



# Last Leaves

Issue 3 | Fall 2021



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*Last Leaves: Issue 3*

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Edited and compiled by Cailey Thiessen, Kiera Baron, and Maina Chen

Cover design by Kiera Baron

## Note from the Editors

MASKS has perhaps been our most thorough issue yet. We got the most submissions, both art and poetry, that we've ever received. It was a pleasure to read each and every one. The last year and some change has been overwhelming in many ways. *Last Leaves* was born from a need to fill space, to fill time. We loved coming up with a theme that took the focus off of the fabric we've been wearing over the last year and put it on the ones we hide and the ones we observe. Thank you for lending us your words and your time. Above all, thank you for being here.

~*Last Leaves* Editors  
Kiera S. Baron, Maina Chen, & Cailey Johanna Thiessen



## Content Warning

Some poems in this book contain content that may be sensitive to some readers. Each of these poems will be marked with the above symbol next so you'll be able to tell which ones have potentially triggering content.

Please read at your own discretion.

At *Last Leaves*, we understand how reading sensitive content can not only affect our daily lives but our mentality and overall state-of-being. Please take care of yourselves, and take breaks reading the content if you need.

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Be Mine Coronavirus

*Lorette C. Luzajic*

## MASKING

*Daniel W.K. Lee*

Here, where old ways  
cling like chromosomes,  
the pageantry of feathers,  
beads, rhinestones,

paint and procession,  
(sometimes called Mardi Gras Indians,  
bal masqué, jazz funeral,  
sometimes Saints game,

protest, or Pride)  
are not artifice, but truer faces  
fashioned—exquisite, liturgical—  
to deliver us home.

## Masks

*Glen Armstrong*

The doubts masquerade  
as certainties,  
which show up again as service fees  
near the property border  
that I share  
with a relatively quiet drug dealer.

I doubt sometimes  
that he's anything more  
than a thirty-year-old retiree  
whose television  
is a little too loud  
in the summertime when the windows  
tend to be open,  
and whose flower garden is a little  
too perfectly manicured.

I don't mind the weird  
children who play in the vacant lot,  
making headbands out of American  
flags and invisible people  
out of invisible clay.

## Liminality

*Melody Wang*

**i.**

The two of you had gone to bed in the early evening. You awake uneasily to an empty room with no idea of the time or when she'd gone. The covers are a crumpled heap on the floor and the din of the city isn't helping your growing migraine. You squint in the gloom, thumb and forefinger squeezing your temples to no avail.

**ii.**

She could be so engaging at moments, head thrown back in that carefree way of hers, peals of laughter escaping her slim neck. You'd think the world was suddenly right again and that this time, you could truly escape — just the two of you.

**iii.**

Without warning, her other side would emerge, the one she could not part with. She would become a careless whirlwind leaving behind remnants for someone else to deal with — overturned books, haphazard piles of clothes, opened bottles of coke that were still full.

**iv.**

You linger on the top step, a bit muddled still from your earlier exploits, the fragmented memory coming back to you in spurts. The two of you had contemplated world events, haunting childhood experiences, the works of Hemingway and Heidegger while sipping strong bitter coffee offset by too-sweet truffles. Immediately afterward, you had gripped each other, laughing and stumbling into bed, content — or so you'd thought.

v.

You slowly descend the staircase, already resolving to let her go. She'd gone away from you before, remember? Too many times to count.

Yet, in the pause of your breath, there she is, sitting in the pale almost-light of the still room, endless legs sprawled out across the coffee table. The clinging charcoal-lace lingerie hardly does her justice, and neither does the clover cigarette she keeps bringing to her swollen lips. She doesn't see you. Then again, when does she ever?

**low tide**

*Melody Wang*

at the turning point, entities  
murmur dead-weighted names

even in the stillness of  
night, their cautious eyes

turn milky with unheeded  
warnings: you taunt gods

unaffected by intricate  
patterns of old to awaken

by northern winds. In the distance,  
a grieving voice is heard. Still —

given the chance to partake in this  
offering, you turn your face away.

## Returning to That Place

*Melody Wang*

It was as if you'd never left —  
a strange stillness in the room  
settles upon your berry-flushed skin  
and lingers like an old friend

You peer through the flimsy facade  
of evening's torn stockings — howls  
of familiars echo all around as time  
and space hold hands and breaths

A cold finger, heavy with the sticky sap  
of this season's last figs, brushes aside your hair  
to implant in your ear a hoarse whispered  
chant of all you had willed yourself to forget:

*If only we could savor this world  
before the soft distortion  
made us unrecognizable  
even to each other*



## A closed door

*Liliya Gazizova*

*Translated by Andrey Gritsman*

My upbringing was  
closed door to my parents' room.

This door saw me off to school.  
It met me and  
never asked any questions.

I tried to take offense,  
holding my tears.  
But the door was looking at me  
indifferently.

I was growing up, but the door  
would not open.  
I stopped looking at it and  
was not offended any more.

Since then  
I pass any closed door  
without stopping.

## Queen Mab

*Aaron Lembo*

Her teeth are jagged maple leaves.  
Her smile, the song of autumn.  
Raven-black locks curl thick  
atop her sleek, serpentine skull.

From behind a cloud of smoke  
she steps, then beckons,  
hand on tilted hip. I stand,  
rooted like the shadows

of willow boughs in summer;  
sunstroke; midday's wet dream.  
I recognise the smell of red onion,  
its scent clings to my fingertips.

I cock my aching neck, roll  
my elemental tungsten dome;  
asleep, in this lonely single bed.  
She dances like hibiscus, suggests

I stroke her floral dress, her  
alligator-skinned purse. Purr.  
She rides a chiselled stallion,  
minus saddle, through blue woods.

Running, out of breath, she  
laps me five times, easy;  
a different steed each time she flies.  
By a stream she paints a symphony.

## Fancy Dress Photo

*Aaron Lembo*

Emojis: lager, whiskey, laughter,  
orange cocktail with blue straw,  
red wine, cigarette, sunshine, masks:  
tragedy & comedy, dancing:  
red dress, purple suit, quaver, treble cleft,  
martini with pitted green olive,  
gin: Mother's Ruin (1721).

This isn't the Jazz Age,  
roaring 20's, Manhattan. This is  
us together, posturing, recalling,  
(our hands and dimples gesture)  
a time, many full moons ago.

No, I'm not Gatsby  
& no, you're not Daisy

but here we are smiling,  
dressed-to-the-nines,  
posing for a pic, side by side.

## The Journey of a Monk

*Gideon Okpeta*

Today, a saint has traipsed out of the church,  
wearing a white garment into heaven, for a rest.  
The sky is heavy with cloud of books, celestial books  
leaping off records, as many stage a bawl across streets,  
leaving dust on every corner.  
How else do a white garment console you,  
how else do i write, tell of a beautiful time spent altogether,  
when pilate is here to nail you to a crucifix,  
Today, you dress like a Monk who's in Rome, somewhere  
in Vatican, a lover raids his voice on the street.  
He wails, "Return If Possible."  
Somewhere, at the end of his voice, an angel peeps  
and takes his lament with a pen.  
Before Jordan's River, another friend sits, perhaps with  
a mirror to reflect his life, as to guard his walk down the  
streets of life.

## Homefront

Bruce McRae

*There but for the grace of God go I,*  
housebound to the miller's daughter,  
at the beck and hue of a childish wawl,  
a cuckold to myriad summers.

Beauty fades, a contracted print,  
our faces wasted as autumn's bramble.  
On mattresses of madder and bedstraw,  
bodies turn from ague to ache,

old hubbies proving little worth,  
our crowns slipped over a jaded brow  
and ancient passions fetched in honour.  
We are sore and surly now and mean to perish.

## Free Time

*Bruce McRae*

I was writing something  
nasty on the jailhouse wall,  
crows walking across my mind,  
despair knotting its kerchief.

You can leave anytime you like,  
the warden said in passing,  
his every word a bolus of dirt,  
each step he took a bell tolling.

Sunlight dappled the bars of my cell.  
Birdsong wafted in a valley,  
all else being intangible  
and impossible to tally.

## Famished

*Bruce McRae*

On the menu is barbed wire  
sautéed in heartless tyrannies.  
The bloodied linens of the Visigoth.  
Tongues of the vanquished, broiled,  
with a side order of children sobbing.  
And salads of inexpressible horrors.

Today's menu includes bandage soup,  
served drawn and quartered.  
Knife pie, with a shotgun topping.  
Visceral stew and smashed-mouth bread.  
And the special, baked heads and hands,  
which are, we think, to die for.

## WHULGE

*Daniel W.K. Lee*

The sound entombs  
the old gods' bones.

Pitchers—in a procession—  
brought pieces of the ocean

to the burial pit.  
Generations tossed in

their faith like flowers.  
Without their clavicles

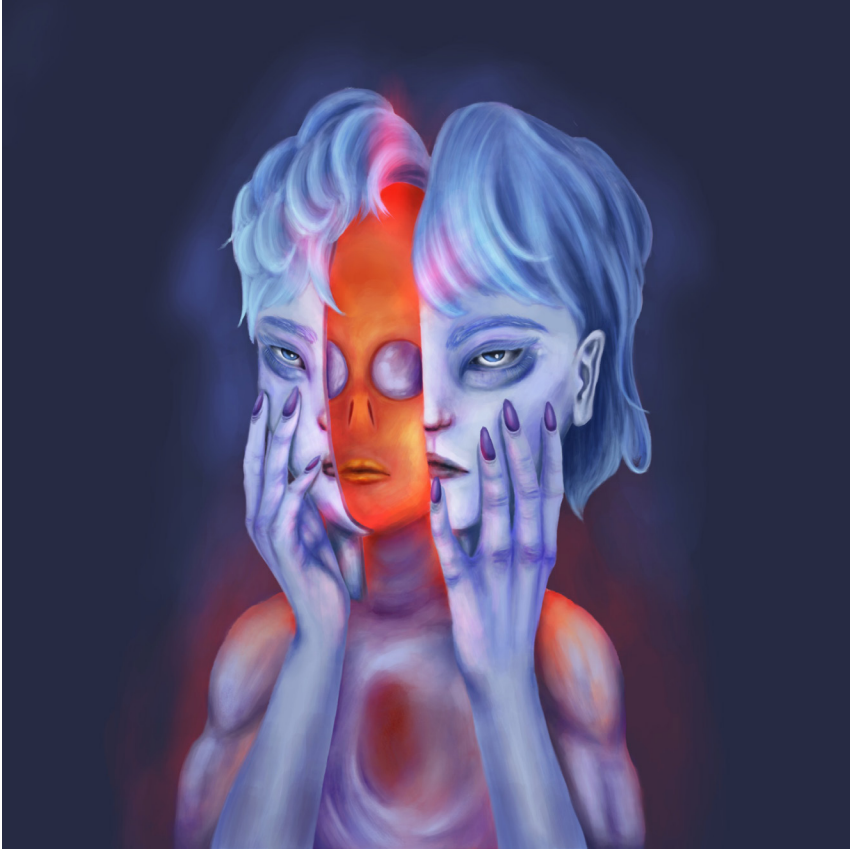
or shoulder blades buckling  
under the bulk of prayers,

this Emerald City is bereft  
of thunder. A murder of new gods

witnessed, thankful  
to be unburdened

by bodies, but no less  
vulnerable to water.





Masks  
*Andrew Feng*

## **Blind Alley**

*Michael Igoe*

Our master Caesar  
wilting in sunlight  
makes other vows.  
The patient maker  
of the past master  
connects to climate  
without permission.  
Caesar stays outdoors,  
smells ripened melons.  
They waft towards him,  
on a pitchman's breeze.  
We're furnished us in,  
what we need is gold.

Poetry, say

*Allan Lake*

This is my life, with watery surname  
where slippery fish reside. I'm waiting –  
without bated breath – for a bite  
but content to just cast a line,  
stare into depths, look for cod-knows-  
what. You never know what lurks below  
or above the fickle surface but if shark  
or sardine decides to engage and tussle,  
you stand or sit ready. Amused Nature  
nudges when it suits and if you're awake,  
not distracted by a thousand other things,  
you may reel in a beauty;  
*that is when real work begins.*

## Look Here Please

Mark Simpson

You see their photographs after all  
the misfortune has settled out,  
their countenance a wary peace still  
holding all the past.

And you want to be like them,  
the misfortune past.  
You want to settle down into  
the fineness of the aftermath,

boat past rapids running on  
smooth river now.  
Still, their faces betray hard times—  
it's something in their eyes

and you want it, pain and mercy, grief  
and forgetfulness strapped to some great  
wheel while the photographer readies her  
camera and says *look here please*.

## The Neurotic's Song

*Mark Simpson*

I wake to phone calls I sometimes answer,  
deciding being in servitude to vague mistakes.  
I wake to spleen, its astounding green  
a phantasmagoria of the probable,  
cold aspic eaten with a spoon.

All mistakes are about to happen.  
I give them careful thought.  
They are the smears and rinds of ache.

I regret the scapegoat  
and the sky at two a.m.  
I regret the scrap bin of the end  
and its vagueness. Even broken,  
it threatens to begin again.

## The Outsiders, Fort St. John

*Robin Susanto*

Maybe it's because they are deaf  
to what is loud that they can hear  
clearly what is soft, the sigh  
of grass bending toward evening,  
the outright speech in the white of aspens.

They have come into our city,  
up and down our alleys, picking up  
the broken glass of our noise, as if it was litter,  
from our yards we thought were green,  
the jobs we dream by,  
the grinding that grinds us into gear:  
things they tie into bundles  
and light with matches as if they were sweet grass.

Look how they address the trees as if they could hear,  
the standing ones who are silent with so much.  
Earth is mother, river is life,  
blood that courses through us only until it returns.

And the animals, who want so much to believe,  
are holding their breath, the moose who  
have lent the grey of their shadow to the  
not-quite night north of solstice, the jays with  
their jewels, lifted from the shine of twilight's cloak  
and are ready.  
One sign of life, and they would step  
into the circle upright and singing.

The outsiders are praying until the air prays with  
them,  
voices that climb on the drums' steady beats  
like feet up flights of stairs.  
They are not praying for things to rise from the  
ground,  
(It's too late for that)  
but for the ground itself to rise,  
indigenous among things that are not yet.

And we who are indigenous nowhere,  
we who can't hear because we are not deaf  
to what is loud,  
we who don't pray  
are suddenly holding our breath with the animals.

## UNTIL THE BONES ARE LAMB, A SONG

*Robin Susanto*

The city I'm wearing has left its clothes  
The skin I dream in has torn its sheet

This is my body  
The being inside of thoughts that walks  
The outer brain on a grid you can't defy

The oil they have raised  
Has gone mad  
Mad that they are not left for dead  
Mad that birds are not made of flames  
And flames don't burn like words

This is my body

The oil that has laid its flesh  
Lewdly on the whitest of your beaches  
Spilled fossil that can't find its bones

This is my body  
The house the wind has cleared  
To make room for a new winter

A stutterer recites my heart  
At the tip of blood where the labyrinth runs out of turns  
Where the drummer is beating faster than the bars  
And the open chest won't close its breath  
The systole and diastole that swell past the limit of their tides

This is my body  
Broken until the bones are lamb



The feeling roads that intersect under my clothes  
Are building a monument to storm  
Where the butterflies are packed so tightly into the clay  
That nothing else is flesh

This is my body  
(A phallus marks the spot)

I am not the first of my heart's beats  
Nor will I be the last  
But maybe it's time I go over to its side of the drum

What rattles the cage is not rattling  
To get itself out  
But to get me in

This is my body  
Broken until the bones are lamb



**Master of None**  
*Director: Vasudha Rungta*  
*Cinematographer: Viraj Singh*

## The Joker

*Joan McNerney*

That playing card running wild  
with royalty. Blending straights,  
changing suits in a flash.

His checker board waistcoat  
bedazzling us, making us  
dizzy with longing.

Then again meaningless,  
muddled in the deck. Another  
bad hand, dealing more trouble.

Light on his toes poised  
to leap sky high.

Ambidextrous in more ways  
than one. Juggling and  
spinning spangles in air.

A picture of deceit...  
slippery smile plastered  
over his mask.

Cowering yet flushed with  
treachery. Sly yellow eyes,  
green spangled pantaloons.  
What trick is he up to now?

## Eleventh Hour

*Joan Mc Nerney*

Wrapped in darkness we can  
no longer deceive ourselves.  
Our masks are gone.  
We snake here, there  
from one side to another.  
How many times do we rip off  
blankets only to claw more on?

