'd never change
my last name, and I haven't—*I haven't*—
some of what I say
comes out in a whisper, and you hear
without ears
my words fractured and blistered, you listen
and seethe from the dust
of your trap you are reaching
for me—You without eyes
who wishes I could see

He did it again,
I confess, as I stare at the top
of the dresser, and I know you
can hear, without ears you can
listen—listen and grieve—with no legs
to beat back what I lay
at your feet and I'm sorry, I say
Some of the things I say are
dark and plaguing for a father to hear
You without arms
to stretch and cling to my shoulders
You without hands
that can ball into fists
that can solve all my problems
that can save me from this
I came here for confession
The dresser, my altar
You next to Christ's statue
near my bras and my flannel

Thomas

You staring from a place of
flat polished goodbyes
waiting for me, to show up and kneel
and vomit my story
and there's nothing you can do—
your gold is fading—as I
bow down hair in a bun and my God
my heart breaking.

Elizabeth Wing

The anchoress Asks for a Change of Clothes

If we are born damned what do we do with the bay trees?
With the nuts we slip from their green skulls like the squirrels do –

Please. A piece of muslin. A new cotton shift. Maybe a hairshirt still shining with goat-grease.
What do we do with the monarchs clustering like airy embers in the eucalyptus?
What do we do with their doomed courage their migration?

A bit of wool to pull down around the neck and up around the ears when the drafts blow through
the chinks of the anchorhold.

If we were born damned what do we do with the yellow brush of
wild mustard across the field? With the handful of hazelnuts, small as planets?
Something lined with rabbit fur. Not a veil a little thinner, but a blanket a little thicker.

Dorothy Brooks
The Magic Bus

for my mother

It is your face
I remember, the lilt
in your voice as we turned
the pages. Your delight,
matching mine, in the adventure:
the dutiful school bus
transformed into a carpet ride
by a magic button.

This was our fairy tale
handed from mother to daughter,
not a tale of sleeping maidens
and princely kisses,
but a story of dreams,
of believing . . .

There was a wind

I recall, and a momentary hush
before the magic kicked in,
and you and I would hold
our collective breath, while the bus
as if feeling our desire,
carried us to red and purple tented
bazaars, the land of the Sphinx,
jungles overhung with vines . . .

Then you closed the book,
became again the mother
who worried us into jackets,
strained chicken soup
when we were ill,
but this was your gift to me:
I had seen the magic.
And I believed.

Dan Hawkins

Where the Building Straddled the Lake

after Seamus Heaney

Where the building straddled the lake,
where students took their ease in winter,
where the algae scummed the surface,
around the corner from the cafeteria
where I mistook a black olive for a grape,
I had the first intimations of the wonder
that wracked my decades then departed.

Before doubt, before jittery hours, before
the heart curdled, I stood on concrete,
watched the ducks push the muck around,
inhaled the reek, and the weight of the
unknown settled. A marvel then,
a consternation now, if still marvelous at times.
A tattered mantle I've yet to fully lay aside.

D.R. James

*Entering Winter with a Line from Gwendolyn
Brooks*

Horizon's burst-smear of pink nonchalance
forgets: *We are things of dry hours and the
involuntary plan.* In winter's vise
I'll wrestle—flail!—stampedes of elegies,
pendulums of memory, sidestepping
swathes of snow-fall brindled with late oak leaves'
yieldings: autumn's ceding. But from this blunt
and silhouetted terrain, ranging out
tactically, cautious in my happenstance,
I will still delight—plod, but still ignite.

D.R. James

Contrails

One answer lies in the tropospheric molecules scattering
short blue waves and vapor meeting minus-sixty. But

what's the burning question? What orders the eye, the
brain, to catch all the colors after rain? What comprehends

a handful of sand, November's endless branches of birds?
I'm bowed down by the simply phenomenal, the asymmetric

stain of mulberry crushed on concrete, what was sown that
now reveals its long green line. Yesterday, mountainous

clouds turned our Midwest horizon into I-76's Wiggins's
vision of the Colorado Rockies, and any headfirst plunge

off my cautious stage in this life supplies the slickest look
at all I never see. Forget insipid interpretations, how the jet

streaking seven miles above your sweetheart blazes the trail
connecting her to you. In a blink, or maybe in a day, those

contrails, heavy as the thin air they cleave, will leave you,
expanding, disbandingly unparalleled into a marbled blue.

