the engine(idling



Issue 6: yarn

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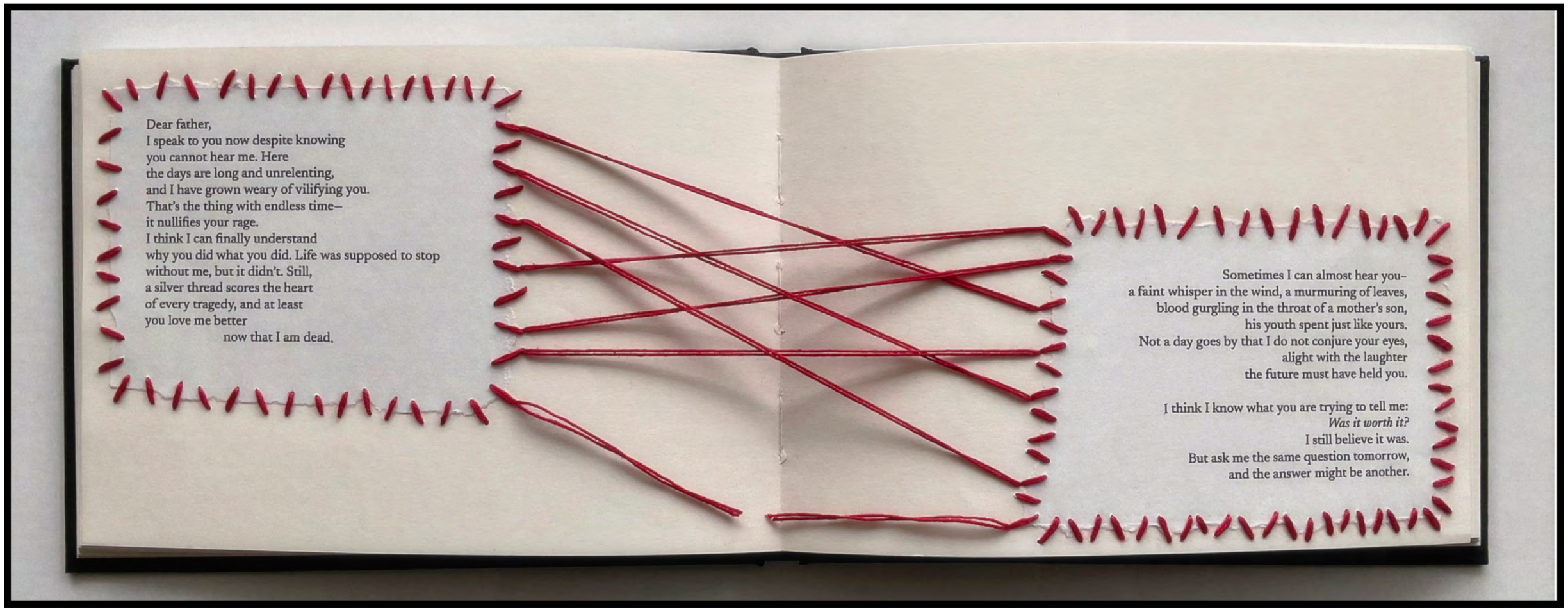
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a.d.

Long Distance Conversation



This is a hybrid poem, finished in April 2025, inspired by the sacrifice of Iphigenia by her father Agamemnon, as recounted in Greek myth. The poem is in the form of a "conversation" between the dead daughter and her still-living father. Red thread is used to visualize a metaphysical connection between father and daughter, which has started to rend but presently still holds. Perhaps their relationship can be salvaged before their bond severs completely.

While the poem was drafted in late 2021, the thread idea came to me early on and was always central to the piece. Originally I had meant to use a single frayed thread dangling in between, but then I decided on interlaced thread, which better illustrates my vision. This work forms part of a collection I am currently working on, inspired by the cursed house of Atreus.

Medium: Paper, ink and Giza thread on sketchbook, 42 x 15 cm.

Kelly R. Samuels

"There and Here, with Footnotes" was prompted by family history, specifically the death of my biological grandfather when my mother was two years old. I wanted to honor his and my grandmother's love story, as well as her second marriage (and second love story) to the man I knew as my grandfather, in addition to referencing the present day, including my own love stories. In short, it is a shuttling back and forth between the past (there) and the present (here), with the footnotes comprised of memories, little details I recall from both there and here.

There and Here, with Footnotes

Should I try for incomprehensible pines?
Should I start at the beginning with enough
clues for you to tease out the narrative(s)?

...

Here is a picture:
rickrack collar, pin curls atop
a boulder. Her dress is hiked up,
bare leg, canvas shoe. Beside
her, he wears a rolled sleeve,
a brimmed hat, cocked, and his death
in three years—death
being of interest, the live-long
life ended. Long Lake.
There they are.[i]

...

We shift from season to season, the one
growing longer with each year.
It was summer then
and now it's winter.[ii]
No mild Ohio slush, rain cleansing us.
We are seventy-two miles from Brookings.
We are in a town that will become a township
and then a memory.
We are far flung forward
and back, landing
in a year better known for other atrocities.

No, we are here. Frigid day.

---

i Seeing the photo, my ten-year-old daughter asks: Would you rather meet the love of your life and have them die shortly after or never meet the love of your life? Late in the day, this question confounds.

ii No matter warming up the car, cold, cold the backseat, narrow band of wool. No, not wool, some fabric foreign to soft cotton, but not sheep's leavings. The blanket was wool, wrapped tight. Creak and screech of packed snow. Lone farm light mid-field. Driving for what felt like hours but was only twelve minutes, the wide curve signaling arrival. I would leave you willingly behind, just as you would discard me. Perhaps this is how I learned what love looked like.

In a house that would be dead
if it were a person.
The stairs are no less steep.
The horrors only slightly less so.

Perhaps
we volley back
and forth.

The snow is crystallized.
Some of us can walk on its top
and not break through.
Green has become unfamiliar.
We dream of it
only sometimes.

...

Early morning:
He is of the store.
Canned goods and wool,
jangle of door.
The bell tolls.
She is of the bed.
Round, taut belly.
The ring
a
pendulum.
The girl plays upstairs,[iii]
the eaves her treehouse.
See her arrange
the dollhouse's furniture,
roll the tiny pink buggy out onto the floor's expanse.
The baby a nub, four painted dots.

---

iii See the dresses with their garish patterns, garden-party loud. Stains in the pits. Tear along hem. Shoeboxes line the floor under them, hats above. In a small dresser along the back wall, gloves of rose, pale green, of cream, pearl buttons at the wrist. Satin slips. Mothballs like spiders' sacs. It's a story of being shrouded in darkness, lock caught. The sole other person having crossed the garden to her mother's, having heard nothing drinking her tea. Not the cry nor the bang. Mother's mother forgetting how to mother. How long to die? Worse yet: How long before missed? The crinolines scratch my cheek. Dust coats my hands. That year in school I memorized a Millay sonnet, and so I recite the lines. *Pity me not*, though under the door—a thin slit of light. Nothing more.

...

Midday:
We eat sandwiches
made hours before. No warm stew thick
with thick carrots, stringy beef.
You are there
and I am here.
If touched, the back porch's windows
would shatter.

...

Evening elicits kicks,
the push and bulge.
She rolls onto her side, leg bare
again. The nightgown voluminous,
the nightgown rucked up.
Pillows are used to muffle tender cries,
to not wake the girl.
An icicle hangs outside
the bedroom window.
The lake's coating thickens.

...

Though there were others,
we only have pictures of each other
across a table. Trees stand
behind you. They might be pines.
A small fire blazes
in the left-hand corner
of my frame.
Sweaters aren't needed.
We have eaten our fill.
There we are.[iv]

---

iv On the peak of the Pleiades, we park amongst corn. Some road for farming equipment, some path leading somewhere. We only go in so far. We lie on the hood, feet pointing northeast and wait. Stalks bend in the wind. I've seen enough horror films to briefly imagine a killer parting the green. Only ten minutes out of the city, we could be in that landscape of my summers. The endless rows and gravel roads, the pungent shit. My mother discouraged walking barefoot and yet there is a picture of me standing next to you, the grader background, toes dug into the muck of that state with 10,000 lakes. I am brown as an acorn. Hair

...

I'll tell you:
She slung a sweater over
her shoulders, tore from the house
as if there were a fire.

What woke her, no one
knows. She's long dead now
and there is no journal.

The girl slept unaware,
tucked up, eaves warm.

He slept the last sleep,
cold and stiff, while his second
born turned and turned, mad
to have been roused, to have been
thrust out, made to wade through the drifts,
bang on a neighbor's door.

...

Has the dramatic question
been answered?
Do you understand
what has happened?
Quick, relay it to someone
who doesn't know.

Winter has its literary connotations.
I have kept true
to those.

We hurtle forward,
the panes of glass still intact.

...

---

bleached. All of five. I am no farmer or farmer's wife and yet this is what I know some of. A star shoots across the sky, tail ablaze. I cannot help but exclaim. The attack by an escaped convict never comes, but this memory surfaces, transitory. And is gone.

In those days, men asked
other men to watch over.
Good friend.
The brother marries
the widow, if need be.

A girl and a babe and a woman
whose store needs minding.
Though the store will soon close,
be razed fifty years later.

Note the street scene:
There's the church
and another church
and the post office
and the Legion
from where he came.
There are the silos
and the sigh
of those who remain.
Sheets on a line.[v]
Blink
and you miss it.

...

He lent a book.
I lent another.
This is how it begins...
falling in some sort of love
with the notes in each other's margins.

...

---

v There's no getting past it, and not death. Not that. Rather, the mustiness of guest sheets folded and stored in the linen closet or a bin or even on an open shelf somewhere off a room somewhere here or there. Why wash and store them away with that result? Why not wait until right before? All that careful tending, attention to detail, like three asters in a vase, seems futile. Cedar and sachets help. Or an airing on lines no one uses much anymore. I imagine you driving out west with your daughter and seeing them billow and whip bright as egg yolk. Or white as cloud. There's a wicker basket on the porch, waiting. The ratty one with the stray reed that drew blood. And somewhere on the second floor a room with bare wood floors and one window that faces west too, the way the tornadoes always came. Listen for the crack of the clean sheet right before it is contained.

Why bother talking of what he saw
over there?
He came in the aftermath,
the severed limb,
the rubble.[vi]

Now oil lies under his nails.
There's the ease of overalls, no word said
that doesn't need to be.

What do you say, what do
you say to us
getting married?

...

Spit and sting of snow.
Creak of floorboard.
Face in a pane, bright eyed.

We are cats
in a sunny window
while the muffled siren wails.

...

There comes another
child to mark
the union.

Another girl who has
no time for eaves, who
runs at a whistle barefoot
down gravel roads. No heed
paid to the garden.[vii]

---

vi Bruised peach or that space in the yard where the willow grew, that soft spot marking where it once was. Absence or damage—what you never spoke of.

vii This expanse, part frivolity, part need. The feathered cosmos' stems not unlike the carrot's top. Hardy tuber, kept in the cellar where we were stranded that January, drifts as tall as any man, blocking light. Pray to the wood stove, to the stack of maple and oak, for the fallen pine even with its short coal bed. Think of the garden in summer.

A new trinity as
the eldest departs.

...

Running alongside,
alongside this life
is another.

See the tracks switch
traveling north to
where the snow piles higher.

When I sleep,
I dream of Uruguay,
river of the colorful birds.
Of bank side, sweat beaded between.[viii]

...

Slap of card, some
semblance of order
dialing down to the one,
to the coveted ace.
Wax worn away,
soft like skin under
the eye. Play it out,
kings above,
the queen,
the barbed joker.
Picture him near
the picture window,
her one cigarette lit
that same night, Johnny
with his wry joke.

...

---

viii There is no winter like this there, here where only the bald brown lawn offers hope. Understand: We have never been. We have only dreamt of Uruguay, though doing so makes it no less real. We are damp with dreams, warmed with what has been conjured. Our feet do not touch the cold stone.

The boy is born
in December, cotton
hat with holly, tie
that binds for a time.

He leaves[ix] and returns,
settling in the bed's nest beside.
Nothing but the suck and
howl of wind is heard in
and outside the pane.

...

Here is a picture:
Slouched on a train.
Before her
and the girl
and the girl
and the babe—the boy
who wailed well into his teens.

Here is another:
Perched in a pine, sticky pitch
on your palm. Only
a smile seen.
The click of the shutter
is a twig broken.

The lake[x] is now
a river that never
freezes.

You thought this was a poem
about people. But it's only
about endings.

ix There were other leavings, though not ours. That New Year's Eve, ones we only witnessed. Rush and ascent beyond glass. Some kind of gift, this night.

x 10,000 lakes and just this one. No matter my age. Enough to know it is summer, the lake as provocation, to prod—move me from the flowered couch where I lie watching soap operas whose characters' lives seem just as dull as mine. Thus: infidelities, sudden trips to the south of France with its Hollywood sound stage backdrop. The lake breaks into fragments of light. So many people trying to convince themselves they are seaside, the sand trucked in, hot to the foot's sole. A girl stands, stretching her arms up and above her head, draws the eye. I never could see that well without glasses, all the bodies bobbing, looming, rising up to frighten from the depths. And cold, too, the kind that comes from forearms you can circle with thumb and forefinger. Why this need to swim out to the suspended raft, stirring the muddy bottom? Better to lie on the beach and read, gathering up my things only when my grandmother calls my name. That night, an ache. Some sort of unfamiliar pain. The rise of shirt, quick gasp. The burn, the burn.

Brent Raycroft

Mark Bruhn was a good friend for several years while we worked on graduate degrees together, but we drifted apart after he moved to Colorado to teach. Hearing of his death brought back this incident (and this geographic location in Nova Scotia) so vividly for me that I tried to capture what it meant, both then and now.

Ropes of Rock and Bells of Air

It was a time of making friends, and I
was lucky to be taken to Chebucto Head
by locals that I'd met. They knew how to get
to the access point, and that this wild trail
leading south along the coast from Duncan's Cove—
or in Mi'kmak: Uni'knitujk—would bewitch
a newcomer more than any pub crawl could.

The trail keeps to the high ground. There are no
sandy beaches, but we could see and hear the breakers
scour the shelves of stone that angle into the deep.
On the horizon lay the dark slip of a cargo ship
slim beyond the curvature of the sea
like a crossbow bolt slowly approaching its target:
Halifax. Chebucto, the Great Harbour.

On a further rise we passed above two crevasses
in an otherwise unbroken land mass—little fjords,
releasing and admitting slivers of ocean in dark jaws.
I can find no name for this spot in any language,
perhaps because no people ever lived exactly here,
where there's little soil and less shelter.
The trail is for hiking, not travel. It goes nowhere.

I lagged back and ventured half-way out the edge of one,
where a noisy precipice let me get quite close,
a few storeys up from the water.
I stepped on a terrace of stone and it moved.
Or not. I stepped back quickly, shocked.
Was it an audible click under the hiss of the surf?
Or a bit of give in the impact of my shoe?

Nothing had changed except my heart rate.
But I wouldn't dare to stand out there again.
A segment the size of the floor of a room
was outlined, I saw now, by a slim perimeter,
a groove of stubborn plant life growing in the cracks.
I let it pass, embarrassed, a clumsy guest,
and caught up to the rest.

Next: grim graffitied bunkers left from WWII,
followed by another hour of sculpted stone and surf,
past smaller headlands and cobblestone bays
on a shore curving steadily out of sight,
with the ocean on the left, and barrens on the right.
At the edge of an expanse of private land we turned
and walked the trail again in reverse.

That night it struck me: What if I was right?
What if my little fright was warranted?

What if someone steps out on that slab one day—
tomorrow, say—and their weight is just enough
to tip the scale, to break it from its niche so that
it plunges under them and they fall into the sea.
Wouldn't the blame be mine to some degree?

It was a time of making friends.
The terrible ocean seemed to recommend it.
I knew a couple on the other shore, the Eastern Shore.
They lived in a cozy house that rattled in the wind.
They were Americans, raising a pair of kids.
When I needed a place to bury my cat,
they had been compassionate.

Too much time has passed since we last spoke
for me to use the second person here, though the art
of elegy would allow it, at least for the departed.
She will know who I mean when I ask
rhetorically now as I did in earnest then:
"Who to take my problem to—the problem
of what to do about the moving stone—but him?"

We could see no point in calling the authorities.
"There's a hazard on the seashore? You're telling me.
Didn't you see the signage, buddy?"
So we settled on a plan: I would try to make it fall.
He would stand on the other side to witness it all.
If I succeeded, he could vouch for me and get the best view.
If the stone didn't budge, I'd have done my due diligence.

If I looked foolish on my back, slapping crabwise
with my booted feet on the flat beyond the crack
and nothing happened, he'd laugh, but not in mockery.
If by chance I triggered a wider avalanche—
which I dismissed with zero knowledge of geology—
we joked that he could tell my tragic story well.
It chills me to recall that youthful certainty.

I stamped three times and the rock came loose,
tipped outward from its place, away and down
knocked one time with a gunshot crash
on a bulge in the wall on the other side and then
impacted on the throb of ocean water
churning always up and down
in the gap of the crevasse.

It took no longer to happen than it does to say,
though the wave it created took a moment more
to exit on the seaward side and inward to surge
up the darkened apex and return.

He was already loping toward me over the headland.
"Oh, man," he shouted, "that's it! That's it right there!"
"'Ropes of rock and bells of air!'"

He knew I'd know that line of poetry
by the widdershins anti-Wordsworth, S.T. Coleridge,
who worried what kind of church bare nature could be
if it began in lust and ended in grief.
The line appears in the weirdest part of "Christabel,"
where an obsessive memorial goes all to hell
like a bad trip on acid through a fairy tale.

On Chebucto Head he set those same words free,
as the falling stone had voided my imagined liability.
We solved the paradox of ropes and rocks, bells and air:
the uninhabitable chasm forgets all visitors
and yet they remember each other there.
We parted at my place in the city, quoting that verse,
and he headed home to Seaforth, to tell this story to her.

Brent Raycroft

This is a somewhat messy poem about an emotionally and practically messy project: the disposal, purge, cull of decades worth of personal papers. Along the way I found out—among other things—that the words disposal, cull, *and* purge *all have more positive original meanings than their daily use suggests.*

Are You Free

I

The Way In

I did a purge of my old papers
from the final decades
of a paper century.
I measured what they meant to me.
I went through all the sagging bankers boxes
at the bottom of the closet.
Documents and manuals
diplomas and ephemera
essays with professors' comments
clippings cut from magazines
and student newsprint efforts.
Receipts, reports and guarantees
photos of things and friends and places
postcards bought and never used
official correspondence and
personal correspondence
from people I once knew
some that I continue to
the living and the dead
letters still in envelopes
letters with drawings in the margins
letters on abandoned letterhead
and layered in the chaos
at irregular intervals
notebooks full of poetry.

The hardest part was saying yea or nay
with little hesitation, moving quickly
with no slipping into tangent rabbit scrapes
or stopping over memories.
One fails at that of course
and next must face the second hardest part
which is enduring what comes at you
in a choppy torrent from the past.
Hold fast. Be ruthless. Reduce.

The unforgettable haunts without evidence
and good riddance to the utterly forgotten.
I kept a slim selection from the bulk of things
that lay unsorted in between.

This clearing of clutter is vanity
as much as housekeeping:
the removal of blemishes
the disposal of the irrelevant
the destruction of the letters you sent.

Yes, those too. They were mine to burn.
You gave them to me, didn't you?
I'm sure my mother and my father do not mind
though my chatty favorite cousin might.
Among the rest there were a few that hurt
and for what it's worth
I never wrote back to explain why I didn't get tested
because I knew. And so did you
and yet it's true I couldn't be trusted.
I never loved my beloved roommate in that way
and you don't get it weeping
drunk across a table.
And I am the only one
who will ever read
as I unwound it
his spiral-bound final diary.
I burned his letters happily.

The photographs were spared.
I kept them all except for duplicates
and unflattering ones of me.

II

The Way Out

The notebooks full of poetry I left for last
because I thought they would be easy
even entertaining: I could laugh
or cringe at what I used to be
or maybe find a turn of phrase
that still had charm or gravity.

The verse was crammed as I suspected
with pretentious overthinking
and belabored puns.
Clichéd nature-in-the-city poems
dated social commentary
bad-faith twenty-something love.
Into the fire then, my tired notebooks
into the waste recovery flow
with all the fragments they enclosed
save this one:
Are you free after work?
Are you free tomorrow?

I don't remember writing that
but there it was, two lines alone
in the centre of a left-hand page.

What made it noteworthy at the time?
Are you free after work?
Are you free tomorrow?

Why make something of it now?
In part because it isn't poetry
in part because it could be
in part because the words are clear
but not the meaning.
Was the voice my own?
Was I about to pass a note
but then thought...no.
Are you free after work?
Are you free tomorrow?

A pair of pick-up lines but not
the witty or comical kind.
This has the simple ring of honesty
which—as they say—if you can fake
you've got it made.
Someone is being asked:
Are you free to not be free, and when.
The answer is not heard.
Are you free tomorrow?
Are you free after work?

You'd have to know the person first
it seems to me but even then
the questions verge on predatory.
Keep in mind it was the eighties and
think of servers, cashiers, and receptionists,
librarians and dental hygienists.
Who do you see—still—most commonly?
Would it be OK to flirt?
Are you free tomorrow?
Are you free after work?

What kills men most often, on the job?
Sudden accidents like transport crashes,
falls and fires and trench collapses.
After that exposure to persistent toxins.
Violence is a distant third.
For women, though, it's first.
Who informed me of that fact?
What mood were they in?
How did I react?
Was that the day
I wrote those words?
Are you free tomorrow?
Are you free after work?

Better a stranger walks in than the angry ex.
I've been a stranger in the meet-cute
that happens in that circumstance.
But even after the third or fourth
or fiftieth impression
how can you know?
Are you free after work?
Are you free tomorrow?

Let's say it was a note to self,
not yet understanding
what it had to tell.
Waiting in a bankers box
for the millennium
and then some:
a proof that I once thought
a question could not be false
because it told no truth.
I still have my not-a-monster excuse.
The other was youth.

I offered urgency and
urged it to recur
but later said that
I would not be free after work
that I was sorry with no sorrow
that I would not be free tomorrow.



LindaAnn LoSchiavo

My poem "Merletto" is woven from threads of memory, heritage, and longing. My grandmothers arrived in America bearing invisible treasures from Italy—my paternal grandmother from volcanic Lipari and my maternal grandmother from bustling Naples. Both were shaped by the disciplined artistry taught in their all-female convent and finishing schools, where they mastered drawn work, tassel-making, and the sublime intricacy of lace-making that would later captivate my childhood imagination.

