

DOOR = JAR



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Cover Image "Resurrection" by Daniel de Culla

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IDLING

Sharon Kennedy-Nolle

Poetry

Parksville: a stop on the way
 for a hot dog and custard at Fiddle's,
 done up in red and white carnival stripes;
 popcorn box Parksville, buried alive
 under the New 86 overpass,
 once was collaring cars off the Quickway
 until they'd barnacle around *Al's Gas – Cheap*.
 Lost tourists, truckers
 the elbow-greased and bathing-suited mingling,
 before taking back roads.

Nobody's here now.
 Only orange hard hats who flag
 away flatbeds like flies over a hamlet corpse.
 Furred shadows crowd
 the road's shoulder, flattened remnants of the wildlife.
 Pipelines clog the lawn of the Methodist Parsonage;
 the five-and-ten, a glassy grave;
 a drugstore counter still gleams in fifties chromium
 green,
 even *Memories*, the antique store, has liquidated spirit,
 "Everything must go."
 Little notices taped to all the doors, driveways to
 weeds.

Past the town's one light
 ancient mist rises from the Catskills, summoned from
 the hollows
 to soften the skin of peeling billboards,
 to hide the bulldoze (the way that word misleads).

I drop my husband off at the bus station,
boarding the Shortline, following the suede blonde,
bound for New York.

Still in my pajamas, I hunch
over a McMuffin, and that's it for the day.

Parksville, there's no place to park.
I can't get out, but I can't stay.

Dig
Mark Antony Rossi
Fiction

One day I woke up and smiling robots were smarter than my children. But I did not rejoice because I don't believe in Evolution. Machines will not replace men as long as we still have a sliver of vanity left in our semi-bionic bodies.

I dug a deep pit and dumped their broken mother boards. And burnt the manuals to warm my tired bones. Confident in my victory I rounded up the tech geeks who built these beasts and sent them to the pit as well. I'm not worrying about their rights. I'm just concerned about what is right. And keeping my family safe. Dig.

Confession at an Ancient Castle

Mark Antony Rossi

Poetry

Needing her
beyond the physical
is not very logical
when my mistress
is a muse
and my heart
is a harbor
tying stray
ships at night.

SUNLIT
Mirana Comstock
Poetry

the sun courses through me
like electricity

my eyes, LEDs
glowing so bright
I wear UV shades
to protect people around me
from their light

my veins and arteries
wires to and from
my heart, brain

simultaneously
in ecstasy
in safety

instinctually
I turn towards it
like a flower

no lotion will come
between us today

TIME IS LIKE WATER

Mirana Comstock

Poetry

time washes over me like water
over rocks, pebbles,
then the fine grains of sand
I am now

it flows and eddies,
laps, crashes
pools around my eyes
ripples my arms and thighs

no matter how high and wide
I rebuild my sea wall
it will erode my shore even more
with the next storm

is it time for me to wave goodbye
to my bikini

ADVICE FOR THE WRITER

Isabel Brome Gaddis

Poetry

Set aside the man of the hour
(a man? again? imagine.)
and the destructive rhythm of others' success.
Gather for yourself a chip of cynicism,
the odor of sloth,
a draught of luck,
and that sweet essence from the bottle next to Death.
Carry them all, with secret ceremony,
to the home you loved the best.
Be truthful when you write the story.
Catch the golden fish yourself, for once, why not,
and treat him to a drink
in honor of your beloved father.

Big Sound

Katy Richardson

Poetry

The driving tune,
when the dial finds
its end point, vibrating
the dashboard. Too
loud for everyone
except me and you.
I don't know if it's
good anymore. It was
then. It probably isn't
good. Say it out loud:
Celtic Christian Rock
circa 1997 and there's
no way the song is
objectively good.
But it's full of sense
memory, more than
the trinkets of the same
era I've already wadded
up and thrown out. People
are dying. Not you, but
people who could be you.
So easily you. And I keep
the song on repeat.

Larceny

Katy Richardson

Poetry

I'll place you inside—
inside the drum I've
covered in skin. It's
a battle cry tool. And
you're in it—right
where I left you—
next to promises
that everything will
be okay, that goodness
will win out if I don't
throw my own hat
in the ring—that
passivity is a good
look on me.

I want to take you
out and I will. One
day. Break through
the skin, when my
battles are over.
But carrying you.
Hearing you rattle.
That is a comfort.

Charisma
Katy Richardson
Poetry

She rears her head
at the most inopportune
time—disease, disaster,
natural or otherwise.
“Meant to be,” she says.
“It’s a fucking fire. That’s
it,” I say back, but too late.
Now she’s rifling
through my consciousness,
making connections,
searching for signs
in ashes, denying
my ability to be scared
or helpful, or pro-active
for the sake of avarice,
knowledge, meaning,
further spiraling in me.
She’s smug, divining
meaning. She knows.
She says she knows—
what God wants,
what God is saying,
the sign God is giving.
Still and small, God replies,
“Drown her.”

we don't know what happened to the hikers

Amy LeBlanc

Poetry

the ravine spun broken branches
shoeless and circling
around the women who
misplaced their tongues and eyes.

Their broken chests
were folding like tents
covered in snow.

With the crook of a coat hanger,
the seams of their woollen
socks ruptured stuffing and fleece
against bare shoeless feet.

In the water,
they waved to their friend
whose heart had stopped
on the thirty-first day of winter.

The prints went down the slope
as branches and antlers fractured.

They burned one another to generate warmth.

I Want You Back
Devan Burton
Poetry

The night Michael Jackson died
you emailed me. The quiet digital
letter possessed all caps.
You were my mother, revealing
a childhood, telling me nothing
mattered more than family.

Five men danced on a stage.
Five black men who did not raise
their hands to strike you. Conversations
became hard for us. When you looked at me
you saw my father, wearing an orange jumpsuit.
He created a debt to the state of Tennessee,
and years of his life served as recompense.

I play all the Jackson Five tracks
I can listen to:
their outrageous outfits,
loud bassline,
and nostrils opened wide to recover all the air they
could.

When you no longer needed air,
you became air. I was no longer
connected to the earth the same way.
I was reborn.

'I want you back.'

Like Father, Like Son

Devan Burton

Poetry

I will reside
among the dark sky,
cool wind, and unforgiving earth.

It rained the day my father met the stars.
The clouds kept all the beauty of the world away.
And the fire did too.

Men seized him from a trial,
moved him through the city streets like cattle.
The end result:

he hung from an oak tree,
his neck curved like the letter "L,"
sable hands close together, like he was praying.

I am not praying.
I do not seek to disturb God.
Children, with their fathers' blond hair,

placed my lifeless body
on a truck bed.
'Let him wade in the water.'

Tonight, I will be one with the stars.

Public Service Announcement

Devan Burton

Poetry

The parent stood before the counter
at the bookstore with her
children running around. She did
not care about the thunder
her sons made while crashing
into each other. The crescent
shaped bruise she wore
dimmed her bright green eyes.

'I fell from a tree, today.'

Her laughter was off key
and she looked over her
shoulders like stranger
in a new town. She took
her order to a table and sat with her
twins. The mother listened
to them praising their father while
her lips trembled.

Watching the Game

Devan Burton

Poetry

America for me
is having black conversations
with white friends.
When asked
why million dollar football players
kneel
I thought of
Timir,
Michael,
and the Minnesota gentleman
who had as much right to carry a gun
as he did to drive.

I cannot see
the soldiers my friend
—the medic in Iraq—tried
to save.
I do not know the sound the flag
made when it fell upon each coffin.
We've had dialogue before,
leaving us wiser,
possessing more insight
into each other's race.
The following week,
we studied defensive schemes
towns apart.

Prince Rogers Nelson

Devan Burton

Poetry

My daughter is old enough to ask where I have been.
 Perhaps she is old enough to understand how debt
 can cripple a person. Maybe someday she will discover
 that when her stepfather presses a slice of birthday
 cake into her face tiny tornadoes form in my chest.
 Maybe someday she will learn that I wait for her
 to hang up first after each phone call.
 Maybe someday I will hear a dove cry.

'If Lady Fortune should ever be kind enough
 and gives you a woman to die for, by all means
 do so.'

I did.

A preacher's daughter.
 She did not like the way I prayed to God.
 Too simple.
 Too orthodox.
 I thought the way I loved her would save me:
 sharing secrets in midnight darkness,
 telling her she was beautiful
 while she menstruated, holding her the night
 the woods surrounding us burned in Sevierville,
 Tennessee
 but I was wrong.

The night my mother died alone in Oklahoma
 I stood on an empty soccer field.
 I fell to my knees and remembered rain.
 When my mother lived.

Laughing.

Dancing.

Black.

The purple dress she wore
clung to her hips before I turned away.

I left the grass and stars.

A motherless child born new to the world.