Christine Pennylegion

Ohio Fields

Charlotta could not have imagined,
opening her hands to send her sons
across the pitching ocean, each bearing
her lasts gifts—sun-bleached linen shirts
straight from her needle, cheeses,
pickled herring—seeking their fortunes
as the stories always go—surely Charlotta
never dreamt the richness of these fields,
the iron ore, the river highways,
grasslands where her grandchildren
would sprout tall like corn: striding half-Swedes
who knew the soil and worked it till
they themselves were planted deep,
America's daughters and sons at last
laid down where August fireflies,
those swarming constellations, still draw
our creaking ships homeward, laden,
seeking our fortunes, deep in these Ohio fields.

Christine Pennylegion

Singer Slant-o-Matic 403A

and isn't that name just the epitome
of nineteen fifty-eight, age of tomato aspics
and tuna casseroles, Sputnik launching
us into the glorious future, and here
it all distills into domestic magic
wielded by the lady of the house,
effervescent with mechanical promise:
a bounty of labour-savers, automators,
chrome-plated fairy godmothers
offering a life of ease. Oh, this machine!
its motor and gears, the scent of oil
and hot steel, the snick and whirr
of its moving parts—the finest semi-
automatic sewing machine ever built!—
all eighteen pounds of it carried up
from the basement cradled to my chest
the way my grandmother carried my father,
born two days after Christmas that year,
before setting him down to thread the needle,
check the bobbin, sew her way forward
and forward into time; she's still sewing now.

Channing Huang

Hong Kong from the Window

After I opened
the curtains, the city's massive ocean

ripples just as I'd remembered: dusty
from the years I spent chained

to my bland suburban neighborhood, flooded
with identical trees and identical houses, familiar

from shining years past. Below me, sprawling streets
meld into the concrete tiles of the path

beside the harbor, the same path I walked
with my brother on cool summer nights, watching

as the bland gray buildings across the harbor
erupted into an ocean of light, bustling with life

and the bridge illuminated the shadows of the invisible
lighthouse with its indigo glow.

Now, the water's gray face ripples, dull, reflecting

the darker clouds approaching, as the freighters carry
loads disturbing the quiet waves. The sky, pitch

Huang

black, holds the stars until the city lights
revive them. Past the harbor, the waves still roll

through the monotonous stones, still shadowed
by the neighboring apartments, flickering

with the light they give it, with houseplant shadows.
Beneath them, the bridge—gray as ever—blends into sky.

Carla Sarett

Sea Lions

I've almost forgotten how
that night we watched *Rio Grande*
with its sentimental ballads,
a thick rain soaked the basement,
we slept over the flood. How
when riding up the coast, I never
could lose sight of the Pacific ocean
mist occasionally ruined by sun,
the bridge's yellow ribbons of light
on the Embarcadero. How he's missed
the thousand sea lions who've conquered
the city shoreline and the lovers
swinging their hands, high and higher,
so high, I've almost forgotten how.

Beverly A. Jackson
To Be Water,

not *in* water—
not whale or porpoise
seeking sonar depths,
tiles of sun trapped
in surface glint—

but the wet ooze,
the slackjawed, spooky renegade
of slosh and wave, tidal flood,
blind mammoth rolled in slumber,
sexed up with trailed sperm, seaweed,
over sands awhorl in fierce unrest,
tails of skates whipping the floors

or a rivulet of sweat on the flank of a mare
or the spit under the tongue of a liar,
or a final drop gliding on sclera
as yet unshed.

Alexander Etheridge

Gratitude

after Robert Bly

After we've set the book down,
it's all right if we only
remember the paper cuts.

It's all right if Eliot stands under
a bare bulb for days
writing two lines.

We should thank our suffering—
Chopin coughed up blood
composing his last mazurka.

We come from an ancient family
of weepers—A certain grief
gave birth to us all.

A flash of agony stokes the coals
in the heart's furnace. We burn
like the scrolls of Alexandria.

