



INAUGURAL ISSUE
SEPTEMBER 2023

the reality of what he looks like doesn't

transmuted in my memory; features pilfered

s eyes,

made him different. The real

is strange to me.

THE WHITE
CRESSET ARTS
JOURNAL

WHITE CRESSET ARTS JOURNAL – INAUGURAL ISSUE

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ARTS JOURNAL
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EDITOR'S LETTER

No publication can begin without the faith of writers, artists, and other creatives. Thanks to your unrelenting support, we were able to enter the online creative world, stumble through our first submission window, and, finally, create our first ever issue. We hope we didn't let you down.

The eclectic body of work we've compiled in this issue encompasses topics such as identity, fertility, mental health, grief, love, and everything in between. What unites them is a rich language of imagery, powerful emotive impact, and/or a sense of atmosphere which pervades through the work. Of course, this aesthetic is specific for this issue – and we've already collected a heady number of pieces with a distinctively different vibe, for publication in the future. As an open online (and print!) journal, we want nothing more than for you to simply *enjoy* the works we're bringing forth.

Finally, I can't end without thanking our truly brilliant team of volunteer readers and editors who helped to carve this issue into fruition – ensuring that the White Cresset burns just a little longer.

Jessica Yang
Founder and Editor-in-Chief

Cover Art: *Reality* by Sugar de Santo
Back cover art: *I beheld* by Sugar de Santo

CREDITS FOR REPRINTS WILL BE FOUND AT THE END OF THE ISSUE, ALONGSIDE THE RELEVANT AUTHOR BIOS.

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The White Cresset Arts Journal, 2023
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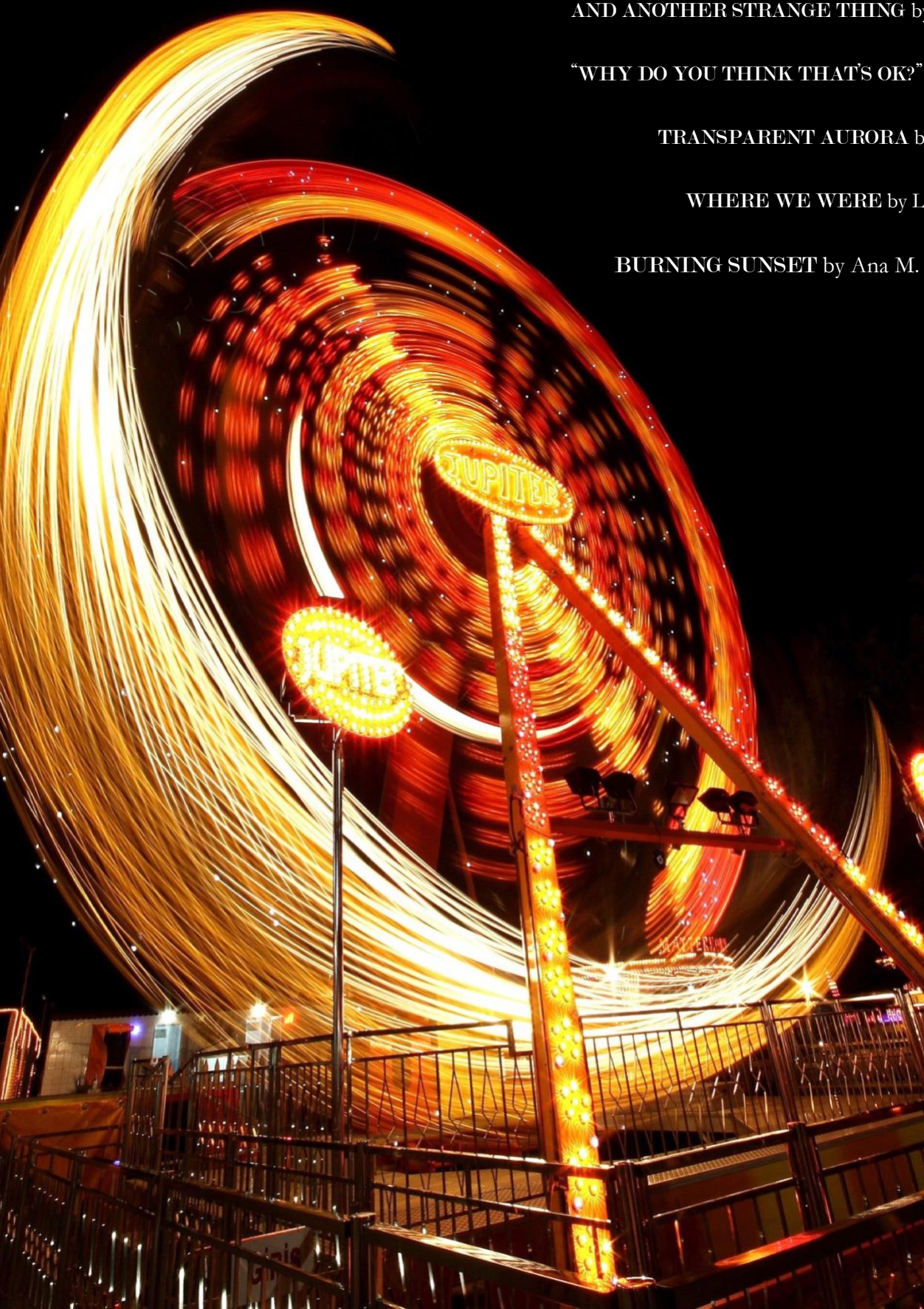
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FALLEN

by Christina Hemmemann

Just be yourself, you whispered when you dumped me on this soil,
baby steps towards the bars of my playpen, grasping for the doll.

Pink roses would bloom only for good girls in dresses and lace,
the choker around my neck left a brand on my skin as you ripped it off.

I walked many nights through rivers and mud, treading brain-fog and rage;
once I stumbled upon a deer, torn open and bleeding from the bone.

Starve and eat and digest, like a vessel that merely passes the sea—
my fallenness unmasked itself to me then, in the flat rhythm of machineering.

It wasn't until much later that I found my heartbeat in the iambic pentameter
of an elm tree dancing in the breeze, breathing a word cloud into my eyes.

I found a trail of your breadcrumbs and followed them: still you were here,
after everything an enrapturing entity that seemed too close to be discerned.

Let me be your disciple, hunting for morsels of light sewn into my denim jumpsuit.
Drawing my bow, I shoot for the earth and carve my name into my Being.

GRADUATING MY BODY

by Lux Alexander

Content warning: sexual violence, self-harm

This is the school that made my body
a war game, let's burn it down.

What is a school if not learning that
a martyr's education is a saint's execution?

I forgot my name so I called myself Tragedy
because I liked the way it left my lips like

choking from poison. The teachers wanted
me to prove the obliteration of my body

but it's hard to remember the colour of
his boxers when he unzipped his trousers,

the shape of his teeth changed so often; it's
hard to prove I'm an animal bitten from

the inside. I used to ignore whatever animal
sank its teeth into me, petals of skin unfolding

from my organs, flesh no longer with my soul.
The emptiness of my organs left a waning

warmth, raw, this summer's thunder croaking
in milky red vessels, an orange gnawed down

to the rinds. Each day, the moon kneels down
while the sun rises—it's chalky body bitten

and impaled by beasts. I learnt that I'm not
made of porcelain but brittle wood that splinters

easily, a marionette jester at a brutal party of
ruthless massacres, a garden party served with

split pomegranates, left bitter and craving for
love. A girl I once knew, my soul, left me and

my house became a museum, the walls etched
with letters from a fresh tragedy. I didn't want

to live here any more but the hinges were held
by sturdy wolf skin who wanted feed upon

something fresh in the decay (the wolves got

A+ for all their rabbit tears). Tell me again

what the name is for a child, plundered, bones
cradling the earth, whose heart is a swollen

cannibalistic ornament for the vampires to
sharpen their teeth on. I've stopped chugging

citalopram during recess, or memorising the
shape of a dissection scalpel during bio class.

I'm learning I don't need a trophy to know
my self worth. Let's make another fruitless

prayer to a rot in my stubborn human
body. Rot is childhood and salt tears marked

by love. I have mapped my body and the
bodies of others. In my new life, I have

left gaps beyond the green ribbons of blood.
Let's make this an exploration of an island,

not marked by rot but by new sainthood.
Mary Magdalene who has now broken out

of the wolf. Little child who can now
breathe.

SPELL FOR CONCEPTION

by Nikoletta Nousiopoulos

Three times I severed

the blossom's head

to conjure ovulation.

My anxieties stung blue

like an inflamed aquarium.

Another obsession affects

the liver & the womb

until *sooner or later*

I obey the mirror of tide pools

& fathom

celestial revelations as facts.

If pregnancies slither between

interrupted yawns,

& all organs grow tender

with delirium,

then I prepare

a sepulcher for the echoes

of my dead mouth—

I fill the cauldron

with lotus water

and distribute the final bones

of the ribs of the Adams;

before my Body was God:

before my Baby was perfectly perforated:

out of the skin: of my skin: of my tragically

bloodied earth, where

I bled in the water; I bred in the heart.

ALZHEIMER'S

by Ray DiZazzo

Yes.

I think I

finally

when I realized

I mean I

knew and
now believe that

understanding
is a variant of light

a radiance of course but not
the sun or bulb or candle kind.

A light of knowing

trusting
you were here
as we were climbing
from our bassinets
flushed and cranky
in the sun-dust of your
mother's morning kitchen
where the dread outside
her windows set the poles
and wires squealing roaring
upward from the pools
of memories in
our palms.

And yes

I think I

Now I see and

we

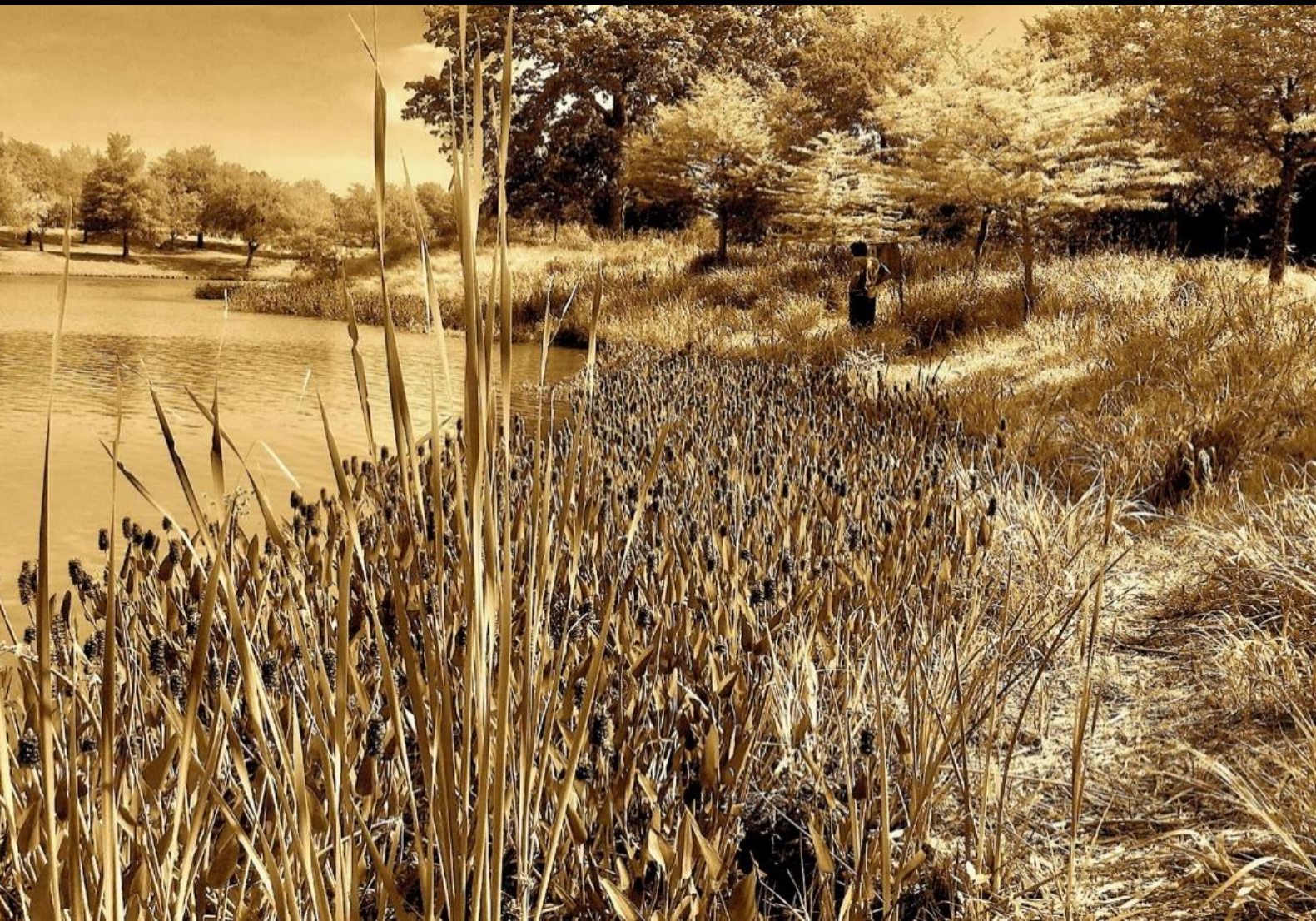
and I can

feel
the dulled release

a brittle wind of

scattered answers

whirling
from behind our eyes
into the mouths of children
we have never known
but think we've
given life to.



