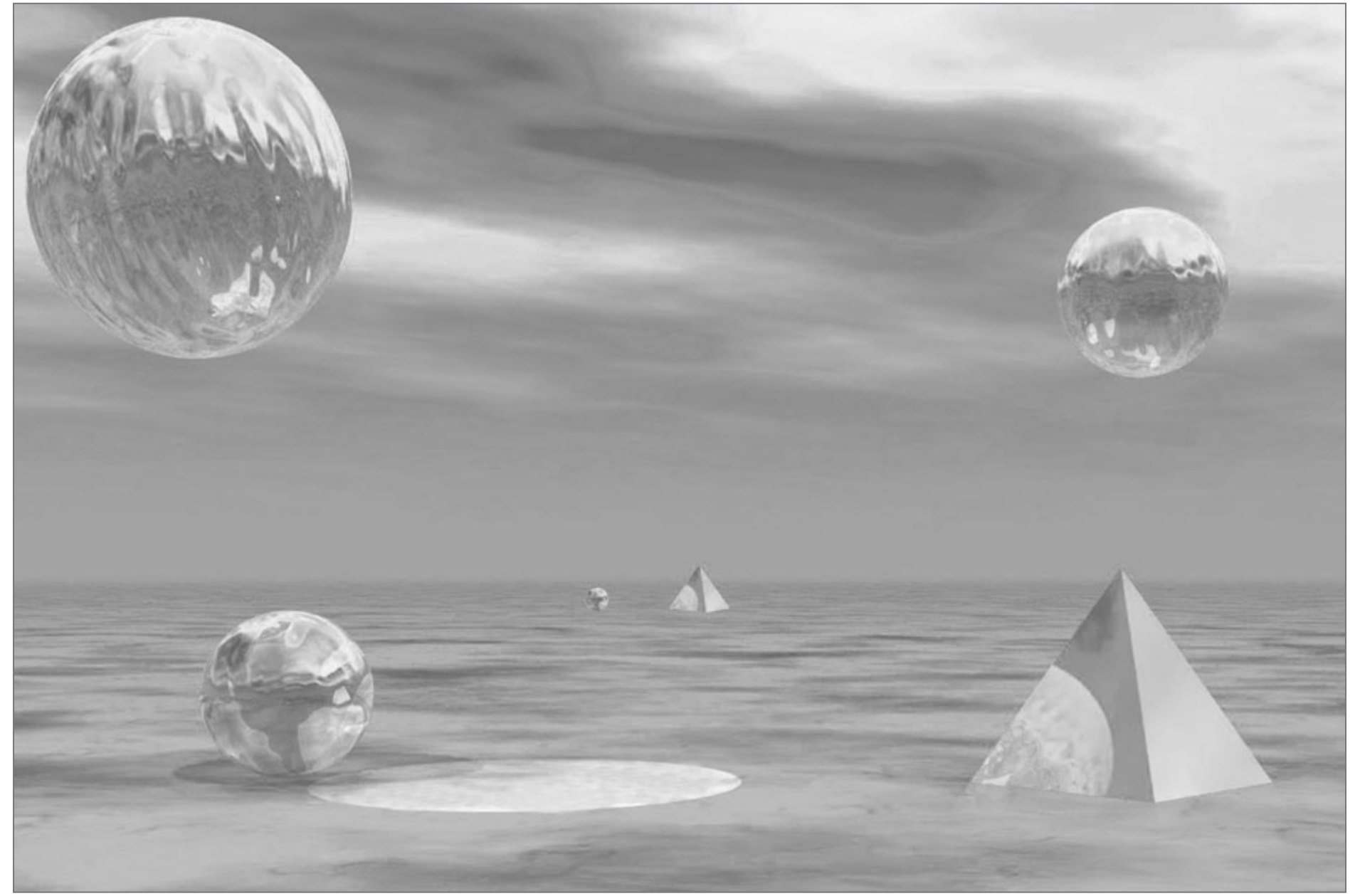


Voices

DAHLIAS, GODS & MERMAIDS



2023



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“A book is made from a tree. It is an assemblage of flat, flexible parts (still called “leaves”) imprinted with dark pigmented squiggles. One glance at it and you hear the voice of another person, perhaps someone dead for thousands of years. Across the millennia, the author is speaking, clearly and silently, inside your head, directly to you. Writing is perhaps the greatest of human inventions, binding together people, citizens of distant epochs, who never knew one another. Books break the shackles of time —proof that humans can work magic.”

~ Carl Sagan

Voices

DAHLIAS, GODS & MERMAIDS



2023

Editor’s Note

Dahlias, Gods & Mermaids. What relevance do they hold, especially when it pertains to an anthology of poetry, prose and fiction? Is it a ruse of some sort? Perhaps an obscure joke or, at best, an attempt at becoming sublime; a small, independent publisher stretching the boundaries of elite, academic acceptance?

The answer is not as simple as it might seem.

Within these pages are the captured imaginations of writers and poets from across the globe. They responded to this, apparently, cryptic theme for publication and sent in their replies. Certainly, there were bound to be poems of Mermaids (believe it or not when coming up with this title I never once thought of the Little Mermaid statue in Denmark, or of Disney’s Mermaid either), however, a few writers did, each with a different twist, so it would appear Mermaids are a rather iconic and popular image.

Of course, Gods was also a fairly obvious and easy target to hit, but what showed up at my desk was as varied and diverse as you could hope to have. Was I thinking of religion when I put that into the title? Not at all. Was I thinking of an abstract use of the word that might denote several and varied meanings? Perhaps. I left it up to the individual to decipher what I might be after with “Gods” (note the plural).

But what of Dahlia’s. What do they have to do with anything, especially Gods and Mermaids? Dahlias have long been associated with Sacred Geometry. The intricate and endless geometry of their petals have been revered by cultures over eons as a physical manifestation of divine uniformity. In essence, holding a dahlia is like holding all of the universe in your hands...its geometrical beauty simply resonates with the soul.

Put that image together with images of Gods, and then combine those two images with that of a Mermaid and you have endless themes to write about. Endless parallels of life and existence to explore.

Mermaid images date back to ancient times. Evolving from the Naga Kings in Mesopotamia in the Middle East, to Chinese folklore that speak of Mermaid tears turning into pearls, Mermaids are also found in Greek mythology, Roman Mythology, Celtic Mythology, Norse Mythology, Korean Mythology, Thai Mythology (the cover illustration is of Suvannamaccha, a deity from the Thai creation story, The Ramakien), African mythology, Middle Eastern mythology, Native American mythology, Brazilian mythology, even Caribbean mythology is alive with Mermaids.

So, at first glance, though it does appear to be a rather aloof and obscure title (in all honesty the entire title came from a line in a book I wrote describing the hallucinogenic visions I had while learning to become a cosmic traveler with my friend, Coyote’s, help) there is much more to it.

Once you dive into it more, giving it a bit of thought and then thinking about it just a little bit more, perhaps if we were to turn off our Netflix, our Hulu, our Paramount Plus, etc... and begin to wonder about the myths and stories over the past thousands of years that our ancestors have shared with us through ancient artwork, stories and tales designed to preserve the memory of such things, this title might actually make sense.

Just as a Dahlias beauty resonates with the soul, stories and art from both ancient, and modern times, Mermaids do the same.

Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Little Mermaid,” inspired

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aspects of adaptation and individual sacrifice for happiness long before forming the basis for Disney's great classic.

Accordingly, Edvard Munch's "Mermaid" painting can also represent longing and desire. The graceful mermaid reflects the human desire to escape the constraints of everyday life and reach for something beyond. As a hybrid creature, the mermaid exists between two worlds, embracing the sense of yearning and longing, becoming a symbol of transformation, desire, and the unknown.

So too does the use of colors and symbolism in John William Waterhouse's "A Mermaid", invite the viewer to consume themselves in the ethereal world of the mermaid, losing themselves into another reality, no matter how brief.