It's OK to break down before
the poem is over. Everything we've lost
carries us on the wind.

Alex Missall

Haibun For Grandma Gatewood

I

After the age of 68 / Old Lady Gatewood
had donated the first gallon of blue paint
to the Buckeye Trail / a path
that outlines Ohio. / She hiked the Appalachian Trail /
end-to-end / again / and twice more /
then walked across America.

II

imagine trekking
this lonely part of lost cave
nameless on Christmas

Nominations

We're pleased to announce our 2024 nominations for the Pushcart Prize.

From Issue One (August 2024):

James Owens, "Ancient Photograph"

Megan Wildhood, "Oso Means Bear in Another Language"

M.S. Rooney, "Caldor Fire, 2021"

From Issue Two (December 2024)

Matthew Slocum, "Thirty-Four Hundred"

Carla Sarett, "Sea Lions"

Chad Sullivan, "Brief Summary of a Worm Reawakened"

Contributor Bios

Nadia Arioli is the cofounder and editor in chief of *Thimble Literary Magazine*. Arioli's work has been nominated for Best of the Net and for the Pushcart Prize and can be found in *Cider Press Review*, *Rust + Moth*, *McNeese Review*, *Penn Review*, *Mom Egg*, and elsewhere. Arioli's forthcoming collections are with Dancing Girl Press and Fernwood Press.

Marie-Eve Bernier is a Québécoise and works as a nursery teacher. She has previously published in *Montréal Writes*, *Quail Bell*, *LitBreak Magazine*, *Academy of the Heart and Mind*, *Afterpast Review*, and elsewhere.

Nicola Brayán is a Sydney-based writer with a passion for language, culture, gender, and noticing little things.

Dorothy Brooks' work has appeared most recently in *Valley Voices*, *California Quarterly*, *Broad River Review*, *Tampa Review*, and *Atlanta Review*. Her second full-length poetry collection, *This Pause, Like Mist Rising*, was published in May 2023 by Main Street Rag. Her fourth chapbook, *Subsoil Plowing*, was published in 2020 by Finishing Line Press.

Martha Clarkson's writing can be found in *The Seattle Times*, *Clackamas Literary Review*, *Seattle Review*, *Portland Review*, *The Sun magazine*, and elsewhere. She is the winner of the Anderbo Fiction Prize for the story "Her Voices, Her Room," which has been produced as a podcast by PenDust Radio. Martha was a former poetry editor for *Word Riot*.

Andrea Damic, born in Sarajevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina, is an artist and writer living in Sydney, Australia. Her art can be found in *Fusion Art* and *Light Space & Time* Online Art Exhibitions, and elsewhere, and her photographs have been published on the covers of *Door Is A Jar Literary Magazine*, *Rat's Ass Review*, *Molecule: A Tiny Lit Mag* and *Gone Lawn*. The latter nominated her cover artwork "Lost for Words" for the Best of the Net 2025. She is an editor for *Pictura Journal*.

Shelley K. Davenport is a published fiction writer and poet. She lives and writes in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania—the Paris of Appalachia, a most uncanny city.

Betty Dobson is a prize-winning author of numerous short stories, personal essays, poems, articles, and one novella.

Alexander Etheridge has been developing his poems and translations since 1998. His poems have been featured in *The Potomac Review*, *Museum of Americana*, *Ink Sac*, *Welter Journal*, *The Cafe Review*, and many others.

Lynn Fanok is the author of *Bread and Fumes* (Kelsay Books). Her work also appears in *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Schuylkill Valley Journal*, *Red Wolf Press*, *Tiny Seed Journal*, *Gossamer Arts Literary Journal*, and the poetry anthology, *Carry Us to the Next Well*.

P. A. Farrell is a psychologist and published author with McGraw-Hill, Springer Publishing, *Cafe Lit*, *Ravens Perch*, *Humans of the World*, *Scarlet Leaf Review*, and elsewhere. She lives on the East Coast of the US.