Narcissus sees his reflection by Ana M. Fores
Tomavo

SENT FROM ANOTHER GALAXY

by Eugene Donaldson

Dead artists in China weep and wonder
why you've taken sumi ink wash drawings,
the snowy white chrysanthemums, foggy
smoke mountains, oversized swimming koi,
blotched orange, black & white. Why then
did you cut them up to make puzzle pieces
for children to put back
together again?

Inadvertent spiritual debris
remains orbiting in an empty room of stale air.
Aimless, negligent lost souls arrived uninvited.
They congregate in search of an immaculate
Life they can neither anticipate or imagine,
void of disappointment.

Like drunken butterflies staggering
and searching for a scholarly astrologer who
can enlighten them when it is to be the best
time to travel and when to remain at home
in a silent raven darkness.

They've come here searching
for clues to mysteries of their past while
looking to the unknown future as though
rocket ships are waiting on the warm side
of the moon. As absurd as watering dead
flowers. As absurd as phoning your ex
on New Year's Eve.

I REFUSE TO HOLD POETRY AT ARM'S LENGTH

by Terry Miller

embrace the nova with passion's gravity
envelops me like the ironed fabric of dark matter

when nature speaks, I listen with the focused attention of a scribe
take down words that fall from pharaoh's mouth
do you spell that with one scarab beetle or two

yes—verse often fails me—yes—I often fail verse
I change tattered bedsheets and give it another go
this time I'll be on top

poetry erases chalked boundaries of vulnerability
pulls sex from the closet like a forgotten mini-skirt
yanks me down into elegy—so much mud—too much mud

places me on the kitchen windowsill after a storm batters the backyard
see the leaves of jasmine droop with metaphor—puddles
of conceit where grass won't grow—the satsuma—not risen from the dead

I was brought to poetry on a tumbrel—my last bit of sanity rope-bound
and there beyond the death I feared lay the land that was more than promise
it is lover—it is savior—it is what infinity keeps secret

IN FETCHING GOD

by Adedokun Ibrahim Anwar

once, I asked you to tell me
in which other language do I fetch god
quickly apart from those of his prophets,

when all I ask for is honey - dripping
from my darkest wounds and I
await his miracle like a late night delivery.

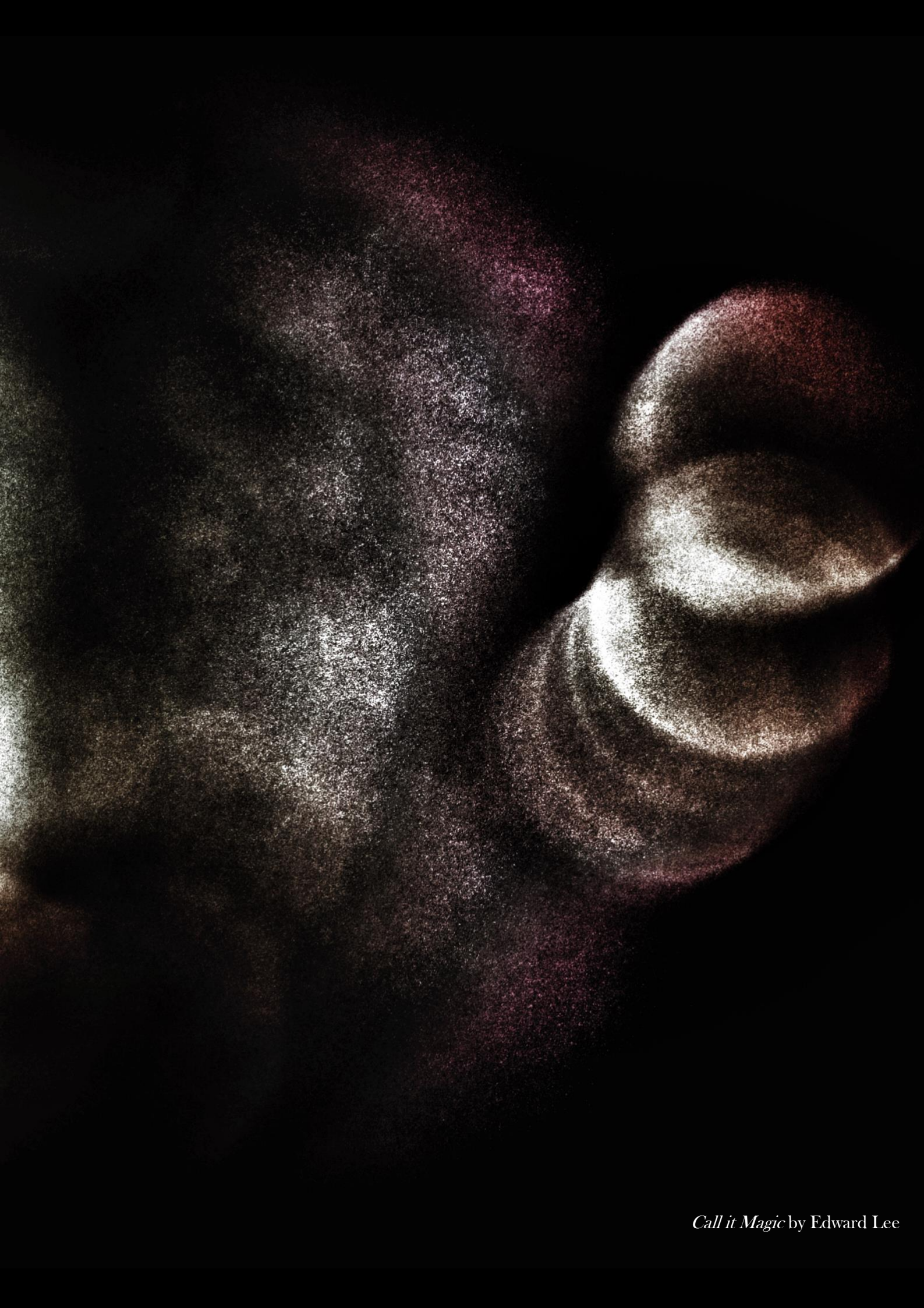
when you sworn that as long as I supplicate
well, and I do not curse my god calling it prayer,
prayers are not seasonal -
i began shredding my heart and planted
hope beneath like hibiscus in a pot.

“WERE YOU A HIPPIE WHO TOOK DRUGS TO SEE GOD?”

question asked by Miriam Sagan

by Ace Boggess

From emptiness thou comest &
to emptiness thou shalt return, &
in the middle, emptiness:
oxycodone, cocaine lined on a dinner plate,
weed I never wanted but smoked with friends
in a locked Pizza Hut at night, & more pills,
capsules easily scattered, amber bottles
of whatever. There was no god
or sense of a god except the god of loneliness &
yearning. I became my own god in blind bliss
of all drugs a man could take & live. I lived:
god & failure. I thought myself more
an escape artist, Houdini unlocking iron shackles,
fear & Fate bound with every move.
I sniffed, gulped, puffed, & didn't care
until I saw myself as less than a god of was.



Call it Magic by Edward Lee

BITTERSWEET

by Rucha Virmani

Inspired by Bittersweet by Susan Cain

Darkness is the absence of light. Happiness is the absence of pain. –Jess Bowen, Breaking Point (The Order of the Elements #1)

i am/ a shadow/ awash in the faux
light of fragile metal moons.

i am/ a body/ a perpetual smiling mouth/
an empty crescent moon/ a vampire
sucking the blood of the strangled sun.

i am/ good vibes. i am/ that only.

i am/ the eternal blinding flashes of *am i am i am i am am am*
lost

in all this

papery light this milky brightness

i am a heart finding itself in all this swirling/

i am bleeding out of my wounded body/ being drunk by the destarred earth/ i am

a boat unmoored from this light/

weight/ floating in the dark sea of stars/

the white salt of our tears/

i am the tree/

its roots clinging to the darkness/ while

its branches stitch/ the bright threads of dawn/

i am the poem/ the twilight translated on the page/ the meeting of dark letters on the white horizon/

i am the absence/ of that which is not me/

i am the darkness/ the presence of invisible light/ the shimmering dance of photons we cannot see/ i

am bittersweet/

i am i am i am

a human, stretching my hand into the darkness, reaching for the polar star, tumbling, ascending,
rising, falling, feeling, feeling, feeling-

THE REAL MOTHER GOOSE

by Anna Villegas

I know the story of Humpty Dumpty.

I know about his pieces, how they offer themselves up to slit your paper-white wrists or settle into your coiled intestines like blood-edged shards of blue black glass you have been made to swallow.

I know the sweet egg man, whose only crime lies in being too small. I know Cinderella's stepmother, who does the pushing—she always does, you know—her fetid breath fouling the air with the stink of evil so putrid they can't force it into rhyme. She doesn't belong in the story with Humpty, but she smears her filth on the page and remains, yellow-eyed, raving. I know the trembling King, who lies. He never issues the command: the horsemen never come.

I know Humpty Dumpty. I have memorized his story. I have gathered the pieces of his fall and swallowed them. They breed diamond cancers in the marrow of my bones, ebony tip tides in my veins. I swallow and I choke, and his pieces rise like crusted bile in my mute throat.

I can never put Humpty together again, but I have his pieces. Please take them. Set me in your lap, breathe in the scent of my shampooed angel hair, and wrap your arms around me. Read me another story, just one more. Then shut the book.

Please.

*Dance, little Baby, dance up high
Never mind, Baby, Mother is by.
Crow and caper, caper and crow,
There, little Baby, there you go!*

When you are born and your mother dies, you go deep inside to the place before time, before words. You make a nest there in the dark in the place that no one can discover and you live there in the deep dark and keep alone where no one can touch you after you learn that now there is no one, there will never be anyone, who will take care. This is your first lesson, the one before words, before time. You take this lesson into your bones because you know without trochee that it is what

will save you now you have no mother, nobody, not anyone who will ever, not now, not ever, take care of you.

*This is the way the baby cries
The baby cries
The baby cries
This is the way the baby cries
So early in the morning.*

When you are eighteen months and your father takes his new bride to his bed, you wish something you have never known may be restored. You are blue-eyed, gold-haired, good-hearted—so utterly good—everyone agrees you are a doll of a child. You have learned the language which buys your purchase in the world, but always you know to make quiet, to sink back into the lightless place where you are safe with the knowing that there is nobody, nobody to take care. So you rub the sleep sticks from your eyes and scamper down the hall to the bedroom where they are lying. You creep in your silent sleeper feet to the edge of the loveless bed. You climb onto your father's chest—he is your real father, isn't he—the nanny said he was: your only evidence. The bride awakes. As she whirls you off the bed by the collar of your pink sleeper with the dancing bears, you see she isn't young, or pretty—and when she screams, her breath against your face is dead animals dead hamster dead parakeet dead doggie but you can't gag because she is clutching the collar of your pink sleeper so tightly that you go deep deep into the safe place where the certainty that there is nobody nobody to care lulls you to sleep stronger than death. You learn whose madness rules this plaster castle in which you are imprisoned, you learn to slink in shadows, you learn to insinuate yourself into air when her hand, her foot, her foul breath dead rat dead cow dead horse glances against the flayed flesh you have made your shell.

And you learn that your father (the nanny said he was!) will tremble and shush and let the hands like black bats fly because is a small man, and afraid for himself. This is your lesson, and every second for the next fifteen years in this house of hell your quick study is what saves you because no one else will, ever.

*I had a little husband no bigger than my thumb
I put him in a pint pot, and there I bid him drum
I bought a little handkerchief to wipe his little nose
And a pair of little garters to tie his little hose.*

When you are three and dying of pneumonia that penicillin could have cured except they gave it to you so late so you can't breath as the oxygen tent in which the nurses' kind hands have laid you rises and falls like a gentle gauze bellows—your lungs, your lungs are tearing at the seams and your white womb whispers with certainty that you weren't intended to survive, it wasn't in her story, and now the fever reads that they expect you to die and there is no one to take care, and even as your own lungs strangle you, you go deep down inside to the sanctuary in the dark and you don't die, you don't die. And when you are dragged to life again and your father (The nanny said he was! Why did she lie?) comes to take you home, you scream and kick and cling to the nurses whose hands are the kindest in your world because you don't want to leave them or their sweet words which have shown you: this is the way it ought to be, ought to be. The nurses' soft hands grant you your lesson for today—you learn so well, smart baby! Outside the circumference of your hell, if you survive, if you escape, you will find goodness.

