

# RUST & MOTH

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## Fourteen-line poem playing hide-and-seek with cancer

*It is a joy to be hidden, a disaster not to be found.*

—D. W. Winnicott

Like everything  
alive, you want  
to grow. Slow bolt  
nested, fed by  
blood and breath. Stealth  
saved you once. We  
both have known that  
distinct joy, that  
disaster. Shy  
occupier,  
I spy and must  
expose you now,  
though it means we  
both are mortal.

## Quiet Turning

Leaves loosen their grip  
with the confidence of dancers  
who know the floor will meet them.  
They spin down in quiet spirals,  
each a small, deliberate goodbye  
brushed in fire.

The air sharpens—  
crisp as the snap of an apple skin,  
cool enough that breath curls  
like a secret escaping lips.

Squirrels sift through the lawn,  
their paws quick and certain,  
as if time has tightened—  
and they're the only ones who noticed.

A gust slips through the trees,  
lifting the branches' thin bones  
into a soft, creaking stretch.

Somewhere, a swing set shivers  
through an empty playground.

Evening arrives early,  
painting long shadows  
that stretch like lazy cats  
across the sidewalk.

A porch light flickers,  
catching the first drift of smoke  
from a chimney testing its voice.

And the world, without announcement,  
leans into its quiet turning—

## The Smudge

The mirror doesn't wait.

It gathers whatever the morning leaves behind—

a stripe of sun sliding across its edge,  
dust lifting like tiny lanterns  
before drifting back down.

A sleeve passes,  
and the glass brightens for a heartbeat,  
then dims again,  
holding only the faint warmth  
of something that moved on.

Across the room,  
a door sighs shut.  
The sound ripples through the silver  
and fades,  
like a stone skipping once  
and sinking without protest.

The mirror keeps its stillness.  
A smudge blooms near the corner,  
soft, uncertain,  
as if made by someone  
who wasn't sure they were there.

Outside, a branch taps—  
not a knock,  
just a rhythm the wind forgets to finish.  
The glass shivers,  
rearranging the shapes it holds  
before settling again  
into a quiet  
that doesn't ask for attention.

And in that quiet,  
light expands,  
thins,  
returns—  
a silent rehearsal  
for something that never arrives.

## On Silence

*"In music, silence is more important than sound."*

—Miles Davis

Let me tell you something true: when I was thirteen, a man put  
his hand over my mouth and I lost my voice

for a decade. Is it grief or grievance that brings me here, to stare into  
this hole dug with daggers and tongues? All those tiny

red devils from my dog-eared copy of Steven Crane,  
but they never settled in my heart. My throat taught me what *home* means

before you came along. And now, all these mercies I've caught  
in this fertile cathedral: the Rose of Sharon in full bloom,

the bumblebees squeezing themselves around the stamens, the ferns  
light against the chain link fence, the Japanese beetles

hiding in the fronds, their little legs hyper-extended above their torsos  
as my shadow passes over. The prehistoric words of my body,

*blood and bone and hand*, ghost notes that ring in chorus  
with our neighbor yelling again at his dogs. I dislike

the word *caught* in this context but all I know to do is trap  
these moments on the page. You picking a crop of Dragon Tongue beans,

the speckled pods dropping to your basket as you snip them  
from their stems. Me dropping the metallic beetles into  
  
soapy water. Me trying to understand why I waited more than a year  
to tell you I'd been molested. The birds chatter while they fight  
  
for room in the bird bath and I catch you, briefly, holding  
your hand against the sun. Here where we ward against the world,  
  
where we work in the measured beats of our bodies, of blood and tendons  
and cracking joints. I want you to know I'd sealed my throat against  
  
the monsters who grew there and when you opened it, all we found  
was a boy at the bottom of a well, scared and starving but ready to forgive  
  
me for the darkness where I'd trapped him. Someone, please convince  
the neighbor's dogs to be quiet so we can hear him singing.

## **Song Through Holes in The Roof**

The rain sketched subtle shapes in cloud,  
the dark streaks streaming after church:

a weekly potluck of men with dowsing forks  
shoveling salt and murmuring,

sliding hats off to lay eyes on the sky,  
Daddy-bellies uncurled in the parking lot.

I was rushed home to “batten down the hatches.”  
Beautiful, black billows forming—

the wind slapped back my praise.  
Shingles’ bang, crack, half-affixed,

warning of puddles in carpet to come  
and frying-pan fish. A no-soup season

of stewpots strewn on floors, catching.  
A plastic tarp above my bed

filled each night with cymbal rattles, dangling  
water. Descant dribble, down the walls

and through the chimney, put out cozy fires.  
School clothes smelled of dog and smoke.

