

Rust + Moth

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Witness

In anticipation of the home birth,
we line a cardboard box
with a blanket, soft as sleep
and place it open on its side
just off the garden path.

The boys and I keep a respectful
distance, crouch down on a lawn
teeming with daisies, humming
with life. We marvel as each kitten
slithers out between short strained intervals.

The queen gently claws
each amniotic sac, chews through
the umbilical cords, licks
her babies clean. She eats
the placentas to expunge the air

of predatory temptation,
as instinctively they milk step
her swollen belly, blind and ravenous
in the summer air, thick with
honeysuckle and promise.

Times Like This

Millennium of sunlight, lost
in translation. Midwestern sky. Arrhythmia.
Abandon. Circadian. Cicada as constellation.
As jaw, as aperture. Brusqued by dusk.
Developed in season. Squash rotting
to susurrus. Coattail, fluttering through
the shutter. Smoulder. State-sanctioned
demolition of all the toadstools
and their occupants. Flint strikes
a congregation of what were presumed
to be butterflies. But how
to fret a heartstring? Fear of the heart.
Formation of dew on their crushed
blue wings. Cloud 9. Bathtime.
Belief in Beethoven. Else ginseng
and its many medicinal properties. Fear
of the dark. Darkening harbour. Discovery
of meteors just under the skin. Harkening.
Stone-born. Haggler of dragons. Exultation
of starlings as a failure to speak. Like
magic. Magnolia's final conquest. First
flight of my mother's bones across
the Atlantic. All the dead waking, then
dozing back off. Times like this I wonder
what you were thinking, in all those flowers.

Benediction: Whale Fall

On 16 October 2019, the crew of Exploration Vessel Nautilus came upon a whale fall being consumed by deep sea scavengers in California's Davidson Seamount.

Bless the slick alms
of your flesh,
pilfered
by scavenging gulls
years before your
last leap skyward.

Bless your unhurried
drift through liminal
zones toward
the abyssal.

Bless the unlit empire
that receives you.

Bless scythed rostrum,
forked mandible,
hemal chevrons hung
beneath your broad
tail's taper.

Bless baleen.
Bless blubber.

Bless the castaway beams
of Nautilus
that render
your bones ghost-
bright.

Bless death's incessant
alchemy
which transmutes
your stillness
to clamorous
feast for octopi,
gape-jawed
viperfish, a shiver of
bone-eating
Osedax.

Bless the fall
that brought you
here,
the cage of your heart
turned to wings.

Considerations for building a house on a cliff

Our tea slants in the cup, leaning
doorward. Though the slightest
shift may bring disaster
we won't tip toe down the stairs.

We set our table by the morning window,
wait as the blind fog wrestles
to dominate the light, and all teeters
in the balance till winds shush
the argument back to bedrock.

We breathe with deep assurance,
pick up our teaspoons from the floor.

Yes, we hear the walls creaking
as we pass the scones, but the broken
boards and tree trunks, blackened rocks
skittering down the cliff
sort themselves, interlocking into bulwarks
of no one's making, certainly not ours.

But this is nothing new—
we live amidst the rumble, always shuffling
the layers and building little houses
with whitewashed walls and impossible porches
unpersuaded by the evidence below.

Leaves Blackened to Crows

Measure the days in gradients of fire
by the chorus of grasshoppers
who made this switchgrass home.

Keepers of the rust, the turning,
we choose one way or another. Or we are
chosen. Branches felled by lightning.

Strangers folded as letters about failure
under the heat of a too-near sun.

For every soft breeze through the pines,
a memory I'm trying to lose is
only a little bit dead. Mothbone. Amulet.

The last bee in a field, drinking deep
of all the nectar left, shining
like harvest. Frantic in the eyes.

Flames ripping across maps, the body as measure.
The hawk overhead is only keeping watch.

Braided Cento:

Jennifer K. Sweeney, Foxlogic Fireweed, The Backwaters Press, 2020

Meghan Sterling, These Few Seeds, Terrapin Books, 2021

Chelsea B. DesAutels, A Dangerous Place, Sarabande Books, 2021

Title is a line by Jennifer K. Sweeney

Poem with Open Roads

Come with me, as if down a highway at night: the flaring strips of yellow, ghostly in their brightness. The whirl of the trees above. The way we cannot tell if, ahead of us, are moths or eyes.