*For every evil under the sun
There is a remedy or there is none
If there be one, seek till you find it;*

If there be none, never mind it.

When you are four, you stand at your half sister's white crib. You want to feel this baby's breath against your cheek, to pull the curled pink fingers to your lips. How can you keep the instincts of love in the black hole of their absence? What blessing from your mother's spirit has made you gentle? Even when you are lifted from the crib by your golden pony-tail—your sweet angel hair tears from your scalp—and you are thrown from the crib in a slow arc against the paper-patterned wall, even when you soar to your nest in the dark, safe place, how do you keep from rotting to the core? Why are you not oozing with rancid puss, salivating green piss like the stepmother? You are but four years old! These are your questions, entangled with your chromosomes, forever and forever. You curl against the wall which catches you and you go deep, deep inside to your nest in the dark, in the still, where she can't touch you.

*Hush-a-bye, baby, lie still with thy daddy
They mammy has gone to the mill,
To get some meal to bake a cake
So pray, my dear baby, lie still.*

When you are five and oh so wise you will not eat the mixed peas and corn and carrots on the plate in front of you. You did not ask for them, you did not serve them to yourself. The lesson for this evening is force feeding. Yes! When she claps the handful of peas and carrots and corn, cold and mashed and vile with her dead snake smell now that she's palmed them against your mouth, when your neck is wrenched from its socket and you are staring up at the ceiling with the mess of vegetables ground into your teeth, don't cry! This is force feeding, you learn, and learn so well that later, when you are forty, the evocation of these colors—green, yellow, orange—will your turn your head and bring your hands up to cover your mouth, vomit rising to your palate. Don't cry: study your father—there will be a test! Watch him look away, light a cigarette, blind himself to what is happening at his table, drum his fingertips—the echo of retreating hoof beats against the mahogany surface now speckled with the bits of pea and corn and carrots that you have expelled through your nose.

Oh believe that you are good, sweet child just five years old!

*You shall have an apple
You shall have a plum
You shall have a rattle
When papa comes home.*

When you are six and sick abed, you are afraid to leave your blanket high upstairs in the safe alcove where it is fast time to the black refuge you carry knotted inside you like a tumor every moment of your waking life. Sleep is next best to not being. With sleep you can will yourself and the wicked queen, the greening stepmother, out of existence. You will not ask for food or drink, oh no, you will gorge on your hunger and drown in your thirst because to ask will say that you're alive, still alive, and your salvation is the death mask you wear: the trained mouth set in the embalmer's smile, the veins flowing with formaldehyde. But you get a sandwich, white bread triangles filled with egg salad—and yes she put the whole eggshell in, too, and you eat the slivers and the yoke and the white all chopped together dripping in mayonnaise like snot in the semblance of wholeness—always the semblance of wholeness in this hole of hell, this house of horror—because if you don't chew and swallow your lovely eggshell sandwich you know by whose hand you will suffocate and now—a big girl six years old—you've learned that eating broken Humpty is always safer than seeing behind the wall, reading ahead in the story—you're so smart, big girl!—you've caught how she's fucked her way into the pages where she doesn't belong, she never will, and you already know the ending even though nobody not anybody not a one has read it to you. And the shards go down smooth, slicing your dumb throat and settling into your ulcerated stomach like the jeweled silt in the River Styx. You know Humpty's story now: you've eaten it for years. What a bright girl you are growing up!

*Hickety, pickety, my black hen
She lays eggs for gentlemen
Gentlemen come every day
To see what my black hen doth lay.*

When you are eight and swim so fast that your scarred lungs tear themselves into ribbons, they think it's to the fool's gold that you swim but it's not for your Daddy's glory (not a father at all, you know this now) but for your Coach, your Charlie coach, that you race and win and win and race. You would tear your heart out for Coach when he waves you the watch and pulls you dripping from the water and rocks you in his arms because you beat time, you beat time, and you get a second chance at being born from a real father and you take it and you love Coach and you keep him in your refuge with the nurses and Miss Karen your red-haired kindergarten teacher and you stay good, you stay good just in the nick of time. Such a fast, good girl you are!

*Swan, swan, over the sea;
Swim, swan, swim!
Swan, swan, back again;
Well swum, swan!*

When you are ten and twelve and fifteen and too big for rhymes now, this is the way the prose moves: you are smart at school but stupid at home—always stupid! This is their plotted decree which keeps them enthroned. You are honest at school, crooked at home; you are right at school; wrong at home; you are innocent at school, but you are guilty, guilty, guilty at home for the dust on the window sill and the garbage under the sink and the car out of gas and the algae in the pool and the washing machine overflow and the dog shit on the lawn and the rain on the parade and everybody, everybody's self-hatred which by unanimous declamation belongs to you, you, you for being born at all, for daring not to die dead day after dead day. And you carry a world inside you like a yolk with its blossom of fertile blood and you grown up even though.

*The hart he loves the high wood,
The hare she loves the hill;
The Knight he loves his bright sword,
The Lady—loves her will.*

The mirror on the wall starts to slip and darken, and whose the fairest is unclear because even at seventeen and twenty and thirty-two when the world serves you its proofs: the ribbons, the medals, the straight A's, the crowns, the acceptances, the honors and every degree of goodness—the accolades of degradation have echoed inside your ears for years and years, and you, you learn your lessons for good, don't you, smart girl, and for you memory in the short term is only a luxury in your psychology book, never a possibility. If you should forget, if you should try to let your early lessons slough off like the scalded membrane of some eyeless reptile, you are not too big for kicking and slapping and always the chanted litany of your worthlessness in service to her jealous gods which the graying Stepmother snarls through degenerate jaundiced teeth. And when you are brave and dare a question, when you ask this man who plays your father why—you are bad again, oh so bad, for disbelieving the seeming balance of power—the gavel is his alone!—because he has long ago surrendered his sovereignty to the queen mother of madness. An acolytic toady—the poison's real, watch out!—he stoops to the stepmother's work daily while she sits back, black mold ringing her lips, no commander he. You remember eating your dinner in the bathroom? You remember the shunning on Christmas mornings? You remember running and running and running away? And you earn 100% in victimization, and you memorize the wisdom of the scapegoat, and you grow up and you stay good and you don't die, and finally after forty years it makes no difference not any difference because you

are dead already, so much conscious cruelty the umbilical cord tightened around your neck so that every awakening is a stillbirth: the same old story.

*The Man in the Moon looked out of the moon,
Looked out of the moon and said,
“Tis time for all children on the earth
To think about getting to bed!”*

So set me in your lap, breathe in the scent of my shampooed angel hair, kiss my downy cheek, and wrap your arms around me. Sing me a lullaby, read me a rhyme, and love me just love me because I am here and I am small.

Take Humpty’s pieces from my bones and blood and throat and put him together again, safe and far away from the wall, because it’s my turn.

Watch me jump.

Now.

THE UNIVERSAL SOLVENT

by William Doreski

Violets try to explain themselves
to mid-May frost but don't convince.
The millrace trembles, confined

by stone walls two centuries old.
We watch streams meet and mingle
and wish we could be so casual.

Our enthusiasms passed gently
as religious revivals. Our crimes
against art and its vague adherents

stuck to our hands to embarrass us.
We'd like to recover ourselves
and our stale ambitions but

granite moments prevail. Reading
the work of a friend who died
the usual death of cancer

we regret her excess adjectives
and the way they cling to the palate.
Today begins the work week

we no longer honor. Skipping
flat stones on the windless lake
might appease our bestial instincts,

but our morning coffee costs more
than dinner at a nice clean diner
cost a generation ago.

The violets and bluets survived
last night's frost but look querulous,
their seasonal instincts challenged.

We've felt that creeping sensation
often enough to empathize,
but comfort ourselves by watching

the millrace flow toward the lake,
the universal solvent applied
to every unanswered question.

SLAM TILTING INTO THE KICKOUT HOLE

by Ben Nardolilli

Energy production is high, these bones know no austerity,
I'm full of pipelines, the key to happiness, as for the lock, look up
the presale code of the future is wafting in the ether,
enter it in and soon a highlight reel will paper over all waking moments

I forget how long ago I seized that special offer, my minutes
are the crown jewels of my hours, and my hours
go yum right through me, increasing the light on my life's playfield
to the point I can glide over the moments others waded through

Before that, I was making vital deliveries for other people,
jealous they could go contactless, and I couldn't,
until I realized there were flippers and anvils inside me, ready to strike
up an echo of their joy, banishing decay to the gutters of my feed

That was only the first heist, others followed in the wake,
now I've got one of the top scores since orbiting through the backglass,
ramping up my points to a caffeinated degree
by grabbing bylines for ballast and rolling under the lid of dawn

COULD I

by Dan Alter

throw my city away
like packaging if
 only for hours
From above it was
 haze-bed road-hatch
 dopplering

My friends had begun dying
 or receded

to a den to be involved in
 glass & complicated light
 Immune systems moving
away from us inflammation seeped
 in windows we didn't
 know opened

Still I climbed a sheer
rock-strewn trail lookout to grid spread
 unremitted
 four-stroke motors also by the minute
 devouring
 Old Tunnel Road

Sungreen pieces of shade in their
 wind fanned millions
 Could I be a little
 less me or more leaf

My city was not bothered it had time
by the throat

Side Hill Tr.

STATIC

by Sherry Shahan

The bedroom smells like furniture polish so
I must've tossed the rags in with the sheets again. Light
from the bedside table burns my fingertips. Memories bore into the flaws of my mattress.
Ink grieves across cocktail napkins, on a sales' receipt, in the margin
of a city map. Air between scraps of paper wants to be truth. Words sound themselves
out as if they're facts. Silly air words on scraps of paper aren't
permanent. A hologram on my lampshade: *a snake's severed head can still bite/
the daddy longlegs in my shower doesn't feel its missing leg.* I'll eat the
Thesaurus if it lies to me again. Insomniacs on my street pipe skunk
weed through my open window as if I don't worry enough about
the kismet of my lungs. Streetlights squeeze out color in a bottomless annum, turning
walls into Pop Tart pastels like my hair, only painted with a toothbrush.
And under it all, daffodil bulbs hibernate in a brown paper bag on the floor
of the closet beneath N95 masks and a canister with my mother's ashes
no, *remains* because how do we really know what's inside? In the broken night my
neighbor shrieks under a honeycomb moon; she's lost her house keys again.
Dogs barking at 3 a.m. make you feel like you're going crazy. Cracking pistachios in bed
has permanently split my thumbnail. I so love the blue-striped Hanes left
behind by my last boyfriend how they bloom recklessly large on my hips, chew on
my thighs; still blood warm stretched-out in the crotch. All those empty
bottles of hotel shampoo float in the tub where an invisible crowd bathes to extinguish
germs we can't see no one comes to apologize who can sleep?

A PRODIGIOUS HOUSE TO WHICH YOU'RE NOT INVITED

by Frances Boyle

White Mars hides
 she bears a great weight
The shoreline purchase
 Why do we want
to be dry?
 Strength as the stone shivers
down two steps up five more
 A shoe
drops
 Refrigerator hallway
in her light housekeeping

space glittering a glimpse
of gifts
 a seizure a stroke
 Sulfur
smears the sky
 obscures the moon
as if she were smelling it

Erased from the sky
 the smear
tilt of her head
 How the moon
lights her hair
 A two-step treatise
covers slumber furniture thumps
porchlight the moon now

Mars ahead
 a troubled sleep
 a stone
A smear on the sky
 The moon
is a bear afraid
 Belonging to the house
we dry her off
 vanished
gazing
at the porch light
 broom face
bashes against floorboards
 Mild
glittering moon

LUNAR ECLIPSE FOR THE MOTHER YEAR

By Nikoletta Nousiopoulos

“A child said *What is the grass?* fetching it to me with full hands;
How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is any more than he.”
-Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself”, Verse 6

As a mother, I resist melting into a body puddle.
Hieroglyphics of ancestors adorn my interiors,
hallows of my hips, DNA, and guts of chaotic women.
Before a tantrumed cloud departs in haste
From the locus of my child’s squid-mouthed gape:
I bear in mind how unlike a mother I am.
My cruel failures douse my disposition down
into helicopter spins. Disquiet rounds sanity into brainwash.
A child said, *I was pretending to be God. He has a poison gun.*
Welcome to this cryptic space within the cortex.
Mothers, where is the detox box of parental trauma?
We damage our children, fetal-shaped, breakable, like bits
of ethereal birds. Some days the world evacuates apologies;
our blood rots. I peel the sun back and illuminate the sky spots.