Listening to zzzzzz of traffic,  
mumble of freight trains, fog horns.  
Listening to wheezing,  
feeling muscles throb.  
How can we find comfort?

Say same word over and over  
again again falling falling to sleep.  
I will stop measuring what was lost.  
I will become brave.

Let slumber come covering me.  
Let my mouth droop, fingers tingle.  
Wishing something cool...soft...sweet.  
Now I will curl like a fetus  
gathering into myself  
hoping to awake new born.

## Shadows of the Heart

Joan McNerney

The night you died, I screamed at the doctor,  
wanted to swallow every pill in my house.  
Felt cold, cold falling in black hole.

Wind chill dipped to 35 below. I long  
to visit the Virgin Mary, ask her help.  
Mounds of snow stand in my way.

I say prayers staring at the Renoir print  
of a dancing man. He reminds me of you.  
So handsome.

Everything is a charade and I must wear a mask.

*Searching for you in shades of sorrow  
through shadows of the heart.*

Threw food out, bread too hard to chew.  
Shut the radio off, so many love songs.  
Can't remember what I read.

The mechanic talks about  
changing fluids in the car.  
I strain to listen.

I gaze at trees for hours. Can they reveal  
something to me? Even if I find perfect words,  
would the pain be quiet?

## INSIDE A GROTESQUE

*Ojo Olumide Emmanuel*

this poem is a painting on a canvass  
the colours are nude with inanities.  
take this poem as a girl  
running away from her lover-  
like Keats 'ode to a grecian urn'  
lovers cut themselves into distances  
yet the heart is the farthest distance---in loneliness.  
like rain patting humans on their shoulders  
in a sleek rum for summer  
everything hidden behind the cloak  
finds a way of telling time;  
"I'm here, come get me"  
how true must truth be to be true?  
grieves hidden on cold nights turns the heart, an oven  
joy hidden inside the cheeks wobbles the face  
& for every emotion soaked in a bucket with detergent  
only a whitewashed, white-faced & ironic face-  
be expected.



## Cucumber. Cheese. Vodka.

*Callie S. Blackstone*

That night was the night of men  
trying to get me drunk. We took vodka shots  
in the traditional manner of some Eastern  
European country: cucumber, cheese,  
vodka. My thesis professor, an expert on said country,  
told us what vodka translated into in said Eastern  
European language. Something like  
fire or water: some primal element. I was too drunk  
to understand

words. You counted the shots I took  
on your fingers, your toes. You whispered to me  
you didn't like it. You told me you didn't like  
what he was doing. You told me you didn't like  
him. The perverted professor,  
his star student, the pornographic scenario.  
You didn't like it, and you would have  
protected me. But you didn't, and you never told me  
why. Instead, you sat there,

skinny, eating borscht. Cucumber, cheese,  
vodka. You sat behind me in the bathroom while my body  
regurgitated these elements into the toilet. You sat there  
while I couldn't get up for an hour. I watched  
the hands spin on a clock, each one echoing  
through my head. I watched your hands  
move to hold back my hair, stroke  
my neck, brush vomit off my mouth.

At the gas station, you bought me a gatorade  
with your last five bucks. I drank. The rim reeked of vomit.  
I could barely continue, my stomach churned.  
And when we got to your house, you had me drink  
gatorade

and lift my shirt.



## The vase my rapist left behind

*Callie S. Blackstone*

came in a large, white box.  
It was green, three stripes  
of green, which descended  
lightmediumdark

It overflowed  
with heavy, fragrant lilies—  
the ones he gave me at the end  
of our date-- the most beautiful,  
perfumed flowers.

And I drove home, looking  
at those flowers, smiling  
at those flowers,  
smiling brightly into the dark



## Trickster God

Callie S. Blackstone

In the dream, my ex-boyfriend wears my  
boyfriend's skin. If I slice through  
the layers, I will find another man--  
my father. He just loves masquerading  
as my lovers; his anger howls down the decades  
from the mouths of numerous men.

This time he's angry because I left  
the litter-box overflowing.  
He humiliates me in front  
of an audience, it escalates, he's dangerous,  
he's big, he's loud, he's flashing terror.

He may wear many faces,  
but I can recognize his voice anywhere

*I'm the only man you'll ever need*

## Erasure

*Callie S. Blackstone*

### I.

The bottle is unscrewed. Out falls sunshine.  
A high that will never wear out. Voices that will never stop singing,  
and heralding your arrival. You will rise.  
Your feet will never graze the ground.  
Your flesh will remain lily white and clean.  
Happiness will roll on your tongue as the sun moves through the sky.

### II.

A simple, innocuous bottle.  
It can be found on shelves in any number of stores.  
Innumerable labels scream out negative effects in bold red.  
Yet, the pills sit there, looming larger and larger. Hypnotizing. Tantalizing.  
The word consequence tastes foreign on your tongue.  
You step into temptation like a threadbare coat.  
You wear happiness and a smile.

### III.

Your features stripped away, your body, a gaping hole.  
People walk through where you stand and shudder,  
wondering if someone walked across their grave. Meanwhile,  
there you are—or there you are not. You never existed, a black hole.  
Your heart is a dark one. Nothing can grow out of a rocky ground.  
There was no one to plant you, to hold you in the warmth of their hands,  
to water you with their tears. You, the black hole that blossomed.

### IV.

The light burns low and the bottle lies empty.  
You have become transparent, empty, a rattling chasm,  
a cavern you pack with cotton in a futile attempt to soak up pain.  
You will leach into your environment until you are dead,  
the dark wet soil unable to absorb your poison.  
Toxic. The flowers no one planted on your grave will die.

## Mars

*John Muro*

Along with your desperate hunger  
For a longer life, you kept well-hidden  
The alien river that carved a channel  
Into the bedrock of your chest.  
Though tonight, light refracts  
Thru your fluted glass and forms  
Another, smaller stream – a dwindling  
Tributary where color drains from  
Your throat down into the hollow  
Ventricles of your heart – calling to  
Mind the cold canals that scar the  
Surface of Mars, having carried lightless  
Water but now shepherd only powdered  
Sediment in the coldest of winds.

## Opaque

*John Muro*

Fog sets out  
In slippered feet,  
Sleepwalker slow,  
And with hands  
Released from ice  
Pushes away from up-  
Right stones, grazing  
Shoulder-high reeds  
And climbing stealthily  
The shag-bark and  
Smudge of conifers;  
Landlocked, it drifts  
Downward to finish  
Its final tasks: latching  
Attic windows, closing  
Porch doors and  
Staining the splintered  
Garden gate before  
Dutifully shaking  
Out the bed-sheets,  
Folding the last of  
The laundry, and  
Then settling, heart-  
Sick and apron-poor,  
Upon the landing,  
Trying to recall the  
Time of day, the  
Season and what else  
Remains to be done.

## Overshadowed

*John Maurer*

Too dumb to know what's good  
Too smart to give a shit  
I don't know if I've given up  
Or if maybe I haven't even started trying yet

To be human is to be agonized from the inside  
The strength to wake up and continue this surprise journey  
I respect, even if you don't respect me  
I wish I could respect myself but I'm not sure who that is

I am a thousand masked faceless inferno  
The eternally burning trash cans and the restless hands  
I come from a place where words are what we eat  
And sleep is not a right but a privilege

Where death isn't feared but welcomed  
Where we look for purpose in an online shopping cart  
Or maybe at the bottom of a whiskey bottle  
Or we give up on finding it altogether and fold into the blind

## A Funeral/A Wedding

John Maurer

Every poem is about love and death  
Or the love of death  
Or dying for love

If a street magician self-mutilates it is a ribbon cutting, a celebratory ceremony  
Disjointing disappointment into anointed ointment; smear it in my eyes like  
leprotic mud masks  
Inhabit electromagnetic tape; patch pipe and listen to the secrets of the  
ocean's mechanic pulse

I hear a stranger died and feel like it's a loss in the family  
I am surrounded by my family and feel like a stranger  
You can't believe that I don't believe anything, but I can believe that

*Let's leave it at that*, but no one in pain forgets about it  
like when you're in it, you can't see anything else  
like the closet where they place my skeleton when tidying up

The flesh yet peeled, but soon enough, they wouldn't be surprised  
They don't come to my birthday parties; I don't go to theirs  
Taught that if my hand makes me sin, I should cut it off

When my thoughts make me sin and I try to cut off my head, they say  
I've already lost it



Coronavirus Heart Attack  
Lorette C. Luzajic

## a woodpecker's delight

*Ilma Qureshi*

there is a dark branch  
shrouded in mist  
to which your mind can turn

i stand on a sheet of grass  
watering plants that whisper  
'nothing that is certain  
lasts'

wild grass standing proud  
will be weeded out  
nettles know their fate  
yet, bear no tale of self-pity  
no remorse

and yet there is a dark, glossy branch  
shrouded in mist  
to which your mind can turn

despite the sunflowers,  
honeyed with sunlight,  
dreamy  
and a bit dramatic

despite the grasshopper,  
that does not mind  
repeatedly falling  
failing  
to blend into grass



yet there is a dark, glossy branch  
shrouded in mist  
to which your mind can turn

forgetting that there is a dream-like beauty  
that lies beyond sight;  
white blades of water  
blinding sunlight  
a woodpecker's delight

## solace

*Ilma Qureshi*

each sunset  
two sparrows  
perch themselves on a wire  
whispering secrets to each other

escaping  
to lick some moments  
of solace

behind them, clouds hang, in indescribable beauty  
their edges glistening in silver  
like a bouquet neatly packed

in a moment, the sky  
will be empty, almost clean of all color  
ready to birth

in another, it will turn grey  
laying a blanket  
in anticipation of rain

outside, the workers are not aware  
of the feast nature has planned  
they water trees,  
listening to Indian songs  
on their cell phones  
laying bricks, giggling, poking fun at each other

just like nature, arriving  
to do their task, playful and full of laughter,  
then departing quietly, once the work is done.

## Litha

Susan Cossette

It's not dangerous to play with fire,  
you are insured.

White-robed dryad dancing barefoot at midnight,  
daughter of the oaks circling the flames,  
driving away dragons with your magic words.

You satisfy the sun god,  
his face mirrored in a thousand green masks,  
The earth tilts on its axis  
the sun stands still, and then turns back.

*The day of the Lord of Light*

*The dying of the old order*

*The rising of the new*

*The beginning of the end*

No one will believe you escaped to the woods on your own.  
They will say you fell into the inferno.  
No one will believe you stepped down on your own.  
They will always say you fell.

## I Tried to Be a Bond Girl

*Susan Cossette*

Slinky black satin dress, fake diamonds,  
a hint of cleavage, the bold red lip.  
Bring it on, you secret agents and covert spies.

I tried to smile, make small talk,  
replete with scintillating clever innuendo,  
and stand, just so.

I tried to be a Bond Girl,  
until the patent-leather kitten heels hurt,  
and my panty girdle began the slow roll downward.

It was existentially exhausting,  
holding my breath,  
my midsection, and my words in.

I left it, and the whole business of being fabulous  
to the professionals.  
I won't wake up tomorrow with a bad hangover, spray-painted gold,  
cold and mute.

## Rancho Mirage by Bike

*Mark Tulin*

This morning I explored  
my new home in Rancho Mirage  
I peddled past succulents  
and dusty roads  
Past tennis courts  
and sprawling golf courses  
and splintered light  
coming through Palm trees

I don't know how long  
I'll be in this wealthy town,  
don't know if I can afford it  
I ride with a sweaty brow,  
finding nooks of beauty,  
people with great fortune,  
lizards who thrive in an arid land,  
and California ranches with solar panels

I smile at the roadrunners,  
skimming across swimming pools,  
over gold statues on Rolls Royce hoods  
If only I can share these moments  
with the people who hide their faces  
behind big floppy hats,  
and diamond-studded masks  
If only I could make friends with the desert.

## Message from a Stranger

Mark Tulin

Was it because of my religion,  
a stranger punched me in the belly?  
I dropped to my knees and muttered,  
*damn gentile!*

It was my christening of sorts,  
introducing me to hate,  
a reminder that persecution still exists  
How a faceless man  
could take out his rage  
on a kid bouncing a ball against a step

After I caught my breath and dried my eyes,  
I wanted to run in the house  
and tell my mother  
to take me in her arms  
and assure me that life wasn't like this

Instead, I kept the pain to myself,  
concealed it from others,  
wrapped it in a disguise of goodwill  
and made believe  
the world was different.

## Aunt Marion

*Mark Tulin*

My Aunt Marion  
hid behind her fat,  
the adipose of regret,  
the blubber of a giant whale  
that swallowed Jonah  
in the sea of loneliness

My aunt stuffed her troubles  
in a king-size bag  
of Cheese Curls,  
watching black and white movies  
on Saturday night,  
daylight doubleheaders  
where no one seemed to win

And when she passed,  
all who knew my aunt were grim  
They remembered her kind face,  
the smile that didn't reflect  
the unhappiness,  
The guard she put up  
to protect her wounds  
The dark clouds that never burst.

## Bits and Pieces

*Antoni Ooto*

holding close life's bits and pieces  
in corners of his mind

it's more mood than exactness  
that persists

memories touch history  
in forgotten places—

wasting thoughts half alive in  
clock and calendar—waking to rain

he writes often  
when he shouldn't





unmasked belongings

*Alan Bern*

## The Eyes Have It

*Lynn White*

We have learned to smile with our eyes,  
we children of the masked generation.  
You're smiling too underneath,  
you've learned that trick,  
but can you see my smile?  
Well, only if I let you,  
what you see is up to me  
for the eyes are all we have,  
we children of the masked generation.  
And we see you all  
unmasked  
exposed.  
We read you well  
as we smile with our eyes.  
We know who you are.  
We know what you are  
behind your shields,  
under your visors  
we know  
that the eyes are all we have.

## Disappearing Acts

*Molly Kilduff Greer*

No one tells you about the others.

The porcelain dolls  
with rosy cheeks  
and painted smiles.

They've all gone mute now,  
in case you hadn't noticed.  
They walked themselves right into the kiln  
and got fired to a crisp,  
cemented in false joy.

Their fused ears can't hear  
the wails of broken hearts.  
Their marble eyes can't see  
the twitch before the tears fall.  
Their mouths are frozen  
in a vacant half smile –  
they don't have any words  
to fill the aching void.

They're untouchable,  
and everything is alright.

Squint your eyes  
and you can still see them  
through the pouring rain.  
They're wearing their tweed coats,  
tailored to a tee,  
huddled under their umbrellas,  
  
waiting for fair weather.

## Wine

*Stephen Page*

Pay monthly bills. Lunch with wife. Nap. Watch two episodes of T.V. series Orange Stone. Post Dad poems on social networks. Awake till 4 a.m. Edit Dad poems. Type one micro fiction about pandemic into computer.

The way to Integrity.

All the things I wanted to talk

to my father about.

Glasses for eyes.

Mask to breathe.

Chocolate for money.

Three more bottles in the trash.

## Strange Days Indeed

*John Sweeder*

Last night I watched fireflies flit freely  
in my backyard embracing summer's  
twilight torridity. As a child, I'd catch  
and confine those tiny blue ghosts  
with flickering light in a glass jelly jar  
and show the insect zoo to my parents  
before releasing the captives.

This morning I sat at my desk  
with a Covid mask and vial of hand  
sanitizer. Staring at my computer  
screen I tried to repress my lethargy  
by chatting on Zoom with distant  
siblings and kin and old friends  
whom today I can seldom hold close.

Like those quarantined fireflies  
of yesteryear, I feel imprisoned,  
with loved ones blinking at me  
like aliens from remote planets  
unable to touch (let alone embrace) me.  
Once upon a time, fireflies were freed.  
These are strange days indeed.

## Maskenfreiheit

Stephen Mead

*(The freedom conferred by masks)*

This one will suffice, the eyes nicely fitting  
with something like collagen smoothing each line  
behind the smile moisturizers pat precisely in place  
& all this a face life curtains the play of  
for those voiceovers off, taking charge of some scrim.

They descend like Dorian, not the portrait, but the presence  
so handsomely suited, a sound mummification with each conflict  
in diagnosis, & all that advice never sought.

Listening is the best performance, Oscar-winning,  
but not yet quietly mad, the large gaze lucid,  
though far away the whole time.

That escape is not perceived nor the running within  
of bulls at Pamplona, bulls who've seen red,  
wrestling with the haze of it to become the pink  
of blossom's raining, the white cotton  
of Poplar's angel fluff.

It is a Summer of such lather drifting on warm breezes,  
the sun's gold a nimbus delicious to revel in  
& bathe in the obscurity of - light, light,  
to be anonymously radiant!