Cross forest & desert & cities rippling with the breath of their sleepers. In one town, my mother sits in the dining room of our old house, refilling her cup. The table is lined with a jarful of every ocean I have ever swum in, & near the end, one tips & spills like a filmstrip; we'll follow.

The final girl runs down a hallway the color of blood. The walls are lined with the mouths of dead wives, whispering. The final girl is in the bathroom, dealing with her own blood, when the fight starts. She watches it through the mirror reflecting the cracked door.

What makes you think you are allowed to leave, the fight says. Blood like a jarful of ocean.

Come with me, through mouths that are not mine, through cups & cracked doors, algaea & radiation. Come out the other side, so that when the fires arrive, they will feel familiar—like running down a hallway, rose-bright. Listen, I don't have the words to stop the future, its flood & blaze, but I have (yes, I think) something small & family I can give you, a story of how to open the road.

The final girl is in there, shaking time in her teeth. The ocean is there, & a house beneath it, full of faces & knives. There is a mirror overhead, raining the house down into itself in the form of a thousand glass doll eyes.

It has to count for something I am here, says every drop inside.

No Vacancy

As vacant as beach hotels in rainy season,
I stand facing you, your stormy eyes dark,
slow dancing in circles under milky clouds.
Like jalousie windows in those lonely rooms
that don't crank closed completely,
I'm a flashing neon sign, a skeleton
under an opaque sky, exposed by each word
before we talk the same small talk we always talk.
When you say more words I don't want to hear
I kiss you as the moonlight turns searchlight
zeroing in on two raw x-rays. On the phone
vibrating in your purse, the phone you never
let me see, is your husband calling,
asking when you'll be home.

This Is Not a Confessional Poem

I'd write about it but it's all so anti-
climactic. Never a hand raised, hardly a voice;
just silence, heavy as a collapsed pillow fort
on a rainy Sunday when we were trying
to stay out of the way but ended up endlessly underfoot.
Storm clouds and cigarettes, an audible sigh. Listen,
I've spent fifty years not talking about it,
the simmering rage that never broke the surface.
Now I wonder if my mother snapped pencils in the kitchen
or tore the newspaper into confetti.
There had to be something other than the vodka
that got cheaper over the years, some form of escape
larger than the flower patch, the tulips lining the drive,
the lilies my mother dead-headed on her knees,
shears furiously clipping.

Still Life, No Roses

honey / he says / to the willow-waisted
whippet girl / to the feather fabergé /
to the teeth picker bone in his hardy
stew *sweetheart* / he wants to see
your errant fumbings *miss* / with the
lace off *snow virgin* / and two long
braids / not horns but handles / cabled
through the skull / to string you up
for dinner parties *darling* / to rein
in the whole song and dance in a
backless dress / no more two ma'ams
sipping tea from coffee-cratered cups /
baby you'll be stored in buckskin with
the pens / don't worry / he'll suckle
each pearl 'cause this is a seduction
can't you tell? / and the weathervane's
on hiatus with the good towels / all
these little things missing from the
mantelpiece / just you *sugar* lathered
up / no love or posies / just entropy
unfurled on that fake Bronx beach /
and me / *lover* / burnt to blush

Pear

Buttering my morning toast, I use her knife
with the yellow bakelite handle
and, for a moment, my grandmother is here with me,
shuffling in her paisley housedress
across my kitchen forty years after her death.
It is November, month of her birth in 1895.
Leaves from the big maples are the yellow
of the knife's bakelite handle and the yellow
of the feathers of the china hen that perched
on her shelf, yellow of the linoleum floor
where I took my first steps. Yellow
like the pear on my window sill.

Encroachment

There was once a marsh here, full of birdsong
and the hum of bugs. Now a road is stretched
across it, a self-congratulatory grin with flattened
frogs stuck between its teeth. The cars whizzing
past have their windows up, the air conditioner's
blast drowning out the peepers' chorus. The car's
inhabitants don't notice the snowy egret stalking
the bog, dipping its needle beak into the water.
It holds still until the threat of its shadow
is forgotten, and then stabs its own reflection
and hauls a pale-bellied frog from its hiding spot.
This should be a warning to us all. This should
be a reminder not to fall for our own lies,
specifically the one where we tell ourselves
we are safe in our houses, only to be snatched,
sudden as a heart attack, and swallowed whole
by a long-necked darkness. There was once
a marsh here, with all its damp cacophony,
but now there's only part of a marsh and
the sound of traffic. The shadow of the part
that's gone exists only in the memories of those
both old enough to have seen it and young
enough to remember. They too will soon
be gone, like the white bird startled to flight
by a sudden squeal of tires and its abrupt end.