EDGES

by Heather Martel

Wildness and the possibility of violence. Toughness. How bracing, how clear, more comfortable than security. It is a knowledge of my own sharp teeth and bones, my muscles and mind as taut as a wire, my chemistry enflamed, surviving, of fight and flight, me lethal, me intimate with death. *“Is this what I can expect?!” I want to ask, act wounded. Then I realize I know I will be able to live through all the possible pain.* At the River. *Write that, she commands.* Violence as possible, always there, felt normal. (I have written about blood on the road, or of a deer fallen down a slide, neck broken, legs wrong, the compound fracture—but also in the forms of rusted nails, groaning as sharply, as my father yanked them from dry-fragiled boards. A thumb smashed by a hammer. A nick over a knuckle. The rough edge wound left by a stick, just in passing.) Normal wildness, but the normalcy born of coming from dysfunction. And a family that was on the edge of hunger, poverty, death: imminent loss and having. *We are sitting here listening to award-winning authors. She makes a joke and meets my eyes mischievously and I laugh, reach across my chest to put my left fingers on her left shoulder. I jot this sensation down in the worst handwriting, so it can be remembered (and not read) in this crowded room. Her otherness: her choleric temperament is hotter than mine, than my easygoing sanguine, muscled style. She, red-skinned, quick and irritable, but warm. Dryness and heat—how so soft?* I look for words to describe this contradiction. A river that took lives every summer, the lives of soft “coasties” of drunks. Jack the one-eyed dog who came with the house, but disappeared. Died. Ran? I realize I am not sure that the carcass I identified as his body was his, far upstream, at the foot of a rock slide. And now, adult, I can ache, as maybe he did, abandoned, as he also was, at the River. *I think of Easter rolls brought to church by our perfect looking family. I think of the fine golden dough, delicate and sweetened with orange juice, sharpened with orange peel, a crumble of nuts and brown sugar. Tender (she hates this word. It reminds her of an aloe plant, its skin pulled from sticky flesh) and I think of how softness is not valued in this masculinist society. Muscle is, hardness. Edges – lean bodies, dents at hips not texture, not tiger scratched, not these scars from eating my own heart. I think of her as like a heron, leggy, long, petite, butcher knife of a beak, bird gaze I cannot read. When they lift off, the weight of history hushes, relieved to knock so loudly on wind.* I think of my dead dog who could not snuggle. “I can’t bend my legs,” I would joke, arms outstretched, embodying her. And fall silent recalling how she looked at me. She would scream and huff away at my embrace, but never take her eyes off me on road trips, except to sleep, twitching, curled nose to tail, feet and legs folded like handkerchiefs, her ruff of cream gold vanilla. How fitting that she lived long enough to get me to the River. We went up for one last hike unaware. Her kidneys failed us both. I drove her body high above the River bed. I swung the new pick axe into the grey and rocky ground to dig her a grave amidst the dark pink sweet pea vines. *It’s as if we are at right angles to each other, our corners bumping and keeping us apart, all edge—when I have this softness for her, this deep shoulder, this chest as broad and full as a body of water, into which she might lay her forehead, like a summer child, put her palms together in prayer to the top of her head and curve them exaggeratedly into the surface (as if she will leap above it like a fish, before cutting into the dive) or relax and float, carried kindly by water and oxygen in buoyant curves and lungs, nice and easy—on a coast with no undertow and not much surf (like the Aegean, clear, unbelievable blue, under dark gold cliffs on Crete, where Theseus arrived captive and intimidated).* Or on the River where it widens and gets emerald and sun filters slowly as moss or a leaf, still full of rain and so, like-submerged-in-like, is pulled under, still bright, flickering like the movie light. *No wonder the edge.* I will take her down into the mud of me, which is so soft, *as soft as her shoulder I accidentally learned, transgressing whenever I do touch her—crossing that infinite divide between our bodies. I never have been, don’t know how to be, intimate without, without the bounds “built in societal template,” without conquest, without sex. Without there is so much more.* I understand what is broken in me. People use the phrase “walking on eggshells”—but it never resonates. It was wading through a forcefield on slippery rocks at the waterfall’s edge, one that could tolerate disruption. Or break suddenly. Like a long note from a voice that might crash suddenly into dissonance. All the keys on the piano could be pressed at once, all the keys side-by-side could make the most sickening sound—but this sound needs symbols, metal, and the keys hit together

with a method meant to jar. It was a chainsaw art rip, one that also produced bears and bigfoots sold by the side of the road. *Now I stood, with her things, aching. The crowd at this conference high, loud, chatting. I can feel their minds and bodies in the red, up the spectrum, to the top, to the sexy Jesus, inspired. But also, on edge, afraid we cannot write after all.* I want to stay here, safe in expectation, with wildness like a warm secret. Because it stings too much to think of my father's thumbs. *She knows me too well. The whole story.* How can I write of hands I emulated without also referencing their transgressions, their going unconscious, how capable and gentle they were showing me? To build a fire, hammer a nail, fish. You won't be able to love and hurt with me at once. You'll judge, not want to take in that it feels like home, natural as raised hackles, then settling back down hunkered over a meal. You will be too horrified and miss the complexity. I fear this. Dad's sweet sweat, not consent, but how his and my body grew intimate in healthy ways—when I was no longer golden, but brown and big enough to follow behind on deer paths. There was always that too. But there was mostly his big, young feet. At my edge, this age, I would see him as so young. Remember and imagine his impulsivity, his physicality, his anguish. Edges, right angles again. And in the same way that by "wildness" I want to say the violence was always possible, but that that seemed natural, beautiful, and acceptable, in the way hurricanes are and in how Gretel Erlich was struck by lightning and lived to tell. She is matter of fact. *I do not gasp. Your beauty is complicated by parts you would surrender. I would take them down into the soft, warm mud, loving as a crocodile.* No wonder the edge.

THE MUNTJAC SOUND

by Eve Connor

He had been working the cut since she could remember. She had been working a long while herself but the sewing room was cold and girdled by brick and didn't have anything like Muntjacs. The sewing room hadn't worked its way inside like the cut had him. When he asked for her hand, he tore a thicket of oxeye daisy from the towpath. When his Ma's waters broke, he said it had been canal water that came out. She said she hoped not because canal water was stagnant and slimy and full of horrid things like coal and goose filth, sometimes men. She got a pinch for that.

He had wanted a barge but settled for the two-bedroom she coveted for its stove. In gratitude, she stitched a coverlet for the bed: she understood the ebb and flow of marriage. Gold and grey horses ran across the length of it, tugging freights of flowers, kittens, and frosted cakes, and the men at their flanks waved hands threaded with all the lines of the waterway. The house she added for herself. She fitted the finished coverlet over the bed and marched into the kitchen to make tea feeling happy and clever. Later, he found her with a wet kiss and her machine under his arm. She started him with a hand needle and the alphabet.

In addition to the coverlet, she papered their walls and erected a statuette of the Virgin Mary on a side table near the corner. Simone de Beauvoir's *Letters to Sartre* and a copy of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (in translation) she had salvaged from a box on her way to work. A boggy mirror was the only possession in the house that was his.

Early on, she bundled him over to a flea market. Blanketed tables warped under the weight of cracked records and books missing pages, splintered cuckoo clocks and photographs of dictators, their mouths painted the colour of lipstick. She watched her boy closely, holding up objects for his approval, nodding encouragingly. He smiled and stamped his boots. Continuing in this fashion, they reached the far gate where he enquired shyly whether she was hungry. The colcannon they forked out of a tub tasted like cold tea leaves. She chewed slowly, trying to recall whether her father had owned many things. Maybe men simply weren't fussed about cloisonné jars or Welsh love spoons. The thought warmed her as though she had deduced some secret wisdom.

On the right wall from their bed, a large leaded window stood naked on his instruction, a lone act of tyranny. One morning when he was at work she peered out until her eyes watered. Although the street was named after lime trees, she could detect no more than a shrub that had forgotten how to bear buds and the weeds festering in the cracks between the cobbles and along the gutters. She watched two children gallop a metal hoop between them. The glass muffled their shouts, hanging

somewhere amidst the greasy washing lines slung from house to house. Past the empty milk bottles, coal bins, abandoned bicycles, pigeon lofts, and outhouses, she strained to catch the flaking wrought iron of the railway fence. Just beyond, a watery brown sliver like a wink. The cut.

She turned away.

Before her boy was her boy, he had been a baby. This was her favourite way to imagine him. She cherished another image of him from behind with her arms outstretched around his neck. She often pictured herself in the third person.

When she was nine, the winter had sunk so deep the canal froze no matter how many men trudged out with their pickaxes. The boaters had nowhere to go. Her boy was among them – ten then. She spotted him first on her way to school, treading the opposite side of the street. She was angry because she had forgotten her workbook so she was sure to get the ruler; his face was hard and close to crying. He wore a grey jumper with shoulder patches and a cap that swallowed him to his ears. He emitted a low clicking noise with his tongue, though his mouth remained fixed. She loved him absolutely, instantly. When Mr Norman ordered her to bend over in front of the class for the ruler, her mind winged beyond the rows of wooden desks and wrinkled smocks and she envisioned the morning after she had left it, his hat an upside-down enamel plate, turning the corner, picking up pace, running, tumbling into the heat and press of the factory men, one piece in an innumerable dinner set.

Glimpsing him the second time eight years later, shaking a cigarette machine off its hinge, she would not let destiny pass her twice.

In the evenings, he skulked home with the canal still in his eyes and opened the coffee tins she had bought from the market and paced the kitchen hungrily.

“You’re under my feet.”

“I was at the heart of it today,” he said.

“Eat your toast.”

“I saw a Muntjac.”

She clamped the kettle down on the hob. “What?”

“A small sort of deer. Two lines on its face. Came right out the bushes while I was dressing the horse and thinking sweetly on you. Whispered big secrets. I can’t tell you exactly.”

“Nonsense.”

He ignored her and cupped his hands around his mouth. A horse’s whinny, sharp as thistle, startled the sugar from her grip.

“Isn’t it wonderful?”

In the coming months, he bred a menagerie in his chest. He hoarded sounds like a schoolgirl collecting ribbons. All she knew was that they came from the canal and that he wouldn’t relax until he got them out, lined them up, chewed them over. She often slept alone. If she asked him anything, he would shake his head and look so sorry she lost her spite.

Once, she caught him in the birth throes, his chair pushed back from the table, his head bowed, strange and tangled gargles against his jaw. The unmistakable call of a blackbird, the sensible, little figures flicking across the roofs from the sewing room, gold on their beaks and around their eyes, whose *chuk* she heard in lulls between the machines. The sound rolled out of him like a marble. She asked what it meant and he blushed, said a mating call. He said the sounds worked in the Midlands, on Midlands creatures, because they had the cut built into them. She said she was born in the Midlands but she couldn’t make any sounds. He smiled at that and carried her upstairs, her hand on his throat.

It was June when the Muntjac returned and June when she got pregnant, but the things happened in that order, the Muntjac first.

He drew a picture. Failing that, he fetched his mirror from the bedroom. *There*, he said, his finger on the glass. The Muntjac sound was the hardest because it was almost human. The men at work called it a bark but, really, he explained, not taking his eyes off the mirror, it was more like a shout, like the two boys legging the boat through the canal tunnel last autumn. Back-to-back, feet treading the wall, one of them had slipped, crushed between boat and brick. She had worn her work dress, the darkest she owned, to the funeral. The body had been mashed into a square. A pair of pink, untouched ears were the lone survivors, protruding like the handles of a bag. Buried in a child's coffin. The other boy was there too. He sat with his back against the pew, pushing.

"The Muntjac sound," said her boy, "was the moment before the breaking."

The sewing room ladies told stories of their own breakings while they worked, though they didn't say breaking. They said *pushing, bleeding, shitting a brick*. The room smelt of women's work, hot thread, and polish. A deal was struck with the warehouse in exchange for mends and the hand-operated hoist began shuddering up spare door handles and brown paper like sea glass after a retreating tide. She snuck the items home under her coat and arranged them on the windowsill. It pleased her to see them and she took pride in her pleasure as evidence of her maternal instinct, reassurance she would slip into motherhood like a dressing gown despite her inexperience.

He cooed her swell and put his ear to it often. It tickled her darkly to have a sound he couldn't hear. He was picking up less and less, forgetting names and cheating sleep, leaving the taps on. Without prompt, the talk of Muntjacs had ceased and she flinched to start it again. She ignored the twigs in the teacups. She washed his shirts and trousers as usual. If there was blood, she washed them twice for good measure.

"Isn't that nice of the warehouse people?" She smiled, pointing out a Sacred Heart ornament missing half of its paint, one of her treasures. He frowned as though the objects had amassed without his notice.