Those days, I learned  
to say “we needed this” in muddy soccer cleats,

stretched  
the damp drumhead of resignation.

## **Draw a Picture of Your Home**

The second task was even harder: “Now the place,” she told us, “that was home to you before.”

I couldn’t draw the first place well, but at least

I knew what place it was. Where was I last at home?

Perhaps the room below my eldest son, the space carved out from mounds of my estranged wife’s goods, her furniture and clothes, spare comforters and curtains, boxes full of papers from her jobs, and some discarded things that had been mine and thus were not worth caring for.

I was glad to have it—my own air to breathe nor ask permission—but beyond the air and finally the space I tidied, cozied, squeezed a life into, it wasn’t mine but hers as landlord and my son’s as paying tenant, both of them with rules. So, home?

The nearest thing I had to one, but no.

I sketched instead the house of my six years with her,  
the side of it that I preferred, the outside.  
That was mine, the lawn I mowed, the trees I planted,  
and the garden—that is what I should have drawn,  
my wealth of Bloomsdale, Buttercrunch, Blue Lake,  
and oh-my Mortgage Lifters, Brandywines and Jubilees.  
Until she called me in, I liked to call myself  
a farming man—out standing in my field—until  
the fungus took the mustard, foiled my plots  
of cukes and squash, and endless summer rains  
drowned all my purple Cherokees, until my spade  
brought little from the once-rich earth but plantain,  
poetry and vetch. My name's still on the title deed  
(and on the deed that nearly did me in), a mortgage  
never to be lifted till the year of Jubilee,  
to be my once and future harvest home.

My now home, as you see, is crudely drawn.  
I've long forgotten everything I knew about perspective.  
Can you make them out, my desk, my lamp, my chair?  
They were all my father's, in the place he used to sit  
while working on his book on zeolites—a field  
in which he really did stand out—and then  
his homely tales of childhood on the farm.  
Before he died, he wanted me to have them. Here  
they are, and where they are, I am at home.

## **Goslings on the riverwalk**

are small eruptions  
of their mother sun.  
Their down is speckled  
with her old light.

They whimper when she flies  
above the path,  
like wind gusts, guttered  
between screen and glass.

## **Getaway**

Over the reef cleaved with moonlight  
water full in its unconstructed way.  
Tomorrow climbing the mountain made  
from absence swollen beyond horror  
we'll recall those dreams flyweighting  
in a sky full of petrified intestines.  
Rest, re-coup, thirsty bone, bacon in  
dermal bliss. As we weave through the forest  
a few of our ancestors join the trek;  
semi-clowning, their manners erase  
many of our cultural outbursts. Trees  
dimorph into savannah where none of us  
is at home. We decide, pressing our thumbs,  
wiggling our toes, to end this day  
heartbeaten by the sun, nerves pathworn.

## **Notes Taken During a CPR and First Aid Class**

The tricks might slip away from me again.

Forgotten by tomorrow, like the birds

passing, flashing, by the window now.

How to turn the victim; whether to mouth

or not to mouth to mouth;

where to finger the place of a pulse.

I fumble without a salve for these spots

that keep showing up blind.

The longer I breathe, the more strange and cruel

the plays death makes around me.

I've found my way back to this course

wanting only to be taught to survive

the bloodless guilt of not knowing

how and where and when to say goodbye.

Instead they'd certify me a savior

keeping hope alive through protocols

sealed with steady compressions by the minute.

Every year, back here, I recount the old

and add up all the new ones I have loved  
whisked away when I wasn't looking

though I have worked my tongue,  
pen and prayer only to fail them.

While off in another continent  
they have died in my sleep.

Thus I return to you fluent  
in tourniquet and death,

my hands bound tight and force-fed  
the grace to let them go.

## Allegiance

I sit down, write *SoKo* in Serif at the top of the page. (S: nineteenth letter. Here, doing the same work as the thirty-eight parallel). Cursor draws a blank. Click at another half-chewed draft. Do not metaphor dumpster scraps. Words will list to the side, right-justified. Let them engorge.