These tales are endless. From ancient Chinese tales depicting Mermaids crying, their tears turning to pearls, to countless and endless stories of Gods and how they created humankind and the animals, in fact, all life around us, to the use of Dahlias in Aztec culture for a cure for epilepsy or the use of specific variants of the flower in Vedic writings to illustrate sacred lev-

els of spiritual attainment, the significance of Dahlias, Gods & Mermaids is endless, Coyote guide or not.

Here, then, between these covers, are interpretations as diverse as time itself. Could these words, thoughts, images, ultimately become part of our future, viewed as perhaps our contribution to the ongoing weaving of the fabric, the history, of life? It's possible. Who's to say?

I hope you enjoy reading this collection as much as I did in collecting it. I have presented the anthology with a lot of white space in order to allow the reader to take their time with the writer's found within. What are they saying? What message might they convey? Don't just hurriedly read through this book, it was not intended to be read in that fashion. Let go of your world for just a bit and take the time to explore the images, the meanings, of what is written here. For it is a wondrous journey, my friend, wondrous indeed. There are many magical journeys to be found within. And, perhaps, a few lessons or two as well.

Enjoy!

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*COME,
 LEND ME A FEW
 MOMENTS
 OF YOUR TIME

 I WILL REVEAL
 WORDS
 IMAGES
 MAGIC
 TO HELP YOU
 ALONG THE WAY*



Illustration by Brock Alexander

FANTASEA

No icy waters
rough and deep,
no cold gray steely
sword – tipped waves –
Nay, my love
let us not sleep
among the rough
and rocky caves.
But come to me
in waters warm
with sweet sea grass
in some lagoon.
Then we shall laugh
and swim and play
one sparkling night
beneath the moon.
Oh merman
rock me in your arms.
Now kiss me
sweet, so tenderly.
For our two worlds
join into one
as we make love
here in the sea.

THE GODDESS GALA

They came from near and a few from afar
on foot, by van, on bikes, by car.
They came to feast and sumptuously dine
and perhaps imbibe a bit of wine.

They came to hug and laugh and talk,
to pray and bless their sacred walks.
They came to give their hearts a chance
to share their beauty, and to dance.

They came to drum, to chant, to sing,
and glory in Her spirit ring.

Grandmothers, sisters, daughters, mothers,
granddaughters, aunts, friends, and others:
a knitted chain of feminine divine -
a net of strength and beauty fine.

Nowhere together in the past have I witnessed
such a cast of ages, colors, and costumes bright
as that which gathered
for the Goddess Night.

A room of joy, a place of love,
with twinkling, sparkling fairy light
and heartbeat drumming through the night.

So come my sisters one and all
next year to the Goddess Ball

*The Goddess Gala is an annual charity event benefitting
the Merlin Foundation in Carroll County, Arkansas.*

SEA DANCER

Dressed in shimmering
sequined fins
she flips and twirls
within wet caves.
Long kelp ribbons
grace her hair
which ebbs and flows
along the waves.

She moves in fluid
pirouettes.
Toe shoes are not
for one as she:
a ballerina of the waves,
a fish girl in
the briny sea.

And if you, too
imagine well
and let your mind
swim loose and free,
perhaps sometime
you will be blessed
and she will come
to dance for thee.

BRIGHT GODDESS

Orange tongues lick hungrily
at night's deep blackness,
flushing to vermilion
from wresting the last
tiny drop of life from
scraggly downed wood.
Pictures emerge from the fire:
strange, beautiful, grotesque
faces sculpted from
rough dry bark -
an ever shifting promenade
of Jack – O – Lantern visages.

I am enveloped and infused
with the campfire's smoke.
She and I both breathe
the same air.
We are each candles
in this world of shadows.
They say that smoke
follows beauty, but perhaps
She is only purifying this
temple of trees
I am visiting tonight.

She is not to be trifled with,
this brazen bright Goddess.
She is kindler of food,
warmer of hearth and home,
and blesses glowing hearts.
Love and respect Her well.
Her radiance is worthy
of fearful worship.

She is the creatress of worlds,
the birther, the maker,

transformer of the ores
of the earth into shining jewels
and glittering swords.
Disdain Her, turn your back on Her,
forget Her power,
and your memory will sharpen
as She spits forth rivers of fire,
incinerating every living thing
in Her path -
twisting and trapping all that is
green in a mountain of molten rage.
It will be eons until Her anger cools,
until new seeds sprout life again.

In a glowing gown She pirouettes deftly,
trailing behind Her shining hair like
ribbons more golden than sun rays.
Her every movement flickers, shifts,
changes like mercury with the restless wind.
Smoldering charcoal prints trace the
passage of Her flaming dance.

Mere mortal, take care you
admire Her from afar.
Let Her luster warm you and
bathe you in its brilliance,
envelope you and set to glowing
every fiber, every cell of your being.
But never, ever kiss Her.
Her tongue scorches in an instant -
burning to blackness beyond recognition:
purging the world to begin anew.

She is Pele.
She is Kali.
She is brightest Flame.

She has many faces, many names.
Elemental,
She has always been
and always will be.
Tonight in this forest I am blessed
with Her most tender ardor.
I bow to Her light.
I sing Her praise.
I name Her Fire.



Illustration by Brock Alexander

FRAGRANT AND AMARANTHINE FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS

One day I will come back from outer space
by a red cloud and bring giant's picture scroll.
My lines of lightning songs will flutter gold greetings of
prehistoric giant city
The mountains that have been sleeping for hundreds
of millions of years
will be transparent suddenly and the lights will be brilliant,
like five-coloured gems;
And the songs of my soul in the skeleton will be in
full bloom,
like the fairyland flowers of the Kingdom of Heaven,
that will be fragrant and amaranthine for
thousands of years.

HEAVENLY TEMPLES AND TOWERS

I rode a heavenly camel towards a desolate desert, .
a jade bottle poured the sweet dew
of the Kingdom of Heaven
and converged a lake of springs that never dry up.
so where the giant trees in prehistoric times grew up.
Their branches and leaves rippled like the garden of
phoenixes and birds,
and the song of birds sounded like music,
which made the clouds in the sky to be intoxicated by
the time.
And the colorful and transparent grits grew into the huge
jewels in the dreams
Even grew into heavenly temples and towers.

THE INTERSTELLAR KINGDOM

My snowflakes are white flames
and death is the singing of the golden car
from the kingdom of heaven.
I walked through the black forests for many years
and slept soundly in the rocks
and forgot the pictures of the world, until the wings
of gold were like clouds
and I heard a call from the outside world,
which was as sweet as the lightning of the sun.
I opened the ninety-ninth floors doors of the heavens
and back to the interstellar kingdom that words
were fragrant and honey.

ANGEL'S BEAUTIFUL IMAGE OF WHITE FEATHERS

The birds in my head sang the music of the
Kingdom of Heaven,
sprinkled the rain of sweet dew and made the dusty
world be honeyed
made the bones be like jade and the king of soul to smile.
A golden axe cut off the body of a black python
for thousands of years,
and the light of dawn bloomed the giant's
prehistoric garden,
made the angel's beautiful image of white feathers
to intoxicate a giant city beyond the sky.

GIANT'S YOURSELF IN ANOTHER GIANT CITY

The gods who delight and smile in your body,
much older than stone and much younger than the morning.
They bestow you with the nectar of the kingdom of heaven,
make your bones becomes much more transparent with
each passing day.
So the light of soul wakes up in your head,
then you hear a ballad from an outer world;
In the labyrinth of time you see giant's yourself
in another giant city.

THE SOUL IS INVISIBLE MUSE

Open your eyes of soul and you'll see countless yourself.
No time goes by, as if the sun and the moon never set
and rise.
The world is only a book of phantom and the soul
is invisible Muse.
Before the words hadn't been born yet, you have been a giant
from the kingdom of gold, who know not what is meant
by yourself.