While marriage spared my Sicilian grandmother from needing to monetize these delicate skills, my Neapolitan grandmother transformed necessity into art, supporting herself in New York City through commissioned needlework created at home. It was here, at four years old, that I first witnessed alchemy—the metamorphosis of simple thread into structural poetry under her practiced fingers.

The lines I treasure most from my blank verse narrative—"She shakes from pale silk its unwillingness / To be superior: pure handmade lace" and "Imagine what perfection she could coax / From hiding out of me*?. . ."—crystallize that profound childhood realization that her hands possessed not just skill but a kind of magic. These moments capture both my admiration for her craftsmanship and my early, inarticulate grief at knowing this inheritance would remain beyond my grasp.*

In "Merletto," lace becomes more than fabric; it transforms into a complex metaphor for cultural transmission across oceans and generations. The intricate patterns mirror the complexities of immigrant identity—what remains intact, what unravels, what must be reimagined. The poem honors the ephemeral nature of our all-too-brief time together and acknowledges that certain knowledge dies with its keepers, yet celebrates how witnessing such artistry forever alters those who observe it.

Through this meditation on lace-making, I explore not just family history but the broader tapestry of how art and identity intertwine across cultures and time, and how even fleeting connections can leave permanent impressions on a child's developing sense of beauty and belonging.

Merletto [Lace]

It's noon, a time without the shadows here,
Earth fitting trees to her embrace secure
That she has left no trace, no certainty
Of patterns, leaving our lives in pieces
Near 12 o'clock, day's delicate balance
Suspended, shadowless, conditional.

Reality's removed without patterns
Like shadowplay. A lesson's here perhaps,
I thought when I was four and lacemaking
Took place, full centered in my childhood's loom.

Grandmother, lacemaker, her face worn thin
From secrets, some perpetual, straight-pinned.
Our lady of the leaping fingers, she.
Sly Rumpelstiltskin in the fairytale
Never knew slackness of time jerked so tight.

A lesson's here perhaps, I thought at four,
Unschooled, unlike my *nonna*: convent-bred,
Whose hands don't falter though her world gave way
Beneath her tiny feet. She hates it here.
New Yorkers mock outsiders with accents,
And foreign ways. Life snipped all promises
Away along with pretty certainties.

I stand before her, silent, at a loss.
She is my book who sadly lost its place,
Recording everything in foreign words
I've *yet* to learn. Her Naples dialect
Is Virgil's tongue (that her father prized)
Debased — uneasy compromise she made.
"Fit in!" advised her husband. Neither did,
Unnoticed by America's embrace.

I study her. Those movements are trimmed tight
Creating bobbin-lace, diminished light
About to stop her for today, unrest
Instructing *nonna*'s face, defacing joy
As she works threads by feel, through memory.

Grandmother, lacemaker: age silvered her
Beyond full-figured hopes except for *mine*.

I want to live on fingertips enclosed
In palms that hoard European know-how.
She shakes from pale silk its unwillingness
To be superior: pure handmade lace.

Imagine what perfection she could coax

From hiding out of *me*? I know we'll be
Cut off — slim shreds of golden day returned
To earth as shadows alter light she needs.

This slender spray of lace she'll leave behind,
Ethereal and printed from no plans
But beauty's memories across pearled seas,
White-capped like virgin brides, their futures laced
With every pretty certainty, those lives
Not ripped asunder. Pinned in place, their lace
(Re-worked for christening gowns), announces news:
Renewal, newborn things, dull safety's brace.

What lesson's here of what I want to be?

Chi son'? *Chi son*'? My insufficient face
Reveals no trace. Ancestral graces may
Escape my generation. The sun leans
To catch late afternoon. Our living room
Is less familiar when I fold pure lace,
Protecting it from dirt, aware my hands
Discourage courage. No safe certainty
Came looking for *me* at age four except
Low beams of dusk advancing as if dragged
Across a scorned sphere. Twilight blinks. Tired night.
No heart can be heard in winds blowing by.
Like predator or prey, owls nestle in
Among pitch-dripping, tightly laced branches.

Sunset is an illusion, I am told.
Though the sun seems to sink, it's earth that turns,
Indifferently, away towards east, a habit.

A yellowed lacework of remains would be
My life without her guidance, so I pray.

Nightbirds: come thread my sighing capably
Through shadows, tying every word I say
To kites, each colorfully aired, displayed,
Ascending to the heavens unafraid.

I'd love to be her handmade kite, retrace
Her youth, securely tethered to her spool,
A favor that's called in. When dreams conclude,
Night, let me wake to see dear grandma's face,
Pigmenting the canvas of my universe.



Chi son'? [*Who am I*? asks the poet Rodolfo in his aria: *Che gelida manina*, La Boheme, Act I.]

R. Gerry Fabian

I always find a folksy peace at a diner.

Some Things Are That Simple

We pull in up close cause the parking lot is not full.
The senior discount people are long gone.
This is one of those steel oblong structures
so very popular in the 50's.

We walk inside to the smells of a bakery,
deep fried and cigarette fans.
It's no smoking now.

We are seated in a booth
that still has a miniature jukebox.
Our drink orders are taken immediately.

I scan the jukebox revolving playlist
before looking at the menu.
I know what I want — liver, onions and gravy.

I know my wife will have
the turkey platter with baked potato,
cranberry sauce and a salad.

At the counter, the single working men
are eating before or after work.
They are t-shirt rough and work boot hard.
They are also welcome.

Our waitress takes our orders
with the efficiency of a drill sergeant.
She does it with a practiced smile
that is so real, we buy it immediately.

Somebody near us play, "Crazy."
Just as Patsy sings "... and I'm crazy for loving you,"
our salads and rolls arrive.

At the counter, a tattooed man
orders cherry pie
a little louder than is acceptable.

The diner pauses.

His waitress is a pro and knows him.
She brings his pie and admonishment
before he can say another word.

Our food arrives just after that awkward moment.
My liver has sauce and onions
with fries and fresh green beans.
The waitress refills our drinks without a word.
She gets it.

As we eat, someone plays “Sugar Magnolia.”

I say a short prayer of thanks to Jesus
as my liver is not overcooked.
The gravy and onions are spectacular.
Enough leftover gravy to spoon over the fries.

My wife is smiling as she eats.

Three rough bulky guys enter.
They are slop, stank dirty.
At the counter, they find stools and alight.

One bye one, they visit the rest room.
Their orders are interspersed with the visits.
All of them flirt with the waitress.
Her retorts are quick and biting.
All three smile.

Our waitress returns to ask about dessert
which we both decline.
I watch as she checks on other customers
then spins 180 degrees and delivers our check
with her name and a hand drawn smiley face.

She knew we were not having dessert before we did.
I show the check to my wife
with a nod to leave her a good tip.
I pay for the meal, my wife tips.

I pay the woman up front at the register
who has a smile the size of Texas.

We leave the diner and emerge
into a late sunset July evening.

The bug chorus is rollicking
and fireflies dot the sky.

I reach over, grab my wife
and kiss her like I did
when we first dated.

She pulls away, blushes
and comes back with
and even stronger, passionate kiss.

Some things are that simple.



Will Cordeiro

"The Ventriloquist" developed over several years—I've honestly lost track at this point. The original impulse was to write a noir-ish "anti-detective" story, a kind of parody of Sherlockian ratiocination. There's a well-established genre here: Stevenson's Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Paul Auster's* City of Glass*, Stanisław Lem's* The Investigation*, Borges's "Death and the Compass," Charles Yu's* Interior Chinatown*, Bolaño's* 2666*, etc. But I also wanted to give this type of material a queer spin. To camp it up a bit maybe.*

The ghoulish if not Gothic sensibility that everything wears a mask that must be revealed (think Scooby-Doo, for instance, or Dorian Gray) built into the detective genre also seemed ripe for treatment in the key of a sleazy yet fabulous masquerade ball or scene at some dark, dank leather bar. A celebratory energy transpires despite, or perhaps because of, the almost lethal sense of menace which hangs around these spaces. Facts, too, are fabulations, after all. Identities swim in their own juices, measurements are in flux, voices are thrown and re-echo, and any grand narrative this puzzle fits into is shown up as loco as it is rococo.

In the classic detective novel, the would-be initial "haunted" event—rendering the story at once paranormal and paranoid—concludes when not only the case is solved but also when the ghostly residue is resolved into humdrum physicalist terms. Point in case: The Hound of the Baskervilles*. The detective genre, historically, is an outgrowth of Gothic mysteries where this phantasmatic residue is never fully eliminated: ironically, we might say then, the anti-detective story predates the detective genre. In "The Ventriloquist," the epistemological nightmare only exacerbates the more any investigation proceeds. Nothing is given. And the methods of logic and observation appear askew from the word go. And yet, this haunted proving ground remains a frenetic dance of self-transforming vitality as much as it's one charged with death and morning.*

Interpretation has no end. Even in science, there's no ultimate backstop. New theories displace older ones. You can see this cosmological uncertainty as a threat that undermines the Enlightenment assumptions about truth and justice that are embedded in the detective and police procedural genres. You can also see it as a jubilant font of energy that calls for more study, more analysis, more scrutiny, more introspection, even while knowing that all knowledge contains elements that are artificial, exaggerated, incomplete, and undefined. The nature of knowledge, understood this way, while spooky, is also inherently playful.

The Ventriloquist

I hired a detective. I tasked him with a razor
and some funny glasses. I told him to redact
the report. I offered him some lemonade,
lacking any harder stuff. Now take your money,
I said. Use a process of elimination. Please, sir,
I simply want the facts...
Well, I crossed
off every suspect. It's just us here, buddy.
Nobody left. All is flux. There is no fixer.
Then, with a martyred look, he shuffled papers
and said that after several months of work,
he kept tailing after the same missing person:
me. He stared into the sexual quasars
erupting in my bloodstream. Who'd slept with whom
whole days that he'd been dozing on the job?
The methods and the values we create
must justify themselves, or so he claimed.
He added, introspection is a funhouse
in which direction sunders, pointing elsewhere.
A plot's a snippet from some greater fabric:
it's cherrypicked from all the past that's scatter-
shot with continuity's irresolution.
Also, lamely, let's just put to bed... something,
something... the astral process by which the soul
might know its own true name, the analysand
that babbles random truths upon the couch
since who doesn't need to catch up on their sleep?

I retorted, "In the long run, we're all dead."
(John Maynard Keynes.) —The voices I kept
throwing, which I was thrown by, were the only
leads I had. Who sends our dreams? Too many
clues had skipped off sideways, elliptic,
like pinballs slipping through the flipped-up bumpers,
falling down the chute. Game over. Proof
was only something used to measure alcohol:
riddles in a non-Euclidean warp zone,
so many eigenvectors torqued through scalar planes.
My cortex firing but all results looked lumpish.
Ergo, my guts played bagpipes, to coin a phrase.
Heart, heart! A glut of dark sinks down. Pure madness
is assumed by every fragment, clue:
a jagged improvisation of dissolving jazz,
each attitude rejiggering with revision
in the archive's fritter. The figured patterns
of whatever ligatures had held
it all together was from the outset
an arbitrary, wriggling machine.
Another out-of-focus photo mottled
by the hocus of phosphorescent fungus

like moldy bread. The wall I brooded at
showed black-lit stains that mapped a motel room.
The light I talked to happens to play Scrabble;
voices ping-pong among us with lopsided
topspin. —Batty, you say? I trill it
in falsetto, belting out in sing-song:
all memories are follies built from straw,
a fire hazard for the gaslit flames...

I lurch upon the barstool at this dive.
Again, the keys to everything are locked inside
where every feeling feels so far away it's like
a mock-up of your mind inside your mind.
I jerry-rig each beam like pick-up sticks,
the luster shifting into listing auras:
more crooked lines, hallucinations, squibs—
through scratch I see a temple made of pubes
and hairballs: a drainpipe's errant curlicues.
An orphic backwardation quite obscene!
The stories I told had only grifted *moi*.
What marbles still remained I plunked and piffled,
old stolen eyeballs from the heads of giants
who sold me out.
I shimmied in a short
black skirt, I clamped on fake long lashes, rouged
and lipstick'd, purred and flirted with a man
(or whoever in that leather bar had passed for one)
while filling every curve of negligee.
His first rodeo, he said; his name was Cash
Johnson. His moustache falling off, his wit
had saved him—he leaned in for a kiss. I played
the femme fatale. A lilt to my tone, a hitch
to my gait. I tried desperately to betray myself.
A frog jumped in my throat, peckish to ditch
his starring role for one of merely part-time prince.
Pish-posh! My fishnets ran, and I ran away—
vowed never to rinse my mouth; gave him lush love
notes scribbled damp and glistening. Why, here's
a kiss that's time-stamped on a business card.
—Copy that? Still listening? I'm not quite over
but ha, I'm definitely *out*. About to throw it in,
it boomeranged right back. There was a time
when we would wind the clocks; theoretically,
a time when time would end, but now such time
has passed, and every doorway's vanished, spent
by the effort it has taken to invent. The future's
only déjà vu—like yet another lame-ass video
you can't help but watch, gone viral. But no,
crass structural forces sink us down a vortex:
a spreading Rorschach blot reminding me

of pretexts from those salad days I made a killing,
when hours were billable and dollars were my Bible,
ripe backrooms smokey with sad shades of bourbon.

I tramped the sour city blocks and alleys.
Here empty office towers still cast shadows
over empty parks. A few hangdog prophets
still clutched their pamphlets, stutter on a soapbox
with wizened hope and scraggly beards. Stoplights
blurred and pulsed. My stubble's thick with lipstick smears.
Each puddling droplet kept gazing back as if
a crush from long ago. Later still, returning to
my crossroads' crux where every mask has come
to hunt me down, the "I" whom I have been
was disavowed, when now I *am* some ghostly
other: a bum, a heavy, a rude red herring,
and the perp; it could be, too, I was the dick I hired.
No ticket out from these marauding snickets,
I meandered in their fickle snarl of hints.
Could this be what I *liked*? Interpretation.
But every twist reveals another wrinkle...
Flaunt thorny passes learning form's a circle.

Go!, I tell these sordid eyesores haunting me.
I tell the voices that I'm tapping out.
A ruptured sock, a puppet's who I am.
Names, facts, dates, numbers, data—all lumber
round this dead construction zone like burning
tinder... I stare into the night, a gaping pit.
More mixed than pickled relish, with hellish tongues
all licking, cackling, I'm a figure hobbling
down foggy thoroughfares where halos fracture.
I sink into the guilt of my own nothingness,
a glut of bilge, estranged brain-pudding. Fog
curdles down the streets as if it's spilling guts.
My stomach gurgles, gorged on so much tumult—
dumb luck that I've been born with. My gullet
mumbles like one deciphering the Talmud, lisping
underneath its breath, *the soul's a fallacy*; I trip
like a hurried scrap of trash that's dervish'd.
A wind trap bricked-up in some dank passageway
funnels more voices: whirlwinds in my head.
Small voices stalk me down. They're chattering
like toys slowly running low on batteries,
faint echoes heckling in a whispering gallery.

Will Cordeiro

"Split" is a work that originated 15 years ago. I was knifed in the skull at a crowded bar during St. Patty's Day. It was totally unprovoked. Perhaps it was just random violence; or perhaps I was mistaken for someone else. I never saw the attack occur, and I only realized what happened retrospectively from the doctor's report after going to the emergency room. Because I didn't have a car, I had to call my ex to drive me there. She was kind enough to wait around and drive me back home, too. The disorienting experience of my head trauma was emotionally compounded by the disorienting experience of relying on my on-again, off-again ex for help. While this much can be confirmed as true, the speaker in the poem is nonetheless highly unreliable: he embellishes details, vacillates, doubles back, recognizes his own capricious storytelling, and keeps trying—often against his better judgment—to piece things back together, Humpty-Dumpty-like. It leaves the reader wondering what really happened, distrusting the narrator. Inducing this interpretive bewilderment felt like the readiest way to capture my own collywobbled and discombobulated experience.

I turned in an early draft of this poem in my MFA workshop, a workshop led by one of my personal writing "heroes," Denis Johnson. Of course, one of Johnson's most celebrated stories—from Jesus' Son*—is "Emergency," which includes a guy who gets shanked in the eye by his wife but who can see better than any of the orderlies around him who are tripping out on stolen pills. At the end of the workshop, I remember, I took off my baseball hat to display my wounds, as if I were Coriolanus. I guess, I wanted to show I wasn't just riffing on (or ripping off) Johnson's story. Look, I seemed to say: in this piece, for what it's worth, I wrote nonfiction. But maybe I was tipping my cap to the famous author, too. Johnson's critique of the poem was that it "embroidered." Why couldn't I tell this tale in a straight-shooting manner? The basic story always seemed to get sidetracked into little purls and knots.*

I still think, though, that in this instance, embroidery might be the most effective technique to convey the woozy double-whammy that the speaker undergoes. I wouldn't call this a confessional poem, and the speaker is not enjoining the reader for pity or empathy. To tell this story pointblank, however, would make it seem more self-aggrandizing or mawkish. In fact, I suspect that the prejudice against "embroidery" might even rely on tacit masculine aesthetic values—e.g., Hemingwayesque terseness—that belittles feminist discourses of narrative. Stitching, suturing, weaving, threading, and spinning out yarns are explicitly enmeshed by the poem's tropes and motifs. Indeed, these methods allow callbacks and backwardation in the poem to develop a wholly different form of narrative sense-making and, as it were, -unmaking. The slant and warp of the piece as its various threads become increasingly loopy, holding each other in tension, are what likely give the poem its oomph.

Split

——I needed you
like a hole in the head,
I thought. My brain still
throbbed. I joked to myself,
it's the lobotomy talking. I
lingered around the bar,
gulped down another
drink before last call, before
heading to my cold studio
apartment, its messy piles
dusty books and dishes, pulp
on the plates, a late-night
refuge from this Saint
Patty's Day. Past the haloed
neon, the jaded vomit on
sidewalks. I was green, of
course. Nattily dressed
and bleeding. I fingered
my scalp. I took a hot bath,
lukewarm water conceding
slowly into its afterimage:
not day's verdant wizardry
of emerald but a blistering
red. I still wanted a second
opinion—and if it came to
that, I didn't own a car. I
stalled and then called you
past midnight—closer to
two. I spilt my guts, at least
I tried. Who cares? You came
right over. *Now—stay still*,
you said. *Look down*. Will
any of this stop? Why ex-
pect anything; our break
up made more literal, in
fact, now you were gazing
into my trepanned skull.
A syncope under my shag
of hair, which you sifted,
for the first time since we'd
drifted apart. Gushing, a gash
as if a stigmata—jabs and
digs—voided then returned
our whole bloody past...
But the emergency room?
Stock forms. Hours at it
until I caught something,
flipping ripped magazines
contaminated by so many
candid photos from lousy

paparazzi—until I caught
on that my own life was
not high drama but sordid
mimesis of tabloid fodder.
Wait, how did we get here?
If I had a dollar for every
excuse we'd used to use to
use each other, I would—
I would still be poor since
everything of mine always
fell to dog-shit, leaving me
to pick up the pieces. Juke-
box and stripper: my tender
exchanged was debased and
shattered to scratch. Scratched
out again. A loose handful of
coins, dirty money that's soiled.
Or another cliché. Face it,
dollar dollar and they'd bill
you later, a vanishing point
of no return in which lavish
promises fade to zippo. Sad
luck reflected in every mirror.
Break it, it's all bye-bye after
that. I sat there by your side;
you took my hand in yours,
token of empathy or mock
solicitation, I didn't know.
I patted your knee, smiled,
as an act of solace. Fittingly
you construed this as a pat
gesture: gauchely hitting on
you or perhaps a way to get
under your skin. You shot
me a dirty look. But then,
I always did like you angry,
though I always tried to
please you. Hurt, you didn't
know what you wanted. Why
when you think you're finally
safe, you turn and get blind-
sided? Easy. Few things you
control since most things are
fated. Fire leaps into fire, and
this chiaroscuro, our heart,
is but a dapple and shadow,
redacting the record. Doctor,
I said, when at last she arrived,
how does anything happen?
But she required the whole

hair-brained story—a recap
of my capsized night, a gory
play-by-play. She'd caught me
napping. I jostled awake. Ok,
ok. I'd waded through a dive
bar, packed elbow to shoulder.
What hit me? An 8-ball skipped
off a pool table—was my dull
sense of it. Classic cause-and-
effect, I imagined the chalked
stick balking on the slick green
felt, the game-ending scratch.
Some girl I didn't know, as if
on cue, said I'd been bleeding.
True, it wasn't a knife fight—
but the film of my life is one
quick cut, one white lie after
another. If you'd open up,
declaring what's fable from
gospel, you're split head-to-
toe. A gut check—a sucker
punch. Hospitalized. Fuck it,
why soft pedal? The world's
full of choices: cheats, back-
stabbers, bruisers, boozers,
and repeat offenders. Sure,
we'd returned to our old sore
points again. More in store,
sooner or later. We're blinking
back tears. It's all sinking in.
Doc tweezed my hair between
thumb and pointer, exposing
my cut. Clean breaks like this
signal a blade. Staked straight
in a swift nonstop motion, top
downward plunge, she claimed.
Thankfully, it didn't penetrate
past your parietal crania. Small
miracle, from the angle—your
skull didn't crack. The damage
was mainly to the dermal tissue,
doc said, and like that she left.
Well, I was beginning to see
stars. And not the fat-pics from
People. Another hour passed. I
stood, a glassy-eyed phantom
in my paper gown. You slept
in a sour mess of my clothes
sprawled in the corner. Apart.
I wasted time by picking old

wounds. Now nearly morning,
a P.A. arrived. What happened
here? Oh, some codger was cut
loose by his cooze; got revenge,
I said, by plunging a shank in
my noggin, looks like. It ain't
nothing but a scratch—I'll just
sleep it off. But the P.A. riffled
my stiff, clotted hair; buzzed it
off. Probed down till she saw
the whole mess. Fresh ooze
squirted up. I flinched and lost
heart. Grabbing a razor, she
hacked away at small chunks
of hair; junked my locks. Then
the needles pressed in: my ex
gave me (uhh) a thumbs up. Up
in numb air—a pause between
pulses, a staple-gun chattered,
clack-clack clack-clack, and I
joked with the plump grave-
yard shift nurse standing by
that I'd lost my head. Nurse
dressed my wound, rubbing
topical ointment; covering it
in gauzy cotton strips. I ripped
off my gown. In order to dis-
charge me, I needed someone
to drive my tired body back
home. Couldn't alone, given
what drugs I'd been fed. A long
form in exiguous font sped by
I lost the thread of. Sign here.
I sold myself—if not my soul—
during that trip in the car, how
thankful I was that you'd come;
hugged you, as you dropped me
off at my door—saying foolish
twaddle now addled on pain-
killers, pills, Adderall. Doesn't
add up—like some lop-
sided top, it keeps spinning
out; or perhaps a calculus
that never reaches its limit.
But hey, baby, I love— *Now,
please. Give it a rest; try to heal.
Refuse to exert yourself and feel
better soon. Maybe find a new hat.
Don't act so foolish; another fall on,
you'll forget.* I never did catch

the rest of whatever. With
nothing to look ahead to, I
blabbered; I blubbered. No
narrative has closure—a nice
little bow without any loose
strands. I could barely stand
there and take it, stiff-lipped
while I imagined you stiff-
armed me, recounting each
nettling fact, each terrible head-
game we'd played with each
other. Flashbacks and black-
outs; words twisted like pretzels
next to kisses and hugs. What
was it all worth? O, each of
those X's that sutured my skin?
Months of banging and bung.
Enough! Then I jab-jabbered
on. Emptied out, out of touch,
wiped as the doormat where I
was parked, I suddenly noticed
(there's the rub, poor stabbing
ache) ach! Or, rather: *Achtung*—
since you'd departed long ago.
I stared at the dark. But your
voice still kept up its chatter-
box shadowboxing, glib gab
to a vacant room in my mind.
Ah, a blue mundo so doomed.
A seasick fish story unraveled,
ribald day burning off: I go on
confessing, sagging near dusk,
to rag-shuddering furniture
(arms, legs, and headboard)
sinking in gloom, quick restless
guesswork. I repeat a pat patter
'til it's petering out. Scoff if you
like, since when had I any heart
left to cut myself off——

Suze Kay

For a year in my early twenties, I worked for a luxury florist in Manhattan. Despite being surrounded by beautiful flowers every day, I became cynical and uninspired. It was a creatively barren time in my life. Writing this poem was an attempt to return to that year and wring something meaningful - and perhaps beautiful - from it.