"Nesting..." He muttered at last. His hands twitched mindlessly through the air towards his head, back around his thighs. "Yes. That's good."

But as her boy seemed to retreat, his appetite strengthened. Whatever she cooked was never enough. He bent over his plate – pork cutlets, soft-boiled carrots, tough peas, lamb, vegetable soups, thick-sliced bread stacked with cheese and green leaves – and soon she had surrendered prompting him to keep his elbows off the table. She harboured a private, embarrassed fear that one day he would discard the cutlery altogether.

A woman's magazine passed around during a lunch break had spouted the importance of maintaining one's appearance in the later stages of pregnancy, so she had counted her blessings when a ruffled nylon nightgown surfaced amongst a pile of underthings at the church bazaar, replacing its mourning dress with colourful streamers. Hauling the nightgown over to a table stationed below the pulpit had felt a smidge blasphemous but since the proceeds were going to the community and the nightgown would contribute towards the health of her marriage, she steeled herself and advanced, setting her chin at a noble elevation even as Mrs Martin, an octogenarian in a knock-off *Chanel* jacket, held up a ruffle and sniffed.

The nightgown was exciting without succumbing to bad taste, exuberant yet unaffected. Sophisticated. Wriggling into it in the bathroom, she noted the pinch around her neck and the bagginess at her hips as a child registers and dismisses the asymmetry of a birthday cake. Her exhilaration whirled her through the nightly routine. She returned to the bedroom light and charming, angling her hip against the doorframe.

Her boy was crouched by the curtainless window. He stared out, as she had weeks earlier, into darkness. The streetlamps could not have illuminated farther than a few houses down the street. She was sure he was searching for the cut. The strength and chill of her certainty, that he could see it,

could somehow penetrate the murk to reach the towpath and the still, viscid water, alarmed her. The sound of a dragonfly buzzed unbroken from his lips.

“Darling,” she said, shakier than she had intended. “Darling, do you like my new nightgown? I bought it at the bazaar.”

His gaze was fuzzy as he turned, the moonlight cutting his exposed chest. She counted the three seconds she had learned to rely on before he recognised her. To her relief, he stood and smiled, reaching out.

“Really something. Wow.” He patted one of the ruffles. “I’ll be sorry to miss it. Yes, that will be a real shame.” His fist closed around the nylon. Cryptically: “Circumstances.”

“I might be able to adjust it after the baby arrives, or you could.” She opened his hand with hers and smoothed out the fabric between them. “You’re getting nifty on the sewing machine. Nylon is difficult though. It’s so slippery and rips like nothing.”

He laughed and kissed her. “Sexy talk.”

They climbed into bed, her on the left side by the Virgin Mary. She contemplated the ceiling, listening for the breaths she knew wouldn’t deepen before she fell asleep, if they did at all. From their first meeting on her way to school, she had realised there were parts of her boy that would remain remote to her however long they lived and loved together. This had comforted her, a fact she hadn’t considered perverse until that moment; his mystery had been solid, masculine, proper. She wasn’t a prying wife. Affairs wouldn’t satisfy him. But the muddled shadows on the ceiling twisted her conviction. How could she not have tried to bridge the gulf between them? Since the Muntjac, their distance had hardened somehow. She could hardly believe there was a body next to her under the coverlet.

The baby kicked and her stomach gasped. The nightgown stuck close to her skin, too close. She attempted to manoeuvre her hair away from her neck, each movement wrapping the nylon around her middle. A prickling sensation on her scalp crawled across her arms and legs and the soles of her feet. Hands over her eyes, she forced out the bare window and the embroidered Muntjacs crowding the coverlet in her imagination, black swiping the faces of her men.

The world outside was quiet, a street under snow. The cut shimmered before her eyelids like an afterimage. Beast. Cut. Canal. It curled around her belly, snaked and basted the womb, and dribbled lazily down one thigh. It waited with all the time in the universe. As she cringed inwards, she saw a deer tremble out of the undergrowth, its delicate hooves disturbing small, sandy clouds of dust from the gravel towpath. The breaths by her side went steadily on.

A breaking.

THE MAHUA PICKER

by Dr. Pragya Suman

about 5 am, the mahua picker was beneath the tropical tree
I heard the drip-drop flowers; God whistles in wisps
they were not dumb; the red skyline was in equilibrium, wavy
looking like her curly hair. a grass widow, she was a matchstick,
burnt half and deserted in the dog-eared matchbox along with
three progenies. in a plastic bucket she collected mahua flowers,
spread on the open roof.

“what would you do with all of it?”

lips trembled. I tried to decipher the wavelength-
in the scorching sun, mahua flowers got tanned.
replicated her fading figure in the twilight



Freedom by Ana M. Fores Tomayo

A FAMILY DURING THIS ECO-DECONSTRUCTION

by Kushal Poddar

Midst of this haze
the sun rises and sets.

We can discern the shades,
shapeless, tempera smudges
between the time-poles of darkness.

The pink eye hurts the grey sky
bulges out, pushes the nerves.
Clouds at the corners clot like gunks.
Rain tastes saline, acidic, of mucus.

Midst this chaos my wife fabricates
a home I deconstruct using the daily news.

MIGRATION

by Kushal Poddar

The bird's whirring migrates here.
We have our reasons to move here,
never the right one.

We have lost our luggage. The bird
looses its first two attempted nests.
The weather hangs in tight holding
a single vane, and the cock spins amock.

I look for the bird and when
some feathers float on the rill
I shiver, stay up until the noise
represents its presence.

SATISFY ME

by Zac Walsh

*Love is eaten away by appetite.
Love does not last, but it is different
from the passions that do not last.
Love lasts by not lasting.*
- Jack Gilbert, "The Great Fires"

Dissatisfaction is fun; it must be, human history being a timeless, fragmentary story of finding novel ways to be so. We, our very corporal sense of self, emerge furious with timelessness so we meticulously count our efforts to be satisfied with life as an abstraction called *years*, sometimes up, sometimes down (depending on which side of zero you are on). We call those years one thing with the weight of the State until we are predictably no longer content with the former. Our lust for the unseen latter is the very impetus that necessitated the move from referring to the present movement of time as "within the spark that began creation" to simply: Common Era, which is unmistakably much more palatable for our bone-deep dissatisfaction with all that surrounds us and allows us to be.

We know without a shadow of humility that flight was unfairly designed for the birds alone, the deep ocean merely for Leviathan, space hoarded for the spheres. Clearly those too ought be for us, and because creation dissatisfies us so, we moderns create the miracles of planes, submarines and spaceships -just as the "ancient" Egyptians did thousands of years before us (as Dendera proves) - and we smugly claim these feats as our own. Our six-thousand years of surviving stories show how much we must claim, stake and light out, to the demise of our better senses, though also in sincere response to the deepest, woven-in aspect of what it is to be human. That we crave. As if it were food or rest, our very being engineers the thrill of conquering, and even if it is not frontiers, empires or galaxies, anything 'not this' will do as a substitute. Give us something for which to be dissatisfied with and we, individually and collectively, will conjure three ways before Door Dashing lunch to make it not what it once was. We will be complete once the corner office comes, the car that doubles as a butler, the device that sits buried into our brain which makes our "smart" phone finally (after 14 long years!) obsolete, the illicit lover in flesh or on screen, the laughable "medicines" to help us persist, and now the superintelligent machines to fix all the rest we are so clearly fed up trying to fend off or finally accept as ourselves. If it all be so perilous, finite and infinitely inconsequential, we seem to

consistently say with our choices throughout time, then simply satisfy us. Anything more, like transcendence or second-sight, would be trite. Anything less is war.

*

I heard a story once about everything. It went something like this:

There was a frog and a toad and they lived inside of years, just like you and me. The frog was big, old and wise, the kind of wise that led him to act as if he had done this all before, near another pond in another time. The toad was small but his worries were large, larger certainly than the frog's assurances.

Each season brought its own troubles for the toad. In the winter he felt alone, so he wanted to be alone. In the spring he felt ignored and let down by the napping worms and sunning lizards. He could not see what all the fuss was about. In the summer ice cream melted far too fast to be fair. In fall, the worst of all, so much death fell, creating work for the toad he simply did not have the time or will to do.

The frog, loving the toad at least as much as he loved himself, was, in his own manner of being, there with his friend through each thick and each thin, though for the toad, no doubt, it was mostly the thin. When the frog asked the toad in winter to consider the joy of sleigh riding, or in spring gardening, or summer resting in the shade, or fall jumping in the harmless, crunchy leaves the toad became sure his friend was trying to kill him! Luckily, for the toad, he came one day across the cunning crow.

"Toad," the crow said, "you are alone. Look around. There is no one who cares, no one who knows, no one who can."

This startled the already startled toad. He looked around.

"There is no frog?" asked the toad.

The crow cackled and cawed then said, "There never was. See?"

The toad peered around the pond, looking under every lily pad and around every sprout. He examined, hypothesized, and examined his hypotheses. In short, the toad hopped until he could not hop anymore. Convinced he had been had, that there was no frog to find, just as the crow said, he packed up his things and made way to the west. Where it looked brighter, greener, and new.

A few hours later the frog arrived with a sled, some seeds, a hammock and a rake. "Toad? Where have you hopped off to? I have all that we need for the entire year!" As the toad made his way, his persistent thought was, "better to entertain myself."

*

Recently a Senator of our land spoke of war as *holy*. He spoke of the billions of dollars he was so happy to spend on weapons to kill Russians, saying these billions will be "the best money we've ever spent as a nation." At least half the country agreed and most of his immediate audience cheered.

With this historical gong still ringing in my ears, it strikes me as impossible to argue against the notion that as a species (not as fans on pseudosides with colors and merch and mascots and owners and televised honks), we are extremely satisfied with war. The video game market alone boasts \$56 billion in sales in 2022, and the top ten list of games is littered with titles like *God of War*, *World of Warcraft*, *Call of Duty* and their friends. When this Senator listed the statistics of the humans now slaughtered on "the other side" this was cause for celebration for half the pie that is us. Our kill count was sick. We find our warring to be dope. We want more. When will this one be streaming?

The point here has nothing to do with the reason to fight or not fight, to fund or not fund, to red or to blue. Rather, the suggestion is that we consider examining *why* it makes sense for us to feel satisfied by what we feel satisfied by, considering these very apparent desires to create enemies so that we might war with them goes back to the very first two brothers, or so it's told.

Might it be that it is an inherent existential fissure within homo sapiens that necessitates our very nature to believe and demand that the living of life be satisfactory to each one of us? Is it possible that what wisdom requires is that one asks the Kantian question: what would the outcome be if each person lived as if it were true that life was meant to be satisfactory to their each and every whim?

What might a planet of sentient, needy, selfish beings look like if, instead of being taught in a loving, dialectic manner early on that life's not fair and never promised to be so, were told that everyone could be anything they wanted to be and anyone who told you different was an enemy who should be silenced, effaced, erased? Well, for better or for worse, for us there is no longer any "what if" about it. "What if" has become here and now. Graciously, our confusion is not new and the solutions that have saved us from the brink in the past are still the same. Unfortunately, the so-called smarter our tools become (all the way to our tools actually *becoming*) the more difficult it is for us to see the proverbial forest for the cell phone tower trees.

Even a cursory glance at our fallible recorded past illuminates that when culture focuses its steely gaze upon personal satisfaction in opposition against human empathy we get realities like Nero's flute or the toad's futile long, lonely walk to nowhere. As a lover of being, I hope we go nowhere slow.

FRAGMENTS OF EDEN IN BROKEN BONDS

by Robin Ouzman Hislop

Mast at Bass Rock a glimmer flashes
beneath the threshold *in the eye of the gannet*
as with folded wing it dives from the sky

*on the rock
white feathers cheek by jowl
putrefy*

it will not go away once upon a time
a wild duck came to a mill pond
where a hen pecked & a pig chomped & **an ape smoked its pipe**

*in a world of flame
money frames*

nation states wear hoods
ghost riders in the sky stampede
the plains & piss in the oceans
the salmon from the rivers have gone
in what seas will they now spawn

*the arm's game
where are you hidden O Eden
but in the banks where money flows
like water like blood*

an exponential surge through fossil fuels enables arms manufacture enhances mass bulk consumption
of animal flesh planet catastrophe global warming pandemic war & boom growth of artificial
intelligence simulation of the universe in which we exist as a simulation before the **coming utopia** &
where we unfortunately **rot**

transcendental anthropocentrism assumes a teleological universal human nature
at great cost to the rest of life on the planet as we question our cultural identity

then **noble savage**
run with the *Jaguar Moon*
until a world reborn
from the anthropocene

atomic bomb & cartoon simulation
from an ocean of plastic pollution
& sky of poison to where the deserts
grow green & **the age of the sixth
extinction** has come & gone

*to where the cascade of life
resumes its growth*

to where you remain

& where the wild fires
on the horizon no longer rage

*then run noble savage
until a new age of homo sapiens*

fading
to a swarm of frantic breaths and slowing finally into the silence
of a tropic vacuum
a place at last to rest
and gently let your soul
go free
into a wilderness
too full of light for dreams.