Death, Yes, Life

The ceremony of the wasp
dying in the body

of a fig, and time passing, and inward
blooming—these are not metaphors.

See how the wings, antenna, bit
by bit, break from the body. See

how she doesn't need them anymore.
Lying in the dark interior of the inside out

flower, children unborn and gathered
around her, children going to die. What

initiation is this? What beginning
to ripen, to become pearl, flesh,

red fruit? Love, fullness is not water
passing down the neck and forgotten.

The body must go, and no symbol can
carry the cost. You must

say yes, and the yes will grow
in you, bloom hundreds of days,

multiply tenfold, costing
not less than everything.

POPCORN & JELLYFISH

I run a putty knife between the popcorn
and the ceiling,
sure
to catch each broken peak in my mouth.

I am learning to breathe through hard things.

As my lungs top off,
I scream something vague about happiness
—that my legacy will not
be carved on stone the wrong tint of renter's beige
—that my body brims with kernels
—and that when they grow,
they will jolt my muscles from position,
leaving me—
should I dare to walk again—
only marginally greater than a jellyfish
willing itself over land,
hoping
it might hurt someone enough to get some help.

XOC / SHARK

Synecdoche—

to think of sharks, I think of their teeth,
one tooth, the letter V held in my palm...
So, when I learned that some believe
the English word “shark”
comes from the Mayan word “xoc,”
and “xoc” can also mean “count,” I smiled.
Of course! one counts all of those teeth,
an endless-seeming wave of bone, up to fifty-thousand
produced over the course of one shark’s life.
Too bad there’s an instance of the word “shark”
in an English manuscript from the fifteenth century,
before anyone in Europe used the word “Maya,”
or thought to write “xoc” with a “x,”
that letter which, in English, we pronounce “z,”
as in “xenophobic Anglo-Americans
didn’t believe the Mayans were civilized,
despite all those pyramids and calendars,
and thus could not have a writing system...”
But for the Mayans, the “x” represents “sh,”
so “X-O-C” is pronounced “SHAHK,”
as in what the “shark” does when it smiles at you
and all you can do is “count” the seconds left before it bites.
Where does our “shark” swim from?
Xocingly, from the German word “Schurke,”
which means “scoundrel,” but also gave English
“shirk.” Shark. Shock. This is self-indulgent play,
yes, so I will return to *sé nekðakē*—

To think of people, I think of our mouths,
our lips parting, opening, joining, pursing,
smiling, frowning, forming a kiss
and plosives—our finite teeth, all fifty-two,
easily knocked out, irreplaceable—
and our tongues behind them,
like caged birds which struggle to fly,
but cannot, and so flutter against our teeth
and lips, forming vowels and affricates.
This is what I think about when I want to think about us:
how our mouths say, “xoc,” and “shark,”
these nests for the birds we call “language” in English,
and in Mayan, “T’aan.”

*Information regarding the word “xoc” and its possible influence on
English “shark” is drawn from Breaking the Maya Code by
Michael D. Coe, p. 141.*

Rainbow Sky

The year of the Loma Prieta earthquake in San Francisco
everything came crashing down: the Berlin Wall,
my mother's second marriage. Inches from the TV,
we watched cars drive off the bridge into the water.

Nothing was solid enough to hold anything else.
On the advice of my mother's astrologer,
we flew out to Santa Fe, spent a week
looking at houses we couldn't afford.

I followed my brother and sister through
adobe brick homes, fingered the curtains,
stared at the high desert plains, wondered
Is this where everything gets better?

We drove to Canyon Road—art galleries and studios,
pretended to shop. An artist stepped toward me
and pressed a wrapped package into my hands.
A gift to open when you get home, he said.

Out on the sidewalk, my mother snapped,
You better watch your step, young lady.
Maybe you can act like a slut at school,
but you won't get away with it here.

Later, when I unwrapped the paper,
I discovered a framed pastel drawing—
a young woman with braids
standing under a rainbow sky.