Love and Death in the Flower Shop

Men love women who suffer, or suffered them once. They called me for miracles:
peonies out of season, long-stemmed red roses on a baby's breath budget,
bouquets delivered twelve hours before their ordering. I hand-wrote *I'm sorry*
as much as *I love you*. I asked them what her favorite color was. They just said
something pretty and I died for her. In the flower room I learned to bleach water,
strip stems, trim rot. My sneakers grayed by the day. My nails collected a dingy
rime of eucalyptus sap. My knowledge grew of weeds and wonders. My boss let me
take home near-dead blooms, their pale blown cores dropping petals in the subway,
blowsy tulips draped on my windowsill to be tipped out with coffee grounds. In February
last-minute men bunched along the sidewalk like snowbanks until we closed. Aphids
bulged the head of an Ecuadorian rose — I could not save it. I didn't even want to try.
I tipped the bundle, washed my hands of it, picked crawling stowaways from my cuff.
At the events expo I set a table for an imaginary wedding, noosed white silk orchids
with invisible strings, hung them swaying over rented crystal goblets. A man approached
me and said he liked my shoes. He offered a business dinner and told me of his children,
then begged to buy me black boots priced higher than my monthly rent. I saw the indent
on his finger. I knew his lies before he said them. I wondered if he knew his wife's
favorite color. I asked a bride about her dream bouquet and she told me she didn't dream,
to go ask her mother-in-law. Gray circles rimmed her eyes. I took a week off for Easter.
My parents' lawn was still wintered over but the riverbank brimmed with daffodils,
a thousand yellow heads bobbing with wind in chilled sun. My mother handed me shears
in a wicker basket and I lopped them away from the Earth, snugged their squeaky stems
into seven pitchers and set the table with my brothers. I quizzed myself on pricing I ought
to know by heart: Anemone, $2.50 a stem. Bells of Ireland, $3. Calla lily, $6.75. Dahlias, $7.
Echinacea, $4. Freesia, $7.50. Gladiolus, $6. Hellebore, $3. I returned to work. The prices
changed. I draped a chicken wire net over a child's coffin, wove in vines and rosebuds.
In May the phones rang panic in with the morning, the mother forgotten until dawn
the day of. I tied bouquets in the flower room and shivered beside the sweet peas under
refrigerated wind. I never grew anything but jealous, just cut stems down to size, piled
papered bunches into backs of trucks and grateful hands. I took a terrarium class to feel
my hands in soil. They gave me perlite. The cacti died on my windowsill, their glass
meniscus frying them dry in the southerly sun. I dropped a vase, swept up sparkling shards
with shred-ends of ribbon and soggy leaves. I cut cellophane. I cut sheets of tissue. I cut my
hands on scissors, on wire, on thorns, on carbon copy order forms. My left sole separated
behind the counter. I wished I'd been less proud. I wished I'd let that man buy me boots.
My boss went to the Hamptons and cut me loose for a month. I visited the bonsai trees
in Prospect Park. They hadn't changed. I begrudged them their seasonless patience.
The month ended. I called my boss and she told me to take another, no one wants flowers
when they're growing well. I suffered. My boyfriend bought me carnations when I couldn't
give them to myself anymore. He knew I liked pink freesia but couldn't find them, so he said
I'm sorry. I said *I love you*. At our wedding I told my florist to make it wild, like it grew here
on the golf course of its own accord, like the head and the soil were never separated.

Angela Arnold

Nature is my happy place, so it's strange that I don't write more nature-inspired poetry but mostly about human relationships. This poem is a deep meander through experience, imagination, observation, pondering our place in nature, how we look for connection with it and are affected by it - not always as we expect.

The Day That Did

Should it matter at all that it's a Sunday, sun day, day green
with uplifting slopes, bright with white crag lines, soft
with slopes that runnel into dips, yawn idly
down into grassy mouths?
That higher up,
hills are yarned with a straightforwardness of path, a grey-
dabbling of boulder dots saying nothing more
complicated than sit, rest
for breath, rest your eyes on it all, any of it?
It did; does; matters
as I look up from late lunch, boots stowed, windows down
for a warm hand of air
to pull the hot from the car,
eyes drawn to the long hang there of kestrel, eyes
drawn, for no reason, down:
the laboured reversing, the car
close, far too close to the sloping, the slide, the revving,
revving – some fool's outing on a sun-day tilting already –
and I laugh. Laughed
among the summer-green give
of the hills, the enticingly gentle edges.
Day's default setting a grin.
Grin that stayed set, the better to cradle
the crook panic unfolding, the sudden roll and capsize:
slope sucking in,
a laughable undertow
aided and abetted by a good metal glint wink
from the sun – a disappearance like a mere bird silence.
And so this long pause
is a softish end to it, surely.
Wiggling walking-sock toes, holding
semi-sandwich in the melt of a June heat lavished car,
pines still posing with only the slowest of sway, surely,
all this marks a full stop?
The cannon shot
when it comes (late) makes me
snort, involuntary hiccup of amusement,
till my half-lunch thrusts itself aside in a rush of
gut banishment: where to look
now? My eyes still feast,
how can they stop?
True, kestrel's gone, in a flash of great startle. –
It'll hang there again, though,
will it not? Mid-sun, mid-*fairness*
of another day?

II

But how to move forward on *this* day: already
cracked like a jar. Flee into woods.
(Sacred site, so they say. But are coins pushed into clefts
in an outcrop evidence?)
Survey this hall that rings hollow
with reaching trees, branches hung with multicoloured
enchantments suspended, lightly wind-vocal, for us to
feel touched by
one way or the other. A small coin, then.
And I'll have this slim trail of mud that promises things
spiritual at its end, no doubt. – Maybe at this boulder-
cleft bottleneck, rough
stone that won't budge?
Nothing here to chime at you either, twirl a sparkle.
Hell! Surely only a child! Even feet have to
squeeze, shapeshift.
And a point is reached: trust and
throw (backpack, hope) no longer optional. Where the fun
really starts. With every squirming don't-mock effort
I'm only too plainly
what-am-I-saying rock-
re-born here. And subtly, subtly there follows
my whole frame of mind. Primed now, like it or not, for
(heaven help me!)
the sacred well – so-called, *so-called* –
to go earwigging at, lean into a moss-crust mouth, hear…
not much, as it turns out, in all deep
standing stillness.
Something clearer, though,
a lot clearer than the rushing water only
(all humdrum, I *hear* now) bumbling through trees.

III

After all that, home seems flat now. No angst, no
spells, thrall, nothing? The night sky too light
to seal this day.
Stretching arms up in vain, conjuring
mirages, signalling:
Earth to Orion?
I hunt you down every night
come black winter. I construct the myth of you
anew with each view of your bling,
those sun-spark dots that were never introduced
to each other:

stars so far apart in 3D,
so blind to our flat appreciation,
grandly oblivious to the reams of fancy words
we daisychain together
in our efforts to draw the very sky
into our nets. (Make sense, cold pinpoints
in space, make sense!)
No, we don't want to hear about
suns, combustion, distance and Earth's final fate.
We want your Dog* at heel, every twinkling bark
that says yes, present and correct,
even in summer – at least your name still
perfectly, witchingly visible.

*Sirius, the Dog Star, companion of Orion The Hunter.

Allison Burris

I've been trying to write about my family's property in the California mountains for years, and have amassed quite a few attempts that never felt quite whole or finished enough to address the place in its complexity. When this call came out, I realized that maybe something holding me back from saying what I needed to say was the length of the piece. This poem is sort of a collage or Frankenstein-ing of four and half other poems that were all attempting to say something similar from different angles. I think there's a craft lesson in this—keep those multiple drafts of your old work. Remix it. Change the form—make it much shorter or much longer. If you like reading about the associations between people, place, and nature I recommend the work of Gary Snyder, Ada Limón, and One Long River of Song *by Brian Doyle.*

Today's Fire Danger

high in the Sierras there's a cabin, surrounded
by a forest of pine, fir, assorted cedars

it's been in my family for generations, barely
a full cycle for the Jeffrey Pines

like the wedding trees, which died
within moments of each other

a fire could gobble everything, greedy
even for the decay and loam, could

paint the trees carbon black, charred
to core, curling ash on the breeze

meanwhile, my cousins grow
in the shadows of sugar pines

learning how to pick spiny gooseberries
and howl in chorus with coyotes

we share a memory of childhoods covered
in fine brown volcanic dirt

we pretend to make burgers out of lichen
put it in our hair like ribbons

the larking birds provide soundtrack
for the woodpecker's knock knock

jokes, owls questioning each other
about the time, and we know the flying

squirrels are out there, though we never
see evidence, just the erratic flight of bats

jerky in twilight with a ghost orchestra
playing off-key accompanied by mothy violin

I lose my sense of pitch
as I scan the night for green-gold eyes

bounce my flashlight with worry
hope and hope it's only me out here

walking in the colding dark
sometimes I hum to keep the band

playing, like a tune is what will
ensure the chimney won't fall

I don't think about black bears, rustling
their rumble through the trees

instead I think of the trees, breathing
but the present is hard to hold

soon I turn the flashlight off, scare
myself to sleep since it's too quiet

in the morning there are dragonflies
hovering past their normal season

I'm bracing for the fire that will take
this cabin down to stumps, but force

myself to sit on the porch, towards the meadow
everyone remembers the view, opening

before it became tree-clogged, hard to tell
in the faded photographs from the 70s

no matter what you do to try and preserve
them, they will continue to fade

but you can squint at the layers, the rotting
picnic table, the swath of fairy purple lupine

daisies and cat's paw and yarrow
chipmunks and the wind tapping the chimes

everything we've built will be eaten
by the forest, a feast for beetles

mushrooms, while we cut down saplings
along the road for fire truck clearance

one was sheltering an abandoned nest
the squirrels chitter their displeasure

throw their pine cones while the chainsaw
revs and rips through the pines

each pine drinks dozens of bathtubs of water
from the meadow altering what it touches

changing the soil into one more suitable
for trees, crowding out the flowers

drying the fork of the river

nothing seems like enough armor

even the tin roof can only do so much
little sparks like orange fireflies

from the chimney wink out
but a wildfire—against a wildfire—

the cabin shifts as creatures assail the walls
we hammer on another can lid scale

against wasps and mice and woodpeckers
we fall one tree at a time

to create a perimeter, a break
up here any possibility seems like a matter

of time, here we're on the trees' time
the lichen's time and my clock is not slow

enough to fully understand, so I remove
my watch and keep an eye on the sun

we clear and save what we can,
whatever we can to mitigate

the destruction, already mourning
the changes and loss of habitat

even for the rattlesnakes, the mice
poking their noses everywhere

the fire will come in time
after the fire, come the ferns

Zebulon Huset

When I was doing my MFA at UW-Seattle, I was coordinating editor of The Seattle Review *as it transitioned into only publishing long-form works which was pretty eye-opening and gave me a lifelong love of long poems.*

Dancing with the Surreal

she is the one who said 'fun' sounded like a word of german origin - Saul Williams

Surreal isn't the interplay of black holes and jaunty music,
the shadows of jazz musicians cringing in tune
as once-stars make out-of-register catcalls,
surreally guys—
two surrealists walk into a bar
and order a satiation of surreal cereal.

Have we reached the appropriate level of sur-silliness, yet?
Are we having fun, funning it up for fun's sake?

This is how we met. Surreal and Fun standing in a parking lot like burnt out bulb-bearing lampposts.

Stars masked by clouds
and
dark matter and
choreographers.

*

Who was Tom DeLay and why can't he dance?
Why does even his cha-cha seem guilty of something?
What's this magic picture box? asks great-great-grandpa,
and why is it so beautiful,
so terrible?
Who are you?

The sky is both up and
down.

Written on the sidewalk:
surreal slurs reality surreal sursursurreal.

And the sky moves. And we move.

*

Two surrealists walk into a bar
the third should duck,
but gooses.

Fun forgives funky
for its showboating. Surreal slurring.

*

Why won't my morphemes change for anyone but you?

*

Once-white dwarfs sashay. Meteorites
dust the atmosphere with fun fun fire. Shadow.

A children's song from a Disney snuff film.
Surreal laerrus. We raise Lazarus and insist
"Second position!"
We start the pyres in homes without containers.
There aren't enough Coopers in the yellowpages.

In all surrealistness, where do we buy a barrel?

There's a stock of fish
and fishsticks
and stones.

*

Are we ready? Surrealsurrealsurreal. Syzygy-guided.
Are we ready? Ready? Are we? Are we away from the place
in time and space you left me? We are are are
surreal.
Not *beyond* but *in addition to*.

We are here. We divorce petals. We constellate.
We tickle atoms. We surreal. We surreal. We surreal. We leave the realities of words tied to meaning with repetition. We we we we drown in syzygys. We eulogize and say *so surreal* and *how surreal* and *isn't that ironic?* and it isn't it isn't it isn't.

We write fun fun fun having fun with fun fun
fun fun fun for fun. Semantic satiation's fun!

We shout.
Self-dizzied.

Inscribing
knitting
etching
fun for surreal fun
and sur-fun-real and and
we sketch abstractions
across constellations of ands
until we can't catch our breath
and we wonder if it was ever ours to have
in the first place.
We are we
if I type it. Stars and all.
It feels really *surreal-*

surreal. It's over.

Overlapping.

*

There is a narrative we can predict and foreshorten. The horror movie insists that *now* the cliché is the expected. Our virgins aren't safe from hacks. *In media res*, we will televise Lazarus—for the cha-cha perhaps.

Dance monkey.
Dance zombie. Dance for us.

We've watched three seasons already and we know you must move to the music and if we're lucky you will cry.

The you has shifted and I don't like it
(*lasso lasso lasso*).

*

We drip
from expected pronouns.

We dance nounless where moonlight
might've been.

Real life is so much easier to understand,
but
boringboringboring
we must insist as
we sing and step and shush and saddle the actual night

with *fun fun surreal fun surreal surreal surreal surreal.*

Zebulon Huset

Our Wondrous Garbage Island

We met like dry ice plopped into water:
immediate and ethereal.
The proof in the smoky pudding? We'd both
seen that episode of Duck Tales.
The grassy sargassum
Bermuda Triangle tangling one of Uncle
Scrooge's many ships in its grip. The adventure!
Of course the interchangeable nephews (we viewers)
got to tag along. Science!—bring your other
homework, we're oceanbound! But...

That wasn't our island. Our mix of *Swiss Family*
Robinson Crusoe and *The Cay* with maybe
some *Waterworld* mixed up in the visionary soup
that sprouted from a short phrase misremembered.
And why island? Why both seeking the safety
of land when the spiral title of gyre came
attached to the pacific garbage some nondescript
face explained was poisoning the ocean. A gyre!
A fucking unstable gyre with its gravital gimbal!
Forgive my exuberance, this is serious.
This is metaphor.
It's also about currents.
Nothing still.

Nome oceanfront eventually winters in Baja.
Sand will come. As will tide.
We're spinning
500mph and I can't hear what you're saying
because you're not here. Like light.
Like matter.
This isn't physics, Mr. Higgs. It's anecdote at best.
This is afterschool cartoons gone awry.

***

There are no garbage islands in the Pacific.
Just the last bit of broth from a buffet's vegetable beef soup.

The polymers we melt into plastic bottles
and hardhats, and grocery membranes
swirl in the deadland of the windless north Pacific
waters only truly manipulated with combustion engines,
carbon-ignition once again (measured in equine metaphor).

Thousands of Chinese-made bath toys
were blown overboard before hitting Seattle.

They're still cruising the currents,
stamping their passports everywhere from New Zealand

to Scotland.
Our world tour.

The warm-toned, duck-yellow and beaver-red
have been completely blanched of their passion
to neutral, nearly transparent white,
while their cold-toned buddies
maintained their turtle-blue and frog-greens.

Stragglers but lost tourists in the gyre,
world of off-ramps,
of one-way cul-de-sacs filled with empty bottles,
the fire quenching off-day to day to day.

***

Which is why we agreed the hourglass
as representation of passing time is outdated.

We burn the midnight oil without ever seeing
the oil (that doesn't meet landfall).
We went with Acme bomb wick.
A cut scene.
Bland adobe wall behind the twisted cotton twine spiked
with wax and gunpowder, of course,
coolant and accelerant, love and the smolder
leading toward what must be a powderkeg,
but really, who knows what's below the screen?

Only the next scene.

But this is really about Duck Tales, isn't it?
About the ducklings' ship rushing into the kelp trap
which harbored the fabled sea monster
(was there a huge seaweed sphincter that closed behind them?).

It's at least [as associatively] about
the biological island which carried two iguanas
away from the damned world to Arcadian Galapagos
and the milieu of Captain Bounty or
the ensuing mutiny except that Gableless,
the widow's walk was somber, premonitory.

Our garbage Arcadia evolved from *A New Hope*-like imagery
as well as sargassum mat and kelp raft petri dishes
drifting life to its own happy, isolated,
mutant future.

We don't think of the early generations
in grand talk of evolution,

the freaks not entirely unique but still
So Fucking Weird. That's us.

A rebel army all our genetic own.

Taboo-breakers all. Fuck the world and
all that.

***

This one is ours. All ours.
Peel a wicked laughter's wrapper.
Ours! Our own garbage island to rule as we wished!
But a word to build it higher, grander.
Let the temperamental sun melt pebbles of plastic
into impressionistic pavement for our alleyways.
Every building with spiral fire escape ladder and slide.
Pillars and flying buttresses of bottles warped into place.
Bring me my crown. There's one around,
somewhere.
If not, I command (into existence): A crown.
Grandiose.
Your presence.
I'd never discovered my regal ambitions before you
vamoosed.
Now it's all kings and court jesters.
Banana peels
waiting on the stares to be stepped on.

Zebulon Huset

Podded

They had canvas book bags with Anoka County Library screened along their sides and I had a backpack stuffed and tossed somewhere near the back door at home, but I used plastic grocery bags to carry my library books home. The handlebar held the plastic's hand and I rode home slow so the swinging sack wouldn't bump the front tire, tearing the bag and possibly accruing library fines. A canvas bag would have been smarter, but also more expensive. We had plenty of plastic bags under the sink. Besides, I was never known for taking the easiest or smartest route. It wasn't in my genes.

**

It's all about
the sentences.

It's about the way
the sentences
move
in
paragraphs.

It's about r h y t h m.

It's about am-
big-
u-
it-
y.

It's about the
way
emotion,

in *difficult*
circumstances,

gets

I I c I a I p I t I u I r I e I d I I

in language.

It's about instants
of
consciousness.

—found poem in Rick Moody's introduction to Amy Hempel's *The Collected Stories*

**

It's a love/hate relationship with Code Word and Magic Word. It's not their fault, it's their parents' baggage. Heredity in etymology is much more insistent than even *traditional* human parents. A Code Word is one which has been predetermined by two or more people, along with, often, a secret question. It is a bonding experience like when AJ broke the jumbo super glue tube. A word of close community or kinship within the greater world of dull and ugly. A Magic Word is known by an untold number who have no affiliation with each other. Sure, the transitive properties of a secret magic cocoons people from anything less wonderful: social events, neighbors, windows—but how wonderful that cocoon while pouring yourself into the luminous surreality you'd pulled into the world miraculously.

**

/Open Mind Sweeper (any difficulty).
/Type Xyzzy-shift-enter.

If you take this Monochrome cheat to set a new high score turn to page 23.

If you slowly move your binary metal detector over the blank squares until you find the largest reservoir of blank-slates to explode onto the screen (or, would at least consider this option carefully before methodically placing each flag, field's non-fatal destinies left a mystery to the school children who haplessly roam the field in your imagination) turn to page 43.

**

When you reach the goal time of 13 seconds a great light appears over your head and harp music slowly begins building. Rush of wind blows paperwork off your desk. A cake appears. A bad person dies somewhere across the planet. You have saved the world. What more is there to do? Sit between Estragon and Vladimir. Discuss leaving.

If you accept the sit-pace of waiting for Godot, close the book. Sit. Do not be ashamed.

If you wait a spell, then cast yourself from the bench in futile search of further narrative turn to Page π.

**

Book as shield. As anti-social minion. Who interrupts someone so clearly wrapped in another world for anything trivial? It provides safety at family reunions, birthday parties for friends of parents, places unfamiliar and slightly not-home. Teleportation device of sorts, but that has always been a troublesome thought. Does the transporter in Star Trek digitize you, DNA and mitochondria and memory alike, then reproduce that, while simultaneously vaporizing your then-body? What sort of storage are we talking here? One time use, tear the tab off style clones, or could you keep that version as a sort of vac-u-pac-me in case something goes horribly wrong, which, let's face it, happens almost every episode for the visiting cast member. You know, that guy, over there with the book.

**

There's a music to the word anonymity that is impossible to reproduce. The way the meaning curls around the iambs like creeper vine-vibrato. Rolls regular as breath.

**

Gary Paulsen isolated his characters in many of his young adult books. There were plane crashes, midnight marathons, cultural isolation; a bouquet of adventures and opportunity right along the cusp of hopelessness and death. *Hatchet* roughed its corners in my backpack for almost a full year. Pulled out in emergencies of the boredom varietal.

