

# RUST & MOTH

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Edited by Chelsea Hansen, Suncerae Smith,  
Josiah Spence, and Michael Young.

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## **Resume**

There is poetry in the way sound departs the womb of renewal. What seems to contain endlessness: dark. What punctuates it: moonlight. I'm a house that no longer aches; a house grateful for windows. Say forward like you mean it, the way we commit to breaking through the unwanted or feared. This is where I do not know what moves to become static. In a poem that is not a poem. In a sound that is only sound and not music. This is where the throbbing afternoon becomes a part of me squeezing out of origami, paper gods in creases and folds and the quiet, wet solitude of the back roads taking me home.

## A Mouth the Shape of the Atlanta Forest

*“... for the whole of nature, too, is imbued with a nameless, unspoken language, the residue of the creative word of God.”*

—Walter Benjamin, *On Language as Such and on the Language of Man*

I do not remember the language of  
the Chattahoochee, only the sound  
the sun made when it bended  
into the kudzu—wounded crane,  
gilded arrow. Of course, there were your toes  
between the reddened mud. We resisted nothing.  
Red is the secret of torpored water.  
You laid beside me in your yellow swimsuit,  
the one with daisies. I rested my head onto the mildewy  
towel. Your second shape was created  
in the heavy heat. I tried to grasp it.  
We noticed a man some yards away; naked,  
washing the back of his neck.  
You named him Adam. Along us there was river birch,  
hickory, tenderfooted trillium. But, there were your  
words, too, hanging from the trees, whistling.  
I had never known before, how naming permits  
existence. You made things knowable in  
their names.

## Pathways

We shared a hymnal,  
pulling a pink ribbon  
through gilt-edged pages  
where our fingers touched.  
The congregation's mouths  
formed 'o's as everyone  
inhaled at once, voices  
echoing through the neighborhood.  
We snuck out early. Nearby houses  
wore sweaters of thick rain,  
the grass was slick with moldy leaves,  
black walnuts rocked beneath our feet.  
We tripped into a nearby park—  
under catalpas  
where neighbors sat and read  
behind yellowed drapes  
in corners of late autumn.  
At fourteen, it was my first time  
and my second. It did not seem  
superfluous—not with cold  
rain fine as sand, with leaves  
twisting on thin stems.  
Perhaps I knew  
as car lights shined in our clothes,  
spirits followed us,  
as we were told.



Cement-gray clouds  
pulled like gathered silk,  
revealing bare night sky  
and all light's pathways,  
new stars and constellations  
burned into our skin.

## Olympe de Gouges Mounts the Scaffold

Autumn. Mists settle, covering  
the wrapped bodies in the pit,  
composting and kissed by the chemistry of lime.  
This is what you knew.  
Shivering in November's chilled glaze, not cold  
enough to keep the flies away.  
You think of the blood crawling in the gutters  
like the pain you wished to send to hell  
like the anarchy you believed should live  
only and always, always in the heart.

This is what you knew.  
That resistance changes colour with the boys'  
starched coats, or the patterns  
printed and displayed on rue de Montreuil,  
that the ambivalence hanging on your birth  
could only be resolved  
by the insouciant equality of the scaffold.

What else? What else for you, you nothing, you lack,  
you hollow ache of a stolen rib?  
O children, one day you will know the voiceless composite  
of massed and disorderly bones, the fleshless scrabble  
of history at your door, voiceless no more.

What wonder is this air opening above you?  
What wonder clouds, sun, all a world  
you only started knowing. That knowing,  
that terrible knowing that boys without a trace of Occitan  
to timbre their pronouncements  
can only cut to a spray of stars  
burning crimson, burning dark  
above the streets of Paris.

## **Now Do**

In the pupil,  
in the memory,

in the dry dun tide  
where the bars of our skulls

call down lightning  
and wild borders blur—:

A signal, a supplication,  
a grass paint incantation—

Come emerald, come kelly,  
come jade. Come vapor,

come billow, come milk  
from the mountain clouds.

Come morning, we beetle  
to the dunes, we hike up

our hind ends, we trap fog  
with our hard wings.

You fruit of great price.  
Do the mint kiss.

Now do the rivers.  
Now do the scars.

## Anna Atkins' Father Gifts Her a Camera, 1841

*Photography, because it stops the flow of life, is always flirting with death.*

—John Berger

A mahogany box perches like a bird in the girl's lap.  
Her hands flutter over the spice-smooth edges.  
Her dead mother's voice trills through the cracks.  
A mahogany box perches like a bird in the girl's lap.  
Her mother's song is copper and sap.  
The girl peers into the glass eye to capture her vestiges.  
A mahogany box perches like a bird in the girl's lap.  
Her hands flutter over the spice-smooth edges.