Flitting at the font bar, lotus-women leap off the lines, skirts bullet-holed, bodies uncolonized. I sit, dog-ear a page, polish it off. My wreckage poems are collarbones and Zoloft—infanthood, my country sucked on cannons to keep warm. Still, the space

below *SoKo* is firing blanks. Spiteful, I sow new seeds: Ghazal for Begging for Adderall. God Bless High School, Carpal Tunnel and Cortisol. Out of all possible coin, my country traded youth. Days defined by #: # of hours studied. # of clubs founded. # of people who voted you as #1. # of designer bags. # of skipped meals. #다음은너야\* climbing YouTube charts. There is no place for a poet in the East-Asian Dream.

E-string about to snap: an aunt's laughter. Blood  
runs thicker than water. Never thicker than soju flowing  
when so-and-so got into SNU. No, my country is not  
Abel, red-skinned sibling, but who forged the hoe

that killed Cain? Twelve-o'clock, they announce another  
bridge will be netted. How I long to dig into gold-rush  
dust, burrow those river-children back into the womb.  
Instead, I watch as fluorescent jackets pull them into  
a one-armed embrace, and think of the lotus women.

\*Translation: *#You'reNext*, a hashtag used by the generation scheduled to  
take South Korea's notorious college entrance exam.

## **The Lost Uncle, 1946**

She claims V. never really  
played the cello, it played him,

making of him an instrument of melancholy.  
Cigarettes rolled in a T-shirt sleeve,

dark hair feathered with olive oil,  
his were the deep-sunk eyes

women dreamed in compact mirrors.  
On good days, he spoke

of the largess of America, Hollywood,  
a restaurant with his name in lights.

On bad, even Lucifer must  
carry his own bible.

Of the final time  
she saw him: his hands, their long, sad

fingerails, a filterless twirled  
like Fred Astaire's cane.

He asked for a twenty spot,  
swore he was aces. In the car idling

under a streetlamp, a fedora  
in a raccoon collar sucking a toothpick.

The photo she keeps on the fireplace mantel  
captures him tottering at the edge

of the frame, as if about to capsize  
into obsolescence, face down in a ditch

or on a train to a land  
of a long, untranslatable curse.

## Summer Camp

And on the afternoon it rained, we crowded  
into the craft cabin to weave shallow baskets  
for our grief—only seven days, and one of them  
wet. Funk of beach towels sour  
to the stitches, hot blacktop steaming sulfur,  
windows fogged white enough to write on  
with our fingertips—cartoon hearts  
and smudged initials, *R + E, T -n- J 4-eva*,  
the lake thrashing behind our tracings,  
cavitated with rain. On the shelves, forgotten  
tubs of acrylic paint separated like small bodies  
of water, bright sediment under a blear  
of polymer. We made bracelets from embroidery thread,  
knotting them onto each other's wrists, *best  
friends forever*, although in truth it was  
only a week, the days deliciously long, extending  
past dusk and into actual night, cricket song  
giving way to the hum and slap of mosquitoes  
as we circled around the campfire, faces  
whetted and planed by the shifting light  
until we could've been anyone. That week,  
that fire, that place where I tried to lose myself  
again and again, and failed, my finger on the window  
scribbling only, inevitably, *I was here*.

## Petechiae

Platelets just another way to die  
of lack, I bled out small.  
I spotted. Every movement a microtear

in the blood vessels, a pinhead bruise  
like rust on a pylon,  
like asphalt under first rain,

the wallpaper freckled with mildew,  
a field of poppies  
observed from a great height...

*Transient, likely*, the hematologist said  
and I bummed a decade  
off futons, guest rooms, a vehicle, living well

below the poverty line.  
At night a lover could trace where  
my constellations had faded.

If I was ever beautiful  
it was then: a sunset by Seurat,  
a thousand red doors

unlocking all at once, the air  
asleep on the lawn, releasing its dew.

## Chicken Piccata

*Sobriety: Day 163*

I can't help that the recipe calls for wine.  
It's a favorite of mine, and cooking  
is one of my substitutes, a spotlight I sweep  
the horizon with to keep the shadow  
from jumping the fence and carrying off  
the wobbling calf I'm nursing to strength.

Cooking for others buys me tolerance.  
They'll have to hear how the med I took  
to decrease my anxiety increased my anxiety,  
about intrusive thoughts on my commute saying,  
"Just keep driving into the night, cross state lines,  
get a motel room, await instructions," or worse.

But my chicken piccata will balance that out.  
I tried to get Marta to buy the wine, but  
driving ten minutes each way for one item  
was out of the question—she's European, you see—  
so I buy a dry white. It feels huge in my hand  
at the checkout. I tell the cashier it's for cooking.