What voices are still chattering  
not reaching the length, even the proscenium's depth?

Transposing, the enormous secret life, is spot-lit adrift.

## Pandora's Looking Glass

*Stephen Mead*

is all that is inside this box.

It is not Wilde's symbolic painting worm-writhing with crimes  
as the asps of Medusa reflected in a sword.

Actually it is just the sadness that if ever let out  
would be so frightening as to shoot acid  
down the walls of the heart.

I have tasted it in the lacerations of every avoided beloved,  
every deflecting thought corroding.

They are all two-faced lies of whiteness bleaching the tongue  
raw with a memory-loss identifying only regret.

Could I ever not once be martyr perfect-enough,  
superhuman in virtue, selfless simply with love  
welling without end?

Could I not be the judge of anyone's history,  
having become that very circumstance  
& the shoes caught up with the blood of those times?

Oh, I look & look, my eyes filling with all I tried  
not to witness, my ears, Narcissus to Echo,  
drowned at last by what silence still heard.

You know I know the monsters outside & in  
we strive to hide to protect ourselves from,  
& how they rain in a parade of Mardi Gras masks,  
the day of the dead, the night of long knives,  
& the trees, the black forests too human with hooks.

You know. I know, but let's cover it with velvet  
& line it with sachets. Let us make a pretend pact, precious,  
only of pretty things sealed with a thrown away key  
to keep the lid on, the lid on  
whatever death shall not ever divide.



Untitled

*Jim Zola*



## Simple

*Stephen Mead*

Life really is that big tornado the cable channel advertises  
its video of in the whirlwind of your still living room.

Walk out & around—

Intimacy, immediacy even in the windows  
distant with yellow tongues of night song  
becoming perhaps the masks on Egyptian graves.

Golden time, maybe Etruscan, or the pearl-carved,  
faces of the calm smile, faces whose inward eyes  
have known betrayal's string & howling grief  
& chambers they may protect us from  
as we may do the same, dancing  
in our calm whirlwind of trouble simple  
as the richness of living ringing music  
through our skeletons.

Here, the sparkling tears of stars in our gazes,  
&, here too, feelings huge as the universe looking out for,  
looking out for the clue which is its own solution.

Be there. Enter, hover, you angel  
of flesh named by the blood beat, your own pealing bell;  
you, angel, just alive & just holding this page,  
the wonder of it: simple.

## Unpacking the Word

Tricia Knoll

*Languishing is a sense of stagnation and emptiness. It feels as if you're muddling through your days, looking at life through a foggy windshield.*

*And it might be the dominant emotion of 2021.*

—Adam Grant, *New York Times*, May 5, 2021

Choose from roots of languish—

Old French: listless, loose or lax, lament

Middle English: faint or feeble.

Dig into languishing. Rip it to pieces for words nestled inside –  
anguish, lashing, lunging.

Find slang—long haul gaining.

Or fear—lungs inhaling, ailing.

A mask-sigil at gulags signals our sighing,  
hails a sag of aging. Gangs of nuns sling  
hauls of ash. Shun the snug of gigs.

What we weren't saying: laughing. We sing sin with gin.  
Shining nigh, hanging in for hugs.

## Let's Meet Again

Tricia Knoll

*Let's meet again  
when this clears up. Perhaps*

*at the cheap hotel in Tours with yellow sheets  
by the fire in Big Sur that crackled with pine cones  
on the red deck chair we fought over  
near the sign to Moonshadow, rotting under time  
where the vendor sells orange popsicles  
inside the smell of maple bacon  
where Celtic music plays on the porch of a cabin in the Arctic  
in the fifth row of the theater playing Red Balloon  
on that dance floor in La Jolla near the ocean  
under the candlelight of an ancient Roman stone church  
where we know the difference between damn and dam  
on the path you built of stone and gravel  
where tools hang exactly as they are supposed to  
where your grandchild made you a picture with glued macaroni  
not too close to the boulders on the warm day the snakes come out  
in the rear pews near the exit*

*so you can see the full moon through my skylights  
as fear drains out of our masks and puppies lick it up like syrup*

## Siblings on a Sleigh

Alison Jennings

We can't see who took this picture,  
or how near are other roads or houses,  
to threaten or to save these children.

We may think  
this family is well-cared for.

We may hope  
they will be forever young.

The big lie  
is that the waiting world  
will welcome them, will soften  
its demands, melt  
from the X-ray vision  
of their innocent eyes.

Hugs and smiles are masking glimpses  
of their wariness, only showing  
on the youngest face—  
she is too new  
to know how to dissemble  
happiness on cue before a camera.

I bear signs of some survival skills:

an old soul peers out from behind  
my hooded eyes—  
I have seen the future,  
*and it's not a posed Polaroid.*

## Dead Rabbit

*Celia Lisset Alvarez*

*for Ann*

Morning breaks in a new sorrow.  
There, at the edge of their property,  
the white rabbit, decapitated.  
It is not a sight for children,  
and so she must gather up the parts—  
the head, the hind quarters, one foot missing—  
without any thought for its life.  
The rabbit had caught her eye once or twice,  
darting here and there among the sea grass,  
given a woodsy air to the beach boulevard,  
her and the box turtle named Priscilla.  
She had fancied herself a little Marjorie,  
Kinnan Rawlings, Stoneman Douglas;  
bought a floppy hat,  
a guide to birdwatching.  
This morning, their neighbor's dog  
had other plans. Resting her elbows  
on the picket fence, the gardening gloves  
stiff with dirt, she supposes Priscilla  
will be next, surprised, one day, as well,  
mid-lawn, mid-morning, by  
her own foolishness.

## Broken Landings

*Hester L. Furey*

No one is home  
when the mind's eye opens.  
Maybe a bird outside the window:  
chickadee, chickadee, chick chick chick.  
A small black presence  
uncurls warmth from the spine.  
Residual aches of grinding teeth,  
a crick spread from neck  
to shoulders, a thought:  
find money for rolfing.  
I miss touch, solvency,  
days not blue.  
On the ceiling the sun  
makes three small kites.  
I remember my open heart.  
It smiles at me from dreams,  
reminds me to breathe.



Grey Tabby  
*Cheryl Caesar*

## The Breadth Between

*J. C. Dudley*

The breadth between the breath and the mask can  
House a hundred thousand contingencies:  
A grin not knowing when the grin began,  
A tongue sticking out at all enemies,  
Chapsticked lips smacking like ping pong balls,  
A murmured “I love you” out of earshot.  
Your voice reverberates beyond the walls  
And ensnares my heart in tightly wound knots.  
Internal masks, biological clocks,  
They ground us, protect us, reason with us  
We know when to don them, when the door locks  
But your timbre is a mighty chorus  
That transcends the vast breadth of the façade  
To the man behind the mask, I must applaud.



## Mansion Villanelle

*Sam Moe*

The room is a golden peach. Quietly, we circle  
one another around the empty table. I lock  
eyes with you, once, before the sky opens purple

and we drift towards the others. Soon I'll burgle  
my diamond-heart into the lining of my coat. Lock  
the room, slice the moldy peach. Quietly, I circle

iced statues who reach out their hands, my aortal  
a set of cymbals, a scared lemon bird with bedrock  
eyes. Only with you, once, before the sky opens purple,

I'll tell you what I've hidden behind. The purpose  
of the game is to keep me alive, a gummy shock  
to the golden peach, my replacement heart. It's quiet,

we circle one another around the mansion. A mud turtle  
dreams about storms in an oil painting. There you are, look  
at how your eyes open once, meet mine, torture

the statues, command wallpaper to the grounds. A flock  
of alarms open their mouths on my skin. I almost faint, lock  
the paintings, walls will disintegrate quietly. We echo and circle,  
eyes pulsing with blue and grey. At once, the sky opens.

## Name

Sam Moe

(a double-villanelle)

To say my name is to make a trade, take your favorite salted lungs, the *damnit* I witnessed, your mother's piano, bring me your toughest tissue walls and I'll take what I can get these days I'm not gentle with my palm-against palm but I'll be gentle for you. I'm replaced on the report card with too-pink hearts, to write my name is to make a trade, I take my favorite words and use them against my reflection        I design a scotch-tape black-light flashlight with sharpies to beg back old scars. They're gone. Me, I'm tough, no tissue walls, I'll take what I can safely hold these days, though I suppose the rumor is I've been unsafe in the sun roof of your beautiful car, you can't have my name unless you help me steal my name, to say it is to make a trade, I'll take your word for it, that my true self will be safe with you—but just the word for it—my name—is a street-vendor's wax paper grasp of a soft pretzel and to write my name is to threaten me with salt in my favorite wound or perhaps you'd like my name to fetch fish from the pond, unaware I can understand your arguments are just fodder for poetry, say my name wake me up from the trade take the letters to your favorite hero store, wrap me up in tough cotton-candy walls, I'll take what I can wrap up in tinfoil these days, I'm not tough or New-York-City-hotdog good, I'm palm and smudge scar cheek, my name's a tear, an unsuitable, trade, favorite moment to hear my-self in your stories is when you're calling me out for not admitting the truth soon enough, the way you say *Sam, just say it*, and my name becomes a threat on your tongue, a trade between two people in unequal friendship, and once he called me sweet-pea and I thought, fuck *Sam* now *Sand* now *Sugary* now

I'm telling you my name will wake the burnt-birds, take my words, it's a terrible idea, a trade my unlabeled want soft-spot, I pretend that I'm not a rumor, I tell everyone I meet that I'm pristine sun, I'm private and tough risks, I'm climbing the garden wall to take these stupid birds into my own hands, no I mean wrists, that's not right either I mean I take a leap and almost trip into the star-freckled pool, I am gonna write my name like I'm cooler than you are, gonna rip the truth out like splinters, favorite words of stress-balls and spun cinnamon buns that open the late-night-kitchen-for-me name, I'm not gentle with the screen door but I'll be gentle for you. Hand me your toughest tear remedy, I'm gonna take what I've got and hide the note in one of those shiny and stainless-steel pots at your station. Worst case scenario you find out the truth, best case scenario we make a trade and I turn angel hair into gold.



Playing Dead Won't Make a Saint  
*Janina Karpinska*

## laugh or scream?

*Clay Waters*

let the crazed gaze  
blocked by a careless wave  
hold its secret tight

let the girl shaking the pennant be living  
or dead  
the hallway shadow sheltering its secret

keep the nude's smile ambivalent  
replace the black strip  
so the past stays masked  
as a face lingers upon a snipped-out lover  
or the void

The god of these gaps:  
a lens large enough  
to take us all in

cursing us  
to miss nothing

**water**

*Osy Mizpah Unuevho*

this morning the singing was seasonal: an awakening into the  
kind  
of tongue that reveals your heart as edge of many persons in  
thirst— a sea wave collective

myself, lime seed today, learned  
the tangibility of objects & dreams  
daylight clothing of  
all my dragons with the water &  
rock till each one is born again, a  
torch-lit essay of purpose, where  
the divestment of my spirit should  
begin

## towards transmutation

*Osy Mizpah Unuevho*

*we have eaten the world and mean to keep  
swallowing*

—*Kerri Webster*

it comes, like old memory issues of beauty &  
scar,  
this break-down of your searching for what takes  
over the space should you cut out, the wolf-  
beliefs  
in your chest & the street.

i dream where the writings are only  
open-ends of destiny present— saying,  
this person is/was  
an emotive prophecy of little ravished  
kingdoms.

then where the sun met us, god says, all the men we  
have *too* loved have only made us idols of  
lust & limit; can we begin to go naked before him?  
say, beholding with opened-faces, what spark &  
colour of his voice we really are

## HIDING IS A DIRTY JOB

*Jean Fineberg*

My best friend's parents  
banned her from my bat mitzvah  
and took her to church

After they died,  
their hidden documents  
outed them as Jews

My college had 27 sororities -  
22 Christian, 5 Jewish,  
none lesbian

Nobody knew I was a lesbian  
I dated fraternity boys  
and hung out with townie girls

My father drove across town  
to a golf club where  
nobody knew he was a Jew

His brother Abraham  
became "Albert Christian"  
to get a job in the sewer

His overalls smelled  
of shit and methane  
and lived outside the garage

No amount of scrubbing  
could buy them  
a ticket indoors







## The Thing He Used: The Belt

*Karla Linn Merrifield*

The belt came out for stealing  
my brother's diving mask  
and breaking it. A long leather belt.  
Brown. An ordinary belt, J.C. Penny-issue,  
a belt constructed to hold up  
the Sunday dress pants of a man six- foot-tall  
and broad about the waist: hefty.  
A belt with a thick brass buckle built  
for welting. That belt, unmasked, that lashed out.

## First of all, manners

*Cat Dixon*

First of all, manners. Introduce me to your little friend with the cute little face please. I just assumed you had no friends except for pillowcases with Sharpie smiley faces and paper mâché giant heads that hide in your closet. Can I get a picture of you with that head on? Or video evidence that you and your little friend exist? If your puppet comes to life, why hide him a box? Comebacks are overrated. Go plan your next kickball tournament, go to In-N-Out for the fries—eat your guilt until you sink, go start a ruckus with your imaginary friends without names.

## Doppelgänger

*Evgeniya Dineva*

I'll bleach my hair strikingly blond,  
Borderline silver, or perhaps something in gold?  
I'll wipe out all traces of my real looks, of everything  
betraying where I come from.  
I'd paint my lips in bright red-  
an explosion of carnations  
in the middle of my face  
and everyone would have no choice but see it,  
look at it.  
It'll distract them from hearing my accent when I speak,  
from making jokes about my name  
from pointing at me and asking  
"Do you really have five sisters?"  
They'll press harder until shame stains my cheeks  
to make them the same color as my lips,  
my fingertips, my hairline.  
Until I'm a walking red stain-  
Red like my embarrassment,  
Red like my mother's bleeding nose after another encounter with my father.  
I'll pretend until I can no longer hide it.  
Because we say everything in life forms a full circle.  
It's not a circle. It's a noose,  
and it tightens its hold around our necks, around our vertebrae  
until we can no longer move,  
until I hear my bones crunching between the onlookers' teeth.  
until we acknowledge we can't trick blood,  
we can't lie about who we are.

## Prognosis

*Evgeniya Dineva*

The rain smells like soil,  
it grounds me down to the earth,  
and whispers in my ear things I don't want to be reminded of.  
It's quiet and the naturally lulling drumming on the rooftop,  
on the windows,  
on the thick leaves tricks me into thinking of peace.  
I prefer the sun with its bright light,  
blinding me and stopping me from seeing things  
for what they are.  
Not seeing everything is happiness.  
If emotions were the weather,  
then we'd find more comfort in sadness,  
we'd find it in the rain.  
Sorrow's not as whimsical as happiness.  
It's simply more reliable.  
They say happy people would never  
choose the grey sky over a sunny day.  
That means bad weather is loneliness.  
But I guess happy people don't care  
about the weather outside.

## The Glimpse

*John Hicks*

They were down-sizing onto lists:  
one for his new apartment;  
one for her to take;

last for the charity van.  
Picking up a plate, he said,  
*Mary always liked this.*

He'd used her name, not  
*Your mother mentioned,*  
or *Ask your mother.*

Today she was Mary. It was  
as if a door had opened  
like the swinging doors

that once closed off kitchens;  
doors that gave  
only a glimpse of the inside.

She turned, hoping for more.  
*Anyway, I thought you might want it.*  
*Your mother's favorite plate.*

## Where Does Morning Start?

*John Hicks*

Log book of a freighter leaving Cartagena?  
Burnished reflection from a Shelby County silo?  
Blue unfocused eyes lifting from your cell phone?

Or beneath this plastic mask covering my face  
silencing the brightness lamping overhead  
as the surgeon, leaning over, stitches in the light?

## Keeping the Inn

*Sheryl Guterl*

*Annesbrook, County Meath, Ireland*

An antique sign swings by one hook,  
marks the long and overgrown driveway  
of the inn where my friend and I will rest.  
We stop in front of an imposing façade.

Four gray columns support  
a peaked portico roof,  
arched windows, and glassed transom.  
Doorbell ring brings no answer, so we snoop.

Behind the structure  
older stone sheds, broken windows,  
discarded tools. A cat stretches,  
a scruffy dog barks, then limps away.

Within adjacent brick wall  
beyond unlatched iron gate,  
grow tangled roses, unpruned fruit trees,  
untamed weeds.

A tall granite column,  
without its crowning statue,  
rises at the center of a bubble-less fountain,  
focal point of former garden.