Let's say her mother's really in there.  
Dead at childbirth, she flickers as an afterimage.  
*Stay, stay.* She entreats her daughter to linger.  
Let's say her mother's really in there,  
circling the funneled light of the aperture.  
As she does, she alters the image just a smidge.  
Let's say her mother's really in there.  
Dead at childbirth, she flickers as an afterimage.

## Utah

They take a boy in white and dunk him  
like a digestive into tea, in a great American lake  
dotted with stern American pine trees, pointed  
like rockets to God, and I see it now, how he might  
fizzle out and then froth into something new,  
something righteous and smoother round the edges,  
how he might fit snug into its palm,  
and, with the practised flick of the wrist, skim  
over the water's edge to the rim of the lake, those endless  
American lakes. There is one thing I know: to be buried  
is no fate for something loved.

## **Winter, 2020**

I'm the first back after Christmas. I walk naked  
from bedroom to bathroom. I leave lone socks on the sofa  
and in the middle of the living room floor. I skin olives  
with my teeth, leave pits on counters. I have a new lover  
who is bad for me. I keep the TV on, always. I wash  
the dishes in the dark, and stop, steeped fingertip-to-wrist,  
to stare at the pear-bulbed streetlights, the snowfall like bats.  
You would be shocked to see bats in the dark, their fumbling  
crashes, flinging from body to body, but never  
with fear. I like to feel cloistered, or like a slasher killer  
waiting patiently in the shadow of the staircase.  
If I think about that too much, it turns back on me. I'll realise  
I am always afraid when I am alone. There's no one  
to open the door to. The snow is already coming in.

## **Tender Is a Weakness I Keep Repeating**

Heart lying on the sidewalk for anyone  
to trample, foolish and unteachable slamming  
into plateglass, leaving another stunned smear.  
Heart begging plaintive at the empty bowl, heart  
who never locks the door. Heart left to swelter  
in the sun untended, chestless and pleading.  
Heart hiding under the table with lantern eyes,  
drawing a map of footsteps, scared and ready,  
racing seconds, buried in a heave of furry breast.  
Heart whose mirror is a field of poppies,  
delicate fleet of tissue red lifted brief.  
Seasonal, made to wilt, made to return.  
Heart who will never leave the yard  
because longing chains it to the fencepost.



## **Signal to Noise**

Visitation slips into occupancy. A dry summer invests in yellow as a small protest—a ringing without the bell.

On my forearm yellow appears as a slight contusion beginning to heal. There's no gentle way to move through the landscape.

Trees maintain their ongoing edits. Deciduous is a slow decision.

Say something green and it comes back lutescent. We can hear when we're hollow. The cradle is stowed for another season.

We slide into this bright geometry where the sun is crooked and ruinous.

## Solitude

So I can feel better: I take the  
dryer up for three rounds, seven-fifty  
in quarters for a Saturday at the  
laundromat. Brunch at an oyster  
place in landlocked Iowa where the  
mignonette is too much red wine and  
not enough touch—sorry, brine. In the  
house with blue paneling, we read Lasky.  
The clumps of bluegrass we pull up from the  
lawn stumble over themselves  
like toddlers or men. I take pills riverside  
where we saw the crocodile. Spend  
nights rubbing the insides of my palms  
on the steel bridge, examining my  
damage. I am not the person that I  
never wanted to be. Fireflies singing  
above my hurt. There is nothing here except  
books about poets, clean linens,  
salt lamps, all the corners unkempt.  
There is nothing here except my hurt.

## Night Bloom

The factory's dust settles in its neighbors'  
pores: particulate, volatile, dusty-hot.  
Sometimes you can hear the air  
ignite. Stars scurry off their festive  
moltings in a self-governing pattern  
like ants. Paola says organize, a strike  
would stop the bleeding. The air is a skin  
for the blood in carbon. What leeches out  
smells sulphurous as matches' flint-strike.

Each seed has been condemned. Each  
condemnation has within it another  
condemnation like dolls filled with filled  
candies in a child's pocket.

Still, the twinkle  
of the refinery lights before the ocean entranced me  
as I would ride in the back of my parents' car  
through a night layered in salt smell and taillights.