Sean Ferrier-Watson has pieces published or forthcoming in *Lovecraftiana*, *Discretionary Love*, *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, *Better Than Starbucks*, *Hank & Whippoorwill*, and elsewhere. He was recently a finalist in Crystal Lake Publishing's Shallow Waters Flash Fiction Contest. His book *The Children's Ghost Story in America* was published by McFarland in 2017.

Andrew Graber enjoys karaoke when he isn't creating artwork in various mediums.

Julien Griswold (they/them) thinks insurance agencies should cover notebook costs as therapy expenses. When they aren't laying their thoughts bare in said notebooks, they study at Brown University. Their work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Palette Poetry*, *Pinhole Poetry*, *The /temz/ Review*, *Poetry Online*, and elsewhere.

Nicholas Grooms is a poet, writer and musician hailing from Garden City, Kansas. He has appeared in such periodicals as *Verse Libre Quarterly*, *Roi Faineant*, *Skyline Magazine* and *Midsummer Dream House*. He currently resides in Austin, TX.

Dan Hawkins is a poet and librarian from North Carolina living in South Carolina.

Nora Hickey lives in Springfield, Ohio, where she is a librarian at Ridgewood School. She writes about comics at *Autobiographix* on Substack. Her work also appears in *Guernica*, *Electric Lit*, *Hyperallergic*, and elsewhere.

Channing Huang is a student at the International School in Bellevue, Washington. When he's not writing poems, he can be found singing or reading poems.

Beverly A. Jackson is a painter and writer living in Las Cruces, N.M. Her work can be seen in over 100 venues both online and in print. She was the founder/EIC of *Lit Pot Press*, *Ink Pot* online journal and *Literary Pot Pourri* which she closed in 2006.

James Croal Jackson is a Filipino-American poet who works in film production. His latest chapbooks are *A God You Believed In* (Pinhole Poetry, 2023) and *Count Seeds With Me* (Ethel Zine & Micro-Press, 2022). Recent poems are in *Packingtown Review*, *JONAH Magazine*, and *ONE ART*. He edits *The Mantle Poetry* from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

D. R. James, now retired from teaching college writing, literature, and peace studies, lives and cycles with his wife in the woods and along the Lake Michigan shore near Saugatuck, Michigan. His latest of ten collections are *Mobius Trip* and *Flip Requiem* (Dos Madres Press).

Anna Kolczynska is a poet and writer from the East Coast of the United States. Her previous publishing credits include *Roi Fainéant Press*, *Exist Otherwise*, and *Messy Misfits Club*.

Jaylee Marchese is an American writer from a tiny town in the deep south. She has work either forthcoming or published in *Rattle*, *Creation Magazine*, *Persephone Literary Magazine*, *Moonbow Magazine*, and *Nixes Mate Review*.

Alex Missall studied creative writing at the University of Cincinnati. His work has appeared in *Unleash Lit*, *Hole in the Head Review*, and *Willows Wept Review*, as well as other publications. He resides in Ohio, where he enjoys the trails with his Husky, Betts.

Jimmy O'Hara is a gay writer and editor who crafts science news for a non-profit medical organization. His work often focuses on memory, spirituality, animal rights, social conscience, and a sense of belonging. His works have been published or are forthcoming in *Eunoia Review*, *Literary Veganism*, and *Rising Phoenix Review*.

Karol Olesiak is a queer disabled poet, writer, and activist. Karol's poetic work is featured or forthcoming in *Rogue Agent*, *Neologism Poetry*, *Proud to Be*, *Zoetic*, *Sugar House*, and elsewhere. Karol has an MFA from the University of San Francisco.

Christine Pennylegion has lived in and around Toronto, Ottawa, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, and Windsor. She holds a BA(Hons) in English from the University of Toronto, and an MAR from Trinity School for Ministry. Her poems have been published by *Dunes Review*, *Humana Obscura*, *Understorey Magazine*, and others.

Elizabeth Rosen is a former Nickelodeon Television writer whose work has appeared or is forthcoming in journals such as *North American Review*, *Glimmer Train*, *Pithead Chapel*, *JMWW*, *New Flash Fiction Review*, and numerous others. Her fiction has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, Best of the Net, and Best Small Fictions. She is a native New Orleanian and a transplant to small-town Pennsylvania.