PREHISTORIC MYSELF

When the heaven woke up in my body day after day
and the world began to be hyaline and smiling,
I saw myself fifty thousand years ago
that engraved the poems of shimmering gold in the jade.
The stars were spinning in space and composed the
mysterious pictures,
and that giant who travelled by light waved to me joyfully,
made me to be happy and perfectly comfortable,
as if have met prehistoric myself.

THE NECTAR SONG

A sieve of my soul I weave with lightning of time
And cast it into the interstellar sea of heavens.
My giant city of ancient times exists till date
Where my golden smile still blossoms forth.
The giant words flash about in Space
Sprinkling the nectar song from my memory.
Lo! It helps you grow massive wings
To return to the forlorn Paradise of Gods;
The same that has been overlooked a thousand years
The eternal kingdom of heaven which knows no years!

THE FUTURE KINGDOM OF GIANTS

Though I might regret for myself when I turn dust
As I bid goodbye to this world,
I know there exists in the scrapbook of heaven
A gorgeous image of mine that often smiles to me in dreams;
That my olden words are engraved on primeval stones,
Yes! The apocalypse from the gods of heaven and earth!
I shall then be a future giant, to have carved
The platinum city of giants in the future Kingdom of giants.

AN OUTER WONDERLAND

Every tree is a philosopher.
Their roots took shape in the body of the earth;
Their domes bathed in the music of sun and stars.
To the black liveness in my bones I listened;
I saw the ancient flowers from paradise.
A giant from mountains gave me an embroidered mirror,
Which mirrored a layered outer wonderland.

STONE CITY

City of stone
 Eyes of snake
 Whip of fire is the sun
 While death, death of stone
 Death of wind ,is howling along the streets
 A girl woven with ivy
 Is walking on the high wall of the city
 Countless glass masks
 Bones piled up with rocks
 Under the sharp sword of time
 Melt into a poisonous snake
 A colorful rope is
 Entangling the city
 Water flows across amid the sky
 The eyes of water illuminate the pallor of spring
 Shadows flee one by one
 City go out of the city
 While the ocean is coming quietly
 Standing on the forehead of the sun
 A girl burned the flowers red in her hands
 Crystals emerge from the clouds
 Another city, another spring, is smiling
 under the embrace of light
 The rocks crumbled and the sand turned into a scenery

Blue sky fell down from the up high
 Drowned the river's eyes
 Blue snow, blue scenery
 Walks over here from the horizon
 Tall people , skin golden , shadows shining
 Sitting in a silver carriage
 I saw birds flying from the sky
 Monster three million years ago
 Returns on the wings of auspicious clouds
 The shadow forest, with golden branches and leaves,
 stands above the city
 The wind sings the song of feathers
 Blue sea water and golden city
 Set foot on their long lost home
 The foam of bone disappears and hides in the desert
 Water is the master of the world
 And those who raise the cup of the sun
 Is drinking the crystal sunshine and Silver Spring
 On the shoulders of the sea and the city
 On the wings of the wind, in the temple of water
 On a bed woven with roses
 In the streets of crystal and gems, in the eyes
 of the stars descending from the sky
 Spread bright red wings and fly like clouds.

THE PETTY AND THE DIVINE

g*d, were you in
 the gutter when i was
 bleeding on the
 city sidewalk, or were
 you looking out the
 dorm window? did you
 hear my gasps from above
 or below?

were you blessed with
 empathy & compassion?

does the lab technician
 count the souls of frogs
 that enter & exit
 their office? is the farmer
 completely silent with their
 cattle, even when no one
 is looking?

a priest once told me
 that g*d loves us so much that
 g*d cannot see our thoughts,
 & g*d gave us our brains
 & free will as gifts

& so i have my g*d-free
 secrets in this vault, & i
 won't let them fully out
 on the page

g*d is keeping secrets, & i am keeping mine

GOD ENJOYS THE PLEASURES
OF SMASHING SNOW GLOBES

take a snow globe, take pleasure in polishing the curved glass
 place a small father, small mother, small daughter in it
 make it large enough to traverse in five stanzas

give the father: a beer-barrel stomach, middle-age indigestion
 give the mother: cancer, self-image issues
 give the daughter: the mother, and nothing else

drop in some furniture
 rummage through it for significant items
 so: a broken mirror, a stashed love letter, a hidden key, etc.
 give it a lived-in look

hold a gun over the snow globe
 threaten to annihilate it

annihilate it and my hand is bleeding from glass

INVISIBLE INK

it is not widely known but
 god has a tattoo

she got it when she was a young anarchist
 and bored of the endless

the tattoo started as one elegant equation
 that transformed into a candle,
 bloomed into a colorful zoo of particles,
 and coalesced into droplets of universes

once the tattoo was finished,
 it was unchangeable

inevitably, it faded
 god's interests went elsewhere

WHAT IF GOD WAS ONE OF US?

what if god was one of us, man?
 looking for an uber at 2 in the morning
 regretting those last two tequila shots
 and before that regretting kissing that girl
 and before that regretted going to the karaoke bar
 and singing ‘i need somebody to love’?
 and before that regretted starting the night with
 two jamesons shots
 and before that regretting quitting his shit job
 at the restaurant
 and before that regretting making the stars and
 the earth and the cats
 and resting on the seventh day,
 y’know we could have had a cool universe, man
 if god just worked a little harder
 what if god was one of us?
 what if one of you were god?
 would you have rested on the seventh day?
 but no
 god’s on vacation
 the pain is too much
 everything happens all the time
 and god’s on vacation
 god stopped talking to us
 god stopped texting us
 god goddamn ghosted us
 your. god. hates. me.

THE DECLINING ECONOMY OF WHISKEY

there’s the bottle
 there’s the three of us, drinking it all in
 there’s the bar
 there’s los angeles
 there’s no one else

my young friend L declares into the night
 that she once fell from a great height and soon,
 when she is on her deathbed, all she wants is pussy and steak
 steak and pussy, punk as fuck
 like a corrupt man who sold his soul
 running a media empire from his deathbed
 ringing one bell or the other bell

my darling friend G amuses us
 with more decanted whiskey from a lovely handcrafted bottle
 aged in dead oak barrels
 while recanting life advice and old dirty jokes
 which are sometimes one and the same
 whether you are into the birds or the bees

faded memories
 I can barely recall the original name of whiskey...
uisge beatha

my friends G, L, and I hold spirited vessels, nearly empty
 and sing...
 it is the close of day
 our whiskey is at its last dying drops
 and we hesitate before going
 into that good night

there’s the angels
 there’s no one else

AN ANGEL ON THE CEILING

Stressors mounting in my mind
 Local issues at home hard to resolve
 Global issues abroad injustice far reaching
 Peaceful notions seem out of reach

My search for calm almost fruitless
 Restless sleep troubles looming
 Pursue rote activity no thought required
 A yoga routine ideal a thousand times familiar

Prone on the floor a vision appears
 A tranquil angel looking down from the ceiling
 A reflection of the sun’s morning light
 Thrice refracted to create the image

A sign of holiness a reminder of blessings
 Too tangible for serendipity
 The unlikely series of events directed at me
 The shape of a dove shining light on hope

My SOUL

My soul is my being my belonging
 It has always been and will always be with me
 An ever-present and loving observer
 Of my glory and folly

Connected to me at birth
 Growing with me into consciousness
 Gaining strength as I develop
 Part of my naked identity

Its presence influences my actions
 Guides me toward a life that preserves
 Leads me toward nurturing myself and others
 Strengthened by communion with like-minded people

I seek to find it through meditation
 Outstretch my arms
 Palms facing outward
 A posture inviting it in

Its presence manifests in my heart
 A calm possesses me when it is near
 An answer to a prayer
 My soul is my god

My bond to it weakens
 When my body begins to fail
 The fear of certain abandonment on my death
 Will subside shortly before my last breath

ON THE THIRD DAY: FLOWER SERIES

Remember to still hold us with your fiery hands:
here, walls press out; you can find us upright now
like mortal cups—veins deep with inky Sun-desire.

Hair-like breath lives in this earthly garden, where
pulses twist together, working by day to grow
before the Dark, sexed only by the sounds of spring.