Like he cares, like I hadn't been in that store  
each week with a cart provisioned for months.  
The employees know who the addicts are.  
I unpack in the kitchen and the bottle has grown.  
It takes up a whole counter.  
I slice and pound and chop and dredge squeezed

in a corner. I turn my back to brown the chicken,  
but its presence is loud. Is this what psychics feel  
when they channel your loved one? Convulsing  
and straining while all you hear is the air conditioner  
and the faint sound of traffic? Time to deglaze,  
so I reach for the bottle, impossibly big,

but my hand grows to match. I feel the smooth glass,  
the ridge of the label, the grain of the paper,  
the shifting weight of liquid, the reverberant “gluck”  
of air bubbles as I pour it. All of my body  
moves into my hand, every nerve ending.  
I think I can feel individual atoms.

The smell of alcohol burning off is sickly sweet.  
I have to set it aside to tend to the sauce  
but suddenly I’m Bilbo reluctant to relinquish  
the Ring to Frodo. I somehow manage to  
take the bottle, now filling the kitchen, and wrangle it  
into the fridge like so many clowns cramming

into a tiny car. Most of the wine is left. Wine  
I paid for. It would pair nicely with chicken,  
or with nothing at all, alone in the basement.  
I chastise myself and finish the meal. I’ll serve this  
to friends. I’ll be with people. I’ll look in their faces  
and think, “Am I doing it? Is this connection?”

## When the Librarian's Mind Goes Blank

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<sup>1</sup> She stares at a spiderweb of light just below the window.

<sup>2</sup> The internet describes her condition as malaise (or is it ennui?).

<sup>3</sup> She can't remember the last time she's finished a book.

<sup>4</sup> From time to time, an ISBN number will come to her: *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

<sup>5</sup> But most days, loneliness chews holes in her sweaters. Why does she feel this old?

<sup>6</sup> She brackets her memory lapses. The word will come to her [...].

<sup>7</sup> A moth beats against the glass.

<sup>8</sup> *I know exactly how you feel*, she whispers to the shadows.

## After Hugo

I wake to an ocean churning brown as rust,  
shore strewn with driftwood bones of shelter lost.  
Mud clings beneath my boots;  
thresholds gape where doors once blocked wind.

A sailboat tilts in a ditch, mast snapped,  
pines flung like splinters across the road.  
Blue tarps tremble—torn flags  
above streets stilled by silence.

Diesel and pine soak the air,  
heavier than the storm's own roar.  
I barter tarp and story  
for a night's shelter.

Through wreckage, a cat's cry threads—  
faint will rising from ruin,  
among the bones of this town.

## **Red Shift**

The observatory sits above the town  
like a thought no one finished.

At night the dome opens  
on its slow hinge—  
a pupil widening  
toward distance.

We lie on the concrete platform  
still holding the day's heat.  
The telescope turns in small corrections,  
metal listening.

Inside the lens, a star elongates—  
not bursting,  
just slipping  
toward a color we cannot keep.

Light thins  
as it travels.

By the time it reaches us  
it has already survived  
what we call  
now.

You say something about distance—  
wavelength, recession—  
but the word away lingers  
longer than the math.

The star stains the eyepiece  
with a red that isn't flame  
but stretch.

Below, the town gathers itself  
into porch-light constellations.

You reach for my hand  
as if to steady the ground  
from moving under us.  
For a moment everything seems aligned—  
lens, sky, pulse.

Then the star slips further  
into itself.

Morning will come  
without announcement.

The dome will close.

The light will keep arriving—  
older each time  
than we remember  
sending it.

## Swimming

Let the shark camera declare our safety.

Let the lifeguard claim our taxes.

Let the rotting kelp assert the natural cycle  
of life and death and rebirth,

and the trash convey to tourist and local alike  
shame. Let the dolphins delight us

when they leap in the good pleasure  
God must take in them,

and the boats on the horizon teach us  
perspective and desire. Let the kelp beds

whisper without end. Let it stop.  
Let the pier groan under the weight of people

fatter than they used to be, dopey and distracted and  
worthy of love, even when I hate them.

Let the water take my body and loosen it.  
Let us be directed where to go, let us go.

Let us be taken up into larger bodies,  
our only hope, and let me be free to risk within

that which grows old without regard for me  
or for itself. The shark is compelled

by an appetite that like a sail pulls  
instead of pushes. The lifeguard from the tower

runs towards figures blind to the dangers  
they can't help but dive into.

