

Rust + Moth

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The Final Liaison

—after the painting “Veiled Mystery Woman” by Daniel Content

I waited for her in the darkened room.
One small lamp illuminated the white cat
who lay taking in the scene.
It was difficult to discern her quiet knocking
from the steady rain on the flat tar roof.
My nerves flashed and kindled.
I poured a glass of vodka and drank it quickly,
the faint buzz surging through me immediately.
The knocking continued, quietly, sets of three,
so unobtrusive one might think
the caller did not want to be heard.
The rain on the roof was one continuous sound.
I quickly drank another glass of vodka.
I could feel you tearing through
the thick wall of my imagination
as the wind began to wail nearly silently
it was so far off.
I gathered what nerve I had left
as the wind drew closer.
I opened the door,
and behind her, illumined
by the meagre lights of the crumbling parking lot,
was the silver-black scrim of rain
which fell like a single thing
and I stepped aside to let her in.

Guilt tore open my conscience
and I immediately turned from her,
her expression locked somewhere
between sorrow and suspicion,
as your image, unmistakable,
rose to the ceiling,
your eyes closed in lust or sorrow,
and for a moment she and I stood motionless
waiting for the encroaching wind
to give us our next command.

My Grandmother Never Spoke of Her Body

In my dream, she is under a man that knows about satisfaction,
and indulgence. A giver and pleaser—one that doesn't hand
over the chocolate, but rubs the morsel on your lips,
leans his limbs down to the center of her mouth
and says, *Here, take*. In my dream, I came from pleasure,
from men that believe the arch in her back
was medicine for aging hands, that foreplay cures
cataracts better than THC, and all good pipes burst
when tapped at the right place. In my dream, she is body-embraced
and thirsting for more. She is gushing, knows dying in ecstasy
would be a sweet death, that anticipation is the realest form
of feminism there is.

Crackle

My mother's bones clatter under her skin.
Her ghosts wander the house, whispering stories,

leaves, fallen and brittle
under a tree, crackling across a sidewalk in the wind.
Somewhere the radiators' teeth rattle and crunch.

Her walker clinks across the wooden floor
step by step across time, through her childhood, motherhood,
and now this moment, a withering stem of a lily.
Sometimes the scent of decaying petals drifts through the house.

She pulls herself, twisting her crooked body,
till she finally lies
straight across her mattress. A storm crackles across her rigid line.
There are shadows in every corner, rustling like autumn's clatter.

Windows clink against the wind, voiceless chatter
of her dead knocking on glass.

She crackles away in the night. Her voice clatters in the silent rooms.
I am buried in the mulch of our lives.
I hold her hand, and I rise.

Not a Thing to Speak

—for Lee

You are not a beautiful word. You are not a poem to be read and reread. You are not here for that, for turning over in my mouth until you are frayed and a part of me. You are not a mantra to be spoken into the hollow place in my— You are not something to be sounded out, some aural oral mystery that tastes like oranges when we say oranges and smells like walking bare-foot and trailing rind, the memory so strong that I am sticky and blossomed when tongue touches alveolar ridge, the sound of it tactile. You are not in dictionaries and you do not rhyme well and you are not here to make sense of everything for me, a prism to lay down on and filter and filter and filter myself through until I am a point of light, small and hard and shakingly, achingly bright. You are not here for that. You are not a naming, a knowing, a prayer to a star on a night when I am afraid to be alone and hungry, you are not that wish that I toss up like a nickel, fine and arcing. You are atom and atom and atom and atom, you are carbon and oxygen and hydrogen and nitrogen, you are water and proteins and lipids and acids, you are cells and cells and cells and cells, you are cells and cells and cells and cells, you are muscle, you are bone, you are striation and rhythm, you are pulse and breath and the sweat smell of sleep on my shoulder. You are here.

You are here.

You are here.

The Party

The parade loops:

mounded coffins on a flatbed
like a Jenga loss,

other people's children, costumeless,
playing instruments
they haven't learned to play.

Onlookers reapply their lipstick.

No sentiments
that can't be spray-painted
onto a bedsheet.