The artist had scrawled a smiley face
with a handwritten note on the back,
Don't hide your light under a bushel.
I was nineteen—anything could happen.

Plants Fed by Fracking Flowback

At the water's edge, green pleats.
A cattail hem, sweetspire
with annabelle buttons.

Water itself silver as a woman
slipping from a sundress.
Still as a woman saying
no I don't need anything right now,
no, I just need some time.

As we walk, the engine quiets.
Bird heads on the ground,
sucked dry. Swamp pinks vanished.
The softleaf sedge.

We let that white horse in.
We said the silver of the woman's flesh was a gift.
She meant to give it to us.

Big bluestem, sweetflag, swamp milkweed.
Turtle head snapping its stem back and forth.
Some horror, too, in the canal to your brain,
in the route you pull from yourself
like silk. You pull it like milk. Old milk,
dark, decaying eggs.

Old salt, your father's bones,
your garter of black snake. The creek's bank
which never changes, which is always
already changed. The deer drink

from tumors. The holy drink from heavy metal.
In temples we've scalded and drugged.
The gods forgive us anyway. Pull from us
the strange oil, the frowning seed.

Shop Talk

She's talking about a kid in her class who throws things, because I said I was a teacher too, and she can smell the crayons and warm lamination in my title. 'Teacher' never conjures images of noontime meds in applesauce, doses of crushed lithium served on wooden spoons. I nod and listen. 'Even when he's quiet he's got this look.' The easy ones walk in with that look, I think. A favorite filled her pre-test out with expletives, the spelling of which I corrected deadpan. 'It's a W H in this one' as she watched my face for anger. Beware the children who honeymoon, who wait to show their anger, a week, maybe more. Explosions are proportional to hang time. I nod again. 'Administration won't do anything. He's a foster, poor kid.' I picture squat men, holstered guns, a social worker wearing a tired expression and bargain store pants, his mother screaming, or worse, consenting. What can they do? I want to say. No consequence matters. Nothing is consequential when the woman whose blood was on your lips and in your veins the day you first filled lungs and screamed no longer wants you. Or wants you but is powerless to get you. Or is too drunk or sad or stoned or in love with an abuser to know what she wants except maybe to get well. I want to say he will do anything to be louder than his memories. I picture paper packets, short stories we give sans staples. I picture counting safety scissors out, and later holding my class of eight with a beating heart and calm face until every sharp is returned.

Missing light bulbs and a fourteen-year-old with soft eyes,
the raised scars where she sliced 'help' into her own skin.
Sock feet, no shoes after a run. I imagine sugar packets dissolved
in plastic bottles of juice hidden in windows for months,
so children can drink hooch. A fist sized hole in drywall,
client J.C. pulling nails from studs with teeth. My coaxing
voice. 'It's my job to keep you safe. It's my job
to keep you safe.' Staff scissors sharp enough for nooses,
just in case. I want to say her student would do well
if he could. He'd listen and earn gold stars, be a leader in class
like the child he punched last week. He isn't
throwing chairs but reaching for something to stop the fall.
Finally she asks, "Now, tell me where you teach."

Ми тут (We are here)

We learned to live in translation,
raised with the restless understanding
that we come from ghosts
you have to believe in
to see.

If we did not stain our fingers red from beets for borshch,
knock on wood, learn to layer wax and paint on raw eggs,
and never whistle in the house,
if we did not memorize and chant,
trade Saturday morning cartoons
for lessons about Shevchenko, Stalin, and the Holodomor—
we might disappear.

And now, today,
because “Ukrainian” would not fade away,
culture not replaced, language not erased,
again they try to make us invisible,
borders redrawn with body bags,
and every mother’s heart a bomb.

Garden Elegy

Starlings still light in the sycamore
above empty feeders.

Sunflowers moldy
with neglect bend earthward,

unable to escape gravity.
The wind rasps through cornstalks.

I hear the coarseness of his hands,
the darkness of his cough.

A decade in the mines
was his purgatory,

so he asked not to go below
again. I dusted the ground

over his wife with his ashes
not more than a week ago.

Already, their grave is greening.

On the Ducks Who Are People and the Ducks Who Are Ducks

In the animated movie that's made for children there is one particular duck who can talk and is a person, while the rest of the ducks just quack and are only ducks. If those ducks are shot they will die and you can eat them, unlike Daffy Duck who is shot again and again and his feathers are singed but he can't die.

