



a home for poetry
about trauma, loss, and grief

Issue 2

Harrow House Journal

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A. Kahn, Editor

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About Harrow House

Harrow House Journal was born of a desire to create a healing space for poets to share works centered on trauma, loss, and grief.

It is intended to be a safe, inclusive space where pain is valid, and words are used to connect and heal. Your experiences matter. You matter.

Welcome to *Harrow House*.

Editor's Note Regarding Triggers

Thank you so much for taking the time to read our second issue of *Harrow House*, and joining our space to grieve—and heal.

I have added Trigger Warnings wherever authors indicated or where I felt were necessary, although it is possible I may have missed some. I also did not want to insist upon Trigger Warnings for every potential interpretation other than the poet's intended meaning; if it was apparent one was needed, I noted it.

Please read with caution, especially if you are going through a difficult time.

It will get better.

— A. Kahn

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The Urn With His Wife's Ashes

John Grey

TW: death, mention of alcohol

It goes everywhere with him.
It sits on his lap at the movies.
It occupies center-table at weekly poker games.
He eats with it in the opposite chair.

Airport security peeked inside but let it through.
He and it were buckled together
all the way to the west coast.
It bounced around in the passenger seat

of a hired car, saw Disneyland
and Universal Studios.
His family indulge him, his friends likewise.
If it helps him get over her loss, they say,

then more power to the urn, the ashes.
Better that than weeping over her grave,
or pretending she's still alive like Mr Johnson
or, worse than that, like old man Hargreaves,

celebrating her departure with a hooker
and a dozen beers or, like Sam McDonald,

so far gone, he forgets she ever existed.
No, he doesn't weep, he holds.

He doesn't pretend, just shakes the urn
a little, shifts the ashes around like sand.
And there's no celebration.
Her remains are merely a fact of life.

And how could he ever forget,
when his whole life's spent being reminded.
She always loved the ocean, says his sister.
Why don't you spread her ashes on the waves.

Instead, he walks out into the water, holding the urn aloft.
Fact is, they always loved the ocean

The Language of Dreams

Claudia Wysocky

Look here.
This is the language
of dreams. It speaks in tongues,
in symbols, in signs. And it whispers
to us of things unseen— of secrets lost
beneath the waves.
We are but vessels for its message,
a conduit between worlds. Listen closely.
Hear the truth in its riddles,
the clarity in its confusion.
For this is the language of dreams,
and you must learn to speak it.

Akin to Gravity

T.E. Bean

TW: death of a spouse

Bound by the black knot of his heart,
guided by the thunder in his brain,
a man throws himself into his task,
labors as memories scrape inside his chest.

Through sore-worked bones, his spirit grows dim.
And still he pushes harder, presses to forget,
until aches become essence,
until, after years spent railing against himself,
he stretches on his wife's grave,
digs his palms into his eyes,
and tells her he's sorry.
That he might feel for this new woman.

Of late, she is sunshine,
a clear sky above his dark cloud,
and he's all rushing wind and racing heart for her.

Downcast, a man lies in the damp grass.
It was difficult to admit, even to himself.
But there's movement in the stillness,
a shiver of motion.

Something rolls over him the way a storm rolls across a field.
Nine words ripple the air—
his wife's voice on the breeze.

A witless belief, he well knows:
dubious. Dire. Beguiling.
But here, now, he won't push through his clouds.
Today, burned muscles won't match what brews within,

because belief is akin to gravity.
With enough of it, your feet find solid ground.

Now, from the rain-slicked grass, he presses up,
releases a breath when gravity holds firm,
and simply says yes,

to nine words ringing around him,
as though shouted from mountaintops:
“You are worthy of all happiness you can imagine.”

The Graduation

Karen Louise

TW: sexual assault

When she was little, perhaps about five, a boy twisted her nipples each time she walked by.

With tears in her eyes, arms crossed on her shirt, her Sunday School teacher, a volunteer preacher, said:

Just ignore him.

When she was nine, a boy pulled her hair, pushed her to the ground, held her face down, forced a worm between her lips. Her mother said:

It's because he likes you.

(A woman's mouth is a man's property to renovate. You're lucky to have the attention.)

When she was 14, her bra strap snapped until her back turned black, became unwanted holding hidden in a crowd, became forceful hands in the night, became turkey slaps in plain sight. Her father said:

Boys will be boys

It took six of them to hold her down and her father said:

It's just a bit of fun.

When she was 19, she met a nice guy,
they went out for dinner and then to a bar.
She had a great time, he insisted on paying.

They made out in the back of the taxi to her place.
He asked to come in, she liked him a lot.
She found some red wine and they talked about politics.
Half-way through a flirt about single use plastics
he gentled her arm, leaned in for a kiss . . .
put her hand on his dick.
In the beginning, she went along.
They'd had a few drinks and the night was still young.
When she tried to pull back, he wouldn't let go.
She couldn't say stop. She didn't say no.

I can't give you an ending that's tied in a bow
No court case or soul mate or personal growth
That night was no lesson, it was a graduation.
A life of systemic minimisation.

What are we teaching our daughters?
What are we teaching our sons?

The Waiting Game

Sophia Dzinski

The moon is staring back.
Like the lightning bugs she used to catch in a jar.
She was only seven.
Innocent and pure.

She sits in her car and waits.
All she does these days is wait.
Wait for the one set of words to appear on the screen,
it always sends her butterflies.

Wait for something
that will surely leave her shattered.
Instead, the car engine stays running,
like the mascara down her cheek when you never call.
But the makeup isn't as wet as it used to be.
Only a little damp.
It's the amount of hope she has left.

The moon is still bright, it blinds her.
When she tries to close her eyes,
she's still waiting.
The light turns green and she slowly drives home.
Down the gravel road,
the only street she's ever known,
The lightning bugs fly free.

in godless country

Michael Carter

TW: child abuse

i.

sprawled out as a languishing beast
we spent childhood,
playacting our dreams and terrors
like we all do.
we played in the rubble of ruins
left by those before us,
broken glass a more constant companion
than love.
our lessons taught that prisms and punctures add
color to wastelands the same.

we accepted what may come
and asked for nothing more.

ii.

can you keep a secret from god?
you had asked me
and out of naivety or love—
was there a difference—
i graciously accepted.

secrets like that don't rest
they only ever cry
on and on
in desperate hunger.
i begged

an empty sky to listen, to judge,
to do anything other than witness.

iii.

i have prayed a hundred days over
and i pray a hundred days more
to the unrelenting chasm
in which i buried
the bones of childhood.
i tell the past to go easy
like a euthanized dog,
hoping he can finally rest.
i urge him to un-home what was,
to release the night.

but to myself alone i pray, knowing
we have always lived in godless country.

Christmas Lights

May Garner

TW: domestic violence

No lights that year on Sonora.
Just the open mouth of December,
screaming through the broken seams of our walls.

Four days before the world
wrapped itself in holy peace,
you left, your ghost swinging
like a prayer started but never finished

Mom still hangs the old lights sometimes.
Bulbs half dead, wires snarled like veins.
How you left our home, in shambles.

I sit in the living room she rebuilt from your blow,
the stains scrubbed out, the locks changed,
and I wonder if there is a version of us
that made it.

A version where the lights *hum*,
and nobody is afraid of *footsteps*,
or winter, or the sound of the rope *tightening*.

The Candle

Danny P. Barbare

Memories

of

dad

are

still

aglow

warm

like

the

tears

of

a

candle

that

drip

into

the

candle

holder

till

the

candle

no
longer
melts

but
the
tears
are
still
warm.

Cairns

Kellie Brown

Pile up rocks—
large and small;
sharp and smooth;
all warm from carrying hands,
wet from weeping eyes.

When you lose sense of how
far you've come, glance back
at these waystations, humble
monuments to struggle— yet
embedded with joyful pebbles.

Laying down burdens is hard.
It needs practice like violin scales.
It takes acceptance that other
cumbrous stones will accumulate
as you journey on.

The best you or I can hope for is
more strength for the bearing,
more certainty for the discarding.

Moments

SR Inciardi

Each lifespan comes with a price.

Perhaps what takes its time has more time
since all days are limited just as there's a certain number
of rings in the trunk of a tree a certain number of roses
in a rose bush when it then flowers in large bursts of color
and crowds out all of the other aspects of being a rose.

Perhaps longevity is threatened sustainability teetering
when a lifetime is condensed then consumed in fewer
more intense moments—their density their vibrance spent
in just a fraction of time.

Maybe this is the weather's real plan?
Maybe longing for other moments can't be
when other moments are part of what's been:
the way different birds build nests
the way light cannot move any faster?

Maybe after one-hundred-thousand years
the questions asked by those who sat along a river
are the same now as then in the silence
of another moment already heard already lived?
Maybe the sun shines the snow falls the wind wraps
each day to its limit and anything further takes
from those still ahead those still waiting?

Final rest

Heledd Haf Howells

TW: death of a pet

He passed on my lap.
My golden lab panting,
Confused but chewing,
Happy in our company,
Safe hearing our voices.
They interrupted three times,
Compassion lost per visit,
An ivory document to sign
And a long number to call.
48 hours to pay through tears,
15 minutes to hold him close.
They snuck us out the side door
Like a shameful evening.
I was told on the way out that
They'll take good care of him.
I should've helped move his body
Which no longer held his spirit.
We left him on the floor for them
To drag away, freeze, to burn.
It's been 36 hours and I'm stuck.
I'm not in the car journey home,

The silent hours sat on the sofa,
The moments of valued weakness.
I'm still in the room with 2 strangers
And 3 family members, feeling
His heavy head rest on my lap
For the final time.

Wasp in Terrace Dish

Jerry Reynolds

TW: mention of suicide

She was struggling
Bound by the water
Soon to die
I fished her out
Laid her on the deck to dry
She flexed gossamer wings
Until she could fly
Days later, the same refrain
To her rescue again, I arrived
To prevent her second
Attempt at suicide

Stage 4

Ann H Reddick

TW: illness

Mortality is moving in
windy gusts settling into my bones

Dissolving organ
Dissipating function
How long will I be?

Maybe high winds
Will blow tree branches
thru my flesh

Will this end be satisfying?

As I march strongly
into the finite breezes.

The Wounding

Eline Tuijn

If you saw me walk on crutches,
propping up a fractured core,
struggling on an unseen path
blinded by love no more;
if you could see the string of lies
etched deep into my skin,
behold the deceit and deception
in the bruising on my limbs,
or trace the raw betrayals
as lacerations on my chest,
see proof of violated boundaries
in bleeding palms, begging for rest:
Would you question still my struggle to heal?
Would you tell me again to just break free?
My heartache might be invisible
- to you - but it's as real as this to me.

In a Sky of Self-Injury

Nicholas Grooms

TW: self-harm

Can I capture you in a silhouette, Traced?
Enraptured by shadow's swallowing mouth

Down the cavernous throat of ember black
Her bleeding wounds sneer in sighing yaps-

Crisp breeze seeks the language of delicate freeze
Icicle teeth, sharp tongue in the sheath

Arctic soul seeks a way to punctuate all woes
Her arms; A sky of razor thin harm-

Leaving those she trusts to wish upon a scar
Dulling their drawn edges, Star by glistening star.

Ever and Again

P.C. Scheponik

TW: death of a parent

Now that he is gone, I visit him every day,
often, more than once.

We have long since moved away from our
differences.

Long-held anger has turned to trust.

I must confess it is much better like this—
no limit to the time we spend together,
no lack of devotion,
no unexpressed tenderness or repressed
emotion.

All we know and all we are is in the open
corridors of my mind and the wide hallways
of my heart.

These days we are rarely apart—calm and harmony—
no one to start a disagreement or sow a seed of
discontent.

All contentiousness has been packed away.

We are very careful my father and I,
now that Death has had his say.

The truth is that nothing can get in the way
of our love for each other anymore.

911 Watch

Taffeta Chime

TW: pregnancy loss

Doctor spoke with placating hands:
You're fine, but
Her voice became serious:
Things could go south
fast.

If you have a headache that won't go away,
call 911.

If you notice her movements slow or stop,
call 911.

If you have sparkled vision—
that sounds exciting—
call 911.

You're fine, but
things might turn suddenly terrible.

Brings me back to last year:

If you run a fever,
call 911.

If you notice sharp abdominal pain,

call 911.

If you bleed,

call 911.

You're fine, or

you could be dying.