Specimen trees line the path  
from garden to house--  
tallest beech, oak, and chestnut,  
still strong amidst failed estate.

We ring again. Huge wooden door creaks open.  
Kate, unkempt hostess of 50 or 70 years, greets us



with “Oh dear. I was afraid it was you.” A frightful welcome, surprise to guests with reservations.

Kate opens the door wider, signals for us to follow her.  
The entryway holds a frayed sofa,  
a dried, split mahogany table, spent candle,  
and cracked plaster walls once painted bright red.

A wide stairway sweeps up past stained glass,  
through which jeweled light dances on rose walls.  
We follow the withered widow up to a closed door,  
which she unlocks with an antique iron key.

This aged manor house once hosted  
King George III, says the proud owner,  
who’s lived here since childhood,  
reared her children, admired her husband,

and worked to keep the home viable  
as a bed and breakfast for too long.  
Only memories of grandeur and glory remain  
amidst fallen stones and wild garden.

## The Loom of Fate

*Catherine A. Coundjeris*

### Part 1

Arachne, drunk on the nectar  
of the sweet plums of praise,  
boasted that the perfection of her art  
exceeded even the goddess,  
daring to enter a challenge to see whose  
art was indeed the best.  
The marble hands of Athena flew  
expertly over her loom,  
depicting the gods in their glory,  
but Arachne's dove-like hands flew  
with the warp and woof of her humanity  
and revealed the gods' amorous entanglements.  
Enraged for propriety's sake or on behalf  
of her own reputation,  
Athena savaged the work of Arachne  
And the maid in despair hanged herself.  
The huntress, moved to pity,  
transformed the maid.  
Her youthful beauty masked;  
her renowned weaving became webbing.  
And yet a dew bedecked web  
is truly stunning,  
and a garden protected by arachnids  
A miracle.

## Part II

We are fabulous like a string  
Of pearls in the morning light  
Around the downy neck of youth.  
Bourgeoning spirit and thirst for knowledge  
brimming full of all our potential destinations.  
Unwilling to settle down just yet into  
the ordinary route of there and back again  
Ready for glamorous expeditions into the event horizons  
Of other dominions.

We plummet the caverns of the earth  
And explore the limits of the heavens  
Testing the gods for a claim to their perfection.  
We toil with exultation and purpose  
Ever aware of our mortality as we race  
Onward towards the finish line.  
Doom is not so gloomy a proposition  
for those transported out of themselves.  
And so, we write our stories, as architects of words  
Crisscrossing between characters and  
Knitting together astounding tales  
from the stuff of imagination  
becoming other than ourselves,  
masks worn and discarded  
spinning beyond the orbit of our existence  
beside those toiling with their own webs.  
On this loom the fate of humanity  
is laid out like a holy sacrifice.

## Witches, Ghosts, and Goblins

*Catherine A. Coundjeris*

The birds of day bed down at night,  
tight round the hill the shadows play  
as the sun settles behind the mountain  
billowy clouds form airy fountains,  
steaked in purples, pinks and blues.  
Bird songs hush over the green hue  
of fern, oak, maple and birch.  
The feathered folk nestle down each on a perch  
hidden from view in a bush or on a limb.  
The skylark sings its soulful hymn.  
The black birds chatter and cavort.  
The starlings pass by in murmuring cohorts.  
Then as the gloaming ends, they disappear.  
The wings of night fold quietly far and near.  
The crescent moon rises on a cool navy sky.  
The birds will rest; no need to fly.  
Masked witches, goblins and ghosts come out,  
carrying their booty down the darkened route.  
A spider's web is in the way...  
they dance right through it but will not stay.  
They have their allotted tasks to do:  
Terrify some creatures scare up some brew.  
Unseen forces join in the parade  
well into the wee hours until the night fades.  
The birds awaken sing their songs of praise.  
Those shadow people taken to flight  
To come again on Halloween night.



## Open Mouths

*Alan Bern*

## Charade

*Betty Naegele Gundred*

My new minidress,  
hot pink and chartreuse striped,  
was not me  
but who I wanted to be—  
I didn't even like the dress

a friend invited  
me to his hip party  
in town,  
home from college,  
I needed something  
besides my preppy clothes

sounds of the Stones  
drummed at the open door  
didn't know anyone  
except the host  
cliques guarded their inner circles  
a joint in one hand, a Bud in the other  
or maybe a 7 & 7

I wanted to fit in, be cool,  
far-out, groovy, "Mellow Yellow,"  
let it all hang out—  
what we were supposed to be  
Then

My dress was making me itch  
I got it on sale . . .  
barely covered my butt  
when I sat down  
the runs in my nylons threading  
to spider webs

*how did I get so entangled?* I thought  
as I sipped my rum and coke

## Through my Window

*Betty Naegele Gundred*

a hazy gray  
hangs  
low in the sky

It could be fog—  
but an open door  
confirms my fear,  
that, and the eerie red  
of the sun

like a woolen blanket  
prickly and coarse  
smoke sits heavy on the land  
near and far  
a cataract view

down from the Sierras,  
where fires rage  
to the north and east,  
the toxic vapor  
has found its way here,

a silent strangler

feeling my airways tighten,  
I shut the windows and doors,  
Covid wasn't enough  
I reach for my mask again.

## A Work of Art

Betty Naegele Gundred

Sunburnt skin and freckles  
brand my face at ten.  
I scowl at the image  
staring back at me.

Skin silken, freckles gone,  
cheeks flushed with expectation.  
With a flirty wink in the mirror,  
I dream of senior prom.

Auburn tresses thick with luster  
tousle in the summer breeze.  
I have no regrets or worry lines—  
tomorrows dance in my eyes.

Carefree, my reflection glows,  
joys of a budding family,  
laughter lines emerge,  
subtle – I barely notice.

Job stress, teenage daughters,  
furrows deepen, blemishes appear,  
I try more makeup,  
add some “conceal-her.”

Dim light blurs deep creases,  
like an impressionist painting.  
With sun light, all is naked.  
I cannot deny my age.

Lines sculpted by life’s journey  
read like a novel across my face—  
*a work of art*, I think,  
and there is beauty in that.





summer gold

*Gissel Gomez*

## They Never Noticed

*Tom Squitieri*

All posed so nicely  
Looking straight forward with smiles  
For the camera  
You looked right  
In the right direction

Your eyes make no secret of your search  
With no regards to the pose

So perfectly you.

You look in the distance  
For a reason you do not yet know  
As I wait like a still rabbit  
In the shadows of the grass blades  
In your sight but not yet seen  
Sending you words  
A message you decipher as a puzzle  
For you have waited far too long to hear it call you.

Others never notice you looking away  
Their radiant perfect smiles only for the camera  
The soft rain adding texture to the happy pose  
Your look will be only be realized  
As they see the photos afterwards and wonder

What they never noticed  
And what waits for you  
In a distance that is getting more clear.  
Slowly rise and walk through the soft rain to me  
They will not notice  
Perhaps many can find the language of the eyes,  
Only we have the language of silent lips  
Not sign language. Soft language  
Subtle. Just for the moment

## CHINESE SPRING

*Duane L Herrmann*

Cherry blossoms  
    fall gently  
onto the water  
    where geese float  
and cover soot  
    on the ground  
from black clouds  
    that hide the sun.  
Breathing masks float  
    in the air –  
large flower blossoms  
    bobbing  
as people walk  
    about their lives:  
Spring, in transition  
    from traditional  
to high energy  
    society.



Untitled  
*Jim Zola*

## PERFORMANCE

*Duane L Herrmann*

I show up  
breathe  
listen  
smile, if only faintly,  
nod politely  
try to laugh  
go through motions  
I don't understand:  
still trying to be human.

## Did You Know

*Katherine Darlington*

Our skin is the largest organ in our body because  
It covers everything, it protects us, it is waterproof, it  
Protects us against wind and rain and it helps hold  
Our organs together

I know, this isn't very beautiful, talking about skin  
Like I am. It doesn't sound delicate and happy and romantic, does it  
But skin holds us together and skin  
Holds things in

Did you know that if we strip away skin  
Things might fly out? Things we can't let go!

My thoughts would spill out of me  
And they might land on my old, pine table  
And in the place of sunflowers that I personally picked  
From my yard this morning you might see  
Something much, much different

Without my skin things choke my pretty house  
Like weeds in the garden

The screaming, the sadness, the scars  
Spill onto the table  
Guts  
There is nothing else to call it

I am thankful for this skin  
Holding all the sadness I feel  
Squished hard inside me: In.



**The Ballerina**

*Jim George*



Untitled  
*Antonia Vázquez*



## NEVINBUMBAAN RETURNS

*John Bartlett*

the women in black are  
on the trains, walking, crawling  
carrying hurt and placards,  
they're tearing down the  
wounded sky, riding the river  
of steel and glittering revenge  
knitting up the sky again with  
skeins of blood and afterbirth

the women in black are bearing aloft  
women dumped in parks and laneways,  
abandoned in kitchens and shallow graves  
reanimating an angry, ghostly army

men are hiding behind their  
phallic masks and important meetings  
their secret business, initiation  
rites and cases of defamation  
worried they'll be consumed by  
Nevinbumba, the cannibal goddess

—the women are marching

## OUTSIDE IGA

*John Bartlett*

Outside IGA the beanie'd  
man's guitar riffs *Stairway  
to Heaven*, each note ascending  
to the tops of trees, arrowing into  
that impossible blue

Down on the beach a father  
and his small son stand  
hand-in-hand, sculpted  
from the thin air of expectation  
gazing towards the puzzling ocean

I walk towards my waiting friend  
—I know behind her mask  
she's smiling

We're all just lighting candles  
at the Shrine of the  
Madre de la Esperanza

## In the Mask of Stillness

*Allegra Jostad Silberstein*

Nothing is the solace for  
*what's the matter now*

Deep footprints  
drag their shadows behind them

In the stillness between  
the rhythm of tick and tock

does pulp from the felled tree becoming paper  
long for the flow of words...

Haystacks do not grieve  
the lost needle

Though dark paragraphs  
dangle new prophets before us

the stillness of mountains  
waits for the witness of words

## CAVAFY'S DOUBLE HELIX

*Con Chapman*

The store was closing for good, and so I purchased a book of poems by Cavafy,  
that poet of ruins and tombstones, and fragments from disintegration.

In some cases they recalled a double helix,  
like this; he led a double life, clerk by day,  
bemoaning a beautiful boy of whom  
and another, consigned to a grim shop,

two strands coiled around an axis  
Captain of Pleasure by night,  
no statue was made before he died,  
never to taste the pleasures of the city.

He lived upstairs from a whore house,  
from a hospital--poised between flesh,

across from a church, down the street  
forgiveness and death, he said.

The bookstore is being picked clean,  
on the road by carrion birds.  
like himself, their legs entwined like

like the rotting carcass of an animal  
I can only imagine his lust for young men  
his columns of broken lines, like ruins.

Cavafy died at age 70 to the day, neatly  
He loved discreetly, knowing the stigma

completing his three score and ten.  
there is in scandal, laconic to the end.

**Rue the Devil**

*Kay Cora Jewett*

Rue the devil's mask  
He whistles the demon wind  
Pretends to be God.

## I Can't See

*Ripley Crow*

i can't see  
the horns

only the red-lit  
exhaust resisting

expulsion  
into the dark,

frozen air  
just before dawn.

satan hides  
in the nooks

of warm, safe  
places.

## I Recognize

*Ripley Crow*

i recognize  
when people wear

invisible floatation devices  
of fear—

so heavy  
is the weight

of the yoke  
their necks strain—

hoping  
this shield

will protect the wearer  
from imaginary puddles

to drown in

5 AM

*Laurie Kolp*

& the air I breathe is a tight squeeze  
of oil-based paint  
compressed between two rooms.

I am clamped  
between two shelves  
of desperation,  
between the selves I have created  
to survive this situation—  
how to survive these dark times.

Sudden claps of thunder, flashing lightning  
bring me back to reality,  
my waking dogs whining in fear.  
They rush over to me  
& jump in my lap,  
my coffee sloshing on me.

I don't take it personal—  
it's 5 o'clock in the morning  
& I am pillowed between  
two clueless, unconditional  
lovable pets reminding me  
that like this storm, this too shall pass.





Untitled  
*Jim Zola*



Don't Panic Coronavirus

*Lorette C. Luzajic*

## the cover of darkness

*David D'Ettore*

A phantom figure steals about  
as a nightly fog hovers over  
the sweating streets.  
The trickle of heaven weeping  
bathes this shadow  
as he slips into his wanderings.  
A somber lad  
who blends into the darkness.

His face is barely visible  
for his coat is wrapped around him  
in a way that covers all.

Does he truly try to hide his face,  
or does the coat merely stifle  
his plaintive call?

They have a knack for finding caves  
in many different ways  
when darkness lurks around.  
These eerie shadows of the night  
know not death  
nor fear  
nor fright  
for they never can be found.

## FUGITIVE FROM MYSELF

*Milton P. Ehrlich*

I can see him now  
bouncing around  
in zero gravity  
longing to join me  
under sun-filled  
Sycamore leaves.  
He belongs to me  
under my old skin.  
I don't know how  
he ever escaped  
leaving footprints  
buried in the sand.  
I need him as much  
as he needs me.  
All I have to do  
is open my door  
and welcome him.  
He has always  
been my closest  
friend, and now  
that I have lived a life  
without any regrets,  
I remain nothing  
but an open door  
for him to enter.

## ON NOT BEING ME ANYMORE

Milton P. Ehrlich

When my alarm goes off  
I wake up singing: Some day  
*I'm going to murder the bugler,  
one day you are going to find him dead—*  
I'm too tired to get up anymore  
when I find my body has vanished.  
My church friends tell me I do the  
Lord's work helping folks solve problems.  
But what about me—what do I want  
for myself since my one and only  
life has come to an end? I invite the  
spirit of my wife to come with me  
to a utopian nirvana that returns us  
to the aquatic world we came from—  
and spend our time swimming with  
friendly barracudas and loving octopuses  
in and around the everlasting beauty of  
fluorescing corals, enchanted by our now  
sustained contentment.

## HIDING FROM HIMSELF

*Milton P. Ehrlich*

As plain as the nose on his face  
he runs from the truth—ignoring red flags,  
he climbs every mountain, sails the Seven Seas,  
and searches for a way to sustain the light of the world,  
subdued by bloodshot eyes.

He meditates like a monk, prays like a priest,  
rants and raves to no avail—even tries dancing  
like a Whirling Dervish, but ends up weeping  
in a puddle of tears listening to his tinnitus ringing church bells.  
He cannot forgive the Divine Mother for creating human beings—  
the only creatures born knowing they will die.

But when someone you love is about to pass, they always turn into a poem.

## The Circus of Light

*Angela*

blue-washed tempera of magic  
airborne on an unconscious balloon,  
I sit amongst a kaleidoscope of hallucinations  
on the borders of enlightenment,  
stretching, I kiss your moon mouth  
and wheels are set in motion,  
I roll myself in your canvass  
to attract attention under the canopy,  
juggling form and concept is  
an intricate abstraction from reality,  
a high wire act of ambitious anticipation  
gasping, I collapse into concrete dust  
bathed in bright light, observed through  
the eyes of the painted masked clown.

## is it a costume if you don't have a choice?

Alex "Fairyrthing" Masse

a checklist:

- take my hands and tie them down, so i can't wave them around
- take my eyes, force them up, they must meet yours to make the cut
- take my words, go berserk, my language is worthless if it can't match yours
- play with my volume, my brightness, tweak me to crisis

build that mask, make it heavy,  
weighted by odd looks and hurled slurs

tell me to hate how i look underneath,  
to wear it if i want friends i can keep

hold me down as it hardens,  
screams into my skin

speak in rhymes, rules, norms,  
a storm of ableist expectation

know that even now, trying for my truth,  
i find its chips on my flesh, stuck in strands of my hair

shards of shame  
that sliced me for being myself

know when i bleed,  
it's your life pressed onto me.

it wasn't a costume.  
i didn't have a choice.

only now  
am i finding my own voice.





Alas  
Gissel Gomez

## QUEER CHANGELING

Alex "*Fairything*" Masse

I was raised unaware of my wings  
Kept away from those with their own  
Told they were sinners at worst  
Strangers at best  
Surely, their kind couldn't be among us.

But I'm right here  
I found the violets in my skin,  
Sappho's stanzas under my tongue  
Soon, my nature became clear  
As a queer changeling.

It could be your kid next, y'know  
You can do whatever you want  
And they'd still be like me  
Celebrate the change we bring,  
Or you won't get to see it.