Another flatbed carries
everything you've ever owned
still in the original packaging.

An overwhelming desire to pet
all the service animals.

Traveling Light (For Once)

i captured an angel
palming him gently in my dominant hand,
spectral metallic high beams
point to the eaves and clear out the cobwebs.
pleasure center receptors pulse with the muse of confusion.

i know now that recovery was coming down
toward me like a sheer canopy,
sleep was waiting to sew me into the blanket.
the cement dried, the asteroid hit
a crisis blur, a slow and careful healing.

i am always happiest when i have
two of everything.
between them i was the clotted cream
the icing, the cherry cordial
folded in to crème brûlée, to chocolate grease
thick liqueur, a bad tincture, oozing out its amber spill.
veins through it, a Smithsonian fossil
a quantum memory of an alternate me.

Bedouin, wolf-woman, star-worshipper, wandering Jew
i placed my limp body, my physical life,
on the swiveling loom of the earth experience
where i gutted my wish, rebuilt it from the inside out,
and wove the unicorn tapestries out of matter i still cannot name.
destroyed the parasite killjoy of terminal dissatisfaction
which was riding on my arm.

the arbiter of the singularity
stepped into the pool with me,
high on LSD
in windy acres of apricot flowers;
she's wearing pastel blossoms, sheer chiffon
and my every move is guided by the gauntlet.
at my best i am dancing,
shuffling lightly just above the mortal coil.

December Elegy

At the mouth of December, chimneys smoke
our shadows into soot. The crows cling overhead,
wings calling to the cold. In migration their feathers dip

against the rib of our martyred shingles. Inside, people swallow
their last suppers, wave goodnight to the vagabonds
they welcomed as visitors. Only we know

warmth can only last as long as our bodies do,
that the stockpiles will thin in growls of hunger
we have christened into home. I am trying to remember

the blood of Mama's dahlias before the frost—
how they glistened & glowed in the winter light.
In this season of subtraction, color is the native synonym to cold,

hurting & hollowing our tongues into submission.
As always, I mistake blue for bruise, black for lack.
Even the sun empties, shorting yellow for yell;

its screams muffled by morning's pale warmth unspindling
into lampshade. How I have only ever seen yellow
as a cry for help, a warning to wound. At night the moon wanes,

boning away its sole source of light. I wander through its phases,
searching for the crumbs of faith that its lunar white
will return. Somewhere, a girl like me will leave herself;

confirmation that faith is not forgiveness but rather forgetting
that all the colors have fled from this year to the next.

Andrei

The table where you sat waiting for me, Andrei,
was wet with rain, little blisters of sky.

You had tea ready for both of us.

A bee hovered around your ear
and you leaned away from it, as a child might
lean away from his mother's kiss.

How did you find my house?

Surprised to see you, I wasn't sure
of what to say, and stood on my porch steps.
Your dog wagged his tail beside my legs.

You look like your photographs, of course,
and I'm disappointed that you answer
my first question—
how does a man look in the afterlife?—
with the familiarity of your face.

But you aren't incongruous here,
and that's why I am so confused.
If my neighbor saw us,
he might think you were my father.
Is that how ghosts stay incognito?
To others they are just strangers—
only those they haunt know who they are.

Why of all ghosts have you come?
I wasn't thinking of you when I woke.
There are many people I love
but haven't seen in years.
I've sat here waiting for them—
but you have undone my locks,
boiled water as if you were at home,
set out plates and knives.

Toast with butter, a few plums,
their rose-tinged juice dripping
onto your napkin—
you eat your light breakfast.
Finally, I sit down.
Does the burden of explanation rest with me?
I will try: this is an accident.
On my way home from buying coffee
I turned down the wrong street.
We're raised to think the otherworlds are invisible;
there's a distinction
between inner and outer,
life and death—
but you can see Dante's Heaven
if you wait for night,
and the doorway to the land of the dead,
according to poets, is a lake in Italy.
Are you here to forgive me?

You offer me a cup with a candle in it.
That little flame
reflected in the orange-brown tea
makes a small cross—
and this has been my problem all along:
how to quench my thirst
without burning my lips.