By my childhood home, leaded gas burned  
on Marine Avenue. In an apartment,  
I woke when I-45 did. In a home I owned,  
the freeway's swell out-roared Tesoro's flame stacks.  
When I moved to the mountains, the quiet  
was so loud I couldn't sleep.

## **Thirty-Two Nocturnes**

Bleach bites my nose, fugitives me from my bankrupted  
sleep. I do not recall my dreams, only slithering charcoal.  
The walls seem to bend, become a toothless mouth,  
gumming my unleavened body. I am yeast that cannot rise,

belly a black hole, mind struggling to break glass, bird  
a breath of unfiltered air. Outside, the sodium street light  
halves my beige curtains, knifes the shadows in my white  
room jaundice. A nightingale enters on scrubbed feet, hands

like warm, browned butter. I yearn to slumber her long  
black hair, daughter my face into the mother of her neck,  
feel Morpheus safe. Instead, she crows me awake, dolls me  
like a cursed princess, enthrones my blue body in half-life.

I count the spokes of time when my doctor's beak mask  
glides in. His leeches cannot blood me of this 4 AM fever.

## **How It Can Be Done**

Cardinal rodeo call lariates the dawn, robin sings  
sun into being, sensing before we do the shard  
of light that says this is where it begins. Me

up and sitting on the cushion shivering wonder  
back into my bones after all the twittering  
about variants, convoys, Highland Park. How much

silence to fill this hole of being human, this void  
in the echo of bird song? It takes so long to gather  
what is essential. The sheer weight of it grinds you

down to dust to dust to dust you shall return to  
the spaciousness of a single breath, this exhalation  
into the multisphere of birds, trees, fungi weaving

songlines, roots, hyphae holding it all together,  
showing how it can be done, this caring  
for each other. How it can be done.

## **Missing Dog**

September  
and Shelby's gnawed  
through the fence wire.

All day we staple her face  
to wooden pillars  
beside concert flyers  
and strip club propaganda.

She's either dead  
or being rained on.

At dawn,  
I scour neighborhoods  
for dried blood, riding my  
bike barefoot  
across white suburbia.

Most dogs  
love suburban living.

Every house  
is made of bones,  
but you find her roaming  
along a highway.

## **Grief as Heat Before Rain**

Sometimes grief is a corn maze  
I'm all bend and fury  
breathless,  
mouth full of grit,  
clutching husks in my hands.

Sometimes it's the hull of a ship  
holding everything the waves  
would scatter.

I'm waiting for the rain  
to cut through this heatwave  
August holds a scythe to my throat—  
I'm gripping at an unraveling clump  
of chicken wire.

Can I feel everything now, all at once?  
Can I grieve for what I never held,  
just the same as what was lost?

Maybe grief is a familiar place,  
like the farm fields I spent summers barreling through,  
dirt on my knees,  
cradling kittens against my chest  
while coyotes crawled in  
through the barn windows.

## Hoshigaki

1

Our last year together began with the wettest July on record.  
I trailed you in our woods with a bucket  
of house paint. And blazed while you lopped.  
And saw it all wash off  
in long streaks by noon.  
It was the season of damp heat which warped the floor boards.  
And of swarming mosquitos. How we swore  
to do something about that half-dug pond.  
But didn't.

Then fall came with rain  
and rain and we had to admit we needed gutters.  
Between bouts of downpours  
I gathered leaves for the compost,  
while you tried to lay a bridge across the river.  
And it began to seem our house was a boat  
in a great flowing swamp.  
And we in it, rowing—



2

—I have been thinking:  
What was it that we forgot to do?  
Was it the clumsy way I ran to you—  
who I loved most, with almost  
my whole heart?  
Maybe it was all my worry-loving,  
worry-loving you.  
All three heavy generations of it.  
Maybe ten. At least two.

3

Now another summer has come, a dry one  
this time, and I'm eating potatoes wrapped in tinfoil  
tossed into the campfire.  
The girls are bonding  
in the California heat—  
talking about fruit.  
The thing about persimmons, says Emma,  
is you can't eat them even a minute too soon.  
A persimmon patience, I think,  
and I write this down.

I'm disappointed to note that you are still everywhere.  
Even way out here. But isn't it just  
grief doing its work now? Making  
Hoshigaki. White fingers touching everything,  
kneading the whole fruit of our life together—  
which in its slow drying  
is expelling granules of sugar?