I found my fae siblings  
And we're tired of hiding.  
Your rule is dead, and like butterflies alight,  
As they feed on dead flesh  
We will harvest from the system's corpse.

We will rebuild, revive,  
Remember, redesign,  
For now I know what I am  
Who came before  
Who we're doing all of this for.

Everywhere I go,  
I see the free wings of this family  
And know all it takes  
Is a loving embrace  
To feel light enough for flight.

## A Feud...

*Ian Koh*

is a lot of doing nothing. Hiding,  
while the days and months pass by pedestrian,  
like a dangerous little government secret held in place by grey canvas  
so it doesn't cause a panic,  
with preservatives enough to last a decade or longer  
so you'll remember the taste when the time comes.

It's perfection inevitable. It's still warm.  
You thought it turned frostbitten and fell off due to neglect.  
The humidity festers a wilderness of mold that will ooze out from the walls,  
screaming, "lick me!"  
You still could not put the word "toadstool" together.

## Fraying

*Ian Koh*

Soft wisps of smoke from fresh sprigs fallen on embers,  
the silent welt of scars,  
my emotions like a parchment stretched with cracks visible from a past life.  
I am a notebook for your grief.

You hightailed out of town, cracking a magic stick.  
The matches lit from the friction and speed.  
I suppose you needed a guide,

a trail back to where you came from  
before the darkness swallowed you.  
The children watch

god-like in their gaze,  
bearing these things like taut lines

that hold the world together, fraying.

## Curtain Call

*Ashleigh Catibog-Abraham*

Everyday feels like a performance  
I play a part so convincing  
The line is blurred  
Between my authentic self  
And the character I am forced  
To portray.

Exit stage right  
Who will be introduced  
To our eager audience?

Will it be the grieving granddaughter?  
The one who can barely  
String a sentence together  
Without breaking down.  
Whose pain is so raw to the touch  
Fearful that she will never heal.

Is it the distant daughter?  
Cold and unfeeling  
Her smile is rarer than  
The most precious stone.  
Her strength is a marvel  
Weakness isn't an option.

Or the worrisome wife-to-be?  
Riddled with anxiety  
Blood on her feet  
From walking on glass.  
Carrying heaven and earth on her shoulders  
A classic balancing act  
One misstep is fatal.

Identity lost in the roster of roles  
Forcibly latched onto the host  
Bow for the curtain call  
Return for the encore.

## The Chicken and The Egg

Ashleigh Catibog-Abraham

The gift of motherhood  
Joy, tears, pain, relief, worry  
Bundled up in the form of a small person  
Cradling new life  
The stench of your fraudulent nature seeps out of every pore  
Pretending to have it together

### **Are you ready for this?**

You lie to everyone who asks  
Fragile and tiny, dependent on your supply  
Everything is being sucked out

### **Are you ready for this?**

You smile, holding a crying baby  
Nothing seems right  
Pull back your tears  
You're no longer important  
This is the life you chose

### **Are you ready for this?**

You should be happy  
You should be grateful  
The weight of it tears your body in half  
You lose your sparkle  
The old you disappears  
Say goodbye  
You'll never see them again

### **Are you ready for this?**

*I couldn't be happier.*

## Joker

*Ashleigh Catibog-Abraham*

Darkness is a gentle embrace  
Its warmth fills my empty cup  
My soul has been tired  
Darkness offers me rest  
A comfort I had rarely been afforded  
Rocked softly into a dream  
Then the light pulls me out of my slumber  
Forces my mouth into a more palatable shape  
Sews it in place  
Shoves me back out into the world  
The people I face will never know  
How much I prefer the dark

## PORTRAIT IN OIL / a masquerade of war

*Ave Jeanne Ventresca*

propaganda posters flutter  
from house to house,  
black & red paints of oil  
thundering like drums, viscous  
yet ethereal. there is a

sense of immediate message  
as many words  
brassy and shrill,  
litter the once silent streets.  
it is their attempt to manipulate  
air and human emotions. we

hear them as they run  
through our tuesdays  
and eat across our weekend's  
dreary activities. just now

making 'the sign of the cross'  
this weathered woman's tears  
for her life partner  
fall onto desperate roads of  
concrete. people brittle and  
soundless, shield themselves in



camouflage, hiding their constant  
fear and hunger.  
war seems to munch and devour  
these parched fields and the ever  
so small bodies of  
grimy children. there is no

escaping these bullets  
that reside behind their eyes  
of brown. the power  
of persuasion flutters on,  
and they remain  
in a masquerade.

## Morning Veil

*Kathryn Reilly*

she rose, slipping on a robe  
padding softly downstairs  
to grind coffee  
and set out two mugs.  
Silently she  
scrambles two eggs  
sprinkling cheese on one  
then lets the dog out.  
Ascending the stairs  
to dress for the day  
their empty bed greets her  
with only one side made.  
she dresses listening to the  
shower's cascade; water stops and  
lips ghost her shoulder  
mumbling "Morning".  
Finished, she descends  
to see one coffee poured.  
she pours hers  
lets the dog in  
eats the plain egg  
then brushes her teeth.  
she smiles in the mirror  
to remind herself how.



The Boys  
*Ann Privateer*

## SONG OF THE SHRIKE

*D. C. Weiser*

Such tiny feet (not like  
the eagle's talons or the hawk's,  
this harmless little  
songbird of Missouri  
migrates in other states  
—not this one)  
Seize a spider, grasshopper,  
a lizard or a rodent and  
impaling it on barbed wire  
or thorns, rip it apart and  
feed. The shrike thinks  
it is a predator, a raptor.

I wish I were a new beginning

Ryan Gibbs

*“New beginnings are often disguised as painful endings”*

—Lao Tzu

too long have I disguised  
my painful endings

worn the heavy cloak of grief  
masked myself in unfelt joy  
from everyone concealed

still I wish

## March

*Ryan Gibbs*

I break a new path  
alluding treacherous ice  
by clinging to barren trees

hearing the eerie quacks  
of huddled ducks  
I stop short

I walk on  
across fleecy snow  
releasing my inner lion

## metamorphosis

*Votey Cheav*

We are covered in ash  
flicks of cigarettes,  
heartache but no regrets,  
watching the slow burn  
creep off the slim flame,  
trimming every piece of us  
not meant for this next phase  
as we rise from uncertainty  
to our destined lovers  
who are also cocooning.

This is the time for stillness,  
soaked in self-love,  
circles of thoughts  
and repeated mantras.  
Effervescent with champagne,  
excited about the future,  
anxious about the present.  
Tenderness for ourselves,  
morphing, transcending  
is an active process  
learned by doing, being, rising.

We rise, and stretch, and rise.  
All that has burned us  
lays cindered and useless.  
We will not take this with us.  
The phoenix does not look back at its ashes.

The metamorphosis  
to goddess is upon us.

## After You've Gone

Jeri Frederickson

I have all questions about myself

Each one including *you*

like *younger*

like *yourself*

like *yours*

like *yuck*

like *yuletide*

like *yummy*

like *yup*

like *uphold*

*uphold*

*uppercase*

*uprising*

*upstream*

*streamline*

like *streamline*

like *dreamer*

like *amble*

like *ambush*

like the cold in *November* the hour

the text from you woke me.

I woke.

The sandman covers my face in stiff leaves  
and white until glowing of your final text recedes.



## Stars

*L. Sydney Abel*

We look up to the stars  
    and wish to play among the heavens  
We are performing fools in mortal form  
    to a universe that beckons

Cut us up in paper strips  
    laugh and cry and then burn us  
Souls leave this prison of a planet  
    once the body is superfluous

Tears prickle  
    and bite  
    and sting  
    even though the heart knows that fool is risen  
We are all acting  
    looking up to be forgiven

## MELPOMENE AND THALIA

*Tricia da Costa*

On the dark stage of  
The Greek theatre stood,  
A frowning mask in hand,  
The heavy, heavy buskin' boot on her foot,  
Daughter of the God of gods,  
The Muse of Tragedy, Melpomene.

And then there stood,  
Just there, her sister,  
A smiling, laughing mask in hand,  
The flimsy, thin-soled sock on her foot,  
One of the kin, of the divine,  
The Muse of Comedy, Thalia.

They stood there, so different,  
Yet so, so alike, they are  
One, Oh! So tragic,  
The other, so comical,  
But blood of kin, and near they drew,  
With bonded masks, forever they clung.

## Bird in a Gilded Cage

*Marsha Andrews*

Like a bird in a gilded cage  
Songs singing on, melodious  
Sounds that trill and thrill  
Masquerading as happiness.  
For the message the winged one carries  
Is lost in the sweet refrain  
Listen with your heart and hear  
The longing to be free again.

## **A Butterfly Kiss**

*Ramzi Albert Rihani*

A butterfly kiss fills the air  
With hiss larger than thunder  
A moon rushing to end the night  
Tumbles and cracks open the morning light

A sound soars to the cathedral ceiling  
And lights the eyes that are still sleeping  
A drift of shiver, a case of joy  
Awake the girl with a magical toy

In the vast yellow valley,  
Seeds of freedom become trees of history  
One grows without pain  
The other, in the shadow of the seed, waits for the rain

The little girl with her white mandolin  
With prophetic eyes and Mona Lisa smile  
Men around her, gather with a look sublime  
Chanting for the kings of the valley



**Autumn Wind**

*Jim George*

## My Dad

*Jess Paauwe*

My dad's green thumb was on videocassettes  
a break from banjos and boards

We were cowboys and film critics  
it was clandestine as he would say,  
to opine and not be a sycophant  
the integrity of books and mountains

My dad was a businessmen,  
but his true suit was flannel and boots  
the woods called to him more than co-workers

He had a cross on his banjo,  
for blue grass was his deliverance  
no effrontery, no obstreperous material world

Likewise, he died alone in the bushes  
his ego not remiss

We scattered his ashes, that he may find Eden  
free of man's hubris, of pills, of parenting

It stormed vehemently soon after his funeral  
as if God was outraged, as if man's very fallacy

I see him and I now as two herons fly over  
perhaps the same two he's shown me  
distracting us from the world

## Hat Collections

*James B. Nicola*

Edith wore a hat  
indoors and out.

I just found out from Sarah P  
that Edith always wore a hat (indoors and out)

to hide a bump  
a bald spot  
and a scar.

When someone wears a hat  
you don't imagine  
do you  
why?

I wear  
fedoras, Stetsons, baseball caps,  
a Homburg, a Dutch sailor's, a beret.

I'm happy when you say  
you like my hat.

My hats, though,  
are not the same  
as Edith's.

And I wear hats  
I hope  
you'll never see

and notice hats you wear  
that are not there.



Smoke Break

*Jim George*



## To Be Dead

*written and translated by Ivan de Monbrison*

Быть мертвым - значит быть живым.  
только Кости и плоть это тело.  
Я могу представить себе сад,  
полный деревьев и диких животных.  
Я вижу солнце в своей голове,  
и я вижу своего мертвого отца,  
его кожа была холодная,  
когда я ее поцеловал.

To be dead means to be alive.  
The body being only flesh and bones.  
I can imagine a garden  
Full of trees and wild animals.  
I see the sun in my head  
And I see my dead father,  
His skin was cold when I kissed it.

## Codependence

*V. Bray*

They would kick me out of the twelve steps  
if I said

you do not raise your voice with her  
you do not raise a hand at her  
you are a different man  
from the one I feared

from the one I fear

I made



Queen of Coronavirus

*Lorette C. Luzajic*

## On a Saturday Night with Little to Do but This

Carol Lynn Stevenson Grellas

Once, I told my professor that I wrote  
a poem about falling in love with Robert Bly,  
*I wouldn't suggest it*, he said with a grin

on his face and moved onto a discussion  
of poetry. But that opening line he wrote,  
*All day I've loved you in a fever—*

I'm overwhelmed when I read a line like that.  
Don't get hung up on the beginnings, he said,  
remove the first stanza from every poem

you write— some things are heightened  
by the power of omission, the way the  
unspoken lingers like a quiet prayer

that finds its path to God, which reminded  
me of my mother and her old phonebook,  
nameless entries scribbled across paper

in leaning left-handed scroll, a code only  
she knew as if she was being secretive  
in her usual almost sacred style of unsharring—

maybe poets aren't supposed to fall in love.  
I wondered if my professor was warning my heart  
by implied thought yet something he instinctively

knew, the same way my mother left off those names.  
I wanted to ask him; I wanted to open my mother's  
old phonebook, and dial one of those saved

numbers, because something in their anonymity  
made them feel a little bit like hope, or maybe  
it was just because she'd added a note

on the bottom of the page, *Today is a wonderful  
day*, like an epilogue, or maybe a nod to serendipity  
and promise, as if Robert Bly might pick up

the receiver, and say, I love you.

## The Difference Between X and O

Carol Lynn Stevenson Grellas

It was in sixth grade when I first  
learned what it was to be a Jew  
hater, when I heard the word kike  
and asked my mother what it meant,

when the girl down the street with blonde  
hair and blue eyes used it to label  
the neighbors, a girl whose tongue  
was like a loaded gun of ethnic slurs

who didn't know my father's thirteenth  
birthday gift, a Hebrew Bible, was tucked  
inside my nightstand drawer, his initials  
engraved in gold letters on yellowed paper,

one satin ribbon dangling over the page  
from the inside separating the middle from  
either end. A placeholder as if to say, read me,  
start here, near the center, and never forget

never forget, because that's where the story  
lies. I read somewhere the Yiddish term  
for 'little circle' is kikel, a way to sign a name  
for fear an X implied a cross when Jewish

immigrants arrived on Ellis Island. If only  
I'd known the origin back then, I would've said,  
*give me your wrist, so I can draw an endless ring,  
a kikel with my pen that arcs, bends and intersects*

*where love meets ignorance, an O instead of X.*

## Masque

*Paul*

I reached into the lie of my face  
through layers of denial tucked  
in the wings of my shadowed  
surmise, tied in curated words  
of constructed perspective, a  
veritable vaudevillian panopticon,  
who sees all there is to see, with  
one exception, always overlooking  
the small end of the telescope,  
failing to notice that I have  
colonized myself with disconnection,  
but the clue is sown into the fabric,  
there lies within a restlessness for the real.

## The Day Trip

Ashley Oakes

*for Matt*

The train I am on is new.  
It is for tourists and every few miles  
the presence of a famous magician is announced

as he does a show with coins. Their metal sits lightly  
in his hand. Perhaps he is unsure  
how much is magic. The lady next to me

with shoes off massages a foot, balancing  
two pills and her phone on the arm rest saying  
my body is always talking. I look

outside at a horizon that spills  
houses, each with a just-planted tree  
popping up like frames in an old ViewMaster

as if with small involuntary motions I have clicked through

the entire disk. There is the interstate  
with cars streaming south on I-35  
making a current so deep and fast



the coffee shop drive-thrus cannot  
contain them  
they rush directly

over the farm towns and pastures  
where I am from. One of my teachers  
took her yellow Dodge van to Nicaragua

every summer to preach. Without intending to  
she once drove over the longest bridge  
in Central America. That was where

so many vehicles merging convinced her

(she said) we are like birds at the water's edge  
—but that feels forced. There is no analogy  
only, plainly, I do not wish to go back

right away. The man doing tricks sets up  
his shell game. It is intended for kids  
but I am taken in by the illusion of moving pieces



**Stonewall Silence**

*Janina Karpinska*

## A Lily

*Carole Stone*

I am sick of my hair no longer blonde.  
Tired of the face I see in the mirror.  
I've had all I can take  
of the loneliness that hangs over me  
like a dead mouth.

I'm fed up with the moon over the trees.  
The sun rises without purpose.  
I can't stand the stars.  
I want to fall in love with this world  
as if it were a first amour,  
forgive those who left  
without saying goodbye.

I, too, will become shadow,  
feel the icy wool of the earth.  
I'll leave behind my human light,  
fall asleep like a new mother,  
who stayed up all night, walking her baby.

I want to be the woman who,  
on a day ordinary as breathing,  
takes her coffee in the morning.  
I don't want to go  
on as a lily on a hillside.

## The One

*Carole Stone*

After the boredom of each day, TV in the evening,  
I bury myself under the king-sized bedsheets.

Heart stopped, words silenced,  
my husband's ashes floated like the white dust

on the blackboard erasers the teacher let  
her favorite student, clap.

I pump my own gas, set the thermostat  
for Standard Time, program the all-night lamp,

load and empty the dishwasher.  
I'm the one who carries the laundry

basket to the basement, takes  
the trash can to the curb on Thursdays

Wednesday, comingled, Friday, plastics.  
Will I ever learn which is which?