My Italian Mother and I Cook Sauce Together As She Asks Why She Can't Bring Her Homophobic Love Interest Over My House

She takes pork neck marbled with fat,
yellow onions, and Italian sausage
and plunges them into a large pot.
She sautés them at the bottom
until browned. I purée the tomatoes
until they look like bloody guts
and I spill them into the pot. She stirs
until the sauce splashes and falls
in between the black stove
top grates. It sizzles as it touches
the fire. At the counter top, my fingers
knead the breadcrumbs as I listen
to the sauce boil. The lid rocks
on the rim. For the first time,
I don't hum the opening melody
to my favorite show while I pat
slices of eggplant. Clumps of
breadcrumbs and egg wash form
underneath my fingernails as she
clutches my shoulder & tells me:
One day you'll cherish these memories.

Shelf Life

I used to check the expiration dates
of everything I saw. The Tsingtao beer,
canned Swedish meatballs, my mother's
eyes. My therapist chalked it up to paranoia:
Said I was on the cusp of bone, breath,
anything of sustenance. *Stop searching for
something to prove.* How
a girl will do anything to live more than once.
At least that's how my grandmother
preached down the moon: a birth of boys
at her door by midnight. Once
I had an All-American boy. A boy with
wrists like milk and everything white,
everything unholy. When he winked into
the backseat of the Honda I always got
nervous. *Where did you go?*, as if he was a
mirage. When he left for good I wondered
how a lifespan can psalm a girl, how a girl
can love no one but herself. My mother
used to make me blow-dry my hair until
it was flammable. Warned me that
my ghosts would pass through my scalp
like a child. Never let go. I didn't listen.

She dried my hair until the spit migrated
to saltwater. To mercy. I asked *do*
ghosts ever die and really meant *will you*
ever die? I imagine my mother
giving her answer to the kitchen sink
that night. How she dreamed up
the whole moon to offer herself back.
She preached me Buddhism instead:
『生命只是等待重置的身体*』。
Over dinner, I mistook her eyes
for some kind of refugee, wondered if
she preached *adrift* like it was
a love language waiting to die.

*生命只是等待重置的身体:

Chinese, meaning, "lives are just bodies waiting to reset."

The Carnality of Clearing

Gone are the lights of the fireflies
ground up and sprinkled in outstretched hair.
Gone is the smolder of fallen timber piled
in celebration, smoking in the glow of autumn.
The musty scents of rotting logs draw words
out of mud pits bubbling beneath barren limbs
and the soft songs of crows pour like liquid,
the land giving rise to falling apart,
to dilapidated fence posts flecked
in white peels and splintered deep browns
moist with purple mist, purple ants dripping
down the remnants of structure, paths
forking in clearings, clearings opening
into nothingness behind windowpanes
shut to the yard below, encircled by fading
pines chalked and marked for felling.

My Kitten the Maestro

His name is Nibby, short for Nibbler,
or Nibi, water in Anishinaabemowin.
He hails from the alleys of Detroit,
unphased by the rain, the snow,
the leaky faucet & the sink. He listens
when he's called to, appears
upon a whim. At any point, he is
the center of a room. Will trickle
his way through any seemingly
shut door. He will find you you see:
beneath the covers, tucked away
in your moods. Will seep between
your bicep & chest to nest within
your peripheries. He sniffs out the light
of my prayer candles; there is
a flicker in his pupils. When I sing
in ceremony, he plays along
in the old windowsill, cuddled up
with the glittering resonance of dirt
& broken glass, pawing at the cosmos,
bringing it to Earth with his teeth—
but he casts this all aside. Much
prefers the birdsong, the amusement of
a plastic bag, his purple rubberband.

Jersey Diner

—after Edward Hirsch

As he leafed through Meister Eckhart
and his tattered copy of Merton's
The Way of Chuang Tzu under the diner's

soft light, he side-glanced at the laminated menu
with its surfeit of options: Prime Rib, Fisherman's
Basket, Greek Delight, matzo-ball soup,

and settled, as always, for a cheese omelet
with home fries and a Diet Coke from the fountain,
which his wife, long dead, said would kill him

if whisky didn't kill him first. And why should
a 69-year-old man be out at 4:00 AM
searching in old books for the *via negativa*

that in his youth he hoped to intuit to end all sorrow?
You belong in a monastery, his mother, a
Lutheran, once said with disdain.