The duck who talks and is a person is the one duck who matters. That duck is you. You identify with that duck, not the others, because you are a person, a person who talks and matters and survives, unlike the others, who quack and die and will be eaten or whatever might happen to them—it doesn't matter.

But all the other people, it turns out, also feel the same way about it: they also identify with the only duck who can talk and is a person, who gets things done in the world, whose life could be wasted, but isn't. Know this: everyone alive is that duck. Every single person is that cartoon character.

The ducks themselves, though, the actual ducks in the world, the ducks who live in the water between ice and ice, those ducks don't make distinctions between ducks who are ducks and ducks who are people. None of them talk. None of them want to. They all quack and they don't know why that matters. This isn't to say they're not missing something. They are.

But we must not miss what they're not missing, in ourselves
or in them. They open onto the world like we do.
They are moved by the sun like we are, they feel it and
they awaken themselves. They are moved by hunger like
we are, feel their emptiness, seek to fill their bodies.
They are moved by the cold like we are, shiver, notice

their shivering and they fly until they've outflown it.
In the lengthening night, their world shrunken by darkness,
they push with their voices against its closing borders,
against the encroachment of known and unknown others.
Some are taken unseen in the dark and some are shot
after dawn, in the light of day, when the light goes out.

Shotgun Shells and Other Empty Vessels

I don't know who aimed the weapons, or where.
I collect the discarded ammo casings
in turnouts on dirt roads,
raw hewn edges of
clearcuts. Trees
shorn to greyscale,
shotgun shells echoing
their landscape's emptiness, emptiness.

If I don't beg for my life,
how will anyone know that
I don't want to die?
I have witnessed the gutting of grace,
the force it takes
to pry a bullet from a gun,
tear a tree from the earth,
remove me from my self.

Front page terrors and fear of strangers and
flinching at touch.

A doe carcass splayed in the bed
of a red pickup truck, always red;
a guilty man swaggering shamedrunk
and bragging nonsense.

*If she didn't want to die,
she would have learned how to speak.*

The hillsides wait, endlessly treeless
and ready to receive the report,
the echo,
the fallout. The felling.
Only shells remain. The stumps, the casings.
The bodies are always removed:
merchandise or evidence,
or souvenirs.

I collect ammo casings as souvenirs, or evidence.
The trees become whatever trees become:
tree-shaped merchandise.

I don't know
where those bullets are now
but there will always be more bullets.

I don't know what else has died here,
or if it ever learned how to speak,
or who would have listened if it did.

Her Offering

I planted cantaloupe
in my front yard last spring,
a sweet ground cover,

annual among perennials.
One by one before

they could ripen, their skins split,
coral flesh gaping.
I suspected raccoon, opossum,

deer, the heat—not
the Eastern box turtle

plodding through shadowed vines,
snug under its stenciled carapace,
saffron-eyed among chiseled

rinds, spilled seeds,
the raw viscera of loss.

Three years before,
my mother proffered a list
of marriage partners for my father,

for after she passed.
The roll call of candidates

carried on, my mother then
too frail to deliver her lines.
I preserved the spectacle

of my silence, never performed
her part, even as she made

her bow. Today in this garden,
honeyed with carnage, I see
my mother's kindness, how

she offered herself, the fruit
of her overripe body, untangled

the withering vine of her illness,
fashioned him a sequel,
a shell like a shield etched

with widows' names. Perhaps
she hoped one would slip

the cover off, crack
open the hull of him,
gather the scattered kernels,

salvage a cantaloupe, roughly
inscribed, before summer's end.

My Daughter and I Watch it Snow from Her Window and Talk about the Day She Was Born

They feared you would be early, so the doctors sent your mother to the hospital four months pregnant. She lay in bed, gathering days. Me at home, collecting hours. The two of us hoping in smaller and smaller increments. Then, that night in October, I rushed to the hospital. The road dark, leaves falling upon leaves. And a deer, suddenly, in front of the car and across the road. I stopped in time and saw her, half in the woods, turn and look back. A fawn, fall-brown, tried to follow but hesitated and dropped, hiding itself in the grass. I could see the rise and fall of its chest, its soft eyes. All of us still for a moment, cautious in the autumn chill.