Aren't I already?

Every morning I creep closer to my end.

You're telling me I could finally sprint?

That the finish line could move?

Will I hold her over while I keep crawling?

Or can I thrust myself and push her back?

I was done.

Exhausted

of everything

Fragile,

too powerful.

A ticking time bomb

set to explode at the smallest tap,

my job both to keep the bomb safe

and to crowd control if it goes off.

I was ready—

Ready.

I went to bed with pain.

Didn't tell anyone.

Turned off my alarm,

ready to not wake up.

But I did.

The anxiety rushes back

like blood to the head.

You're fine, but
this could be a life-threatening emergency.

Will she live?

If not,
call 911.

Will I live?

If not,

Nullity

C. Christine Fair

TW: physical abuse, sexual abuse, infant death, ableist language

I'm five.
I don't know who my father
is.
I call my mother's husband "John" but baby Joey
calls him "dadda."
My mom tells me that
"three men made a bet to get her
in the sack." My dad is Bob. He won.
He volunteered to go to Vietnam thrice
instead of being my dad and her husband.
She was briefly a single mom in 1967 rural Indiana.
Mom became a nullity.

I'm five
Mom tells me she married John
because she had to.
She couldn't raise me
on her own.
She couldn't stay with her parents.
Her father nearly blinded her
while beating her.

On the way to the hospital,
they rehearsed the story in the car.
“She fell down the stairs. Hit
her eye on the banister.”
Mom became a nullity

I am five
Baby Johnny was born.
His tiny heart had a hole in it.
Johnny turned blue and died often.
The doctors didn’t care
because baby Johnny
was born a “mongoloid.”
My entire family was embarrassed.
John, my step-monster, said his namesake baby
could not be his. He was adamant mom
had “fucked around.”
Johnny, her little blue baby, died in mom’s arms.
Mom became a nullity.

I’m five
Uncle art lives with Aunt Carol in our basement
They help mom with me and Joey while
Baby Johnny keeps on dying.
He folds me over the couch.
He plunges his trigger finger
into my girlhood and
plucks out my innocence.
I cry when Mom leaves me alone with him.
Mom doesn’t notice.
Mom was a nullity.

With Bells On

Todd Matson

I don't know where we were, but
surprisingly, she showed up with
bells embroidered on her sweater,
lips sealed, poker faced, emotionless
and motionless, yielding the floor
to silence which can have its own
way of dominating conversations.
Oh, and I should say she appeared
in a dream as that is the only way
I see her anymore.

Funny how loud silence can be
if you've ever truly heard it: air
molecules swirling about mimicking
sounds of waves arriving on shore
and receding as you breathe in and
out to the beat of your heart. When
silence becomes deafening, for those
with ears to hear, there is the faint
white noise of blood flowing through
your veins.

*As I've never been good at staring
contests or yielding the floor to
silence when I've heard enough*

*of it, I found myself speaking.
From the time you were floating
in amniotic fluid, I have loved you,
and for you I would have died a
thousand times.*

Lips sealed, poker faced, emotionless
and motionless, she yielded the floor
to the sound of air molecules swirling
to the beat of my heart and the faint
white noise of blood flowing through
my veins. I swear, I found myself
tilting my ear in the off chance any
embroidered bells were ringing.

i masturbated the night he died

Vera Podell

TW: death

i masturbated the night he died
(not because he was dead but
because of what i was)
a fever
rapid decline
days on the phone
i don't know if
he was a good person
(i didn't know him at all in fact)
even though i spent
half of my life
with him in the same room
stale room
books and dust
november hit
almost his birthday
i didn't cry on his funerals
(i loved him)
(it's a complicated thing)
remember his eyes as he was ill
(he didn't recognize me)
i still think about him

(five years later)

lately

i cried in a bus for no reason

and maybe that was one

Sunshine

Elizabeth Rosell

TW: death of a parent, guilt

How does the sun keep shining?
How does the world keep spinning?
Doesn't the world know my mother is dead?
Can't the world feel her loss as much as me?
How do I keep going, now that I'm orphaned?
And worse than that, how do I live with the guilt,
When she called, coherent, begging me to come?
How do I live with my selfishness?
What else would you call it?
Were they just crocodile tears I cried at her beside?
Or was it truly the pain of losing her?
Had I not lost her months before?
Had she not become an empty shell?
How can I explain how tired I was?
How can I justify thinking of myself first,
When my mother was suffering alone.
How can I cry, begging for her return?
How can I live with myself anymore?
How can I live without her anymore?
How can I ever look at the sun again?

Requiem

Anne Mikusinski

TW: grief

Grief and loss
The melancholy twins
Travel together
Due to lack
Of other companions.
They tolerate and
And
Complement each other
Often
Based on their joint impact
Of those they visit.
Frequently
They linger
Their hosts
Too deep in sadness
To ask for their departure.
Not yet, they say
Not yet.

The Cigarette Carton/My Master's Coffin

Toni Dawe

I feel trapped.

They've built a box made of rotten, wet wood and enclosed me inside. I inhale the cortisol in the smog like I'm sucking through the very last bit of a drenched cigarette that's been ashed too many times.

I regulate.

I adjust.

I adapt it as a habit as long as I am granted the grace of feeling the outside.

The breeze, I sense it in my hair and across my skin, weaving through lines of loving, trusting, connecting.

They do not stay.

I cannot know when the lid will close. It slides in my view at the pace of a slug. At first, it's just a slight blur, casting nothing more than the shadow of a cloud.

The crash of thunder signals a detonation. It echoes, vibrates,

Frac/tures

All things. The smog cements, securing its favourite place in my bones and my flesh, where it began to lay its claim and build its home long ago.

I cannot move.

I cannot breathe.

There is no space for me.

Now.

In the Grasp of Envy

Rae Greenwood

Walking through the busy streets among strangers
Strangers - all relishing in their hopes and dreams
Happy mothers strolling their giggling babies
A couple with clasped hands and adoring smiles
Men in suits bragging about their wealth
All basking in their successes

For a moment, one small moment -
I dream of strolling my own baby
Holding the hand of my partner
Enjoying a wealthy lifestyle
What a grand moment it is

But - are they truly happy?

Judging strangers on the busy streets -
Won't help me with my dreams
My scornful glares just mar my face
Transforming myself into an ugly monster
A cruel metamorphosis

the inheritance

Rebekah Rodriguez

you told me someday I'd be an heiress,
sun-kissed and crowned with bugambilias,
waiting for the world behind a rusted gate.

two houses and a ranch in my name,
you drew me a map and showed me
where you'd buried the gold.

but now the house is painted white
gutted from the inside, stuffed with
lamine floors and marble counters.

that home made of iron and stone
the roots planted at the century's turn
were sold and poured into concrete.

the ranch is just a piece of land
in someone else's name and our family
is just an idea that died with you.

all you promised me is not gone,
but who else will remember
when all of this was ours?

the vultures wasted no time flying in,
selling the house for scraps,
and crowning themselves in fool's gold.

now they've painted over the pink,
bleached the laughter from the walls
all to erase the color of you.

these strangers won't know what lives
in the bones and breath you left
for me, once upon a time:

I could've been an heiress,
but the deed wasn't signed
so the land isn't mine, only the loss.

Your Divorce Ruined My Faith in Brunch

Dustin Triplett

TW: divorce, mention of car accident, mentions of blood/bones/gore

It felt like losing my family
in a car crash,
the kind they don't show on TV
because the limbs are too scattered—
because the blood forms letters
that spell ***I thought they'd make it.***

They were the couple you'd tell God about
if you were the praying type.
You'd say, "*This. Make more of this.*"
And He, with His holy indifference,
must've laughed.

Now she's posting poems with razors
between the lines,
and he's moved into a loft
that looks like a divorcee's apology.
There's a lava lamp.
There's a bike he doesn't ride.

And we all line up like
children in a courtroom—
Who gets Christmas?
Who gets the jokes about Trader Joe's
and bad indie movies
and that fight about the cracked tile
that became a party story?

The air smells like betrayal,
but no one will say who farted.
We speculate. We scroll.
She's too flirty with the barista.
He's too tan for January.
Someone unfollowed someone.
Someone's sister liked the wrong post.

I want to side with the truth,
but it packed a suitcase
and ghosted us all.
Now I'm the awkward friend
invited to both funerals
but only one eulogy.

And still—
I miss them.
Together.
Like two bones that didn't know
how broken they were
until the crash.

Now all we have are fragments
and a family photo
we don't know where to hang.

When the Whales Leave

Jeannette de Beauvoir

And I stand watching the sunset dipping
gold and purple into the ocean and think
about what it will be like
when the whales leave—

Do you? You always said their beauty
and power were overwhelming: we
could never let them go.
But I am cursed to imagine it—

the shape of a world left behind, silent
of melodies ancient as stardust, bereft
of shadows deeper than memory
lost dreams haunting silvered ripples

of water and we didn't even care. Names
lost in the spindrift and waves, Blue,
and Humpback, and Minke, their fluid
grace a memorial to the aching majestic

world we inherited—and then destroyed.
Perhaps we won't, you say: perhaps there
is still time to learn, to save them, maybe even
to save ourselves. I am not optimistic.

The greed of gold and power always
a sharper siren call to those who rule
than ever were the echoing cries running
wild and raw through fathoms of water:

and that emptiness is what it will be like
when the whales leave.

For whom?

Diana Morley

TW: pregnancy, adoption, mentions of divorce/sobriety

To give her up at birth the kindest way.
We said no military parents and please
find a couple with a good sense of humor.

Cafeteria-style contract for relinquishing
our newborn.

Later missed resting my arm on her soft bump
but no doubt she was with a wonderful couple
meeting her needs to perfection. Lucky kid!

Later had another girl, by choice,
who in her forties found her birth sister
through DNA. We three met and hugged.

Older sister knew we meant well but
popped my bubble. Her parents divorced.
She's now sober but has many other struggles.

She gets by, so far.

To give her up at birth the kindest way—
for whom?

The Dead are Really Gone

Taisa Jenne

TW: death

In my dream I woke up and you were in my house
just stopping in with some cereal
the kids had asked you to bring by

We both knew you were dead but we hugged and cried
and you called me honey and it sounded so good

It's like that sometimes, that you might just be
waiting in the kitchen with the cereal

It's wishing things were true, how
the wasp knocks its head against the window
wanting into the reflection
of the day it is already in

or the mountain holds its empty blue cup
where the glacier used to rest

The comfrey hacked down
and heaped onto the compost
wilting but still full of some
reaching, illogical life-force

bending its flowering tips
up for the bees

After Adrienne Rich's poem For the Dead

micro doesn't mean minor

Ayomide Okeowo

TW: racial profiling, generational trauma, anti-Blackness

my grandmother taught me
how to press a curl flat
with a hand steadier than god.

she said,

*if they see you wild,
they will think you don't know better.*

i did not know what she meant
until a teacher touched my braids
without asking.
until a mall security guard followed me
through two stores
and out the door.

but i smiled.

because i had been told
that being angry
was another way to get arrested.

it's not a *real* trauma,
as i've been told.
not like war,

not like a car crash,
not like blood on the pavement.

but it is.

it hides in my shoulders,
in how i apologize before speaking,
in how i never leave the house
without doing my edges.

my mother called it *survival*.
her mother called it *pride*.

i call it what it is:
a grief that doesn't scream,
but chews through the body
quietly.

Skeletons

Solape Adetutu Adeyemi

When those buried skeletons,
Insist most vehemently
to come out to dance

moonlight 23

Alyssa Ladewski

the sun has woken me up
while the moon has kissed me goodnight
for *23 years straight*
that is:
8,400.75 days
201,618 hours
12,097,080 minutes
725,804,800 seconds
they were supposed to stop, but yet here they are not giving up on me
looking through my notes of my final days, where were they then?
did they ignore the life that was supposed to be taken
or were they the ones keeping me *alive*?
i'm still unsure of where i'm supposed to be but i know, somehow,
that i'm here.
maybe someday i'll become the moon
just to save you again.

I Should Have Been There

Mel Bartlett

TW: gun violence

The first thing they will tell you will be
a frail attempt at compassion,
boiled down by blue speech bubbles
behind the cracks of a glowing screen.

The first thing they will tell you
when the back stock door of the candy shop
unlocks for the first time
and a different world greets you is this:

I should have been there.

As if it would have been any different,
a tradeoff a simple thing,
proving you indeed as disposable
as the sound of three pops made apparent.