Meanwhile the late August wind is  
running its cool hand through the trees  
and taking first fistfuls of leaves  
again. Each leaf a thing  
we had built—  
kept on building—even so near  
to the end you bought me flowers,  
put on that sweet smile to tell me we'd  
come through another winter.  
And soon, daffodils  
will come blazing up out of that dead earth,  
to make sense of it all. Any day now.

## **At the Edge of the Field**

In the stillness of a child's remembered dreams, Crow  
is being chased from his tree by two smaller birds  
nipping at his tail feathers,  
barefoot girl in cotton dress below  
watching with toes buried in loose sand.

In this version, Girl fashions a boy  
from Georgia red clay, tall and handsome,  
black straight hair, a poet voice  
that sings for her, anthems in tongues  
only her ears can understand.

Boy is strong and breathes into her, holds  
her in ways she wishes to be held. The two  
of them lie together beneath Crow's tree,  
their thighs gnarl together like twisted willow roots,  
each day deeper in the firm earth.

Girl tells her mother who remembers  
when once she had the same dream  
but does not tell her father  
who is a patrician oak, a thick bole.  
He has never learned to speak of dreams.

## **Ar Bruach**

Glaonn mac tíre amach  
faoin spéir sholas na gealaí  
ag iarraidh cara a aimsiú.

Seasann fear leis féin ar bhruach an locha.  
Feiceann sé é féin ag crith san uisce  
nuair a shéideann gaoth trí na crainnte.

Ólann mac tíre ón loch  
agus stadann sé go ciúin  
ag fanacht le fuaim seachas a féin.

Glaonn fear amach leis féin  
faoin spéir gan deireadh san oíche  
ag iarraidh é féin a aimsiú ag an uisce.

## **On the Brink**

A wolf calls out  
under light of the moon  
to find a friend.

A man standing alone at the lake's edge  
sees himself shuddering in water  
when wind blows through the trees.

A wolf drinks from the lake  
and softly pauses  
listening for the rustling of others.

A man alone calls out  
under the endless night sky  
trying to find himself by the water.

*Original poem by Dan Murphy and translated from the Irish by the author.*

## Trying

You lie there inside  
blinking at an eggshell ceiling  
as you grow smaller  
hearing all these cars pass  
through a city street  
just feet from your window,  
a one-way narrowed by parked cars.  
You don't let yourself think  
of the journey, of how lucky  
you must be, must've been  
to have been, to be, to have  
someone else to be with you,  
to think how greedy it seems  
to want even more than that.  
And so, instead, you think of names  
for this desire, and for these  
misadventures marked  
without lilies or ceremony.  
But there are no names  
that take shape in your mouth  
that leap from your tongue  
that grow like moonflower  
in the dark. There is only carlight  
slowing through the blinds and silence,  
painting prison bars across the wall.

## **At Kitsilano Beach**

I come early  
before sunscreen and sand  
precipitate over miles of skin,  
before portable nets  
catch spikes and volleys  
of sunlit sound, a cicada cadence  
in summer heat. I seek  
the closest thing to winter,  
to feel the chill  
of water unravel warmth  
from between splayed fingers  
and treading knees,  
while the ocean teaches me again  
that submergence  
is the allowance of one body  
to inhabit another  
even if just for a breath,  
the width of a rib cage  
expanded.

## Poem that Ends with Garden

If, when I say butterfly, you believe  
she used to wing her way around the milkweed

gathering bouquets of dill like handfuls of pollen,  
that is not what I mean. She liked it in the dirt—

played softball, got down in the dust,  
had sex for the first time while camping. The garden comes later—

here, there is nothing that blooms. I wish  
I could tell you I smelled the damp of mushrooms

sprouting in her gut the day she told me that love  
was different than *in* love, but at least she loved him,

right? But I was just confused. I didn't know the cycle  
she was entering into. The last good day

I remember, there was a virgin strawberry daiquiri  
in her fridge, bright pink: the last good day

everything was still sweet, with a hint of tang  
we wouldn't think to call sour. Don't think *boy*,



think entomologist, pinning a butterfly through the thorax.

Think the opposite of a moth: a pop of color spiraling

away from the light. Think of the butterfly's life  
cycle in reverse: girl full of flight closing her wings,

then crawling out of the darkness that tried to swallow her whole.

Someday, there will be a strand of red poppies threaded

to her thigh. A rose crawling up her side. Her body  
becomes a garden.