You were born on the edge of life. Twenty-eight weeks. At the hospital, we slept that night to the hum of an incubator, to thoughts of what a narrow tube could carry. To your new, small body. The window that looked onto the parking lot was cold to the touch. A night you could see your own breath, the breath of another animal.

Now, frost on the pane.
I draw a face, you a heart.
The start of something.

XVII: the star.

spring is here and the green grass
draws deer down to the dawn highway,
does and antlered stags all alike
in Death, bones scattered as
a graveled tracery of clouds

while overhead on warm wide wings
between white ribs a dozen hot hearts
spiral
spiral
spiral

down

over black branches that pink
under sunlight fingers

and maybe i'll never tell you that
i love you,
maybe i'll die with the words
on my tongue
and let a vulture carry them

up.

They Find Me at Night by Torchlight

—*Marrakesh*

They weave me on hundred-year-old looms
with camel wool milky as goat's eyes
and dyes the gold flakes of leaves in the trees
and the red trickle of chins after cherries.
When they touch me, I can feel too the men
who follow them home, the husbands
who widowed them, and the newborns still nursing.
In their hair I smell the desert, and starlight
pathways into the old medina, and when they sing,
it is more beautiful than figs still warm
from the sun, or mint in tea glasses, or even your name.
Why have I never heard them before?
Where they touch me, I touch their songs.
As they bend over me, holding up the frayed hems
of their dresses like lamps, they are more memorable
than sight or jasmine trees or the beggar's teeth.
I want to tell them to have them dance on me
is like no pleasure I have ever known,
even their joy. When they kneel on me in prayer,
their mouths are matches for God's light,
and they swallow God whole like sugar.

Revival at the Hotel Biron

—*Musee Rodin, Paris*

I had never known the passion
Rodin lifted from stone into light—

contours like silk embrace, whisper
in shadows; kneel flesh before flesh,

holy; gather energy between palms,
a universe. I wander room after room

until I find *The Hand of God* on
a wooden pedestal, close enough

to touch; I turn the piece slowly, see
the sinews, knuckles and fingernails

of the Master hand, and his children,
still part of the earth, not fully formed,

but held—I lay under his chisel as
he lifts me from stone into light.

Trans discourse

"A felony ban on health care for trans people up to 19 is now close to passage.

They are trying to eradicate us."

—Chase Strangio, March 2, 2022

i've never felt so free—
this new deep voice and stubble
on my upper lip, getting called
sir at the grocery store where
yesterday I bought raspberries
& mango, sweet sun incarnate
nearly cleaning out my bank
account. i can't stop touching
this new flat chest of mine.
there's a ribcage rippling under
the rough pads of my fingers
now, a feeling that turns the sky
slippery & marvelous as it passes
through my eyes. everything
makes me so delirious and alive.

i've been stepping into crosswalks
without looking, wearing a
zebra print button down
to the gay bar, taking the kind
of rpm naps that settle outward
through the body from deep solar plexus.
and in the mid-afternoon wakening
i get flashes of my old body, the
boy whose pronouns were once

still fragile in the bio. *careful*, i
want to tell him (or maybe just hold
his shoulders and feel his exhales),
*revelation and heartbreak come all
too close together. nothing could
prepare me for this body like a fresh
egg. ripe for cracking open.*

You are Here

—for A

Fire snarls down the mountainside, clawing
at maple and pine, deer and toad, and you
stand frozen in the glare, ashes
on your arms, your hair. Your roof
falls. Your walls. People you love.
And everything in you

is saying run back, into the flare, save
what you know,
and everything in you is saying fly
fast and far, save
skin and bone, and everything
in you is saying stay—save
face.

Your chest is tight. You ache
for air. And everyone near you is
calm.

Everyone gazing serenely
at bright little screams
in their palms.

Everyone
sipping coffee, smiling
over muffins and scones.

You empty
your eyes. Hold your heart
still. Let no one else know you
are here.