HAWAII

Lucinda Watson

Poetry

Yet sometimes, here in the middle
of a conversation, one becomes a plumaged
bird but no one notices. A shiver, a feather,
picking lint off strangers, making a
nest, beaking seeds and swallowing
great gulps of air, neck warbling,
Hawaii longs for us birds to stay
and we long to remain birds, free
to preen, to fly and to roost.

SPRING JAM

Robert Rothman

Poetry

I don't know whether to laugh or cry, so I
do both — you've heard the saxophone weep out notes

so true they trickle down your cheeks like salty
joy, the ninety-two-year-old maple's trunk

torn open wide, a dripping hole, and still
it greens! Leafing out so full you would never

know and you, all in white like winter ice,
wheeled from room to room, hoping that after

the knife there still will be another bloom;
no wonder that to keep it alive the jazzman

can't know where the music will go, hanging on
for dear: the riff that lifts and dips, merging with

the bass, weaving in and out the drummer's beat,
then at the edge where it would end, leaps across

the void to begin again — yes, that bright note,
that up-beat, that riot in the blood, lifts me over

for another season of green-think, bee-buzzing
about the brain, scent-crazy, intoxicated

with stirrings, ever-young, wreathed and crowned
while down low, if I slow down, I hear the wind

blowing through the gap in me like a distant,
sweet-tuned wail: a blue among the green.

VENUED NOW AND NOW

Robert Rothman

Poetry

Raging doesn't work. Nor shaking fists

At the close-lipped sky. Not beating the sea

Black and blue. At night your horse

Paws the ground, bangs against

The stall, kicks at the timbers.

During the day you go outside

And like a Japanese sword-maker

In his workroom, layer the sunlight

One beam after another into

Something sharp enough to slice though

And last after. What else is there to do?

THE DAY OF LEAVING

Laurie Reiche

Poetry

*A Poem Written in Twenty Minutes Before Entering
the Newest Day*

Could I in twenty minutes speak of the grace of thirty
years
with all their slurred and flurried continuations, each
object in this house
a grace note, a wave of modulations, days touching
days, seconds threaded
to the other, a symphonic rendition of this that we call
life?
I am moving to a new place all alone. Could I in twenty
minutes
describe the pellucid face of the alien expanse my eyes
are tracking
as I gaze at the hills and sky this morning? I never
believed in the word "leaving,"
but swore an oath when I was very young to
"beginning."
Perpetuity isn't stagnant, isn't stillness; it is infinite. Do
you get it?
There is darkness up ahead, and then there is the
brightness.

**ON PLANNING TO LEAVE MY HUSBAND OF THIRTY-
THREE YEARS**

Laurie Reiche

Poetry

Where to begin when one has been gone so long from
the Self?

Where to begin when morning is the first day of the last
and what was day's dream turns into the good goodbye
and what we had now seems like the gong of a faraway
Tibetan bell ringing?

Where to begin when love has done its job and is
packing up his bow and arrow in a red
sack and is spreading his wings to fly out the window?

This is not the place to begin, inside the walls of a poem
with its glass-stained windows.

Old habits are hard to break. We are not old habits but
friends, two birds in a flock
who have flown together for a long time. With each flap
of our wings, years passed.

There's no looking back now, for time is a hill of
gravestones with many dead arms
breaking out of the earth to snatch you. Be careful,
friend, not to get caught,
for I will always love you, but the beginning is calling to
me even as I see the end
in the distance, and how could I refuse the gift of being
born?

NOT LISTENING TO YOU

Laurie Reiche

Poetry

Sometimes
when you talk
and it looks as if I'm listening,
I'm not
for I've slipped inside of you,
I'm drifting
on the clouds behind your eyes,
I'm rowing on the boat
of your soul,
but I'm also roped to your heart,
and it tells me to pay attention
a little bit
because the words you speak
are just as true
as the deepest part of you
that I belong to like an angel
to her ward,
so I come back,
I step off
that gently rocking boat
of the core of you,
and I try really hard to listen,
to stay in the real
moment,
be good,
and pay attention.
So I do.
I sort of listen to you,
though I'd much rather be in that heaven
on the other side of your eyes.

DADDY'S SHOES

Rosalia Scalia

Fiction

The shoes — covered by a light layer of dust — must have sat in neat rows arranged on the shelves in the overflow closet for the last few years. He must have been too sick in the recent years to clean and polish them, as was his habit. Some of the shoes, perhaps the ones he'd worn most recently, shimmered with a sheen from a distant polishing, despite the dust. Shoes with tassels decorating the toe caps, with buckles, no longer shiny silver and glittery gold, some squared-toed, others with a rounded point; all bore the names of Italian designers — Gucci, Balenciaga, Dolce & Gabbana — and other names, unrecognizable as designers but definitely Italian, older, ordinary shoes, outdated pairs he must have bought during his few trips back home to see his parents and siblings. He must have never tossed out or given away a single pair, and he must have rotated wearing them so that they all appeared wearable. Organized by color — browns with browns, blacks with blacks, tans with tans, whites with whites — some pairs appeared worn with uneven heel tops, creased leather throats, and worn tongues, while others looked nearly new. A few never-worn pairs still retained price tags showing prices marked down several times from sales. Several pair of sneakers lined the opposite shelf; their worn toe caps faced forward like soldiers, untied shoestrings loose in their eyelets, frayed here and there. He must have attached the electric revolving belt holder on the wall near the light switch so that he could easily match a belt to the shoes he would wear. He touched them all, placing them neatly in color-

coordinated rows on shelves he built himself. He would not have included his work boots and shoes, which he kept in the basement. He must have been proud of the sheer abundance of these shoes after having told stories of an impoverished childhood with only one pair to his name to wear at any given time, whether they fit or not. He must have worked hard to never be without a pair of shoes. He once spoke of how, as a teenager, he accidentally dropped one of his shoes into one of the harbors of his birth city on an island and was forced to dive into the water to rescue it, not for fear of the beating he'd get at home for having lost a shoe, but from the terror of having no shoes to wear to school.

I have come to pack his clothes, to help my mother sort through his garments, when I came across the closet chock full of shoes on the third floor, where she couldn't go because of a steep staircase. He must have been proud of this shoe closet, concrete evidence that he would never again be without a pair of shoes. He must have polished them all methodically, even after he stopped going to places where he could wear them and found himself restricted to running shoes, sandals, and slippers, housebound footwear after a series of ischemic strokes forced him to stop driving. In the basement, I retrieve black contractor garbage bags and sprint up three flights of stairs with them. I'll drop the shoes into the bags to be passed along to the non-profit for homeless veterans, down-on-their-luck men who once cleaned, polished, and buffed boots as part of their military lives, men who knew how to coax these Italian beauties back to their previous luster, a dead man's shoes to become useful for other men's unshorn feet. I stand in his shoe closet marveling at the collection of stylish footwear, seemingly forgotten

during his battle with strokes that killed his brain centimeter by centimeter and the dementia they bought. The shoes looked lonely and abandoned under the thin film of dust, remnants of a life now passed. He must have understood that the strokes would steal his memory by degrees, a gradual erasing of his personality, his pride, his power of basic choice as to what shoes to wear each day and why not wear stylish dress shoes under jeans or pajamas. I considered carefully dusting them before dropping them into the black garbage bags but chose not to. Instead I peered into each shoe, searched for gems hidden inside, as he was known for hiding things in unusual places, before placing them on the floor and gingerly stepping into his treasured footgear as I once did as a small child, and now, even as an adult, his shoes remain too big.

THE END

Survival Guide
Chelsea Hansen
Poetry

Listen to your own voice sometime.
When you are able to create that hum,
the vibration and release,
be there for yourself and hear it.
Memorize your own frequencies
as if you are learning to read Braille:
your hands cupped over your heart
may remember the beats your ears cannot hear.

Be there for yourself.
If your body cries out for sleep
sleep.
If at the thought of small conversation you recoil,
avoid it —
shut the blinds — turn the key in the lock —
allow the anxieties to have their say.
And when they are again silent
fill the remaining spaces, pages yourself.

Speak the words you must. Give yourself permission
to accept the advice you would give yourself
if you knew how to ask the questions.
Ask whether you are happy
and if the answer is hidden in another's arms
remain there, unashamed, until the hurt has passed.

Pause. Breathe. Sleep. Run away.
Try. Smile. Laugh even.
Only resist the urge to end.
You will find your way back to sunshine when you need

it.

You are still needed and so stay —
linger long enough for the clock hands
to heal your blindness and dry your tears.

One more time you must make a mark,
something for them to see or smell or remember
when you, fragile, end.
Rather another mark on a prison wall
than for the end to come of your own accord.
What chains you carry are not immutably yours.

Fidelity

Chelsea Hansen

Poetry

Let me build you a fence,
pretty and small,
something to keep cows in pasture
or mark a property line —
nothing with barbs to prick
or warn away visitors.