The waitress, an Irishwoman who called him *honey*,
dropped the seared eggs and potatoes onto
the paper mat with a half-finished word search

puzzle a few minutes later, just as Billie Holiday's
molten voice oozed through the nickel juke.

I'm a fool to want you, she sang, correctly,

and outside, the light hinted at its arrival
in the cloud cover, tuning the sky a faint blue.
Soon it would assert its dominance and fissure

through the clouds, heat the asphalt,
ignite the snow-melt's ruddy puddles as
hard hats swarmed the counter for breakfast.

Donating Blood With the Queen of England

Every other month, I pull into Buckingham Palace to pick up Her Majesty for our trip to the Red Cross Bloodmobile. When we arrive, I help her fill out the paperwork, and when we get to the part about blood type, I write *Royal* and underline the *O* and add a little plus sign meaning positive. Both of us hate needles so we talk about how poorly the Cleveland Browns played last Sunday and we get so mad we barely even notice the needle's prick. As we're waiting for our bags to fill, we keep talking and I finally ask her what's the deal with having royal blood and how it can it be any different from my blood or Paul Newman's? Then she peeled off the tape holding down her needle, taking a few of the royal arm hairs with it, and took out her needle and dabbed a bit of her blood on my tongue and surely enough, it tastes just like the Crown Jewels and the tears of Oliver Cromwell and then I knew she was ordained by God, or at least that's what I thought until she read my expression and said *that's just the inbreeding, love* before adding *keep this between you and me, we've got loads of tourist revenue on the line here* as she tucked a one-pound note in my pocket with her face on one side and Isaac Newton's on the other.

do not gather flowers for me,

yet
a black cadillac first, a hundred—
a buick will do if old enough
it's all about the body
& what it's bore anyway
line them up— out front
then,
let the chrysanthemums
roses & carnations
spill
out each window

make it magnificent

rev the engines—

until they are voiceless
until there is no gas
 left in the cylinders

until a mushroom cloud
of grey-black exhaust can be seen
from the heavens

anything this large
& dying
must have god's attention

Saw

The blade took
what you see

—not took,
turned up, cut trunk

held skyward.
Dead bark furrowed

the earth
where it fell,

rot inside
the colour of dirt.

Not a blade
but a mouth,

hunger for burnt leaves
and flame.

Not what you see
but how it felt,

mass of years
back to ground,

round of a life
fell clear.

Apex, Pandemic II

I leave the room, doff my gown and gloves, wash my hands, put on clean gloves, doff my cap and face shield, sanitize my face shield, doff my gloves, wash my hands, put on clean gloves, doff my N95 mask, place it in a paper sack labeled with my name, doff my gloves, wash my hands.

Death in the Old Country

Most nights I wake up screaming, death
between my legs, bodies clawing at the gaps
in my teeth. I slather the walls of my stomach
in antiseptic and you teach me to peel
the burnt skin from my bones until I am loved.
I bite my cheeks waiting for the moon to pull
soft loam from paddy — maybe then you'll water
me as you did my brothers. After school,
my skin ripens gold as I play outside. The boys drop
their cricket bats and whistle, as if every collapsing
star did not swallow me whole. Last night I dreamed
that the rice fields opened up, slackened my body
with dirt, smoothed the valleys of my hips
into flatlands. Mama, would you hold me then?
If my veins criss-crossed the sky at dusk?
If the crush of people in the market bruised
my neck purple? Remember once, you drowned
me for a day, held my face underwater until my mouth
crumbled. Instead, the cows graze sinew
from bone, and I die every new-moon's eve.
These days are drumbeat, steady, the dull wind
of the rice mills over marsh. You dress the wounds
in my stomach lining with words and something
chemical: in the morning I look down at my hands,
practice scraping blood from beneath my fingernails.

