

DOOR = JAR



FALL 2020

ISSUE 16

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Door Is A Jar
Issue 16

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Cover Image “Untitled 5”
by June Levitan

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Celia
Michael Estabrook
Poetry

I close my email
to an old high school acquaintance:
“Did you hear that Celia from our class,
our beautiful homecoming queen, died last year?”
He responds: “I vaguely remember Celia...
unlike you my thoughts of EBHS seldom manifest.”
Letting me know I’m some
sort of lesser creature, like he’s better
than me because he’s moved on,
left high school in the distant past.
I’m tempted to retort
I don’t dwell on those high school days either
which of course is a lie because
after all I married my high school sweetheart
the most beautiful girl in the school
hard to avoid thinking back
about those days
when love ruled my world.

Black Shoes

Japhy Mitchell

Poetry

In the back right-hand corner
Rests a pair of black sandals
Only worn once
on a date from hell,

Now they sleep
Nestled next
To shoes
worn out but
Never thrown away.

Shoes with a story,

Sadness and suffering
Funerals and break ups
That trip to the doctor
That ended in tears.

One day
I won't wake up.
And
My children will come
put them
In boxes
Not to be buried or burned
Like me,

But to be sold at some
Dusty goodwill store.

Where the black sandals
will sit

Waiting
to be reincarnated
To someone else,

And hopefully a better
Life
Than that miserable date.

Combat Boots

Heather Sager

Poetry

A pivotal experience,
being left to sit on the cold sidewalk after school.
Was it my aunt who forgot to get me,
or someone else?
Regardless, it happens to everyone.
I was wearing combat boots and my feet froze
in the falling snow.
God knows why I sat on the sidewalk,
watching other junior high-schoolers pass,
give me the look-down stinkeye
amid all that blurring into cars and busses.
I nodded, my ears plugged
with hard-rock headphones.
How quickly people dispersed,
leaving only brick apartments and empty street,
frantic pacing life poofing into thin air.
When my music paused and the janitor locked the
school's doors,
what heavy jangling keys he had.
From a window across the street I heard
a disembodied voice.
An elderly woman singing,
a piano's notes, warm, rambling and pretty,
out-of-tune.
The snow fell,
darkness eliding the late day.
Where did the railing of the apartment go, the siding
of rusted car?
An older and glamorous girl passed by me and said hello
she was on her way to the club.
I wanted to be her.
Eventually my ride came,

only an hour-and-a-half late
but it felt like eternity.

Terminal
Patrick Nevins
Fiction

The terminals extended from the center of the airport, tentacle-like, delivering passengers to their gates via moving sidewalks. They terminated at jet bridges, where Airbuses and Boeings awaited to take passengers anywhere in the world; their destination was Minneapolis-Saint Paul International and her mother, who was dying of MS.

The couple was sitting inside their terminal's Starbucks, drinking coffee to pass the time until they could board. The plan — which very reasonable — was for Ellie to spend a week relieving her brother from caring for their mother nearly full time. The week would help her decide whether she would return to the coast to finish her PhD or move back home to help with the inevitable. The disease had struck her mother where her limbs terminated, weakening her hands and stiffening her gait; at least, her extremities was where the disease manifested. It had seized control of her nervous system, and as its grip tightened, its damage worked its way inward. Ellie's mother could do nothing but measure the disease's advance and let her children be her hands and feet.

Ellie thought she could be her mother's hands and feet — at least temporarily. There were no Echinoderms in Minnesota. Echinoderms — specifically starfish — was the subject of her PhD. Familiar but beautiful *Asterias rubens*. Slender-armed *Henricia oculata*. Seven-armed *Luidia ciliaris*. How does one take up starfish as a specialty? She could take the view that it was born in her family's vacations to the Gulf of Mexico, where she and her brother would occasionally see a common starfish swept onto the beach; whoever

spotted it would point excitedly, and they would rush toward it as a receding wave snatched it back. More prosaically (because she likely saw more starfish as stiff, dried-out souvenirs in tacky gift shops), there was a progression from a high-school biology teacher who saw promise in her to her college major to finding an enjoyable niche for herself in Echinoderm research. It had taken her far from home—and when she went into dissertation mode, and on the job market, she imagined coming home less and less. She already missed her niece and nephew — they were slimmer and longer every time she saw them. But such was life: You outgrew your origins, your younger self.

Simon, whom she had lived with for three years with no sign of a bigger commitment, was coming along to finally meet her family. A conference presentation on mudskippers (of all the fish in the sea) had kept him from accompanying her to her father's funeral. (Fish were his specialty — and he could be so superior about it, just because they were vertebrates!) If it were *your* father's funeral, she'd said, I wouldn't skip it for an Echinoderm symposium. I wouldn't ask you to, he'd said. *I* don't plan on going to his funeral. He could be so cold. Like a fish. He didn't share her sympathy for her brother. It was his choice to never leave his hometown, Simon had said. And, sure, he spent a lot of time taking care of their mother, but he didn't have to put his life on hold, exactly. That's what you'd have to do, Simon had warned her. Would I have to come to Minnesota to see you? You won't be able to go on the job market with me. Be reasonable. Oh, he could be cold. And selfish. She would say his mother would be ashamed of him, but she didn't know his mother. His parents lived within driving distance, but they never visited them. When Ellie became certain that he kept hidden from them that they lived together, she'd said, What are you, spineless? He'd

stormed out at that. Sometimes she wondered if he really had parents, or if he'd just spawned from the mildewed floors of a lab.

Simon got up and announced that he was taking a walk. He'd not given Ellie time to respond before he was slinking down the concourse, leaving her with their carry-ons. Totally unreasonable! That thought — it was shouted in Ellie's head — brought back his words: "Be reasonable." Be reasonable. It was a mantra with him lately. And that's how she decided she was through with him. She wasn't going to terminate their relationship as they boarded — wasn't going to break up with him on the jet bridge — but she knew this trip would mark the end of it. Be reasonable. She'd grown away from things, but she'd remained tethered, too, held by her pitiful mother, her adorable niece and nephew. Simon was a severed arm, cut off from the past. And he refused to seriously attach himself to her and grow something new. As he walked the concourse, still heading away from her, she realized that he'd never been further from her center than "Be reasonable." He returned when their zone was called. She picked up her carry-on and approached the gate. The image that returned to her as she boarded was that of a common starfish splayed on glistening sand, surprised and pulled by familiar waters back into the ocean

Villanelle of Your Death

Michael Seeger

Poetry

I gaze at the sunset and make no plans
listening to the pigeons on the roof —
not from complacency but acceptance.

The mountains outline the sun's reflectance,
Coral clouds gathered in the east don't move;
I gaze at the sunset and make no plans.

It is difficult to write a sentence —
the dog-less yard endures without a woof,
not from complacency but acceptance.

The evening's long shadows heighten sentience
of all things remotely close and aloof —
I gaze at the sunset and make no plans.

There's an elevating independence
that comes by seeing from such a remove —
not from complacency but acceptance.

Though you have gone, the house holds your essence
Untouched like a needle stuck in its groove —
I gaze at the sunset and make no plans
not from complacency but acceptance.

The Darkness of Our Love

Michael Seeger

Poetry

*Let us forget with generosity
those who cannot love us.*

—Pablo Neruda

Like dementia, the loss was gradual
though obvious. Scales fell quietly
like autumn leaves, vanishing
from my eyes. Alone I stood
a bare tree in late summer;
You no longer knew me —
as if always meeting
for the first time.

The mist over the trail thickened
like blood. The dark nights wore
forgettable faces like cyphers
whose only real power lay
in words — words which
brought disengagement,
hardly noticeable
at first...

But which proved to be a colossal,
ever-widening, chasm — like
love recklessly professed,
tumbling aimlessly.
At the center of it all,
there was comfort
in the darkness
of our love,

Fumbling over thresholds for what
We knew must lay just beyond —
Something. Blind men knew
More. Searching the mind
for thawing thought
or what disarms
what's deeply
seated.

For Words to invoke the sacred name
of Superstition — a valid charm
(Often vaguely repeated to dis-
engage the reasoning mind)
to bless, or curse, and get
what's needed from
the deep night's
undercurrent.

April Storm
Michael Seeger
Poetry

A storm brewing —
above the valley darkened

clouds gather, descending
along the western range —

shimmering with lightning
flares echoing thunder

rolling high along the canyon
walls distilled the bright

awareness swirling within
the deepest brown of

your eyes — promising blue skies
and growth.