As if flesh and blood and bone
can withstand
a boy with only two things left:

a gun
and something to prove,

both crackling
like fourth of july sparklers
in his hands

Please Heal on the Weekends

Mitchell Biggs

Grief should be reclassified as a four letter word

More akin
to the stink of shit
or the weight carried by fuck

Grief
so piquant and hushed and tidy it sounds

It feels
hard,
staccato consonants stab with serrated blades
hilt buried and twisted

Too old
for this to be truly tragic

Too young
to pass for normal anymore

I am orphan-light

This is diet-disaster

Holy trinity trine now squared
family scattered &
shattered at 33

Drowning in Her (Trust)

Kamalendu Nath

TW: death

“Would you ever call me?” “Would you call my name?”

I look at her lone eye - lying motionless, as-is, on right side,
on this metallic floor, raised way - way up - way-up; high –

“(Tourniquet) I need to shave off, (syringe) a little bit of hair...”

“It is very fast - in ten seconds she’d clear; (needle) ...” (despair)

Looking at that chiding eye - that I have loved always and
known, just the look she’d hold, in our family that she’d grown –

*“I can’t hear her heartbeat (stethoscope), which is very unusual,
there must be something obstructing, probably, from liquid (flow)...”*

I couldn’t take off my eyes off her - our lovely ‘Anna-Manu’;
a playful tease name I held on for her, the flowering spirit I knew -

*“Survival chances are quite slim for this late age, nothing can be of
help - see her lying (unmoving); Yes, she is in pain (hemorrhaging)...”*

I’d gently lay that dim spirit on car’s back seat, she’d lay unmoving
on sheet, the whole long-short trip; just perked up slight by the drive,
would observe my wife, but not in her spirit; not in her anima. Upon

opening the back door when I did put her out once more, she'd try -
unsteady - as she did back on front porch. Took some patience coaxing
before her unsteady foot would carry – she tried, did let go all, perhaps
in burst of aneurism, inflaming last few days of burgeoning worry –

“no; eyes do not close (pressing lid) but be assured that she is no more
and about the jaws jerking, on an involuntary action's score (a repeat) ...”

my wife kept on heaving - showering ‘Anna-Manu’ with tears - great
loss, I stroked gently that immobile gaze to an imprinted emboss, for
that eternity in sharing life whence it had all begun from abandonment -Yes, in that gilded
frame, I would brave your story, before echoes end

“Would you ever call me?” “Would you so ever call my name?”

“I would though usurp our *Amani*, through smoldering remains”

Last Loveline: Upon My Demise

Yuan Changming

Don't cry over my loss, Dear
But feel happy for us: I am
Going first to decorate our
Permanent home, where I'll
Be waiting to welcome you
To join me once and fall all

As I Wait

Susan Lindsley

They say I fell
But I don't remember
When or where,
All I know is here and now:
The bed,
The woman next to me,
The television blaring on forever,
The rattle of the food cart thrice a day
And the sunlight streaming in my eyes
So all the world is flare
Until evening falls outside.

Each day the same,
But unremembered
Like tomorrow never comes
Or is forgotten before
It is the past...

All I know is
I am waiting for the day,
I hope tomorrow,
That death takes me away
From here and now,
This place
Where all I do is

Wait
And wait
And wait,
Alone,
To simply die.

A Father-Son Conversation Before It Was Not

Jim Bellanca

TW: death

I saw him that morning before I did not.
I walked into his room (at least my body did)
when my heart and soul said not.
My eyes were blank,
my tongue immobile,
not able to speak
because I could not.
I fought to say “I love you”
because he did not,
because he could not.

I recalled good times, good travels
because he did not
before I forgot so many I knew,
but he did not,
because he would not
—munch saltwater taffy on the ferris wheel at the Jersey Shore
—drive down Route Sixty-Six to catch a tequila sunrise
—dog sled the Alaska route in search of fool ‘s gold
—climb Kilimanjaro to smell rare impatiens flowers on top the snow

He looked at me until his eyes could not.

I prayed his heart could forgive when it did not;
the times he asked my silent love, that I did not
give when

—his tickling, giggling grandchildren's days were bygones before they would
understand his memory had gone before he could travel their pathways.

—my mother, his sisters, his brothers ended life's travels before they should.

—his walking ways across the golf course were lost like beloved golf balls sand-trapped
before he could hit life's par.

I talked to him.

I have no idea what he heard when he could not.

I asked

— why he spent so much time, his endless hours
away from wife and daughter and four sons.

— why he seldom shared a word of love, gave a hug,
blew out a birthday candle or clapped at school plays.

— why he skipped graduation rites, saying little
about his children's small triumphs.

He did not answer me, because he could not.

I looked at him one last time, his eyes tightly closed, but not
his voice with no words, his beating heart now still, but not.

I whispered a weak goodbye because that's all I could but not
before I closed my eyes as I closed the casket lid, but not
because that is all I could, because that is all I would.

I look back now ten years after he was not
able to say his love in words. From his heart he could not
express what he felt. What was left were acts that could not
replace the work he felt compelled to do
to share his caring heart.

I did not understand that then.

Today, I still do not.

Drinks

Craig Kirchner

TW: war, death, mentions of blood

I arch my back into the ell of the bar stool.
The world, this is my world again, a gross
viewing station, of the two-dimensional
Breaking News, brought to me every evening
with Jameson neat, sticks in my chest,
makes the pressure rise and the AFib flutter.

Tonight's blood, Ukrainian children's blood,
bombed in a school, bodies, large eyes,
hair mottled with blood, become furniture,
not moving, like the bottles framing them,
stared at by classmates, journalists, and now
Mayfield's patrons - fortunately an ocean away.

Two drinks - it occurs to me this slaughter is
on the soul of the aggressor - a year later,
those who could have helped but didn't.
Two years later the blood is on my hands
for not getting off this stool, out in the street,
to tell world leaders to make it stop.

The coverage flips to children in Gaza, Hamas
uses them as shields. They starve kids because
they are in Gaza - not as shields. The bartender
pours another, says the guy in the red hat is buying.
He must sense my disgust, says, *It'll all be good,*
they're gonna build a hotel and casino

hope

mk zariel

For about two minutes, he doesn't do anything. Doesn't announce online that he's now a fascist. Doesn't make you wonder if he knows what that is, or why he doesn't. Doesn't undo years of belonging, of care, of the promises he made. Doesn't unwrap the layers of trance and ache and desire around your heart and replace them with tendrils of fear. Doesn't repress himself until his darkest secrets linger at the core of the earth, boiling over. Doesn't make you wonder if it's even possible for straight dudes to be anarchists, to stay anarchists, to grow through their initial problems. Doesn't use his Instagram to troll your Instagram until you wonder about the veracity of using Instagram in the first place. Doesn't draw lines and borders around you, thick charcoal ink that slowly closes in. He's just there. Silent. Maybe asleep. And even that breaks you, because he's there and no longer yours. It was never a good day to begin with.

Messy

Kate Howlett

TW: death of a parent, death of a pet

The morning after my father died
My mother washed his clothes
Hung them up to dry as if nothing had happened

I wanted to smell them
Hold them
Scrunch them into myself
Because only yesterday
They were warm

I collected the flowers from the funeral a few days after
I did not want them to wilt where no one could see them
I laid them out in the garden in the June sunshine

Then she cleared them away
Before I had finished
As she did with everything

The evening we found Cecily
They dug a hole for her
Had I not seen her from my bedroom window

Ran down to her
I would not have been able to hold her goodbye

Once, my father reached out for his glass of water
And she cleared it away from under him
The butter dish, the barrel of cheese crackers, the salt and pepper grinders
An anti-anticipator of needs

My whole life
Her finger has been on the fast-forward button
As if she is clearing away her life as she goes
So as not to leave any mess

It's chilling
To realise that your own life is being cleared away
From underneath you
Before you have lived it

But the thing is
I do not want to wipe bad things from my life
Before I have lived them
I cannot live like that.

A Winter Morning

Dawn Lo

TW: pregnancy loss

Once I looked for you
in the silver scrawlings of a leaf
left by larvae, almost-bugs,
mining the cushion membrane.

They had etched a maze, elliptical,
one end pinched and the other
with a straight line down, so close in shape
to its canvas that I searched

for a miracle. In the nearby damp,
a boar bristled at my stalling,
her young waiting for
their mother's instructions, run

or fight? I walked, tempestuous,
down the black-branched path,
the leaves underfoot mottled
wet and fraying, already soil.

Had I followed the puzzle map
would I find you there,

my almost-child,
which had a spasm of life

burrowed deep within and
blended with mine
before washing away?
What becomes of rain that

soaks into the ground?
In cold hills
I clawed the pillow air
for something within nothing.

I'm Sorry

A. L. Smith

TW: physical abuse

Slap.

Girl not boy.

I'm sorry.

Slap.

Destroyer of marital joy.

I'm sorry.

Slap.

Defective not perfection.

I'm sorry.

Slap.

My mothers reflection.

I'm sorry.

Slap.

Homely not lovely.

I'm sorry.

Slap.

I'm sorry.

If not me,
would you be
tender Daddy.

Little Girl

Shontay Luna

TW: mentions of sexuality and sexual abuse

Tell that little girl everything will be all right. That the things that may happen to her are NOT her fault. Because she'll think that they are. Even worse, she will think they are what she deserve. Especially if no one says otherwise.

The world will have her believe that she has such strong sexual presence that it's her superpower and her only power, even if she's just a little girl. Later, they'll tell her she's only as good as her body, through subtle and not-so-subtle hints that will stick and jab at her already fragile psyche. While making no mention whatsoever of her mind.

Little girls of the past, little girls of today - you are not to blame. And much more powerful that the things that happen to you. Being, from the earliest of ages, the recipient of unwanted and unwarranted sexual perversions that were a disease gleefully fed in the souls of the perpetrators. I'm here to quietly remind you that you didn't "ask for it." You didn't even know what "it" was.

Little girl, you are powerful. Don't let the drama and the trauma destroy you, don't let the evil hiding in the corners of nightfall win. Stand tall, Goddess of Sun and Moon, Queen of Earth, and Heaven. The dream of the slave, the segregated and the stolen. You are never alone; the ancestors your guardian angels. Your path forged by the Hand of God. And always remember; bad things happen merely because this is Earth and not Heaven. So take a deep breath, Little Girl. And move forward. Reach for the stars while embracing the sky.

Let go of the pain and love yourself. Hold the ancestors in your heart as you become who you truly are. An Ebony Queen.

Shattered Dreams

Tracey Olphert

TW: physical abuse

A fragile soul, scarred by the abuse of a man desperate to steal her soul, she dwells. Her body, a shrine to the cruelty inflicted on her will never be the same. Every whisper carries the echoes of his warm breath. She is haunted by the ghost of him, etched into those scars.

Her heart, shattered by broken dreams is now a fortress. Once open and vulnerable, now guarded by walls of stone. She shields herself with the darkness of the light. Her thoughts lost in the maze of her mind, praying for release from the demons that chase her.

Each bruise of purple hues reflects the pain that haunts her. Her eyes, once bright and blue are now a well of unshed tears, lost in the grief of who she could have been. Her mind, once filled with music, listens to silence, often the loudest noise she can hear.

A spark of rebellion acts like electricity through her veins as she ponders escape. Those broken dreams are touchable once more until the door closes on them forever. The force of his hand against her skin questions her, are her hopes and dreams dead, just like her soul.

In the depths of her despair, lies a glimmer of hope. Her flame refuses to be extinguished. Her defiance against the darkness that consumes her brings resilience. The scars spoiling her flesh will never fade, but she is a survivor, and she wants to be free.

Glass

Nikkeya D. Bell

TW: sexual abuse

I have stomach aches that plague me
My heart races
What do I do?
Take me with you
Take me with you
I beg
Don't leave me
What do I do?
I hear these words in my head
And I want to save her –
I hear these words in my mind
And I want to cry –
I hear these words and think they are a dream
I want to wake up –
It's going to be late, and you have school
Maybe, this was her escape
I cover my ears from the yelling
I cover my ears from the screaming
I cover my ears from the silence
I imagine that I left
Even if it is alone

I find feeling
I stop counting the tally marks on the wall
There are so many
I hate them. I want to erase them
Each one is my story
But it's chalk
And no one knows
I am afraid
I will shatter
Broken

Panic

Xandra Bushway

Urgently making use of a whetstone
When my vocabulary fails in its task
I fork my tongue, lubricated with blood
To speak more than twice as fast

My corium burns when the air hits the skin
As I scrape off the dead; to put to pen
Shaking, gripped in my red, raw hand
Epidermis falls through my fingers like sand
Failure in all aspects, I split open the ground
I antennae the earth to project her sound
I thought I knew all the ways to get into your head
Not a force of nature could put this to bed

Urgently making use of a whetstone I
Turn my frustration to a condition
I cease the competition,
I sink into submission.