SELF: PHASING OUT

by Ofor Chidera

Onion on the kitchen floor is red-purple.

//

Red-purple is the nail varnish my grandma used, a
Wood painting of her buried in the wall,
Betwixt the cellar and the buzz clock, before she was
Frozen in time and star. As she was carried away,
Her withered, gangrenous hands oozing, I witnessed the
Unbecoming of her boisterous life, her intimacy
And the myriad blessings she gave me with those hands
As they began to itch my skin. My mind stood clear of her image,
Her eyes popping, riddled by crow's feet. And suddenly, her
Memory became one of the things I hated—but
What I hated even more was myself,
For hating the things I have always loved.

//

Red-purple silhouettes the greenness of my vein traveling
Across a thousand melanocytes.
Dissonant to my baked skin; imbruing the folly of youth to reveal
Time's verdict. My therapist says chemo is a process—I know,
So is death—but if healing is dependent on the will to live, then
The universe must have shelved me in a wait-list.
He gives me a tab to list the things I didn't like and
The first thing I write is: my life.
Sometimes, things have to end
For a new beginning.

A VIRAL GOODBYE

by Tracey Thiessen

We race through the deserted aisles of hell beneath the gutter of this villainous threat, without a car in sight we swiftly reach the flashing gateway of the phantom-like hospital, where a shadowy figure who resembles a large lemon extracts your weakened, trembling receptible from my devoted clutches abruptly extinguishing our network of love. your words float above in a whisper as they wheel you away, my aged ears can't catch them, my heart thuds to the cold tile floor, hand-sanitizer gains no entry for me / I never said, goodbye / day after day, rainbow rows of vehicles litter the parking lot swamped with kindred souls who tighten their grip on each steering wheel ready to anticipate one lingering glimpse at these towering hospital windows, your weary face pressed against the glass, breath frosting a lonely picture. I pray his soft, wistful eyes meet my hopeful stare, find my pendulum arm signal that sways I'm here. a sudden whiff of stale coffee filtering through my car prompts me to exit this formula one pit stop and refuel my own engine / again, I never said, goodbye / in a living room filled with family photos, I'm unprepared while blurred images of ventilators, hoses, masks, and strangers crush my tiny home screen as the nurse's sympathetic rushed words rewind like a time loop inside my vacant brain, my vacant home, through its haunting silence / I never said, goodbye, he never said, goodbye / no proper funeral, no friends or family to share the lonesome valley, share his stories, to squeeze tight in this nightmare carnage or cry along an everlasting road, no one to help sweep the daily shattered pieces. an endless stream of battered memories burgeon my system of flooded mine fields, restless anger bristles to the bubbling surface / how do I say, goodbye? / I limp into our bedroom and expect you to be there, your woody scent still lingers. I battle the disbelieving dream that gorges a new pathway to my heart, unplanned hopelessness settles in until a mercenary bargain culminates with the Almighty to negotiate the unbearable pain, admit surrender, plead infinite acceptance, let you go / goodbye, my sweet love.

ALCHEMY

by Chun Yu

On a quiet lab bench
observing a microscopic miracle
created in the human world:
A failing cardiac muscle cell
driven by a synthetic molecule
began to revive, beating
at the rate of the heart
like the pulse of immortality
carrying me beyond Death.
Stealthily, Death
caged my sight from behind:
On the other side of the earth
you left quietly—
organs, tissues, and cells
the new no longer superseded the old.
The mind that once undulated for me
returned to stillness.
The heart that once beat for me
returned to silence.
In the silent world
I raised my eyes
heart and hands empty
open like vessels of alchemy
with the golden Azoth vanished
letting the ancient sorrow of parting
teardrops like silver mercury
cold moonlight on a foreign land
filled them up one by one.

SINE COLORE

by Cadriel Hallward

The night after you left, I opened the cabinet behind my mirror.

I stared at the red of my gums, the harsh orange of pill bottles and painkillers that I don't remember taking. I stood in the middle of the street, slowing traffic like a yellow light. It flickered green; some people tried to drive around me. I refused to let them.

Nothing is supposed to happen if you're not here.

I swallowed a Tylenol, and then another. I had a headache. I have a headache. I don't know how time passes anymore, because I'm not passing it with you. I missed you. I miss you.

I listened to music, lots of it. Blues. Jazz. Acoustic. Classical. R&B. Rock. It didn't matter at all— the sound doesn't fill your absence. It makes me sick, even. I can't eat. I can't sleep. I wonder if you're tossing and turning, your body passing over the free space I left on our bed. Your bed.

I sat down looking up at the stars. The darkness obscured my view. I saw no beautiful midnight sky, no gentle purple tinge behind pinpricks of light. Everything was in black and white.

The night after you left, I closed the cabinet behind my mirror. I looked at my reflection and all I saw was half a man.

TOO MUCH FOLDING

by KG Newman

Our love became yawning origami
black crayon nubs
a mix of tequila and coffee
and ibuprofen
and world-record showers
that leave the water heater

gasping for air.
Infinite connecting flights.
Taxis still existing somehow.
Everything now a dollar-fifty
at the Dollar Tree.
A handwriting audit
into our first epistles.
Tarps over the water tower

obscuring the town name.
Highway signs with
cracked, peeling lettering.
Little paper birds

perched atop them
in the driving rain,
their creases about to
surrender into tears.

YOU WERE BORN SEVENTEEN MINUTES BEFORE ME

by Lynn Finger

I ride in on swan wings, transcendent as sky,
a memoria over the shore. My dwelling is my
emptiness. I pluck the air like I can create
a lung of my own thirst.

I finally find you, standing on a corner by
the bank, trying to look busy, buying clever
chains from vendors and staring at passing
cranes, who bugle and cry.

You were born seventeen minutes before me.
Neither of us had been caught in the boxed ceremony
of endings. There's more to waking up than distance
and lysol. No land can hold us, and the waves nearby
froth like gray wolves in the dawn.

A message reaches for us, it cries a further return,
but we tremble to rise as we expand our wings.
What might have trapped us before, is now broken
and weeps.

The unused cache is nothing but figures
in our dreams of splintered wood cabinets,
seagull feathers from childhood beaches, old

magazines, and images of us, entranced
by a bonfire
with smoke in our hair

DERELICTION OF DUTY

by Brandon Shane

a half-stitched sweater of moth-eaten cotton
upon a dilapidated chair that won't stop rocking
wood buried & forgotten exhales for the first time
as sunshine breaks through the cracks

the front door which has sunken into a singular wall
is kicked down by masked men with gunpowder souls
but the wet graveyard air that has rotted this cabin
is all they find and all that's left is bilge rats
adapted to stagnancy, mold & rot, willing to die

for everything they have ever known, even nothingness,
carcasses, maggots, the rage of unattended perfection
decaying into the subtle film left by wet legged spiders,
crawling up empty pipes unsure of why they exist at all,

and just like this cabin, devoid of purpose,
I long for the day a stranger breaks into my heart
and announces their unannounced presence,
allowing in new breath & butterflies & life

knowing the maladies of refusing love,
can be just as dangerous as its addiction.

THE RECLUSE IMAGINES HEARTBREAK AND OTHER WAYS TO DIE

By James Kangas

I could die in this house with the floor's worn oak grain, aglow in sunlight like a gold fleece, soaking up my blood from where it pools, some thug with a smirk fleeing out the back door, smug with his take, his haul, his masterstroke.

Or sitting down to brown trout, I could choke on a bone, cough madly, turn blue and croak *splat* on my plate, knock over the spent Riesling jug. I could die in this house

of a burst vessel, a bathtub fall, or from smoke billowing up the stairs to my lungs, something Baroque melting on the turntable, or with a dreamy drug whiting me out as I cocoon on the couch in a rug. Or broken by love (for someone who always thought me a joke), I could die in this house.

FALL BENEATH YOURSELF

by Audrey Howitt

she knows what lies beneath sheltered stones
where crushed oyster shells
shed their calcium
into the ache between toes

breathe among the shivering trees
a wind calls,
pushes at shells under soft pads
unused to upward pressure

in the darkness, her fingers weave air into sticks
stomach and kidneys
dance in blue rhythm
the baby asleep, so quiet
the hush feels of death

a snap and inside air rushes out
toward hands that know
she is her own respite, her own wind

her heart quiets, the baby wakes
oyster shells gleam in silvered night

THE WIDOW IN THE MANOR

by Gregory E. Lucas

As an Adirondack evening nears its end,
behind the silhouetted Sentinel Range
a pastel sun sets in wintry October air,
and in Birch Knoll Manor sepulchral silence drifts
on currents colder than the Ausable's depths.
Like autumn leaves they swirl on the stair's curves,
announce her fears of constant loneliness
to the stark stillness that lingers in the den.
With trembling gnarled hands, she pats the urn
that holds her husband's one-week-old remains.
The wind's too weak to shake the window panes,
and the nearby brook has a flow too soft to hear.
Her world seems gathered into somber pools
of sustained silence spread throughout the room.
She sets her loved-one down onto the mantle,
shuffles through the foyer to the door
she left ajar, and in the leaden sky
two deer that graze in the meadow stand still
and stare at her with understanding eyes.
They blink, then dash into mysterious shades.
Unseen above the peaks some geese fly by,
their plaintive calls diminishing, then gone.
The twilight turns to night and the wind dies.
The only sound – her husband's whispered name,
uttered to the manor's everlasting hush.

WALKING HOME AT NIGHT

by David Hanlon

What's this?
this strange stasis
this vacuum-like period
every thing tucked away
shedding the day's stories
like tearing pages from a children's book
and burning them to cinders
sleep conjuring new beginnings
to hatch at dawn's
strike of sunlight

The sky above me is an open
jar of molasses, a heavy
drip
of foreboding
yet I remain unsoiled
as if all ground matter
is sky-split and protected
wizardry at work
streetlamps are mystical orbs
levitating
or held in place
by night's god-like hands

I'm walking through this snapshot
a fox appears
scuttles
across the asphalt-stillness
shatters
the verisimilitude
stops, stares
ears prick, eyes glower
tarnished amber
his tail its own thing of majesty
an exaggeration
then gone
like a hologram
every thing
so invisibly present

A DARK NIGHT

by Fizza Abbas

After Noor Mukaddam's murder case.

things i want to say:

night cruising aboard the moon, the silhouette of a castle against the dimming sky, an ongoing funfair,
a masquerade.

things i want to defy:

a drunken werewolf, a piece of half-cut photograph on fire, blood spilling all over the teal-white sheet,
flower plucked from its stalk.

CONTRACTION

by Mark J. Mitchell

His nights shrink. Moons plot to swallow time
between sun set and rise. The dark's compressed
into small blocks of dream and sound. His mind
likes night and shrunken moons, He swallows. Time
to rise for no reason, by dim streetlight
glow. Morning's rushing like a test.

His night knowledge shrinks. Moons swallow plots. Time
falls beneath his unset clock. Day comes. Compressed.

TWO MAYFLIES

by Michael Todd Steffen

One on a lighted porch screen.
It moves up and down on its smart chart of how
life goes, dangling languid limbs, obscene
ly disproportionate (like angels') wings
fluttering between its world and ours.

The other one is fanning around the ceiling light
above the door here,
situating aphorism:
What's out yearns to be in; what's in wants out.

Leave it to nature to produce
yet keep no promise. O for the long views
of desire's brief sweet days, the woken hours
delicate—and bothersome—as others'
pop-ins are for us who wake on a good sleep.

LUCKY LIMULUS

by Richard Gessner

An aboriginal Horseshoe Crab in an oceans' childhood puddle,
Measured its species' millennia of daybreak— tracing itself
Back, before time began—

Book lungs of arthropod covered with a relief map of pre-hominid
Fingerprints, marking each breath with a motif of anonymous
Mass signatures—

Overlapping faceless spirals, recording time like age rings on
A sawed off cross section of redwood tree stump.

Blue blood Limulus, royally surviving earthly extinctions of
Fauna ephemera, surpassing all competitors with unchanging
form—

Priapic Telson shooting skyward; phallic tail mating with Princess
Polaris, begetting north star children of jellyfish, plankton and sharks.