Traversing the trail descending
Murray Hill high above

the shimmering desert sand of
the Coachella Valley

the steady strain of rain that fell —
a melody as sweet as

the song of birds — has lingered
in my ears ever since

the day you left us
for Idaho.

The Crows at Cliff Palace, Mesa Verde, AZ

Michael Seeger

Poetry

There is something that compels
on this vast, wildfire-wasted vista.

A sense of permanence pervades
the hundred-mile views and mystery —

exquisitely built architecture abandoned

shortly after completion still stands on
scorched earth and within canyon walls.

The ancient, mind-capturing cliff dwellings
astonish in beauty and timelessness —

enveloping awareness, like incense, heady

and crisp upon the ashened whirlwinds
of remaining ponderosa and pinyon now

in regrowth and regeneration coalescing
high above the elegant cities of fitted stone.

Why did they build? Where did they go?

The stubborn, willful and laughing call of
the memory-keeping trickster crows know —

stealthily flying in apparent scorn above the
Mesa Verde sandstone, under autumn sky or

perched upon their Anasazi castle keep. And

as tree skeleton moonscape covering the
mountain acres high in Colorado surrounds

the Arcadian cityscape now shimmering
in sunset's reflection and bleached (to

perfection) rises like twisters of ash.

Pastry Fever
Margaret McCaffrey
Nonfiction

I have always valued the importance of being good. But lately I've noticed my good self walking out the door, leaving another, entirely different one behind.

I could blame it on the *Ayer Vedic* healing center I attended in India, where I contracted a fever that ran up and down my body, spurting pain into my limbs — like leaks from a rusty gasoline pipe — and making me feel sleepy all the time. By the time I arrived back home, the aching fever had reached the pit of my stomach, and I didn't care much about anything, not even the bug itself.

"Come on, M," I said to myself one morning. "Get up, get dressed, and go to the library for work."

"OK," my good self replied. I put on my clothes and set off.

I entered the city library, with its computers arranged in rows like pews in a church, and found a secluded spot. I'd begun typing when I looked up to see a familiar face of someone I'd once known hovering over me. His cheeks had become swollen since I'd last seen him, and lines had appeared on his face — much as they had on mine. His skin had taken on the color of uncooked pastry.

He greeted me and began chatting, luring me once more into his faithless realm with talk of books and assorted ideas, as he'd always done. He said something about a writer named Alice someone, whose theory on chaos I might like. Her name swirled in my head like a dervish.

No, I told him, I hadn't heard of her.

A picture came to mind of certain novels on my bookshelf at home with *Rowden White Library* stamped all over them; books he'd stolen from the university,

presented to me and which I'd accepted. Books by Jean Genet, Djuna Barnes, and *Death on the Installment Plan* by Celine.

"How are you?" I asked, buying myself some time, my head nodding like a metronome. "And how is your health?" He said that doctors were prescribing cortisone for his condition, whatever that was.

"No-o!" he waved away my concern, as if I had delirium. "I'm fine," he insisted. "You're looking well," he said.

Was I? I hadn't been looking too well when I came through the infrared screen at Chennai airport, lit up like an ambulance. (That year it was Avian Flu. I didn't think I had it. All I'd done is ask the healing practitioner to help me change my ways.)

This day at the library my friend suggested we exchange phone numbers. "I'll give you mine," he said, reaching for the pen inside his shirt pocket.

No, I shook my head. I didn't think that would be necessary.

"Oh, then you've got a partner?" he said by way of answering his own question.

Did I? I didn't know what I had. I was tempted to nod from that old place inside me that manufactured "nice." Instead I gave him my recently acquired Indian yes-no swing of the head that for me signaled infinity.

I only knew what I didn't have. I didn't have the inclination to lift pen to paper to write down anyone's unwanted phone number, or to give them mine. I only wanted to sit at my desk, and work.

"I see," he said, with a flicker to his eyes.

I turned back to the computer screen...

Back home that afternoon I rang my Chinese herbalist. "I want to get rid of this ache I have in the pit of my

stomach," I said, "that makes my body feel lethargic, and my arms feel like tree stumps."

"We can fix that," she said brightly. "Come on in."

Once in her office, she handed me a bottle of tiny black capsules, the size of Puy lentils. "Those should do the trick," she smiled. "I'd say you've got "Delhi belly" from your travels."

I'd been thinking of something more esoteric; something along the lines of a spiritual epiphany, such as in E M Forster's *A Passage to India*. But I kept quiet, not wanting to get caught in any ancient Indo-Chinese healing war.

The next morning, I could pinpoint the exact moment the bug had left my body. My fever had gone and I was back to my old self again. The Chinese herbs had worked. Everything was fine. Fine, I said to myself, as long as the cure hadn't removed the recently discovered gene within that bade me never to raise my head, hand or will in deference to another human being in my life again — should I not want to.

Unanswered
Lucy Ann Fiorini
Poetry

There was one moment that hung unanswered
Hands above me but still underwater
I could see the light moving through the blue
Dark shapes of faces near the edge, then gone
They never reached down, though they saw me too

Dark shapes of faces near the edge, then gone
Sitting under the tree, carving our names
There was one moment that hung unanswered
Until you ask a question with no sound,
Nothing was sharper than knife into bark

Until you ask a question with no sound,
They always leave at night; there's no reprieve
Let the seashells fall; your lungs were burning
Could someone know you, yet forget you're here
There was one moment that hung unanswered

Night Bombing
Lucy Ann Fiorini
Poetry

When you flew
Enveloped in night
Your wings fixed
Nose pointed
Five hundred and eighty miles
In air cold as black

Did you see
The Dead scattered seeds
To our mouths?
And sated
With a taste of Hades' fruit
We'd find our own strength

Did you know
As you sliced the sky
Raining fire
On our heads
The sleeping and the dying
Would grow our own wings?

Ice Loch

Amy B. Moreno

Poetry

Anticipation tickles my arms,
Almost too light, like a sickly breath
rising in warning
Heavy stones clack behind my eyes
And sharp white light spirals my head
They cover me and I crawl away, animal-like
to groan and wrap myself in pitying bedcovers

Later, the thudding echoes dull and I slither out
walking on sea legs
The loch brims with frost
I crack tiny icy puddles with satisfying steps
Each sparks a little pain
and I squint in reply
Where the crinkled doily edge meets the Lochside,
The air is stilled
I lift a weight stick and smash it through the tranquillity,
let the wet bubble up through my jagged destruction
I remove my outer shell, submerge and relent
With the water
— the pain will ebb, the cold will flow.

Wired to the Moon

Amy B. Moreno

Poetry

Tell me, when you land
How high is the moon?
I reach into the fluttered curls of milky light
With sunken fingertips which paw for a rotary phone
To speak with remembered voices, now hushed
From this place of hitches
and stitches
xylophone barcodes of old bones
strung together but disconnected
wireless twists which itch to ring and
coil round a finger
and whistle memories on discontinued lines
They cut my cable, once strung to the stars
derelict my bungalow basket
And tether my red balloon

Like Sneaking Candy into a Movie Theater

Devan Burton

Poetry

When the crowd appears,
like random water drops
sliding down a window,
we've already claimed our seats.
Plush, black chairs —
speakers the weight of boulders.
And the purse opens.
You reach for candy bars.
I look around,
'The prices here are criminal.'
I agree and eat
processed, cold chocolate
from a wrapper.
You know we cannot cheat
time, disease, and money troubles.
We hold our breaths
while death flies over
and his frigid, aged hands
claims souls that do not belong to us.
We break the laws,
and digest candy bars
we bought elsewhere.

God Wears Clothes

Devan Burton

Poetry

God wears clothes.
He wakes,
rubs his face,
and thinks about the day.
In his closet,
there are different fabrics
from which he creates a wardrobe.
There is no darkness, and his decision is clear.

Before he leaves home,
he contemplates a sweater
(he only wears black in mourning
he only wears green when the daffodils bloom).

With the snow,
God is clothed.
Snow covers his chest.
Snow covers his neck.
Snow hugs his toes.
God believes today is casual Friday.
And he leaves the tie and blazer for Monday.

The Cry of a Kid

Devan Burton

Poetry

The photographer's shutter sees more than me:
two women holding time,
two girls running for a leash,
and a kid that cries.

In full maturity,
the kid will become a goat.
Nature provides an education
when nefarious children kick him.
The goat will not remember
the Sunday afternoon in a garden;
will not cherish the embrace
a human mother shares with him.
The goat will bite until he feels unhindered.

The kid that laments today is small, fragile, and thin.
He does not smile during the photo opportunity
because nature's youth longs to run free.
He shouts for open land.