Loaf at your ease here with me:
there is a gate to which we hold the key,
you and I, we walk along together
and ponder whether to pass through
or lean against the low lengths of wood
and watch the clouds progress through
a summer sunset.

Let me build you a fence and here,
let me show you how closely I can walk its border,
your hand in mine;
there may be wolves beyond
but here is where our heart is.

Bedfellows
Chelsea Hansen
Poetry

Trying to sleep with a poem in mind
is far less like going to bed with a lover
than going to bed with a rambunctious six-year-old.
You'd like to think that you can curl up next to a poem,
wrapped securely in its arms,
and fall asleep listening to its heartbeat.
You try to convince yourself that in the morning,
you'll study it from your comfortable place in bed
as it bustles around your space,
making you tea and kissing you good-morning;
that you'll lazily reach for your pen and notepad
and effortlessly write it all down,
a yawn lingering on your lips.

But a poem is not a lover. A poem is a child who,
just as you begin to fall asleep,
will burst into your room and climb into your bed.
You sleepily make room for it only to discover that
it is all sharp elbows, bony knees, and cold feet,
and poems don't behave.
A poem will jump on the bed, turn the light switch
on-off-on-off-on-off-on-off-on-off,
and shove terrible metaphors like colored Legos
up your nose, into your ears, down your nightshirt.
"Go to sleep," you implore,
"I'll write about you in the morning,
just come lie quietly next to me
and let me sleep awhile."
If you insist, the poem will finally
give up on keeping you awake.

But when, in the morning, you wake up to find
the bedsheets rumpled and empty,
don't be surprised that your little poem
has simply gotten up early once again
looking for someone's attention
and, finding you fast asleep,
has bounded off somewhere in the world
where it is likely finger-painting rich ideas
on the walls of someone else's bedroom.

NOW I SEE

Hillary Vaillancourt

Nonfiction

Growing up, I was overweight. My teeth were wickedly crooked. My cheeks were chipmunk puffy. I still struggle from time to time with my insecurities, especially with my self-consciousness over my voice.

I perpetually sound like I have a cold. Time and time again people I'm speaking to on the phone have told me to "get well," when I wasn't even sick. I will do just about anything to avoid phone conversations and leaving phone messages.

I didn't sing along to the car radio if my husband was along for the ride until we were nearly engaged. When singing hymns in church, I smile and move my lips but save my voice. Surely my contribution would only bring the congregation down.

I hear my teenage stepson confess similar insecurities. He calls himself "fatty." His latest girlfriend has broken up with him, and I've lost count of how many short-lived high-school relationships he's had.

"I'm just not good enough," he says.

"I wish you could see yourself through your dad's and my eyes," I tell him. "You are *more* than enough."

He shrugs, and I can tell he's still blinded by his own insecurities.

I know how he feels.

I have learned as an adult to have more confidence in myself than I did as a child and adolescent. Running helped me lose weight. Braces straightened my twisted teeth. And, my husband, to my surprise, declares that my cheeks are his favorite feature of mine.

I know he's serious, but sometimes I have a hard time believing him. I analyze my face in our bathroom mirror. If I wear my hair down and smile wide pushing my chin and jawline out, I can narrow my cheeks just enough to be satisfied with my reflection. I stop smiling and manipulating my face to see it for what it naturally is. I wonder what my husband sees, what I'm missing.

Last night, my five-month-old son, Michael, was overtired. He was rocking in his ExerSaucer cooing and cooing then suddenly whimpering and fussing. I needed to finish pumping milk for him and couldn't quite pick him up when he wanted me. Instead, without thinking, I began to shyly sing to him.

Amazing grace — how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me —

His little eyebrows arched. He stopped wiggling.

I once was lost but now I'm found —

His little pouty lips broke into a smile. The more I sang, the bigger his smile spread across his darling face.

My voice, the voice I was ashamed of, the voice so unappealing to me, was the voice that soothed my baby boy.

I finished pumping and took Michael in my arms. He leaned back, put his bitty baby hand on my Cabbage-Patch-Kid cheek and studied my face.

I sang more confidently.

I was blind, but now I see.

He leaned into me kissing my big cheek. Now I see, indeed.

Vespers

Christine Brooks

Poetry

On the rare warm, quiet night
That comes along when spring is ready to push us
forward, but
Summer is not quite ready to catch us — he prays.

On these nights, windows open
Under the covers I can hear him.

In the time just before the dark of night shrouds dusk
completely, the robins and the
Sparrows chirp their night time lullabies.
They sing their soulful songs knowing that soon he will
be there, watching, guiding, and
standing guard over their homes of sticks and scraps.

Dishes clank just outside my window as some neighbors
are just finishing dinner, and
lights dim to the other side as the tired tuck in early and
hope for a restful night listening
to the crickets as they begin their own symphony of
chirps.

Over the hum of the box fan, and the wind in the giant
American Yellowwood tree
outside my window, he prays.

From his moon porch, the man prays every night,
For another night

That the birds will sing and the crickets will chirp, and
the tired get rest
Tonight, like all nights, the man in the moon can only
watch, and pray and hope that
We all awake to peace.

THE MOTH AND THE WHALE

Ann Wuehler

Drama

Characters:

Moth, a successful assassin, facing execution. Thirties.

Two Guards, female, faces covered.

Setting: An open field, at night. Light comes from the flashlights held by the guards. Time is now.

(Moth stands DC holding a shovel. She wears sweats, her ankles shackled. One of the masked guards holds a flashlight on Moth.)

MOTH

Are they recording this?

(One of the guards cocks a gun. Moth smiles out, leans on the shovel.)

So that's a yes.

(Gives the biggest laugh she can muster.)

This is my America. I made a crossbow out of knitting needles and tampons and fetus bones. At an open air We Love You, Dear Leader event, I assassinated the Whale. My name is Moth. I'm not digging. Come on. That's just corny. We're not even in Kansas! Oh come on, girls, that was funny. All that winning and you can't laugh at the loser?

(Moth looks over her shoulder at the two guards. Then shuffles forward a bit.)

Statues of me will go up. Moth Day, maybe even Moth Month. I'll be dead, but you can't erase what I did. The Whale ain't comin' back from this one, ladies! And where's my trial? Why keep me alive at all? Oh yeah,

the Fox We Wuv Him Bigly All Day and All Night will be showing...

GUARD 1

Keep talking, snowflake.

GUARD 2

People have moved on to a raccoon climbing up a building. While they grieve a beloved leader's tragic passing. You've made him a saint. Thank you.

MOTH

Is this being recorded?

GUARD 1

We have our orders.

GUARD 2

We have our orders.

MOTH

Well, yeah. Or we wouldn't be here doing this ridiculous thing. Execution at midnight. It could be one of those books you read at the beach. If we still had beaches. I wanted this to be touching and fiery. It's just silly. All of this, so silly. The Whale had to go. I'm not sorry. I'm not going to beg. I'm probably gonna cry a bit. I was told to ask God for forgiveness. Fuck that.

GUARD 2

Be a lady, please. Watch the language.

MOTH

I don't want conspiracies about me. I acted alone. I used a crossbow I bought at Whale-Mart. Tee hee! I saved for three years to buy it. I had to eat and pay rent. I wasn't drunk or high. I'm not Antifa or a Free America Now sort or anything like that. I never marched. They got shot at. I'm a bit of a coward, too. I never signed a petition, they hunt you down. I never did the angry face emoji under the happy news of Dear Leader posts. That's just asking for trouble. I kept out of it until I couldn't. I juggled the best way to get close enough to get a shot. It's been fifteen years since the last election. There was security work, coal mine because the Whale liked to visit them and take pictures of himself, cleaning up toxic sludge, because he liked to pose with the people in their gear. The Whale liked rallies where people cheered no matter what he said. Rallies are gun-free, weapons get taken, metal detectors. Security seemed my best bet. Get to know everyone. Routines. Get friendly, bring cookies to work. I had to starve to make a bunch of cookies, but the good will created, priceless. I talked about the weather. I studied the events scheduled, waiting, waiting. Praise the Whale takes two hours a day of our job. Two hours. I timed it once. I got in trouble. A scolding. You enjoy this, I was told. We're great again, I was told.

(Stops. Attempts to sit. It takes a bit. The two guards have a brief silent argument, gesturing, but they do nothing to stop Moth sitting.)

My feet hurt. So! I made sure I was on the roster for that rally. And it all worked out. I've never really planned anything this big before. I'm a bit proud. I followed through for once. I saw a problem, came up with a plan, followed that plan and here we are! I am the American dream come to life!

(Holds out her arms. Laughs. The guards make disgusted sounds.)