## **Intrauterine Elegy**

It's been over five years since my body  
shed its little uterine suit into the thin  
sling of my cotton underwear,  
this interlude due to you, small  
hormonal hummingbird, hovering  
above my cervix, preventing me  
from holding more than I am  
ready to. I remember the white shock  
of pain when you touched some deep  
part of me, the sudden nausea, sweat  
jumping like hot oil to my skin's surface.  
Three times I've lain on this table, waiting  
to become a perch for your tiny talons.  
Is it wrong that I sometimes miss  
the rush of blood upon sitting up in bed,  
the sideways waddle to the bathroom?  
It's not that I enjoyed being an open  
wound or aching across each hour,  
just that my body was intelligible to me,  
a language whose syntax I understood.  
Now my uterus is mute, home to an animal  
I am indebted to, and when it hurts me,  
I am expected to say thank you.

## Night Walk After an Argument

I put on moonlight salve, though what you said  
still stings and festers: how I can't feel love,  
or joy, or grief as you do—teasings of  
a bully dangling life above my head  
as if I were a lump of leaping clay.  
Tell me, O Living One, of high emotion:  
the flash-flood tears, the spasms of elation—  
how's having all that passion?

Suddenly

the moon contracts into an upright slit;  
the stars blink on and off, and start to flow.  
No, not stars—glints of light upon the scales  
of a great snake. The false night sky uncoils;  
the beast descends; and as our gazes meet  
its low voice rumbles: *Would you like to know?*

## **Black-Shouldered Kites**

Like satisfaction unfurling on  
an August day, I watch two kites  
hover over a just-harvested  
corn-field—marking stray hoppers  
and voles, while late morning thermals  
massage away the haze, and driving  
north on I-5, glance east and west  
to see both Sierra Foothills  
and Coastal Range, gilded in late  
summer grasses, and olivine  
live oaks—the Sacramento  
Valley resembling nothing so much  
as a giant taco—cilantro  
strewn randomly on the edges  
of these tortilla mountains—the kites  
now just flapping wings suspended  
in mid-air—reflected in my left  
side mirror, shrinking, until they're  
just periods typed on a page  
of sky, and my brow furrows as I  
wonder whether all my deeds  
and intentions dispersed into  
the universe have shifted this  
disheartened planet even a  
millimeter—back towards its proper  
orbit.

## **My Period at Fifty**

Surprise—a bright red smear  
on white tissue.

The candied cherry  
at the bottom of the sundae.

A painted clown's nose.

A cardinal perched alone  
in snow.

## In the Butterfly House

—for Zemerì

Through double vestibule, we enter  
jungle. Vines bloom their saturated glories:  
Firespike, Lantana, Jatropha Tree,  
Pagoda Flower. My son, his solemn face  
uplifted, cannot understand the reason  
why the other visitors won't whisper.  
How could they come in and not acknowledge  
the cathedral?

He stands, face upturned to watch as butterflies  
kaleidoscope, drift through ferns toward  
a plate of decomposing fruit where they settle,  
drink fermented elegies of mango or papaya.  
He yearns. If his wish were granted here, he'd be  
a branch of something beautiful, a place they'd want to touch.  
This afternoon, his every breath on tiptoe, he sees a girl, her face  
in bloom as a Blue Moon skims her hair, alighting there.

For forty minutes, more, he tries to be a tree, tries to twine  
himself to vine and root. I will a butterfly to him,  
but not even one comes near. Slowly, his face falls, trampled  
in the jostle of a field trip as it ricochets around him.  
I have to hold my breath to keep from weeping. *Yes,*  
I want to say, *this is what it is. This is the grief of it,*  
*the wait for what will sometimes never come.*  
I stay silent. If I brush the edges of his sadness, it might

steal his chance at flight. I stand beside him, think of all  
the times I've tried to breathe myself to branch,  
hoping that a moment might alight, might show me outer wings  
with eyes of owls until they open into luminous. I know  
his wish to witness this, submerge his shadow into stillness.  
I know that ache of being close but never near enough  
to catch what flutters in periphery: the winged shape,  
its transience: that trembled resonance of light.

## Elegy for My Uterus

I will miss that moon tug,  
the invitation to slough, cleanse  
and begin again. Gone  
the meaty mess of it, the pulp  
and blood squelch, ancient  
ache of emptying. Goodbye  
to that leaky grief-giver,

always trailing its *sorry sorry*.

Its orbits governed three-  
quarters of my life, the wax  
and wane of estrogen,  
my ruinous or amorous moods.

For decades nothing dreamed  
itself into existence, but then

into that soft pocket, lumpen  
with my collection of marbles  
and scars, two little lives  
stitched themselves with intention  
to be enfolded and nourished.  
One was scraped dead, the next  
was lifted living, out of it.