Antonio's Last Laugh

Marc Littman

Drama

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Ruth, Peevish woman, 37. No fan of late restaurateur, Antonio.

Larry, Donna's husband, 42.

Andy, Ruth and Larry's son, 11.

Al, Longtime waiter at Antonio's restaurant, 52.

Two Other Diners, They sit behind Ruth and her family.

SETTING

Front portion of a small Sicilian Italian restaurant, a bit rundown. Tables are covered in red checkered tablecloths. By Ruth's table on an easel is a large memorial photo poster of the recently passed owner, Antonio. The restaurant is named after him. Antonio appears to be in his 60s. He's smiling. He has a moustache and a cheap toupee. A rose and a joke book are placed on the easel ledge.

TIME

Present, evening dinner

AT RISE

Smiling, Larry talks to Antonio's photo as Andy toys with his dinner and blows bubbles through his drink straw while Ruth frets.

LARRY

So, Antonio, did you hear about the ham sandwich that walked into a bar? The bartender says, 'sorry, we don't serve food here'.

(Larry drums table)

Bada bing bada boom. Good one, huh? I miss you, Buddy.

(Ruth rolls her eyes.)

RUTH

You would.

LARRY

Antonio's probably cracking up Saint Peter in heaven right now. One corny joke after the other.

RUTH

I'd like to think there's some decorum in heaven.

(Tapping Andy's wrist)

Andy, stop playing with your straw! We're in a restaurant. If you can call it that.

LARRY

Hey, the food here's great. The spaghetti and pasta con le sarde is *delizioso*!

(Larry kisses his fingers in salute, again facing Antonio.)

RUTH

It's salty, like his jokes.

LARRY

No, he kept them clean. It's a family restaurant. He just liked to make people laugh.

RUTH

There was nothing funny about Antonio's jokes or his demeanor. That ridiculous toupee, his garlic breath. The man was creepy; he enjoyed torturing me with his one-liners.

(Larry expertly winds a strand of spaghetti on his spoon and fork.)

LARRY

That's cuz you refused to laugh. You have no sense of humor, Ruth. Nothing is funny to you. You hurt Antonio's feelings.

(Al, the longtime waiter, approaches with a water pitcher.)

AL

Everything okay, folks?

LARRY

The Missus was just saying how much she misses Antonio. He sure got to her.

AL

He's still here at Antonio's. After 40 years of running the place, it's hard for his spirit to leave. I've read about that. People leave behind magnetic impressions or energy. Some of our diners claim they felt the Old Man's presence by the restrooms.

RUTH

Oh, great, now I can't even use the ladies' room. And, Lord knows, I need to. The pasta alla norma is way too spicy. I always would tell Antonio, in all things, moderation. He'd respond with a joke.

AL

He liked to sprinkle a little happiness. Do you want to hear one of his all-time favorites?

RUTH

(Glowering)

No. But you can take my dish and bring me a cheese pizza. And a diet Coke. I need something to wash down the taste...

(Al shuffles away, RUTH whispers conspiratorially to Larry.)

...and wash away the taste of his rotten jokes.

(Suddenly, and spits up his food, laughing uncontrollably. Ruth is mortified.)

Andy! What's gotten into you? Cover your mouth!

ANDY

Sorry, Mom, I can't help it. Antonio's cracking me up. He's in my head telling jokes. Do you know why the Clydesdale gave the pony a glass of water? Because he was a little horse.

RUTH

Larry, let's get the check.

LARRY

I'm still eating.

(Larry dips his fork into his pasta but is stabbed by a spasm of laughter.)

Hey, Ruth, why shouldn't you write with a broken pencil? Because it's pointless.

(Andy joins his father's mirth as Ruth shudders in agony.)

ANDY

What do you call a shoe made out of a banana? A slipper.

(Their infectious laughter draws Al who chimes in.)

AL

How do you stop a bull from charging? Cancel its credit card.

(The laugh fest spills over to the table behind them.)

DINER ONE

How do billboards talk? Sign language.

DINER TWO

What do you get when you cross a snowman with a vampire? Frostbite.

(The whole restaurant convulses with laughter except for Ruth. She bolts to her feet, plugging her ears.)

RUTH

Enough! Please, let the man rest in peace!

(Ruth knocks over Antonio's poster easel then, embarrassed, gingerly picks it up. No one notices. They're laughing too hard. Ruth's eyes shoot daggers at Antonio's frozen smile.)

You think it's funny to torture me?! Well, the last laugh's on you, Antonio, I'm leaving. Larry, I'll wait for you in the car.

(Ruth gathers her purse to go but is lassoed by a strange twitch. She stumbles and careens into an empty table laughing hysterically. Everyone stops laughing except for Ruth. A somber pall drops like a heavy net over the other Diner and Al.)

LARRY

Ruth, please, we're in a restaurant. A great man, Antonio Lombardo, the owner of this fine establishment, has died. Show some respect.

(Lights slowly dim with spotlight on Antonio's smiling face as RUTH struggles in vain to control her laughter.)

(Blackout)

End of Play

Staredown
Greg Stidham
Poetry

They rest broad chins on
splintered wood cross rails
gazing dumbly out at the occasional
pick-up passing by, trailing
a dirty red-brown gown of dust behind,
silent, tails swatting
at meddlesome
stinging gadflies, eyes
betraying nothing but calm
indifference, or possibly curiosity.
I pass by and look in those eyes,
look for something to say,
and find no right words, and just look back,
passing by, on my way home.

Plums
Greg Stidham
Poetry

Overripe damson plums
dapple the lawn beneath the tree,
delighting neighborhood squirrels
and raccoons drawn to the scent
of the softening, nearly
fermenting fruit.

Overhead the trees are full
with leaves, but leaves dressing
in chiffons of early red
and yellow hues, and
autumn's arrival is celebrated
with plum custard tarts.

The Possum
Greg Stidham
Poetry

(after Ted Kooser)

I read a poem today about an opossum
that touched me,
and reminded me of a possum
in the garage of my wife's house.
Like the possum in the poem,
she was pink. She looked at us, calm,
her pink tongue poised at her pointed lips,
her pink fingers raised as if in prayer.
She wasn't afraid, she didn't flee.
She didn't attack in a frenzy of sharp claws.
She sat and looked at us as though
awaiting a fate she could not know.
She let us guide her
into a screened cage box covered
with a blanket to keep it dark,
and keep her calm.
We fed her niblets of dogfood,
kept a water dish full until
next night, in the dark,
we moved the cage into the back yard,
and lifted the screen gate and waited,
while she waited to see
if we were serious about her freedom.

Leaf-Raking in Autumn

Greg Stidham

Poetry

The calm that comes
with the pull of the rake,
the rhythm of the scrape
drawing leaves to feet,
and the arc of the tines
reaching through air again
to embrace another family
of brown, littered with reds
and yellows, the smell
of smoke from a neighbor's pile,
burning in the newly crisp October air.

Twentieth Anniversary

Greg Stidham

Poetry

Waves slap soulfully
at the rocky shore
of Lake Ontario.

A cloud slips under
the sun's crisp disk,
and the trees on the bank
below the grassy knoll
all fall into its shadow,
while the wings of a single duck
stir a commotion of water,
as it lifts airborne,
and disappears, leaving
only the vacuum of solitude.

Pilgrimage
Sandip Saha
Poetry

Our son and I walked twenty kilometers
in a single day in Himalayas, twelve of it
was so stiff, narrow and slippery
due to intermittent drizzling,
that even those on horses were panicky
as the horsemen were unable to control
the direction of the horses on zigzag way.

You initially tried to climb on a horse
but declined when you became scary
after sitting on its back
as you heard people sometimes fall off it
endangering life since gorge was so deep.
Ultimately, we decided to put you
on the basket like seat on the back of a person.

It was about eleven thousand feet above the sea level
I was walking up behind you to keep track
all of a sudden you felt high altitude sickness
forcing us to halt to give you relief.
I proposed to go back
you decided otherwise
as Devi worship at the temple was paramount to you.

We reached *Yamunotri* and had our prayer and offerings,
while climbing down our son went ahead
as he felt thirsty and searching for water to drink.
My both legs became so painful than I was very slow
suddenly I found that you and the man who was carrying
you
disappeared, I started shouting calling you and our son,

so frightened to lose you! You appeared from a shortcut bush path.

Pilgrimage is once in a life time experience
the fear I encountered that day is unforgettable.