People are rioting now. I did that. I set that off. I can hear them. The military never seems to get anything upgraded, all that money seems to go elsewhere, into pockets, my my. Ancient tanks still work, right? Isn't there footage of you guys running over a tent city? Squishing us peasants like ants? It looped for an hour before it got taken down, with Bible verses to throw at us grubby fuckers. Romans 13. As if people read anymore. We've gone back in time. It's not the fun, family-friendly wonderfulness that was promised. How can you two...

(Stops. Head down for a bit. The guards impatient to get this over with.)

I got the code name the Whale from this secret blog. It was all in code but you knew who they were talking about. Who will save us from the ancient Whale that shits on us all? The language used was the real issue, of course. The bad words, the lack of tolerance from those who claimed to be so tolerant, oh yes. We must be polite and use gentle words when describing monsters. The monsters get hurt feelings and have to shoot us otherwise.

(Guard 1 steps up behind Moth, gun at back of her head. Moth looks out, being as brave as she can be.)

MOTH

I really want an enchilada. And to hear that sound of that bolt sliding into his head once more. And how silent he finally went. How silent. Amen.

(She smiles. The flashlights go off, a shot rings out.)

END

Natural Exorcism

Shawn Anto

Nonfiction

For M

*“The wilderness is new to you, Master let me lead
you”*

— *Emily Dickinson*

I told him I was tired of it. I told him his negativity required silence. I told him I've had enough. How close was I? Close to truth — so close, separated in my abdomen by what I couldn't give him and what I could. I thought each truth was a slippery slope. And what about what my parents thought about my new path? And what about what my friends thought about him? My new friend always more trouble than he should be. I was trying to help him on his journey, but I kept getting toxicity. What does it mean to hold on, what truth settled in the pit of my mind? I don't want to give up but sometimes he made it so hard to be his friend.

A few days before he left from California, we had been fighting. The same fight for months. He loved me. Too much. My culture, my old-fashioned ideals were important to me. I wanted to marry someone I loved. I hoped she would be understanding. My parents wanted me to live the traditional way and marry an Indian girl, but I am trying to be my own person. I'm trying desperately to keep some form of me intact.

A few days before he left from California, M was chaotic more so than he had ever been. What was his end goal? I wasn't disappearing like he thought. I wasn't addressing his poison because I wanted to breathe.

So now I've been hiking more, biking more, trying to find some calm in the chaos, trying to find some happiness that he thinks he's sucking away. The time that I've known him have been the most chaotic, but important moments. I've learned more than I used to know. I want this demon in my throat to leave. This old me and the new me to merge. I'm trying to convene with nature and relax my old self, form something new. I don't want to forsake my culture. But Kerala is so far behind me and I'm reinventing myself. I have a little mantra when I think of selfishness or my friend or anything that love was, or hate was or the filter in between:

Find my scent in wilderness

Recollect everything you love about me

Build a pyre.

and so, it feels like we are. Building old memories, burning them for new ones. The past smoke in the lungs. The past swarming my dreams, swarming old thoughts I'm trying to recover from. There is so much history, what do we do with gold and disaster? What do we do with time and how we spread it evenly toward healing.

and I repeat. I repeat. Who Am I? Who are You?

Find my scent in wilderness

Bleed straight through me

Build a pyre, flame gathering

Each demon dance underneath thin-skin.

I went out to Yosemite a few days ago. I tried to purify the darkness. I tried to remember what kept me around. The choice to be here, learn and grow, despite the flames and chaos. I never leave anyone, but sometimes the stickiness of pain lingers, and I think about disappearing. I'm not immune to decisive change.

*and bleed straight through me, slowly
 Drain each unholy thought with light
 Each demon dance underneath brown skin
 Grasp the rosary around my neck — breathe.*

I don't want to go back to me old self — alone. But sometimes that's all I've known. It's what I'm best at. Disappearing. Cutting off any who want to get close. I blame my mother. I blame myself. I cannot blame anyone else, but time and never learning how to trust. Or trusting someone and them cutting our threads. People say to man-up, or do this or do that, could I be gay for not finding love so quickly, but I am just waiting for honesty. I'm waiting. Nothing wrong with my demons being destroyed before jumping into the heart. I can wait there is no expiration date to this feeling.

*Drain each unholy thought with love
 Forget each worry, consume, I go running — forget
 Grasp the rosary around my neck — do not hate
 What it meant to feel possessed.*

and what about change. I tell M every day to try. Please try. Try to find where we were. Learn to love me as your friend and not as your lover. We cannot do that. I am myself. Love me for that. He is trying, but only time fills in the gaps. What do we do with this fragility? Piece it together, watch every fury crumble.

*Forget each worry, consume, I go running —
 remember*

*Recollect everything you love about me each prayer
 stained*

*and what it meant to feel possessed
 How close am I to purity, close to selflessness?*

And I'm still learning to adjust to the United States. Learning to adjust to California. Learning to be open to all the newness around me. Learning to construct a new

being out of what I was used to. Let the demons die. Sprinkle holy water over my flesh and pray for something different. M doesn't believe in God, but I pray for him too. M has been through worse than I could imagine and that is why I stick around and I think that's what faith is about: having the brevity/bravery to relinquish archaic ideas of being "better" learning to embrace your own form of it. The most natural exorcism is with hope and light and plenty of real understanding and love. You can burn all the evil away, just like that.

we're half way there

Scott Laudati

Poetry

they promised me it was over
but it never ended
it just got worse.
and the shifts went longer
and the aliens flew away
and the u-boats swam home
and nothing good ever happened.
the chickens got fat
and america dropped the blinds on the nightmare
plaguing everyone who never made it off
the sacred rock,
the one all great greats sailed here from
when the sun still set
on another empire.
and the lucky ones learned
you don't look back
when it's all on the line,
you buy a happy meal
and drive to death
in a 99' toyota camry
while singing the chorus of
livin on a prayer

my bluest valentine

Scott Laudati

Poetry

don't bake me a birthday cake
this year.
let's go to wawa and
buy a carton
of our old cigarettes
and drive to the poconos,
to the mini golf
where we made dirty bets
around the windmill
and both of us got a rash
that night from the
heart-shaped hot tub.
or we can go back
to your parents' basement
with the wood paneled walls
and the one cold night
we laid under the heater
and you whispered,
"pretend it's aspen."
let's get married this time
like we swore we would at 17
when all we wanted
was to do drugs and fall in love
and we were still young enough
to be good at both.

The Chain
Jake Bailey
Poetry

In the fog, I wear a pendant to ward
off the chain-rattling shackles of gut-sick
ghosts wandering the halls. Losing
my grip, I reach out for the tiny, silver medallion,
caressing its edges and asking for deliverance
from the rust-dyed waters of myself.

They say it'll lift when the shine takes hold,
when penumbra solidify in slack-jawed
muzzles munching the inconsumable.
They say it'll lift when the pills run their course,
when blue-green cylinders stitch
fraying fabric back into place.

I'm looking for a bus stop
that's scratched out on the map,
one that lets off on the wrong side
of a one-way street, one
that isn't haunted by glass-domed memories
of greenhouses filled
with lilac, honeysuckle, and rose.

Let me know when you find the gate,
find the lock-picked door,
find the locus of stringing together the right words
to make it from here to there,
to conjure the spell binding self to frame,
to return return return
to the bottom of the river
so the churning waters can't touch

the tips of your outstretched fingers.

Resurrection
Daniel de Culla
Art



First Kiss

Eric Lochridge

Poetry

Do you remember our first kiss?
I do not. I remember floods of them all at once
with you, those nights
on my parents' couch, on top of the sheets in my bed,
your bed.
But not the very first.
Hours and hours of lying beside you,
sleeping, not sleeping. Watching you sleep.
But the first contact of our lips eludes me
like a promise I meant to keep.

Memory

Eric Lochridge

Poetry

I was in a lovely garden.
Canopy of trees. Mossy
statues and stone columns
wrapped in climbing vines.
The air's humid embrace.
On my knees in the grass
praying for something
I could never receive.
My hands clutching dirt.
Planting tears like seeds.
On my knees in the shade
of the weeping trees
in the lovely garden.
No. That's wrong.
It was a cemetery.

Junior High
Eric Lochridge
Poetry

the one day of his life
a boy should not cry
cried

his new mask slipped,
puddled on the floor
at his feet

his new classmates
suggested new names

crybaby
superfem
fag

his father said
sensitive kid

your greatest burden
is your greatest gift

Grace
Kevin White
Fiction

"I'm pregnant!" Aunt Leslie said, beaming, standing up at the table, banging her knee as she rose.

"No you're not, God, shut up," her son Jason said.

"Don't talk to her like that," Mom said.

"You guhys don't understand," Leslie said.

"Drunky McDrunk," Jason said.

Dad laughed.

"I have a baby," Leslie said, tearing up.

"Leslie, sit down." Mom.

"In my living womb. Jesus Christ has blessed it."