My Desperate Small Wealth of Moments

Thomas Phalen

TW: death

*The bane of grief does not relent
For the sin done me that none repent.*

Who will hold and comfort her
Help her climb the stairs,
Help her with her walk,
With her tongue and broken talk
And with her sight that has grown dark
As I did through to autumn's end
And into our last winter
Now that she has gone Elsewhere
And I'm not with her there?

I am not resigned, nor will I absolve
This pitiless inexpiable god
Of this vile atrocious perfidy
Of this pernicious contemptible atrocity
Of this unpardonable wreckage and calamity
Of this unspeakable crime.
The slow brutal ruin of my Love.

Her ignominious death, a sin.
No sin so grave as Beauty's murder.

All that was ours foundered
On winter's rocks and ice.
Death's truculent season
Showed us no mercy.
My life now empty
But of longing, yearning.
Living my desperate small wealth of moments,
The slow passing count of the hours,
My dwindling impoverished nights and days,
Ever on the cusp of weeping
For her passing, my Sweetheart,
From me vicious stolen.
Evicted from the light of life.
Impudently, rudely erased.
As gone as yesterday.

I will not survive my bleak survival.
Out of love with life I've fallen.
Undone by the impossible mystery
In which I wander lost.

Doing the Doable

Dave Stern

TW: death of a child, estrangement

I wish
for my second-born son to return among the living,
for his all-consuming pain to have been quenched before he abandoned hope,
for his vacant chair to be filled with his sparkle,
for his flute to enrich the air,
for the wittiness of his stories to bring unexpected revelations,
for his sensitivity to embrace all people at risk, lost and troubled.

This wish cannot be granted. Your son chose the other side. He cannot return.

I wish
to hear my father's gravelly voice cracking as he intones, "I understand,"
to feel his arthritic hands bending with unease to rest lightly on my shoulders,
to search his sympathetic eyes for his unconditional acceptance,
to feel his nucleating force, the warmth of our family hearth.

This wish cannot be granted. Your father is five years departed. His life was full. He cannot return.

I wish
for my first-born son to be restored to me,
after a decade of isolation and coldness

after he has grown to a man raising two daughters by himself,
to embrace and become the attentive family we all yearn for.

These wishes can be granted. But can YOU do it?
Abandon the quiet melancholy existence you created for yourself,
reorganize your life around the girls, and their
art lessons on Monday, gymnastics on Tuesday,
skillfully pilot past the acrimony,
serve, without questioning, day after day.

My voice is quiet.
The invitation seems too sudden,
past bitterness and hurt ignored, the page too swiftly turned.

If we became ostracized again without cause, without warning,
could I survive the blow?

I hesitate.

Our other son beseeches from his ashes:
"You've got another chance. Do it right this time."

My father gently nudges:
"There's no higher calling than caring for family."

Voices are screaming in my head.
Be careful what you wish for.

8:25 pm

Star Galasyn

TW: death

I was the first one to know
That she had stopped breathing.

The first to know
She had slipped into the beyond.

My mother, sister,
My stepfather and his girls
They are standing outside the room.

I silently beckon the nurse
To her bedside
He checks her pulse,
Watches the watch on his wrist.

He counts two heartbeats
One for me, one for her
I hope the rhythm was in time.

Time of death
8:25 pm.

I do not cry,
Just hold her hand to my chest.

When the nurse confirms she's gone
My mother begins to wail.

Midnight Scribes

Gaby Ortiz

Who else has woken up at 3 AM
with a heart too loud for silence,
a mind too restless for sleep,
and hands that tremble like unfinished sentences?

Tell me I'm not the only one
who uses a pillow for paper—
because the mattress knows my secrets better than my diary,
and the ceiling has memorized every prayer I never spoke aloud.

Who else has turned tears into ink,
let them bleed into the dark like constellations no one else can read?
I write sonnets in the hollow of my collarbone,
prayers in the space between my ribs,
and every stanza tastes like salt and insomnia.

They say poets are just broken people
who never learned how to scream quietly—
but what if our voices are the only thing
holding us together?

Who else has whispered verses into the dark,
hoping the echoes will stitch them into something beautiful?
Who else has carved their grief into the night,
only to wake up and pretend it was just a dream?

Don't tell me I'm the only one
who writes love letters to ghosts
and sends them through the wind—
unsigned, unread, unravelling before they reach the sky.

If you've ever held a pen like a lifeline,
ever bled metaphor instead of answers,
ever let the moon bear witness to your unwritten eulogies—
then raise your voice with mine.

Because the night belongs to the ones who write in shadows,
the ones who turn pain into poetry,
the ones who know that sometimes
the only way to survive the dark
is to set yourself on fire
and call it light.

Heredity

Anji Brown

TW: death, war

Her mother gathers folds of fabric
Like origami, then
Releases it from her fingertips.
The little girl watches her
Skilfully controlling;
Billowing, drifting, covering the bed.
Learning the beauty and love
In a simple act.

A little boy,
Raised and nurtured by these hands, then
Schooled in skills by
Father and grandfather,
Drawing pictures with their words;
Soldiers and battles,
Songs and marching,
Brave deeds with bullets.

The woman sketches clouds in the air
With the tips of her fingers
And the the rough white cloth falls

Just so over the table, as
The girl watches.
They set down the meal
Carefully prepared together,
And the family gathers around to share.

The boy reads tales of
Kings and Kingdoms,
Honour and obedience,
Duty and dying.
He learns that he should protect those
That have no voice.

Years later, the boy,
Now a man,
Returns from war.
The girl,
Now a woman,
Knows just how to lay the flag
Over the coffin.

Afternoon Antipoem

Ryan Di Francesco

TW: conflict

It's a shame.

I sat there
while my stepfather
let out all the anger
he harboured
for me,

all that anger
tacked
to his heart,

dragged
into the feast
at the kitchen table.

I asked him
if he felt better now
as she wept.

A cloud passed
over the cedars,

sunlight flickered
through the backyard
in the pause
before it all
rolled away

into a wine glass,
and we pretended
it didn't happen.

We ate cheddar cheese,
picked green grapes from Walmart,
listening to
FM radio

while it all settled
heavily
into our guts

before

it was time
to get the hell
out of there

that winter
afternoon.

A Generation Passes

Duane L. Herrmann

TW: parental conflict

Could she have been kind
to me? My mother.

If maybe she
had seen kindness
in her own life,
childhood, then,
she could recognize
what kindness was,
and affection too,
but there was none.

Her mother, I know now,
was depressed, profoundly,
unable to function,
could not nurture
or show affection.

Her lack caused pain
and we suffered,
to the very end.

Remembering the Time

Ben Williams

TW: child abuse, neglect

Why did you hate me?

I was just a kid, I didn't know any better.

Remembering the photoshoot where you dug your bitter claws into me.

The shock when I realized you were willing to draw blood.

Why have we fought as much as we have?

You're supposed to be the bigger person, why do I have to be?

Remembering the time you bashed pots and pans against your skull.

The fear from seeing you hurt yourself will never leave me.

Why won't you get help when you clearly need it?

Your fucking juice cleanse and slumber parties aren't working.

Remembering the time you cried because you weren't invited.

The confusion and worry I still feel towards you.

But why do I care?

You clearly don't.

Remembering the time you walked out because dad didn't do the dishes.

The hope that I had that you wouldn't come back.

Remembering the moment when I stopped expecting you to make sense.

The moment when I realized there was more wrong with you than me.

The moment I saw that I wasn't the villain of our family.

The moment when I knew that I had to leave.

Remember when you lied and said that I hit you?

Remember when I punched a fucking hole in the wall because you wouldn't shut up?

Remember when you told me that you wanted to kill yourself?

Remember when you broke that wood spoon over your head because you had to win?

Do you remember any of this?

Because you act like you don't.

Remembering all of this has held me back.

The healthy thing to do is let it go, but I can't.

Brave of Desire

Constantinos N. Makris

Your scent lingers
on my fingertips.
I touch you —
and time falls silent.

At night you come,
a gentle thief of dreams:
warm, intense, fragrant.

Salt of the sea in your hair,
in your eyes, golden bees
pour their nectar.

Your lips — a mountain, inviolate,
a sacred height.

And though your face bears
the shadows of unspoken sorrows,
your smile remains
the compass of my days.

Your laughter, a hymn of glory;
your embrace, a triumph.

I kiss your fevered brow,
as fire courses through
your hallowed body.

Sleep still, beloved.
The Light flows down,
its waters healing,
to seal the wounds
that ache within you.

Azaleas Bloom

CM Pickard

TW: death

I need not caress your face,
for you lay in restful slumber,
old age ought rise before you
—not wither at fifty-one.

Hewn from resolute mountain rock,
yet fissures whisper frailties
veiled by honeyed spice
—cradled in nurtured shrubs.

Scorching tears streak my cheeks,
realising you're gone
—emotions collide, while beneath
the surface swirling currents churn.

Once green—wilted yellowed leaves
from your favourite flower decay,
scattered amongst neglected blooms
in the lonely garden bed.

Flickering candles illuminate
the object of my sorrow,

while I offer pleading prayers
—for God to alter fate.

Clouds descend, cloaking
me in despair's heavy shroud,
and you—accept earth's warm embrace,
shattering my illusions.

Time runs down until dawn breaks
on memories no longer painful
to possess—azaleas bloom,
mending my charred heart.

Final Arrangements

Amy Soricelli

TW: death

I breathed-in the lines of your face.
Drops of who you were on the arm of the chair -
wrapped my fingers around unspoken hushed,
half-whispered words - tumbled;
tripped-up, fallen.
Staring down your scars - your hollow eyes -
guilty that they made me squirm.
Small round math lines, tunnels, knives.
I know blood was pushed in a mad dash.
They spun your stuff around tricking it into clean.
But nothing was new on you.
Soon you would be all that's left of nothing.
Short hair in spiked-up gray - snipped slick down at the sides
so you could be less sick in a smaller space.
You swallowed up those voiceless screams -
brave rock-climber folded into last year's size.
I was screaming for you
and you just wanted to live.
You asked for nail polish in deep blues -
velvet blues you called them.
You wanted to face the next stretch of your journey

with your nails shaped into neat half-moons.
You cupped your hands around the tea cup
sipping it like you had all the time in the world.
But you were already gone by then.
I was just borrowing you.

Button Jar

Lorri Ventura

The vintage Vlasic pickle jar
Holds Mom's button collection
Dozens of colorful fasteners
Ready to be pressed into service
To replace lost mates
And complete everything from
A neighbor's sport coat
To a grandchild's hand-knit sweater

Each button awakens a memory—
Of a toddler's overalls
Festooned with yellow ducky buttons
Or my First Communion dress
Brightened by hand-sewn pearl baubles

Lasting mementos
Of the meticulous care
My mother devoted to everyone she knew
Each button exudes love
Her button jar outlives her
And is my most precious reminder
Of who she was

Waiting

Jennifer Rodrigues

TW: childhood illness

In the corner of the crafting room
Adjacent to the waiting room
Was a Pac-Man game
The only enticement I knew then.

This arcade game was free to play
For all the children waiting
Waiting to be called back.

As I remember, it was Mrs. Pac-Man
Eating those yellow dots
Being chased by ghosts
Good about eating her fruit.

Invincible
Invincible
Until nurses called our names.