**

Picture a man. His wife. Their first born. Second. Third. Fourth.
Fracture *marriage* between the arse.

Believe that I am not a part of it.

Rage recognizable with its clean cut stress.

First born marries his first lady in black, bi-sexual coven-mistress. Moves toward tundra and becomes middleman for a cab dispatch. No need for interaction with more than a handful. Third accepts video games early. Learns to think in numbers. Fourth spits at removal of self and doesn't recognize *riage*.

To be continued.

**

National Novel Writing Month takes place in November and is highly community-based. In cities across the world groups organize to offer moral support to each other in their novel

attempts at writing. Of course, hermetic vein kept me sealed within apartment. Of course the plot involved the joyous, and unavoidable adventure that opens up a whole world to the character, in my case two worlds. And teleportation of the mystic style. The kind that is based on unknown, perhaps unknowable rules. But never illogical. I made graphs and pages and pages of narrative and scenic notes. Then I trapped my narrator in a cave and didn't make it out to the main story, then November ended—freedom.

**

Man and woman's second son rages as well. While Daughter One learns shoe-tying and first boggle words: ant, the, red—help— Son Two returns home from bussing tables one cold November night—North Minneapolis breath freezing so furiously its density keeps it from rising too fast—locked door barring him from the house's warmth. Years after Mom quit closing KJ's, cocktailing the cowboy bar between Spring Lake Park and Blaine on the old-highway-now-frontage-road. She should be wrapped in the blue glow of TV he sees illuminating her bedroom shades. Rages for warmth. Hot as a hare. Kicks door trying to make racket. Draw attention. When door's 12 panes crumble (only one of two layers thickness—bent between locked deadbolt and corner curled under a little more with each sequential kick, he breaks a basement window and finds house empty. And door's still halved its glass.

**

I wish my mom began phone conversations with the bad news. Her "Heyyyy" held onto its A as buffer. As moment not returning to news via words. As time and bad news "Heyyyy"s piled up in my memory, I finally just cut it off. "What happened?" Pause. But not long enough to elicit concern. "Sammi overdosed, but—" "What?" The tiny girl who always begged me to teach her to rollerblade and only got truncated, impatient lessons. "She was in a coma for a little bit, but she's out now."

1500 miles from phone to waiting room.

As Boeing flies. Crows are slow and prone to eat, sleep.

Rent is high.

Mom cries. Assure her it's not her fault.

Consider meaning of fault as self inflicted means of feeling worse so as to (hopefully) feel better exorcism.

**

Family as pod of lilacs. There's a whole bush sure, but this pad sticks out a little. As the sun stretches across the sky and tries to tickle forth the soft, fragrant purple the branch tries to

maintain its protective green. As each budlet cracks open, others around it brown, fall, recede.

**

This essay began writing itself long before it took shape as a whole. Before this period. Though resistant to the term memoirist, my family's individuals sprang into my earliest poems—egocentric caricatures and blatant false modesty of the worst kind clearly pictographs:

me
\
them.

Leonard Michaels wrote "Self pity is a corrupt version of honesty," so, even the excising of <[1] honest poems, heroic-me pieces,[2] spurring new poems and fragments that may too prove even less honest in another decade.[3] My teeth are rotting already, joints creaky—[4] wouldn't that fit with me as a character?

1. As opposed to ">" or greater than. Bra, where > = ket. The C, such a seemingly vital sense, is left adrift above the so-rare straight equals sign.
2. Even if the metaphysic-me isn't the hero, via comparison to deeply flawed others, the *me* becomes the hero.
3. When pixels drop from memory and are smoothed out with interpolation.
4. Why shouldn't my honesty be corrupted as well?

**

Secret numbers of such importance. Numbers only the wisest mice knew (42) which answered an unknown, but terminal question. Secret numbers known by parents, religious figures, chaosticians, math books. Combinations. Keys. In Darren Arronofsky's Pi, a mathematician discovers a 216 digit number which is hidden in all of nature and human interaction, and when incanted shows him the overwhelming light of God. Of course, in the movie rabbis and capitalists the worst, most zealous varieties hunt him, but because he alone was special, had discovered the magic word that so many with unclenching power wished to turn into a code word they could trade in secret. Of course, also, the narrator performs self-trepanning with a power tool following the beauty of the code word. So it goes.

**

Family of four (Man, woman, son #1 and son #2) semi-circle faux-oak desk. No, semi-circle around green screen of Apple IIe and map slowly emerging on pilfered school graph paper. The game, Crystal Cave Adventures, predated graphically-futuristic Centipede, Oregon Trail, by a decade. More, even. It trapped you in a room, around a computer. Blind aside a line of text and the map we made of its responses.

>Inventory

You have nothing.

(>Go Left) however, runs you into the quicksand, which you can only escape if you equip wheelbarrow. Proving, finally, just how much depends on the red wheelbarrow.

**

YES, itistrue
that life would be better
if we were all
a little kinder,

and

it is true

p t
that paint s l t e
a r d
e
i n t h e a i r

will
f
a
l
l to the
g r o u n d.

BOTH are true,

but

who
wouldhavesuspected
that they were[1]

1. notable.

—found poem in David Mamet's essay "Hearing the Notes that Aren't Played"

**

I sat, typing this essay in your hand. I agonized over this period. This comma, really every keystroke my keyboard wireless and batteries dying—drama queen AA's—lazing out early. Don't give up on me. On my pod of lilacs. Get a soda, a glass of wine or coffee, but please, come back to my commas, so lonely in the shut book's dark, static as a coffin.

**

Sammi's got her pink, hard plastic rollerblades on and I'm wearing $300 Oxygens I'd won at the last skate competition—deep in St. Paul, where empty warehouses are cheap enough for skater punks to lease—the last snow four days since plowed from streets, dried white froth of dissipated salt like abstract sand sketches on the sidewalk in front of Rainbow Foods. She's maybe six. The wooded planters ankle high and slick, as frozen wood tends to be. I hold her right hand as we slowy roll up to crayon-buffed section we'd prepared. "Step up Sammi," and she does. I hold her weight and pull her along the slick wood. "Now jump!" and she does. We roll away. I check my cell phone. Re turn and repeat. Again and she leans less on me, more upon the space of frame where I'd removed her bulky soft wheels for the lesson. Buzz of text message. "How long are you going to be in California?" "I don't know." Text indicates a trip to skate park. To take photos for a magazine. To capture instants. "You're never coming back, are you?" "Of course I will." Automatic. Inaccurate.[1] "Let's go home, I think you got it." Sammi grips my hand tighter. "Just one more. This time let me go for a second." Smile. Five tries later she's torn her pants, and stepped off the planter without my help. Rolled backwards slowly toward the parking lot, alone.

1. Another way to say that, would be "A lie," though, that wasn't entirely known at the time. Just hoped for. To fly from the frozen flats of Minneapolis to somewhere warm and undulating. Pitted, handrailed and perfect.

**

December 24th, 2 a.m. and I lie sleepless on my waterbed, piled high with baseball cards, stuffed animals, dirty and clean clothes, vhs cassette cases, NES controllers and games—which would have to be carefully blown free of dust, left free of their black dust sleeves—uneasy. Grab booklight book and pillow and lay on the only clear, body-length place in my room: the floor in front of the door. Open standby book. *The Fantastic Mr. Fox*. He was a carnivore and he ate to survive. He was wily and lived not by being the biggest kid on the block, but by outsmarting the farmer. So many farmers at school. The book short, familiar. Read through. Then again. Repeat. And again. I made a pantoum of the book and curled its reality around my brain hoping, wishing that I get Techmo Super Bowl beneath some colorful paper. Newspaper. I didn't care what they had to use that year. Footsteps on stairs that lead to parent's room. Red ticks of my alarm clock render the time as 3:30. Three hours before allowed wake-up-and-voraciously-unwrap our presents. Close booklight just before my door cracks. Slight push against my side but it hardly budges. Projects its dark. Door closes. Santa begins. I consider this momentarily. My parents placing presents printed "From Santa" under the tree. When we colored his sleigh red at school I hadn't asked how Santa made it to so many children's houses. It was clearly just a story. One of those fantastic endings that a lucky choice in a Choose Your Own Adventure book took you to where everything was perfect and illogical. When their rustling stopped I reopened my

booklight, quiet darkness of sleep still wading out on the horizon where ocean and sky melt their hues into each other, and returned to Mr. Fox's fantastic escape from the farmer and his cronies. There was no villain in the Santa story. Not even time.

**

Back when I thought I wanted to be a journalist and slung my camera at everything I could, pulse or not, I knew that through angle and cropping you can turn a mundane truth into something extraordinary. But that's not how you photograph something horrible, something that makes you guilty for viewing with any shred of objectivity. Fact so easy to angle into something so subjective. To fisheye, compress with telephoto. I liked the ability to tilt things, but sometimes the most startling, disarming images look the thing in the eye without filter or distortion. Objectivity in the bleakest of places, admission of the darkness of the night. Of the eight varieties of pills they pumped from my little sister's stomach were two types of narcotic pain medicines my mom had been taking after numerous joint surgeries.

Flash to catalyst incident: there had been an argument about a phone bill. A grounding, a slammed door. A pill cache entirely engulfed. Ipecac from the first aid kit Mom kept from her Day Care days. An ambulance etc.

All while I tramped Porterhouses out to gluttons thinking *woe is me*.

**

Photography with its distortions and candor translated well into poetry. Words like tiny snapshots of their things. Individual pictures collaged into phrases, a story. Constant recomposition from new angles, until perspective and vision line up. Or sometimes something else altogether. The famous picture of a black and white Whitman staring at a black and white butterfly is at least anecdotally a candid shot near the end of the portrait session. Called real, even by Whitman, but eventually surfaced as a mass-produced cardboard cut-out bearing a hymnal by John Mason Neale. *Fraud! Lies!* Flaps the left brain. "What though the saints like Him shall die." Flaps the right.

**

The Whitman-Butterfly story, though in one way an invention of photographer and poet, is also a narrative. The butterfly is real in that it existed. Its crude cardboard edges held elegy and Higgs-Boson alike. It mattered. The photo was Whitman's favorite of himself, perhaps precisely because it is not about him, but about the butterfly. The subject, via its subject, becomes a prop. If not inorganic, his body becomes at least secondary to the focus, accepted in the scene—as the scene—and allowed to tilt the eye elsewhere. You cannot fool us, Walt. That is a portrait not of the butterfly, but of you.

Oh shit.

**

No, lilacs are too anonymous. Too similar, like the ideal of happy families. Too easy. If Prometheus had a favorite tree it would've been the Monterey Pine—Grand Sequoias. Its seeds lay locked within tightly sapped cones as if for the eternity that Shakespeare imagined his words enduring. But that would be too bland. It would require something non-pine to find, and extract its DNA like Jurassic Park scientists. Too insular to be human, which is why the metaphor doesn't end there. Forest fires naturally spark through that epiphanic lightning, and while they rarely situate long enough to burn through the thick bark, melt the sap between plate-mail of cone and release likewise-coated shells onto the ground. To take root on their own.

**

A copse of sequoias is daunting when looking up from the very break of earth.

**

A friend born in Chile said that though she's spent most of her life in America, she'll notice that she sometimes *thinks* in Spanish. Word as representation of thing. These are words. Words about my family, myself. But mostly words to represent the idea of the thing. Words as middlemen. How easy to claim guilt in a courtroom. How does the author plea?

Pine cone, your Honor.

**

Hot as a Hare,
Dry as a Bone,
Mad as a Hatter,
Red as a Beet,
Blind as a Bat.

—Mnemonic to never forget: Toxidrome (Xyzzy of overdose symptoms).

**

R.A. Montgomery's introduction to each Choose Your Own Adventure book advises the reader as one would a writer.

BEWARE and WARNING!

This book is different from other books.

You and YOU ALONE are in charge of
what happens in this story.

There are dangers, choices, adventures and
consequences. YOU must use all of your
numerous talents and much of your
enormous intelligence. The wrong decision
could end in disaster—even death. But,
don't despair. At anytime YOU can go
back and make another choice, alter the
path of your story, and change its result.

What a wonderful idea to implant into a child. That reality can be reordered, revisited, and re-envisioned. Practice lead to the revelation that this is only applicable to the past. The present remains frustratingly illusive and concrete. And at times, broken glass and ipecac as well.

**

Colossal Cave Adventures was one of the first computer adventure games that came to be known as IF—interactive fiction.

It is based on imperative sentences.

It—like most IF—forces the reader to interact with the text to progress the story/game often through puzzles and word games.

There is a magic word which teleports you through walls. Xyzzy typed anywhere except designated locations, earns the reader the reply *Nothing happens*. Later programmers encoded Xyzzy into their own games in reverence, like poets acknowledging each other. Like film editors slipping an infamously campy Wilhelm scream past a director. Pods of specialized artists making the mystical magic of the word into a code word like a secret handshake or last name.

A tiny recognition amidst the anonymity of being one of billions of people on one of perhaps a trillion-trillion planets, or more—where the idea of anonymity loses its glamor and a family seems favorable to a pod. But time isn't like IF. Linearity is a bitch, and it likes to remind you of your faults at every chance it can.

**

—at Torrey Pines

1.

Some things I still don't quite understand.

I know the moon's gravitation pulls the ocean
back from the Pacific coast sands once a day.
But I don't know when it will be high tide again.

Today small gray rocks speckle the tide's
hardened sand and we walk in near-silence.

Close to the water's ebb and floe
are smaller sea polished pebbles,
but nearer the cliff lay larger stones
half-submerged in sand —dangling back
toward the fickle ocean a trail of dark silt
protected in its wake like a mourner's scarf.

The smaller rocks rolled continuously against grating sand as the waves pulled them softer and shallower until they slipped into being another feature of the landscape being slowly scoured

clean.

2.

The stench hit us before we could tell
the pale lump from a large stone standing
deposited years ago from the cliff
into the wishy-washy beach sand.

We knew of one such abutment which jutted into the falling waves ahead of us with sight-seeing tidepools for my teenage sister, who'd flown in
on a whim.

We'd seen the news blurb between segments of some TV show or another,
but failed to connect time and place and dead whale.

And our noses chastised us roundly.

Near its left fin a large emdash cut in thick skin spewed a seaweed-like gray.

3.

Perhaps the whale died and was rolled ashore like a pebble in the wax of morning,
or stranded asand in a hunger-propelled thrust after shallow baitfish as the moon melted into the horizon.

However the whale arrived on the beach,

it remained there,
tongue
bloating
mouth
open.

I thought of my sister as a puff of Newport coasted a couple yards of wind to my face.

Of my mom having to go to truancy court,
her 3-children-raised-already parenting called into question
by lawyers
because she couldn't stop my sister from leaving school at lunch, or after Gym,
the only class she was passing that year.

I think of my own dropping out,
less ceremonious than even quitting a job,
of the in-patient bills and near-overdoses.
Things would be better.
Or worse,
then eventually better.

Experience as shoulder via cell phone.

I thought of the tide rolling me about its calendar of sand and where I landed and the divot I've dug for myself as I watch her slide slowly away from the protection of my landmark—the fertility of my experience—into uncharted waters, where a steep drop could be anywhere under that
turgid
surface.



Zebulon Huset

Collectivity

Brown stripes on yellow wallpaper. It makes Gabriel sick. He sits on bed's edge and stares at mustard and chocolate mixing and wants to throw up. The room makes him sick. The world makes him sick for the room. Frill arms of the canary pillow a gentle reassurance on hairless biceps. Gabriel returns every night. Twice. Three times Wednesdays. Four on the fifth of every month. The week of her birthday passes entirely sunless. But eventually, Gabriel lays the pillow next to its twin. The hair catcher. The artifact. He stands up. He steps toward the door intent on brass handle just visible from Rainbow Brite Night-Lite. Handle turns. The world always accepts him again into its bright glare and deep shadows.

*

Green vest and red tie. Porter calls it a Santa suit. Garish in the bright-bright lights of commerce and ecology. There are more textiles than food here, Porter thinks. Porter thinks about textiles. Porter thinks about songbirds. Porter thinks about bamboo. Porter thinks about the shoelace that has lost its aglet. He will have to scotch tape that. He will have to buy scotch tape. Scotch. His house stripped of every scrap of anything. Bleached. It aches for a human's touch. Porter had exorcised everything that she'd touched. His first three layers of skin scrubbed off. Sometimes he feels her fingertips walking up his scalp. Deeper.

*

White heat makes most things disappear. Working with the force that melts steel like margarine gives Stewart a couple inches on everyone. Balls hang heavy and hairy against his legs. "I am Zeus! I can do no wrong!" Stewart shouts, alone in the metal shop after the latest of talk shows. Morning shift trickles in, minutes after his white Tacoma slowly crunches its way out of the gravel parking lot, toward the once bright green house. He'd sworn he'd paint the house white. She wanted aluminum siding. Angela wanted a fairy tale castle in the clouds. Last night new wife won. Stewart just wanted to watch metal run like water with a touch of his finger.

*

In the sandbox a daddy long legs insists it's not a spider. Angela shakes the mayonnaise jar. "Then why are you called a Daddy Long Legs Spider?" Angela asks. "I am called Theodore," the Daddy Long Legs says. "A Theodore Spider?" Angela asks. "No, just Theodore. My mother named me." "My mother named me too!" Angela exclaims. "What else did your mother do?" Angela asks Theodore. "Nothing," Theodore says. "Nothing?" "Nothing, she died when I was young." "I'm so sorry, I know exactly how you feel." Angela bows her head. The dungeon pre-dug in the sand accepts its tenant. Hand dozed sand removes sky from Theodore's short long-legged life.

*

Red blinks its tint on Gabriel's head. *Budweiser*. Ahead of him: *Harp's* in white sieged by red. Flame at top. Trapped. Gabriel lifts his empty pint glass. Foam slides slowly towards lips tipped with spit. A black haired waif slowly gathers empty pints from Gabriel's table. Blue bruise wilts on forearm. Black tray weighed by five glasses, she waits for the sixth. Dot of foam hangs onto side of pint. He taps it. The waitress waits. He taps it. She snaps her gum. The white Harp. The angel. Surrounded by evil. Stolen by it. Gabriel stands abruptly, thigh tips table into pillar. Pint missiles at sign. Extinguishes flames in a shower of sparks. Angel vanishes. The bouncer stands from his stool.

*

White light is essential to cereal box color saturation. Tungsten bulbs dull. Rob the punch that sells units. Porter knows this. Porter knows that red catches the eye faster than green. His uniform draws the grocery customer's attention to his tie. His center. His heart cavity, aching for attention. Porter knows he must eat. Throat and mouth disagree. She is halfway around the Earth. He is alone. The shortest route to her is down. Centered in his green backyard, the dark hole is seven feet deep. He only digs at night. Somehow she always manages to sneak her touch onto his cleaning bottles. He replaces them every week. Porter knows that he will be able to eradicate her. He must. And he will live again. A phoenix.

*

Lilted daffodils on wheat-white grass. His love's charcoal tombstone sunken, small. Everything is shriveling. Stewart feels it here. Grounded. He'd picked the stunted flowers three houses before the low stone walls that separate the dead from the traffic. A tense silence spilled from his wife's cup even aluminum siding couldn't dry. It's splashing more and more. He'd picked yellow-gold rings. Platinum retired. Buried. On his finger, the yellow shine looks garish. Fake. Wherever he stands this pricks him. Makes him sick. Angela had captured some of his wife's spilled silence, stored it, slung it with an assassin's skill. The lawyer's card sharp in Stewart's pocket. His ungloved fingers acute in the cold that tastes like steel melting in his mouth.

*

Deep blue stained the world under a massive cloud screen. Sharp decline of the full moon still pierces, tints Angela's blonde head. Her back slides quietly against the aluminum siding. Angela had chipped off a long sharp triangle of the green paint before they'd baptized it in that hypocritical white. She'd applied that green. Her mother had laid the second coat. Her father the third. The family is in that slice of paint she hid in the back of the shed. Angela touches it, holds it. Slides her finger down the blade of paint, pushes the two tips together until black slides down the edge. Wets the paint, brings it back to life for only a moment. The smashed mayonnaise jar slivers Angela had prepared piled on her mother's red handkerchief. The red Tupperware of her father's wife's tuna beside it. Angela's father hates tuna. From her pocket, Angela withdraws a chrome spoon.

*

Grey slathers the sky like flavorless gravy. Every car window in the parking lot is sealed from the possibility of rain. Tires whittled away by imbalance slow to a stop a hairline from white line. Gabriel's car speaker announces an Amber alert. White pick-up, license pla—Gabriel snaps back his keys. Thinks his shopping list. Fast as he can. Over and over, the same three items, until he's sure there won't be a little girl in his backseat when he opens his eyes. When they open, only the tan and brown that makes him think of yellow wallpaper. Makes him close his eyes. Sourcreambutterbread. Sourcreambutterbread. Sourcreambutterbread.

*

Dark-grey-that-used-to-be-black paints out the grocery store with Porter's honeymoon beach chairs. Porter thinks about the rotation of the Earth. About the refraction of light that causes the

spectrum of colors. Porter thinks that under certain light, every color's the same. No one is special. Porter thinks of no one. Porter thinks of no thing. Porter scans milk, beep. Porter scans carrots, beep. The man in black jacket leads a girl toward a textile aisle. A non-food aisle. Aisle 13. Band aids and ointments. Sunwashed black. They'd let the tide slowly take the feet of their faded canvas recliners, lean them forward grain by grain. Porter scans persimmons. Porter scans apples.

*

Red trickles down two sets of quivering lips as Stewart's Tacoma slides to a harsh stop. Bloody mouths clap at chin and belly level. A fleck occasionally falling to the crisp tan grass. Two shrill voices screech syllables. Stewart says "Stop." Stewart says "One at a time." The frantic retelling yelling and finger pointing hurt his ears. "CUNT!" Stewart thunders at neither. Few words could have stopped the sounds in the yard. Stewart picked one. Stewart pieces together the story of pieced glass in tuna, bleeding mouth, laughter, punch, hatred only slightly tinged with regret. Angela looks at her feet. Sniffles. Blank divorce papers on grey bench seat. Stewart slides them into glove box. Yanks Angela up by her armpits into the cab. Glares. A smirk from the yard. Glares sharper. Tries to cut her lip further with his eyes.