The gendered colonies are constantly pivoting.
Cosmic orange hues speak tongues amongst their kin,
their bodies bloom beneath botanical bed sheets;

the Earth now decides what to bless and who will be
the last to survive. After the rains, we center our bodies,
lean in closer, a post-newborn separation, and yield from

one another, an eternal wilt, after the absence of any Sun.

POEM ABOUT A SMALL BIRD TRAPPED
BENEATH A CAGED WATER GRATE

For Rick

It was either male
or female a neologism
of flight reduced
three inches from a riddle
beneath a rusted-wired sky
from all the human designs
to keep waste and debris out.

The bird is reduced to vision
and peers through a honeycomb of
weathered grooves for windows
and waits on the other side
where life
and thought
equals freedom
and reduction
lives daunting
a space
now grounded.

Surrender is never the same
even when free from entanglement
songs are rarely heard using one's own breath.

Flight risks fatality
only when windborne
and left to scratch for treasures
within fallen ignorance
along the surface of the earth.

LORD'S AND LORD

We're near the gallows
and not supposed to
say anything. Don't say
The Word too loud
or how it may feel
as it lands face down
avoidance is heaviest
in its betrayal
after the weight lands
breaking the necks
of the highest dahlia heads.
The King Tide is here at the lip
of the land spilling petals
from its mouth mortality frays
and instability begins
to split
its own mouth wide open
from the gnashing of its own teeth.

Look the other way
without rolling
your eyes a nonverbal dissent
like aged particles
as if we were subjects
living safe inside
the underwater sea but only
serfs tucked beneath
the clean cuffs of a lord's pant.

These directions lead me
nowhere home instead

it's a trapping like an itch
deep below the river's skin
until the currents which
begin to shape us
tell us
what we born to hear.

This is not a grave
but the turning of the middle
ages of the light
towards the marketplace—
stands of life
nesting in crystal wicker
beneath the snaps and the claps
from rows of kingdom-home flags.

I see you again all of you
before me within me.
We are no longer fractured
but movements within light
embracing the afterlife
part of the cosmos
and now able to be
in more
than only one place.

God save the... king?
Don't look back
at the all perversion now
there's no need to translate
we've all reached the same place.

The animals are having a barn dance.¹

¹ Tom T. Hall. *Songs of Fox Hall*.

BOREAS

When the wind is from the north
 I yearn to be that invisible
 touch combing the trees,
 held to no form.
 What is the sense
 of this beauty
 if one does not,
 finally,
 go with it?

BEAUTY

You are woven now
 into the world
 I pause to see—

First light before
 it touches a field
 of dry grass.

Dusk behind a blue
 mountain. A tiny, iridescent
 beetle whose path

I follow in the palm
 of my hand. The way you tilt
 your head—beautiful.

When I think of you
 in this way I am
 becoming full or empty.

SHE LAUGHS

most of the time and lets me forget.
 Today was all about roses and hummingbirds
 and the rain that keeps her indoors.
 Then, oh yes, she had a dream last night.
 I was there and she showed me her wings.
 She already had them on her feet
 but now she has them at her shoulders.
 She laughed again, shaking her head
 at the oddness. Of course I smiled to hide
 the thought that death makes angels.
 Later, holding one another, we talk
 about the petals dropping from her bones.

PEACE

We are promised a major storm.
 There is a light rain before dusk,
 but no wind.
 We had snow last night,
 though not much of it.
 I slept too little,
 in and out of memories.

Tomorrow is the end of the first year of this war.
 It isn't mine, I'm too old.
 But I follow the news
 and glance at the weapons.
 The Great Leaders walk and stand
 in forests of flags and grave markers.
 What can we do?
 What can anyone do with this new crop
 of soldiers and witnesses,
 all sick and smiling in the ageless way,
 unable to get home.

THE SELKIE

We were new at sleeping together
 when I saw you in a dream sunning on a platform
 a short way out on a small lake.
 Even here I loved you and slipped
 into the water to swim below.

I swam and swam as the light changed to darkness
 where I was cold and afraid.
 Turning upward I found the pale green light
 then broke the surface just as my lungs failed.

I was crying out, holding you,
 desperate to be alive.
 You laughed and caressed me,
 asking in that so dark night,
 "Whatever is the matter?"

CIRCE

I opened my heart to a sail
 and found you at sea.
 Clouds and waves, a warm
 place in between.
 Night without darkness.
 Daylight under stars.
 A breeze next to you
 that the world may pass
 and not be kept from leaving.
 This, you.
 The diamond of absence
 and other abuses
 of long standing.
 And having seized you
 in full view of the coast,
 night without darkness,
 I burn my sails.

UNDERSONG

It was evil to fight
 with those who lost
 and it was evil
 to fight with those
 who won. It was evil
 to do nothing or
 to shout at those
 who were doing
 nothing. It was evil
 to make clouds
 of the water that ran
 out of wounds. It was
 evil that so many
 were turned into
 dirt in despair.
 It was evil simply
 to know all this
 was occurring again
 in one's own life.

SCANDALIZED

"I invited you over for dinner
 and let you sleep outside.
 But I never thought
 you would sleep out there
 with her!"

Thirty years ago,
 the evening's turn
 was a woman
 who wanted me only that once.
 She took the wariness of my surprise
 as though she could tame anything,
 even the standing fear and anger
 that whipped me day and night
 toward clarity.

She spoke to me
 not minding my silence.
 She held me
 as though I were her second child.
 She touched my face
 so that I was ashamed
 and cried
 and loved her.

In the morning
 she left before I could confess.
 She left me where I belonged—
 in all the tangled resentment
 I had earned.

CADENCE

This rhythm moves my feet
across levitating antiquities
to venerable ledges where a new
descent of fascination unfurls.

Flapping against half-staff flagpoles,
flittering in breezes Noah stirs with one
twisted burst of his holy Dervishness,
I find myself singing
a career-ending song.

I lift my shirt to show you all the
tattoos that have never been inked
into my roughly responsive skin.

I wanna walk on unending sidewalks
mystically mixed in evocative leisure,
concocted postures implicitly lost.

Move me through this despondency, please.
Shake this new civility by its broken throat –
we are cronies of a brilliant mistake!

Once this rail-smashing sabotage
comes full circle, Pasithea will sift
our sound resonance
into a cadence of misfit calm.

GIVEN

What can I give the world today
that would help it be a better place?

I wanna hear what others have to say.
I wanna say what others don't have
to wear here on earth anymore.

My message is no longer clear –
in fact, it's not my message at all.

If spoken, I would tumble through it
like an elastic gymnast bouncing
on padded mats in full extension.

I leave my Karmic retention back on
the tracks of some well-worn iron forged
from ram horn cognition into the hair
of an Aries man; graphic spasms ground
down into Tunisian
love tunnels, bejeweled by
the powers of Calypso.

But I wait for integrated answers
where turmoil transitions to tranquility;
where simplicity pacifies soul-saving
solutions into resolutions of desires fulfilled,

and I move breathlessly toward Nirvana
(*not the grunge band from Seattle*) –
but a parking garage turned into a palace
of bombastic bliss I followed here from afar.

*"Free all the prisoners!
Past, present, NOW –
not another moment of internment!"*

the parking garage attendant yells at me,
and I pay my parking fee, slip through the
up-swung gate and roll down the road,
still wondering –

what can I give the world today
that would help it be a better place?

BLACK MOUTH INVECTIVE

Once, out of the black-mouth invective,
there came phrases engraved
in terminal fogs –
resistant, low and coasting.

Somehow, radiant removals
wing through breezes left over from
a few years gone by; centuries passed.

I admire your reflection of someone,
obviously so important to you,
their light beams in your essence.

I let the tips of my wings drag too long
across an unveiled societal muckery
as this mist, concealing the latest redemption,
offers a vacuous hope to anyone born of
pain, misfortune, and misery.

Then suddenly, I see an alchemy
in your eye that's usually seen in
old solstice stones rising to plain view,
and my hollow invective is hushed.