Divine Feminine

Genevieve Poe

Show me a woman
and I'll show you the man
who made her small
so he could feel tougher

My nurturing nature is not a weakness
to be shamed out of me;
there is no weakness in picking up
the pieces of a brother

There's penance due
for Original Sin;
my body is not a punishment
for which I am to suffer

Turning life into a rat race
for the hell of it;
there's no pride
in the failure of another

Intuition ferments in my gut
like sourdough,
passed down from
mother, to mother, to mother, to mother

Rejection of the ties that bind
will end up with your fingers
reaching for claws
of wolves dressed like lovers

Miscast as a surrogate,
I played the part I was given;
gave in to a man's demands
to atone for the wounds of his mother

Show me a woman
and I'll show you the monster
that frankensteined a
lover, a mother, a fluffer

Every Day's Child

Terry Manion

as sun shines down on your light face

mesmerized

I stare at one

never fallen from grace

wordless as always

one who works hard

just to stay alive

yet stays unable to separate

from placid happiness

from subtle pleasantness

while never connected

with judgement

you are not one day's child

no single day could contain so much

against the odds

Fishing (For My Son, 1990-2012)

John Romagna

We never stayed long enough for you. That day
you caught your finger on a hook
I was impatient
putting things away. You could stand in the sun for hours
without saying much. Were you taking in the images
on the surface of the pond? Clouds moving,
the red barn getting darker. Afternoon
passing. For you, a day fishing was not
time spent
casting, reeling in,
casting again, asking for help
when your line was knotted. You knew, there is
a great fish down there.

I was sure you'd have passion, live a long life, boy
to man. I was sure
that would happen.

Saudade

Jaclyn Youhana Garver

She sits with Longing like an old friend,
invites Him to tea, steeps it too long,
extra bitter, cause He likes it like that.

Long ago, He learned another language—
over the years, He lost his native tongue.
She asks Him a million questions and drinks

every response. Who the hell knows what

*Eu sinto saudades de você, mas cada dia
menos*

or

*Obrigada pelo chá, mas não sinto o gosto de nada
há muito tempo*

means, but she swears she understands the melody
in the trills and lilts of this language: foreign
yet familiar, frightening and a comfort.

She records the conversation on her phone,
testy marvel against steady antiquity.
She takes notes, too, in a butter leather journal,

gilded pages, embossed cover. She's kept it
for ages, refused to use it before its time, waiting
for something special that never came

til now.

They chat so long she falls asleep. When she awakens,
her Old Friend is gone. His tea, cold. The journal,
empty. And that recording, nothing

but sharp, cruel static. He's nowhere
to be found, but His weight still ornaments
her heart and all its hollows. She feels it

in each step, each swallow,
and the pain conjures tears,
a baptism—drops for her collection,

a stitch
along the contour
of her lung.

Motherhood

Tirill B. Svaler

She is trailing after me
I walk
They cannot see her, but
I can feel
her dragging nails into my
shoulders

She is laughing
She gasps and points
people staring

crowded together, lined up to watch me
walk. She recoils. She stares. She shoves her tongue at them. She hisses.

My shoes are
too big. My calves are
cramping
I steady myself, steadying
her. She grows heavy

They stare. Expectant.
They smile. Expectant.

Barely seen through

the veil. It itches my skin.

The altar is close

The altar is far away

She does not want me to have this

without her. It is hers as well. Always hers

as well

Her fingers are thin

sharp

I can feel my skin

breaking

where the dress meets my shoulders

her and I and her are one and gone

now, because she does not want to be

She trails after me

eating me up, chewing fabric slowly between rotten teeth, saliva seeping into the dress

Returning to the Body that Once Was

Dawn Levitt

TW: drugs, illness

I float oblivious on a crystalline sea
of propofol and morphine,
the respirator whistles its regular tune.

The sun rises beautiful, full,
a brilliant blossom unfurling
golden petals that fall upon me like rain.

I melt, dissolve, become dew on the golden grass,
merging with the beauty and the light,
I soak into the brilliant earth.

Tune changes – ventilator honks in distress,
my body quivers, fighting the machine,
trying to draw breath alone.

The tube a harsh bone bruising my throat as
white figures confer. I cough and gag
as the slippery eel swims from my mouth.

My eyes flutter, breathing alone,
rain bullets the darkened window as
the heaviness of my body pulls me down to the sheets.

The ineffable lightness of that other world fades
into night gripping me in his fist.
Silent in the darkness, I weep.

At the Basilica de San Juan

Xiomarra Milann

TW: child death

Madrecita, how did you
Let go of your boy
Raised since birth?

You say we have to die
to be reborn, but I can't
let go of this life

I created, from nothing
Flesh and bone alchemized
Into the body of this boy

I fear my heart cannot
withstand the weight of love
We sacrifice for

the greater good, be damned
He was mine before
He became anything

To anyone else.
Mother, I am
Selfish and I won't

Forgive. Baptize me
In flames if it means
I get to cradle my boy,

Heartbeat and rosy
Cheeks, one more night.
Let sleep be just

Sleep, and he will wake
In the morning, a new
Day will be blessed

If only for me.
Be gone my soul.
The end of my days

Will be filled
With eternal night.
But it's worth the sight

Of the light of the son,
My soft, golden halo.

Charybdis

Faye Webb

It was smooth sails, and tall tales at first.
An endless cacophony of blues and greens,
Soon to be stained with spilled blood, with stabbed backs and spleens.
You'll blame it on your family tree, but you're not fooling me.

So Charybdis, blame your curse, and we'll all pretend you would never do worse.
Wreck all our ships, and pretend you didn't cause this.
It's all lies and salt water, leading all the ships to slaughter.
Tell yourself it's hard to tell the difference between a monster and a loyal daughter.
Oh, but I'll know.
They pretend we don't all know, oh but I know.

All enemies must drown,
All the urchins and plankton must be sucked down to Charybdis,
Because she convinced them they deserve this.
The water is long dyed red, yet I'm the only one to shake my head above water
I see what you are, unlike the rest I'm not scared to declare you a monster.
A mother protecting her brood,
Or whirlpool that sees all as food?

I guess that's why she spit me out.
So I'll sail west, while the rest convince themselves they can pass her test.
She tells herself I 'think I'm sooooo smart,' but it got me this far.
Proud to touch dry land while I still stand.

I survived you Charybdis, and you'll do well to remember this.
I can tell the difference between a monster, and a loyal daughter.
I can see the difference between a mother protecting her brood,
and a whirlpool that sees all as food.

i forgot to tell you how much you ruined my life

Ky Struck

TW: trauma, sexual assault

i forgot to tell you how much you ruined my life
so i'll
tell you no
w i hate your stupid f(ucking)
ace and your beer gut and how
some
times when i look in the mirror
i see your eyes and eye
brows look(leer)ing
back i hate knowing
what your laugh
sounds like and smell
ing the tint of your cologne (sharp and dense, the sinking heart of a ship)
i hate remembering the t(ouch)
ime you held our fingers up
sidebyside and told me that
they bent the same
way i hate that some
times (too much) i still

feel the ghost of you
r hand lingering
in places it shouldn't be
i hate hat(e)
ing you
because that means i'm
thinking about
you how long does it take before
i
fall
before i drown
in my tears and the si(n)
ck monster you sowed in me shreds
its way through my
chest i want my
own story my
own life
so how do i write
y
o
u
out of it

If My Brother Were a Bat, I Would Fly With Him Over the Sydney Harbor

Rachel Turney

My broken bone kept me awake, the right collar bone.
The same one my brother broke. Are our shoulders more
fragile than our hearts? Perhaps we have that in common.
It's the weight of you that harmed us. Dangling like a bat
and falling without patagium wings.

Two flying foxes in the sky over Sydney, searching for
figs. To wake at dusk and hunt all night for eucalyptus
and mangoes, that's the life I want for us.

This is why I seek vampirism. Not for eternal life, but
because I so desperately crave to be a bat and fly with you.

Haunting...

Kausar Abubakar Usman

TW: intense emotional distress, anxiety, mental breakdown

The ache in me awakens every second,
Filtering out every good thing I ever knew,
Slaps my sanity until it loses its identity, and when I
Rush to hug myself it threatens to blanket the whole me.
My ribs crackle and slowly crush my fatigue heart,
The drumbeats of my heartbeats set to wake the world out
of its slumber.
My spine hurts whenever I try to calm my nerves,
Maybe I'm growing wings to fly out of this doom.
My head feels heavy and my thoughts punch it harder
To escape and land somewhere because inside my head is
Already a mayday, and no one could escape the rush of
Gushing wind of the thoughts that pass by it.
These sagging shoulders can no longer carry the weight
Of these thoughts without breaking into a lost figure.
My heart is melting and the crimson red liquid is spilling
Into my lungs and I think they are having a wine party in there.

Funeral Fires

Ben Bruges

TW: death

I remember black flowers, a low-slung coffin
and priestly incantations. I stared at my boots
as they buried their girl, killed in a car crash.

Sent by school, I stood awkwardly
between the Head and the driver—
neither family, nor believers—three aliens.

I watched the fisted handfuls of dirt and gravel
thud on wood, and could imagine a thin wail rising,
a soul smoke, curling into these believers' ears,

welcome in their mind's heaven: perhaps just
a place for people they can't yet leave
to the long, the nothing, the end.

*

My spirited gran's funeral day was godless—
the small casket slid back, curtains closed
on her leaving, engulfed by a secular fire.

I admired their strength. Even in this last ritual
grandparents chose unbelieving, uncomforted pain—
there were no half truths, no small lies, no rot.

His daughters then watched granddad choke
gutdeep sobs, and soon, too soon, cancer
yellowed his sharp mind, sapping his quiet force.

His same ritual reduced us, silenced us.
Becoming adults, we children wait
to bury parents, but don't know how.

Pomegranate Hunger

Betty Stanton

TW: eating disorder, illness

Lying in a hospital bed, too frail to move, her small body a shrine collapsing, forty-eight pounds of flesh refusing to obey the mind's commands. She stopped eating one day and no one noticed because she had never been a problem before, because saints are quiet, because good little girls vanish without a sound. For three months her mouth was closed, skin thinning to parchment, bones pressing outward, cheekbones and ribs carved to knives. The skin hung loose, a ghost's garment clinging to her while her body performed its silent liturgy of subtraction. Her parents waited one more week in devotion to disappearance, before they carried her to a hospital, before they placed her on the altar of the bed and named her illness sacrifice. She is Persephone at the threshold, not yet taken but already vanishing, flowers falling from her hands, tears refusing to fall, pomegranate seeds slipping down her throat like stones. Each missed meal is another seed swallowed, another bond to the underworld where the thin and the pale are crowned. Hades bends too close to her in the night, his breath sharp as knives, his voice the scrape of cold stone on stone. He tells her thinness is a kingdom, but the throne is bone. He tells her hunger is holy, that vanishing is devotion, that her ruin is the rising of his altar. He lays his hands against her ribs and counts them like coins, presses his mouth to her ear and whispers that each shiver belongs to him. Her body becomes season. Winter spreads beneath her flesh, her pale face the frozen field, her hair the roots twisting in cold earth. She waits for spring to find her, but the calendar does not turn. She walks through corridors of ashen bone, ghost blossoms crushed underfoot, her ribs the gates of the damned, her silence the iron key. She is too young to be an offering, too young to be a ruin. She is both. She believes

she must be thin to be loved but Hades has always been watching, measuring the hollows of her cheeks, weighing her bones like jewels. He smiles as her skin grows paler, as her shadow thins. As she disappears. So fat, she thought at ninety pounds. All the pretty girls were thin. So she stopped eating, became thinner, became a hollow cage wrapped in a veil of holiness. Persephone kneeling in her own shadow while Hades lingers, watching the spring run dry, waiting for her transformation to be complete.

I Do Til I Don't

Madison McClintock

Extreme heat
melting platinum and diamond
in a closed loop

alchemy tossed aside
each time
I'm chiseled smaller

I disappear you
imagine a home
full of one hundred dogs and me

resurrect the profile
where younger copies gawk
at how I've aged

feel my worth separating
returning whole
embodied

until ten years flood in
forcing, cracking, pleading
through the gap

I can't live
an amnesiac
oh how I've tried

just my mouth
can't lose
the shape of your name

Mending By Hand

Barbara E. Hunt

as we were taught to
stitch by stitch or twist

of wrench. By fabric,
fibre, filament, sheet-good

of all manner of stuff
no longer counts in skillset

scores of many in this
modern world. But what

then of the human heart's
need for contact skin-to-

skin? What of halts and
hurts; the death of love

or losses of much lesser
scale that slice through

everyday requiring suture?
Or ointment, if not

anesthetic. How bedside
manner's lost. No

knowledge of ancient
healing practice. Rare

to find bandage applied
by able, sage practitioner.