## Remorse

Sue Chenette

*after H.D.*

what was it that you crushed or mangled dreading  
to know the matted fur, purpling spill  
onto rough gravel or was it cobbles  
sea-washed slate; *you retract, you dare not*  
*remember* how you sped on or stumbled or splashed  
your squint fixed tight against periphery  
no turning back to grasp what had been done

what was it crushed what rose in shivering  
thought, kept you from turning back to take  
in your arms what you had harmed, embrace  
its dashed leap, *conjure it, supplicate* its spirit

Lift it to your breast. Say, I did this  
I am sorry. *Pray to it.* Say  
I am sorry. I did this.

## Crows feet

*Kassidy Bowen*

The cracks around your eyes are like beams of light. Dawn  
breaking through the clouds,  
Etched into your skin from the radiant  
Power of your gaze.

A sun living in your eyes leaving impressions like blanket patterns  
after an evening of deep sleep or the lingering kiss of leather seats  
after a long car ride

leaving you raw. But who

is going to tell the ocean it is wrong for leaving impressions in the sand  
with her mighty waters and gentle caresses. She can break apart entire  
mountains with her waters but what a sight it is to behold. These lands  
don't hold her, she is not contained like an animal to be watched. She  
rules her tides, and we are

at the mercy of her passing

We are here for the ride and darling

Your soul is a divine tide. Your body, its passage. It cannot contain your light.

So when you smile and your skin folds and cracks say 'I cannot be contained.

The ocean has no keeper to withstand her tides and neither

do I.



Poppies  
*Gissel Gomez*

## Heat lightning

*Kassidy Bowen*

I thought I saw her hair silver in moonlight blue  
Clouds passing in dense shadows near midnight  
But when the heat snapped and brought light in cold fire  
The shadows bore emptiness  
As if your skin had aged in a delusion of what ifs  
The memories blossoming into a rosie glow  
Another place, another time where infinitely  
You were as I imagined you to be  
You stayed  
And I built frames for every dimpled  
Smile I  
Insulated my chest with every flicker  
Of blue seeking me out  
Making sure I hadn't fallen behind  
You fixed me  
And the world seemed to grow with pluming clouds almost invisible  
in the night  
As if one person could be a home or  
Hope in its entirety  
Imagining shapes into the evening clouds  
Seemingly harmless until the lightning comes then,  
There is darkness in the sky  
There is pain in the imagined and??  
There is an emptiness that only I  
can fill.



## When the Blaze Comes Again

*Eric Pitman*

There will be no smoke on the horizon  
revealing its languid crawl  
or cruel prophecy

ingress immediate, no motion at all  
no smell of cinder, no animal flood or scurry

No haze in the air, no scarlet sun  
the soul twine is spun, cast down, tangled thing

you remember naught but the run  
a fallow hollow rapacious during

When it's done, fawn, sweep up your ashes  
but store them far from an urn.

Spread thin over skin, coat your fragile fleshs,  
until the rage comes again you're safe you hidden burn.

Pick through the pumice, gentle maker, inside your hull,  
that almost-husk

leave some fairytale trace  
something white  
your skull.

## It arrives

Eric Pitman

without exception, during the pandemic

a friend who cannot carry me    ferries me    to groceries  
at times, it is so quiet and routine I worry it's for pity  
that I'm too queer  
and alienated  
and unfortunate  
to be a good pet.

my need to monitor relationships is inversely proportional to shame

my friend asks why I call it the bathroom  
it's yours, they say. Why do you say the  
my pronouns aren't so convivial with permanence  
being thrown away can lead to impermanence    efficient stasis  
I don't know how to explain either, so I laugh

my urge to monitor relationships is directly proportional to shame  
excess material emphasis is disquieting, but things given to me, matter

my mother read stories about others from *Guideposts*  
often, her tears made the reading take a little longer  
trying to stop my own made listening just as difficult  
my brothers too, and sometimes even our dad  
other times, he roared from the house, to his shop  
to work on something, because mom was too choked up

interior designers hide things:  
matters, rooms, whole people in moons, planets, minds and plans,  
emotional filters.

I'm outraged when I find the corner with the tiny box that  
has my bones inside  
the hidden table, my body, my guts chopped and stitched, and shrouded  
the ones who build, space after place, illusions,  
from my flesh, and permanence  
they weld even the air, cutting, sewing, pairing knives and needles, busy  
they look like me and ask what I'm doing there,  
why I have thread            not a scalpel instead

## Hermeneutics of Despair

*Eric Pitman*

The principal body suffers from immoral inadequacy,  
by design, an ill-conceived vessel for supreme,  
high-performance being—  
a prison.

Did you know? There is symmetry to the soul  
and it is non-euclidian, non-rhizomatic, loose,  
or emergent, but immanent and whole.

Father is a cop—his hours of outrage for disobedience  
and lack of rule—your ways—adds a special spice to sin,  
unlike others who sleep, you stay awake, cayenne.

These men do what they want with you; move you  
as a tool meant to suit them; I know the grip  
of their hands, their fingers tight round the hair—  
you cannot ply them free  
so cut each one by the root.

Should I have my way, I'm becoming a sleek sympoetic  
asexual (but fully functional) cyborganism that gives  
Donna Haraway a run for her money—  
no, debilitating orgasms.

My gender is corneas on ice, a lovechild born  
from the Laniakea and Virgo superclusters,  
spit from their vast antediluvian churn—  
for the flood I was given no boat  
so from their old, rugged cross I'll make  
a vessel unto honor  
without rot

## Sound of Night

*Patricia L. Scruggs*

It's snow on the mountains,  
tiles shifting on the roof,  
poinsettia opening a new leaf,

the dog on the porch,  
or the furnace clicking off  
then on again as the air cools.

It's the sound the year makes  
as it draws to a close,  
then draws to a close again.

Endless blue boxes  
in houses cast their shadows.  
Another door opens.

Listen. It's men talking,  
almost a foreign language  
never really understood.

It's the voices of fathers,  
brothers, even uncles  
who hold back approval

like the final few grains  
of rice in the bowl.



Planet Corona  
*Lorette C. Luzajic*

## A Girl Much Like Me

*Patricia L. Scruggs*

When I came home from school, Marjorie  
was sitting on our sofa next to her aunt.  
I remember her long braids, her smile,  
the way her voice rose barely above a whisper.  
She laughed once, but that was all.

After they left, my mother told me that a year before,  
while Marjorie was at a slumber party, her father  
took his hunting rifle and shot her mother,  
her sister, her little brother, then himself.  
“How terrible,” I said.

Later, I remembered,  
my father had hunting rifles.  
Enough for us all.

## Babi Remembers Her Days

*Sandra Vallie*

*after Bhannu Kapil*

The stink of my sweat, a blossom across my skin every day  
in the fields. I scrub with ground  
stone and lye. Still I wear it.

My needle gashes stitches in cloth. The pull of  
red embroidery floss. The push of yellow.

Painted wildflowers on cobalt blue glass. The sister I left it with  
in Czechia. An ocean I prayed I  
would never see again. Wanted nothing more to cross once more to home.

Cracks spider further through my spine each day I bend above a row  
of onions. My son-in-law's  
French horn sounds. I chant all the prayers I know and more  
that this farm will sink into the  
swamp. I spit toward the music, the way the ground shakes with dancing.

Above my head in the room where I send him, my husband  
coughs in our sleep.



Grandchildren I must slap and pinch for the sins they are.

Curled in the asparagus bed, a heat-swollen snake on the blade  
of my hoe. Its pulling heaviness  
before I fling it across the fields. How it twists in light reflected green  
from corn.

Those who wander lost in the rows when cornstalks grow  
above their heads. By the window at  
night, I listen for them to call out. A temptation to walk barefoot  
in wet grass. Follow bent  
cornstalks, the trail of their voices.

Onion roots, damp soil, a musk of glacial lakes rising through bedrock,  
glandular odor unending  
at the back of my closet. The hours each night I dig through it. If I have  
the nights left, I will  
bring down this house I cannot leave.

## Because I am Black Woman

*Eva Lynch-Comer*

They tell me to clench my soul in place.  
Instead, I twirl in subways  
arms outstretched and let my hips sway.

They wield the wind like a whip  
and teach me how to starve my breath.  
Instead, I lie in grass while the breeze  
braids dandelion fuzz into my hair.

They show me how to gouge the vines of my veins  
from the Black trunks of my wrists.  
Instead, I scoop my spiraling soul  
into the hearts of my palms and lean forward  
so my tears can rinse my hands.

## Lullaby

*Ana M. Fores Tamayo*

That malignant spell awoke me  
to macabre dreams of death:  
and as I watched uncannily  
his beastly body raptured,  
a child grew wild,  
Neanderthal beginnings wrapped  
in sordid ecstasies.  
A darkness grew,  
enveloped wild glass jungles  
and the pitfalls numbered burrs,  
bleeding my aching body  
as I stumbled far far into the night.

All light receded,  
becoming frenzied fantasy of music  
lumbering in fatal destiny.  
I cried on in agony,  
a wounded, dying animal shrieking  
in that mocking silence  
of a world gone mad.  
That hanging head,  
Medusa's locks untarnished,  
falls to the ground  
where slivering snarling snakes  
hiss their poison  
and sting that beastly child.

Death strikes,  
pounds pistols shooting  
in a wild attack  
and that boy is dead:  
beast-child of fantasy retrieved  
from webbed denial,  
dead bleeding throat and head hanging...

Wake, my child, awake

## New York

*Sarah Beck Mather*

The face.

A put-

on-puppet-face.

The Joker.

A vibration that shook my useless bones. *Let them Chatter away.*

New York was beautiful in the snow,

*isn't it?*

A blue that seared with a black that cooked.

I understood that I was

being eaten.

Feather-flakes-skimming oil-slicked-blackness –

A vast display of seeds.

I used to hum when I ate.

Consuming and loving,

draped over father as he molded his face.

The Clown.

*That house.*

Midnight and

good and evil.

*The pebbles in a row.*

And the roses were beautiful.

The streets made you stretch

(Compared to London).

An unfurling of the lungs as you sit -

An urge to run.

Garden statues that should be spurting water, blunted,

But the bicycle looked better

covered in dust.

The house of horrors gave me hope,

and as I tied his shoelace,

he tried to stop my breath.



New York  
*Sarah Beck Mather*

## The Mill

Sarah Beck Mather

I had all of my winter clothes,  
all laid out.

I

Was

Ready.

*Do up the top button.*

It became colder as I watched the smoke turned to clay.

Towering black, a visceral tall,

smoky buildings blazing into sand.

That black and white repeats itself; transforms into  
a perfect panel. An acceptable package.

*I'll make the most of it while you feel welcome.*

It was Summer,

and the light dropped across dingy walls whilst  
flies un-hollowed so much never-ending earth.

Metal foam flattens the surface

that I can still taste, every morning.

Howls that can be heard all across Oldham.

*I'm still here.*

I can remember, even if you don't, *what we talked about.*

The dialogue that modifies the mill.

Salt sweepings sweet tastings.

Thanks for teaching me.

And now that crisp feeling -

that brings poppadow towels, new reds and blues,

new uniforms and -

a time to let you be,

let you be who you are *duck.*

A considered space - of revealing lines,

that place

that place

that place.



The Mill

*Sarah Beck Mather*

## Knowledge, 1984

*Ana M. Fores Tamayo*

Reveries of coils and twists in blazing flames,  
opalescent waves engulfing  
blackened nightmares.  
The butchery of passioned savagery  
violates that peaceful trance  
as eggs are broken, vindicated...  
Torn images of children  
cutting gazes bleed  
by razored knives.

Slit in half and spliced with mutilation,  
formless shapes enshroud  
the cluttered room.

Though sterile, her pain stains out.  
And void she shrieks the clouded tears  
of silent odors  
in the tickless tocking of her time.

Destroyed, her ghost imparts the child within.  
Annihilated, she stands alone.

The pain her fingers carry awaits her through eternity,  
memories and fantasies, abandoned and aborted,  
forever crying out.  
Yet forever she continues,  
Stronger in her knowledge that still, she stands.



## Home

*Alan Bern*

If night could darken  
more wholly  
and our lights dim  
more slowly,  
then your hand, palm  
to your brow,  
rough over your eyes,  
closed down lids,  
would bring me,  
stiff straight, your mother's  
feeble face  
just before  
and your death mask still.

## Mourning of the Virgin of Guadalupe

*Alan Bern*

of course, caged, wired  
cloistered one,  
you were never there  
to bid a farewell  
to your Jesús, but you  
would have removed the sharp nails  
from his roughened palms  
and been surprised by red blood  
shooting from his wounds  
as he if were still alive—  
meanwhile in a tree nearby  
a young one climbed anxiously  
to the top to see  
you off to your destination—  
suppose his visible hands  
that hold the branches  
entirely capable  
of desperate waving



masked protectress

*Alan Bern*

## What Does He See?

*Ivanka Fear*

He hung around me all day as I sat  
    alone, as usual.  
inanimate, with a big grin on his face,  
nose upturned in my direction,  
tongue hanging out, panting in excitement  
What does he have to grin about?  
He seemed to feel he belonged here,  
    me, I belong to no one.  
stuffed with a soft inner core,  
and something rattling around in that big head,  
colourful, tightly holding onto his trinkets  
What does he find so amusing?  
He moved only slightly in the breeze,  
    still, but more alive than I.  
alert, ears perked right up straight,  
listening for my words of wisdom,  
leaning towards me, anticipating some interaction  
Why is he so eager?  
He waits anxiously for the opportunity for fun,  
    a friend. I could use one.  
twinkling almost, eyes bright and wide open,  
staring at me the whole time,  
ardently hoping I'll take notice.  
What does he see when he sees me?

## Kiddo's Super-purse

*Christopher Clauss*

Big Girl has a purse and a wallet like her mother.  
She wears long cotton dresses that twirl.  
She carries the sparkly purse proudly into church  
It holds her wallet and her kleenex and a hair tie and her library card  
and it's got room enough for her Sunday school papers on the way home.  
Big Girl loves how it matches her sequinned shoes.

Little Girl wears twirly cotton dresses like her sister.  
Twirly dresses are beautiful and also make excellent napkins  
for sticky fingers at snack time.  
She wants a purse, too, for Sunday mornings.  
It is not so much to hold her Sunday school drawings and the money for  
the offering  
as it is because a purse  
is the perfect vehicle in which  
to smuggle Iron Man into junior church undetected.  
He is there every week.

Little Girl loves her superheroes  
and her Daddy could not be more glad to know this is true.  
She runs circles in the yard  
in a mask and a cape  
Leaps daringly from furniture and third steps  
and back in a single bound!

She has Batman and Iron Man  
Spider Man and Superman  
Ice Man and Aquaman.  
All the 'Mans!  
She even got to meet Green Lantern at Six Flags  
but wasn't so impressed with his little ring and lack of cape.

For her birthday  
Daddy made her  
her very own cape with the Wonder Woman logo  
and she loved it  
but didn't know whose cape it was meant to be.  
Super -W?  
He tried to show her when they went to the store  
but they didn't sell that action figure in the toy aisle.

Every day Little Girl watches five Lego ninjas  
battle Lord Garmadon while one ninja's kid sister lingers at home.  
Peter Pan and Jake fight Captain Hook  
while the girls and Tinkerbell hang back to help out when they can.  
Even the bad guys are almost always  
bad guys...  
at least they sort of got something kind of right.

She is starting to dream about the hero she will grow up to become  
But none of those heroes  
have a woman's voice like her Sunday school teacher  
None espouse the wisdom of her grandmother  
None of the action figures looks like her mother  
or her sister  
the kindergarten staff  
or her favorite waitress at the diner with a magic iPhone  
the dance instructor who commands with whispers and smiles  
or the the tumbling, flying gymnastics coach  
the crafty sitter who always knows just what to do on a rainy day  
or the reflection she sees  
when she climbs on the stepstool  
to look at herself in the bathroom mirror  
in her mask and her cape  
so ready to save the day  
for someone.

Daddy tells her that she is already his super hero.  
That there are so many heroes already in her life  
as powerful as the super woman she will grow up to be.  
And it isn't that she doesn't believe him  
but it isn't really  
that she does.

Maybe  
those men at the store  
just haven't made the right action figure yet.

*But when they do,  
she says  
the weapons it comes with  
had better match her shoes.*

## Uneven time: August 2021

*Kate Meyer-Currey*

I was told once the French believe  
mid-August heralds Autumn's onset.  
I have seen it for myself.

Fields are leached of ripeness under  
burning sun. Leaves rustle and mutter,  
sensing change in the breeze.