RUSTY NAILS, DIRTY MARTINIS
AND A TETANUS SHOT

It's a so-so social club –
It's a flash of push-button marvel cards
and I smell black cherries washed
in blue-altar rainwater spilling

quantum love into a slippery earth
hovering over my own muddy mouth.
I wish the gin stood up to this
bathtub tribute on all four legs.

Back when subdivisions were more
unified, there was always some
jazz-spackled cracker running through
the hood with a box of candy and an
envelope marked "*Julio*" just in case
that gray Cadillac came calling with one
fist full of fury, the other a nicotine-
stained paw of greasy bat-cone cash.

I wanna salt sentimentality like a
raw piece of beef hung on an iron hook.
I wanna lick my own rusty nail wounds
with the same muddy mouth I spent

lambasting my inner castigator like
a Lampoon skit, scraping chalkboards
with Mistress Long Nails donned in
her dirty martini cocktail laser dress.

Wicker makes me stoned –
stones are my best friends.
Numbers are posted in classifieds –
*that's not a lie, just a long-running truth
with a history of stretching the edges.*

MY RELIGION

I was raised by paradox
and Southern tunnel vision
where God was a magic word
who mostly brought beatings
when we gave a damn.
There was power in a book
of weird translations
that made no sense
that everyone swore by...
The bigger and fancier the Bible
the holier you were esteemed.
Fancy church ladies had
flowers and lace hugging
unregulated misogyny
and rules few followed
but claimed they'd die for
Even as a child in Sunday School
I could never make sense
of the Trinity
or how God as Jesus
could "die for us"
or how dying could
take away sins we
didn't know we'd made.
Seeking clarification
itself was a sin...
was the devil whispering.

I remained "a good girl"
until college and Philosophy 101
when my entire belief system
crashed into history.
Stolen myths
with names changed.
God was a plagiarist
mean and proud
warring for possessions
under holy pretense
and a hypocrite
breaking the rules
enforced on us.
Of course He was us.
We made him in our image.

Yet I hold reverence
for the mystery of Life:
infinity that boggles the mind...
our webbed connections
and roots of Love.
I call this God.
I believe.

ETERNITY

Life and Death
dichotomy
yin-yang
front and back
roots and branches
segments
webbing through eternity
above and below
dark and light
multi-cultures
multi-tongues
multi-orgasms
no single thing is true
everything is

JOY TO THE WORLD

Joy rises in a new soft bed.
Crickets and flutes
sing of the night.

Thought is plasma
through kinship
common grounds
freedom to Love.

There is something Holy
about this Land.
You cannot drown
in the Dead Sea
cradled in the salty
womb water
of Mother Cosmic Orb
moving through Eternity.

HUMIDITY AND JESUS

In the hot, damp South of last century,
when a noisy metal fan
was technology for cooling
when digital only meant with fingers,
where guilt and shame
were on a playground for Jesus
who turned water into wine
but made it a sin for drinking.
Even symbolic blood, in church
was grape juice, body of Christ a cracker
to be eaten while sweating
in punishing wood pews.

Some men never went inside,
chose to melt somewhere without rules
where "moonshine" was medicine,
where there were no admonishing women
praying for them.

There were tears in the church,
assurance of God's forgiveness
for being human,
mouthing code
no one dared disdain...
energetically charged interpretations
with tendrils of longing
clinging metaphorical feathers
from the ghost of a spaceship
stuck in reverse, in the rain.

FAITH

We are dots on a globe
that sustains us.
Our understanding decreases
as historical, hysterical notes
chronicle a human infestation.

The earth cracks, erupts,
bleeds in lava,
cries hurricanes,
wails tsunamis.

We stab and drill inside her
empty her bowels of oil
replace with toxic water
as if she were not living
and we didn't poison mother.

Our cauliflower ears,
coffee and sea blue eyes
register desire
propped by dogma of dominion
exalted to gods
who enslave their own.

Look, I never gave up alters
but I never gave up reason..
If I just spread my arms,
open my hands
as if to fly like the angel
I believe I am,
my faith will not save me.
My lack will haunt me.
I will fall in the reality
of gravity
as my mind soars.

I may not believe in science
but it believes in me.

JOHN BURROUGHS

BEARING HER

She's in sunny Somewhere driving
while I'm in rainy Right Here drinking
Awestruck Lovestruck cider and a couple
of IPAs, listening to November Rain
in March at Water Street Brewery, thinking
it's her street in an obfuscated state
as I see her in my pint glass and on
the server's Hellcat shirt and lingering near
the liquor shelves, and in every other
corner of the jukebox and my world
is awash in her being and bearing.

25-27 March 2023
Binghamton, NY and South Euclid, OH

DARSHAN

Polka dots and corduroy in
black heading back to Music
Box seeing Robyn Hitchcock
my life and my dead wife whirl
and sway in a way I would never
attempt to pray for in this
otherwise godless world.

1 April 2023 South Euclid, Ohio
[With a nod to Robyn's song "My Wife and My Dead Wife"]

SELKIE

after Jennifer Browne

The woman whose throat emits
light stands by water, beckons
seafowl to circle, sees distant
seal and yearns to return.

2 April 2023 South Euclid, Ohio

SHAKTIPAT

Work all day with eyes and brain and pain
and feel my age and all the pages aching
in my overstressed osseous framework,
despairing that sparing won't come until Alex
Harvey's Faith Healer reaches into my ears
like a hand from God that escaped the Sistine
Chapel ceiling to fortify and reanimate me.

3 April 2023 South Euclid, Ohio

BEAT

Given it's the fourth day of April I'll forgive you
for expecting four/four time, but I'm drinking
Columbus Brewing's Bodhi, listening to Crimson
Bruford, realizing the all-in-all is polyrhythmic.

4 April 2023 South Euclid, Ohio

BEACON

The woman with light-
houses in her eyes guides me,
into safe harbor.

6 August 2023 South Euclid, Ohio

KILLER

In the Warhol museum
with Jerry Lee's Breathless
on repeat in my brain

eleven Flaming Star Presleys
point their silkscreen revolvers
in my direction

but it's a well-read redhead
in black pleather
who slays me.

4 December 2022 South Euclid, Ohio

A WAIT, A FINAL FALL

Sinéad O'Connor has died and I hear her
"John I Love You" playing on repeat as I fall
asleep afloat in loving you, imagine her
song telegraphed across the waves, whispered
by the salt air that seemed to entangle threads
of my hair with yours near Marconi Beach.
And through the breath and sea between
the three of us I feel an indomitable pulse.

6 August 2023 South Euclid, Ohio

DELUGE

You are the ocean
(or is that me
or are we both)
and all I want
(is to drown)

20 July 2023 South Euclid, Ohio

CROSSOVER

Last night we had seder
and today it is Easter

For folk celebrating
springtime and new life
we eat a lot of eggs.

9 April 2023 South Euclid, Ohio

YEARNING TO COMBINE

after Call and Answer by Jim Bowling

So much felt
clear in my bones,
though I lacked eyes
to see and appeared
to be little more
than a detached
appendage
with a gaping mouth.

I wanted to take
your mouth and all
into mine and keep you
safe from heartache,
horror and more,
but the larger mouth
of Time loomed heavily,
waiting to swallow us both.

26 February 2023 South Euclid, Ohio

“BLIND TOM’S” BATTLE OF MANASSAS

(COMPOSED BY PIANIST THOMAS WIGGINS IN 1861)*

I.