The boats on the horizon move  
left to right along a thread in the sky.

## Norman Door II

*"A friend told me of the time he got trapped in the doorway of a post office... pushed on one of the outer doors. It swung inward and he entered the building... When he came to the next door and pushed it, nothing happened... He turned around and pushed against the side of a door. Nothing. He pushed the adjacent door. Nothing... He was trapped!"*  
—Donald A. Norman, *The Design of Everyday Things*

only once trapped, only between glass, do I stack  
my bones and stop, search with desire neither come  
nor go but close (*close* as in skintoskin not  
the verb for *ending*). I look for words, to signify my hands my feet  
my aching brass joints. perhaps something is  
wrong here, but i can't seem to see beyond  
what is clear. I know simplicity is quiet  
worded into nothing,  
like latched-shut eyes, a sidewalk before the knee,  
the synapses take what is empty, glasstoeye, and *push*.  
meanwhile, I'm prismatic as light, chaotic  
and barely mobile, a red-eyed missing exit sign.  
hand-slugs trace prayers on the glass and  
people on the other side pass easily  
toward where no one went—  
even those spirits know escape is a luxury.

each knobs at me a question smirking, blushing up,  
breath caught between arches,  
though we are all afraid of revolving doors,  
what it is to be moved with no need of direction.  
the entrance had seemed a swinging  
between open and closed, some kind of  
hinge that held up invisible seams of sight,  
glancing between knowing and found.  
elite synapse instruction, translation of blank space.  
so is *push* to the plate, *pull* to the handle,  
man's better design as nameless as words  
slide in and out of shadow as the mouth  
seeks *hold* seeks *helve* and *turns*  
and the hand leaves the glass and *pulls*  
ribs wide open to the sky, begging  
in a quest to figure out how this body is meant  
to be used

## **Vestigial, As In No Longer Functioning**

I sit here for the first time since I mourned  
bruises you didn't mean  
to leave on my neck, two lost silver fish.

The hygienist is interrogating  
my teeth, and I wonder if there is still residue  
of you. That is to say, I wanted

to salvage whatever refuge remained  
in my gums. He puts a finger in my mouth  
to thumb lip tissue out of his way

and I think of the days we avoided  
salivation. I let him  
excavate each stone carefully.

After he is finished  
he dabs my lips with gauze. It is gentle  
and I want to cry.

## **After Asphalt**

One day the trees will reclaim the street,  
braid their roots, unfasten their demons,  
split the asphalt open.

Parks will find their voices again in rain  
when storms wander the sky  
like stray hounds hunting sleep.

Plants will cup the dark with blind hands,  
feel for a bloodstream underground  
until sunlight gnaws the clouds to bone.

No more forests as backdrops,  
no trees cast as extras.  
Wood loosens its flesh,  
inscribes its own rings.

We move through our questions in silence.  
Portents travel under the skin.  
Where the road gives out,  
something waits to be given.

We too shed bark,  
take root in one another,  
grow into stubborn growth,

fighting the thirst  
of being alive.

## **Smoky Mountain Road**

The mountains breathe in layers—  
blue behind blue  
behind blue.

Mist rises slowly  
as if the forest is remembering  
how to exhale.

I try to do the same.

Stone steps climb through the woods,  
water slipping patiently  
between old rocks.

Some griefs move like that—  
quiet,  
persistent,  
never asking permission.

Further down the road  
a black bear stands in the lane  
like a question  
the forest has asked  
in its ancient tongue.

We stop.

The car idles.  
Brake lights glow red in the green.

I wonder which of us  
looks more unnatural  
to the other.

She lowers her head,  
considers us briefly,  
then disappears  
into the enormous patience  
of trees.

Night comes softly here.

Then suddenly  
the dark is full of small lanterns—  
fireflies  
writing quiet messages  
between the trees.

And somewhere  
beyond the road,

through emerald ferns  
and watchful hemlocks

the bear is still speaking  
about what she saw.

## **Forwarding Service**

Dear Dad, hard to believe it's already  
been a year since your mailbox  
was hermetically sealed,  
as if with an oxyacetylene torch,  
and all the correspondence  
intended for you was rerouted  
to me, mid-flight. But since then,  
things have really tapered off.  
No more stray bills from the radiologist  
or Medicare summary notices (no hope  
of meeting your deductible now).  
And no more home energy reports,  
your usage a perfect zero, or glossy  
issues of AARP: The Magazine.  
(I was shocked at how gray  
Jon Bon Jovi had gotten.)  
In fact, the only regular missives  
you still receive are from your local  
humane society, imploring you  
to become a foster, make  
a 'pawsitive' impact, send love  
to a shelter pet today. And believe  
me, Dad, I have; already writing  
three checks and purchasing  
an engraved patio brick in your honor.