Now that it is taken from me,  
    how am I to navigate without  
its wisdom in the salty broth  
    of my body? Without it  
I only carry the mulberry-dark  
    memory of the womb  
from which we are all formed.

## **Aubade for the Body (25)**

This is what it means to be a body lying curled  
—pill bug, snail, acorn—

under a pile of blankets, waiting for memory  
to overtake the world.

Lying curled warm and sleepless in the container  
of forgetting, something

the shape of a hand, something resting. Lying  
curled in the imprint of itself,

a fawn in a hollow, a set of keys dropped in long grass,  
a stone. Lying curled in itself,

the body lists the names it gives to day and darkness—  
Where I Must Go, What

Leaves Me, Restlessness with Wren. It lists the names  
it has sung and forgotten,

all piled like leaves under a maple, all naked. It lists  
the names it wants to be known by,

silent single syllables of recognition and longing.  
It can never remember quite

what it means, but the trying makes a melody that hums  
while the full moon sets.

## Rare Sighting

*There are so many birds this year,*  
my husband says, as if this is his first time  
out in the world with his eyes open.  
He tries every year with tomatoes.  
I gave up when the kids were still small.  
He nods his head toward a robin sized bird,  
gray and quick—*what's that one?*  
A catbird, I say and know he doesn't quite believe me.  
The bird perches on the brown paper edge  
of the yard waste bag—almost manages it.  
*He's not afraid,* my husband says.  
He expects they are rare—  
and I don't say darling, you need  
to get out more, or even, dearest, you should walk  
with me an evening or two—  
you do not always have to be so efficient  
or alone. I could show you, I could name  
some few familiar things: the company I've kept  
while the boys have been growing  
and you've been striving. Here  
is the catbird, a mimic, he sits, tail down,  
shoulders slightly hunched, wings  
dangling a bit like the arms of someone  
who doesn't know what he's looking at—  
watching, and wanting, too, to know.

## In which I am coming out

& my mother takes me to the  
supermarket so I will stop crying.

In moth-drowned morning  
she is singing — *what'll I do? without you?*

the June rain knocks bullets down into our hollow  
car. Through the ritual silence of the pedal brake,

I confuse transmission for omission. Let me drive right  
through her, hear the bones in the trunk rattle out

cautionary tales. Outside, a thread of silence  
pulls out of my throat, ties a knot around the

deadened sky. A singular nerve unspools itself  
from my neck. Another unravelling suspended

in a cascade of rain. Yesterday, a photo of a younger  
me. How she was growing into a mooned face,

crescent mouth sculpted to sink into a girl's thigh,  
a rope of saliva palmed into a skywire lifeline.

Last summer, a girl tried to kiss me, a victory stolen  
in-between the splattered bugs on the car windshield.

Their deaths all domesticated by my hand-tailored  
rebirth. In the distance between me and her, a hole  
-punched wound of a girl drunkenly stumbled out, rerouted  
our veins to accommodate for the wasting bullethole.

Today, my mother tucks an orange into the grocery  
bag. She kisses my forehead, says that I take  
everything too seriously. Her jaw twitching out  
a heartbeat. & between aisles of bitten  
sweet soda, I unbutton my mouth into a sheet-white  
envelope, mistake every set of empty arms for an  
invitation. My girlhood sets into a car-made wreckage.  
I stop myself from deveining my body, I cleave out  
safety in the glovebox: my girlhood  
a carnal wreckage.

## **Forgiveness**

Back from Mexico we plunge into life  
again (the laundry untamed; the dishes caked),

like we had plunged  
into the ocean, pelicans overhead. The air clung

to us like cellophane around a fresh tattoo.  
I'm not sure when it changed, this lenience

within me. The sky was so large it seemed to swallow  
the sun, us along with it. We were no more

than the shells, shifting palms, or even the beached pufferfish  
deflated like a balloon after a party has ended.

I almost pitied it, the pufferfish—eyes like pressed  
obsidian, its pock-marked body and spikes

like icicles or the barbed cactus skin I wear  
on days I can't be touched.

Despite our attempts, it returned  
to shore and each time pierced me.

Without ignoring or forgetting the fish—all its venom  
and viciousness—we continued our walk. The sting

having lost its novelty.