Want Like Flood

is want like bloodmuck, brook's stinking bank
a quartz-studded hunk of rock turned over
promiscuousness of bugs
all crawling armor and legs

want like raw clay that says harvest me, take me
home and sink hands in me to knuckle, wrist

give me your softness clothed in rough
bring back your taste to meet my throat, bitter aster
watch me taking it in like loam

like custard-yellow seafoam skimming the tide-line
the sulfur marsh that swallowed my sister
spat her out silted and kicking

palm whatever hank of me you put your hand to
fall on me thundering like the rain
carving a new trench in the gravel road

August Song

is the horsefly buzz skimming a chlorinated
pool is the creosote factory's closing bell

is a lightning bug for one day blinking is the last
ruby-throated hummingbird finding no nectar

is your sunscreen running in the hollow of your throat?
at night I want to kiss you while the toad

in his pond croaks alone I want to unpeel
the day from your lips breathe the same tar

smoke from the new paved road that took you
and led you back

About the Authors

Lorraine Carey is from Donegal, Ireland. Her poems have appeared in *Poetry Ireland Review*, *One*, *The Waxed Lemon*, *The Ofi Press*, *Gyroscope Review*, *The High Window*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *Orbis*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *Skylight 47*, *Poetry Birmingham*, and *Eunoia Review*, among others. *From Doll House Windows* is her debut collection.

Leo Kang is tucked away somewhere dour in Yorkshire, England. His poems have been published or are upcoming in *Kissing Dynamite*, *Tilted House*, *Figure 1*, and others. This autumn, he begins his English degree at the University of Cambridge. On good days, he still believes in dragons.

Frank Paino's poems have appeared in a variety of journals, including *Crab Orchard Review*, *North American Review*, *World Literature Today*, and *Gettysburg Review*. Frank's third book *Obscura* was published in 2020 (Orison). Awards include the Pushcart Prize, the Cleveland Arts Prize, and an Individual Excellence Award from the Ohio Arts Council.

Nadine Ellsworth-Moran serves in ministry in Georgia. She is fascinated by the stories unfolding all around her and seeks to bring everyone into conversation around a common table. Her work has appeared in *Interpretation*, *Ekstasis*, *Emrys*, *Structo*, and *Kakalak*, among others. She lives with her husband and three unrepentant cats.

Sandra Crouch, MA, is a poet, artist, and letterpress printer living in Los Angeles. She's studied poetry on two coasts and two continents—most recently with Hollowdeck Press. Sandra's poems appear in *Rogue Agent* and *Unlost*, and are forthcoming in *West Trestle Review*.

Sara Fetherolf (she/they) is the author of *Via Combusta*, winner of the 2021 New American Press Poetry Prize, forthcoming October 2022. Their story, “The Place” was the 2021 Iron Horse Long Story award winner. She has an MFA from Hunter College and is a PhD candidate at the University of Southern California.

David Colodney is the author of the chapbook *Mimeograph*. His poetry has or will appear in journals including *South Carolina Review*, *Panoply*, and *St. Petersburg Review*. He holds an MFA from Converse College and serves as an associate editor of *South Florida Poetry Journal*. David lives in Boynton Beach, Florida.

Jennifer Saunders (she/her) is the author of *Self-Portrait with Housewife* (Tebot Bach, 2019) and the winner of the 2020 Gregory O’Donoghue International Poetry Competition. Her work has appeared in *Cotton Xenomorph*, *The Georgia Review*, *Ninth Letter*, and elsewhere. She holds an MFA from Pacific University and lives in German-speaking Switzerland.

Lauren Nelson is an artist and caregiver based in upstate New York. Since graduating from Bard College in 2020, she has pursued projects in art conservation, illustration, and poetry. She is working on a free verse graphic novel.

Bethany Reid’s poetry books include *Sparrow*, which won the 2012 Gell Poetry Prize (Big Pencil Press 2012), and *The Thing with Feathers*, which was published as part of *Triple No. 10* (Ravenna Press 2020).

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

Lily Greenberg is a writer from Nashville, Tennessee and the author of *In the Shape of a Woman* (Broadstone Books 2022). Her work has appeared in *About Place Journal*, and *Third Coast Magazine*, among others. A 2021 Breadloaf Scholar, Lily holds an MFA from the University of New Hampshire and lives in Portland, Maine.

E. Bowers is a writer from Enon, Ohio. She teaches music and has a BA in English, Creative Writing, from Wright State University. Bowers interned as Managing Editor for *Mad River Review* from 2018 to 2019. Her work has appeared in *Sinking City*, *Mock Turtle Zine*, and *Rogue Agent*.