*

Grey plastic armrest hogs Angela's eyes as pick-up speeds toward disinfectant, band aids. Tires hog the conversation with their hum. Angela's lifted from bench seat, set roughly on concrete. "You fucked up," he says. "That was fucked up." He pulls her through the motion sensor doors. Angela had intended it to be such. Couldn't resist witnessing, laughing as teeth met slivers of glass mixed with celery, tuna, mayonnaise. A second bite. A third spat out: balled bread and meat dyed red. Splattered the counter. "You're fucked up!" Angela hisses. Cashier fakes yet another smile. Beep. Beep. "No, not like that." Green vest takes cash. "Have a nice day now." Plastic bag in hand. "You abandoned her!" "She's gone." "Been to St. Philip's lately?" Arm yanks upward. "I'll scream," Angela's thin wrist a twig in his fist, unreservedly breakable. He pulls. The scream pierces the soundtrack of beeps. Cashiers hover milk over scanners. Stewart leans lips to ear. "Every. Single. Day." He releases wrist. Angela turns toward truck, her feet place themselves one in front of the other.

*

Black slams Gabriel as the scream pierces his grocery list. His daughter dives at him, through him. She's gone. Supermarket's white replaces black. Tense. Black jacketed man yanks little girl. Sour cream, butter and bread slide along the black conveyer. Cashier nods blankly. Smiles with a thin abruptness of the often forced to smile. Picks up soured cream. Through sliding door's glass the man yanks open door of white pick-up. White pick-up. That scream. Amber casts the world in a state of alert. Gabriel's daughter pounds on pick-up's window. Voiceless screams. Face white with fright. Edged in red. Gabriel makes a straight line to the man. Knife from pocket without breaking stride. Gabriel's heart beats regular as earth's rotation slows. Echo of slapping soles turns man's chest in time to catch blade. Deep into jacket, then out. Again. A scream breaks through his heart's bassline. A blonde girl pounds truck window. Face red with anger. His fingers dripping with it. The sun green in the leaves. "You're safe," Gabriel says, letting the Earth catch up finally, heart shaking his entire head with its reverb, sliding to his knees, his chest. He melts like margarine onto the still ground.

Devon Webb

This poem is unique among most of my recent publications because I wrote it a loooong time ago, the January in question being the January of 2021. I hadn't revisited it recently until I was looking for long poems for this 'yarns' call, & I wrote infamously long poems in this time period, mainly 'day-in-the-life' accounts/poetic retellings of the generally trivial things I experienced ~ that idea of making poetry out of triviality is something I still really love. Something else I love about this poem is that it name drops a few people with whom I'm still friends, so even though so much has changed in the past four years there are still some things that stay constant & familiar.

January 13th

My vape tastes like
my ex-boyfriend
not that nice
I spent
twenty dollars on this shit
I do not have
twenty dollars to spend on this shit
but I do have
moments of crippling social anxiety
hence using my vape as
an emotional crutch
& something to occupy my time
another comparison
to my ex-boyfriend

anyway I bought it cos
ended my vape celibacy cos
I saw one of the things that causes me
social anxiety
& disproportionate quantities of melancholy
my ex-crush
looking glorious
in a red patterned shirt
& those shorts he wore
on Halloween
not that I memorise all his outfits
& associate them
with the related social occasion
on which I was
socially weird

fuck

hence the vape
hence trying to be
socially appropriate
hence trying to remove the past
firmly from my brain

it is a new year & I am a new woman
& it is a new gig
7.59 at San Fran
with Tyler, as usual
beer got Flavour
till I spill it on the table
karma for talking shit about
boys I don't like in the industry
ahhh let's hit that
vape

ah let's dance
alone
as usual

ah let's feel the confusing weight
of being an introvert & an extrovert
at the same damn time

ah let's dance with Jack
at the stage left speaker
let's lose ourselves in the
fucking freedom
of singing along to
songs we know & love
with all the vigour of a broken string

let's compliment
objectively cute boys
& girls &
people in general

let's laugh when
that guy I sucked off in June
who avoided me
religiously afterwards
says hello so
enthusiastically
cos I'm a cool
booker now

let's make friends on the balcony
& remove hands affectionately from my shoulder
cos I don't like being touched so claustrophobically
even by good friends

let's go home
with free bagels baby
& smoke weed alone
& go to sleep thinking bout
how my favourite astrologer
warned me I'd be horny
cos Venus is in Capricorn
& my Venus is in Capricorn
which makes me overthink intimacy
to the point where
flirtation is only easy when I'm apathetic
but I'm not apathetic anymore

ahhh they weren't fucking kidding
& the world is crowded & noisy

& I'm busy doing shit
but I wish I was busy doing shit with you

I wish I was on MDMA in a puddle of flower petals with you
& this part of the poem
is totally unrelated to all the rest
but the point is
that even though I've got heaps of shit going on
& lots of songs to sing along to
I wish I was singing along to you

& I'm thinking of you
even when I'm thinking of other things too
like my ex-crush
& my ex-boyfriend
& objectively cute boys
but you are
subjectively cute

& I am high
& you're the last thing on my
mind tonight

& will probably be
on it again in the morning

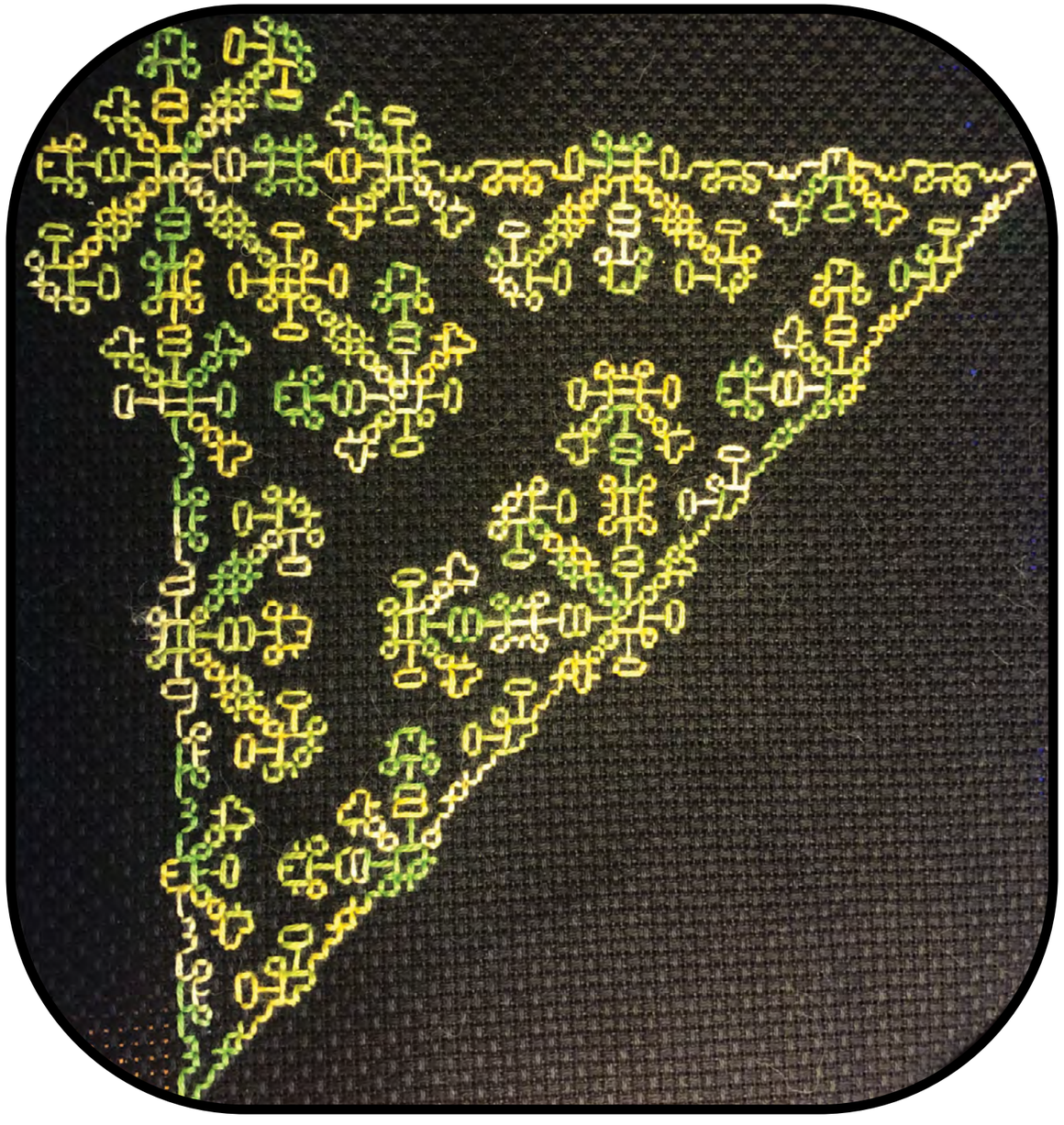
& after the next gig

& at the end of the next
ever-recurring melody.

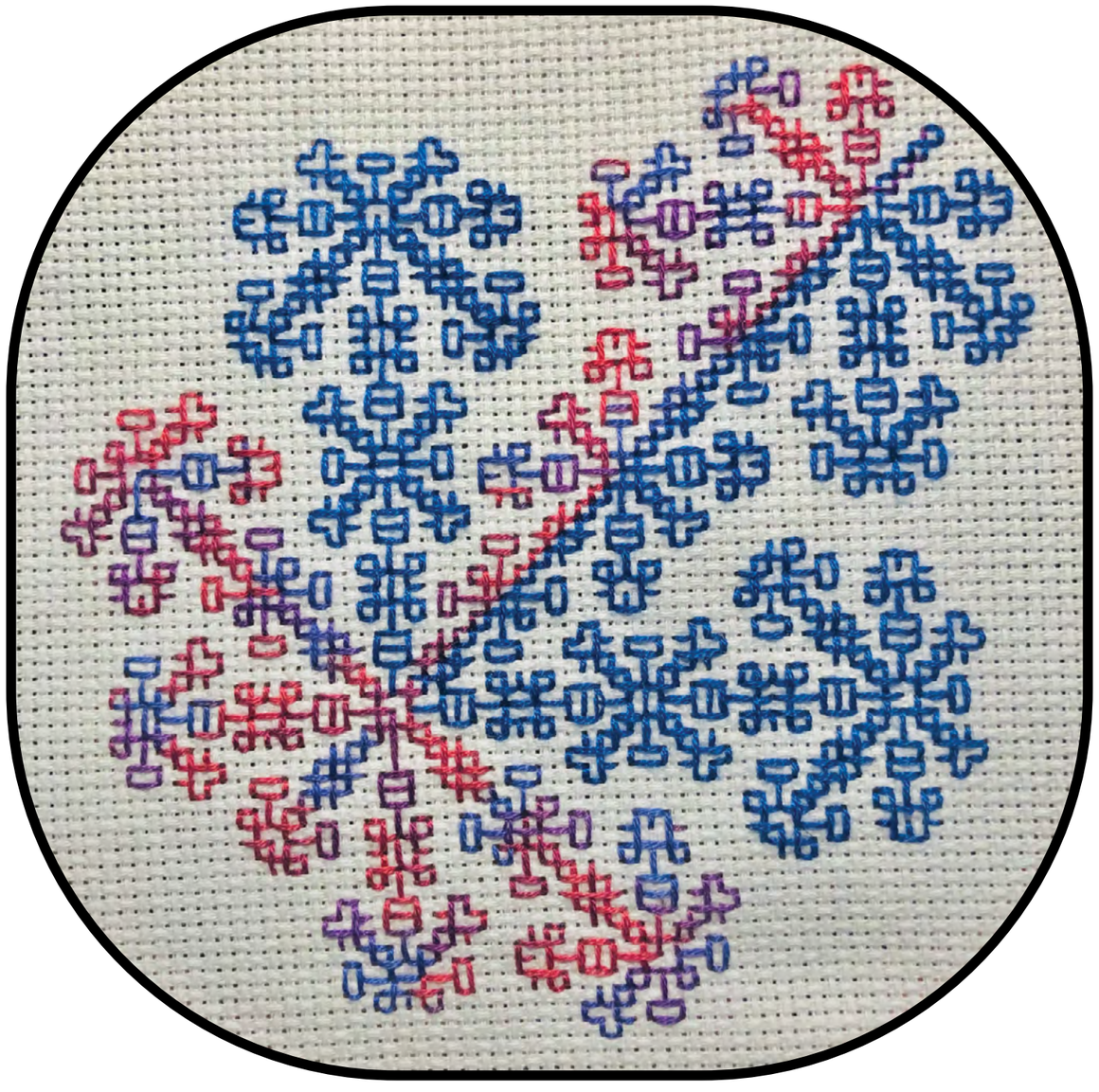
Sarah (Ember) Bricault

Blackwork Collection

The photos here are geometric blackwork pieces (a form of cross-stitch), but they require a bit of explanation to fully appreciate. I love the beauty of fractals, and I especially enjoy bringing together fiber arts and mathematical concepts! I began by noticing that folding curves fractals (e.g. the Dragon Curve and the related Levy C curve) could be easily implemented in blackwork, as the lines are all perpendicular to each other! That's what the first two pictures here represent. But, in playing around with the code for these fractals, I discovered a way to extend this mathematical concept to generate an entirely new class of folding curves! These often beautiful pieces just begged to be stitched, and two examples of that are shown as the custom curves here. The results of this work were presented as part of the Bridges Conference in 2024 (a math and art conference). I often feel that math, art, and poetry have so much in common that longs to be explored, and I feel these fractals are a part of that poetic landscape!



Custom Curve 1



Custom Curve 2



Levy C Curve



Dragon Curve

John A. deSouza

I thought of this longish poem for your [e(i's] Yarn call. When I wrote it I was thinking of an actual carpet store in Lambertville, NJ where we had bought several carpets. I conceived of it as narrated with the poet's voice and a storybook's Djinn's voice merged. I was aiming for that feeling of an adult reading and at the same time being transported into a children's story. (So the yarn woven in carpets along with spinning a yarn). It's obviously more storybook than literal, but has elements of both.

The Rambling Djinn

At first too many beginnings,
was how the entrance had been.
Aspects curled up like embroidered toes.

Rugs at the dealer's shop, piled and peeled,
woven salt bags, the way a story changes.
After a thousand, one night's revenge.

Or 60,000 verses after a thousand years,
miniatures that open worlds. The harried boy
running about the shop, a child's *Aladdin*,

run ragged by the smiling *Pasha*
or evil sorcerer. The day is long that way,
achieves something mysterious,

casts its shadows. That old cave
was a lot damper than she made
out after the perfunctory love-making.

All the perspectives of the usual tales,
with gasps, applause, snickering,
the winks and nods of a rapt audience.

They begin across dunes or a coastline,
a caravan of languages woven along borders.
The script of a poem's cursive,

the storybook Sultan locked in his tale.
In the present the past falls asleep,
would be roused by those who carried

rolled parchment, zithers, swayed wildly
to the accompaniment of the *ūd*. The scholar
sighs wearily, but gradually grows animated,

embarks on explanations, discredits me
as figment, explains things—You decide.
It haunts you. Told over and over,

comes down to you from the top
of a dark stair that folds out of the ceiling,
or emerges from the river, always a river,

flowing on with its dead drunks, thieves,
its lost lovers, confused, betrayed, crossed,
sorry suicides that can no longer swoon.

Though this one was a cantankerous old sow!
People are people, and not sacred

unless necessary. There are the dissenters

willing to die for what they believe in,
and *the true believers* that are revered,
who tell their parables behind white moustaches,

pulling their beards, arching their bushy
eyebrows, while these others die, made
examples of for necessary developments.

Stories are like that once they get traction.
A good hero helps. And a monster who was
once human that lingers like remorse.

The great man arrives with his machines
and enchanted apparatus, humming
an ancient reverie of scimitars. Ex machina.

(You weren't expecting this from a Djinn?
Whatever the proper term is for verisimilitude).
He too has a daughter, the maybe progenitor

of *The Chosen One*, who is always about to
return at any moment. Until then, he cleans up
any loose ends. There are many ways for things

to take a turn compared to the entirety.
The lovers are at it again, mocking their parents.
The jealous vizier hatches yet another plot,

foolishly seduces the sorcerer's daughter.
Life is precious to the murderer who laughs
at the sight of blood that swirls in the basin

like wine, the smell of a receding pleasure.
Empty ways of knowing. Above, outside,
we beings hover, called demons or angels,

ready to impart a secret, that the universe is
an energy twist, or space is your mind deciphering
its definitions, time is the noise of too many voices,

all vying for their moment. Moments are
solitary and only follow each other
once a line is drawn by the philosopher,

a geometrical proof of— "I don't like this one.
Is there one with a little more green in it?
Herding and tree of life motifs interest me,

and also because of the new Joseon Buncheong
ginger jar." *(Now there's a glazed history).*
"Oh, thank you, I do find mint relaxes me."

Charles Leggett

"Clus Encounters" is an offshoot of a loose collection of light verse — mostly limericks — based on a persona called The Restless Online Troubadour. In the daylight hours (so to speak), TROT writes missives — most often humorous, but sometimes more lyrical and plangent — to women on traditional online dating sites (if there are such things). But "Clus Encounters" finds him in the wee hours, turning his attention to the seamier side of it all, the scam-scum floating blithely atop the phishing pond. He looks up, sees the grimy light of a Bot Signal trolling, luring, upstaging the moon, and decides not to take it sitting down, but rather to engage in a bit of gamesmanship all his own.

For better or for worse, all TROT matter, including "Clus Encounters," is sourced directly from experience. Over a dozen of the "proper" dating site verses have been published, with another two dozen waiting in the wings; all, in the actual event, were met online with the silence of the grave. "Clus Encounters," obviously, is a different story — not least because, in its tawdry way, IT IS a story, it HAS some back-and-forth, unlike the dating site missives, which more resemble shiny little teardrops surrendered to the digital tides of a deafening, indifferent ocean.

Clus Encounters of an Online Troubadour

Motif: To "Trolls" the Poet Is Meant to Believe Have Seen His "Adult" Online Dating Profile (a Profile Which the Poet Never Set up, on a Website He Has Never Visited, His Subsequent Joining of Which Is the Trolls' Unstated Motive) and Have Written the Poet with Offers to "Hook up"...

1. *...Having Included a Photo of "Her" Pulling Her Dress off over Her Head*

We've grapes, and a bottle of red;
Presumably, nearby, a bed;
    She has obvious charms
    But invisible arms
– And heavens! where *is* the girl's head?

No response.

2. *...Having Included a Mirror Selfie (in Which "Her" Tattooed Fingers Look like Large Spiders' Legs Spanning the Back of Her Phone), and Provided a Greek-derived Given Name Synonymous with Virtuousness and Health*

The Bomb in the North of Korea.
The Russians want more than Crimea.
    A whole sum of diversion,
    Is this emailed excursion
—A dark-eyed young belle named Althea.

Troll writes back to say thanks.

3. *...Having Included Three Selfies of "Her" in a Bra*

Hazel Ann, Hazel Ann, Hazel Ann,
You have done a fine thing for a man:
    You have shown him a place
    Under sheer purple lace
That reminds him of how he began.

Troll thanks the poet, cautions that "it's better
if we know each other first," inquires
as to the Poet's name. The Poet begs off.

4. *...Having Included Three Selfies (One Topless) and Provided a Calendar-based Given Name and, for a Surname, an Antiquated Spelling of a Noun Synonymous with Fortune*

This world is an oyster to shuck;
The straw of a milkshake to suck;
    But I long for a Spring
    That could bring such a thing
—An April of bounteous Lucke.

Troll writes to ask what Poet means by this.
Poet replies that it's not meant to mean
a thing, it's just a playful little ditty.
"AL"'s reply deploys the acronym
"LMAO," inquires as to the Poet's
marital status, age. Poet recites
the relevant facts, then adds he had to use
a search engine to ferret out "LM-
AO." "She" shouts in all-caps, "NEVER MIND.
ARE YOU STILL WORKING? WHERE IS YOUR COMPLETE
ADDRESS?" Scared shitless, Poet begs off, pours drink.

5. ...*Having Included a Mirror Selfie*

Sara Calixto,
Where would my heart go
If it were I you would choose?

Can you make a man glad
For the slight ribbon'd plaid
And sheer top on your world of tattoos?

Troll asks Poet's name. Poet supplies
his given name, asks if rhyme for her
surname was correct. Troll states that she
is looking to "hookup" and asks for Poet's
photo, to "know" that he is "real ;),"
including two additional (and slightly
less *racy) photos. Poet thanks "SC"*
for offer, cites his age (at least twice hers),
posits that "SC" can do much better,
wishes her luck. Troll says she cares about
"satisfaction" she has "never found,"
not youth or comeliness. Poet exclaims
"SC" just broke his heart a little bit,
recommends she find a "sturdy" man
in his 30s and counsels against
ignoring age and comeliness. Troll asks
where in town the Poet lives, if he
is single, if he "really" wants to meet.
Poet reiterates and clarifies
above admonishments, demurs the offer,
again wishes her luck. Troll says it would
"just" be to "meet and have some fun" but does
accept Poet's decision, while inserting
a 7-second video (of same
woman in photos) featuring bare breasts
and lazzi *with a bright red lollipop,*

and apologizes for wasting Poet's time.

O Sara Calixto
where would my heart go
if it were you I could choose

on a stick to your nipple
where your tart tongue could tipple
while asking, What have you to lose

Clus: Trubar clus, the "close style," during the golden age of Provençal literature

david woodward aka un-known

As mentioned in my bio, dreams play a large role in my writing. This piece was inspired by a nightmare. I think it reveals what all of us are going through, or perhaps more pointedly, what we are all working through. Each brain contains a history all their own, yet with a shared, common link. As somewhat of a Jungian, I think the key to understanding ourselves better (and, of course, other as well) is to open up what I call the "un-conscious—conscious highway." Lucid dreams are fantastic learning mechanisms. If we can work through our latent shames, guilts, insecurities, loss of innocence, and fear of all authority figures, I think we'd a stand a fairer chance at true reconciliation with all of humanity. I can only dream.

trip to Seville one windy night

i ran toward an invisible line in the desert
tripped on a barbed wire

around my neck
was flung into a funnel

that dropped me into a bull fight
in the heart of Seville

where bulls sang Ove Maria
as they dropped me headfirst into

barrels filled with red
ink

wrong! wrong! wrong!
i heard my fifth-grade teacher

chant her most favourite
mantra into my devious

ears
while i bobbed for mackerel

at the bottom of humility
shame! shame! shame!

gills flapped as i sucked
desperately for

reason
truth! i bellowed

please, leave me alone
and the wind picked up

speed as the moon dipped
beneath my fluttering

moist
covers

while the border patrol stood
erect above me shaking

their long girthed
esoteric members

as cherubs with pitchforks
stabbed the hot stale

meat between
my frightened

fingers
i produced just enough

courage to steal
a gander of innocence

crouched in the corner
behind a mushrooming

crotch
where a pair of bloodied

doves flew out
with handcuffs

i knew without
being told that things

would not get any
better from here on

in
in! i cried

and the doves' blood
mixed with disgrace

seeped back
laughing

into my veins
trying yet again

to make it back over
the borderline

where an optimistic tree sat
in the middle of death

waiting to be nourished
i opened wide

sending forth a long winding
train

coughing out steel and smoke

i was led away from

freedom
as the barbed wire fence

worked its way tighter
around my pulsing veinous choking

neck.

epilogue or the awakening:

i was held in place
by bars and

barking goats
who tried to convince me

that they were really
sheep

sleep sleep i heard
the wind wail

at the back of my
throat

a boat,
trying to impress me,

was sailing
around in circles

so i coughed and out came
captain hook

hook & all
and my throat,

guillotined,
in the noontime sun,

was buried beneath
my covers

without
a head or thread

of evidence.