Half a Wing

A window is not
a wall, but both

are empty. It's just
this, as it is. Slow

rain in alders. Hard
to tell if the tree

is holding up
the house or

the house, the tree.

Freedom!

Even now, I worry that no pleasure
will ever rival the feeling of being sixteen
and leaving work for the afternoon,

peeling the green polo shirt from my body
and racing home to drink a beer,
or stare at the cloudless blue sky

until it flattened me beneath it
like a jump boot. I'll do almost anything
or more often, nothing, to taste

this feeling in adjacent forms, until
I'm up late weeping about the 90s and all
that they entailed—the personal computer,

the chicken pox vaccine, “No Diggity,”
and some vision for the future that began
in the basements where we gallivanted

under dim rays which always illumine
occult behavior. You are in this version too:
love-drunk, leaning on the loadbearing beam

of an underground room, helping to keep
the building standing—see how love
softens? The heart becomes immune

so that no bug can afflict us like *that*
the second time. Remembering
the night we swung our stolen swords

through crowded apartments in Alphabet City,
terrifying partygoers with impressions
of heat lightning, or Ohio when we climbed

atop holy rocks and whistled with the birds—
rapture cannot purchase, can only rent in my mind
which turns thoughts of rapture

to raptors, to swallows, to strep throat,
to tongue depressors, and the ascendancy of 401ks
over pensions. What I want is to forget all jokes

and laugh like it was the first time. There are things
I wish I'd never seen so that I could see them again
and maybe this time savor them like a dessert.

What I'm talking about is *freedom!* though I could be
talking about chasing any high, love, or wildness,
each with their eroding returns. What I wouldn't give

for an afternoon in 2003, returning from a field trip
on a Friday in April as wet, bifurcated leaves
of Kentucky coffeetrees brushed the roof and sides

of the bus, and we were just forty-five minutes from home.
It wouldn't even have to be that moment exactly—
I just want another one that feels exactly like it.

January One

I dream of Jeannie. Of Dion
and Bo Diddley. High and tights,
Hugo Boss, plimsolls and a VFW parking lot
where my mother roller skated as a girl.
At night I dream of Dayton: its oxidized bridges
which harbor graffiti like regretful tattoos
in intimate places. I dream a cherries jubilee
of fireworks bursting over the river,
of endless ranch houses with egg cream vinyl siding
and backyard basketball courts. I dream a horde
of Catholic boys named Tom and Drew to inhabit
those courts, then funnel them to Jesuit schools.

I dream I buy four ranch houses in Dayton
and they become a hotel. I pass Go and am given
two hundred dollars. When I wake I resolve
to be more proactive, so I leave you to sleep.
Last year's newspapers are all flattened by foot tracks,
stained by road salt. Tell me, why is it I always
tell someone I love them for the first time
on a Sunday, and do I always mean it as an apology?
Today is the biggest Sunday, if a week was a year
and I am still sorry. I believe this one
will be different. I take a walk while the world is still
hungover, everyone stirring sauerkraut at their stoves.
I tell myself I feel better already, and this time I mean it.

When the world cracks in half

soon,

this world will crack in half, become

but a wild rue seedpod roasting in the fire of the salt-grassed sun.

so,

we prepare.

we journey through the wilderness of our quiet rage,

a lonely desert, faint sage.

suck the mulled wine from our prayer rugs in the sand

until we are drunk with the beloved.

we harden.

we press the dunes on our cheeks into rose quartz

and wring the grief from our dehydrated flesh.

and we fall in love.

swell our lovelorn lips with aloe licks, thickly sticky stubbled,

stealing joyful cactus kisses in the shadow of Empire.

Body Politics

Back from the butterflies, and the black blackjack jackdaws
their windy wing wing world, she gives me a jelly heart,
a wholly inscribed history of how and hie she found

with sound, grease and wire, leaves scattered literati-like beyond
all recognition. She says your valves are the gate keepers,
the bouncers who decide what bossy blood gets in before

the liver has its say. It's all about electricity, glib as that may
be, and I want to mute the heart's noisemakers, take away
her hired help. Maybe it's too soon, too spiritual, too smash

to trick those stars, and maybe I want most to throttle through
until my limbs catch fire. I remember the train roar
down both arms as something alien descended my pipes,

the squeeze and the bees, the sting of it, and it reminds me
that I am not the administrator of my amongst, not the apologist
of my abandonment. Above this pinning politic, above this

fancy feeling I fly, and what's left are some candles, a glass
crucifix, my most moving mother-may-I to ever watermark
my wheezing and stuck fluttery whatever; ever.