French Noir Translated through a Best Buy Sound Bar

Olivia D'Zavala

TW: grief, mention of alcohol

Drowning in hours, days
of streaming pixelated fuzz,
international Sundance films in melodic languages
choppily translated to that ASE cacophony
and the closed-captioned subtitles don't match the words,
all while drinking lavender infused gimlets and bittersweet Negronis.

Refusal to admit I'm still in mourning
so I pretend that I'm actually celebrating this new found freedom,
heavy and sweltering as it is.

Loneliness sounds like the mindless chatter
of mistranslated French noir
reverberating out of the Best Buy sound bar
and the clink, clink, clink

of ice banging around before
silently jangling into
nothing of a drink, drink, drink.

Then I knew I was alone.

Tears well, then begin to bloat, grow heavy,
and slide, glide down my face.

And steadily,
the faucet tears, also drawn
from some well down below,

grow heavy and begin to bloat, and then fall,
plink, plink, plink.

Those were the only sounds in this place, this place,
this place that used to be a home.

How Would Life Be?

Shannara Emmett

How different would life be
if tragedy had never found me?
Would the feel of an ocean breeze caress and calm?
Would the smell of the morning dew
on fallen pine engulf and unwind?
Would a lover's touch still
overwhelm and still the demons inside?
Would the sweet, consuming joy
of holding a child still taste of honey and sunshine?

If tragedy had never come for me,
would the senses of life lack their palatial claim?
Would touch falter, become lackluster?
Would digging toes in unknown shores
come with bitterness and uncertainty?
Would love lose its giddy warmth,
replaced by fear and indelicacy?

Would regret fill the holes,
left from drowning in
the muddy leftovers
of the lives tragedy turned over?

Or would light manage to break through
the roughened exteriors
of the concrete barricaded hearts
made from disappointment and broken promises?

I know what life would be
if tragedy had never touched my heart.
I wouldn't know the bitter from the sweet.
I wouldn't know the heat from the bitter cold.
I wouldn't relish a life full of laughter,
Filled with sticky fingers,
tiny, chubby toes,
and whispered conversations.

I wouldn't know our equal companionship
or the deep appreciation
for an unending, divine love.

Me Too

A. Kahn

TW: sexual assault

What a luxury it must be
to sneer and call
strength to accuse
the powerful
of rape
a *trend*.
to walk alone
in the dark
without a hidden box cutter
and wear what you like.
What a luxury
to never have trust
stolen
from between your legs
eyes locked on the ceiling
confusion
drying on your inner thighs

Wreath

Karina Ten

TW: loss, grief

I remember us weaving a flower wreath on a meadow, surrounded by bugs —
picking up dandelions and daisies, arranging them in tiny hugs.

You kept saying how you like yellow: it suits my half-brown, half-green eyes.

It was a warm day in April — and April is still my favorite month.

I remember how just two years later I was choosing a grave wreath for you,

I tried to find yellow, but they only had purple and blue.

I cried my heart out because it did not matter if the color would go with your eyes.

It was a snowy December — which still every year I despise.

Summer Solstice

Sekar Ajiningsih

TW: death

You drag your feet across the lawn where even the weeds are reluctant to grow, white buds of freshly-cut zinnias bounded by a black ribbon clutched tightly inside your palm. Some residents here may mock you for mispronouncing words in the language that only flowers speak, but it's not like they will complain anyway—their voices have long left the chambers of their throats and only their echoes remain to haunt the grounds. After all, we don't need two jesters for this occasion, because the sky has volunteered, spreading blue-tinted hue across the air you breathed without adorning itself with a single speck of cloud. An exhale that costs everything. The vibrancy rips your pleura and drowns you almost immediately, pushing you for another expiration that you are hesitant to take. Nothing matters, not the world, not the people, nor the heavens that sneers at you—*why did you never tell me that you want to*

leave?

You ask. If I were there with you right now, I would answer, “I should have pushed back my plans all the way to December.”

You look up. Lakes are starting to form beneath your eyelids.
They shiver, as they stir to churn rays of the burning sun—

three summers

Riley G. Johnston

TW: death

i.

we meet in god's country
at a sleepaway camp for girls empty-
bellied and seeking. in the thick
of night we flock; folding in
on one another, they feed us gospel
music til we're fat
with saltwater. hysterical,
we gorge on hurt; beg jesus
to love us like our mother did

ii.

we become
like sisters. you need me too
much and i let you. touching
foreheads, you confess
you dreamt yourself
a lamb. you will leave me soon
and i will promise
to write you a letter

iii.

when they pull
you from independence creek,
your chest murmurs
with indifference, a duet
with the hum in your head. elsewhere,
i press my face into the glass
of my bathroom mirror and will
my skin to remember
the cool of the night

Biographies

JOHN GREY, *The Urn With His Wife's Ashes*

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in New World Writing, City Brink and Tenth Muse. Latest books, "Subject Matters", "Between Two Fires" and "Covert" are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in Paterson Literary Review, Amazing Stories and Cantos.

CLAUDIA WYSOCKY, *The Language of Dreams*

Claudia Wysocky is a 16-year-old Polish poet based in New York, celebrated for her evocative creations that capture life's essence through emotional depth and rich imagery. With over five years of experience in fiction writing, her poetry has appeared in various local newspapers and literary magazines. Wysocky believes in the transformative power of art and views writing as a vital force that inspires her daily. Her works blend personal reflections with universal themes, making them relatable to a broad audience. Actively engaging with her community on social media, she fosters a shared passion for poetry and creative expression.

T.E. BEAN, *Akin to Gravity*

T.E. Bean, a Toronto-based songwriter, has composed music featured in PlayStation and Xbox games. With over a decade of experience as Director of Brand Marketing at a record label, he now turns his creative energy to writing. His debut novel is currently on submission to publishers.

KAREN LOUISE, *The Graduation*

Karen Louise (she/her) is a performance poet and minimalist songwriter who lives in the jarrah forests of the Wardandi, Piblemen and Keneang peoples in Balingup, Western

Australia. A 2024 Australian Poetry Slam national finalist, her work weaves womanhood with worldliness. Her performances find space, her poems breathe and her songs linger.

SOPHIA DZINSKI, *The Waiting Game*

Sophia Dzinski is a passionate writer, cat lover, and soon graduate at Rowan University. She lives in Pitman, New Jersey. She has always loved writing as a young girl, and decided to further pursue this interest when she became an adult. In her free time, Sophia enjoys reading and writing book reviews on Instagram, cuddling with her cats, and exploring new places. Connect with her on Instagram: @readsswithsoph.

MICHAEL CARTER, *in godless country*

Michael Silas Carter is a queer writer based in Colorado. He spends his time finding family and collecting stories. His flash fiction piece, *Mona Lisa is Dying*, can be found on Prose Online.

MAY GARNER, *Christmas Lights*

May Garner is a poet and author based out of Dayton, Ohio. She has been crafting and sharing her work online for over a decade. She is the author of two poetry collections, "Withered Rising" and "Melancholic Muse". Her work has been featured in several magazines and anthologies, including features through Querencia Press, Cozy Ink Press, and most recently, The Ohio Bards Poetry Anthology. You can find more of her work on Instagram (@crimson.hands).

DANNY P. BARBARE, *The Candle*

Danny P. Barbare resides in the Upstate of the Carolinas.

KELLIE BROWN, *Cairns*

Dr. Kellie Brown is a violinist, music educator, and award-winning writer of the book *The Sound of Hope: Music as Solace, Resistance and Salvation During the Holocaust and World War II*. Her words have appeared in *Writerly*, *Ekstasis*, *Galway Review*, and others.

SR INCIARDI, *Moments*

SR (Salvatore Richard) Inciardi was born in New York City and attended Brooklyn College and New York University. He was employed in the health care industry in New York and New Jersey for over thirty-five years. He has been a writer of poetry

from his time at Brooklyn College where he was influenced by David Lehman and John Ashbery, both professors of English while he attended the school. He previously self-published three books of poetry all appearing on Amazon. These collections are entitled "**Coloring Outside the Edges**", "**The Aroma of Thawing, Poems on Grief and Recovery**", after the sudden and tragic loss of his 37-year-old son, due to influenza and pneumonia, who was married with two young daughters and "**The Aroma of Lilac, Poems on Hope and Healing After Loss**" authored in an effort to connect with others experiencing devastating loss. SR Inciardi's poetry has appeared in the USA and in Europe in various online and print magazines. His writing has appeared in **Front Porch Review**, **SpillWords**, **Green Ink Poetry**, **The Font**, **Written Tales**, **Harrow House Journal** and other places. He was a featured poet in **Spillwords' "Spotlight on Writers"** and included by **Green Ink Poetry** in their publication: "**Kennings: Equinox Collections: Autumn**" released on Amazon in October 2024. He was a contributor to **Newsweek** for their "**My Turn**" segment which appeared in September 2024.

HELEDD HAF HOWELLS, *Final rest*

Heledd Haf Howells (she/her) is a Queer, Welsh poet who writes during intense moments for an emotional release. Themes discussed include mental illnesses, disordered eating, grief, lost love, nature appreciation and friendship. With poetry published in 20 literary magazines/journals, her own Substack and 2 book anthologies, Heledd's work continues to be published regularly.

JERRY REYNOLDS, *Wasp in Terrace Dish*

Jerry has been a working artist for over 50 years. He studied at the School of Visual Arts in New York City and the School of Mosaics in Ravenna, Italy. His work has been exhibited in galleries and museums and is included in several collections across the US and Canada. Mr. Reynolds has experience meeting project deadlines, including creating advertising copy for his studio at Advertising Services. Additionally, he writes articles for local newspapers and publishes an annual guide that highlights shopping and recreational activities for the Northport, New York Chamber of Commerce. Some of his poems have been published in monthly magazines.

ANN H REDDICK, *Stage 4*

Ann H Reddick lives in Glen Allen, Va. Her work has been published in The Journal of the Virginia Writers Club, 2023, 2024 and 2025. Also the Virginia Writers club, Golden Nib and Teen Nib 2024. She has been writing poetry since adolescence, finding them to be cathartic and therapeutic. She is on the kidney transplant list at Henrico Doctors Hospital.

ELINE TUIJN, *The Wounding*

Eline is Dutch but lived in the UK until her early teens. A divorce after a 30-year relationship prompted her to start writing poetry and short stories in Dutch and English. This is her first poem in English. She has one short story published on the website of a Dutch Association of English language professionals (SENSE). She also writes light-hearted columns for the Border Collie Club Magazine.

NICHOLAS GROOMS, *In a Sky of Self-Injury*

Nicholas Grooms is a poet, writer and musician hailing from Garden City, Kansas. He has recently appeared in such periodicals as Pictura Journal, Ionosphere, Discretionary Love and Midsummer Dream House though he is best known for his work as a musician, appearing on many notable stages including the Vans Warped Tour and creating original songs for the Kansas City Chiefs organization. Grooms is also a revered sports and entertainment journalist and is author of the books “Me, Myself and I Hate You” and “My Mental State Has a Midwest Shape”. He currently resides in Austin, TX, forever learning and growing in his favorite role of proud father.

P.C. SCHEPONIK, *Ever and Again*

P.C. Scheponik is life-long poet who lives with his wife, Shirley, and their shizon, Bella. His writing celebrates nature, the human condition, and the metaphysical mysteries of life. He has published six collections of poems. His work has appeared in numerous literary journals. He was a 2019 Pushcart Prize nominee.

TAFFETA CHIME, *911 Watch*

Taffeta Chime, a lifelong fabulist and logolept, has two published novels (*Stoodie*, 2007, and *The Last*, 2011) and several short stories, poems, and articles printed across many

publications (including Complex Magazine, Dandelion Scribes, and Short Édition). She currently works as a freelance writer and editor in Tennessee.

C. CHRISTINE FAIR, *Nullity*

C. Christine Fair is a Professor of Security Studies at Georgetown University. She completed her PhD in South Asian Languages and Civilization at the University of Chicago. Her creative pieces have appeared in The Blood Pudding, Fictive Dream, Hyptertext, Lunch Ticket, Bangalore Review, among others in addition to her scholarly work. She causes trouble in multiple languages: Hindi, Urdu, and Punjabi.

TODD MATSON, *With Bells On*

Todd Matson is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in North Carolina, United States. His poetry has been published in The Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling, Salvation South, Soul-Lit, The Clayjar Review, Agape Review, Redrosethorns, San Antonio Review, The Brussels Review, The Shallot and Prosetrics. He has also written lyrics for songs recorded by several contemporary Christian music artists, including Brent Lamb, Connie Scott and The Gaither Vocal Band.