But still, the letters keep coming.  
Just today, they sent a whole  
sheet of cat and dog return labels  
printed with your name and defunct  
address. I actually debated  
sticking one to this poem, along  
with a stamp, and dropping it  
in the mail for you, but we both know  
it'd only make it so far, before  
beating its way back to me.

## **Monsoon**

red earth glistens naked  
steeped in lush streams  
tiny fish dart and shimmer  
concrete walls burst  
with green bloom  
rain thuds its urgent fists  
against the window  
Amma lies next to me  
her sobs muffled  
I feign sleep  
between us  
a darkness coils and swells  
it devours the roof  
above us  
night closes its jaws

## **in pursuit of your approval**

I suckled on fire  
till the space between my ribs glowed inferno  
I wrapped my skeleton in borrowed skin  
and grew foreign to myself  
I stuffed my razorblades into pockets  
that hardly ripped, barely bled  
I bore people on my back through the mud  
with my own lips caked in mire  
I monitored my reflection in every shiny surface  
and tumbled down a mirrored rabbit hole  
and when I showed you how warm,  
how thin, how agreeable, how giving,  
how pretty I had become—  
you flinched in horror, said  
not like this  
not like this

## Winter Light

—*Beginning with a line by Megan Fernandes*

One winter, I became very quiet  
and heard light scrape across the world.

It sounded like dragging a chair  
over a brand-new hardwood floor.

It was December, and snow fell  
straight down, at zero angle.

The communion of the flakes  
kept things in line. The roads,

with their grubby beaches of sand,  
were the only well-treated things.

I bought myself oily black coffee  
and old donuts from the grocery store,

cut-price for quick sale,  
and in my claustrophobic little room,

my stomach creaked like an old house.  
At work, snow heaved off the warming roof

and thumped like a heartbeat to the ground.  
Down the hall, I heard my boss croak

about how the wind whipped him  
like a flyswatter to the face.

Christmas music refused to reach my ears  
in the same way that it used to, although

this was the year I realized  
that Rowan Atkinson in *Love Actually*

is a Christmas angel, and reminds me of my father.  
I wanted you, but too slowly.

When we kissed in the snow in my untied boots,  
a shiver pounded through my ribs, and the cloudy night

flushed with light under its skin.  
That year, I did many things very wrong.

I was like the young man in the parking lot  
who, with a car full-buried in white,

and all the tools available to him,  
beat the ice off the windshield with his fists.

## **endemic**

We are driving to Davis, and I can't tell  
if I'm supposed to be here. Every time

we see mullein, we go out of our way  
to uproot it—invasive species, you say

with disgust, and I nod in agreement,  
even though mullein is known

to soothe coughs and nerves.  
A long time ago, I might have

worshipped this expedition, its every  
attempt to prune me, offer me sun

and shade in equal measures.  
Every time I see a rocky hillside

sprawling with rhododendron, I think  
of how the plant predates the Himalayas,

how it swallows mountains at each turn.  
Now West Virginia's state flower, it is

rapture in green, blanket-soft, snow-hardy,  
and oh, the hummingbirds it feeds.

How lovely it must be, I think,  
to be endemic to something so vast,

so lush and expansive; to understand  
your place so surely, everywhere you go

begins to look like home.

## **The Trickster and the Hare**

My husband's soul  
flies on a bullet,  
and widowhood  
becomes

a limping hare.

Coyotes come sniffing,  
trickster grins  
flashing silver  
on streetlamp corners.

Soft words—  
baited breath—  
tongues lingering  
on promises of  
safety and comfort.

Their eyes  
stalk my daughter,  
and trace the  
curve of my thighs—

With a broken suitcase  
and four-foot-eleven inches  
that outpace the hunt,  
we flee a desert  
to a new country.

Now and then,  
coyotes come prowling—  
but the hare  
has become  
a trickster.

I growl and bare my teeth—

my daughter pulls her lips back—  
and tests the trill.

## Flip the Script

I hear myself anachronistically exclaim, “Good God!”  
and I think about the god I was given as a child  
who trotted faithfully at my side on a leash of prayer.

Who protected me from strangers luring children  
into cars. Who accompanied me on my first bike ride  
(though I crashed into a rosebush all the same).