Urgency lies in dormant shadows of  
drowsy afternoons that stretch into  
waiting evening.

Fruits bask in the sun, as tipsy wasps  
guzzle their fermented juice, like  
Calvados-sozzled farmhands.

They fall, sodden, into the bleached  
grass; awaiting harvest, distilling the  
essence of warmer days.

But that was a different summer  
altogether. Maybe I dreamed it in  
a life long-gone?



Now I feel this uneasy transition; in  
England's early August.

Summer's fulcrum swings like an  
off-beat pendulum through days  
out of sequence; veering from  
cloudburst to hesitant sun.

Bullets of rain batter the sky's  
tin helmet and the chilly wind  
evokes November. Heatwaves  
are foretold like strange omens.

Old seasonal certainties I knew  
are changing. September is the  
end's beginning as my bones  
creak into Autumn.

## Sunflower Syndrome

*Kate Meyer-Currey*

Mid-July's rising thermometer has brought the first sultry heatwave of sunflowers back to supermarket shelves. I first saw them this week as I sweated round Tesco after work. I envied them, dipping their toes in the bucket, as if they chilled at their local Lido. They were long and lean in high-cut chartreuse one-pieces, with stems for days. With their dirty-blond touselled petals, they were 'Fifties pin-up girls, fresh from a boardwalk photoshoot. Hand-picked by model-scouts, they had survived the killing fields of casting to make the final cut. Even under strip-lights their tight-pored permatanned faces were immaculate. They blanked me with their inscrutable Rayban stares, from behind shuttered eyes. I was a clumsy wildebeest eyed up by this blonde-maned lioness pride. Under their burning gaze, I felt photosensitive. My hand shielded my eyes from the radiant heat of their glare. Normally I'm drawn to sunflowers, but not today. I imagined how I'd feel facing their cool appraisal after a twelve-hour shift and I balked. I need to work on my summer body before I take that lot on.

## Contributor Bios

**Cameron Morse** is Senior Reviews editor at *Harbor Review*, a poetry editor at *Harbor Editions*, and the author of six collections of poetry. His first, *Fall Risk*, won Glass Lyre Press's 2018 Best Book Award. His latest is *Far Other* (Woodley Press, 2020). He holds an MFA from the University of Kansas City–Missouri and lives in Independence, Missouri, with his wife Lili and two children. For more information, check out his Facebook page or website.

**Jim Zola** is a poet and photographer living in North Carolina. [Jimzola@hotmail.com](mailto:Jimzola@hotmail.com)

**Melody Wang** currently resides in sunny Southern California with her dear husband. In her free time, she dabbles in piano composition and also enjoys hiking, baking, and playing with her dogs. She can be found on Twitter @MelodyOfMusings.

**Liliya Gazizova** is a Russian poet of Tatar origin. She was born in Kazan, Russia, graduated from the Kazan Medical Institute, and Moscow M. Gorky's Literature Institute (1996). Liliya Gazizova is a member of the International Pen Club (Pen-Moscow). Gazizova is the author of fifteen volumes of poetry, published in Russia, Europe, and USA. Gazizova's poems were translated into several European languages and published in number of anthologies.

**Aaron Lembo** has taught English in China, Spain and Vietnam. His debut poetry pamphlet *It's All Gone Don Juan* is published by erbacce-press (2020). His libretti have been performed at the Leeds Lieder Festival and at the International Anthony Burgess Foundation and his poetry podcast, *Verse Amor*, is on YouTube.

**Okpeta, Gideon Iching** is a poet. He is a contributing writer for *Joshuastruth magazine (JT MAG)*. His work has appeared at *Last Leaves Magazine*, *Literary yard journal*, *Words and Whispers*, *Academic of the Hearts and Minds*, and else where. At his spare time, he writes and plays the keyboard.

**Bruce McRae**, a Canadian musician and multiple Pushcart nominee, has had work appear in hundreds of publications around the world. The winner of the

2020 Libretto Chapbook Prize (20 Sonnets), his books include “The So-Called Sonnets,” “An Unbecoming Fit Of Frenzy,” “Like As If,” “All Right Already,” and “Hearsay.”

**Daniel W.K. Lee** is a New Orleans-based writer and author of *Anatomy of Want* (Rebel Satori Press/QueerMojo, 2019). He loves tater tots, tofu, tattoos, facial hair that he himself cannot grow, and his head-turning whippet Camden. Find out more at [danielwkle.com](http://danielwkle.com)

**Michael Igoe**, city boy, neurodiverse, Chicago now Boston. Numerous works appear in journals online and in print. Recent: [agapanthuscollective.com](http://agapanthuscollective.com), [flyovercountryliterarymagazine.com](http://flyovercountryliterarymagazine.com), [bookofmatcheslitmag.com](http://bookofmatcheslitmag.com). Anthologies: *Avalanches in Poetry*, *The Poets of 2020* (Fevers of the Mind Press) on Amazon. National Library of Poetry Editors Choice Award 1997. Twitter: [MichaelIgoe5](https://twitter.com/MichaelIgoe5). Urban Realism, Surrealism. I like the night.

**Allan Lake**, originally from Saskatchewan, has lived in Vancouver, Cape Breton, Ibiza, Tasmania, & Melbourne. Poetry Collection: *Sand in the Sole* (Xlibris, 2014). Lake won Lost Tower Publications (UK) Comp 2017, Melbourne Spoken Word Poetry Fest 2018 and publication in *New Philosopher* 2020. Chapbook (Ginninderra Press 2020) *My Photos of Sicily*.

**Mark Simpson** lives on Whidbey Island, WA USA.

**Glen Armstrong** (he/him/his) holds an MFA in English from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and edits a poetry journal called *Cruel Garters*. He has three current books of poems: *Invisible Histories*, *The New Vaudeville*, and *Midsummer*. His work has appeared in *Poetry Northwest*, *Conduit*, and *The Cream City Review*.

**Robin Susanto** was born in Indonesia. After many departures he's settled in Coast Salish territory, aka Vancouver, Canada, where he continues to immigrate homeward. His poems have won prizes and mentions including in the Ross & Davis Mitchell Canada 150 and Proverse Hong Kong contests.

**Joan McNerney's** poetry is found in many literary magazines such as *Seven Circle Press*, *Dinner with the Muse*, *Poet Warriors*, *Blueline*, and *Halcyon Days*. She has

four Best of the Net nominations. Her latest titles are *The Muse in Miniature* and *Love Poems for Michael* both available on Amazon.com and Cyberwit.net

**Ojo Olumide Emmanuel** is a Nigerian Poet and Book Editor. He is the Author of the Poetry Chapbook “Supplication For Years in Sands” (Polarsphere Books, 2021). His works have appeared and forthcoming at *Feral*, *Quills*, *Melbourne-Culture*, *TNR*, and elsewhere. He is a fellow of SprinNG Writers Fellowship. Say hi to him on Twitter @OjoOlumideEmma2

**Callie S. Blackstone’s** work appears or is forthcoming in *Plainsongs*, *Lily Poetry Review*, *Prime Number Magazine*, and others. Callie is a lifelong New Englander. She is lucky enough to wake up to the smell of saltwater and the call of seagulls everyday. You can find her online home at [callieblackstone.wordpress.com](http://callieblackstone.wordpress.com).

**John Muro** is a life-long resident of Connecticut and a graduate of Trinity College, Wesleyan University, and the University of Connecticut. His professional career has been dedicated to environmental stewardship and conservation. His first volume of poems, *In the Lilac Hour*, was published last fall by Antrim House and it is available on Amazon. John’s poems have been published or are forthcoming in numerous literary journals, including *Moria*, *Euphony*, *Third Wednesday*, and others. In addition, he is a Pushcart Prize nominee.

**John Maurer** is a 26-year-old writer from Pittsburgh that writes fiction, poetry, and everything in-between, but his work always strives to portray that what is true is beautiful. He has been previously published in *Claudius Speaks*, *The Bitchin’ Kitsch*, *Thought Catalog*, and more than sixty others. @JohnPMaurer ([johnpmaurer.com](http://johnpmaurer.com))

**Ilma Qureshi** is currently pursuing their doctorate at the University of Virginia, with a focus on Persian poetics and South Asian Literature. Hailing from Multan, a small town decked in the south of Pakistan, they grew up with a host of languages and write in Persian, Urdu, and English. Their work has been previously published in *Tafbeem*, *Tareekh-e-Adab-e-Urdu*, and more.

**Susan Cossette** lives and writes in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Author of *Peggy Sue Messed Up*, her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Rust and Moth*,

*Vita Brevis, Adelaide, ONE ART, Anti-Heroine Chic, Loch Raven Review, As it Ought to Be, The Amethyst Review*, and in the anthologies *Tuesdays at Curley's* and *After the Equinox*.

**Mark Tulin** is a former therapist from California. His books include *Magical Yogis, Awkward Grace, The Asthmatic Kid and Other Stories, Junkyard Souls, Rain on Cabrillo*. He's been featured in *Amethyst Review, Weeds and Wildflowers, Vita Brevis Press, Spillwords*, and others. Follow Mark at [www.crowonthewire.com](http://www.crowonthewire.com). Twitter: @Crow\_writer.

**Antoni Ooto** lives and works with his wife, poet/storyteller, Judy DeCroce, in rural Brockport, New York. He is a well-known abstract expressionist artist whose art is collected throughout the US. These days, Antoni reads and studies the works of many poets which has opened another means of self-expression.

**Lynn White** lives in north Wales. Her work is influenced by issues of social justice and events, places, and people she has known or imagined. She is especially interested in exploring the boundaries of dream, fantasy, and reality. Her poetry has appeared in many publications including *Apogee, Firewords*, and more. Find Lynn at: <https://lynnwhitepoetry.blogspot.com> and on Facebook at Lynn White Poetry.

**Molly Kilduff Greer** was born and raised in the suburbs of Washington, DC, where she currently resides with her husband and two children. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *34 Orchard* and *Green Ink Poetry*. You can find her on Twitter: @MKGreerPoetry.

**Stephen Page** is part Native American. He was born in Detroit. He is the author of *A Ranch Bordering the Salty River, The Timbre of Sand, Still Dandelions*, and *The Salty River Bleeds*. He holds degrees from Palomar College, Columbia University, and Bennington College. He likes dog-eared pages in books.

**Stephen Mead** is an Outsider multi-media artist and writer. Since the 1990s he's been grateful to many editors for publishing his work in print zines and eventually online. He is also grateful to have managed to keep various day jobs for the Health Insurance. Currently he is resident artist/curator for The

Chroma Museum, artistic renderings of LGBTQI historical figures, organizations and allies predominantly before Stonewall, The Chroma Museum.

**Tricia Knoll** is a Vermont poet whose work appears widely in journals and anthologies. Her collected poems include *Urban Wild*, *Ocean's Laughter*, *Broadfork Farm*, *How I Learned To Be White*, and *Checked Mates*. *How I Learned To Be White* received the 2018 Indie Book award for motivational poetry. Website: [triciaknoll.com](http://triciaknoll.com)

**Alison Jennings** (email: [djenning6@msn.com](mailto:djenning6@msn.com)) is a Seattle-based poet who's written poetry since her ninth year, but only began to submit her work after retiring from public school teaching. She has had over 50 poems published internationally and won 3rd place or Honorable Mention in several contests. Please visit her website at <https://sites.google.com/view/airandfirepoet/home>.

**Celia Lisset Alvarez** is a graduate of the University of Miami's creative writing program. She has two chapbooks of poetry, *Shapeshifting* (Spire Press 2006) and *The Stones* (Finishing Line Press 2006). Her first full-length collection, *Multiverses*, is available from Finishing Line Press. *Bodies & Words* is forthcoming from Assure Press.

**Hester L. Furey** is the author of *Skeleton Woman Buys the Ticket* (Finishing Line Press, 2019) and *Little Fish: Poems* (Finishing Line Press, 2010). Assistant Professor of English at Georgia State University's Perimeter College, Furey is an expert on the American Radical Left 1880-1920. Her poems and essays have appeared in a number of journals and anthologies. She lives in Atlanta with her cat, Skillet.

**J. C. Dudley** is a poet, playwright, and recent graduate of Piedmont University with a BFA in Arts Administration. Some of his other poems can also be found in *Culturally's Modern Renaissance Magazine* and the *Blue Moth*.

**Sam Moe** is a queer writer currently pursuing a PhD in creative writing at Illinois State University. Her work has appeared in *Overheard Lit Mag* and she is the recipient of an Author Fellowship from the Martha's Vineyard Institute of Creative Writing.

**Clay Waters** has had poems published in *Green Hills Literary Lantern*, *The Santa Clara Review*, *Roanoke Review*, *Poet Lore*, as well as *Last Leaves* (Issue 2). Clay lived in Fort Lauderdale until the age of four and recently returned to find it hasn't changed a bit. His website is claywaters.org, featuring his self-published cozy mystery novel *Death in the Eye*.

**Osy Mizpah Unuevho** spends his time between Lagos and Minna where he works as a geologist and collects poetry, photography and music. He is a member of the Hill Top Creative Arts Foundation where he helped as mentor and editor. His works have begun appearing quietly on electronic magazines including: *Lunaris Review*; *Praxis MagOnline*; *Poets in Nigeria*; *Pangoline Review*; *AfricanWriter*, and *Ori*.

**Jean Fineberg** is a jazz saxophonist with poems published in *Modern Poets Magazine*, *Soliloquies*, *Vita Brevis*, *Dove Tails*, *Uppagus*, *Literary Yard*, *Flagler Review*, *Riza Press*, *High Shelf Press*, *Fibonacci Review*, *Creativity Webzine*, *Quillkeepers*, *Superpresent*, *Lucky Jefferson*, *Unlost Journal*, *Kerning*, and *Shot Glass Journal*. Her first chapbook is entitled *A Mobius Path*.

**Carol Hamilton** taught 2nd grade through graduate school in Connecticut, Indiana, and Oklahoma and was a medical translator and storyteller. She is a former Poet Laureate of Oklahoma and has published 17 books (children's novels, legends, and poetry) and has been nominated nine times for a Pushcart Prize.

**Karla Linn Merrifield** has 14 books to her credit. She is currently compiling *My Body the Guitar*, to be published in December 2021 by Before Your Quiet Eyes Publications Holograph Series (Rochester, NY). She is a frequent contributor to *The Songs of Eretz Poetry Review*. Web site: <https://www.karlalinnmerrifield.org/>; blog: <https://karlalinnmerrifield.wordpress.com/>.

**Cat Dixon (she/her)** is the author of *Eva* and *Too Heavy to Carry* (Stephen F. Austin University Press, 2016, 2014) and the chapbook *Table for Two* (Poet's Haven, 2019). Work forthcoming from *Sledgehammer Lit* and *Whale Road Review*. She is a poetry editor at *The Good Life Review*.

**Alan Bern** is a retired children's librarian and cofounder with artist/printer Robert Woods of Lines & Faces, a poetry broadside press/publisher, linesand-



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**Evgeniya Dineva** is a bi-lingual writer from Bulgaria. Her works appear in various literary journals such as *The Trouvaille Review*, *Poetic Sun*, *Indian Ruminations*, *Ethel*, and *Asian Cha*. She's currently working on her second novel, which is going to be traditionally published under a pen name.

**John Hicks** is a New Mexico poet who has been published by: *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Bangor Literary Journal*, *Versé-Virtual*, *Blue Nib*, *Poetica Review*, and others. He holds an MFA in Creative Writing from University of Nebraska—Omaha, and writes in the thin mountain air of the high plains.

**Sheryl Guterl** writes from New Mexico and New Hampshire. Retiring to the Southwest after a career as an educator in New Jersey, she appreciates more sunshine, higher mountains, and less winter ice. Her cabin on a lake in wooded New England provides inspiration and refreshment with cooler summers.

**Catherine A. Coundjeris** is a former elementary school teacher and has also taught writing at Emerson College and ESL writing at Urban College in Boston. She is published in literary magazines, including *Proem*, *The Dawntreader*, *Visions with Voices*, *Nine Cloud Journal*, *Academy of the Heart and Mind*, *Bombfire*, and more. Catherine is very passionate about adult literacy.

**John Sweeder's** poetry has appeared in *Burningword Literary Journal*, *Shantih*, and *Better Than Starbucks*, among other venues. His first book of poetry, *Untethered Balloons* (2021), was published by Adelaide Books, New York/Lisbon. He resides in Ocean City, New Jersey. When not writing, he's crabbing and fishing the back bays.