Forest Girl
Sandip Saha
Poetry

I saw you in red attire
dancing along with water
of a falls roaring down
the forest hills.

Oh, lonely girl
how did you get there?
Hid inside the bush as the train
arrived from the St. Petersburg.

You appeared dancing,
disappeared dancing,
only to come out again
from another hilly hideout.

Are you real or a dream?
I could not fathom
nor perhaps my companions
amused in the daydream.

Train started, I looked on and on
till you along with the falls
went out of my sight
I lamented I shall not see you again.

But the other day miracle happened
you appeared in a different dress
I could not recognize you initially
you made it to reach me in disguise.

I was overwhelmed with joy
ran towards you and held you

in a long tight hug, so pleasant
we looked at each other with tears.

For Kelly
Joseph Edwin Haeger
Poetry

In high school
when one of your friends
died by suicide,

I sat in your car
and let you talk
and sing
and drive.

Then in college
when my brother
died of an overdose,

you sat next to me on the curb
and let me smoke.

Cumulus, Hold Me
Joseph Edwin Haeger
Poetry

I want to live in a town
where the buildings are tall enough
to get lost in the morning fog

Where I can take a rickety elevator
to the 14th — or 31st — or 100th floor
and walk up to a window to see nothing
but a sea of white

On days when the sun crests
into the precipitation
making the fog transform
into the most velutinous clouds
ever witnessed by this altitude
and my skin prickles
against the moisture
emitting from the cumuli
I'll crack the window open
and put one foot out,
hesitate,
and then the other

There I'll stand

I might be on the wrong side
of the state,
but if I'm high enough up
I might be able to see Rainier
and if I'm in the sky amongst
these clouds
I'll fall in a way that
feels like I'm floating

And there, I'll float.
with one tentative hand
reaching out for the windowsill

Forever floating
and waiting

Wandering Back In from the Cold

Robert Beveridge

Poetry

The birds outside the window
and the bubble of the cauldron
a concerto, the smell of stew
heavy in the air. We wash down
raspberry jam and a handful
of heart pills with a ladleful
of steam, toss in a hand of salt,
a bunch of juniper leaves, bay.
The clock hands creep closer
to the hour, while rabbits,
rats, the occasional ocelot
gather in the corner, await
their evening meal, their fortunes
told over a glass of elderberry
wine. The night is young.

A Surprise Trip

Ahming Zee

Fiction

My friend ET lives in Sydney, Australia. He was called ET back in our college days, possibly because he was short, dark colored, funny in a way he didn't take the world as it is, as if he was an alien from a different planet. We became close after we both failed a final exam on Chinese Communist Party History class, and were placed to repeat the grade.

It's been five years since I met ET last time in Boston, so I'm making a surprise trip to his Sydney home. He's got crushes, lots of crushes in the past, on every girl he's met. One crush was developed into romance, and from there to marriage, till one day they suddenly got divorced and he became single again. ET never shared the reason for their divorce, but his ex-wife did, and confided to me that ET was diagnosed as infertile, and she was not prepared to be childless for the rest of her life.

Now in front of me is a pink-colored two-story house. The door swings open to my knock, and out front is a four-year-old looking boy, asking whom I'm looking for with an adult-like serious face. I tell him that I'm here visiting my friend ET, the nickname I've used for so long that his real name has escaped me.

"ET?" the boy flashes an innocent smile, "he may still be in his spaceship heading home."

I laughed, looking inside, and spot a lady from behind a kitchen counter craning her neck in my direction. "No ET here," said she, switching her eyes to the kid.

"ET, ET," a repeating loop of *ET* in a male voice that's traveling down through the staircase from above. There is ET, my friend ET; his face twitches, eyes wide

and narrow, and he breaks into laughter that I thought was a cry at its starting sound.

“Looks like you’re have a good life here, with a nanny to help you out,” I say. The lady is silent, while the kid walking over to me.

He points to the photos etched on the wall, and my jaw drops to see a photo, a family of three, while the kid babbles, “This is my baba, and this is my mama. And this is me.”

“You married, and this is your kid?” I turn to ET in disbelief, and ET meets my gaze looking proud. “I can’t believe you didn’t share this with even me.” As I congratulate both of them in a handshake, I wonder how ET ended up with a child after all.

Today is Saturday, one day before my return to Boston. ET is out for groceries, leaving me with his wife preparing for dumpling dinner.

“I need to let something out,” his wife says, making dumplings out of the wrappers I make. “Since I have no other family ties, and you’re his best friend. ET is infertile. His father, who was terminally ill, desperately wanted to see a grandkid in his remaining days, ‘Or I would die and turn over in my grave,’ his father had said. This plunged ET in deep depression. He became a binge drinker, and at one point he’d made multiple attempts to die by suicide. I offered up a donor sperm option, which both ET and his father dismissed, adding that the offspring would have to be the biological lineage of their families.” She glances at the family room checking on her kid, and returns her eyes back to the wrapper in her hand. She puts stuffing on it, and continues, “At this critical juncture, ET’s brother stepped up, willing to help.”

“Oh?” I’m totally stunned.

“We spent a month together for the sole purpose of getting me pregnant. And the day the kid was born, his

brother died,” she said, sobbing. “The night before his death, his brother called me and said that he felt sinful, a perpetual stain he was not able to wear off.”

“And he committed suicide?”

“Yes, just to atone for what he saw as his sin that he was not able to get out of.”

“Does ET know anything about it at all?”

She shakes her head.

ET is back, dinner ready on the table with wines, I simply cannot bring myself to engage in what’s supposed to be a lively conversation, the one filled with laugh and humor, as does every time we meet. I toast to them both, eyes tearing. ET looks at me, then his wife, and without a word, he walks away.

He never comes down to see me off on the day of my return trip. And as I’m onboard the plane, I pray for ET and his family in silence.

Sprung Loose
Sarah Carleton
Poetry

When the wind shakes the fronds,
the catkins fall like dead caterpillars
and clump with laurel oak
leaves, blocking gutters
on a bright spring day in Florida.

Brown debris crunches to rough flour
beneath our walking shoes,
sending up a cloud,
and some folks cough, weep,
build piles of snot rags,
keep the windows shut and stay inside.

Not me. I'm breathing in the blue-skied
temperate paradise where orange nuts
gather in the folds of the driveway
and the sun dusts the car yellow.

The Aftermath

Gina Stratos

Poetry

I thought I knew it all
that he liked to dip me
in tequila, throw my leg
over his shoulder, push
me into pillows wet
with sweat, with us

feral animals, when the crush
of a body is power
and purpose *everything*

his starched shirts, my heels
too high, him so slick
with his tongue

in so many ways; you know
that guy. Or, you think you do

maybe you don't

maybe you can't see past syrup
and shine because you're hungry
and dirty, still

you don't ask

there's a certain injury
in knowing you had no idea
didn't care to know
him, his heart

when you thought a hothouse

of writhing was the best
he could ever do

when you were sticks and stones
your gunmetal grey version
of this man, the only truth

when it was your loaded mouth
your rooted mistrust that birthed
this lie

Being & Nothingness

Idowu Odeyemi

Poetry

They said Green pastures are
What we must chase.
So I ask myself:
What about death?
Should we leave it to stay, with us?
Or, we chase it away?
Perhaps, no need for Green pastures,
Since death makes
all synonymous to nothing.
So how do we chase death?

We can only chase death
By leaving Green pastures.

Something is illusion
Death is — reality.

My History as a Bystander to Automotive Arson

Toby Wallis

Nonfiction

The first time a car was set on fire directly outside my home was one night in October 1997. I was in my student dorm when the fire alarm sounded. I opened the door and the other residents were squinting in the light and covering their ears. We looked at each other, waiting for someone to know what to do.

Outside, two cars were on fire, each engulfed in blue and orange flames that stretched up the sides of the building. There was one on either side of the car park, each roughly mirroring the other. The symmetry had unsettled one of the assembled crowds.

“We've been targeted!” he shouted.

He was convinced that students were a hated underclass, and that this attack represented the beginning of what was to come.

“They're sending a message,” he shouted. “This is how it starts.”

We stood around at an incautious distance. I had pulled on yesterday's clothes, but others were in their pyjamas, bare foot on the cold concrete. Occasionally we heard cracks as bits of the cars shattered. The heat caused one of the car horns to begin sounding continuously, as though screaming for help. A tire burst. The car slumped.

We found out later we hadn't been targeted. Four or five other cars around the town had been set on fire in the same manner. Someone had gone on a spree, dropping lit matches down petrol caps. We were no one to them. We were just on their way.