## **Esquecimento**

I walk with this emptiness in my hands. I carry it  
as a quilt-work star. I carry it  
in the same way you carry eulogies  
in your mouth. Think of how many grains  
of sand you've scraped  
from your ankles, how many moons  
you've seen buried  
in this ocean. The night is the path  
I have chosen to take, wider than the day  
and its glittering edges, brighter even  
than the morning and the bones  
it reveals on the floor of the sky.  
I walk with this emptiness in my hands. I carry it  
somewhere safe from the light  
your teeth announce.

## About the Authors

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**Ariana D. Den Bleyker** is a Pittsburgh native residing in New York's Hudson Valley, where she is a wife and mother of two. When she's not writing, she's spending time with her family and every once in a while sleeps. She is the author of three collections and twenty chapbooks, among others. She hopes you'll fall in love with her words.

**Chloe Tsolakoglou** is a Greek-American writer who grew up in Athens, Greece. Chloe is a PhD Student in English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University. Her work has been published in or is forthcoming by *Denver Quarterly's FIVES*, *The Adroit Journal*, *Cream City Review*, and elsewhere.

**David Cazden's** second book is *The Lost Animals* (Sundress Publications, 2013). He has had work most recently in *Still: The Journal*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, and forthcoming at *Sunlight Press*. He lives in Danville, Kentucky.

**Darcy Cornwallis** is a major figure in his own household in Melbourne, Australia. He has had poetry published in *Australian Poetry Journal* and *n-Scribe*.

**Elizabeth Kuelbs** writes at the edge of a Los Angeles canyon. Her work appears in *Claw & Blossom*, *Poets Reading the News*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, and elsewhere. She's the author of the poetry chapbooks *Little Victory* (Finishing Line Press, 2021) and *How to Clean Your Eyes* (dancing girl press, 2021).

**Shannon K. Winston's** book *The Girl Who Talked to Paintings* (Glass Lyre Press) was published in 2021. Her individual poems have appeared in *Bracken*, *Cider Press Review*, *On the Seawall*, *RHINO Poetry*, and elsewhere. She holds an MFA from the Warren Wilson Program for Writers. She lives in Bloomington, Indiana.



**Adriano Noble** is a recent graduate of Durham, now based near Birmingham. His work has been featured in *The Hellebore*, *Hungry Ghost Magazine*, and *Ink, Sweat & Tears*, as well as shortlisted for the Creative Future Writers' Award.

**Ann DeVilbiss** (she/her) has work published or forthcoming in *Columbia Journal*, *The Maine Review*, *PANK*, *Radar*, and elsewhere. She has received support from the Kentucky Arts Council and the Kentucky Foundation for Women, and she lives and works in Louisville, Kentucky.

**Cherie Hunter Day** is the author of *Miles Deep in a Drum Solo* (Backbone Press, 2022) and *Qualia* (White Knuckle Press, 2017). Her work can be found in *100 Word Story*, *Mid-American Review*, *Moon City Review*, *Quarter After Eight*, and *Unbroken*.

**Daniel Liu** is an American writer. The author of *COMRADE* (fifth wheel press 2022), his work appears in *The Adroit Journal* and *Diode*. He was selected by Arthur Sze and Kali Fajardo-Anstine respectively as a finalist for both the Adroit Prize for Poetry and the Adroit Prize for Prose.

**Barbara Duffey** is a 2015 NEA Literature Fellow in poetry and the author of two poetry collections, most recently *Simple Machines* (The Word Works, 2016), which won the 2015 Washington Prize. An associate professor of English at Dakota Wesleyan University, she lives in Mitchell, South Dakota, with her son.

**Alixen Pham** is a poet/writer/artist published in journals and anthologies including *The Slowdown with Ada Limón* and *Salamander*. She is nominated for Best New Poets 2022 and Best of the Net 2021. She leads the West-side Los Angeles chapter of Women Who Submit and is the recipient of grants and fellowships.

**Nancy Huggett** is a settler descendant who writes, lives, and caregives in Ottawa, Canada on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg people. Thanks to Firefly Creative, Merritt Writers, and not-the-rodeo-poets, she has work out/forthcoming in *Citron Review*, *The Forge*, *Literary Mama*, *One Art*, *Prairie Fire*, and *Waterwheel Review*.

**Coleman Bomar** (he/him) is a writer from Middle Tennessee. You can find his stuff at *Hobart After Dark*, *Maudlin House*, *Eunoia Review*, *X-R-A-Y*, and many more. He loves cats.

**Catheryne Gagnon** lives in Tiohtià ke / Montreal and works in communications in the humanitarian field. Her poetry has been published in *Black Fox* and *Quail Bell*. When not writing, she can be found tending to her plants, searching for the best window seat at a café, or looking for fireflies in dark woods.