"And the wine evidently," Dad muttered. Mom shot him a look. Jason wolfs down a crescent roll. I stare at my hands.

"My baby," Leslie sobbed, sloshing wine on her plate.

"Not on the china," Jason said.

Dad glances at his watch. Mom is ready to cry. Al, Leslie's husband, comes back from the toilet. He sees his wife.

"That's not my baby," he said, and then adds: "And who's Jesus?"

Jason laughs and spits crumbs.

"Leslie, sit down, please," Mom said.

"So we can eat," Dad said.

Leslie and Al sit. I folded my hands. Mom wants me to be comfortable because I'm home for the first time in months and Leslie is messing it up. Mom goes to say something but is interrupted.

"Our baby," Leslie said, looking at Al, and Al pats her shoulder.

"Red flag," Jason said.

Dad clears his throat.

Mom begins. "Let's all be thankful please that Nate is home from..." She won't say it because she's being sweet but Jason says it of course.

"Rehab."

I nod slowly.

Leslie reaches for more wine. No one stops here. Mom wants to make some speech so I stand with my iced tea and I say, "Hallelujah and little fishes."

Al laughs and Mom scoffs.

"Nathan," Dad said.

I nod. Not good enough. "Thank you all for the support," I said and sat down.

"So, Nate," Leslie said, "Did you have to sit in a padded room?"

Mom grimaces. Dad glances at his watch.

"Next to the drunk," I said.

Jason drum rolls.

"Everyone," Mom said. She's so upset. Her daydream is beginning to unravel. Leslie is unfazed. Al shoots me a look. He is sorry. I wave it off.

"Turkey," I said.

And so Dad carves and there's no noise except for silverware and things being destroyed.

"Who wants to butter me a roll?" Al said.

"Not me," Leslie said. "You insulted our buh-by."

"Jesus forgives," Dad said.

"This turkey is great," I said.

"This turkey is dry," Jason said.

"All of you, PLEASE," Mom said. I wish this day was going better for her but she had to know that all of us in one room was a bad idea.

"I will just never understand you, Allem," Leslie said, putting down her fork. "I just can't understand why you

won't accept the fact that my womb is currently inhabited."

"Hide the wine," Dad whispered to me. I get up and begin to move it. Mom does not stop me so I guess she finally had enough. No more drinking at family functions, I guess. I thought I would have set the tone but it seems that Leslie has surpassed me. It's nice to see a new champion.

"Leslie," Al starts.

"So, Al," Mom said, "How's the fishing line business?"

"It's in knots," Jason said.

Dad snorts.

I put the extra bottle of wine into the garbage can. I look outside for a while, hearing muffled voices, just bouncing around. I'm suddenly exhausted.

"Come on, Leslie, that's enough," I hear Dad say in his authoritative voice.

"I would have to agree, Mom. Just can it, okay?" Jason.

I shuffle back into the dining room but Mom strides past me, blotting her eyes with a silk napkin. I watch as she fumbles in the kitchen for a bit to make noise, only to look up at me seconds later. "Where's the wine?"

"In the garbage can," I said.

"THIS IS ABOUT THE BIBLE," Leslie shouted.

Mom nods and fishes it out. "I want a sip."

So much for that new rule. I walk back in and sit down. Jason shoots me a look as if to say, you should have stayed right where you were at, dude. I just shrug.

"Leslie, enough already, for God's sake," Al said.

"You're right, this is for God's sake," Leslie sobbed.

I look back at Mom and she's putting the wine back in the garbage can. I've finally had enough of this crap.

I stand up and I roll up my sleeves and I lay my arms down on the table. I show them all my needle marks, the ruined skin, what I worked so hard for. I let them stare in silence for a while. I roll my sleeves back down, looking at Leslie as she looks at me with red eyes, as if she's suddenly lost her tongue somewhere in her fat unhealthy body. Dad pats me very oddly on the shoulder and I accept it. I don't think he was prepared to do that. I'm expecting a speech from someone, from any of them, but no one says anything. Not even the mother of the son of Jesus.

Lullaby for Highway 1

Erin Vance

Poetry

Father, the sea is calling you.
Like an unhappy child,
it screams
and spits at you,
but now you are too old for the tempest
too used to the prairies and the dust
the unrelenting sun
Father, the sea is calling you
but you mustn't listen.
She is angry, an ocean of broken glass beckons,
muddied.
Father, the sea is calling you
but you are already home.

If I Tell You It's there Would You Find It?

Devon Ortega

Poetry

You can unlock the secrets, the key
Is inside and I split from my sternum
Like my ribs divorcing. Spilling
Forth glistening-wet, apple-red droplets—
Pulsating globules between bloody teeth.

Would you root to your elbows and weigh
Every organ, tear open the kidneys
To see what's within? Could you
Evacuate stomach, intestines, and bladder,
Inspect all the contents, trying to win?
Or is it easier to take the bailing thread, sew me
Back up the best that one can, ignoring
The viscera aching the stitches you pierced
In my flesh with your own shaking hand.

I'd rather be open, exposed
To the elements; welcoming flora
And fauna to grow.
To eat from my contents, to satiate
Something. Or grow
From the hollow place
Love used to go.

On Cutting Forever Short

Devon Ortega

Poetry

I did not fully consider
What the promise meant
When I swore my fealty,
Promised a forever
I didn't know I had. All

For love that was like taking
A breath from a fresh, electric-cold
Norwegian stream. Or like floating
On the pregnant, green waters
Of a still, mossy bog.

Sinking to the bottom
Of a marsh. Being enveloped
In an silted womb, cattails nodding
You down to the floor
Where you stay, secure.
Breathless, expanding back

Out to the universe
Until you are absolutely
Nothing and everything
All at once.

Ex-boyfriend
Devon Ortega
Poetry

He bought me
The giant bear
I told him
I that I definitely
Wanted
And it made
Me realize
I never meant
Anything I said.

Selective Amnesia

Devon Ortega

Poetry

We are the opposite of what we used to be
Lovers turned loathers, and everything we were
Changed into something that I don't recognize.
I think there were kisses, or was it we threw stones
Into a river, watching them reach the bottom?
The water was deeper than we anticipated,
There wasn't a way to retrieve them without getting
Our sleeves wet so we just let them sit and gather
The silt that collected, the current never stopping
To consider the rocks might be something that we
wanted.

Embraces we had are now nothing but scratches
From branches that caught on our naked arms and faces
As we ran from each other, laughing in the garland
Of tinsel-gray moonlight draping through the forest;
The sound that the trees made sounded like a clatter
Of bones being rattled in an empty seed bag
As they tried to restrain us, but we were running too
fast
To ever stop going, despite how much we bled.

I try to recall how we used these sharpened arrows
And it seems like they might be the way you used to
look
At my undressed body but now I use them only
To shoot at wild rabbits intruding in my garden
To munch at my harvest I'm growing for a winter
That's predicted to be the longest one on record.

I've found some belongings in boxes in my attic
That still smell like you, that windy/fleshy mixture
That used to enchant me whenever I would smell it
But now all I smell is spoiled Ralph Lauren Romance.

The pictures we hung in our first house together
Are memento mori—photos of long-dead strangers.

Our vows that we made are now words never spoken.

A Moment Among Megabits of Data

Mark William Jackson

Poetry

I took a photo of you with my phone,
caught a particular moment,
but the photo fell into the binary abyss,
lost in the digital fray of ordinary days,
of smart phone functionality –
among megabits of data;
emails & txt messages;
facebook updates & twitter tweets;
among MP3 music; &
apps to access my bank accounts.

Months later while sitting in a doctor's waiting room,
not wanting to watch daytime TV
or read old gossip magazines,
I swipe through my phone,
thumbing my way back through time,
and there you are,
in that moment,
and I wish I could remember
what I did
that made you smile
so much.

The Walls

Mark William Jackson

Poetry

We wiped down the walls to remove the tobacco
shadows
from all the cigarettes you smoked after dinner
when we'd sit around and you'd tell us your stories.

We filled in the holes and removed
any impressions of the pictures you'd hung;
the photos of our school days, holidays, birthdays,
the portraits of innocent times,
ignorant of mortality.

A coat of paint, a neutral beige,
now muffles all the whispers of the life we had,
back when you'd tuck us in at night
and tell us you loved us.

After the sale we'll divide the proceeds
according to your will
and go on with our own lives,
in our own separate houses.

Time Stood Still

Nicholas Olson

Fiction

Sitting in the back of the bus with a dollar store notebook on my lap, sketching and thinking about the past. October droplets stain my public transit window, turning the grime to a vertical stream as it passes and changes the passing headlights into alien stars — nothing more than ways to mark my way as I move along.

The headlights become fireflies in fading light, the summer retreating to its chrysalis, nights getting colder and rain and wind starting to claim the treehouse we made out in the woods, not in the trees but among them, sitting on the ground and made out of repurposed wooden fences, branches, and a blue tarp we liberated from a neighbor's backyard. More branches plotted out the yard around the house, where we'd plant our garden once we had enough money for seeds. We never had enough money.