One of the cars owners had been in his room smoking marijuana with a friend when the alarm went off but had been slow to respond. When he eventually

came out and saw his car thickly wrapped in flames, he pointed at it and started laughing. A moment later his friend came stumbling out and was stopped dead by what he saw. The wild flames flickered in his glassy eyes as the horror of the scene slowly dawned on him.

“Oh no!” he shouted. “My Bowie tape!”

The second time a car was set on fire outside my home was in 2008, shortly after Kerry and I had moved into our new house on the Alcatraz estate. We knew the estate had a bad reputation — Alcatraz was not its real name — but the house was close to the train station, and large for the rent. People asked if we were sure we wanted to live there but we were blasé.

“It's fine,” we said, “we're not in the *centre*. We're out on the edge.”

The house wasn't as good as it seemed. On the day we moved in we discovered most of the ceiling in the hallway was missing. We stood looking up at the exposed pipes, wondering how we hadn't noticed it before. From our bedroom window we saw that our neighbour had fortified his wall with a heavy coil of barbed wire. Barbed wire that would later rip a three-inch tear into our cat's leg.

We were in bed reading quietly when we heard the continuous sound of a car horn. We looked at each other and rolled our eyes. Twenty seconds later it was still going so we got up to look out the window and saw a car behind our garden wall, engulfed in flames.

Kerry called the emergency services but was the third person to have called, so she hung up and we leaned on the windowsill, watching the car burn.

“Electrical fault?” she said.

I shook my head. “Someone dropped a match down the petrol cap.”

“How do you know?”

“I've seen this before.”

Eventually the horn went dead. A tire popped. A window shattered. We went back to our books.

The burned-out husk of the car hung around for a while. I walked past it each morning. The charred paint had split and cracked, all the windows were shattered, and a small Police Aware sign had been stuck to what was left. It stayed like that for about a week, then one evening it was gone. All that remained was an ashy silhouette on the ground.

The third time a car was set on fire outside my home was in 2009. We had moved out of Alcatraz as soon as our lease was up and rented a house in a nicer part of town. The house was smaller, the rent was about the same, but as we stood in the kitchen with the landlord discussing the lease Kerry suddenly shushed us.

“Listen,” she said.

We listened.

“What are we listening to?” the landlord asked.

“Bird song.”

There hadn't been birds in Alcatraz. We hadn't realised they were missing until they were back. We agreed the lease without haggling the rent.

Behind the house was a long footpath, enclosed beneath a canopy of trees with houses on one side, a retirement home on the other. One Friday night I was playing a video game in the dark when the room seemed to lighten. I opened the curtains and on the footpath was a column of flames spitting and thrashing through the branches of the trees.

Someone had stolen a car, squeezed it down the footpath, set fire to it and left. We called the emergency services and went outside to help the fire engine find its way. When it arrived, we pointed them toward the footpath and stood back as they manoeuvred as close as

they could, stopped by the concrete bollards that the stolen car had circumvented.

We returned to the house and watched from the bedroom window. The fire was wild. Bits of the overhanging trees had caught light. Fences on both sides buckled from the heat.

“Do you get the feeling we’re being targeted?” I said.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Kerry said.

Outside, the firefighters screamed instructions to each other over the roar of the fire. Bits of the car exploded and cracked. Black smoke rose thickly through the trees. The horn cried out, and then was silent.

The Pause

Aleah Dye

Poetry

The softest part of time
is when I feel you
against me,

still oceans, last
waves crashed.

Last waves crashed
into still ocean,

felt against my skin,
I let you in
with time.

The room is full
of all things tempting,
blues and reds and wine.

I let you in, you let me in,
we pull down shades,
we turn off time.

Untitled 3
June Levitan
Art



Untitled 5
June Levitan
Art



Among the Painted Rocks

Leela Srinivasan

Poetry

there was the sky that hung like water
 we hiked down and picked our way
through sun-soaked bones with a touch
 so slight it might have been toxic
the horseflies neglected us for each other
 drunk on thickened heat and the pleasure
of being seen the dunes swelled up before us
 in recital toughened in tongue-blood red
early afternoon scythed the air the old phantoms
 passed their legacy down onto new visitors
and further down there wasn't much wind
 just a murmured hymn to soothe the desert's
lonesome children we fielded off its flirtations
 and skidded onto full-bodied soil digging
our fingers into distance and breaking it clean
 remembering that we had been sultans once too

Snowfall
Eddie Fogler
Poetry

I heard the newborn snow cry
As it was casted out
By its creator
Rounds of frigid wails
Crescendoed down
With each snowflake.

Out of pity
I offered up my hand
Rescuing as much snow
As I could
Letting its delicate frame
Snuggle into the folds of my palm
Piling together into an alabaster dome.

Despite my mercy
The snow continued to cry
Torn between
Ascending back to the heavens
And staying to blanket the earth.

I became lost in the white noise
Until its frosty nature
Began to bite
And its flurries carried no end.

I closed my fingers
Over my camp of refugees
To muffle their sound
The taste of silence
Was warm and sweet
I gripped tighter

Until all the cries melted
And dripped out of my hand
Sprinkling the first snow
Reborn
Into hushed ice.

Party Guest

Eddie Fogler

Poetry

It was a Friday
at a dinner party
when I laughed in the face
of Adversity.

I had been doing my best for Mingle
making sure I was
stepping outside of
Comfort Zone's view.

But once I backed into Corner
I was promptly introduced
to blasts from Pasts
I persevered
and exchanged pleasantries with Small Talk
avoided eye rolls with Long Winded
and even attempted
to hold back Choice Words
against Gossip and Shade.

It wasn't until Nerves
starting making audible oddities
and Alcohol finally settled in
that I realized I had never found Composure
and it was already too late to search
so when Adversity commented
on feeling just like Unwanted
I laughed.

My Fireflies

Eddie Fogler

Poetry

Portable starlight
encased in a mason jar
Little glints of light
that once frolicked through the fields
of early summer nights
Fireflies
A full constellation
locked away in a glass prison
I always wondered
what they would have been
had they flown out of reach
Would my stars have gazed up dreams
or charted a secret course across the states
Would they have found their mates
instead of me
I knew I wasn't enough for them
Only caught them for company
for some light warmth
in the darkness of my nights
I shook the jar often
Shook as hard as I could
But my stars never
brightened my midnights
Never sparkled like before
Never even murmured a glow
Instead they filled the glass
with a dreary overcast
Clouded star clusters
For when I put my fireflies in a jar
They are already dead.

Boxed In
Enda Scott
Fiction

Candy found a seat beside the rather large man whose hips and thighs needed far more than the space provided. Candy shook her hood and let rain spatter. The man shuffled under the shower, sullenly bequeathing a little scrap of scuffed plastic. Candy moved over. Her jeans ripped on the torn seat covering, cold metal scratched her bare skin.

Whoosh, cling, puff of diesel, the bus creaked out into the traffic.

Candy sighed, face thawing in the stuffy heat. The big man coughed. Thick air clung to their throats.

Candy held her present tight on her knee. She fiddled with the wrapping, heard it crinkle, let her hands flatten down the corners, entwine themselves with the silvery ribbon, the bow they had insisted on in the shop.

“No need,” Candy said.

“Of course there is. Something memorable. Someone special.” Like magicians, hands covered the box until it looked soft and glittered like the stars on a dark blue night. “Got to treat them right. Give them that little extra.”

That's what Candy thought. Nervously. It's not easy choose a treasured present for somebody you consider unique. Because you never know if they agree, if definitions coincide. That's what unique means.

The box shuffled, shook on her knees. Candy held it tighter as the vehicle rumbled on. She patted the sparkling paper, felt her hands dirty as they stroked the pristine offering.

The man beside her frowned, scanning the package suspiciously. He got off at the next stop: a feat of engineering as he scrambled over her knees, almost

squashing her box, stumbled in the aisle stomach bulging as he stretched for the handrail. Hadn't washed this morning Candy noticed.

He was replaced by a student type, long and thin, probably equally unclean, hint of a ginger beard flickering his chin.

Candy moved over to the window seat, the comfort of condensation, writing messages only she could read on the damp glass that kept her from the shadows hovering outside.

She held the package firm, as they turned corners, shuddered to halts, broke back out into the traffic. She could feel the young man's breath on her right hand. She curved her fingers around the corner of her parcel. Candy huddled the object closer to her stomach, the soft synthetic material of her maroon winter coat, half-unzipped because it had caught days ago, and she didn't know how to mend things like that. She wasn't good in general at handicrafts, fixing, curing, patching things up. She hoped the gift would do the trick.