This cataclysm on piano keys
 Begins with bass clef cadences on “drum,”
 Snatches of “The Girl I Left Behind Me,”
 In piccolo octaves, à la Doodle, Yankee...
 Yes, here comes “Yankee Doodle,” prancing frieze-
 Flat in elongated fife-line, tootling glum;
 The drum tattoos turn distant blast; on come
 Naïve cadets who still believe one breeze
 Of musket breath will shear those shako plumes
 Aimed like cocked snooks at gallant batteries.
 We’ve heard from Yankees; here come Dixie’s kids,
 Arrogant as all raw but colorful
 Parade-ground victors; open eye-wide lids.
 Pamplona-like, this first Run of the Bull
 Will soon begin; first hear an elegy,
 A stripped-down nocturne for the stripping-down;
 Seems placed precisely where the canopy
 Of smoke will soon cloud noon mock dusk, false dawn.
 Next, fresh enigma: why the Marseillaise?
 A cavalryman’s conceit, supposed quite suave,
 Meet for sword-slashing, lathered-horse forays?
 Or is this the knell for uniform-frogged Zouaves?
 Abrupt as the jerky start that snaps from sleep,
 The nearer, nearer cannon-blast tone clusters,
 Exploding song as torn young corpses heap,
 From Earth by cannonball and canister
 Discharged: as much from illusion as from life,
 Storm routing the drummer, scattering all fifes.
 Now, the shredded flag; Star-Spangled Banner,
 Holed everywhere the cluster-blast scores hits;

Each levels the railroad magnate with the tanner,
 Smithereens boys into smaller bits
 As the mock-thunder-intervals come shorter,
 Thinning the ranks that run to red disorder.
 If only in one Battle-Piece Herman Melville
 Had fitly depicted Blind Tom Wiggins’ work,
 Spanning Wilderness, Gettysburg, Malvern Hill,
 Chancellorsville, synods of the devil’s kirk,
 Blasts back to front and front to back across
 Four years of cenotaphs, long architraves
 On colonnades (each column tallies one loss),
 Greek Revivals built on the frames of slaves
 Such as Tom Wiggins whose whole enterprise
 Was crafting chords from ambient dissonance,
 —Discords to subtly underscore the lies
 Of Lees and Stonewalls, even perhaps of Grants?
 From camp Tom leads; we wade the fever swamp,
 Cross flaming rivers: Tom’s our psychopomp.
 What white man’s riddled ghost can have suggested
 To this disabled man far from the fight
 How leaden musket balls can be ingested
 By enslaver and liberator wrong or right?
 What psychic tremors vibrant in Tom’s mind
 Evoke men fractioned by remorseless math?
 How, decades before Charles Ives could dream or find
 Such clangors, was Tom born a telepath?
 Prestissimo octaves, Lisztomania clatter;
 Contending hands delve opposite keyboard ends,
 Pound into goulash all remaining coherence,
 Objective correlative of the battle-shatter.
 At last, all tunes accelerate, ribald, antic,
 As terror whips the horse with empty saddle,
 Supplanting the bravado with the frantic,
 The anguished cowardice, the Big Skedaddle.
 And last of all, bone-rattling, one more blast
 Disperses as it affixes us in the Past.

II.

Great Wiggins’ ghost! Slave, yet master of your medium,
 Your sleepless keyboard-carillons toll your fate,
 Your genius robbed of life’s relieving tedium,
 Each closed eyelid’s an impassable postern gate
 Shut, even as perked ears cup: the clashing teeth
 Of unoiled gears; the squawks crows make when pressed
 Instinctively to speak; wind-shear across heath
 That snaps trees—snap’s a noise!—or flays the hill’s crest.
 It’s clear the daguerreotype’s ungainly plate
 Will catch none of the ecstatic blush on dark cheeks
 When, clicking into the mosaic template,
 Locks that last sonic chip your earsight seeks.

* The winning poem in the Robinson Jeffers
 Tor House poetry competition, 2021

PURPOSED DISPROPORTION

Michelangelo’s wondrous Pietà
 Brings equipoise to beauty-with-distortion.
 Mary’s beseeching hand prays to declaw
 The sharpest wit. Serenely malproportioned,
 Like Jack the Giant-Killer’s Giant’s Wife
 Of seven-league-if-outspread thighs and shins,
 The Virgin rocks in Her rock lap the Life
 Whose Death is the Omega that begins.
 Her drapery sweeps and ice-folds could outlast
 The glaciers of Mont Blanc. Her sad teen face
 Rebuffs the claim her legs must be mainmast-
 Or redwood-trunk-thick timber just to brace
 Christ’s Corpse. When hammering Laszlo Toth
 had at Her,
 Was he Distortion’s pain-distorted answer?

OCULAR DEMONSTRATION

Give me the ocular proof.
 —Othello, to Iago

Othello deems his own speech acts too “rude.”
 Yet begs of Iago what? Why, Rhetoric.
 As Cicero writes, the truth may be construed
 Through verbal vividness. A parlor trick?
 The Roman figure Ocular Demonstration
 So brilliantly describes events, we see,
 —Or think we see—they pass in demarcation
 Of crisp outlines. The Real Reality
 Iago “proves” by Cassio’s dream-kisses.
 His interlude of “Dupe Meets Handkerchief”
 (Othello catches Cassio’s half, but misses
 The prompter’s cues) air-sculpts in high relief
 The “ocular proof” best fitted to the need,
 Othello’s eyes his stomach, rumbling greed.

CHRISTMAS WITH THE BRAWNES

What film directors achieve by sleight of time
 Can mesmerize us. Take Jane Campion,
 Who in *Bright Star* exploits*—is this a crime?—
 Keats’ “When I have fears” to build a scene upon.
 The poet recites for Fanny and Mrs. Brawne
 His sonnet with its “that I may cease to be,”
 Continues, down to “my teeming brain,” and on
 To “the magic hand of chance” till, cunningly
 (For here the time frame is all out of whack,
 The poem, written much earlier than this)
 Keats breaks off: Mrs. Brawne construes the slack
 As, *Tired*. Not that: with Fanny near, a bliss
 The giveaway next lines must not uncover,
 A subtlety over the table’s left to hover.

* *Bright Star*, a film about Fanny Brawne and Keats,
 starring Abbie Cornish and Ben Whishaw.

CROSSINGS

Footsore from chasing my heart 'round well-tended
suburban plots and wind scoured city streets
I sat down on a curbstone to catch my breath
and gave myself over to the eternal question
Why did the chicken cross the road?

We take it on faith, but is it hearsay?
Did the chicken, any chicken
cross the road *any* road casually or with intent?
And who saw this deed, if indeed it did occur?

Perhaps it was not a road. Perhaps it was a river
a border
a Rubicon

Perhaps it was not a chicken
It might well have been an armored division,
or several
crossing the avenue

SCENE

Streetlights illumine the four corners
Venus and Adonis stand facing one another
She on the South-East
He on the North-West
Both are wearing trench coats
Each warily considers the other
Music drifts out of a bar
Eros rocks his air guitar.

Down Memory Lane

A THOUSAND HONEYED SECRETS
SHALT THOU KNOW

Sequestered in a dappled bower
Flowers primroses
pink and ivory//they support our bodies//petals bruised
to near transparency

NO that's wrong

It was a hallway//August heat//the half-darkness tasting
sweet, tasting sweat Tumbling over laundry tied up
in a sheet

Children's voices in the driveway

Our voices stifled corner close, fingers finding

WE WERE NOT PREPARED

The air was electric, my anticipation high
as if I knew
and you
dressed to the nines
Still, we were not prepared
How could we be?
The door //slammed open
a gust of wind
Wings beating furiously in the air
about our ears deafening
dizzying Desire had joined us.
Fools that we were
we ran for the exits
No one outruns the gods

RESTLESS HEARTS

It had been so long, so much time had passed, she couldn't remember what had happened to all the pieces of her heart. Sometimes it seemed as if they had simply flown away; and, of course, there were those pieces that she had given away. Other bits seemed to have been lost, forgotten, perhaps in the backseat of a taxi; and there were a few she had buried in a suburban backyard. Then it was all gone. She felt empty, though she slept well and had a good appetite. One day she found that she had grown a new heart. She swaddled it in silk and cottonwool, promising to keep it safe, as she was older now and felt she better understood the heart's importance. It wasn't long before the new heart began to wither; it became dry around the edges, like a plant suffering from malnutrition. She fretted; she asked her new heart what was wrong, how could she help. The heart sighed, addressed her: *You don't get it This isn't what I was made for. Let me out*

AND SO IT BEGINS

Her husband,
(the master metalsmith) who
wrought so finely the golden net he caught them *in-*
flagrante,
has left the scene.