VERA PODELL, *i masturbated the night he died*

Vera Podell is a Russian-born writer and photo artist. She writes in three languages which are English, Russian and German. Her art primarily focuses on the themes of memory and how it forms our identity and perception of life. Vera's poetry has been published in "Password. Very short poetry," "Heliosparrow" and "Vial of Bones."

ELIZABETH ROSSELL, *Sunshine*

Elizabeth Rosell lives in Northern Ontario, Canada, with her cat Belle. She has spent her life working in the non-profit field, inspired by her own mental health issues with borderline personality disorder. Elizabeth has been published in The Seat, Punk Monk, The Amphibian, and Yale's The Perch. When not writing, she spends her spare time crafting and baking. She can be found online at www.ElizabethRosell.com.

ANNE MIKUSINSKI, *Requiem*

Anne Mikusinski has always been in love with words. She's been writing poems and short stories since she was seven. Her influences range from Robert Frost and Dylan Thomas

to David Byrne and Nick Cave. She hopes that one day, some of her writing will impress others the way these writers have had an impact on her.

TONI DAWE, *The Cigarette Carton/My Master's Coffin*

Toni (they/them) is an emerging writer from Edmonton, Alberta. They're busy with their evolutionary astrology practice when they're not writing. They are also currently working on their BA in Psychology.

RAE GREENWOOD, *In the Grasp of Envy*

Rae Greenwood is a teacher and write from California. Some of her work appears in The Amazine, As Surely As the Sun, Blue Villa, miniMAG, and elsewhere. You can follow on raegreenwood.blogspot.com.

REBEKAH RODRIGUEZ, *the inheritance*

Rebekah Rodriguez is a writer from Laredo, Texas. She holds both a bachelor's and master's degree in communication from Texas A&M International University, and her work spans poetry, personal essays, and newswriting. Rooted in themes of memory, love, grief, and identity, her writing is shaped by her South Texas upbringing. Most recently, her work has appeared in DVINO Magazine, Infrarrealista Review, and Tragaluz Journal.

DUSTIN TRIPLETT, *Your Divorce Ruined My Faith in Brunch*

Dustin Triplett is a creative with a dark streak and a soft underbelly. His work leans into the raw, the uncomfortable, and the emotionally unfiltered. Whether through poetry or creative nonfiction, he explores the messy middle—where humor collides with heartbreak and truth refuses to stay buried. When not writing, he's probably overthinking, hiking Missouri trails, or naming stray cats that never come back.

JEANNETTE DE BEAUVOIR, *When the Whales Leave*

Jeannette de Beauvoir is a poet and novelist who lives and works at Land's End—Provincetown, Massachusetts. Her work has appeared in the Emerson Review, the Looking Glass Review, Avalon Literary Review, the Blue Collar Review, Sheepshead Review, Grande Dame Literary, On Gaia Literary, Merganser Literary Magazine, the Adirondack Review, Perception, and the New England Review, among others; she was featured in WCAI's Poetry Sunday, and is the recipient of the Mary

Ballard Chapbook Prize and the Outermost Poetry Contest national award. More at jeannettedebeauvoir.com

DIANA MORLEY, *For whom?*

Diana Morley publishes poetry online and in journals. She published “Spreading Like Water” (2019), a chapbook, “Splashing” (2020), a poetry collection, and “Oregon’s Almeda Fire: From loss to renewal” (2021), a documentary of photos and poems, as well as a short story about evacuating from the fire (2024).

TAISA JENNE, *The Dead are Really Gone*

Taisa Jenne is a writer and educator who lives in Northern British Columbia, Canada with her 3 children, 2 cats and 6 chickens. Her poems have been previously published in the Creekstone Press anthology *creekstones: words & images*, and *Painted Pebble Lit Mag*.

AYOMIDE OKEOWO, *micro doesn't mean minor*

Ayomide Okeowo, also known as Verse and Vantage, is a Nigerian poet and writer exploring themes of identity, memory, and inheritance. Her various works appear on her Substack blog, *Verse and Words*.

SOLAPE ADETUTU ADEYEMI, *Skeletons*

Solape Adetutu Adeyemi is a dedicated professional with a Bachelor's degree in Microbiology and a Master's in Environmental Management. She is a researcher, a consultant, a passionate environmental sustainability enthusiast and a talented award winning creative writer, with her works published in esteemed journals and magazines, including *Writenow Literary Journal*, *TV Metro*, *Poetry Marathon Anthology*, the *Guardian* newspaper, the *Kalahari review* and the *Indiana review* among others.

ALYSSA LADEWSKI, *moonlight 23*

Alyssa Ladewski is a writer of poetry, coffee enthusiast, and band director based in Chicago. When she's not writing, she's on the move, exploring cafés in and around Chicago, always chasing the next great cup and story. She often travels to forests and natural spaces for creative inspiration. Her work has previously appeared in *The Nature of Our Times*.

MEL BARTLETT, *I Should Have Been There*

Mel Bartlett is an American poet and fiction writer floating ominously around the Eastern United States. Her poetry has been featured in ROPES Literary Journal (Issue #33) and the University of Galway Writer's Society Anthology, Surreal. She is currently pursuing her Writing Master's at the University of Galway.

MITCHELL BIGGS, *Please Heal on the Weekends*

Mitchell Biggs is a writer based out of the Skagit Valley in Washington State. Growing up near the Salish Sea, he found his creative muses in the natural world, in the DIY music scene and in endless stacks of thrifted paperbacks. His poetry has been featured in Writer's Hour Magazine, Dissident Voice, 50-Word Stories and A Sufferer's Digest with a forthcoming appearance in Headstone Zine vol 1.

KAMALENDU NATH, *Drowning in Her (Trust)*

Kamalendu Nath, an emeritus professor of Long Island University, NY; resides in New Hampshire, USA and seeks an understanding of rhythms in Nature. Some of his poems have appeared in the *Adelaide Literary Magazine*; *The Aurorean*; *Inclement Poetry Magazine*; *Palimpsest*; *Thresholds Literary Journal*; *Vermont Literary Review*; *Oracle* and others.

YUAN CHANGMING, *Last Loveline: Upon My Demise*

Yuan Changming co-edits *Poetry Pacific* with Allen Yuan. Writing credits include 12 Pushcart nominations for poetry and 3 for fiction besides appearances in *Best of the Best Canadian Poetry* (2008-17) and 2149 other publications worldwide. A poetry juror for Canada's 44th National Magazine Awards, Yuan began to write prose in 2022, his hybrid novel *DETACHING*, 'silver romance' *THE TUNER* and short story collection *FLASHBACKS* available at Amazon.

SUSAN LINDSLEY, *As I Wait*

Susan Lindsley won her first writing award in thirds grade and has garnered many since. She has penned more twenty published books in various genres. Like her mentor, Flannery O'Connor, she bases much of her writings on the people—cattle rustlers and moonshiners— and events on the 2,500-acre farm that was her childhood home. Her mentor was friend and neighbor Flannery O'Conner in her early years.

JIM BELLANCA, *A Father-Son Conversation Before It Was Not*

Jim Bellanca took to authoring poems after retiring from teaching and educational publishing. His poems intertwine themes of love, grief, family, war and peace, nature and place, e also writes in blank and free verse. Among accepted online and print publications accepting his poems have been *Harrow House*, *Kelp—Wave*, *LastLeaf*, *The Lyric*, *Merion West*, *7th Circle Phyre*, *Solution Tree Press*, *Sparks of Calliope*, *Westward Quarterly* and *Witcraft*. Bottlecap Press (in press) will publish his first chapbook focused on nature and place. He lives with his wife in Lake Forest, IL.

CRAIG KIRCHNER, *Drinks*

Craig Kirchner is retired and living in Jacksonville, because that's where his granddaughters are. He loves the aesthetics of writing, has a book of poetry, *Roomful of Navels* and has been nominated three times for Pushcart. He was recently published in *Chiron Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *Harrow House* and about 100 others. He houses 500 books in his office and about 400 poems on a laptop, these words help keep him straight.

mk zariel, *hope*

mk zariel {it/its + masc terms} is a transmasculine neuroqueer poet, theater artist, movement journalist, and BashBack aligned anarchist. it is fueled by folk-punk, Emma Goldman, and existential dread. the author of VOIDGAZING (2026, Whittle Micropress), it can be found online at <https://mkzariel.carrd.co/>, creating conflictually queer-anarchic spaces, writing columns for *Asymptote* and the *Anarchist Review of Books*, and being mildly feral in the great lakes region. it is kinda gay ngl.

KATE HOWLETT, *Messy*

Kate Howlett is a writer and social ecologist based in Cambridge, UK. She lives with a snake called Luisa, an African land snail called Carrot and a cat called Steve. She holds a PhD in zoology from the University of Cambridge, where her research focused on children's relationship with nature. She writes a Substack newsletter, Natural Connection, about fixing our relationship with nature and often shares her poems via Notes.

DAWN LO, *A Winter Morning*

Dawn Lo is a HK-Canadian writer and teacher. Her work has appeared in *The Offing*,

The Malahat Review, Pulp Literature and elsewhere. She is currently the teacher-editor of *He(a)rd*, a literary zine for young writers. She has been nominated twice for the Pushcart Prize.

A. L. SMITH, *I'm Sorry*

A. L. Smith lives in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States. Since she was a girl, she has written stories and poems to cope with the world around her.

SHONTAY LUNA, *Little Girl*

Shontay Luna is a poet / fanfiction author whose first job was a Concessionaire at a downtown theater. Her poems have appeared in Olney Magazine, [alternate route] and The Literary Nest, among others. The author of four books, she lives in Chicago with her notebooks, pens and fanfiction fantasies.

TRACEY OLPHERT, *Shattered Dreams*

Tracey is a 46-year-old wife, mum to two, living in Lincolnshire. A lover of writing led to her enrolment at the University of Lincoln, where she studies Creative Writing. Tracey enjoys writing Non-Fiction and Fiction. In her spare time, you will most likely find her travelling. The documentation of her travels, through photography can be found at www.instagram.com/wanderbloggs

Contact email: energy12@hotmail.com

NIKKEYA D. BELL, *Glass*

Nikkeya Dey Bell is a writer based on Long Island, New York. Born in the Spring when butterflies flutter and wildflowers bloom. draws inspiration from community connections and personal reflection. Her work has appeared on platforms such as Her Heart Poetry "Voyage" and at an anti-bullying event "I Rise". Through writing she hopes to help others feel seen supported and connected.

XANDRA BUSHWAY, *Panic*

Xandra is a mental health professional in Michigan. She loves hiking and eating strawberries in the sunshine.

THOMAS PHALEN, *My Desperate Small Wealth of Moments*

Thomas Phalen is a retired lawyer. He has a Master in Philosophy degree in

Creative Writing from Trinity College, Dublin. His work is in *Lune*, *Blue Mountain Review*, *Muleskinner Journal*, *Icarus*, *Wild Umbrella*, *Third Wednesday*, and *Cider Press Review*. He was a four-time contributor in poetry at the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference. He is an editor of *Muleskinner Journal*. He lives alternately in Phoenix, Arizona, and in Dublin, Ireland.

DAVE STERN, *Doing the Doable*

Dave Stern is new to the community of writers after decades working as a physician scientist and health sciences administrator. He has recently placed pieces in *The Write Launch*, *Windmill*, *Free Spirit Publishing*, *1922 Revival/VOICES*, *Streetlight Magazine*, the *Awakenings Review*, *Manifest Station* and others. Dave grew up on the North Shore of Long Island.

STAR GALASYN, 8:25 pm

Star Galasyn has been writing poetry since she was in middle school. Within the last eight years, she has written over a dozen poetry books and in June 2025 published her debut poetry collection, 'All The Things in The Sky', which can be found on Amazon. Her poetry explores diverse topics such as mental health, relationships, philosophical thought pieces, grief, and self-exploration. She is currently working on her next poetry collection and a novel and is active on social media. She also writes articles and has been published by *Marrow Magazine*, *The Passionate Post*, *The 20-Something Files*, and *Poetry Nation* (Eber and Wein).