Wayne Russell is a creative jack of all trades, master of none. Poet, rhythm guitar player, singer, artist, photographer, and author of the poetry books *Where Angels Fear* via Guerilla Genius Press, and *Splinter of the Moon* and *Waves of Lucidity*, both via Silver Bow Publishing.

Carla Sarett writes fiction, poetry and essays; her work has been nominated for awards including Pushcart and Best of Net. She is the author of one full-length collection, *She Has Visions* (Main Street Rag), and two chapbooks. New work appears in *Potomac Review*, *Stonecoast Review*, *Harpy Hybrid* and *tiny wren*. Carla has a PhD from University of Pennsylvania and is based in San Francisco.

Matthew Slocum earned a PhD in ecology at the University of Miami and currently works as a data scientist in Houston. "Thirty-Four Hundred" is his first fiction publication.

Michael Dwayne Smith haunts many literary houses, including *Bending Genres*, *The Cortland Review*, *Gargoyle*, *Third Wednesday*, and *Heavy Feather Review*. Author of four books, recipient of the Hinderaker Poetry Prize, the Polonsky Prize for fiction, and multiple Pushcart Prize/Best of the Net nominations, he lives near a Mojave Desert ghost town with his family and rescued horses.

Paul Smith writes poetry and fiction. He lives in Skokie, Illinois with his wife Flavia. Sometimes he performs poetry at an open mic in Chicago. He believes that brevity is the soul of something he read about once, and whatever that something is or was, it should be cut in half immediately.

Patty Somlo's books, *Hairway to Heaven Stories* (Cherry Castle Publishing), *The First to Disappear* (Spuyten Duyvil), and *Even When Trapped Behind Clouds: A Memoir of Quiet Grace* (WiDo Publishing), have been finalists in several contests. Her work has appeared in *Guernica*, *Delmarva Review*, *Under the Sun*, *the Los Angeles Review*, and over 40 anthologies.

Mark Stroschein is a Washington state poet and high school English teacher who lives on Whidbey Island. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Flint Hills Review*, *Bryant Literary Review*, *The Milk House*, *Washington Square Review* and *The Mantelpiece Literary Magazine*. His poetry book, *We Share the Same Road & Other Poems*, received honorable mention for the 2024 Sally Albiso Award, while *Cries Across Borders* was a semifinalist for Button Poetry's 2023 chapbook contest.

Chad Sullivan is a father, husband, and heavy equipment operator who lives and writes in Elburn, Illinois. His work will be appearing in upcoming issues of *X-R-A-Y*, *trampset*, and *BAM*, among others. He exists quietly, running in the woods and roughhousing with his two children.

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*, *The Door Is a Jar*, *The Phoenix*, and other journals. Edward is also a published poet who has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize multiple times.

Gillian Thomas graduated from New York City's Hunter College with a degree in English and Theater. Thomas' work has been featured in such journals as *Blue Unicorn*, *The Mid-Atlantic Review*, *Beltway Poetry Quarterly*, *Gargoyle*, and more. She lives with her husband, son and 2 barking Miniature Schnauzers near Washington, DC.

Jeffrey Thompson was raised in Fargo, North Dakota, and educated at the University of Iowa and Cornell Law School. He lives in Phoenix, where he practices public interest law. His work has appeared in *North Dakota Quarterly*, *On the Seawall*, *The Tusculum Review*, *ONE ART*, *New World Writing Quarterly*, and elsewhere.

Kelley White is a pediatrician who has worked in Philadelphia and New Hampshire. Her poems have appeared in *Exquisite Corpse*, *Rattle*, and *JAMA*. Her most recent chapbook is *A Field Guide to Northern Tattoos* (Main Street Rag Press.) Her newest collection, *NO. HOPE STREET*, was recently published by Kelsay Books.

Elizabeth Wing is a writer and trail worker based in Portland, Oregon. Her work has appeared in *7x7*, *Hanging Loose Magazine*, *The West Marin Review*, and other venues.

Marisela Zamora is a young writer from California. She loves Mary Oliver, watching director debut films, and eating sliced fruit.

c_zientek is a retired creative looking for ways to put off being measured for funeral clothes.