She could sense the young man's curiosity. The way he kept flicking hair over his ear so that he could twist his head with the action, apparently casual, and gaze briefly into her hands. Her fingers rippled in reply, crinkling the bow until it was almost crumpled. She hastened to straighten it out, then shook the contents reassuringly. The young lad too had a cough, dry, tickling, incessant. Candy let her elbow glance off his lower arm. He nudged closer, or was it the movement of the bus, because suddenly he was leaning the other way.

It was her stop. Reluctantly she stood, stumbled slightly with the halting motion. She clutched her treasure tightly with one hand as she kept balance with the other. She grasped his shoulder briefly. He looked up and caught her eyes. She gripped her trophy tighter, slipped out the door and was gone into the rain,

electronic door hissing closed as her shadow squeezed out of sight.

He swung his knees back into place, grazing the metal back of the seat in front. Through the damp he recognized the scent, that whiff of innocence about to explode. He glanced around, checking she had left nothing else behind. He shivered, then carefully curled his stray hair back over his ear. He couldn't stop thinking about what was in the scuffed present, who it was for, what she needed to seek redemption from.

You Enlisted and That Was That

Emily Uduwana

Poetry

Tuna on white —
extra pickles, hold the oil.

You memorized my order
in a little over a week

but I don't eat tuna sandwiches
anymore

and I can't stand the smell of
fish makes me picture

little sardines in little blue
uniforms,

packed into their
little tin ships,

locked in tight and sent out
across a factory conveyor belt:

(non)perishable and prepped
to sink.

The Best Offense

Emily Uduwana

Poetry

Team players do not run
in my family
(despite our shared obsession
with team sports),

so when my parents
pressed my toes
into tiny soccer cleats,
they told me if I scored a goal,

they would buy me
a new doll:
any doll, anywhere,
that I wanted.

So it didn't matter
that I played defense,
didn't matter
that my role was to stay

wide-eyed and waiting
on the opposite
side
of the field:

for every goal that I scored,
I earned a trip to Toys R Us,
and I learned
that it didn't matter

which team won or lost,
as long as I scored

a single goal
in a single game,

I was a winner
(if only to the Barbie dolls
I unboxed
on the ride home).

On the Porch, Outside of the Bridal Shower

Maya Nordine

Poetry

Unlike the girls you see in movies
who become friends despite one's defect —

like curly hair or good grades — our love
will not endure.

In a moment of weakness, I declared
I'd missed you. "Enough of that,"

you laughed. Asked me to be a bridesmaid.
And I showed up for you, hitched

a ride across state lines. As it drove off,
I wished I'd died. Crashed along my way,

in the chariot that carried me here,
in a hit and run, or gone down 1,000 times,

in every plane I'd ever flown on, a corpse
crisping in the eternal flames.

But when I reached your porch, the front door
appeared as fiery vines. Inside, laughter.

A different kind of burning.

Wings
Claire Scott
Poetry

A moving, stirring, almost fluttering
feeling in my scapulae
a something that is trying to happen
an almost wanting to rise
without the drag of this heavy body
this earthbound, leg-walking, plod-along body
a vague memory of soaring over fields
drifting through clouds
riding the glory of the wind
on great feathered wings
useless now, withered nubs, vestigial
like our tail bone, wisdom teeth and appendix
yet the longing lasts
we watch condors and eagles sail from cliffs
we watch finches at our feeder, touching
down, nibbling seeds, then flying free
we lower our heads to our morning toast and tea

To Bowie
Michael T. Smith
Poetry

... and your dreams are so close to your face
that they gave you a black eye.
(We sat down on the couch and kept falling,
looking for Major Tom — our drinks rye).

The glam stars hung loosely above us,
where man made a cliché of god's beauty,
so turn the record on its spindle
but only if its rotation is a rebellious duty.

Sitting, we passed upon the stairs
to meet a pretty thing, who only
gingerbreaded up her eyes, sans gaze,
so that we existed together lonely.

We died with our mouths open
from the memory of a free will,
before the hologramic machine
took our ashes and made our fame kill.

Let's soar my friend to the greatest heights
with a wink and a satanic grin.
How sad if the planets above didn't dance
with beautiful and feigned indifference.

Respite
Anindita Sarkar
Fiction

We were at the underground bar of Clifton Avenue. As we sailed into our third drink the waitress definitely thought we were lovers, she greeted us with a smirk, like she knew about our little secret. The ice cubes melted in our glasses. I noticed a middle-aged couple in a booth adjacent to ours, staring at us. Did they think we were lovers too? Were they repulsed? There was no mistaking the furrows on their brows.

I was too drunk to even think clearly. My mind was preoccupied with a curious motley of indefinable sadness, and childhood memories, my eyes were travelling unobtrusively to the eyes veering towards us, at regular intervals. He asked me if I was ready to go with a pussy-footed politeness. Hurriedly he waved down the waitress and handed her a credit card. As we walked home I could only see flees jumping on the side-walks freely.

When I awoke the next morning, the usual fuzziness was there. I lay completely still, for a while trying to register the familiar surroundings. The pale mint walls were devoid of wall hangings, the furniture unused during the weekdays. His body lay close to mine in the room we shared during the weekends. I mourned for all the girls who had ever loved him. I sat up and swung my legs over the side of the bed, reached for the packet of cigarette on the bedside table and lit up. I had solid motivation to leave the bed now and go home to my family and tick off another day of pretending to-be-in love.

My wife and I had figured out in an inarticulate agreement that living our lives on our own terms and not encroaching our private spaces, was the best way of

staying out of each other's nerves during the two days off we had from work. We didn't see each other until dinner, most days not even then. We all have lost ourselves into the vortex of daily existence. Sometimes when I look in the mirror I feel I have changed beyond recognition.

Funeral March for Humanity

Yash Seyedbagheri

Fiction

Politicos demand seniors sacrifice and the world open up.

While politicos dissect corpses and talk tradeoffs, Grandpa plays the piano. Notes pound with bewilderment, sorrow, and menace. Chopin's "Tristesse," Ravel's "Pavane for a Dead Princess," Saint Saens' "Danse Macabre."

People demand upbeat serenades. Grandpa refuses. They call him a geriatric parasite. I threaten to fight, but Grandpa laughs.

"They'll be depressed when we bury the dead," Grandpa says. "Fighting's why the world's a shithole. Music's a way to the consciousness."

Some linger. Most disappear, running a little too fast, drowning him out with rap.

Grandpa smiles, sly, wide.

I smile too.

grrrl got a sword

RC deWinter

Poetry

no doubt you remember me saying
i carry no sword
i have to rewind that tape and edit it

i've picked up a steel at last
not to show off
or run amok
i despise bravado

appearances sometimes to the contrary
i'm not crazy
or swinging it just because i can
believe me i wouldn't waste the money

but to be ready
for the slings and arrows
not of outrageous fortune
but of outrageous people

you know the kind i mean
the backstabbers bullies
bullshit throwers
control freaks woundsalters
and plain old socios
who wouldn't know a conscience
if it bit them on the ass

even now
armed with my sharp new
potentially lethal weapon
i won't be separating heads from necks
or even pinking anyone

no i don't plan to spill blood
this blade will simply sever
the unwanted from my life

the tease
RC deWinter
Poetry

when you told that ancient lie
in the seductive voice of a lover
i opened wide
thinking it would nourish me forever

you poured enough honey
to keep me standing at the harbor
waiting for a ship with a cargo of happy ever after

now that lie
a rusty fishhook living in my throat
chokes everything but breath

and buds reluctant to bloom
a yellow-green army of someday maybe
unworthy of the sun
sagging in standard-issue sorrow

days pass without laughter
the hum of rainbows
the warm clasp of the wind

yet stars twinkle in the night sky
wishes never granted
wishes waiting to be made

Translated

Sam Rose

Poetry

I will translate this
barely lit sun
into a star-shaped
compass swelling
with light you can
keep inside your pocket

Don't worry. We know where
we are going, strands
of brambles showing us
the way off this island,
through dark water:
it's only the cool ocean
that's closing in

I will exhale something
with my voice,
stretch you out like a
creased napkin. We can
count on anything but
we don't need to.

Summer Put Out

Sam Rose

Poetry

I will wait out the summer
waiting for winter
I am waiting for a season
that outweighs me.
A month that will
pour water over the sun
to put it out, rays doused
to put us out of our misery
leave no doubt that we
have not been bested by
mother nature. Naturally,
there is joy to be had in the
dark; we will persist. In the
dark we will persist, in
anticipation of precipitation,
we resist the temptation to
hibernate. We come out when
it's dark, when it's late. We put
out, we are put out, we persist.