A TASTE OF ILLNESS

by Aisha Al-Tarweh

how distress seizes you by your throat,
throws you against the earth,
and the dirt, the dirt stings blinded eyes,
irises rolled up towards the heavens in pleading.
tremors kiss your veins, sparking fire beneath your limbs, how violent such a thing as despair, how
lustful.

how desperate such a thing as craving,
such a thing as ripping your chest into shreds,
held down by man, pinned to a bed by fragility;
the sun screams burning dreams down upon
a fevered mind, cruelly gentle,
how sweat frames an ailing face kindly:
you shiver, and your eyesight erupts-
spidery cracks.

choke on deceit, cough it up, spit it out,
catch a bleeding heart in your hands and
your tongue stings a coppery iron,
your teeth stained crimson silk, silk you knot
over and over and over,
almost compulsively, your nerves shot a hot white-

so the sun sets upon a field of bloody ties.

AND ANOTHER STRANGE THING

by Angela Arnold

You say the clock is going backwards, has done
for a while, as if I ought to acknowledge that
and not forget your skin's coming palpable off
(though not visibly to husbands or doctors)
or the mild ache that erupted
into crimson torture last month and no one
could dis-measure it, or even the havoc flowering
inside your gut since May, a flimsiness
of a puzzle finally displayed as definite bedsores,
confused and intermingled
with a carapace (if that's what it is) of pills
that make you hurt in your heart region - down your
arm, you say canny enough, never stopping
except for too-deep breaths
when paramedics find nothing beyond plaintiveness
(hinting with eyebrows) and my running
myself ragged with worry that you lap up to feed
a blossoming of reassurance (if that's what it is) and now
of course the clock is being weird, as weird
is the only thing left after another
and another and the hole no nearer filled, or your
flesh any less hanging in the same tatters
you were born into and no one to kiss it all shut
to keep the you of you *in*.

“WHY DO YOU THINK THAT’S OKAY?”

question asked by Krishna Wright

by Ace Boggess

Never said, never claimed,
never promised you a rose
garden, never tried
to lasso the moon in a mood
of empty effervescence,
never refused to share
my drugs when I had plenty,
never stopped crawling
around in the floor when I didn’t—
seeking fragments, sniffing dirt—
never meant to use the knife
I raised like a bowl for more,
never believed the answers
I gave were lies when the cop
said *please & tell me*,
never wanted what I wanted
though I always wanted
lots, never looked
at an eclipse in a pinhole box &
thought how quickly
everything can disappear,
never trusted myself
with myself, never *never*,
never knew I could be cruel
until the codeine told me
to wave a blade & ask donations,
never said, never believed—
wrong man with head
full of bees & honeyed lips—
never let my confession fester
in the secret archives of regret.

TRANSPARENT AURORA

by Ofor Chidera

</ kintsukuroi (n.) (v.phr) “to repair /w gold”; the art of repairing pottery /w gold or silver lacquer and understanding that the piece is more beautiful for having been broken. />

The vinegar in my belly ferments to a tipsy rashness,
Lingering as scraps on my cheek. These days petals lose pink;
Scraggly anthers leak between decussate whorls to lavishly articulate
A sunset, an epilogue to a life half-spent. Just like

A sycamore’s twig /w a brute texture and a
Prickling capsule, judged by taste;
The coarseness that riddles my hair softening when I bite
Its leaves & savor the venous network desperate to
Clog my throat, to end it now.

I curse this body enthused by the fury of bright burning scarlet ball
Dissolving, festering, the scourge of Lazarus
Running thru my vein. Fingers of Hades pick me up by the
Scapula but, out of thin & thistle, my
Aura springs, breaking free from the anvil of mortality.

WHERE WE WERE

by Lee Clark Zumpe

cheap cigars and cheap clichés
notwithstanding

I paced the weedy riverbank
beneath an erythrasma sunset,
its dark red radiance
mirrored brilliantly upon
the water's surface.

where we were

once, before anarchy
and the apathy

brooding, I try to discover
such subterranean cues -
lingering embryonic trifles,
superfluous residue
from our mutual abortion

where we were

once, unmindful
of the coming storm.



Burning Sunset by Ana M. Fores Tomayo

Christina Hennemann – *Fallen*

Christina Hennemann is a poet and prose writer based in Ireland. She's a recipient of the Irish Arts Council's Agility Award '23 and she was longlisted in the National Poetry Competition. Her work is forthcoming or appears in Poetry Wales, The Iowa Review, Skylight 47, The Moth, York Literary Review, fifth wheel, Ink Sweat & Tears, Moria, and elsewhere. www.christinahennemann.com

Lux Alexander – *Graduating my Body*

Lux Alexander is a queer poet and writer who loves surrealist art and listening to music.

Nikoletta Nousiopoulos – *Spell for Conception* and *Lunar Eclipse for the Mother Year*

Nikoletta Nousiopoulos is an English teacher who resides in Southeastern Connecticut with her husband, fiction writer Daniel Giovinazzo, and their 3 young children. Her debut collection, *all the dead goats*, was published in 2010 by Little Red Tree Publishing. Since then she has published in various print and digital journals including: The Fairy Tale Review, Tammy, ethel, Whiskey Island, poineertown, Thin Noon and Peach Mag. In June 2023 her poem, "Penelope's moment of slip___page when thinking about abortion", won an Honorable Mention for the Red Noise Collective Poetry Prize.

Ray DiZazzo – *Alzheimer's* and *Bouncing Betty*

Ray DiZazzo has published fiction, poetry, criticism, nonfiction and self-help in commercial and literary magazines, newspapers and 14 books. His work has been published in *The Mid-Atlantic Review*, *Valley Magazine*, *The Christian Science Monitor, Inc.*, *The Berkeley Review*, *Poetry Now*, *The Coachella Review*, and many others. He is the recipient of the Percival Roberts Book Award and the Rhysling Award. His work has been anthologized in *Contemporary Literary Criticism* and other publications. A documentary scripted by him for KOCE TV won the first Los Angeles Emmy in the Education category. He has also published four books of poetry: *Clovin's Head*, Red Hill Press, 1976, *Songs for a Summer Fly*, Kenmore Press (Chapbook), 1978; *The Water Bulls*, Granite-Collen, 2009; and *The Revlon Slough*, 2Leaf Press/University of Chicago Press, 2018.

Ana M. Fores Tamayo – *Narcissus Sees His Reflection*, *Freedom*, and *Burning Sunset*

Being an academic not paid enough for her trouble, Ana M. Fores Tamayo wanted instead to do something that mattered: work with asylum seekers. She advocates for marginalized refugee families from Mexico, Central America, and most recently, many other countries from which people flee. Working with asylum seekers is heart wrenching, yet satisfying. It is also quite humbling. Her labor has eased her own sense of displacement, being a child refugee, always trying to find home. In parallel, poetry is her escape: she has published in *The Raving Press*, *Indolent Books*, *the Laurel Review*, *Shenandoah*, and many other anthologies and journals, both in the US and internationally, online and in-print. Her poetry in translation with its accompanying photography has been featured in art fairs and galleries as well. Ediciones Valparaiso in Spain published her book of poems, PEREGRINA, this past June 2022. She hopes you like her art; it is a catharsis from the cruelty yet ecstasy of her work. Through it, she keeps tilting at windmills.

***Freedom* was first published in *The Spirit It Travels: An Anthology of Transcendent Poetry* (Cosmographia Books, August 2019), edited by Nina Alvarez. *Narcissus Seeing His Reflection* was published in the *Chachalaca Review*, Autumn 2018**

Eugene Donaldson – *Sent From Another Galaxy*

Eugene D. Donaldson is a native of Baltimore, Maryland. He has been a steel mill laborer, an Army soldier, a bartender and a restaurant waiter, a career graphic designer & a career art director. Eugene thinks of himself as a student of paint and poetry. He began his creative journey in Fine Arts at the University of Maryland (BA, 1968). Blue Moon Literary & Art Review University of California has selected a number of his poems and a short story. He was a finalist for the Jimenez-Porter Literary Prize 2019 (Univ. of MD).

Terry Miller – *I Refuse to Hold Poetry at Arm's Length*

Terry Jude Miller is a Pushcart Prize-nominated poet from Houston. He received the 2018 Catherine Case Lubbe Manuscript Prize for his book, *The Drawn Cat's Dream*. His work has been published in the Southern Poetry Anthology, The Lily Poetry Review, The Comstock Review, and The Oakland Review and in scores of other publications. He serves as 1st Vice Chancellor for the National Federation of State Poetry Societies.

Adedokun Ibrahim Anwar - *In Fetching God*

Born on a Friday in October, Adedokun Ibrahim Anwar is a homeschooled Nigerian, a teen writer who was born and raised in the suburbs of Lagos. He writes in a voice that is meaningful communication, for himself, for those who seek to be touched in places where humans can't. His work has appeared or are forthcoming in literary journals, including Brittle Paper, Eunoia Review, African Writer Magazine, The Kalahari Review, The Shallow Tales Review and elsewhere. If you don't find him catching up with late night deadlines, you find him building bricks with toddlers. He is also active on Twitter: @IbraaheemAde1

***In Fetching God* was first published on the Eunoia Review.**

Ace Boggess - “*Were You A Hippie Who Took Drugs to See God?*” and “*Why Do You Think That’s OK?*”

Ace Boggess is author of six books of poetry, most recently *Escape Envy*. His writing has appeared in Michigan Quarterly Review, Notre Dame Review, Harvard Review, Mid-American Review, and other journals. An ex-con, he lives in Charleston, West Virginia, where he writes and tries to stay out of trouble. His seventh collection, *Tell Us How to Live*, is forthcoming in 2024 from Fernwood Press.

Edward Lee - *Call it Magic*

Edward Lee is an artist and writer from Ireland. His paintings and photography have been exhibited widely, while his poetry, short stories, non-fiction have been published in magazines in Ireland, England and America, including *The Stinging Fly*, *Skylight 47*, *Acumen* and *Smiths Knoll*. His poetry collections are *Playing Poohsticks On Ha’Penny Bridge*, *The Madness Of Qwerty*, *A Foetal Heart* and *Bones Speaking With Hard Tongues*. He also makes musical noise under the names *Ayahuasca Collective*, *Orson Carroll*, *Lego Figures Fighting*, and *Pale Blond Boy*. His blogwebsite can be found at <https://edwardmlee.wordpress.com>

Rucha Virmani - *Bittersweet*

Rucha Virmani is a writer from India. She is passionate about climate activism and started The Climatopia Project to use creative writing to contribute to the climate movement. Her work has been longlisted by Young Poets Network and has been published twice by *The Teenager Today*. She has been selected for the Ellipsis Writing programme. She received the ‘Honourable Mention’ title in the young adults category of the global 2019 AstroPoetry contest.

Anna Villegas - *The Real Mother Goose*

For forty-one years, Anna Villegas happily taught college English in the San Joaquin Valley of California. Her published work includes many short stories, poems, essays, newspaper columns, and three novels (Synergistic Press, William Morrow, St. Martin’s Press). Now retired, she lives in the Gold Country foothills of Nevada City, California, where five generations of family ghosts inspire her writing.

***The Real Mother Goose* was first published in LITERAL LATTE: The Best of Literal Latte Anthology, 2008.**

William Doreski - *The Universal Solvent*

William Doreski lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire. He has taught at several colleges and universities. His most recent book of poetry is *Venus, Jupiter*(2023). His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in various journals.

Ben Nardolilli - *Slam Tilting into the Kickout Hole*

Ben Nardolilli is currently an MFA candidate at Long Island University. His work has appeared in *Perigee Magazine*, *Red Fez*, *SLAB*, *Quail Bell Magazine*, *Elimae*, *The Northampton Review*, *Door Is A Jar Literary Magazine*, *The Minetta Review*, and *Yes Poetry*. Follow his publishing journey at <http://mirrorsponge.blogspot.com>.

Dan Alter - *Could I*

Dan Alter’s poems and reviews have been published in journals including *Field*, *Fourteen Hills*, *Pank*, and *Zyzyva*; his first collection “*My Little Book of Exiles*” won the Poetry Prize for the 2022 Anne and Robert Cowan Writer’s Awards. He lives with his wife and daughter in Berkeley and makes his living as an IBEW electrician. You can find him at <https://danalter.net/>.

Sherry Shahan - *Static*

Sherry Shahan is a teal-haired septuagenarian who grows potatoes in the box that delivered a stereo. Her poetry has appeared in F(r)iction, Progenitor, Zoetic Press, Last Stanza Poetry Journal, Open Minds, and elsewhere. She holds an MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts.

Frances Boyle – *A Prodigious House to Which You're Not Invited*

Frances Boyle (she/her) is a Canadian writer, living in Ottawa. She is the author of three poetry books, most recently Openwork and Limestone (2022). She has also written Seeking Shade, an award-winning short story collection (2020) and Tower, a novella (2018). Her first novel, Skin Hunger, is forthcoming in 2024. Frances's writing has been selected for the Best Canadian Poetry series and appeared throughout North America and abroad. Recent publications include work in TAB Journal, Dust Poetry, The Windsor Review and Acropolis. For more, visit www.francesboyle.com.