The Sky, Moonless

The sky, moonless,
as if
I scraped
it away
with the
back of
a nickel

The Pacific, flat,
as if
my dull
jealous body
demanded
the waves
for itself

The trees, dark,
as if
lumbering
silhouettes
of dead
bodiless
skyscrapers

Plant-based

I try not to bring it up but you're asking anyway
aggressively
if this is some kind of fad

and a knotted clutch of chicken legs
sprout up inside me, scrunched stars on stalks
that flail, pale yellow and scared

then run like hell, wheeling round
and round my skinless heart

as I grasp helplessly for facts, deflections
something irrefutable about climate change.

The truth? I was in his flat. He'd been drinking,
didn't really have a recipe

when he put me on the counter
and pulled out all my pliant feathers
one crass handful at a time.

I spat out my own stomach. Didn't move

as he slimed me, smeared me, made me
into a thing without a face. I don't know
the exact temperature or how long it took.

The next day I ate an apple and went to work

but just last year
a man on the London Underground
tried to eat me. I stood very still

as he latched on then quietly gnawed
my left arm. My face was hot
and I knew that if I didn't get off at the next stop
I would be gone completely, nothing left

but dog chews, tattered scraps
still carefully gripping the rail.

I'm explaining it badly. I'm not explaining it at all

but there is a canal inside me, a thick wet commute
where sawn-off beaks collect and bob in blood.
They have such small tongues

and I have no words

for all the eaten things, for all the things
that never get a say, that cannot speak.

Family Yard Sales

The labeling was easy.
Each object got a yellow sticker
and was arranged by color and kind.

Harder was determining the price.
10¢ for the razor I skid down
my shins like a carrot peeler.

*You're so hairy, my father
teased. It looks like you have
a second pair of shorts.*

\$2 for the hoodie my grandmother
hated. *Only ugly women are
lesbians.* She didn't see me flush.

50¢ for the polka dotted dish
towel my mother cried into at night
when she thought we were asleep.

\$5 for the dish set my sister loved
even after she stopped eating. *Fuck it,
I'll eat air;* her glare seemed to say.

For the knives, forks, and spoons: \$3, please.
Price unknown for my Cabbage Patch Kid
my parents sold as I napped.

Afterwards, small depressions
pockmarked the grass
where each object had been.

This is where everyday grief settles—
in a barrette, a Rubik's
cube, a chipped violin.

Even Now

Like a raccoon, I forage. It's my only excuse to leave the house. I learn which store gets paper goods at dawn, which one usually has bread. I know where to find apples, milk—even now. On my way back, I pass the empty cathedral, its towers still slicing clouds. Tulip poplars rain petals on the sidewalk. A hospital-gowned man with an IV stand smokes by a bus stop. At home, bumblebees are back, motoring between my neighbor's porch and mine as we complain about a truck blocking the alley. Solomon's seal drills its newborn leaves through soil. And the brazen azaleas: pinking and purpling the backyard, as if nothing has changed.

worst-kept secret

I often think of eating myself
alive. Make like butter and

slather. I want to bathe in
blood at least once for

experimental reasons. I want to knock out
every wall and live in my own tabernacle.

My spine is winding rigid static.
Salt and iron in the attic.

There are ways to do this so
no one notices. There are

gargoyles everywhere else. They are
peeking out from under my ribs. We

have a little secret now. We slip them
in our coats, private like the way they

crawl around; silent like public ecstasy
folded carefully over knees.

I think I feel alive and indecent because I'm
wide and awake. My laces could be much tighter.

Shed

What would it feel like
to slip from my skin
as easily as an orange
absconds its peel,

or the way a hibiscus petal,
steeped in warmth,
cedes its essence
for my afternoon tea.