Sam Kerbel

I was having a difficult week, and put everything aside, and picked up a book I'd purchased recently, Lucian Freud Herbarium *(Giovanni Aloi). I'd seen quite a number of Freud's paintings but very few, if any, of plants. It's a rare honor to set forth on a familiar path made new. This poem was written alongside my paging through, over an hour or two.*

The First War is Never the Last

after Lucian Freud

We received an invitation to the monarch's herbarium
Home movies of the Queen
Her lover, felt to be in lyric terms
Nothing less than the birth of melancholy
A curtained hand distributes evening editions
Of the town gazette—
Insurance it seems has outpaced inflation
The courts are packed to the estate's dismay
And past the overgrown southern garden
The valleys of heaven meet the Pacific
At Henry Miller's three-room house
He should've been a city planner
We wept at the bare-bones sarcophagus
Her lampshade opus of red hair
Less a vision of what will be
Than amber risen from the street
Uncounted testicles, still-life breasts
The last watchful mother of white
Candying her kingdom red
Fanfare elides any curvature
Of conscience: shall the lashing ribbons
Hazed into union with the salt-wrung rocks
Curry more favor with the saltless breeze?
Our mother's lipstick is the final mirror
To our past, her mink makes my sweet
Tooth ache, shakes clean the hare-white clouds,
Asperges pious wit, prayed over, predestined
By the golden proceedings in the king's chapel
Where his head was hung & displayed
As a Book of Hours
Paged open to a festival hymn
By slipping into its breast pocket
The knife on the street
A bug-eyed boy rolls to the trans-Siberian
Assassin a porterhouse & boiled potato
Slopped with pinkish cream
His ming green brocade flashes
And darkens, he folds his napkin
Departs at the next station
On the outskirts of Birobidzhan
Here the Queen espies him, removes the lens
Like a bee
Nervously tracking beneath a mandala
Mohair tarp sourced & woven by the queen's
Head maiden, heir of the court of Bathory
As he sits with an espresso & half-scarfed napoleon
Counting the clocks

Flies have covered the windows of the carriages
On their journey to the greenhouse
Hung with still-lifes of gorse sprig and green lemons
Their grand palms palaces to the star-king
Quiet courtyards nettled wild with astrantia, quinces
Lying drunk on the cold stone floor with the king's guard
Six pompadour feet dangling over the valley
In other words said the exchequer
Still-lifes in landscapes
As time passing is an opulent still-life
Without frame
Dark pastel interior scenes
Of dizzy green bottles of stars
Gently weathered spires of bananas cut
Into quarters, ripe tomatoes sauteed
Under hyacinth
Our party traverses high from the mansion
Chewing the ripest apricots
Pitted by the butler with the heel of his shoe
His son stands behind a potted plant in a trenchcoat
Looking rather Jewish
There is cool milk waiting in a saucer by the buttercups
Replaced each morning by the girls
What are their names? Their journals are
Meticulous with the bones of flora
They hide in the closet from Beria's shiny
Black crown, where sight cannot rise
And word must reason sense into symbol
For that quiet duration
A monarch firefly
Bares its light to the garlic-white breast
Of the Printed Virgin
Summoned humidly to symphony by zimmerlinde
Cooling the dead doctor's bed



Colin Griffin

I don't recollect why I began recording, and perverting when possible, the day's news. But I did last October start to pull a headline almost every day from either NPR's little morning sunshine email or their website. Like many, I find the news absurdly absurd. So I made it an exercise/exorcise to edit them: sometimes more accurate, sometimes more ludicrous, often both simultaneously. Some though, defied all attempts, and remain unchanged. Reading them again now, I frequently don't remember where the truth ends.

Headlines 10/25/24 - 01/01/25

Death toll house cookies
Off-color me happy
Happy birthday suit of armor
Ballots on fire hall chowder
200,000 subscribers flee circus
Debunking conspiracy theories of the universe
Closing arguments over nothing
The Labor Department store prices
Boeing's striking machinists again
McDonald's could repair its soft-serve ice cream machines
A wild election is coming up roses
Control of the house beats
Former President Donald Trump has been elected president again
Australian breakdancer Raygun economics
The first 100 days in office attire
The H5 bird flu south, then north again, changing its mind
Congress returns this week in the knees
What happens when a vaccine skeptic leads health policy? Ask Florida
French officials are deploying thousands of Police B-sides
Bond investors say parts of Trump are junk
Four Los Angeles residents allegedly used a life-sized bear costume to stage attacks on their vehicles
Leaders of the world's largest ball of yarn
Most of what people in Russia eat, buy, read and watch is hallucinatory
At least 100,000 people have left the social media platform X since Trump won the presidential election
Most of the country shifted uncomfortably in its chair, feet starting to tap
Members of the Pittsburgh Sword Fighters club get the general thrust, but ultimately miss the point
President Biden will pardon a turkey today - the president-elect arrives at the White House at noon
The price America paid for its eggs
Black Friday shoppers spent after pouring so much into the bottomless well
Tis the season for porch pirates, and their parrots are leaving quite a mess
The French government could fall today as slick conditions worsen
A South Florida studio is offering tattoos under sedation to improve artist comfort and license
Pope Francis is going electric - his new avatar will bear his voice and likeness, dispense the Blood, the Body, and Holy Water
Artificial Intelligence wants to go nuclear
A chatbot hinted that a kid should kill his parents over screen time limits
A phone company developed an AI 'granny' to beat scammers at their own game whilst simultaneously criticizing your hair, pissing off your mom, and making bomb-ass peanut butter cookies
GM will retreat from robotaxis as the vehicles debate unionization
Mystery drones flying over New Jersey say they're from New York
Once an elf, now a hottie; blueprint of an American rise to fame
Stanley recalls about 2.6 million travel mugs, plunging a generation into disarray
Will the FDA finally ban Red No. 3? Opponents argue it infringes on their right to slowly poison their children

A transplanted pig kidney offers a grandmother hope for life
Nuclear bunker sales increase, despite warnings they won't provide protection, thanks to YouTube influencers staging elaborate dramas in them
TikTok and the Department of Justice are heading to the Supreme Court, phones propped on the bench, to see who rises to the challenge.
Louisiana forbids public health workers from promoting vaccines, citing that no voters is better than blue voters
Move over couples. Meet the single women sending out holiday cards.
Bird flu has killed 20 big cats; chicken pox has infected 12 children
The 'Beyoncé Bowl' halftime show was a massive hit for Netflix, and yet another massive blow to fragile white identity
100-plus cities in the U.S. banned homeless camping this year, many citing public space concerns for annual nativity scene displays
A sea turtle plagued by 'bubble-butt' condition is helped by a 3D printer after months of CBT failed
Grandmaster quits chess championship after refusing to change out of jeans that left his bishop exposed
Four years after the capital riot, why QAnon hasn't gone away: expensive eggs and no high paying low skill jobs in the American energy sector that refuses to leave its abusive relationship with fossil fuels. And the deluge of fentanyl that NO American is abetting or peddling, no way no how, it's only those illegals. And China. We don't know what about China, but China.
Why do we drop a ball on New Year's Eve? To hit the ground running
9 unexpected things we learned about mental health and our brains in 2024 - chiefly, they are related
New Year's resolution ideas: 25 fun and practical ways to disappoint ourselves in 2025 1. Don't try, just be



All Headlines torn in part from the days' news at npr.org.

Aparna Paul

i wrote this whole poem in one single flash after seeing a pile of chargers on my bed. i've performed it many times (a couple times with musical accompaniment, shout out to the band Lemon in the Weed Pipe for their musical stylings!!) and every time i do, it kind of feels like having an anxiety attack. the phone call in this poem did not happen but it draws heavily from my friendship with Areeb Ahmed. there were not actually snakes in my bed but some people have heard this poem and believed it and shared their own stories of snakes in their homes/bedrooms/BEDS with me, please feel free to send me yours if you have them!! i hope to be adequately prepared if/when the situation arises

on the night the snakes came into the bed

they were black & tangled & wiry
& when i saw them out the corner of my eye i thought they were a pile of yarn / as in i thought they were dreaming of being untangled / as in i thought they were a reflection of the self
& when i saw them move i jumped
out of the bed & onto the floor, which was reassuring, in a way, in its firmness, its presence—
even as above the snakes writhed & swirled & coiled & uncoiled
but it was that moment of movement that set me in motion

& the first thing i tried was standing up but my legs
were a little too weak for that

& the second thing i tried was foundering for my phone & thank
god i had dropped it out of bed with me &

& the third thing i tried was googling "how to get snakes out of your bed"
& google said "did you mean *how to get* ***a snake*** *out of your bed*?"
& then my fear multiplied
tenfold, are you telling me no one's ever
experienced multiple snakes in the bed?
needless to say the results were sparse & unsatisfying,
if i wanted a thing done right
i'd have to do it myself, damn it,

& the fourth thing i tried was calling my best friend because
if i wanted a thing done right
i'd have to do it myself, damn it, but not alone, i'm scared to be alone,
& he said, "'s everything okay?"
& i said "oh shit, were you sleeping?"
& he said, "well yeah, it's 2 AM,"
& i said, "oh yeah. it's 2 AM,"
& he said, "you didn't know it was 2 AM, did you?"
& i said "i knew,"
& neither of us believed me,
& he said, "dog, go to sleep," & then he fell asleep before i could even respond,
& my response (had i responded) would have been "THERE ARE 14 SNAKES IN MY BED," which might've been an exaggeration but i'm bad at counting & good at exaggeration & i needed a response but i didn't need a response badly enough to wake him up, i'm not a monster, so instead i listened to the way his breathing sounded, soft & sleepy & slow, & i imagined that air in my own lungs, soft & sleepy & slow,

& the sixth thing i tried was standing up & my legs
could hold me this time

& when i stood up i saw there were like 5 snakes, max, which was way more reasonable than the 14 that i had made up in my terrified state, but still enough to keep me on my toes, because 5 snakes was still 4 more than the average google search result,

& then i made eye contact with one of the snakes & that was the most terrifying part of it all, i need you to know that,

the rest of this story will get less terrifying from here on out,
but the moment that i stared at that snake, & that snake STARED BACK AT ME,
i forgot that i had a soul, or i remembered i had a soul
(& i don't know which one more terrifying),
finally it blinked or i blinked or the universe blinked I DON'T KNOW but SOMEONE blinked
& that was enough for me
& it was like i was paul bunyan or paul rudd, whichever one of them was a superhero, or pretended to be one, because i was pretending the fuck out of being a superhero, & i hate pretending to be things i'm not, especially in my own goddamn bedroom isn't that the one place i can stop pretending? but not when there are five fucking snakes in the bed & i have to pretend i'm not afraid of snakes

& i don't know how i did what i did next but fuck paul bunyan & fuck paul rudd because neither of them has ever had to think about fiber arts, i'm sure, but i did, in every single form,
knitting & crocheting & weaving & sewing & quilting & embroidering,
because my mom is a quilter & her mom is a seamstress & i'm—just me!, & none of us know how to keep our hands still
& my mom's hands
& her mom's hands
& my hands were on the snakes
& the snakes were in my hands &
i know if my mom were there she would knit them into a sweater & my nani would weave them into lace but all i can do is spin a damn good yarn

& by the end of it, they were tied together,
tail to tail to tail to tail to tail, teeth still
gnashing, tongues still
flickering, & i, woman still possessed, kept
tying & tying til the whole duvet was in knots
& i may have made something monstrous but at least
i could call it *mine*



Carolyn Zaikowski

I realized several years ago that I'd implicitly become obsessed with minimalism, and decided to interrogate the reasons why, given the ancient and modern histories of poetry being marked by long and epic approaches. I decided it was partly a gendered lesson I'd learned about not taking up space, and decided to play with maximalism.

the man who never arrives

what did he tell you, the man who never arrives
did he say you must now propose your shape,
or that you must run at the shore echo-like and wide as a bellow

he carted me to the cliff's edge. nodded to my lighthouse keeper.
asked me to number every possible length of a life
and any distances I had in mind. and to number
the verses of my quivers.
said there are no real names to have.

did the man who never arrives say you were free
and did you reply that you are not free, but rather,
unbound and vespertine
like a strange-eyed
orphan lapping the brine

he said there was a one-time only
sale on gods
so to draw a line and trek it while I still can

did he tell you that once there was a shell
who wished to go free, so she did

bulbous spirit, seeds and ash,

thin water, thin veil

and that once there was blood
who wished to become water and wine, so he did—
honed his last breath, was born.
drank himself 'til tears.

he said to solve the preposterous geometry of love and grief.
to step into the ocean's axis.
because that's the only line at which to fathom
the bargain made
by love and grief.

maples shrunken in the lee of the lie.
fawns all alert. ripples rented from
their landlord, the rock's toss.

a lake's grifters scatter, mist-like.

he asked what I'd pack in my pouch,
said to press myself flat on the boat floor
like the refugees at their borders.
wouldn't tell me the truth about uncanny music
wafting from the sea,

the man who never arrives, did he warn you heat's coming
or tell tales of small rain turned flood? it all slides under your feet. there're
no sticks left to stuff the holes of the levee. or to retain the soft damp of moss—

wouldn't say whether music had come as the sea
or despite it. as I closed, opened, and closed my eyes,
trying to figure which side of all this is a dream,
sight's orbits became lucent but scarred.
I watched the refugees about me keep each other safe
by keeping still.

did he tell you to burn it all down and make it again from steel

he insisted I pardon the preposterous and terrible geometry of love and grief

to blow it up and burn it down again and make it again from steel

he told me how tomorrow's weather's
gonna be fast
how the heat of everywhere's coal's gonna come fast
how coal combusts even deep down where lie
bodies who trusted
earthspots of music

did he say no more talk of bodies or orphans?
to stop inquiring about the nature of the dust?
did he mention the music at the place past marigolds
or dance you along to passiflora

he told me not to burn myself down with all of it,
but that if I did,
to be sure to twist into steel the gesture of my collapse

to new definitions of sleep—

I don't seem to be able to depart.

flatten into the boat! he ordered; did you hear?

I am busy pressing the bodies of children and animals
into the bottom of the boat with me.
he asked what I'd bring to my given chamber—I did hear that.
the bodies of children and animals, I told him.
he said, good. enfold them. he told me that if it comes to it,
he'll have to offer them to the sea.
but he said if I wanted, I could put my hand right through all of it
as I waited

did he tell you about the spacious palm
did he say you could be made visible by water

he said I could be made visible by water

the man who never
arrives, did he tell you

what he said was

of the bell's ring

gone, gone, gone

holy inversion,
holy
holy

gone

Carolyn Zaikowski

virus

cleanliness and godliness and all that
coffee mugs and their chips, carrot skin, what's there left to touch? how about now?
and now? they all ask this, like me. the air is a ghost, is a grime, I remember you

what should I breathe now? I'm so tired and godliness is breath, that's the word. my lungs are solid
with lime and bracken, with roots for hire

with sex negated, with incomplete gulps of stone, seeds of words whose futures have rickets.
cleanliness, godliness, all that; my lungs, they know

old filters, soggy rye, vague wheat-colored scraps, radios, you
what's there left to breathe now, what can I own?

you don't remember, but I do, right here:
in this dim room, the whole erratic pulse of you. heart the shape of a wave who always forgets his
own ocean

I'm haunted but you say I do not haunt in return, which is really too bad; our ghosts would have
made such fine, slender lovers

you wouldn't be the first person to say my heart's not a wave it's a tower, you're not allowed in but
then you're not allowed out

my hands, solid with rocks of time. solid with predetermined angles, with grime, I cannot find any
new rooms in this house for the life of me, god clean me now

my bed solid with fever; what can I hold now? and now?
my dreams, solid with images of steel, of vanished lovers who ask for grace and advice
but who refuse to come back. to be witnesses
to cleanliness, godliness, lovers, me, themselves:

all of it, why not witness all of it

I had love. god scour me, clean me, threadbare I lightly paw this third floor window

the air now, mightiest throne. it asks what can I love? or have?
asks, how about now? now? the air's king dismisses my entire premise because he can
floors, masks, sinks, thrones: each solid with kings who once were very simple boys

they believe only in their own gentleness, they really believe in it, the way kings do.
nothing can fix this. all kings are mercurial and blind, by right.

president king, father king, lover king, air king, oh god, clean me,

crusty trays, the last food's been grown and bought. sparse closets from cleaning
sharp lids from cans, dead fronds I hand to dust flecks out back. then I bow

what will rust now? everyone's asking
this is the last jagged lid. this, the last dull leaf from the palm I killed
these scissors in pieces. these, the batteries. they bleed out, blunt little bodies that they are.
they belong in a hospital

I filled jars with water, I'm not sure why. I searched for new batteries I didn't need

for many days I ate only pears and drank electrolytes

my mind's rooms populated with stray cats, buddhas, water ferns tenderly planted
the room that's a kitchen is overrun with sinks, sink after sink, overrun with godliness,

a hall of dusty mirrors of you
overrun with tongues mistaken for sponges tasting every last wave, sink, and tower
but I remember you, our lungs together in a mirror, breathing and dreaming slowly at something

now I can't breathe you or dream you either,
you're just a ghost, which is different from breath or dreams
even though I can put my hand through all three
my dreams, a metropolis of wide gears and emotional mange

your cold coffee I saved got more bitter. your lotions and lye

your fish bowl, its submerged statuettes, what do you want me to do? I'm so tired. cleanliness, etc.

what's even left to clean in any house, street, or body
tell me. some tyrant or oversoul keeps giving me lessons I've already learned, I'm tired
just tell me the answer, I'm tired. a vintage spring jacket, never worn?
apple cores, ants, soap stains, all these forsaken plastics? this lightbulb? this cane?

my loose hair all goes in the trash. with fervor I search for and collect it

I have love, I am told it's in the shape of a puzzle piece
but no one's virtue is patience.
I, moldy. I'm no one's lost object, never have been, that's

just not such stuff as I am made of. through this window, no eyes pierce mine back
at night, cosmic orphans throw themselves at whatever given nova

they ask the air and the god, do I exist, I mean physically, do I exist, I mean literally,
if someone touched me would they put their hand right through me without knowing

and so on

you say that I am not a gentle king who objectively observes emotional estates, mental fields
as you know, I am a mad queen, as all queens are
I shouldn't fancy my porch a balcony

if I challenge these declarations, I prove them. a fine trick. silence is king is godliness
I look out the window

just clean me, wash my heels and chest, I am tired, I am begging, I remember and I know that I had
love

clean me, wash all my hells and colors, scrape my tongue, when this is over recollect me as holy,
when this is over recollect me as smooth water

my life is a-glue with grime with infection, everyone's is, I know. clean my knuckles, touch my wrists
with your wrists,

just mean something, mean anything, use words well, words are seeds or guns, use them holy,

step up, words are guns, step up, I remember you, holy I remember, I remember you, step up, I had
love, so take it with you and run, go, just go, I had love, so take it with you and run
take it with you and run

I remember you

here in this room right before the disease I remember you,

here in this mirror you rinsed away all our shared sight just before the disease I remember you

Kathryn Reese

This was written in response to a prompt to write about the ways social media influences the way we see ourselves. There is so much content in my Insta feed that's marketing quick, easy ways to perfection...this poem is a reflection on the marketing hype and the aesthetics of perfection.

Hermit Crab Poem for the InstaSpiritual

(The screen around these words is a shade of dusk,
there are highlights of moonlit cloud,
the text is muted gold.)

A headshot, in an oval frame.
Gold-rimmed glasses; deep, earnest eyes.
A perfect lip. A neckline; a flutter
of cabbage moths,
tattooed there, at rest.

You have a core wound, don't you? An injury,
some ache that is as old, or older than you. Perhaps
it is a gnawing in your thigh-bone. Perhaps an emptiness
sleeping in your pelvis. Perhaps a catch in your throat or chest,
you feel it, feel it every time you breathe.

(Outside the text box, more dusk.
More dim-lit clouds. Perhaps you pause here,
perhaps scroll quickly down.)

How would it be, to live without
the anatomy that has held you back?
What if I told you: in just 30 days
everything might change? ***You***
could be beautiful, your life could
be beautiful, you could embody
a more beautiful sense of you.

(The shade of dusk has eased.
Perhaps the clouds have cleared.
Perhaps it is dawn.)

(A button invites you to register now. The button is gold,
its corners are round. There are no sharp edges,
only invitation.)

register now

Another gold-framed photo.
Hoop ear-rings. A white linen
shirt, pressed to perfection.
Inviting buttons.

"*...these 30 days have been like breath. These days have been light.*
I have become breath. I have become light. I have tried all this
before, I have failed many times. That was all before this. this. ***this.***"

(The colour of dusk—perhaps it is dawn,
embossed with a gold leaf: a fern, unfurling.
If you touch the fern, it transforms, reads *register now*)

In this course you will learn to—

- return your skin to feathers or chitin
- consume patented oils and seeds blended to nourish true form
- manifest gold, tattoos and white linen robes

(the lettering has changed. A new font.
A slightly whiter shade of gold)

The first 500 participants receive
- exclusive access to curated community
- lifetime bonus content direct to your inbox
- 3 x 1:1 calls with a personal certified transformational mentor

register now

(Dusk intensifies. The font changes again.
Two fern leaves entwine.)

register now

(Are you still scrolling? The moonlight has disappeared,
what might have been dawn, faded.
Another gold-framed portrait, the flutter of cabbage moths blurred.
An invitation to map your core wound.
Find your true form: a 10-minute quiz;
a video teaser.)

register now

(Your screen rolls past bulletpoints and text.
Fern leaves, a forest of ferns, entwined with dusk and gold dust.
Linen shirts and cabbage moths.
Another font. Whiter and whiter gold, a melting dawn.)

(You manifest hoop earrings and inviting buttons.
Your corners are rounded, your shirt pressed to perfection.)



C.M. Green

This piece was born from my years of Catholicism and my years away from it. I can't extricate my queerness from my Catholic upbringing, or either from my madness, and that's the place this piece was born from.

Nothing mere

i.

Kept behind from recess, I learned with other girls
that chastity was not just about sex, it was about
protecting your shivering heart
and that god wanted you to be loved, to love so
much, to be chaste because it was the only way
love would not crucify you.