Amid the laughter of the assembled gods
Mars, redfaced and unmanned, has scuttled off

(He was, after all, becoming a bit of a bore: his demands
on her time, his ever increasing need for her attention)

She, of course, remains unchastened.
Making a spectacle of herself has never bothered her
nor interfered
with the pleasing pastimes of Love, her stock-in-trade

but now,
bored
peevish
looking afield for amusement
She spies two women approaching one another
across the Stop n Shop market parking lot

Calling the boy,
She gives him a pat on his curly head,
nods toward the scene below

His aim is true
He never misses
And so it begins.

FLOATING ISLAND

Begin with a custard so thin
it could pass for water
in a land-locked lagoon

so light it barely coats the spoon
a custard off-white and frothy
as the milky way on a clear night.

Take the whites of eggs
spotless as the Virgin's sheets
clear as rain on the fortieth day.

Beat in a bowl until stiff and white
as arctic ice or sherbet from snow
on the first snowy day.

Drop into the custard sea.
Dollop with a dot of jam to mark
the spot where treasure is buried.

Serve before bedtime. Watch
the vagabond island sink and bob
chased by a curious god

who scoops sugary drifts,
glistening peaks up from the sea
roiled by a sudden tsunami,

pops the fluff into his mouth
where it melts on his monstrous tongue
to sweeten his turbulent dreams.

OUR PEACHES

small this year but sweet console us
for our fallen pear, trunk snapped
near graft. Too many heavy Anjou

we didn't cull because we couldn't bear
to lose even one, watched them grow
from swollen blossom ends, saw pale

petals fall on dark soil, confetti-coating
our old black dog. After flower fall,
green pomes lured with blushed cheeks

desirable as a woman ready to pick. Our peach's
green-gold skin, cleft like buttocks, reminds us
of the *yi-xing* knock-off teapot we bought in '68

at The People's Bookstore with Mao's Little Red Book
and a "Women Hold Up Half the Sky" sticker I put over
the kitchen sink, when we modeled ourselves Marxist

revolutionaries before we met a real one hunched
down, smoldering at a back table in the Hornet Bar,
swore off green idealism for good, pledged instead

our fickle hearts to art, poetry, and a baby.

SEA CHANGE

At the aquarium in Golden Gate Park
the sea cow floats midway in her day-
light tank, somnolent sea borne Venus.

Suspended alone, no heavy sisters sink
with locks of ropy amber kelp waving
in water like curling sea snakes.

Solitary, she dines alone on a head
of pale green iceberg lettuce, its leaves
curled tight around a hidden heart.

Myths say sex-starved sailors thought
them mermaids, fleshy big breasted
babes bidding them to drown in love.

Years later, waiting in Ob-Gyn,
thumbing through a magazine
for expectant mothers, I saw

a photo of a pregnant nude, weightless
in soundless water, floating in a sun-struck
turquoise swimming pool, belly huge,

arms cradling her cargo, more beautiful,
more at ease than I and my sad-eyed
sirenia sister—harbinger of sea change.

NILE FABLE / BABYLONIAN TALE

*After all, did we not invent the sky
so that we might strive for something?*
Srbo Ivanovsky (Macedonia, 1928-2014)

1.

The sky goddess Nut stretched
over her husband Geb, the earth;

Shu, god of the air stood between
tickling Nut's clitoris to keep her

arching in ecstasy away from Geb
so they would thrust and buck

in endless ruckus never conceiving
or achieving the ecstasy they wished.

2.

Tiamat, capricious under-goddess
of angry waters, displeased Marduk,

primordial god of all waters, who warred
with troublemaker Tiamat, tore her apart,

used her body to join earth and sky
creating order from disorder, another

one of those happy stories we long for.

SAPPHO'S BREATH

At the Huntington Library's cactus garden
we stop on the sandy path to admire a giant
prickly pear, bright fruit covered with spines

stiff as old men's whiskers, hard to handle,
delicious when cut, deep red juice sucked
to cool the tongue, sweet as watermelon—

sand-sprung *sandia*—cradled in cactus paddles
lolling like cows' tongues, blue green *nopales*
to settle your stomach, strengthen the taut silk

strand that runs from belly button to breast bone,
red as lips stained by carmine kisses, candied cherries,
blush of Sappho's warm breath on your cheek.

JANUARY NIGHT, 28 DEGREES

Moon waxing toward full
distorted in the old glass

window on the back porch
warped like a luminous

thumbprint dragged
down a frosty window.

I'm sitting on an ice cold
toilet seat, pee splashing

up on my butt off frozen
water in the bowl of the old

pull-chain john in the WC
we can't bear to replace.

It goes with the old house
we love despite its lack

of an en suite bathroom
off a master bedroom

with a walk-in shower
& a pricy French bidet,

a house without central heat
because though 100 plus

years have passed since
a man named Strachan

built with Scots thrift
a hand crafted bungalow

with dark wood panels
and beautiful bones

we can't bear to say
goodbye.

LOCH HENSON

CLAIMING ITS OWN

It was almost enough. Just being at the ocean's edge, with
sand yielding to barefoot transit. It was almost enough to forget.
But not quite.

It has been more than thirty years since I was a teenager. I
still recollect the unhurried pace of a family outing to one of
the seaside towns in southern Oregon. It was unbearably sweet
and dull. The sky circus of seagulls when we emerged onto the
hotel room balcony with a bag of day-old bread was possibly the
highlight of the day's entertainment. If there was a television in
the room, I can't recollect it ever being turned on.

The beach commenced immediately outside the hotel. Day
and night, the surf sounds reached through walls and windows
to invite us onto the shoreline. It was the purpose of our stay,
this invitation. Accepting it was a matter of timing. Too early,
the tide was in and the beach was minimal. Too late, and the
breezes carried a chill that made it difficult to remain comfort-
able without wearing many layers of clothes. Somewhere be-
tween lunchtime and dinnertime there was an ideal opportunity
to enjoy going out and onto the flat water-sculpted terrain.

I had the benefit of borrowing a small plastic bucket and
sand shovel from the entrance to the beach from the hotel. Tak-
ing advantage of the rare opportunity to disappear from the
watchful eye of human companions, I grabbed a large towel, put
my flip flops in the bucket and headed for the least occupied
portion of the beach.

On the way to my preferred waypoint, I collected a mostly
unremarkable assortment of broken shell shards, round rocks,
and soft-edged glass bits. Eventually, I got to 'the spot' and de-
cided it was as good a destination as any. Down went the towel,
not far from a green heap of seaweed. The sun was high in the
sky, and the nearest other person was probably a good half a
mile away.

I emptied the bucket of the collection of varicolored rem-
nants from my walk and fingered through them, almost absent-
mindedly beginning to sort them into piles that struck me as
being similar. This little task, accompanied by nothing but wave
strikes and the steady hum of the wind, acted to coax some nov-
el ideas out of my imagination.

What if...? What if these shells went like so, and then this
little line of rocks made a shape like...? I scooted to sit on the
edge of the towel, and began to look at what was emerging.

A silhouette. A feminine one. My borrowed plastic shovel
came in handy to accentuate a curve here, a dip there...remov-
ing the sandy obstructions to the image. I became gradually
more and more focused on the task, more opinionated about
what went where. Absorbed in the choices and arrangements, I
was gaining momentum.

By the time a shadow fell across my towel, I had rendered my
best efforts into bringing the mermaid sculpture to cohesion. I
looked up in response to the shift in light, and was surprised
to see two people standing very close by. They were wearing
robes, not like terry cloth spa robes, or beach covers. It was a
garment I recognized from a travel memory...a simple length
of dark ocher cloth wrapped around each of them. Their heads
were bare, clean-shaven, and I wasn't able to easily discern if I
was looking at males or females. But they were smiling. It was
enough.