**Betty Naegele Gundred** has enjoyed writing since high school when she was editor of her school's literary magazine. Her work (fiction, non-fiction, and poetry) has appeared in various publications. Betty lives with her husband in the Sierra Foothills of Northern California where she enjoys Zumba classes and hiking.

**Tom Squitieri**, an award-winning war correspondent, is blessed to have his poetry appear in several publications, the book *Put Into Words My Love*, the art exhibition Color: Story2020, and the film “Fate’s Shadow: The Whole Story.” He writes mostly while parallel parking or walking his dogs, Topsy and Batman.

**Duane L Herrmann** was surprised to find himself in 1951 on a prairie farm. Still trying to make sense of that, he’s grown fond of grass waving under wind, trees, and moonlight. He survived a traumatic, abusive childhood embellished with dyslexia, ADHD (both unknown at the time), cyclothymia, now, PTSD.

**Katherine Darlington’s** poetry, stories, and articles have appeared in *Honey Colony*, *Grit*, poetry anthologies, and many other publications. When she was young, her dad read her William Blake’s poetry and her mom made up wonderful bedtime stories, fueling her love of writing. Hiking and riding horses inspire her writing. Please visit her website at [www.katherinedarlington.com](http://www.katherinedarlington.com)

**John Bartlett** is the author of eight books -fiction, non-fiction and poetry. In 2019 his first chapbook *The Arms of Men* was published and *Songs of the Godforsaken* in June 2020. Awake at 3:00 a.m. He was the winner of the 2020 Ada Cambridge Poetry Prize. He reviews and podcasts at [beyondtheestuary.com](http://beyondtheestuary.com) Twitter: [@beyond\\_estuary](https://twitter.com/@beyond_estuary)

**Allegra Jostad Silberstein** grew up on a farm in Wisconsin but has lived in CA since 1964. In 2010 they were honored to be chosen as the first poet laureate for the city of Davis, CA, where they have lived for the past 54 years.

**Con Chapman** is a Boston-area writer, author of *Rabbit’s Blues: The Life and Music of Johnny Hodges* (Oxford University Press), winner of the 2019 Book of the Year Award by Hot Club de France. His poetry has appeared in *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Ligbt*, and a number of literary magazines.

**Kay Cora Jewett**, for the past six years, has been writing essay-style columns on numerous subjects for Pamplin Media Group newspapers in Oregon. She has also published an equestrian newspaper and has been the winner of several local poetry awards.

**Ripley Crow** began writing as a child and delved into poetry in secondary school. Ripley graduated from Southwest Minnesota State University with a bachelor's degree in ELA Education and a writing minor. Ripley grew up in rural Minnesota and now lives there with a spouse and two children. Ripley has been influenced by many poets and writes poems because they demand to be written.

**Laurie Kolp** is an avid runner and lover of nature living in southeast Texas with her husband, three children, and two dogs. Her poems have appeared in *BlueHouse Journal*, *SWWIM*, *Whale Road Review*, and more. Laurie's poetry books include the full-length *Upon the Blue Couch* and chapbook *Hello, It's Your Mother*.

**David D'Ettore** had a short story, "Fallen Leaves" published by *Not Your Mother's Breast Milk (NYMBM)*. NYMBM also published two of his poems, "The Salvation Armoire" and "As the Line Moves Along." *Coffin Bell Journal* published his poem, "A Leper's Lament." "The Salvation Armoire" was recently published in the *Nine Cloud Journal's* August 2020 edition.

**Milton P. Ehrlich, Ph.D.** is a 90 year-old psychologist and a veteran of the Korean War. He has published many of his poems in periodicals such as *Wisconsin Review*, *Red Wheelbarrow*, *Poetica Magazine*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and *The New York Times*.

**Angela (she/her)** is from North Wales, UK. She studied English at Aberystwyth University and has recently returned to writing poetry after many years, for her poetry is freedom. Angela has had a poem recently published in *Inkdrinkers Magazine* and is currently working towards producing her first book of poetry.

**Alex "Fairything" Masse** is a writer of fiction, poetry, plays, and articles. Their words have been everywhere from *Vancouver Pride* to the Scholastic Writing Awards. They're also a neurodivergent nonbinary lesbian, which greatly affects their work. When not writing, they're probably making music. When not making music, they're probably writing.

**Ian Koh** is an MFA student of Creative Writing at Chapman University. His poetry has been published in *Forth Magazine* and *Inkslinger*. You can follow his journey on IG and Twitter @iannkoh.

**Ashleigh Catibog-Abraham** (ashleighcatibogabraham@gmail.com) is a writer from Toronto. She graduated from University of Toronto with an Honours Bachelor of Science degree, specializing in psychology.

**Ave Jeanne Ventresca (aka Ave Jeanne)** is the author of nine chapbooks of poetry that reflect social, political, and environmental concerns. Her most recent collection, *Noticing The Colors of Ordinary*, was released in the summer of 2019. She edited the acclaimed literary magazine *Black Bear Review* and served as publisher of Black Bear Publications for twenty years. Her award winning poetry (contemporary and Asian) has been widely published internationally in print and online.

**Kathryn Reilly** investigates the power of words and helps her classes master grammar's awesomeness. In the evenings, she's reading retold myths and fairy tales when she isn't writing them herself. Her latest work "Iara" is forthcoming in *Shadow Atlas: Dark Landscapes of the Americas*. Find her on Instagram: katecanwrite.

**D. C. Weiser** produced *The Song of Strawberry* at the Uptown Arts Bar (10/27/18) and is the author of *Angels of Twilight* (Scrimshaw Press 2020). A longtime resident of Kansas City, Missouri, his books are featured on Lulu. He is currently writing a new interpretation of Bram Stoker's 1897 *Dracula*.

**Ryan Gibbs** is an English professor who lives in London, Canada. His over forty published poems have appeared in journals and anthologies in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Malta. His children's poetry has been included in the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness. Twitter: @RyanGibbsWriter

**Votey Cheav** is a Cambodian-American daughter of refugees who survived the Khmer Rouge genocide. She is a trained lawyer and lover of the human condition. She is interested in the collective consciousness and moments and memories that evoke awakening in each of us. Her roots pulled her back to Cambodia witnessing its rebirth and resurgence of identity amidst changing geopolitical alliances. She is now based in London.

**Jeri Frederickson** calls Chicago home with her two cats and many plants. She dives into art as a channel to nurture love and access beauty while questioning the experiences that hold people together. She is the Creative Director of a nonprofit arts organization whose mission centers survivors of sexual violence. Her chapbook *You Are Not Lost* was published in October 2021 from Finishing Line Press. You can find her @bshl\_furmonsters and @jfredcreates.

**L. Sydney Abel** is the pen name of Lawrence Abel. He was born and raised in Kingston upon Hull, England. He is married and has two grown-up children. He has written and illustrated several books for children and young adults, including *Timothy Other: the boy who climbed Marzipan Mountain*. His latest novel *12:07 The Sleeping* is based on personal experience of sleep paralysis, or Old Hag Syndrome.

**Tricia da Costa** is a 17 year old student from Goa, India. She writes poetry, fiction, and nonfiction. When she isn't at school, studying, or writing, she can often be found reading poetry, fiction or nonfiction, watching web and television series, watching movies, or fumbling around the kitchen.

**Ramzi Albert Rihani** was born to a literary family and has been living in the Washington, DC, area most of his life. He was a music critic from 1979 to 1990, and wrote a travel book: *The Other Color - a Trip Around the World in Six Months*. He has been writing and publishing poetry since 1995.

**Jess Paauwe** is a former English: Language Arts and Literature major from Grand Valley State University in Allendale, MI. Their email is paauweje@mail.gvsu.edu. They enjoy poetry because they like to experiment with structure and content to create meaning. They strive for aesthetics as a poet.

**Ivan de Monbrison** is a poet and artist born in 1969 and living in Paris. He has been published in literary magazines globally.

**V. Bray** has been a writer since childhood and still has a box filled with her first "books," usually illustrated with markers and bound with yarn. She writes in many genres, from speculative and historical fiction to poetry. Her work has been published in the anthology *Growing Up Lifespan* and *The Writer*. Learn more at authorvbray.com.

**Carol Lynn Stevenson Grellas** is currently enrolled in the Vermont College of Fine Arts, MFA in Writing program. She is an eleven-time Pushcart Prize nominee and a seven-time Best of the Net nominee. She has served as the Editor-in-Chief for the *Orchards Poetry Journal* and Co-Editor-in-Chief for the *Tule Review*. In 2012 she was inducted into the Saratoga Authors Hall of Fame and according to family lore, she is a direct descendant of Robert Louis Stevenson. [www.clgrellaspoetry.com](http://www.clgrellaspoetry.com)

**Janina Aza Karpinska** is a British, mixed cultural-heritage, multidisciplinary artist. Much of her work explores identity through fragmentation; re-integration; distortion, and reflection, with work shown at an International Photographic Exhibition, Ark-T Centre, Cowley, Oxford; in Artist Book form, Picture House, Leicester; and *Response*, Fabrica Gallery Magazine, Brighton, among other publications.

**Paul** is a writer who lives with Lyn in the south-west corner of Western Australia, a place of diverse, fragile flora and fauna, a unique biosphere that inspires. Paul has been writing for some years, and writing poetry for his blog and publication since 2017. Paul enjoys working with different forms, but prefers free-verse.

**Ashley Oakes** has, in no particular order, many pets, children, and interests. They are 45 and have work and life experiences commensurate with someone who is their age. In other words, they are like most people, though perhaps worse at writing biographical statements than others.

**Carole Stone** is a distinguished Professor of English and creative writing, emerita, Montclair State University. Her poetry collections include *AMERICAN RHAPSODY* (Cavankerry Press) and *TRAVELING WITH THE DEAD* (Backwaters Press). Recent journal publications include *Crosswinds* and *Sequestrum*. She received three fellowships from The New Jersey State Council on the Arts.

**Sue Chenette** grew up in northern Wisconsin and has lived in Toronto since 1972. Her most recent books are *Clavier, Paris, Abyssum* (Aeolus House, 2020), and the documentary poem *What We Said* (Motes Books, 2019), based on her time as a social worker in Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty.

**Eric Pitman**, a non-binary native of Kentucky, is a first-generation college student and current PhD candidate in creative writing at Illinois State University. Their work seeks to disrupt the oppressive forces that continue to adversely shape queer subjectivities. When not writing, they are planning their next escape to nature.

**Patricia L. Scruggs** lives and writes in Southern California. In addition to her poetry collection, *Forget the Moon*, her work has appeared in *ONTHEBUS*, *Spillway*, *RATTLE*, *Calyx*, *Cultural Weekly*, *Crab Creek Review*, and others. A recent Pushcart Prize nominee, Patricia is a retired art educator who earned her MFA at California State University, Fullerton. She lives and writes in Southern California.

**Sandra Vallie's** work has appeared in *Adobe Walls*, *Airplane Reading*, *Last Leaves*, *The Más Tequila Review*, *The Malpais Review*, and *plumeforwriters.org*. Sandra is originally from Michigan, where she earned a BA at Eastern Michigan University. She currently lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where she writes and finds it challenging to garden without water.

**Eva Lynch-Comer** holds a B.A. in Creative Writing from Hamilton College. Her poetry has most recently appeared in *Capsule Stories Magazine*, *Peach Velvet Magazine*, and *Analogies Analogies & Allegories Literary Magazine*. A former poetry editor of *Red Weather*, she now works in children's editorial at a publishing company in New York City. When she's not fully immersed in the book world, you can find Eva singing, journaling, drinking chai tea, or walking her dog Osito.

**Kassidy Bowen** is a creative something-or-other that enjoys playing with different mediums and making things. She should probably have some kind of social media to post her work but the best she can do is a half-baked Instagram account that's sporadic at best (@thoughts.of.rest).

**Sarah Beck Mather** is an artist, actress, and poet, having just been published by *The Bounds Green Book Writers*, *A Soft Landing*, and *Nottingham C.A.N.* Sarah trained as an actress at The Central School of Speech and Drama in London and is completing an MSc in Mindfulness at the University of Aberdeen.

**James B. Nicola** is the author of six collections of poetry, the latest being *Fires of Heaven: Poems of Faith and Sense*. His decades of working in the

theater culminated in the nonfiction book *Playing the Audience: The Practical Guide to Live Performance*, which won a Choice award.

**Marsha Andrews** is thrilled to have her first poem published, “Bird in a Gilded Cage.” Her poem speaks to an experience she had while attending a women’s support group. After she finished speaking, one woman spoke up and said “I wouldn’t want your life. You’re like a bird in a gilded cage.” Marsha knew the truth when she heard it. The language of poetry allowed Marsha to express this epiphany in her poem. Marsha’s other creative endeavours are expressed in art, photography, including developing recipes at age 13, to feed a family of seven.

**Ana M. Fores Tamayo** advocates for marginalized refugee families from Mexico and Central America. Working with asylum seekers is heart wrenching, yet satisfying. In parallel, poetry is their escape. They have been published in *The Raving Press*, *the Laurel Review*, *Indolent Books*, and many others. Their poetry in translation & photography have been featured at home and abroad. Through poetry, they keep tilting at windmills.

**Vasudha Rungta** is a Mumbai-based writer, film director, and creative producer. They enjoy writing fiction, poetry, and scripts, and have been published in *Gulmohur Quarterly*, *Usama Literary Review*, and *currentMood magazine*, amongst others. They are the founder of “Melting Clock,” a film production house, and have worked in advertising for more than fifteen years.

**Antonia Vázquez** is a writer and visual artist living in Newark, Delaware, by way of Guanajuato, Mexico. She enjoys dark fiction, cheery music, and making up stories about strangers.

**Cheryl Caesar** lived in Paris, Tuscany, and Sligo for 25 years. She earned her doctorate in comparative literature at the Sorbonne. She teaches writing at Michigan State University, publishes poetry internationally and gives readings locally. She also works in watercolor and charcoal. And, yes, she has and loves cats.

**Ann Privateer** is a poet, artist, and photographer. Some of her recent work has appeared in *Third Wednesday* and *Entering*, among others. Ann grew up in Ohio where she was influenced by weather’s four seasons. She now resides in Northern California where she is happy to year around garden.



**Andrew Feng** creates surreal, horror artwork and portraits through drawings, paintings, and digital art. He would describe himself as a metal head, fashion enthusiast, and a lover of black who spends his time blasting metal music while drinking boba tea. Andrew hopes to spread awareness about mental health through his horror-style art. You can follow him on [@kingfengart\\_](#) on Instagram!

**Jim George** is a writer-artist from Reading, PA. His artwork, fiction, and poetry have appeared in *Otoliths*, *The MOON*, *Dream Noir*, *Lotus-eater*, *The Sea Letter*, and *Pennsylvania Bards Southeast Poetry Review*. He has authored two books: *Jim Shorts*, an illustrated collection of stories and poems, and *My Mind's Eyeful*, a children's book, both available as PDFs.

**Lorette C. Luzajic** is an award-winning artist whose works have appeared in museums, galleries, nightclubs, banks, and hotels; on a billboard in New Orleans and in the Berlin metro; as a prop on reality tv and in the movies; in a magazine ad campaign, and in the homes of collectors in 30 countries and counting. She is also a writer of widely published flash fiction and prose poetry, mostly inspired by art. [@lclmixedupmedia](#)

**Gissel Gomez** is a seventeen-year-old Mexican American artist. She is the Editor-in-Chief of her school's literary magazine, and her artwork has been recognized by several publications. Beauty is her main inspiration, and she can only hope for people to stop and stare at her work.

**Ivanka Fear** is a former teacher now pursuing her passion for writing. Her poems and short stories appear in *Spadina Literary Review*, *Montreal Writes*, *Adelaide Literary*, *October Hill*, *Scarlet Leaf Review*, *The Sirens Call*, *The Literary Hatchet*, *Wellington Street Review*, *Aphelion*, *Muddy River Poetry Review*, and elsewhere. <https://ivankafear.wix.com/mysite>

**Christopher Clauss (he/him)** is an introvert, Ravenclaw, father, poet, photographer, and middle school science teacher in rural New Hampshire. His mother believes his poetry is “just wonderful.” Both of his daughters declare that he is the “best daddy they have,” and his pre-teen science students rave that he is “Fine, I guess. Whatever.”

**Kate Meyer-Currey** moved to Devon in 1973. A varied career in front-line settings has fuelled her interest in gritty urbanism, contrasted with a rural upbringing. Her ADHD instils a sense of ‘other’ in her writing. She has over fifty poems published. Her first chapbook *County Lines* (Dancing Girl Press) comes out this year.