William Welch lives in Utica, New York. His poems have appeared in several journals, including *Nine Mile*, *Rust and Moth*, and *Hole in the Head Review*. His work is forthcoming in *Stone Canoe* and *The Healing Muse*. He edits *Doubly Mad* for The Other Side of Utica.

Diana Donovan lives in Mill Valley, California. In 2021 she received nominations for a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. Her work has recently appeared in *California Quarterly*, *Chestnut Review*, *Eastern Iowa Review*, and *The Lindenwood Review*.

Hannah Craig lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She is the author of *This History that Just Happened* (Parlor Press, 2017). Her work has recently appeared in journals including *Copper Nickel*, *Jet Fuel Review*, and *the Mississippi Review*.

Cambra Koczur is a wife, mother, and teacher who writes poetry and paints while her family is asleep. Her work has been seen in *Rattle: Poets Respond*, *Ginosko Literary Journal*, and *Mothers Always Write*.

Valya Dudycz Lupescu has been making magic with food and words for more than 20 years, incorporating folklore from her Ukrainian heritage with practices that honor the Earth. Author of *The Silence of Trees*, *Forking Good*, and *Geek Parenting*, her graphic novel *Mother Christmas* will be published by Rosarium Publishing this year.

Kip Knott's first collection of short stories *Some Birds Nest in Broken Branches* is available from Alien Buddha Press. His most recent full-length book of poetry *Clean Coal Burn* is available from Kelsay Books.

Matthew King used to teach philosophy at York University in Toronto; he now lives in what Al Purdy called “the country north of Belleville,” where he tries to grow things, counts birds, takes pictures of flowers with bugs on them, and walks a rope bridge between the neighbouring mountaintops of philosophy and poetry.

Christine Barkley is an artist and writer based in the Pacific Northwest. Her poetry explores the intersecting themes of chronic illness, trauma, the natural world, and existential horror. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *littledethlit*, *Not Deer Magazine*, and *HELL IS REAL: A Midwest Gothic Anthology*.

Annette Sisson's poems can be found in *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Nashville Review*, *Typishly*, *One*, and others. Her book *Small Fish in High Branches* is forthcoming from Glass Lyre Press (May 2022). She was named a Mark Strand Poetry Scholar for the 2021 Sewanee Writers' Conference and a 2020 BOAAT Writing Fellow.

Jeffrey Hermann's poetry and prose has appeared in *Hobart, trampset, UCity Review, JMWW*, and other publications. Though less publicized, he finds his work as a father and husband to be rewarding beyond measure.

Elisheva Fox is a mother, lawyer, and writer. She braids her late-blooming queerness, Texan sensibilities, and faith into poetry. Some of her other poems can be found in *Brazos River Review, Cordella Magazine, Paper Brigade*, and *Passengers Journal*.

Megan Gieske is a wandering poet living in Cape Town, South Africa, where she is studying for her Master's in Creative Writing at the University of Cape Town. After realizing her status as a survivor of rape, sexual assault and abuse, living with PTSD, she has found poetry to be the best healer.

Michelle Ortega has been published at *Tweetspeak Poetry, Tiferet Journal, Exit 13, Shrew LitMag, Shot Glass Journal, Snapdragon: A Journal of Healing*, and *The Platform Review: Don't Ask Why* (chapbook, Seven Kitchens Press) was released August 2020. *Tissue Memory* (microchap, Porkbelly Press) was released in February 2022.

Eli Shaw is a student and amateur poet on the precipice of everything else, based in Gainesville, Florida. When not writing, he studies ecology, analyzes data, and works in outdoor recreation. Their work has appeared under an old name in *BlazeVOX Literary Magazine*.

Jennifer L Freed's poetry appears in various journals and anthologies and was awarded the 2020 Samuel Washington Allen Prize. She is the author of a chapbook, *These Hands Still Holding*, and of a full length collection, *When Light Shifts* (Kelsay, 2022), based on the aftermath of her mother's stroke.

Chiara Di Lello is a writer and teacher. She delights in public art, public libraries, and biking through New York City. You can find her poems in *Crab Creek Review, Yes Poetry*, and *Best New Poets*, among others.

Pamela Manasco is a writer and English instructor. She lives in Madison, Alabama. Her poetry has previously appeared or is forthcoming in *New South Journal*, *Descant*, *The Birmingham Review*, and others.

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