GABY ORTIZ, *Midnight Scribes*

Gaby Ortiz is a poet from Ecuador, living in Canada, but forever in a long-distance relationship with NYC. Her poetry is what happens when memory won't shut up. Part exile, part love letter, part fistfight. She brings Ecuadorian stories, Canadian politeness and NYC street rhythm into her writing, blending English and Spanish in bold, unapologetic verse, bringing personal storytelling but mostly she's busy turning bruises into metaphors that won't behave.

ANJI BROWN, *Heredity*

After a career in music and education, Anji Brown now lives in the beautiful, historic city of York, UK with her husband and dog. As an avid reader, her interest in words and

language led her to take an Open University degree in English Literature as a mature student. Although coming to writing later in life, Anji would love to share her work with a wider audience. She has had a couple of short stories published in Books & Pieces Magazine (June 2024, January 2025).

RYAN DI FRANCESCO, *Afternoon Antipoe*

Ryan Di Francesco is a Canadian writer and EIC of *Shadow and Sax*. His poems and stories have appeared in *The Toronto Star*, *The Pit Periodical*, and other journals.

DUANE L. HERRMANN, *A Generation Passes*

With degrees in Education and History, Duane L. Herrmann, award winning, internationally published historian, poet, and author, has work published in print and online, in sixty-plus anthologies, over one hundred other publications, plus a sci fi novel, nine collections of poetry, local history, stories for children, a book on fasting, and other works, all despite an abusive childhood embellished with dyslexia, ADHD; now compounded by cyclothymia, an anxiety disorder, and PTSD.

BEN WILLIAMS, *Remembering the Time*

Ben Williams currently lives in Hattiesburg Mississippi with his Wife McKenna and their six plants. He is currently completing a masters degree in Marriage and Family Therapy, but always tries to find time to write creatively. He is almost done with his first novel "Head Trip," which is a sci-fi epic and he hopes to publish it sometime in 2026.

CONSTANTINOS N. MAKRIS, *Brave of Desire*

Constantinos N. Makris was born in Limassol, Cyprus, in 1982, where he continues to live and write. He is the author of several novels and collections, including *Extracts of Passion* (2011) and *Pentadromos* (2022). His work blends historical, mythological, and philosophical themes, and he has received international recognition for his poetry and prose.

CM PICKARD, *Azaleas Bloom*

CM Pickard is a self-proclaimed late bloomer, living in Melbourne, Australia. Her poetry was shortlisted in *The Letter Review Prize for Poetry* and *SWWV's Kathryn Purnell Poetry Prize*, appeared in *Soul Poetry*, *Prose & Arts Magazine*, *The Raven Review*, and elsewhere. (<https://cmpickardwrites.site/>)

AMY SORICELLI, *Final Arrangements*

Amy Soricelli has been published in numerous publications and anthologies, including The Westchester Review, Deadbeats, Long Island Quarterly, Literati Magazine, Pure Slush, Glimpse Poetry Magazine, and many others. **Coming Spring/2026 - "Growing up Bronx, Dancing Girl Press. *That Plane is not a Star, 4/2024, Dancing Girl Press *Carmen has No Umbrella but Went for Cigarettes Anyway, Dancing Girl Press 9/2021 *Sail Me Away, Dancing Girl Press, 10/2019. Nominations: Pushcart Prize, 2021, "Best of the Net" 2020, 2013. Nominated by Billy Collins for the Aspen Words Emerging Writers Fellowship/2019, Grace C. Croff Poetry Award, Herbert H Lehman College, 1978

LORRI VENTURA, *Button Jar*

Lorri Ventura is a retired special education administrator living in Massachusetts. Her writing has been featured in numerous anthologies, and her debut poetry collection, *Shifting the Mind's Eye*, was published in 2024.

JENNIFER RODRIGUES, *Waiting*

Jennifer lives on the sacred Powhatan land of Fairfax, VA. She is trained as a certified yoga therapist & trauma informed yoga teacher, is a queer & neurodivergent military spouse, & mom. Her poetry & photography have been featured in *Passengers*, *Susurrus*, *FERAL*, *The Jelly Bucket*, *Mid-Atlantic Review*, *Paper Dragon*, *America's Future* anthology by WWPH, & several military anthologies. Her photography has been nominated for Best of the Net. Find her on Insta @gmoneyfunklove.

GENEVIEVE POE, *Divine Feminine*

Genevieve Poe lives in Ogden, Utah with her partner and a very opinionated grandma kitty. From a young age she has written poetry to explore memory, intimacy, and the relationships that shape her life.

TERRY MANION, *Every Day's Child*

In Terry's home country of Australia, he has had work published in cities such as Brisbane, Adelaide and Melbourne. In nearby New Zealand, he has work published in Wellington and Christchurch and recently in America he has had work published in the latest edition of *Soul Poetry* and the *Harrow House Journal*.

JOHN ROMAGNA, *Fishing*

John Romagna lives in Clinton, NJ with his wife Karen, a landscape and seascape painter. He began writing poetry after the death of their younger son, Tim, in order to express his emotions, to hold on to the memory of their son, and to find a way to heal and live joyfully. Writing helps him keep a strong connection with family, friends and other writers.

JACLYN YOUGHANA GARVER, *Saudade*

Jaclyn Youhana Garver is an author, poet, and journalist from Fort Wayne, Indiana. Her poetry chapbook, *The Men I Never*, was originally published by dancing girl press in Chicago. Her debut novel, *Then, Again*, was published by Lake Union Publishing in November 2024. She also co-edited the From Beyond Press anthology, *Requiem for a Siren: Women Poets of the Pulp*s. She serves on the Midwest Writers Workshop board of directors.

TIRILL B. SVALER, *Motherhood*

Tirill B. Svaler is a Norwegian writer and librarian whose work explores grief, family, ancestral trauma, and the invisible horrors of domestic life. Her fiction has previously been published in the anthology *The Unseen*, edited by Leone Ross. Other work has appeared on her Substack, *Unfurling the Archive*. When she is not writing, she likes to do research on accessible library practices and cuddle up with her partner and cats.

DAWN LEVITT, *Returning to the Body that Once Was*

Dawn is a two-time heart transplant recipient, poet, essayist, and disability rights advocate who writes at the intersection of storytelling and healing, combining her personal experiences with Complex PTSD, domestic violence, and medical trauma with thoughts of love and resilience to turn tough experiences into art. Her work has appeared in *Newsweek*, *Insider Magazine*, *Remington Review*, *Breath and Shadow*, *Pink Panther Magazine*, and many other journals and anthologies. Find her website at www.dawnlevittauthor.com and socials – Substack & Bluesky - @2HeartCore4U.

XIOMARRA MILANN, *At the Basilica de San Juan*

Xiomarra Milann is a borderland storyteller, multidisciplinary artists, activist, and educator whose roots lay in Laredo, TX. She holds her MFA in Creative Writing from UTEP, and her writing has been published with entities such as Sybil Journal, Querencia

Press, and Acentos Review, among others. She has been the recipient of fellowships with MoveTexas, the Rowan Foundation, and The Heart of It. She was nominated for Sundress Press' Best of Net 2025, a finalist for the Jack McCarthy Book Prize in 2024, shortlisted for the 2024 Peach Pit Grant, and nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2023. Follow her journey on Instagram @90strashpop.

FAYE WEBB, *Charybdis*

Faye Webb grew up in Southern West Virginia, with a long standing love for writing that began in childhood, that needless to say followed her into adulthood. Along with an obsession with anything fantasy and Greek mythology. She can be found writing poetry at any minor inconvenience, with both tears and a smile on her face.

KY STRUCK, *i forgot to tell you how much you ruined my life*

Ky Struck is a writer and multimedia artist from Minnesota, USA. She has previously been published or has upcoming work in Underbelly Press, Flare Magazine, Glut Press, and more. She is also an editor for several literary journals. You can find her website here: struckky.wixsite.com/portfolio

RACHEL TURNEY, *If My Brother Were a Bat, I Would Fly With Him Over the Sydney Harbor*

Rachel Turney, Ed.D. is an educator and artist located in Denver, Colorado. Rachel is on staff at *Bare Back Magazine* and is a reader for *The Los Angeles Review*. Her poetry collection *Record Player Life* is forthcoming with *The Poetry Lighthouse*. Website: turneytalks.com Instagram: @turneytalks Bluesky: rachelturney

KAUSAR ABUBAKAR USMAN, *Haunting...*

Kausar Abubakar Usman is a Nigerian poet and a Spoken Word Artist from Kebbi State. Studying Mass Communication at Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. Her work explores theme of longing, hope and resilience, weaving together personal emotions and social experiences. When Kausar is not writing, she is observing daily rides and listening to the beauty of silence with deep commitment to contributing to contemporary poetry.

BEN BRUGES, *Funeral Fires*

Ben Bruges works in education, is Features Editor for Hastings Independent Press and has poems published in Interpreter's House, Banyan Review, Santa Fe Literary

Review, London Grip, Macrame Literary Journal, Write Under the Moon, Memoirist, Howling Owl, Radical Catalyst Journal, 'special consideration' for The Wee Sparrow Press' ekphrastic competition, Hastings Poet Town, Creaking Kettle & Elizabeth Royal Patton Memorial Poetry Competition anthologies and forthcoming in Fragmented Voices magazine. He is a member of Hastings Stanza Group. Andrew Motion, former Poet Laureate complimented the poems "for their density, thoughtfulness and cleverly pausing rhythms. [They] manage to make the urban city-scape resonate like a pastoral one."

BETTY STANTON, *Pomegranate Hunger*

Betty Stanton (she/her) is a Pushcart nominated writer who lives and works in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in various journals and collections and has been included in various anthologies. She received her MFA from The University of Texas - El Paso and holds a doctorate in Educational Leadership. She is currently on the editorial board of *Ivo Review*. @fadingbetty.bsky.social

MADISON MCCLINTOCK, *I Do Til I Don't*

Madison McClintock is a writer based in Los Angeles, living with her partner and two dogs. Her work blends personal narrative with cultural critique, often exploring labor, memory, and the shifting terrain between intimacy and performance. She is currently at work on a collection of poetry and a memoir-style essay project.

BARBARA E. HUNT, *Mending By Hand*

Barbara E. Hunt has publications across North America, UK, Netherlands, Scandinavia, Australia, France, Germany, resulting in a Pushcart Prize nomination from Swedish publication. Work is accessible (*free*) on WATTPAD. Her climate-change collection is *Rowing Across the North Atlantic* (available at writersplayground.ca).

OLIVIA D'ZAVALA, *French Noir Translated through a Best Buy Sound Bar*

Olivia D'Zavala has spent over two decades nurturing emerging writers as an adjunct college English instructor, specializing in composition, literature, and technical writing. Her written work has appeared in a variety of undergraduate and graduate literary journals, and her recent publication in *Amaranth Journal* marks her debut on the

international stage. Her writing often reflects the same qualities that define her personal world: dark, subverted, and quietly bold.

SHANNARA EMMETT, *How Would Life Be?*

Shannara Emmett lives in Texas with her husband and three children. Her love for literature began in 4th grade after a teacher issued a summer challenge. Her prose extends from poetry to building unique magic systems in immersive fantasy worlds. She previously worked as a judge for Elementary and Middle School poetry competitions for a publishing company. Her current project is a Gothic Romantic Fantasy where a Goddess's magic is abused, and darker secrets are revealed a century later.

A. KAHN, *Me Too*

A. Kahn (she/her) is a Midwestern writer and artist. Her prose has been published in *Of Rust and Glass*, poetry in various publications including *ONE ART*, *Livina Press*, *confetti*, and *redrosethorns*, and artwork in the horror anthology *Café Macabre II*.

KARINA TEN, *Wreath*

Karina Ten (she/her) is a queer and neurodivergent poet from Kazakhstan, currently studying medicine in Milan, Italy. She writes in her third language and hopes to one day translate the many unpublished poems she has back home. Her work centers on themes of mental health and identity.

SEKAR AJININGSIH, *Summer Solstice*

Sekar Ajiningsih is a senior-year English Literature student at Universitas Gajah Mada, Indonesia. She occasionally takes a break from her final thesis by writing poetry.

RILEY G. JOHNSTON, *three summers*

Riley G. Johnston is a poet from Houston, TX. She is a first-year MFA student at George Mason University, where she works as the Assistant Poetry Editor for *So to Speak Magazine*. She is a current Teaching Fellow for Poetry Alive! and serves on the Poetry Daily editorial team. Her work can be found in *Thimble* and *Screen Door Review*.