Who found lost objects and fulfilled some wishes.  
I remember burying my face in the fur of his neck  
and telling him my problems. He wagged his tail.

I was still a child when I lost him—gone for good,  
I’m afraid—not recoverable by flyers tacked  
to telephone poles. But that’s not where I’m heading.

I’m still at “Good God”—wondering about the people  
who believe not only in the god but in the leash.  
Are they so satisfied with how things are?

How their best friend behaves? Never perceiving  
a need to say: Cancer—bad god! Famine—bad god!  
Collapsing buildings, dreadful storms—bad, bad god!

Don’t tell me what Aquinas, what Augustine  
had to say: these are the bland excuses made  
when a dog bites a child, savages the neighbor’s cat.

If you wish to convince me of your god, drop  
that childish notion of the leash. Speak instead of  
a presence that regards with impartial interest

me and the centipede hiding in the cellar,  
me and the house finch with the oozy eye,  
me and the hawk that struck at it and missed.

Each sends out its throb of prayer-like longing  
to a power that does not heel, that does not fetch,  
that is immanent, immutable and unmoved.

## About the Contributors

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**Erin Redfern's** work has recently appeared in *The Shore*, *Rattle*, *The Hopkins Review*, *New Ohio Review*, and *The Massachusetts Review*. She earned her PhD at Northwestern University, where she was a Fellow at the Searle Center for Teaching Excellence. She has served as poetry judge for the San Francisco Unified School District's Arts Festival and as a reader for Poetry Center San Jose's *Caesura* and *DMQ Review*.

**Youtao Cao** is a writer based in Tokyo, Japan. His work has appeared in *The Daphne Review*, *Rust & Moth*, and *Skipping Stones*, where he was also featured in an interview.

**Anthony Frame**, an exterminator and the editor of Glass Poetry Press, lives with his wife in Toledo, Ohio. His latest collection is *Where Wind Meets Wing* (Sibling Rivalry Press, 2018). Recent work appears in *Poet Lore*, *Up the Staircase Quarterly*, *The Indianapolis Review*, and the anthologies *Delicate Machinery: Poems on Survival* and *Healing and Not That Bad: Dispatches From Rape Culture*.

**Piper Rasmussen** (she/her)'s poems have appeared in *Shot Glass Journal*, *Hare's Paw Literary Journal*, *Kyoto Journal*, *Writing The Land: Horizons*, and others. She works from Manhattan, in spite of her cats' efforts.

**Ed Robson** (he/him) is a retired psychologist, a new MFA, and a heart attack survivor who lives in North Carolina and winters when he can in Guatemala. His first poetry collection will be published in May by Bramble Press.

**Laurie Koengen** lives and writes in Ottawa, Canada. Recent publishers include *Literary Review of Canada*, *Thimble Lit Mag*, *Columba Poetry*, and *Squid Literary & Arts Magazine*. Her latest chapbook, *this clingstone love*, is with Pinhole Poetry Press.

**JW Burns** lives in Florida. Poems and prose in several publications including *Ginosko Literary Journal*, *I-70 Review*, and *Moon City Review*.

**LC Gutierrez** is an erstwhile academic and product of many places in the deep, southern United States and the Caribbean. He lives, writes, teaches, and plays trombone in Madrid, Spain. His work is published or forthcoming in many fine journals, including *Notre Dame Review*, *New York Quarterly*, *Tampa Review*, *Hobart*, *Sugar House Review*, and *Trampset*.

**Kate Choi** is a poet living in Seoul, South Korea. Her work is forthcoming or featured in *Bending Genres Journal*, *The Weight Journal*, and *Eunoia Review*. She is an alumna of Kenyon Young Writers Workshop and Iowa Young Writers' Studio.

**Kurt Olsson** has published three poetry collections, most recently *The Unnumbered Anniversaries* (Fernwood Press, 2025). His poems have appeared in a wide variety of publications, including *Rust & Moth*, *Poetry*, *The Three-penny Review*, *New Republic*, and *Southern Review*.

**Steph Sundermann-Zinger** is a queer poet from the Baltimore area. Her work explores themes of identity, relationship, and connection with the natural world, and it has appeared in *Apple Valley Review*, *Glass*, *Literary Mama*, *ONE ART*, and other journals. She was the 2023 recipient of the Ellen Conroy Kennedy Poetry Prize.