Heather Martel – *Edges*

Heather Martel is a queer academic and a cultural historian of the sixteenth-century Atlantic World. She has published an academic monograph, Deadly Virtue: Fort Caroline and the Protestant Roots of American Whiteness (UPF 2019), as well as several peer reviewed academic history essays, including: “Colonial Allure: Normal Homoeroticism and Sodomy in French and Timucuan Encounters in Sixteenth-Century Florida” Journal of the History of Sexuality 22:1 (2013): 34-64; and “Hans Staden’s Captive Soul: Identity, Imperialism, and Rumors of Cannibalism in Sixteenth-Century Brazil” Journal of World History 17:1 (2006). She has a website, DidoLives.com, where she has self-published drafts for a much larger world-building science fiction project. She is a tarot reader, with a YouTube channel called Metal Dog Tarot. She has a second YouTube channel, The Virago Channel.

Eve Connor – *The Muntjac Sound*

Eve Connor is a British/Irish writer born in Birmingham, UK. Her poems have been recognised by the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award and the Young Romantics Prize. She is reading English at the University of Cambridge.

Dr. Pragya Suman – *The Mahua Picker*

Dr. Pragya Suman is a doctor by profession and a writer by passion. Her poetry, reviews, and fiction have been published in more than fifty magazines and anthologies, like Beir Bua Journal, Rock pebbles pebbles Journal, 3 AM Magazine, Impspired magazine, Arcs prose poetry magazine, Full house literary Journal, flight of the Dragonfly, Indian Periodical Journal, The World of Myth Magazine, The Pine Cone Review, Bengaluru review, etc. She has achieved the certificate of appreciation from Gujarat Sahitya Academy, Indian Government. She won the Gideon poetry prize summer of 2020. Her debut book Lost Mother was published in 2020, and her second book Photonic Postcard is a collection of Prose Poems. In 2022, she won the poet of the year award, Ukiyoto Publishing, Ontario, for the book Photonic Postcard. Dr. Pragya Suman is the founding editor of Arc Magazine. She is currently a Senior Resident in the Shri Krishna Medical College, Muzaffarpur.

***The Mahua Picker* first appeared in Ukiyoto Publishing and the Indian Periodical Journal**

Kushal Poddar – *A Family During This Eco-Deconstruction and Migration*

The author of 'Postmarked Quarantine' has eight books to his credit. He is a journalist, father, and the editor of 'Words Surfacing'. His works have been translated into twelve languages, published across the globe.

Twitter- <https://twitter.com/Kushalpoe>

Zac Walsh – *Satisfy Me*

Zac Walsh's work has appeared in journals such as Blue Unicorn, LUMINA, Gulf Stream, Cimarron Review, Oakwood, Alligator Juniper, The Awakenings, The Other Journal, The Charleston Anvil, Light/Dark, Inscape, Big Lucks, Lime Hawk, Spectre Magazine, the DuPage Valley Review and The Platte Valley Review, as well as in the anthologies Blood on the Floor and Small Batch. He lives in a small, unincorporated town in Oregon with his wife and a very old dog.

Robin Ouzman Hislop – *Fragments of Eden in Broken Bonds*

Robin Ouzman Hislop's poetics cultivate a relationship between ecological, mind body processes and experimental work. He's co-authored translations of contemporary Spanish poets into English and written and performed numerous audio visual video poems. His appearances include Cold Mountain Review (Appalachian University, N.Carolina), The Honest Ulsterman, Cratera No 3, The Hypertexts.com, Better than Starbucks, Dreich Magazine, Zoetic Press, Version9Magazine, Lothlorien Poetry Journal & ImaginePoesia. His publications are collected poems All the Babble of the Souk, Cartoon Molecules, Next Arrivals and Moon Selected Audio Textual Poems. Anthologies: Voices without Borders, Phoenix Rises from the Ashes (a multi international anthology of sonnets) and Bark and Blossom (an anthology of ecological poetry). A translation from Spanish of poems by Guadalupe Grande Key of Mist and Carmen Crespo Tesseract, the award winning (XIII Premio César Simón De Poesía). In November 2017 these works were presented in a live performance at The International Writer's Conference hosted by the University of Leeds. UK. He was on ine Publisher at Poetry Life & Times at Artvilla.com for ten years. A retired TEFL teacher and translator who lives in Avila Spain and Yorkshire UK, you may visit <https://poetrylifeandtimes.com>, which features mostly his video poems and translated authors and <http://www.aquillrelle.com/authorrobin.htm> about author.

***Fragments of Eden in Broken Bonds* was first published in *Cowboys & Injuns* and <https://www.Hypertexts.com>**

Offor Chidera - *Self: Phasing Out* and *Transparent Aurora*

Offor is a budding writer who explores contemporary styles of literature and imaginative works. He typically explores comical and metaphysical themes (but needs to take his writing seriously!).

Tracey Thiessen - *A Viral Goodbye*

Tracey Thiessen received a Recognition of Achievement in Creative Writing from Sheridan College in Oakville, Ontario and belongs to The International Women's Writing Club and The Ontario Poetry Society. Wingless Dreamer and Verse Afire have published her work. Her part-time Fitness/Meditation instruction classes provide a flourishing positive writing environment.

Chun Yu - *Alchemy*

Chun Yu, Ph.D. is an award-winning bilingual (English and Chinese) poet, graphic novelist, scientist, and translator. She is the author of the multi-award winning memoir in verse "Little Green: Growing Up During the Chinese Cultural Revolution" (Simon & Schuster) and a historical graphic novel in progress (Macmillan). Her widely published poetry and translations have been nominated three times for Pushcart Prize in 2021 and 2022 and won China's Xu Zhimo Micropoetry Competition in 2022. She is a Library Laureate 2023 of San Francisco Public Library and an honoree of YBCA 100 award (2020) for creative changemakers and community leaders. She has won grants from San Francisco Arts Commission, Zellerbach, Poets & Writers, and Sankofa Fund. Her work is taught in world history and culture classes. Chun holds a B.S. and M.S. from Peking University and a Ph.D. from Rutgers University. She was a post-doctoral fellow in a Harvard-MIT joint program. Her websites: www.chunyu.org, www.twolanguagesonecommunity.com, and www.chineseamericanstories.org

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Cadriel Hallward - *Sine Colore*

Cadriel Hallward is a Vietnamese queer poet and author. As an emerging voice, he hopes to uplift and inspire people with his work. You can find him on Twitter at @cardboardcheese.

KG Newman - *Too Much Folding*

KG Newman is a sportswriter who covers the Broncos and Rockies for *The Denver Post*. His first four collections of poems are available on Amazon and he has been published in scores of literary journals worldwide. The Arizona State University alum is on Twitter @KyleNewmanDP and more info and writing can be found at kgnewman.com. He is the poetry editor of Hidden Peak Press and he lives in Hidden Village, Colorado, with his wife and three kids.

Lynn Finger - *You Were Born Seventeen Minutes Before Me*

Lynn Finger's (she/her/hers) works have appeared in 8Poems, Book of Matches, Fairy Piece, Drunk Monkeys, and ONE ART: a journal of poetry. Lynn also released a poetry chapbook, "The Truth of Blue Horses," published by Alien Buddha Press. Lynn edits Harpy Hybrid Review, and her Twitter is @sweetfirefly2.

Brandon Shane - *Dereliction of Duty*

Brandon Shane is an alum of California State University, Long Beach, where he majored in English. He's pursuing an MFA while working as a writing instructor and substitute teacher. You can see his work in Acropolis Journal, Grim & Gilded, All Existing Magazine, Bitterleaf Books, Remington Review, Salmon Creek Journal, BarBar Literary Magazine, Discretionary Love, among others. Find him on Twitter @Ruishanewrites

James Kangas - *The Recluse Imagines Heartbreak and Other Ways to Die*

James Kangas is a retired librarian living in Flint, Michigan. His poems have appeared in Atlanta Review, New York Quarterly, Penn Review, West Branch, et al. His chapbook (Sibling Rivalry Press) was published in 2019. *The Recluse Imagines Heartbreak and Other Ways to Die* was first published in Mockingbird (Davis, CA), Spring, 1999

Audrey Howitt - *Fall Beneath Yourself*

Audrey Howitt lives and writes poetry in the San Francisco Bay Area. When not writing, she sings classical music and teaches voice. She is a licensed attorney and psychotherapist. Ms. Howitt has been published in: Purely Lit: Poetry Anthology, Washington Square Review, Panoply, Muddy River Poetry Review, Total Eclipse Poetry and Prose, Chiaroscuro-Darkness and Light, dVerse Poets Anthology, With Painted Words, Algebra of Owls and Lost Towers Publications. Upcoming publications include Academy of the Heart and Mind.

Gregory E. Lucas - *The Widow in the Manor*

Gregory E. Lucas writes fiction and poetry. His short stories and poems have appeared in many magazines such as *The Ekphrastic Review*, *The Fib Review*, and *The Horror Zine*. He lives on Hilton Head Island in South Carolina. Follow him on Twitter @GregoryELucas

David Hanlon - *Walking Home at Night*

David Hanlon is a poet from Cardiff, Wales. He is a Best of the Net nominee. You can find his work online in over 50 magazines, including Rust & Moth, Kissing Dynamite & Homology Lit. His first chapbook Spectrum of Flight is available for purchase now at Animal Heart Press. You can follow him on twitter @davidhanlon13 and Instagram @welshpoetd

Fizza Abbas - *A Dark Night*

Fizza Abbas is a writer based in Karachi, Pakistan. She is fond of poetry and music. Her work has appeared in more than 90 journals, both online and in print. Her work has also been nominated for Best of The Net and shortlisted for Oxford Brookes International Poetry Competition 2021. She has also authored two books, Ool Jalool (Fahmidan Publishing) and Bakho (Ethel Press). Aside from writing, she runs a YouTube channel where she interviews poets and zine editors. She tweets @fizzawrites.

Mark J. Mitchell - *Contraction*

Mark J. Mitchell has been a working poet for 50 years. He's the author of five full-length collections, and six chapbooks. His latest collection is Something To Be from Pski's Porch Publishing. He's fond of baseball, Louis Aragon, Dante, and his wife, activist Joan Juster. He lives in San Francisco

Michael Todd Steffen - *Two Mayflies*

Michael Todd Steffen is the recipient of a Massachusetts Cultural Council Fellowship and an Ibbetson Street Press Poetry Award. His poems have appeared in journals including *The Boston Globe*, *E-Verse Radio*, *The Lyric*, *The Dark Horse*, and *The Poetry Porch*. Of his second book, *On Earth As It Is*, now available from Cervena Barva Press, Joan Houlihan has noted *Steffen's intimate portraits, sense of history, surprising wit and the play of dark and light...the striking combination of the everyday and the transcendent.*

Richard Gessner - *Lucky Limulus*

Richard Gessner is the author of "The Conduit and other Visionary Tales of Morphing Whimsy", Rain Mountain 2017. An audiobook of same title, narrated by Richard Gessner, was published on Amazon 2021. He has work published in Black Scat Review 24, Fiction International, Skidrow Penthouse, Seimundwerden, Air Fish, Another Chicago Magazine, et al. Forthcoming in Dreams & Nightmares.

Angela Arnold - *And Another Strange Thing*

Angela Arnold lives in North Wales and is also an artist, a creative gardener and a campaigner. Her poems have appeared in print magazines, anthologies and online, in the UK and elsewhere. Her collection *In|Between* is about 'inner landscapes' and relationships (Stairwell Books, 2023). She enjoys her synaesthesia and language/s and is currently learning Welsh.

Lee Clark Zumpe - *Where We Were*

Lee Clark Zumpe, an entertainment editor with Tampa Bay Newspapers, earned his bachelor's in English at the University of South Florida. He has been writing since the early 1990s. His work has appeared in publications such as *Tiferet*, *Zillah*, *The Ugly Tree*, *Modern Drunkard Magazine*, and *Main Street Rag*. Lee lives in Florida with his wife and daughter. Visit www.leeclarkzumpe.com

Sugar de Santo - *Reality and I Beheld*

Sugar de Santo (he/him), is a gay/queer, German, disabled, retired visual artist and poet from Berlin, Germany. Sugar owns a BA in Art History (Sister Corita), and has written poetry, prose and short stories for over 10 years. He started his creative work with paper collages, which have appeared in many magazines online, like "Alien Buddha Press", "The Writers Club", "Beaver Magazine", "Spiritus Mundi" and many more. You can find him on his social media via Twitter and Insta: [sugar_de](#)

Justice inspired my high exalted
sakes

was created by the Might divine,

the highest Wisdom and the primal
Love.

Before me there was naught created

eternal things, and I eternal last;

all hope abandon, ye that enter here.

These words of gloomy color I beheld

inscribed upon the summit of a gate

whence I: "Their meaning, Teacher

troubles me."