Some lust

Sam Rose

Poetry

Some lust
after wise words
but not her

she is as cool and silent
as secret loss
as a night bird

Subjunctive mood

Alice Lowe

Nonfiction

Nana Mouskouri sings “Plaisir d’amour.” I accompany her with the help of side-by-side French and English lyrics.

I began online French lessons in January. A New Year’s whim, now the impulse has taken hold. This isn’t my first attempt. I fulfilled my college language requirement with two years of French grammar and conversation courses. To supplement the classroom recitation of basic syntax and stilted sentences, I listened to Edith Piaf CDs and watched French movies. I sought to mesh spoken words with English translations and subtitles, lessen my dependence on the latter. I ignored the seedy-seductive Jean-Paul Belmundo in *Breathless*, my eyes and ears fixated on Jean Seberg, whose American-accented French I could almost understand. On my first trip to Paris, a graduation gift to myself, I was able to book rooms, order meals, ask directions. But in reply a stream of incomprehensible, jumbled-together words would whiz past me like the French high-speed trains.

French isn’t my only foreign language foray. Several years ago, I was wooed by the lyrical sounds of Italian, my love of the food and opera, the belief that it would be easier to learn than French. I took classes at the Italian Cultural Center, but the results were discouraging for what I was paying. I tried Duolingo, a free online program that offers instruction in thirty-five languages, including Navajo, Esperanto, and Klingon, but I didn’t get very far.

I failed at Italian, French, and Spanish too, despite taking classes, living close to Mexico, and basking in a bilingual boyfriend’s pillow talk. At each venture I

digested grammar, mirrored pronunciation, and memorized words, but I avoided opportunities to use what I learned. I failed because of vanity — my self-conscious fear of looking stupid. I'm enthralled by the idea of speaking a second language — the joys it would bring, the doors it would open — but I don't seem to be motivated enough to get past this mental impasse, call it reticence, reluctance, resistance. Now I'm trying again, bearish but undeterred, in full flush of fervor for *le beau français*.

By mid-February I'd reacquainted myself with fundamentals and basic greetings (*bonjour, bienvenue, enchanté*). I'd completed lessons for more than thirty consecutive days, building vocabulary and absorbing syntax, nudged by Duolingo's daily email reminder: "Don't break your streak!"

Then along came COVID-19, and what better pastime to take on in semi-isolation than to study a language. I sprinted past fifty, seventy-five straight days; now I'm nearing a hundred. Milestones garner no flashing lights or clanging bells — my rewards are virtual currency and crowns, the prospect of tackling the next rung. I'm thrilled with my daily-expanding lexicon of words and phrases about home, family, work, school, people, activities, travel, weather, hotels, restaurants, cooking, and shopping. I read and understand brief stories, learn idioms (*ça va, ça vent* = easy come, easy go) and how to flirt in French — *oh lá lá*.

Pronouns and gender variations are tricky, but verbs will be my likely downfall. I'm still in the present tense, but I fear overload when I have to confront past and future, perfect, pluperfect, conditional, subjunctive, the many variations. But I vow to carry on, lesson by lesson, level by level, and so on, ad infinitum — *et comme ça, sans cesse* — until I finish the course, or it finishes me.

I'm busy and don't need time fillers or killers. I doubt that I'll ever return to France, and given past failures and limitations, I don't expect to become conversant in the language. I'm tempted to quit... and then I log on for the next lesson. My pulse quickens, and a warm glow washes over me when my automated teachers (whom I've named Sylvie and Pierre) murmur their velvety phrases, elegance to my ears. That furry "zh" sound. A friend married to a Frenchman says that after twenty-some years she still melts when he says her name: "Zhennifer." My husband dabbles in German, and I tease him: Which sounds more sophisticated, more sensuous, I ask, *guten tag* or *bonjour*? *Ich liebe dich* or *je t'adore*?

Next on my playlist is Edith Piaf's "Non, Je ne Regrette Rien," a fortifying call to arms. I proceed with purpose, through April, now into May, as an antidote to these ambiguous days. Language offers a means of stretching beyond semi-isolation and self-absorption, acclimating to a conditional — or is it a subjunctive? — mood, a hypothetical world of what-ifs and if-onlys, sequestered in situ, steeped in unreality.

Black Cloud
Mitchell Waldman
Poetry

The black cloud is back
Close above
Enveloping my head
My soul
She didn't say a word to me this morning
Pretended I was not there
And the tears behind my eyes well up
But the words came out as anger

Driving now
The cloud enveloping
Swallowing me
And it feels like
I'm driving on
To oblivion.

Afternoon Heat
Mercedes Lawry
Poetry

Scuttled memories and their edges,
substance between dust particles,
possibly once stars or dung.
I exaggerate the elementary, the links
between sky and sea, tree and
underground creatures, tunneling.

What do you call abandonment?
The dying garden, the heat-soaked
daisies, dill and sorry beans? My negligence
swims upriver, restored by mist.

The crows must be huddled in the shade
like fretful priests awaiting confessors.
A rickety fan stirs a meager breeze.
Late July sucks you dry.

You were the patient tender of plants
and then you were nowhere.
I became rootless, unsure of my next
breath, indeed, anything. Now, time
is a jigsaw. I misremember, forget, conjugate,
collect and deceive. Sleep is cleaner.

Am I hiding or hopeless? The hours
plod in a grainy haze. What about years?
Have they whisked by or anchored me
to this state of graceless folly?

Ordinary/ Not Ordinary

Mercedes Lawry

Poetry

How
the sun fails,
weak and milky
on this Tuesday,
empty
of sounds, of
ordinary going
about.

The virus creeps
forward
with no impediment.
We stop
planning ahead,
defeated
by numbers
and reckless imagination.

You send me
a picture of us
on Wild Horse Island
at the highest peak,
scalded blue sky
in a hoop
of snow-capped
mountains.
Without a qualm,
we filled
our lungs with clear,
crisp air.

Contributor Bios

Robert Beveridge

Robert Beveridge (he/him) makes noise (xterminal.bandcamp.com) and writes poetry in Akron, OH. Recent/upcoming appearances in Red Coyote Review, Deep South Magazine, and Aromatica Poetica, among others.

Devan Burton

Devan Burton writes the majority of his poems in April and October. "After experiencing the summer and winter months, the composition of stanzas just makes sense to me." For Devan Burton, the writing of poems is both a declaration and an affirmation of life.

E. F. S. Byrne

Dedicated to education and being a father, E. F. S. Byrne has finally found more time to devote to his writing and is currently working on everything from very short flash stories to full-length novels. Samples and links to over thirty published stories can be read at efsbyrne.wordpress.com or follow him on Twitter @efsbyrne

Sarah Carleton

Sarah Carleton writes poetry, edits fiction, tutors English, plays the banjo, raises her son and makes her husband laugh in Tampa, Florida. She recently rescued a piano from the neighbor's garbage and is obsessed with it. Sarah loves the taste of sour things, and she brews a wicked kombucha.

RC deWinter

RC deWinter's poetry is widely anthologized, notably in New York City Haiku (New York Times, February

2017), Cowboys & Cocktails (Brick Street Poetry, April 2019), Nature In The Now (Tiny Seed Press, August 2019), Coffin Bell Two (March 2020), in print in 2River, Adelaide, Door Is A Jar, Event, Genre Urban Arts, Gravitas, In Parentheses, Kansas City Voices, Meat For Tea: The Valley Review, Night Picnic Journal, Prairie Schooner and Southword among many others and appears in numerous online literary journals.

Aleah Dye

Aleah Dye (she/her) primarily writes poetry, tending towards topics of morbidity, love, social justice, and philosophy. She is dreadfully afraid of imperfection and spiders, in no particular order. She has a one-eyed cat named Ivy and a one-track-minded (food!) cat named Rosebud. Aleah hopes to make hearts grow three sizes with her words. Read her latest work via publications like Ang(st) Zine, mineral lit mag, and giallo lit. Follow her @bearsbeetspoet on Twitter.

Michael Estabrook

Michael Estabrook has been publishing his poetry in the small press since the 1980s. Hopefully with each passing decade the poems have become clearer and more concise, succinct and precise, more appealing and “universal.” He has published over 20 collections, a recent one being The Poet’s Curse, A Miscellany (The Poetry Box, 2019).