**Nicholas Yingling** is the author of *The Fire Road* (Barrow Street Press, 2024). His work has appeared in *Best New Poets*, *Poetry Daily*, *The Adroit Journal*, *The Missouri Review*, *Sixth Finch*, *Pleiades*, and elsewhere. He lives in the Bay Area.

**Chad Rutter** is an emerging poet originally from rural Nebraska now residing in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He received a BFA from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design and an MFA from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, both in visual art. His work has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *Right Hand Pointing* and *Anti-Heroin Chic*.

**Shannon K. Winston** is the author of *The Worry Dolls* (Glass Lyre Press, 2025) and *The Girl Who Talked to Paintings* (Glass Lyre Press, 2021). Her individual poems have appeared in *Cider Press Review*, *Radar*, *RHINO Poetry*, *SWWIM Every Day*, *West Trestle Review*, and elsewhere.

**Mary Whitlow**, based in Williamsburg, Virginia, is a former radio commercial writer and newsletter editor. Her poems have been featured in *Philly Chapbook Review* and *Mid-Atlantic Review*, and are forthcoming in *Virginia Writers Project* (Spring 2026).

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**Chris Davidson's** poetry has appeared in publications such as *Zocalo Public Square*, *The Ear*, *The MacGuffin*, *Zyzzyva*, *Social Alternatives*, *Citric Acid*, and elsewhere. His most recent chapbook, *Easy Meal*, was published in 2020. He lives in Long Beach, California.

**Shannon Cates** can most often be found on her yellow couch in Annapolis, Maryland, cross-legged in sweatpants. A UX designer, she believes poetry and design are basically the same thing. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Black Fox*, *Press Pause Press*, and *Bodega Magazine*, among other journals.

**Abbey Green** grew up in Traverse City, Michigan and studied at Middlebury College. She is a PhD student in Neuroscience at the University of California San Diego, where she researches neuroimmunometabolism and mechanisms of resilience against neurological disease. Her work is forthcoming in *Levitate* and *Philly Chapbook Poetry Review* and has appeared in *Zeniada*, *Blackbird Arts Journal*, and *Other People*.

**Steven Van Der Heyden** is a Belgian Flemish poet and writer and a native Dutch speaker with a profound love for English-language literature. He favors restrained, character-driven work where emotion emerges through atmosphere and detail. In 2024, he was appointed City Poet of Roeselare for a two-year term. His publications include the duo collection *Tot ze koud is* (2020) and his first solo collection *Filigraan* (2023).

**Sarah Gill** is a writer from Oklahoma whose poetry explores memory, nature, and the quiet emotional landscapes that shape our lives. She enjoys wandering through bookstores, writing about ordinary magic, and watching old episodes of *I Love Lucy*.

**Doug Fritock** is a writer, husband, and father of four living in Redondo Beach, California. His work has been nominated for a Pushcart prize and has appeared or is forthcoming in *Rattle*, *Kitchen Table Quarterly*, and *Whale Road Review*, among others.

**Vani Venugopal** is a writer and editor who grew up in India and now lives in the United States. Her work explores memory, grief, and emotional landscapes shaped by place and belonging. She has a background in journalism and digital media.

**Carole Anzovin** writes from Western Massachusetts, where she delights in gardening for pollinators, baking, knitting, and devouring books. Her poetry is a deep dive into living life with joy, attention, and presence, and has appeared in *Gyroscope Review*, *Wordpeace*, *FERAL*, and other journals.

**James King** holds an MFA in Poetry from the University of North Carolina Wilmington and serves as Poetry Editor for *Bear Review*. A Best of the Net and Pushcart nominee, his poems have appeared in *The Boiler*, *ONE ART*, *Passages North*, and others.

**K.M. Hanslik** is a writer who edits for *The Turning Leaf Journal* and has been recently published in *Bleating Thing Magazine*, *Black Glass Pages*, and *Dishsoap Quarterly*.

**Argelia Leon Frizzell** is a special education teacher and emerging poet. Her work draws on oral traditions to explore heritage, memory, and how cultural legacies shape identity. Her writing appears in *Voices* (Tebot Bach Press) and *Anaheim Poetry Review*; she was a finalist for Four Tulips Publishing's Fantastic Mischief contest.

**Carol Hart's** the author of two novels, *Marius & Delia, by D.M.* and *A History of the Novel in Ants*. Her poems have appeared in *Southern Poetry Review*, *Arion*, *Eclectica*, *2River View*, and *Scintilla*, among other places. She lives in the Philadelphia suburbs.



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