Playing backlit portable games underneath the blue tarp sky we made, taking our first sips of alcohol — vodka stolen from parental bottles and transferred to empty Coke cans, filling the bottles back up with water to disguise our theft. We were good.

You painted the tarp ceiling like it was the Sistine Chapel, counting sixteen candles and watching as you made a Frankenstein God touch the finger of a Super Mario Adam. You learned quickly that a little paint went a long way when some of it dripped off of the tarp and into your hair. It speckled it like you were a painted galaxy, took days to fully wash out.

You swiped a pack of cigarettes from the corner store when the clerk wasn't looking, and we only got a cigarette in before we tossed them out, laughing and coughing. Your throw landed them in the creek, and I started like I was going to fish them out, but you told me it was okay. We were going to be enablers of fish addiction. We started a fire.

My pen is tracing lines I don't know the endpoints of before I make them. It's only when I hold it out in front of me that I can see the general shape, can make out what it is that I'm sketching.

You said we were going to get married someday, that you'd have my babies. We hadn't even kissed yet. I laughed, sputtered out an, "Is that so?" Flames played in your eyes. You said, "mmmhmm."

Midterms and finals and college searches. But you wouldn't make it that far.

One day you were here, and the next you weren't. Recited words and lit candles and crying eyes and offers of consolation. Days and nights of empty wandering in my room, thoughts moving from what I could've noticed to what I should've done. Could've and should've. Weeks melting like wax from a candled finger in reverse, working up the energy to take a shower, change my clothes, go to the corner store we used to haunt so I could put some food in my stomach, no matter how unhealthy it was.

Taking walks through the woods alone, thinking I saw you walking beside me, like a phantom limb you were, always attached to me. I kept walking.

My stop is coming up, but I have to finish this sketch first. It needs to have an ending.

One night long after it happened, I walked back out to our tree house. The tarp had sagged from the

season's rain, branches bent, but it was still standing. I crawled underneath and sat in there, the moonlight becoming something different fed through the water-blue of the tarp, something new. You were almost there beside me.

We've already passed my stop, but that's fine. The drawing is done. It's us sitting under the tarp together, the glow of a portable screen on my face as you watch with your head on my shoulder, in a place we both know, back when time stood still.

LIGHTHOUSE KEEPER

Carla McGill

Poetry

mainly you need a guide
think of lighthouses
their lenses and lamps
to help voyagers
who may not know
hazardous pathways
from truer ones

prayers are in the wind
like birds like leaves
or they are spinning
in dark matter after
dazzling comets blaze through

you will also need
a measure of enthusiasm
that through mists and breakers
you will see the lone
lighthouse keeper
his book on the table before him
who has examined the great expanse
the vacillating corridors
you can enter without intention
abruptly
where some of your treasure
can be toppled
where you can still be shaken
and dazed

later you can survey

what is left
perhaps finding yourself more
agile and anticipating
relations a new sublime
series of days

GOING TO JUPITER

Carla McGill

Poetry

Through bands, I am going.
Why am I surprised
that there is no real surface?
Just swirls of chaotic clouds.
The center may be lacking;
my intuition fails.

I have been crying. Memories
of my little dog stream around
my thoughts like Saturn's rings.
Other memories of lost ones follow.

I am closer to the wild
red storm, trying to avoid it.
Eventually, I am pulled in,
tossed out. It was worse than I expected.

Now I see the string of pearls,
the whirling gases,
storms lined up.

The wildest red spot, storms
and pearls, storm jewels, then
the complicated center of things.

Now, though, on my way back,
I see that the winds
have cleansed me, blown away
redundancy, the bright yellow
of distress, the dust

of millions of cosmological moments.

PEARLS

Carla McGill

Poetry

the strand at home
in the drawer
a gift on a birthday

my dearest aunts
their distinctive moments
I the witness

several days beside
waves emerging from blue
expanse and that sapphire horizon

the moving storms on Jupiter
deceptive in a photo
unbridled as the giant red spot
I can almost see from Earth

THREE TELESCOPE VIEWS

Carla McGill

Poetry

1

This infrared camera shows me
the earliest formations of things.

I see that the initial layer
is deficient, holes here and there,

or perhaps one black hole
with clusters all around.

2

The infrared spectrograph shows me
the light spectrum, the chemical

side of things. It is as I suspected.
Indistinct, misty, tumultuous.

Could love encompass
this fiery and volatile mass?

3

The next instrument, a mystery,
allows me to see what forms in the distance.

I am not sure it is anything good.
More of the same chaos?

Ever hopeful, I see that light seems free
to roam. A mutinous, riotous light.

THAT MORNING

Carla McGill

Poetry

It was clear that skies were darkening,
at least the clouds were forming in our thoughts,
the rains from many storms gathering
as we went to the only right place
where we knew that he would not recover,
this little dog of ours, who had just a few hours left.
He was conscious only of his pain and of the vet,
the place he had been more often lately.
Later, when we came home, we avoided
his chair, bowl, but we could not avoid coming
in through the back door, where he always greeted us.
By the next rain, we still expected him to be there.
This morning, I dreamed of our other dog,
and the day is cloudless, sun streaking down
like blades, like flashes of heaven.

Untitled 3
Simon Perchik
Poetry

You can hear the dust and grieving
— it's a warm rag, torn off
while still a sleeve — even here

is reaching out as the nearness
this table found for a chair already frail
from waiting where two should be

— you sift the Earth for her
and all these years with the same dress
slowly gathering your fingers

as a heaviness that is not a sky
pressing them against the dead wood
the way every spell is handed

with a wave side to side
then the wind that covers her
to share a long, long love.

I Bet 'Bogat' Means Something Naughty

David Atkinson

Fiction

There are a lot of inaccuracies in the Bible. For example, everyone is always talking about Noah's ark and the flood that covered the Earth. It didn't happen that way at all though.

Seriously, God sent air, terrible winds, to purify the sinfulness that man had become. Water was nowhere near strong enough at that point, mankind requiring more than a simple wash to get clean. Everything, all the bad, was blasted away.

Except for Noah, since he built an airship; the dude built a zeppelin. He constructed the balloon from old sheep bladders, stitched together into a giant leather ball. The frame was balsa wood, tied to it with baling wire. Ever wondered how they fit two of every animal in such a tiny boat? That's because they didn't, just dangled them over the side. Tied to the balloon by the wires.

We also have to talk about that forty days and forty nights bit. Really, it was more like an hour and a half. God just wanted people to think about what they'd done... but then he remembered that he'd killed them all and went ahead and brought Noah down.

His bad.

The historian lights up

Ben Ray

Poetry

This smoke will go down in history.
A nod, a tilted head: some secret sign
and the game begins.
Into the pocket, out with the hallowed packet
held aloft in a showman's flourish:
my friend, in years to come
people will be singing about this, its wisps
passing into legend, they will tell in hushed tones
of the subtle way your fingers danced,
 spooling out the rolling paper
 gently scattering flecks of tobacco
 the satisfying slot of the filter.
Know this: the firelight will flicker in the eyes of
storytellers
as though reliving that first, virgin flick of the lighter.
Up to the lips now, breathe in, slow, slow...
that first draw is the best, always, you say
the devil's divine blend tongue-wrapping around
loosening the mouth, the muscles, the mind
it has the taste of good conversation.
My friend, this smoke will go down in history
but for now, it is just us and we are here, together
so let me have a pull, will you?

Some doubts on your motives

Ben Ray

Poetry

After the murder of some six million
the bayonetting of the children, the bullet
in the base of the skull of the young man
after all of this was written down in books
and held in the minds of nations
and burnt onto the retinas of mankind
after all of this, when asked whether
he would choose a quiet, hidden existence
or instead re-tread the path he had taken
with the world's eyes on the bloodied footprints
Albert Speer chose the latter.

And, when you finally stand in front of yourself
hold out the hands, see the dust and bones inside –
from somewhere deep within these shattered objects
can't you bring yourself to admit
that you want to be more than just this?

Tongue tied¹
 Ben Ray
 Poetry

“Bonjour madame, pouvez-vous m’aider.”²

It is hard not to sound like a liar
 rolling these strange peaches³ out of my mouth –
 poetry doesn’t diminish their ring of inauthenticity
 their plain whitewash over delicate French reds
 and ringing of airport phrasebook lessons still green⁴.
 And I wish I could tell this girl looking at me over the
 counter⁵
 that I could her give anything other than broken
 apologies⁶
 and not be struck dumb, naked in my mother tongue⁷
 and cold northern nerves. Absurd⁸.

¹ A poem of regret and shame about my limited linguistics, for those whom I could not speak to

² Did I memorise this correctly?