Lucy Ann Fiorini

Lucy Ann Fiorini writes mysteries, paranormal and historical fiction, and poetry based on historical events. She loves to travel, try new restaurants, and talk about food. She spends way too much time watching reality TV.

Eddie Fogler

Originally from Ohio, Eddie Fogler currently lives in Virginia with his husband and two spoiled dogs. He has his MFA in Writing from Lindenwood University. His works have been featured in From Whispers to Roars, Haunted Waters Press, Literally Stories, Exoplanet, The Sirens Call, Capsule Stories, Umbrella Factory, and Gravitas. The first chapter of his novel-in-progress was featured in Seven Hills Literary Review. You can see his antics @ eddiewritesthings.com

Joseph Edwin Haeger

Joseph Edwin Haeger is the author of Learn to Swim (University of Hell Press, 2015). He is currently cooped up in his office surrounded by books he probably won't ever read. He tells people his favorite movie is Face/Off as a litmus test, but a part of him is afraid it's the truth.

Mercedes Lawry

I've previously published poems in such journals as Poetry, Natural Bridge, Nimrod, and Prairie Schooner. I've published three chapbooks - "There are Crows in My Blood", "Happy Darkness" and "In the Early Garden With Reason" which was selected by Molly Peacock for the 2018 WaterSedge Poetry Chapbook Contest. I received the Vachel Lindsay Poetry Prize from Twelve Winters Press for my manuscript, "Small Measures." I've received honors from the Seattle Arts Commission, Jack Straw Foundation, Artist Trust and Richard Hugo House, been a five-time Pushcart Prize nominee and held a residency at Hedgebrook. I've also published short fiction as well as stories and poems for children.

June Levitan

June Levitan is a retired teacher from the South Bronx. Now she takes photos for fun.

Marc Littman

Marc Littman spends so much time observing the world and all the droll characters that populate it that he may not realize he has no life of his own. That's okay. Marc lives in his stories, novels and plays and is content to let his characters live for him.

Alice Lowe

Alice Lowe is hunkered down in San Diego, California, still writing creative nonfiction but focusing increasingly on short form and fragmented work, because these are fragmented times. Recent work has featured hair, lunch, running, and mourning, these pieces published or forthcoming in Eclectica, Kitchen Work, JMWW, and Anti-Heroin Chic.

Margaret McCaffrey

I favour the personal essay and mine look at the little moments in life where something changes — hopefully for the better — and something you didn't see coming.

Japhy Mitchell

Japhy Mitchell is a poet and librarian who lives with his dog Tarkovsky. He loves all things art and outdoors.

Amy B. Moreno

Amy B. Moreno writes poetry and prose for adults and children. After some adventurous years abroad, she currently lives by the seaside on the eastern coast of Scotland with her young family, where she (convinces herself that she) enjoys sea swimming, bracing walks, and a permanently sandy home. You can connect with her on Twitter at @Amy_B_Moreno

Patrick Nevins

I'm Associate Professor of English at Ivy Tech Community College. My fiction appears in Cutbank Online, The MacGuffin, and other journals. I earned an MFA from Purdue University, where I was managing editor of Sycamore Review.

Maya Nordine

I am a current MFA Poetry candidate at Antioch University Los Angeles. I live in Chicago, Illinois, where I co-run a writing workshop series called Study Hall.

Idowu Odeyemi

Idowu Odeyemi is a Nigerian poet and essayist. He was shortlisted for the 2018 Nigerian Students Poetry Prize. His works have appeared on Kalahari review, Praxis Magazine, Constellate journal, Merak Magazine among others. The poems, which is attached to this submission sent to you, is a personal reflection on what counts as Africa heritage and the jurisdiction of being Black. Beyond the dictate of racism which this essay seeks to underscore, it also withstands the elements of colonialism, corruption, philosophy, socio-political ills, among others.

Sam Rose

Sam Rose is a three-time cancer survivor, and this fact has set up home in a corner of her brain. No amount of shooing will usher it from its campsite, so she flings many words at it in the hopes of keeping it pacified. She is the editor of Peeking Cat Poetry Magazine and has been published in several literary magazines and anthologies. Find her throwing words around on Twitter @writersamr and at <https://www.writersam.co.uk>.

Heather Sager

Heather Sager lives in Illinois. An author of poetry and short fiction, she has had recent work in La Piccioletta Barca, Remington Review, Sandpiper, Ariel Chart, Third Wednesday, CircleShow, and other journals.

Sandip Saha

Sandip Saha is from India. He loves writing poetry though his professional life was as a Chemical Engineer. After retirement at the age of 60 he is devoting all his available time in writing and posting poems all over the world, especially America.

Anindita Sarkar

Anindita is a Research Scholar. Her works have appeared in Indolent Books, Snakeskin Poetry, Scars Publication. She is from India.

Claire Scott

Claire Scott is a recently retired psychotherapist who is enjoying having more time to write, take long walks and try to stay ahead of the weeds. She is excited to be spending more time with her five grandchildren who are scattered over the country.

Michael Seeger

Michael lives with his lovely wife, Catherine, and still-precocious 16-year-old daughter, Jenetta, in a house with a magnificent Maine Coon (Jill) and two high-spirited Chihuahuas (Coco and Blue). He is an educator (like his wife) residing in the Coachella Valley near Palm Springs, California. Some of his poems have appeared recently either published or included in print anthologies like the Lummox Press, Better Than Starbucks, and The Literary Hatchet.

Yash Seyedbagheri

Yash Seyedbagheri is a graduate of Colorado State University's MFA program in fiction. Yash's work is forthcoming or has been published in *WestWard Quarterly*, *Café Lit*, and *Ariel Chart*, among others.

Michael T. Smith

Michael T. Smith is an Assistant Professor of English who teaches both writing and film courses. He has published over 150 pieces (poetry and prose) in over 80 different journals. He loves to travel.

Leela Srinivasan

Leela Srinivasan is a poet and MFA student at the Michener Center for Writers at the University of Texas at Austin. Apart from poetry, her fascinations are early 2000s pop music, social psychology, and reading and writing young adult fiction. She currently lives in Austin, Texas.

Greg Stidham

Greg Stidham is a retired pediatric intensivist (ICU physician) currently living in Kingston, Ontario, with his wife Pam and their two foundling "canine kids." Greg's passion for medicine has yielded in retirement to his other lifelong passions — literature and creative writing.

Gina Stratos

Gina Stratos is a writer living in northern Nevada. She enjoys collecting words, sipping buttery Chardonnay, and correcting other people's grammar. Her work can be read in *The Meadow*, *Door Is A Jar*, *Rabid Oak*, and *Dark River Review*.

Emily Uduwana

Emily Uduwana is a chronically-procrastinating graduate student with a passion for poetry and women's history. She lives in Southern California with a guinea pig, a man (her husband), and a very grumpy little dog. All three have thus far graciously endured her late-night writing sessions.

Mitchell Waldman

Mitchell Waldman, when not keeping the corporate wheels turning, keeping kids and their balls off his lawn, and looking for the greatest new ale in the supermarket (with his mask on, of course) has had his fiction, poetry, and essays published in numerous journals and anthologies. He is also the author of the novel, *A Face in the Moon*, and the story collection, *Petty Offenses and Crimes of the Heart*. Check out his work at <http://mitchwaldman.homestead.com>

Toby Wallis

Toby Wallis lives a quiet life in Suffolk, UK, where he reads, writes, and maintains a life-long interest in unusual videogames.

Ahming Zee

Ahming Zee lives in Boston as a naturalized immigrant from China. His work has appeared in *Literary Yard* magazine, and is under consideration by *AGNI*, with translation work in *Culture Monthly*, China. During his graduate studies in Hawaii, Ahming served as Poetry Editor of *Hawaii Review*, and Staff Writer for *Ka Leo O Hawaii*. Ahming is currently working on a romance thriller novel. Follow him on Twitter @ahmingzee.

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Our magazine features new artists and writers and works that are accessible for all readers. Please look at our current and archived issues before submitting your work. Works that are confusing, abstract, or unnecessarily fancy will not be considered.

We only accept new, unpublished work. If you have posted something to your website or social media, this counts as being published.

Contributors can submit to multiple categories; however, only submit once to each category until you have received our decision about your piece.

Upload your submissions to Submittable with the category you are submitting to and your first and last name as the filename. Within the cover letter please include your full name, contact info, and 3-sentence bio.

We accept simultaneous submissions; however, please notify us immediately if a piece is accepted elsewhere. We reserve first initial publishing rights and then all rights revert back to the author. We do not pay contributors at this time.

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