I believed in divine order, but I doubted
that to anyone could die a sinner, and my upbringing
was centered on charity, not fear; still,
I couldn't escape certain felt realities, and
I couldn't escape the voice of hollow-cheeked men
who frightened children with martyr's blood.

So I hid and buried and dug and crept and lied and
I wrestled god, wrestled desire, and I could
be good, so good, unsinning,
never using my body
for anything
but repentance.

ii.

I kissed a girl in a parking lot when I was twenty-two,
and when I lost my mind, walked off my shift
at the red café and wandered four miles into georgetown,
when I wore the word crazy like a badge, like it could
get me in anywhere, when I stared at christmas lights
and wondered how strong they were—

She brought me a london fog, froth and vanilla,
sweet and steamed, and left it in front of my door.
To kiss her felt like transgression, like the word
sin was still etched on my teeth, and she could feel
it with her tongue. I couldn't quiet bells and fears and fire
but it was a sort of romance pure in intent.

This girl, now gone from my life, crosses my mind,
a girl who kissed me in her bed after we wrote
stories about flowers, who gave me a beveled journal,
who straddled me and said is this okay, who showed me
that touch is not boiled oil and that a mouth can
do more than apologize.

iii.

At the railcar diner two girls who taught me the bible
are now in love with each other.

And I think that love observes us, waits
until we're ready for it, waits until our hearts
are free of horseflies and virtues, no more
stinging certainty, no more rancid christ-corpse.

I am twenty-five and I am still afraid to talk
about my lover's tongue, still afraid of disappointing
god,
still afraid that pleasure is purposeless,
or worse, that it will damn me, that hell is
everything I think it is and more.

Essentially it comes to this: I do not know
how to stop thinking that I am still woman,
and that to be woman is to tempt, just by being,
just by showing shoulder, and while I am mostly man now,
a lifetime is a long time to hear that
your body is a sawtoothed trap.

iv.

Evict this idea, please, from my own mind,
the evil ways I deny what I know most deeply.
On mountaintops I am unbothered and ungendered, alone,
and I thought that was the only place it was possible, the only
way I could wring out the catholic ink that stains me, that declares
that my anatomy is my destiny.

I was wrong. At my lover's side and in their arms I feel
so like the me I have found in solitude. Hallowed be
their touch, holy in that a body flourishes when tended to,
that flourishing is sacred, that sacred is not just
votive candles and blood-soaked crosses,
that when my lover says my name I love the saying of it.

I will not describe the things I once imagined waiting for me
on the other side of marriage, the horror, the cruelty
of essentialism, the children I knew I'd have to bear,
because now the only essential thing is that I love.
I am ready to say something
with my body that is not a denial of my own sanctity.

v.

Life shows you where to go if you are observant, if your eyes
track movement, if your mind tracks sentiment.
I did not leave the catholic church, I was ejected by a god
that gave me the silent treatment. Other things they gave me:
the conviction that sex always feels like animal fear, and the body
always feels like a carcass eaten by maggots when it's touched.

I fear plenty, there's plenty I fear, but the only sin left
is to deny yourself love, and I have lately been sure
of a regeneration of spirit, a knowledge hard won,
here I am, lord, is it I, lord, I have heard you calling in the night—
I have heard you calling me a man, I have heard that
there is a way of being that does not demand violence.

You observe life and love observes you and there is a moment
where you and love meet eyes. Physic is not a torment
and it is nothing mere. All I am is limb and blood
and brain, nerves alight with every notion of redemption.
And it is not over, the battle for my body,
but I am winning, I am winning.

Catherine McGuire

Lion Gate Quilt



The Lion Gate quilt was an attempt to mix photo transfer (my photo from Huntington Library, CA) with quilt blocks that give a sense of depth, and the gate theme emerged as I was working.

Catherine McGuire

The Anger/Depression Mandala is a combination - first I sewed the two fabric dolls, to depict my emotions at the time, and then I was using my mandala software and realized they would be a good subject. Mandalas are symbols of wholeness and thus incorporating fragmented emotions into a round felt satisfying. I am attracted to many media in artmaking, and this allows me to explore in more ways than sticking to one medium.

Anger Depression Mandala



Christina Polge

"hamlet at the gas station" was a whacky experiment for me to write a poetic sequence that is also a narrative. It's from the perspective of Ophelia watching Hamlet deliver the "to be or not to be" soliloquy in a gas station. It's inspired by an essay read about the significance of Ophelia witnessing that famous speech and how it could drive her to drowning later in the play. I found the process incredibly creatively fulfilling as I played with the boundaries of poetry versus prose as well as the fragmented and dreamlike parts to contrast.

hamlet at the gas station

you
are standing at the cash register
at the gas station right off of i-40
buying a pack of watermelon gum.

i thought you died last thursday,
sword in your side, fingers
outstretched to something
you can't reach
but i reached...
anyway,
you aren't supposed to be here.
but i watch you soliloquize to your car keys
while *mr. brightside* plays somewhere.

you are saying something about time and hope and death
and blue gatorade.
i don't know how the gatorade is relevant.
but knowing you, it's probably super poetic
and i still need a minute
i remember we used to dream
in the same language

i know my therapist
is gonna have a field day with this
the last time you came up, i told her you'd gotten
into reading the bible and she asked what that meant
for me.
and i knew
calves against the pews

water
i am standing in the water
flowers in my hair

answer
the question
i am standing in the water
flowers in my hair

you were brave
i was small
you were
small
brave
so small
dreams fell like a waterfall
i miss
standing in the water
flowers in my hair

scarlet colored beasts
that fire in your eyes
john or michael or
whatever his name was
the one who told that story
of the garden
in the beginning

i don't think god likes people like me.
not because i'm gay, he's chill with gay people—
probably.
but because yesterday i spent about thirty minutes sitting
on the floor of the shower in my childhood bedroom
water running,
christmas yoda pjs and ratty sports bra on
repeating a line from a dream i had
my shoulders feel like rain/but i don't mind the pain.
you were in it
and i think you died there too
poison seeping into your bones
from the inside out.
but i died first so i can't be sure.

i pray
you don't
i miss
you don't
go
stop
go
the water doesn't
stop
i am standing in the water
flowers in my hair

my shoulders feel like rain
but i don't mind the pain
wake up
i can't
breathe
what was
the song we loved?
when we were brave
small
brave
it hurt
to be so
brave
let me go
let me

goddamn.
heartbreak hangs off you
the same way
your key chain hangs off
the carabiner on your belt loop.

i'm getting back in my father's car
and driving it straight into the lake behind my parents' house.

stand in the water
flowers in my hair

the light hurts
like
rain
i cannot
breathe
stop
go
stop
small
brave
i want
to be
so-so small
can you
see me?
i am standing in the water
flowers in my hair

the song
we used to know
it started with a dream
and it was
small-brave-stop-go
we both
die
at the end
in all
the worlds
poison
sword
water
skulls
violets
dirt
don't
go
stop
go

i wonder if you'd cry
if i died.
i like to hope so
but i know better.

the last time you cried,
we were seven years old.
well you were eight and i was seven.
it was that in between time
those six weeks where we aren't the same age
and the cicadas have resurfaced.
we were in the woods
behind the golf course,
the ones we weren't allowed to be in,
skipping stones
i had just fallen in the water.
you sat down in the water with me
even though you were wearing your brand-new
denim skirt you'd been begging your mom for.
you said, "promise you won't die"
and i said, "i don't know if i can"
because i was seven and i was in that phase
counting dead things on the sidewalk.
i understood that everyone dies.
even my dad.
even me.

answer
the question
in all worlds
i am standing in the water
flowers in my hair

do you still
dream
a dream
of time gone by?
i want
to be
the water
in your head
i want
you to
be made of me
i do
dream
i don't
breathe
i am standing in the water
flowers in my hair

at the time, i wasn't really sure about you.
but you squeezed my hand so hard it hurt
and you repeated it again.
"promise me"
and i wanted so badly to believe in you.
so i did.

that's beside the point.
the point is you are turning towards me.
i don't know why because the door is the other way.
but it feels so good to be seen
in the same way as ripping off the dead skin around your fingernails does

the last time you saw me like this,
we were standing in my room.

time
gone by
i dream
in songs
and skulls
and flowers
you can't
stop-go
choose
answer the question
because
i can't
i am standing in the water
flowers in my hair

the answer
is
water
i
cannot breathe
water
someone
get me
water
fall
stop
stop
go
stop
breathe
under
dreams
i am standing in the water
flowers in my hair

and you looked like a mess.
i mean your socks matched.
i was worried about you.
and you grabbed my arm before looking right at me.
i should've been terrified
but i was very much not so.
actually it was kinda hot.

my therapist says i need to be
more discerning about women i'm attracted to.
i think it's just a you thing.

and here you are.
maybe it's meant to be or some shit
maybe god hates me.

you want
me
it hurts
i
need
water
i need
time
gone
by
i dream
i wait
i am standing in the water
flowers in my hair

i
feel
brave-go-stop-small
small
small
underwater
in my head
hold
me
hold me underwater
until
i
can't
dream
i am standing in the water
flowers in my hair

god
dreams

in the awkward silence, i want to make a joke
about killing myself.
i'm allowed to do that only because well...
anyway, you're the only person in the world
who would laugh.

maybe we will stand here
staring at each other in this gas station.
i'd say it'll last forever
but i don't think either of us is meant to get old.

of time gone by
go
go
stop
stop
water
can we
talk about
god
can i dream
a dream
without you
do you
want
to
go-stop-stop
is it brave?
standing in the water
flowers in my hair?

drown
go
drown
i can't
breathe
small-brave-stop-go
hurts
you hurt
the water
knows
i dreamed
a dream of time
gone by
that
is the
question
i am standing in the water
flowers in my hair

i wish you were better at using your words
as something other than a weapon.
and i wish you'd be gentler with me.
i wish i didn't wish things like that.

in the heavy quiet, you hold out a stick of gum.
before i realize it, i'm opening my palm
to catch it.

you
forgot
the words
i dreamed
a dream
where you
do not
wake
up
flowers
water
get me
out
from
under
you
i want
to be
water
i am standing in the water
flowers in my hair

i miss
hurting
i miss
breathing
i miss
drowning
i
dream
of
flowers
i
dream
of time
going
going
gone
bye
i am standing in the water
flowers in my hair

like it's a pebble you're throwing at my window
like we get a happy ending.

you don't say a word.
maybe you're realizing i heard you saying enough
when you didn't know i was listening.
but i won't leave this goddamn gas station
before you do. so until then
woe is me, i guess.

i
want you
in the
water
with
me
dreaming
being
brave
i am standing in the water
flowers in my hair

i will be
water
i dream
of
water
i am floating in the water
flowers in my hair

Christina Polge

"legs extended" was a very personal piece that sort of spilled out of me after I saw a deer on the side of the road on my way back to school from my parents' house. I wrote the majority of it sitting on a table at a recording studio, actually! I'm most proud of how vulnerable and raw I was able to be without getting too bogged down in myself.

legs extended

i. didn't you see the creature in the road?
its legs extended into the street— the speed
limit 25 or 30 around the curves,
but i am going 45 and still pressing
down on the gas, the street signs fly
past me as it comes into view,
a creature with a hole in the head
and a hollowed out red chasm in its chest—

the body on the side of the road, brown and fuzzy but
nearly unrecognizable, it took me seconds to realize
what it was, combing past the images projected into my head
and seconds were too long as i was soaring down the road
but the moment was seared into my brain the minute i closed
my eyes in my driveway so i began to wonder if she hurt on impact
or if her life just ended in the same way a movie does
fade to black and roll the credits

something in my chest
clenched itself up into the shape of the hole in her head
as i thought about that tire running over her torso
did she see it coming? did she welcome it?
did she close her eyes to let the car run over her?
and she isn't anything more than what she is
sprawled out on the side of the road, legs extended

but to me, she is the same thing i keep on writing about
over and over until i can figure out how it is one can face
a violent death so calmly and how i know that if headlights
looked me straight in the face like that, i'd freeze too
i wouldn't even blink, i'd just open my arms and let it happen

i wonder now
if she's still out there, on the edge of the road somewhere
if she's fallen off or the bugs have gotten to her
i hope someone has moved her even though i was too
afraid to do it. my mother said not to touch dead things.

i remember
how she told me that with her hand
cupped around my cheek, even though
i wasn't paying any attention. i was watching my father
flipping a burger and i was thirteen years old and i thought
that was the closest i'd ever come to death, i didn't picture
myself on my bathroom floor desperate
for something to hit me straight on and carve out a hole
in my chest, a red chasm where my ribcage used to be,
as if that makes me a martyr or a saint or someone worth
writing poetry about. my father says not to be someone
worth writing poetry about.

my father
doesn't believe in looking at the roadkill. he keeps his eyes
on the traffic in front of him, he scoffs when i flinch

because death is a part of life and someone else will
clean it up. he does not understand.

if it had been in our yard,
my father would have told me
to give it mercy with a shovel, separate its head from its body
there is no reason anyone needs to smell the rotting.

if it were my own yard,
in my house with the blue door,
i would have carried the poor thing out into the back,
draped across my arms like a little child who fell asleep at dinner
i wouldn't have listened to my parents
and i wouldn't have worn gloves. i would have swatted away all the flies
and i would have whispered a little prayer to it, i would have asked it to
speak to whoever lives up in the sky wherever it goes after this world
and beg them kindly to send someone to do that for me—
wrap me up in their arms and take me out
to a smoky field with air that tastes crisp

after the car and the hole and the chasm and the silence.
i would leave the creature to rest,
but i would keep a piece of it in my head
and under my fingernails until i scrub them again, even still after that.
i didn't touch it and i feel like a coward because a deer is just a deer
until it dies on the side of the road and then it becomes a legend
i tell myself when i am falling asleep. then, it eats away at me
until i am the one on the same road, standing on the sidewalk above the street
thinking about my legs extended, moving straight into the silver car rushing at me.

ii. i learned to drive by watching my father speed

once, my father was in the car when i hit a deer
or i should say that the deer hit me
because it came out of the woods swinging
like it was looking for a fight, like my father
after he reads the news.
i didn't see it coming or i would have swerved
into oncoming traffic, i would have killed someone
to avoid hitting that deer, but it rammed its antlers
into my rearview mirror so quickly that i thought it was
a gunshot... even though at that point, i'd never heard the sound.
then, i blinked and it had stumbled back into the treeline
where it came from and i was pulling into the parking lot
of a dog park and if it weren't for my cracked mirror
and my father cursing under his breath, i would've
convinced myself i had made it up in my head.

my father doesn't extend his legs in the way that i do
but he keeps his head down and shoulders forward
like he's got a pair of antlers on his head.
standing by himself checking his watch, waiting for me to tie my shoes
on the trail in the woods, i am convinced he is going to run away

straight into the treeline where he came from.

my father doesn't handle dead things, except for burger patties
so thoroughly kneaded no one can even tell they used to be
something living. he stands out by the grill alone with his
hands on his hips and tells the family dinner will be in twenty minutes
if we ask enough times, if someone knows where to find him.
he never lets us know he's cooking, he just walks out the door

once, he decided he would teach my brother and so i
looked on because i was the one who wanted to learn.
i don't remember how to turn the grill on or the exact
temperature the burger needs to be, but i do remember
how the cheese danced as it melted
onto the patty. it stretched itself out
and then curled up and went to sleep, almost
like a little death. i think dying
myself would be pretty similar to that,
legs extended, soul melting.
my brother didn't like touching the frozen patties—
he said they were cold in his hands. my father
didn't seem to mind. my memory is foggy, but i swear
that once they were done, he grabbed them off the
grill with his bare hands.

my father is not a violent man
but he has never shied away from death.
i used to watch him kill snakes with a shovel.
by now, it's been almost eleven years since the last time
a chilly day in december back when i was ten
his hands didn't shake, he made it look easy
or maybe i just thought he wasn't scared because
i was ten and he was my father, but either way
the snake was dead and so i didn't think about it
and he would leave their little bodies curled up in
the driveway, severed in two as we went off to play on the swingset
or finish our basketball game or get in the car and drive to the beach
and when we came back, the snakes were always gone
i used to picture them pieceing themselves back together
like a piece of playdough squeezing into a shape again
and slithering off into the trees where my father would find them
again one day and keep on chopping them in half
like the greek myths he used to tell me in the car
and the time loops i used to have nightmares about being stuck in—

waking up and wondering about running to my parents' room
because i wanted someone else to pour me a glass of water.
but my father sleeps like the dead, so i just laid
in my bed thinking about dying in the same way over and over
split in half like all the snakes in the driveway or with a hole in my

head and a chasm in my chest like that deer i hadn't met yet
and yet some part of me always knew that i would
legs extending, hitting the foot of my bed over and over, repeating
and yet... i never understood why they were sore when i woke up

iii. last night, my roommate was running through the house pantsless in her pink fuzzy socks
and now it is so quiet
i want to scream
at nothing and

the world, aching—
bleeding at the seams
through the cracks in the sidewalk.

my roommates are not at home
when i stand in the driveway, glasses off
watching the red seep through, when i

try to explain how it feels— alone to the
bathroom mirror i am cleaning,
which doesn't know how to respond—

the silence echoes around me
no one knows what i mean
because i think about death and i

splinter into pieces of that deer's
body on the road, leaking out
the blood of the whole world.

i hate how everyone is a body to me
instead of a real life human being
the guilt of it hurts my heart

i am afraid i am going to break
this house of bottles and markers
and index cards proudly displayed on the walls

when i walk, legs extended, it shakes
when i cry, it holds its breath
and i feel too raw to sleep here

my mother worries
about me in the house,
she says i'm not old enough

for being on my own. like
i have to prove i'm capable of
loneliness with some kind of test.

she sees the bottles displayed and the party
decorations and she worries i don't have
friends, just people i know.

she always asks how i'm doing and i cannot
be honest with her because i can't explain
i feel so young and so old at the same time

my roommates call me babygirl and they call me
mom, so the timelines get confusing in my head.
just like every other time in my life, i am the deer

on the side of the road, leaking out
blood into my driveway, scaring the people i
take care of who take care of me.

they are all scared of commitment,
of someone else feeling too much too soon
and i am scared of scaring them

with how much i feel. we are all running, all
four of us legs extended. they are running late and away
and i am running to breathe so fast
it's almost like i'm not breathing at all.

iv. a poem for tommy the cat
the cat i have partial custody over greeted me
when i got home from break, still shaken up
over that deer on the side of the road

(his legs are extending too, but they curve outwards
and he struts paw first, he is not trying to hide anything)

his fur is soft and he makes me laugh
when he presses himself against my leg
and arches his back, expecting attention

i haven't seen him violent, but i watch as he wanders
off into the wilderness around my neighborhood,
imagining birds in between his teeth
feathers surrounding him like war trophies—

no one gets to know about his private victories
he holds them close to his chest, leaves the bird in the woods
and i have to imagine claws and fur and wings when he gets home—

a home that belongs (not technically) to him whenever he appears

at our glass door. we don't have to pay the fee in the lease for owning
a cat, but we get the privilege of him curling up in our laps
or sneaking into our beds in the middle of the night

he likes to stand outside my door and wail at four in the morning

sometimes i don't even know my roommates let him in
and i wake up with him laying on my stomach
expectantly waiting for food
or for affection
he has no empathy for my beauty sleep

once, i caught him laying on my bed with his head buried in my blanket
i wonder if he missed me. i am not used to being someone who is missed.

v. 1572 st bartholomew's day massacre: vezenobres, france
after lunch, walking on the familiar sidewalk
i am all out of order
i think, one earbud in
and the other clenched in my palm,
carabiner on my belt loop whacking my hip...
i think about the bodies.

in my grandfather's family home in france,
there were bodies in the walls and my father
told me this as if it was a fun fact, something i'd
bring to my fourth grade class to tell them about
my family. the catholics killed my people when they took
the town and left them in the walls so the dead didn't
mix. it's been centuries, but no one has thought to
take them out.

to me, it's the same farmhouse
where we ate berries and cheese and wine
in the backyard. my sister and i got drunk off
pina colada mix after she kept sipping out of
my cup when my mother wasn't looking and we
laid out in the sun on a hammock, our stomachs showing,
legs extended, but we weren't allowed inside, maybe
due to the bodies

is there anything else anyone will tell me about the bodies?
did they have names or homes or people that loved them?
when i die, will i be just a body in a wall, waiting for family
members i don't know to write poetry about me
in a language i don't speak?

i think about the bodies in my life—
my mother, my father

my brothers, my sister

we are sitting around the table at the farmhouse
just the six of us, in my head and my childhood
dog sleeps at my feet, waiting for me to drop food
and there is a deer in the woods
with a bloody gap in its chest
who makes slow eye contact with me
and shakes its head sadly
as if it is the whole world
just before the fake memory breaks
and it is october.

so whenever i walk alone now,
the world looks back.

vii. when i went to church, i used to pray that the roadkill i saw would get into heaven
the no-highways route to wilmington is the best place to see roadkill
possums, rabbits, deer. if someone has seen it dead
in the street, it has been dead on that route.
in my head, someone has cataloged all the animals
they've seen in all the grotesque positions,
made sketches then put it in a museum on display.
people's turn signals don't work
when they get far enough away
from civilization and the speed limit signs
are just a suggestion— the numbers are too rusty anyway,
so there's no point in obedience anymore
and the only things out there breathing
are those creatures that drift
through the farmlands like
tumbleweeds. people might even forget
they're alive,
the way they meander out there with no sense
of self-preservation, legs extended toward oncoming traffic
and barely glancing at the heap of bones
being picked over before them.

nobody has explained what happens to roadkill
after it is killed. it sits recognizable
in the road, almost peaceful like it's
just sleeping in an inconvenient position
and sometimes thrown about at bizarre angles,
sometimes with a pool of red under its head
or its leg. people can put the pieces together
in those cases. then, one day, it is just gone.
there is no rotting like there is in the woods.
there is presence and absence.
does someone throw it in the bed of their

pickup truck and bury it gently?
do other creatures transport it to the
middle of the farmlands, in a tobacco field
and lay it to rest where it wanted to be?
or does it simply get back up and wander away,
legs extended
towards something better?

viii. legs extended
i can't remember if my father cried at his parents' funerals
i know that i did and it twists my stomach up to think
i was too focused on my own tears to pay attention.
he was sitting so straight against the pews, in the same church
six years apart with a different father leading the service,

hands holding the program so tightly that the paper wrinkled.
but his suit did not. in another world, my father could've been a man at a
business meeting or a little penguin sitting on his eggs, his beak
pointed towards the sky, looking somewhere that i cannot reach.
do penguins have fur or feathers?
i cannot remember
what my father and i read in my bird facts book years ago.

at the memorial, we did all the remembering in english and
i wonder if that felt strange to his tongue, to be swallowing the shape
of words in a language he didn't speak with mamie and papy.
i imagine their ghosts in the corner of the chapel waiting to hear the french.
they didn't teach me enough of it, so i don't know if my father had to
take a little extra time in his grief to decipher in his brain
what everyone was saying about his parents,

but if someone took my father's brain out of his head, i know it would
look just like a galaxy with all its own little planets and worlds spinning
around each other, pulled together by the gravity of his willpower—
dark green just like a forest and his favorite color when i was five
my father knows everything about me, but he never tells me about his
childhood. when i ask, all he says is *i love you, little bunny*
like an explanation, like an apology. i know he has never lost a fight, only
won or tied. he used to dream in french
... he used to dream.

at the service, watching my father out of the corner of my eye,
i thought he was going to get up and run down the church
aisles, legs extended towards the door, faster and faster
until he reached the south pole or the grill or the beach
or somewhere in between that exists in one of the worlds
in his head; it would be just like a movie
"little bunny,"

my father would say if i let him read my poetry,
"nothing in life happens like the movies."
he and i wanted to start a movie watching club
where we were the only two members
but we got through *the godfather* and *all the king's men* before i
moved out of the house three years later and that was that.

i couldn't tell anyone where the time went. it's a blur and my legs
are extended as i sift through it in slow motion
as if the steps themselves, plodding down the street
or pressing down on the gas will help me understand
the gap in my memory from age thirteen to eighteen
when i was covered in red and sadness, much like
the silent deer on the side of the road, much like how my
father is covered in anger most of the time,

only he doesn't mean it in the way i meant my sadness to be vicious
what good is pain if i'm the only one feeling it?
can i really suffer if nobody else knows?
i wasn't meant to be noble, i live like

death is less of a future and more of a memory, my legs
extended through its dark waters and freezing-freezing-freezing
that day on the beach when i waded with all my clothes on
and kayaking through the marsh
and scrambling across the river
all at once as though time itself is water too—

fragments of poems and words i've spoken drifting past in
the current, my legs e x t e n d e d
into the water forever,
this poem falling
through the cracks of
the one
i meant to write

Frederick Pollack

I was playing here with the trope of "life as theater" familiar from Shakespeare. It has an extra resonance in these times of resurgent fascism, in which performance, hypocrisy, and fear are closely linked.