³ A soft, round, [slightly furry](#) fruit with sweet [yellow](#) flesh and pinky-orange skin

⁴ সবুজ, luhlaza, লুফুস

⁵ How do you pronounce the name? Bolangery ?
 Boulongurie?

⁶ Desole, lo siento, przepaszam

⁷ Safe haven now redundant

⁸ According to a recent study, fewer than 12% of Britons can speak another language fluently

I would tell her this poem is a heartfelt regret⁹
that I can only sing in one key,
that I can only laugh in one colour
and that I cannot pull out my familiar voice box¹⁰
and splash my words on the walls of this unfamiliar city.

⁹ Sadness, repentance, disappointment

¹⁰ This monoglot mouth, this one reeded tongue

2018 Human Odyssey
Sankar Chatterjee
Fiction

Monsoon had arrived early this year. It rained incessantly throughout the entire day. As darkness of dusk approached, a few generator-powered lights would begin to illuminate the inside of a white tent, marked “Women’s Hospital”. The tent belonged to “Doctors without Borders”, an international medical-aid organization. This tent along with several others was erected by the same organization on the no-man’s-land between the borders of two neighboring countries in Far East Asia. A catastrophic humanitarian crisis had evolved in the region due to “ethnic cleansing” of the minority citizens by the majority ones in Myanmar, backed by the federal government in conjunction with powerful military. Over past few years, millions of fleeing refugees migrated to neighboring Bangladesh. The world took notice without enforcing any preventative measure. Thus, the bloodshed continued resulting in continuous flow of migration of the refugees.

This evening while crossing the border, pregnant refugee Ms. Laila Ali went into labor. She was carried into this tent-hospital and handed over to two volunteer pediatricians: Ms. Seema Desai, MD from India and Ms. Nafisa Begum, MD from Pakistan. Ironically, both their countries have been involved in continuous regional conflict since their independence from the colonial power more than three score years ago. Unfortunately for Ms. Ali, this was a difficult pregnancy, complicated by poverty and associated malnutrition, lack of proper pre-delivery healthcare,

and constant fear of being captured and annihilated. Both Drs. Desai and Begum comforted Ms. Ali, while beginning the preparation for the delivery of a baby with the limited amount of resources available to them.

At the same time, 400km high above earth's surface, astronauts Dr. Liz Cohen from US and Dr. Valentina Myaskova from Russia were orbiting the earth inside the International Space Station. Academically trained as biologists, both underwent rigorous astronaut training program to come aboard to carry on several biology experiments in space under zero gravity. The experiments were designed to gain knowledge for future human habitation in space. This day, the long painstaking experiment involved "in vitro fertilization" in space. Coincidentally, this was also the day when Ms. Louise Joy Brown in England would turn forty years old; she was the "first test tube baby" on earth.

The experiment took longer than expected due to the difficulty in doing experiments while floating under zero gravity. But from all indications, both scientists felt the experiment went as planned. Dr. Cohen began the process of deep-freezing the sample to bring it back to earth, while Dr. Myaskova raised the shutter of the window on her side of the space station. Both took a glance at the distant "blue planet". A mesmerizing scene of the sun rising over the Himalayan Mountains bringing a new morning to that part of the earth came to their view.

Down there at the same time, a new-born crying baby clinging to her mother's arms announced her arrival to the world. As the proud mother began to cry in joy, two exhausted doctors stood there silently, while enjoying this glorious moment.

The Tragedy of Gravity

John Mauer

Poetry

Oh, how we sip from each other's breath
Even on the coldest of days
Certainly this curtain of silence is suffocating enough
Must I fear happiness so severely
That I tap dance on these fragile landmines
We do this 'moonshine mash' and it has my head
spinning
Pontificating on how even if owls had knives
none of them would ever get backstabbed

I learned if you fall hard enough,
Your brain is dead before it notices that it hit the
ground
If you fall like we fall,
Like fall leaves fall, you pass right through the dirt
When I did this, the stars moistened their thumb and
index finger
Oust out the flames of their tired wicks
Then each cried a tear of hot wax
It fell so fast that it never hit the ground at all
Instead it crawls down the small of her back
But the brightest always desires to be detritus, why
fight this?

How devilish it is when heavens gates echo a gated
reverberation
It sounds a lot like,
'I've seen you before'
'But I'm happy to see you'
But I'm so focused on what might be behind me

I can't see what is right in-front of me
Instead I hear the snaking whispers of my past
reincarnations, all of them soothsayers
I hear one of them and she has your voice, she says she
met you and you looked like me
She told me a tragic tale
How you told her you wanted to meet at seven
And I thought you said meet at heaven
Right before we only saw each other in our own drained
expressions

Blood to Water

John Maurer

Poetry

Who else do I have to talk to but the blank page?
The lizard-spiders too quick on their trinity toes
Telling them my secrets because eventually I'll kill them
I never have too much confidence in a confidant
And I will contradict Socrates; I'll know it's wrong

But I shall do it anyways and my therapist
will tell me about her feelings and I'll feel relieved
The hell of Sisyphus is rolling the same stone ad
infinitem
My hell is being that stone, my soul stole the law of
gravity
Always going up, meaning, it will always come back
down

I am the only one there to catch me
A one-person trust fall is just hitting the ground
And trusting you will be able to get back up
You act like you would break your own mothers back
You are really that annoyed at the sidewalk cracks
But not your homeless twin brother sleeping on it
Like you prefer drinking blood to water

Contributor Bios

Shawn Anto

Shawn Anto is 23 years old from Bakersfield, California. He's originally from Kerala, India. He currently studies at Cal State Bakersfield looking to receive his B.A. in English & Theatre. His writing has been featured in Orpheus literary journal, Internet Void & Ink & Voices.

David Atkinson

David S. Atkinson is the author of books such as "Roses are Red, Violets are Stealing Loose Change from my Pockets While I Sleep," "Apocalypse All the Time," and the Nebraska book award winning "Not Quite so Stories." In response to a blog post, a police detective once asked him if he had actually been "beer-bonging Cutty Sark and freebasing airplane glue." He spends his time being one of the few people who fondly remember "Sport Billy."

Jake Bailey

Jake Bailey is a schizotypal confessionalist in Antioch University Los Angeles' MFA program and an associate editor of Lunch Ticket. He has forthcoming work in *Mohave He[art] Review*, *The Hellebore*, *Rhythm of the Bones: Dark Marrow*, *Neon Mariposa Magazine*, and *FlyPaper Magazine* and has been published in *catheXis Northwest Press*, *The Esthetic Apostle*, *The Laurel Review*, and *Prairie Light Review*. Jake lives in Chicago with his girlfriend and three dogs.

Christine Brooks

I am a graduate of Western New England University with my B.A. in Literature, and am currently attending

Bay Path University for my M.F.A. in Creative Nonfiction
(Graduating in 2019)

Devan Burton

I live in the Knoxville Tennessee area where I teach composition and literature at two local colleges. Along with being published in numerous literary magazines and journals such as Literary Orphans, Forth Magazine, ALM Magazine, Door is a Jar Lit Mag (Issue 7), and Seshat Literary Magazine, I also have publications available on Amazon: a chapbook "In Quiet Hours," and a play "A Patron of the Arts."

Sankar Chatterjee

Sankar Chatterjee possesses the passion for traveling worldwide to immerse in new cultures and customs to discover the forgotten history of the societies while attempting to find the common thread that connects the humanity as a whole for its continuity. His most recent essays appeared in Parentheses, Boston Accent, Foliate Oak, Wilderness House Literary Review, and Pamplemousse (in press) among others elsewhere.

Mirana Comstock

An award-winning multi-field creative, Mirana has won multiple Best of Fest screenwriting awards from international film festivals and has created national ad campaigns for such clients as Timberland, Seagram's and JBL. Her photographs are in the collections of the 9/11 Memorial Museum and the NY Historical Society and she exhibits frequently in New York and the Boston area. A Juilliard-trained musician, she is currently mixing new music as singer/songwriter/ keyboardist for alt dance duo Theory of Tides.

Daniel de Culla

Daniel de Culla is a writer, poet, and photographer. He's member of the Spanish Writers Association, Earthly Writers International Caucus, Poets of the World, (IA) International Authors, Surrealism Art, and others. Director of Gallo Tricolor Review, and Robespierre Review. He participated in many Festivals of Poetry, and Theater in Madrid, Burgos, Berlin, Minden, Hannover and Genève. He has exposed in many galleries from Madrid, Burgos, London, and Amsterdam. He is moving between North Hollywood, Madrid and Burgos.

Isabel Brome Gaddis

I earned my bachelor's degree in Earth and Planetary Sciences from MIT and worked as a geophysicist at Shell, then as a technical writer and copywriter at Microsoft. I studied playwriting at Freehold Theatre in Seattle, writing for television at UCLA, screenwriting with Corey Mandell, and creative writing with Jack Grapes. I also hold four certificates in embroidery and design from City and Guilds of London.