Is it like the single thread
of hair looped around
your index finger that pulls
freely from the scalp,

or the snake that slithers
from its brittle ghost
that haunts the corner
of my woodshed?

To C., Which is to Say

one day, I will write a poem
 for my brother. I will plot
the lore of how we die, or
 live, or coexist as surrenders.
We are lock & key—my fist opens
 his mouth & I fillet our storybook,
this portrayal of boy & girl as hip-
 joined, toothless. Just because we breathe
in tandem does not mean our stanzas
 align. One day, I will bring a flash-
light into my brother's bed & our wars will be over-
 lapping. We were always fighting
the same words, retelling how I learned
 to shield my voice & he learned to cave
his throat. Maybe our deaths will run the same,
 twinning in transit, waving the flag
of our concession. We are lock & key—
 parting skulls on the same borders,
trimming the valleys of our lips. My brother
 only wants neat endings, battles won
in half. Boy & girl as empty barrels smoking
 out their backs, trigger-happy. One day,
I will speak & there will be no echo, no relapse,
 no baby teeth spelling out our trail. One day,
I will love and there will be no poem.

Afterward

The playhouse sags on its stilts,
stunned and bereft, while the see-saw
rocks back and forth in silence.
The sandbox coughs up lost toys—
matchbox cars caked in rust,
the amputated limbs of dolls.

The lawn scorches under the sun's
judgement. The berry bushes
at the yard's edge grow a fine crop
of thorns, and the starved garden
gnaws off its own fingers.

The maple tree drops every limb
that has ever been touched
by a climbing child. The tire swing
dangles below the branch
from which it has hanged itself.

The lilac bush swallows
the two wooden markers beneath it,
each carved with a pet's name,
and spits out a pile of bleached bones.

The birdhouse closes its mouth,
forgets the words to its song,
then forgets the melody,
then forgets what a song is.

About the Authors

John L. Stanizzi's books: *Ecstasy Among Ghosts*, *Sleepwalking*, *Dance Against the Wall*, *After the Bell*, *Hallelujah Time!*, *High Tid—Ebb Tide*, *Four Bits*, *Chants*, *Sundowning*, *POND*. Besides *Rust and Moth: Prairie Schooner*, *Cortland Review*, *American Life in Poetry*, others. Nonfiction in *Stone Coast Review*, *Ovunque Siamo*, *Literature and Belief*, others.

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Leigh Camacho Rourks is a Cuban-American author from South Louisiana and an Assistant Professor at Beacon College in Florida. Her collection, *Moon Trees and Other Orphans*, won the St. Lawrence Book Award. She is also the recipient of the Glenna Luschei Prairie Schooner Award and the Robert Watson Literary Review Prize.

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Kim Logan is a rock and roll artist, opera singer, and writer originally from Florida. Cutting a global and itinerant path, Kim draws from the veins of varied musical subgenres and long dead poets as reference points for her expression and works to blur the lines between them all.

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Nicole Markert is a bisexual poet and a recipient of Eastern University's Thyra Ferre Bjorn Creative Writing Award. Her work has been featured or is forthcoming in *Furrow*, *SWWIM Every Day*, and *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*. She is a poetry reader for *Split Lip Magazine* and a double degree candidate at Rosemont College.

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Christopher Blackman is a poet from Columbus, Ohio. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Mississippi Review*, *TYPO*, *Grist: A Journal of the Literary Arts*, *DIAGRAM*, and *Cleaver Magazine*, among others. He resides in New York City.

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Matthew Schultz teaches Irish Studies and creative writing at Vassar College. He is the author of two novels—*On Coventry* (2015) and *We, The Wanted* (2021). His poems have recently been featured in *Thrush* and *Eunoia Review*.

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Suzanne Langlois' chapbook, *Bright Glint Gone*, won the 2019 Maine Writers and Publishers Alliance chapbook award. Her poems have appeared in *The Whale Road Review*, *Cider Press Review*, and *The Maine Review*. She holds an MFA from Warren Wilson College and teaches high school English in Falmouth, Maine.

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