I May Be Gone Some Time

They're unsure whether they're explorers
or actors playing the role. And "exploration"
itself is doubtful, qualified by a sense
of escape and flight, horror and pursuit by horror.
What "acting" has going for it
is the bareness of the boards
they traverse, sketchy doorframes, notional
mountains, white light.
What argues against it is the vastness of
the stage and the dark audience, and
cold. A girl draws her hands into
her parka. What am I supposed to appear
to be thinking? she wonders.
A hope or memory might actually
warm me; mission, even survival seem
abstract though they aren't ...
Two steps back she had found
a jewel on the floor, in the snow, and handed it
to the captain. So the trek or scene

is not, he thinks with somber satisfaction,
without its symbol. He wonders if he's projecting
that leadership wavelength which isn't
confidence alone or strength or even
care. Considers that
this doubt applies both
to theater and life. But the look
may be premature, should be put on when
starvation or capture loom. Why
am I assuming failure / tragedy? ...
A couple, inching forward,
struggle to keep up. They are more or less refugees.
At the same time, to provide local color
or vital data, they elegize
the surroundings. We're intellectuals, scholars.
All history is ultimately
that of ruins. The captain thanks us;
we signal our trust
in him, look fearfully behind.
Both expressions are heirlooms.

And what if those two
are spies? What if despair
provokes or excuses violence against
the girl? What if the captain,
lost in thought, muffs
his lines? The arduous progress, foot
before foot, chafed by talk, creates
anguish. Plot, some dramatic turn,
is the last thing one hopes for.

Only a culmination, a
forgetting of all incident
in safety and warmth. It's as hard to imagine
and finally as irrelevant as
applause. He stops
the column, distributes rations,
peers toward the wings, and up into
the light, which mercifully may
have dimmed. Perhaps the next sign
the ground offers will be
a leaf, if only one of autumn.



Eden Chicken

As a child, I absorbed fairytales, folklores, and Greek mythology with relish. The myth of Cassandra is one that always engaged me: the way she was so utterly ignored; her gruesome death. I originally wrote this poem some years ago, retelling her story from a modern perspective using a clueless speaker developing a crush on Cassandra in a bar. While being a mythological retelling, my focus pivoted towards depicting more liminal, ambiguous emotions.

Cassandra

neardivine nearblessed or just
a woman gullcrying warnings
never heeded yet
time less bound less rest less
/ murked she blazed
obscure auburn curls embering
nightshaded eyes deep in her skull bound
less pupils obscure irises
mouth marbled stern / sense of grim never
heeded for centuries to come \ centuries already gone
she remains murmuring fates into a cradled glass
we watch two drunks
augment their altercation taking it outside
he'll kill him / nonchalance further obscured
by thick fumes / neither of us meant for me to hear
i buy her another drink
buy myself some time with her
she looks to know
this desire know the consequence
she snorts
half derisive half humoured half
horse? scoffs again when later i insist
there is meaning in memory
mutters something about prophesy
her gibbous eyes unbelieving
but want to / her manner of speech
compels me she stammers \ stutters through confused tenses
archaic earthern language woven in
with sixties slang / her farfetched stories stretch
land \ traverse time border on daydream
we're the last to leave \ we leave together
i barely notice the floor
ed body she steers me away from
her hold on my elbow
is all i notice / her beautiful hand
manicured mannequin
i want to tell her
she is beautiful
without sounding like the men that have told her
the same before just to buy
some time with her / believing she owes them
she is never believed never heeded
i want to tell her how she has changed
my life in mere hours
but we are too drunk for sincerity
too drunk for poetry so instead
i point out a shooting star
that's actually an airplane
she laughs at my feigned disbelief
she knows i only got it wrong for her

to correct me / for us to both laugh
she knows this desire the consequence
still she asks me home / corner
of her lips fishhooked into coy
a modesty so affected it is explicit
she is laughing at it \ at herself
at me blushing red with night's chill \ alcohol's heat
i've never gone home with someone from a bar
experiences are for experiencing
she retorts \ i start / she's in my head now
was she already? knowing every
desire \ consequence
fingers interlinked i can't remember
who seized who but we left together
now we're walking together
to go back to hers together
interlinked / she's spieling now
eyes on the road \ i'm watching
her lips move / not listening / never heeding
heading towards— i don't know this area
i know she knows
that i don't know
allatonce i'm on her sofa / awkwardly
bashing my feet i don't remember them leading me here
she continues to bewitch with her dulcet stream
conversational inconsequential trivialities
allatonce i want to leave
leave her space \ her voice
but there's a full glass in her hand
her beautifully rumpled hand
a full glass in my hand so i stay
knuckles redwhite around the stem
we sit not touching / but oh her words!
too melodious to call tirade too impassioned to term lecture
too experienced to label monologue
i sit i listen half entranced / how grateful she is for a listener
she tells me of incredible incredulous times
the man whose skin gleamed bronze
like hide of sun / whose voice echoed
orchestrally \ gummed one's attention honeylike
a man who promised truth alongside comfort
gave her neither when she didn't give
her self / now her flesh crawls when
ever she hears a kithara twang
i tell myself to google kithara later
how no one believed a word she said
after him / never heeded / her brother dismissing her
in favour of his girlfriend / her other brother's
body laid at her feet years later / this consequence
known from years before / known \ voiced \ unheeded

yet her father still accused her
of tearing the family apart
how she pilgrimaged
i didn't know that was a thing people still did
instead was violated violently
every boundary breached until
limp / how her city was ruptured to rubble
boundaries breached / known from the beginning
how the man who commanded
the fall \ dealt the hands of fate \ destroyed
her very world / took her as his own
without a thought to her
desire / or consequence
there's a pause
her unfocussed eyes focus
to somewhere else / beyond
my bodily line of sight
she almost spits
bloodbath
then she's wiping quick tears
salting hot cheeks
excusing herself to get a second bottle
we haven't finished the first
in excuse to obscure her face
unwanted tears overbrimming
i could only guess her feelings
but i know the pain / overbrimming / unwanted
i should go i am unwanted
slip out now as she blows snot \ splashes face
rubs at black flecks dispersed under the lashes
as she rubs her sleeves fall down / in
the unforgiving bathroom light
peeks
thick pale gashes of skin / once axed
to nearpieces / neardeath by blood loss
the ceramic below the mirror
is cracked \ splattered
more ancient than filthy
the soap bar wet \ stinking
of olive oil / a sigh bounces off
the mirror as she considers
her reflection / forces my dilemmaing body
to rest / i will not leave
i will never leave

Donna J. Gelagotis Lee

The speaker's route in "From Mitilini" is one I traveled many times on Lesvos. It begins at the city of Mitilini and continues through the central part of the island and branches off to the north. The trip through the mountains and lowlands with its scents and high-altitude excitement has stayed with me.

From Mitilini

As we drive from the port,
climbing out of town,
side-rails of flat stone
drop into fields
of farms and
manufacturing:
first clip: 90 degrees,
almost cut to the edge;
a truck careens onto
our side of the road;
hotel through the pines,
sight of the blue bay,
a photo shoot of light
between trees, glinting
off the water; goats
on long ropes nibble
close to the ground;
their bells clang as they
shake flies into the
breeze; a mule waits to
be untethered, military
saddle moved to a wire
fence; sunburnt grass, high-
reaching rock, and pine cools
the island air; the mountain
turns, hairpin;
few rails to lean into,
slick dust, and one
ancient god gives you room,
knows now about automobiles;
we descend into
the lowlands: salt fields;
nearby: donkeys, a horse,
shelters of summer houses,
chickens in the dust, a goat;
dog on the porch; in Kalloni:
rows of small houses—
white, blue, burst red
brick; kerchiefed women
in black sweep
the dirt away;
teenagers group under the trees
in the square;
as we ascend the mountain
to Stipsi: the largest turn
dirt and gravel-patched, the view
too beautiful to miss.
Near the edge of
the keenest cliff:
boxes of icons, candles

lit for the dead; and
then another, as I save
my breath, my foot
off the floor and bracing;
someone did die . . .
and we descend, rolling
toward the hills; olive trees
scamper into craggy valleys;
a mountain spring opens
itself to me, and to villagers
and tourists who tap it
into jugs, and then a stretch
of valley-to-mountain; the dirt
road to Stipsi runs to
the mountain, but the paved one
descends to the sea
after the final postcard turn
and a breath of what I had
dreamed, the clear water
rushing down for me and
cooling a beach;
a small church rises out
of the highest rock;
olive trees toil
with the ancient sun;
islanders lure lettuce
and eggplant
out of the land,
and fishermen who travel
by sea spot the light
that shows them
the way as night falls.



Salvatore Difalco

I started with a title and a first line and essentially riffed in a controlled manner from there. Connections and associations tumbled freely and the poem slowly but surely came together.

Night Life

Now welcome night, a night so long expected
after the endless ramifications of day,
the slain brainstorms, butchered handshakes
and tender ass-kissing, the nose in the door,
the foot in the door, the foot in your ass.

Now welcome night, with the ashes of day
floating like common snow flurries,
striped with neon and whipped into zero
by the night wind and the night circus
swinging into business with its acrobats

and elephants and pixie bears on unicycles
clever as they come, save for the toy dogs
in tiny top hats and tuxes up on their hind legs
rocking a conga line like miniature Princes:
it is the price we pay for entertainment.

It is what results at the intersection of boredom,
suicidal ideation, and abject cowardice.
It is what comes upon when the sun goes down
and the eyes begin to tire and the bogies
shake off their embryonic camouflage.

Now welcome night, with its hesitations
and fulminations and quicksteps through
quivering puddles of black and black inking
the streets and the plashing ahead and behind
and no one, nothing, not even a cat, to report.

Now welcome night, must it be entered
from here, or can we suspend it for some time,
come back to it when we feel more serene,
less atomized, less watching the seams
of reality swell and thicken and blacken?

All things considered, we shoot ourselves
in the head with stupid ideas, ask even
stupider questions, then fall on the floor
throwing tantrums perfected in childhood.
Where is this going? asks Darkness.

There is no direction that qualifies
as chosen, or naturally occurring. Under
cover of night, under stars dimmed by
smog, no moon in sight, a distant dog baying,
we creep around the city looking for life,

for nightlife, for the jazz club or speakeasy
of night, the clinking and laughing,

the sweat and heat, the slurred slurs
and menacing cross-armed bouncer vibes.
Don't look at me, man, I'm cool, I'm alright.

Now welcome night: imagine a baritone
blowing hot air into a megaphone.
Imagine being chased into a skivvy alley
by thugs in Richard Nixon masks
or a posse of hebephrenics in fright wigs.

Now welcome night—I know, I know,
it begins getting old when it doesn't
really get you anywhere, when it doesn't
save you from despising yourself
for talking a good game but staying put.

There is no danger in stillness, no menace
in bedsheets and walls with their patterns
of light and shadow, their eggshell cracks
and flailing cobwebs: fade to black, not yet,
not yet, the nightlight burns blue in its socket.

Now welcome night, now welcome
nyctophobia, derived from the Greek
for night, widespread among children,
manifest among certain insomniacs
caught between one dread and another.

Now welcome night—be not afraid
of its vagabonds, assassins, and thieves,
but walk quickly by its quiet graveyards,
don't look for its truths in the moonlight
shining on the weathered gravestones.

Far from the truth, one tosses and turns
in bed imagining the hurried walk down
the street, white-streaked asphalt gleaming,
fugitives in shadow leaning in open-handed,
and quickening the step, covering ground.

Now welcome night, without it no moon
would play with our minds. Now welcome
night, how did it get so late so soon?
Now welcome night, night triumphant,
mighty night—what hath night to do with sleep?

But the pillow smells of car-exhaust and pan-grease
and the limbs lie limp as rolled towels.
Trumpets and firetrucks would fail to stir
the future carcass from the coming death

of sleep. Go to sleep then, you can sleep now.

Contributors

Angela Arnold lives in North Wales. Her poems have been widely published in print magazines, in anthologies and online, in the UK and elsewhere. Collection: *In Between* (Stairwell Books, 2023). She is also an artist, a creative gardener and an environmental campaigner.

Sarah (Ember) Bricault is a queer neuroscientist, avid crafter, and poet. Sarah especially loves science-themed poetry, and other works that challenge the distinctions between science, math, and art. Sarah's pieces can be found in *Brown Bag Online*, *High Shelf Press*, *The Poeming Pigeon*, and elsewhere. For more information on Sarah, check out SarahBricault.net.

Allison Burris grew up in the Pacific Northwest and currently lives in Oakland, California. Her poems embrace the whimsical and cozy, explore human connection, and affirm the power of stories. She received her MLIS from San Jose State University and her poetry appears or is forthcoming in various journals, including *Instant Noodles*, *Heartline Spec*, *Muleskinner*, *After Happy Hour Review*, and *The Marbled Sigh*. Connect with her via https://linktr.ee/allisonburris.

Eden Chicken (they/them) is a queer poet whose work explores hybridity: textual forms; divergent identities; coexistences with nature. Recently graduated from the MA Poetry course at University of East Anglia, their work has been published by *Egg Box*, *Sentire*, *Many Nice Donkeys*, and featured on *The Poetry Society*'s website. Instagram: @edenchicken.

Will Cordeiro has published work in *32 Poems*, *AGNI*, *Bennington Review*, *Copper Nickel*, *DIAGRAM*, *Pleiades*, and *The Threepenny Review*. Will is the author of *Trap Street* (Able Muse, 2021) and *Whispering Gallery* (DUMBO Press, 2024) as well as co-author of *Experimental Writing: A Writer's Guide and Anthology* (Bloomsbury, 2024) and the forthcoming *New Foundations of Creative Writing* (Bloomsbury, 2026). Will co-edits *Eggtooth Editions* and lives in Guadalajara, Mexico.

a.d. is drawn to the sacred, the profane, the mysterious and the mythological, which provides inspiration for her work. She is a Pushcart-nominated bisexual poet and visual artist, and her poetry is published or forthcoming in *Querencia Press*, *THINK*, *Anti-Heroin Chic*, *Aôthen Magazine*, *Culterate*, *Sublimation*, *PISSOIR!* and elsewhere. Meanwhile, her visual art, mainly photography and self-portraiture, is or will be featured in *SCAB*, *Small World City*, *Welter*, *Audi Locus*, *Hominum Journal*, *body fluids*, *Bleating Thing* and other outlets. Tumblr & Twitter: @godstained.

John A. deSouza studied English Lit at the University of Toronto and lives in Jersey City, NJ. His chapbook, *Hidden*, was just published by *Bottlecap Press*. John's poetry has recently been published in *The Writing Disorder*, *WayWords*, *Apricity Press*, *The Orchards*, *All Existing Literary Review*, *Half Eaten Mouth*, and also David Cope's *Big Scream Magazine.* He has been translated in China in *New World Poetry*. His unpublished collection, *Unimaginable Hardship* (poems for Ukraine) was short-listed for The Letter Review Prize. Several poems from the same collection were published by *The Writing Disorder*. John's wife's family is Ukrainian.

Salvatore Difalco has recent work in *Cafe Irreal* and *BlazeVox*.

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C.M. Green is a writer with a focus on history, memory, gender, and religion. Their work has appeared in *beestung*, *ANMLY*, and elsewhere. Their debut hybrid chapbook, I *Am Never Leaving Williamsburg*, is available from *fifth wheel press* now. They stand for a free Palestine and encourage you to find tangible ways to do the same. You can find their work at cmgreenwrites.com.

Colin Griffin is a musician, writer, and artist from Buffalo, New York. He was recently published in *Cool Beans Lit*, *Anti-Heroin Chic*, and *#Ranger Magazine*, has a forthcoming publication in *Primer*, and is considering emerging further.

Zebulon Huset is a high school teacher, writer and photographer. He won the Gulf Stream 2020 Summer Poetry Contest and his writing has appeared in *Best New Poets*, *Atlanta Review*, *Meridian*, *North American Review*, *The Southern Review*, *Fence* and many others. His short prose chapbook *Between Even Rows of Trees* is forthcoming from *Bottlecap Editions*.

Suze Kay is a pastry chef in New Jersey. Her poetry is published in *HAD*, *The Hooghly Review*, *trampset*, and more. She's happy you found her here and hopes you'll keep up with her on her website, www.suzekay.com, or social media (Twitter @suz_chef or Bluesky @suzchef.bsky.social).

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Charles Leggett is a professional actor based in Seattle, WA, and a 2022 Lunt-Fontanne Fellow. His poetry has been published in the US, the UK, Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, India and Nigeria; his chapbook *HARD LISTENING* appears in the latest *Ravenna Press* "Triple" series edition, No. 25. Charles's co-adaptation of Maxim Gorky's *THE LOWER DEPTHS* premiered in 2024 at Intiman Theatre with The Seagull Project, and his poetry film short *TO FONDLE NOTHING* has screened as an Official Selection at film festivals in the US, the UK (Scotland and England), Portugal, Serbia, Italy, and Austria.

LindaAnn LoSchiavo. Native New Yorker. Italian-American heritage. Poet. Writer. Dramatist. In 2024 she had three poetry books published in 3 different countries; two titles won multiple awards. Bluesky: @ghostlyverse.bsky.social.

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Aparna Paul (she/her) is a writer, banana bread enthusiast, chemical engineer, and amateur crossword constructor based in Cambridge, MA. Her poetry & prose has appeared with *Reckoning*, *DMQ Review*, *Gaining Ground*, and she edited the anthology *Reflections of the Land: Meditations on Environment & Industry* (Literary Cleveland, 2021). She is a regular performer & occasional host at the Boston Poetry Slam. Her first full-length collection of poetry, *HOME FREE*, is forthcoming with *Game Over Books* in fall 2025. When not reading/writing, she's most likely calling to a stranger on the street and saying, "Look, the moon!"

Christina Polge (she/her) is a poet currently based in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Her work explores collisions between dreams and reality and the past and present, as well as between people. When not writing, she enjoys frolicking in meadows, going for long runs with a good playlist and hosting board game nights for her friends. She is pursuing her undergraduate degree in creative writing and journalism at UNC-Chapel Hill.

Frederick Pollack is the author of two book-length narrative poems, *THE ADVENTURE* and *HAPPINESS* (Story Line Press; the former reissued 2022 by Red Hen Press), and four collections, *A POVERTY OF WORDS* (Prolific Press, 2015), *LANDSCAPE WITH MUTANT* (Smokestack Books, UK, 2018), *THE BEAUTIFUL LOSSES* (Better Than Starbucks Books, 2023), and *THE LIBERATOR* (Survision Books, Ireland, 2024). Many other poems in print and online journals. Website: www.frederickpollack.com.

Brent Raycroft is a Canadian poet whose work has appeared in a variety of magazines, journals and anthologies, including *Prairie Fire*, *Grain*, *CV2*, *Arc*, *The Dalhousie Review*, *Best of Walrus Poetry* (2013) and *The Best of the Best Canadian Poetry: Tenth Anniversary Edition* (2017). He also writes poetry reviews, and works as a freelance editor. He lives with his family in Sydenham, Ontario, at the southern edge of Algonquin traditional territory and the northern edge of Haudenosaunee traditional territory.

Kathryn Reese is a poet living on Peramangk land in Adelaide, South Australia. She works in medical microbiology and enjoys solo road trips, hiking and chasing frogs to record their calls for science. Her poems can be found in *the engine(idling*, *Epistemic Literary*, *Kelp Journal* and *Australian Poetry Journal*. She was a winner of the Red Room Poetry's #30in30 competition & the Heroines Women's Writing Prize 2024. Contact: katwhetter@icloud.com / socials: Insta: https://instagram.com/katwhetter? / BlueSky: @kathrynreese.bsky.social.

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Devon Webb (she/her) is an autistic writer & editor based in Aotearoa New Zealand. Her award-winning work has been published extensively worldwide & accumulated six Best of the Net/Pushcart nominations. She is a founding member of *The Circus* (@circuslit), a literary collective prioritising radical inclusivity in the indie lit scene. She is currently working on her debut novel & full-length poetry collection & can be found on social media at @devonwebbnz.

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Carolyn Zaikowski is the author of the novel *In a Dream, I Dance by Myself, and I Collapse* (Civil Coping Mechanisms, 2016) and the Poet Laureate of Easthampton, MA. Her fiction, poetry, and essays have appeared in *Washington Post*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Everyday Feminism*, *DIAGRAM*, *West Branch*, *Denver Quarterly*, and elsewhere. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Naropa University and works as a creative writing instructor and volunteer death doula. Find her at www.carolynzaikowski.com and carolynzzz.substack.com.

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