Chelsea Hansen

Chelsea Hansen is a freelance musician and English graduate residing in northern Colorado. In between creative projects and an 8-to-5 day job, she spends her free time walking river trails and marveling at the wide expanse of the plains.

Mark William Jackson

Mark William Jackson is a confessional derivative poet living a surreal existence inside a middle-aged man's body. Mark has difficulty differentiating between reality

and dream as the voices in his head keep telling him lies. Mark was born in Stoke-on-Trent, England, and now lives in Sydney, Australia, one day he hopes to become one person. Mark's work has appeared in various journals including; Best Australian Poems, Popshot, Going Down Swinging, Cordite, Rabbit Poetry Journal, Verity La and Tincture. His debut collection *The Frequency of God* was released in 2017 through Close-Up Books. <http://markwmjackson.com>

Sharon Kennedy-Nolle

A graduate of Vassar College, I hold an MFA and doctoral degree from the University of Iowa. In addition to attending the Sarah Lawrence Summer Writing Institute for several years, I was accepted to the Bread Loaf Conferences in both Middlebury and Sicily in 2016 as well as the Sewanee Writers' Conference this year. This year marks the fourth that I have been honored to be a scholarship participant at the Frost Place Summer Writing Program.

Scott Laudati

Scott Laudati lives in New York with his Chiweenie, Drake. He is the author of *Hawaiian Shirts In The Electric Chair* (Kuboa Press) and *Bone House* (Bone Machine, Inc.). His work has appeared in the *Columbia Journal*, *The Stockholm Review*, and many others. Visit him on instagram @scottlaudati

Amy LeBlanc

Amy LeBlanc holds a BA (Hons) in English Literature and creative writing from the University of Calgary. She is currently non-fiction editor at *filling Station* magazine. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Room*,

Prairie Fire, Contemporary Verse 2, Geez, and EVENT among others. Amy won the 2018 BrainStorm Poetry Contest for her poem 'Swell'. She is the author of two chapbooks, most recently "Ladybird, Ladybird" published with Anstruther Press in August 2018. She will be attending an Emerging Writers Intensive at the Banff Centre for the Arts in October 2018.

Eric Lochridge

I write poetry in the rain in the Pacific Northwest. I run long distances in the rain in the Pacific Northwest. I brew beer in my basement while it rains in the Pacific Northwest. On the days it's not raining in the Pacific Northwest, I hardly know what to do with myself.

John Maurer

John Maurer is a 23-year-old writer from Pittsburgh that writes fiction, poetry, and everything in-between, but his work always strives to portray that what is true is beautiful. He has been previously published in Claudius Speaks, The Bitchin' Kitsch, Thought Catalog, and more than twenty others. @JohnPMaurer (johnpmaurer.com)

Carla McGill

I earned my doctorate in English from the University of California, Riverside. My work has been published in A Clean Well-Lighted Place, The Atlanta Review, Shark Reef, Crack the Spine, Westview, Common Ground Review, Caveat Lector, Inland Empire Magazine, Carbon Culture Review, Vending Machine Press, Nebo: A Literary Journal, Schuylkill Valley Journal of the Arts, Streetlight Magazine, The Penmen Review, Cloudbank, Paragon Journal, Burningword, Poets' Espresso Review, The Alembic, and Broad River Review. My story,

“Thirteen Memories,” received an Honorable Mention in Glimmer Train’s MAR/APR 2016 Very Short Fiction Contest. I write poetry and fiction.

Nicholas Olson

Nicholas Olson is a writer from Chicago now living in North Carolina. He was a finalist for Glimmer Train’s 2016 Very Short Fiction Award, his work was included in Crack the Spine’s sixteenth print anthology, and he’s been published in SmokeLong Quarterly, Hobart, decomP, and other fine places. nicksfics.com.

Devon Ortega

Devon Ortega has kids — like, so many kids — but don't tell her she looks good for having so many kids because what kind of person says something like that?

Backhanded compliments are the worst. She has a phobia of multi-legged insects and holes and isn't especially fond of most birds. She knows leggings aren't for her but she wears them anyway because comfort is important when living in a place as weather-crazy as Columbus, Ohio. Go bucks.

Simon Perchik

My poetry has appeared in Partisan Review, The Nation, The New Yorker and elsewhere.

Ben Ray

I am a young poet from the borders of Wales, who has performed his work in supermarkets, on street corners, and from inside a Gruffalo suit. A favourite pastime to prompt poetry is to travel to an unknown city, borrow a bike, and get utterly lost. I've been known to scribble

rhymes on maps, newspapers in shops and, during one drunken night, other people.

Laurie Reiche

A writer, photographer, painter, and creative writing facilitator, I live part time in London, where I concentrate on photographing the city, particularly Virginia Woolf's Bloomsbury. I am the author of *The Dance of the Carbon-Atom* (Mellen Poetry Press, 1996) and have won first place in several contests, including the Riverrun Literary Publication of the University of Colorado Poetry Competition, the national Charlotte Newberger Poetry Prize sponsored by Lilith, and the Mendocino Coast Writers Conference Contest. I am also a member of the Community of Writers at Squaw Valley.

Katy Richardson

I am a graduate of Southern Oregon University with a BA in English and Creative Writing. My work was most recently featured in the *Columbia Poetry Review*.

Mark Antony Rossi

Mark Antony Rossi's poetry, criticism, fiction, creative nonfiction and photography have appeared in *The Antigonish Review*, *Anak Sastra*, *Bareback Magazine*, *Black Heart Review*, *Brain of Forgetting*, *Deep Water Literary Journal*, *Dirty Chai*, *Door Is A Jar*, *Enclave*, *Expound*, *Farther Stars Than*, *Flash Fiction*, *Gravel*, *Indian Periodical*, *Japanophile*, *Journal of Microliterature*, *Kulchur Creative Journal*, *Mad Swirl*, *On The Rusk*, *Purple Patch*, *Scrivener Creative Review*, *Sentiment Literary Journal*, *Snapdragon*, *Syzygy Poetry Journal*, *The Sacrificial*, *Toad Suck Review*,

Transnational, Vine Leaves Literary Journal, Wild Quarterly and Yellow Chair Review. <http://ethical-stranger.webnode.com/>

Robert Rothman

I live in Northern California, near extensive trails and open space, with the Pacific Ocean over the hill. On a hot day I won't see anyone and mouth rubbed red from eating berries, sweat pouring down, I will strip and plunge into the sea. What poetry can be beat that up and over and under.

Rosalia Scalia

I write fiction and nonfiction. My magazine and newspaper articles have appeared in local, regional, and national publications, and I've worked as a staff reporter for a local weekly newspaper, The Messenger. I've written for Web sites including E-Diets.com and Sikhchic.com. Currently, I serve as an assistant editor for Narrative Magazine; my poetry has been published in a U.S. Department of Agriculture newspaper and in a publication by the Enoch Pratt Free Library.

Hillary Vaillancourt

I've previously been published on Motherwell and the Journal of Kindness. When not writing, I edit the Veggie Wagon Journal, a literary journal dedicated to celebrating animals and those who advocate for them.

Erin Vance

Erin Emily Ann Vance's work deals with the dark corners of history and folklore. She loves haunted antiques, old photos of people she doesn't know, and watching crows from her porch. Erin's debut novel. Advice for Amateur

Beekeepers and Taxidermists will be published by Stonehouse Publishing in 2019.

Lucinda Watson

I attended the Community of Writers at Squaw Valley Writers Workshop from 1995 to 2003 and have studied with Richard Blanco, Jane Cooper, Galway Kinnell, Sharon Olds, Grace Paley, and Kevin Pilkington. I am a member of American Pen Women. I received my master's degrees in writing from Manhattanville College and communication from San Francisco State University. I taught communication for fifteen years at the Haas School of Business at UC Berkeley, and am a certified Healing Touch practitioner.

Kevin White

Kevin Richard White is the author of the novels *The Face Of A Monster* and *Patch Of Sunlight through No Frills Buffalo*. His work has been previously published by Akashic Books, Sundog Lit, Grub Street, HCE Review, Hypertext, *The Hunger*, *Crack The Spine*, *Dime Show Review*, *The Molotov Cocktail*, *Lunch Ticket* and *Ghost Parachute* among others. He reads fiction and nonfiction for *Quarterly West* and *Vestal Review*. He lives in Pennsylvania.

Ann Wuehler

A native Oregonian with ambitions and apparently a need to see more of the planet than a few feet beyond her back yard. I received my BA in Theatre from Eastern Oregon University and my MFA in Playwriting from the University of Nevada/Las Vegas. My book, *OREGON GOTHIC*, debuted June 4th, 2015. *The House on Clark Boulevard* came out Sept. 22, 2017.

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