**Lulu Liu** is a writer and physicist and lives between Arlington, Massachusetts and Parsonsfield, Maine. Her writing has appeared in the *Technology Review* and *Sacramento Bee*, among others, and recently her poetry in *Apple Valley Review* and *Thimble*. She's grateful to be nominated for Best of the Net 2023.

**Bob McAfee** is a retired software consultant who lives with his wife near Boston. He has written six books of poetry.

A former carpenter, **Dan Murphy** teaches at Boston University. His poems appear in *Sugar House Review*, *The Summerset Review*, *Slipstream Magazine*, *Terrain.org*, *TAB Journal*, and elsewhere. His debut collection *Estate Sale* was named a finalist for the 2022 Barry Spacks Prize at Gunpowder Press.

**Jenny Wong** is a writer, traveler, and occasional business analyst. Her favorite places to wander are Tokyo alleys, Singapore hawker centers, and Parisian cemeteries. She resides in Canada near the Rocky Mountains.

**Lauren Elaine Jeter** is an alumna of the Creative Writing Program at Stephen F. Austin State University. Her poetry has been nominated for the Best of the Net by *the museum of americana*, selected as a semifinalist for the *Crab Creek Review* Poetry Prize, and anthologized by the *Blue Route*.

**Mollie O'Leary** is a poet from Massachusetts. She holds an MFA in poetry from the University of Washington, Seattle. Her work has previously appeared in *Frontier Poetry*, *Poetry Online*, *DIALOGIST*, and elsewhere. She reads for *GASHER Journal*.

**Warren Nadvornick** is a rocket engineer and writer from Los Angeles. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Raintown Review*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Whistling Shade*, and *Third Wednesday*.

**Gary Grossman** is Professor Emeritus of Fisheries at University of Georgia. His poems have appeared/are forthcoming in 28 reviews, and his book *Lyrical Years* will be published by Kelsay Press in early 2023. Hobbies include running, music, fishing, gardening, and cooking.

**Julia Caroline Knowlton**, PhD, MFA, teaches French and creative writing at Agnes Scott College. She has published three volumes of poetry. Recognition for her poetry includes an Academy of American Poets prize, a Georgia Author of the Year award, and inclusion in the Georgia Poetry in the Parks project.

**Alison Hurwitz** has been published in *Global Poemic*, *Words and Whispers Journal*, *Tiferet Journal*, *Writing in a Woman's Voice*, and *Anti-Heroin Chic*. Her work is forthcoming from *Amethyst Review* and *A Book of Matches Lit Magazine*. Alison lives in North Carolina with her husband, sons, and rescue dog.

**Amy Fleury** is the author of two collections of poems, *Beautiful Trouble* and *Sympathetic Magic*, both from Southern Illinois University Press, and a chapbook, *Reliquaries of the Lesser Saints* (RopeWalk Press). She teaches at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.

**Phoebe Reeves** is Professor of English at the University of Cincinnati's Clermont College. Her first book *Helen of Bikini* is forthcoming in 2023 from Lily Poetry. Her poems have recently appeared in *The Gettysburg Review*, *Phoebe*, *Grist*, *Forklift OH*, and *The Chattahoochee Review*.

**Rebecca Brock's** work appears in *The Threepenny Review*, *CALYX*, *The Comstock Review*, *Whale Road Review*, and elsewhere. She was a finalist in the 2021 Joy Harjo Poetry Contest and won the 2022 Editor's Choice Award at *Sheila-Na-Gig*. She reads for *SWWIM*.

**Sharon Zhang** is an Asian-Australian, Melbourne-based poet and author. Her work has been recognised by *HAD*, *Anti-Heroin Chic*, *Antithesis Magazine*, and elsewhere. She is a mentee at Ellipsis Writing and an editor at *Polyphony Lit*. Outside of writing, she enjoys collecting CDs and thinking about Hegel a touch more than necessary.

**Christian Paulisich** is an undergraduate poet at Johns Hopkins University. He lives in Baltimore, Maryland, but is originally from the Bay Area, California. His poems have appeared in *As It Ought to Be*, *Orchards Poetry Journal*, *Beltway Poetry Quarterly*, *Neologism Poetry Journal*, and others.

**Grant Schutzman** is a poet and translator. He is fascinated by multilingual writing and that which has been deemed untranslatable. His poetry is forthcoming in *Eunoia Review* and translations are forthcoming in *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *Asymptote*, and *Ezra*.

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