"Hello," I ventured. The sound of my own voice after hours
of not using it was startling, an off-key note in the symphony
of silence. I raised my hand in greeting, and looked down at
the sand art, feeling a little embarrassed. I'd been anatomically
accurate about the female attributes of the upper body. Was it
offensive? My lips began to purse almost involuntarily.

The person nearest to me walked to regard the shape from
another angle, and then walked to the nearby pile of seaweed.
They poked and prodded and gathered up a portion of the green
stuff, and brought it over and stood next to me.

"May I?" She asked, still smiling. I nodded, and watched as
she carefully arranged the strands and leaves over the top of the

Continued

LOCH HENSON

sculpture, providing a crown of beautiful, flowing hair to the mermaid. All I could think to do was say “thank you” as they both walked away, headed towards the water.

That I was not alone on the beach for a little bit had not escaped the attention of my parents, who were on their way to me, in a less than hurried gait. I wondered briefly if I should go over and greet them, but opted to stay put and sat back down on the towel.

The foot traffic on the beach had increased a fair amount, and right after my folks arrived, a few other people were in the general vicinity also. There was a family, with a small herd of toddlers, stomping delightedly in the wet sand, headed more or less in a straight line for the sculpture. They had a long-haired golden colored dog with them, who was running in big sweeping circles, nose down, snuffling noisily as he went.

I watched as he beach cruised, ecstatic and distracted, clearly enjoying the freedom. His careening path took him to the edge of the mermaid sculpture’s hair, and it looked for a moment like he intended to roll in the seaweed. His humans yelled for him, and instead of returning to them, he took off on another nose-led adventure, down towards the water. As soon as a wave tapped against his feet, he leapt sideways.

If I hadn’t been watching the dog’s antics, it would have been easy to miss the strange sight of the robed one. There had been two of them, I was sure of it. Now there was one, and they carried an extra robe folded over their arm.

I turned to make a remark to my parents, who were by then occupied with the tribe of toddlers. They’d hunkered down next to the sculpture and commenced building a sandcastle, moat and all, using the borrowed bucket. A few of the pebbles and shiny things were finding their way into the castle walls.

The robed one passed us, headed back towards the rolling dune hills.

As the tide began to come in, approaching in increments almost too subtle to notice, we all began to gather that which we considered ours. From the edge of the horizon, almost out of sight, there raised from the water the glint of an iridescent tail.

LARA GULARTE

LIVE LIKE THE DAHLIA

From high grass dreams in the city,
I live summers in my grandma’s clapboard house
hidden among flowers, behind a collapsing picket fence.

Grandma kneeling in her yard,
wrist deep in dirt urging new sprouts,
to the green curl of budding, impulse to flower.

A season of heat and burn,
root dreams after winter’s darkness,
the perennials hard ground comeback.

Grandma tells me to push through life like the red Dahlia,
gives me a shovel for summer growing,
and I dig earth, out of the earth.

On my stomach, bare toes in the ground,
I rest my face on my hands and elbows,
and take root.

A dampness passes through me
and my whole-body trembles.
By afternoon, my fingers blossom red.

I can’t shake off the blooms from my hands,
and I’m a girl running around the yard without a body,
crimson hands living the red flower life.

SIBILLA HERSHEY

THE CROSSING

I was on the mountaintop
bathing in heavenly light
when the valley called me
to explore its dense growth.
I descended, fought my way
through tangled wines and brush,
through mud. I tripped on roots
then heard a sound in my ears
wind or perhaps water
my foot twisted, I fell.
The river caught me and
carried me. I struggled for breath,
kicked, made motions of despair.
Suddenly it was all very easy.
I was swimming with the current
there was light and color.
I propelled myself forward,
parted water with long even strokes.
I reached the far shore
and was wading in the shallows
when I saw a shadow on the sand.
Anubis, the jackal god, waiting.

TEMPTATION

On the slopes of Mt. Pelion
Apollo watched Cyrene
Wrestling with a lion
Struck by her beauty
And her prowess
He abducted her to Africa
In Central California
Near slopes of Mt. Diablo
We watch grandchild Melanie
Wrestling with a Rottweiler
In her parents’ back yard
On hot cement among weeds
Like a quicksilver force
Fearless naked beautiful
She pulls the white sock
Clenched between his teeth
With brazen innocent might
While I clasp my hands in fear
That some hidden god
May claim her for his own.

My New Bed

In this Queen bed
There will be no King
A bed for sleep
Without a lover
A place to rest
From all ambition
Wants and labors
Rest from crowds
City lights and
Glowing screens
Rest from travels
From Pacific cliffs

To Baltic shore when
Yellow dahlias bloomed
And mermaids sang
In deep slumber
My heart ticks on
To God’s appointed hour
When my breath will cease
And turn to air.

In bed our stories
Start and end.

CONFLUENCE

A mile from here two rivers meet,
two strangers talking river-talk,
befriending each other,
joining hands for the long trip home.

Those of us who live beside them
watch their water levels rise and fall.
In our dreams we hear them breathing
and the currents become exhalations.

Tonight we'll stand along the pebbled shore
like herons and egrets, necks craned
skyward, as the wolf moon disappears
into total eclipse, blood moon.

Rain will fall, storms will blow in
but we will stand there, planted
among the cattails and willows.

We will think we are still dreaming
when the ghosts of the mothers and fathers arrive,
when they hold hands with us, singing.

TUTORING CENTER, YUBA CITY, CA 1964

Where a friend and I once taught at the Richland Housing
Center, the rows of Quonsets on treeless lanes have been
replaced by K-Mart's and tracts.

The heat is the same—I remember stewing in it
with a do-gooder's shock at the mattress for six
on the bare dirt floor,

the unplugged icebox, the four kids chattering excitedly to us
in Spanish, all at once. (Their mother offered *rellenos*
and we ate.)

We prepared to teach, named two made-over corrugated
shacks "Library" and "School", with signs we scratched on
poster board with black markers.

We brought books, paper, pens, with the help of Mr. Alvarez
from County Welfare, and we began (though some kids—even
the youngest—vamoosed to earn and pick). Summer passed.

Some college volunteers from Berkeley came, took over, and
we became high school students again. That was also the year
of drunkenness and despair—

my father overdosed on whiskey and pills, and I turned to the
Church. Mass was in Spanish each Sunday evening and I was
lifted by the choir's labors—

braceros whose ripe voices toiled
to spill their gold
for free.

RECURRING NIGHTMARE

The same old darkness wakes you:
the white glove raises the curtain, the bald puppeteer
jerks every nerve, snaps every string.

*A man who calls himself Daddy,
a stranger you have never
seen, leans over your white crib—*

*the whiskey
breath, the slurred
cooing—*

*You are too young to be terrified
but your heart remembers
to pretend*

*it is a small pink rattle when
he picks you up and shakes you.*

You throw off the quilt
with its myth of lilies and roses, its fairy tale
of warmth and even stitches.

How will you travel the next lightless hour,
trailing the torn hem of sleep, to the kitchen,
the bright window of morning—
the pots of fuchsias filling with sunlight,
the tea kettle, singing its one song,
its one homely hymn?

You want only to release the morning
like its own white dove, want it to return to you
with its sprig of olive.

ASSEMBLAGE

The past rearranges itself before me:
A bride and groom like paper dolls

snipped from old postcards—*pastiche?*
collage? She is made of a day-tripper's

imaginary *Wanderjahr* in Paris, an afternoon
at the Louvre—the groom is all Iowa, wind

in the cornfields. Above them the full moon,
(*l'amour...*) like an exotic but familiar

postage stamp the color of an ancient
coin. Something in the sky snaps shut,

the future's cold black purse. (Inside
her heart is a firefly: luminosity, then

flight!)

AFTERSHOCK

Two houses down a family has moved out, U-Haul
vanished, father headed for prison, For Sale
sign up on the lawn. Where

will his three children be ten, twenty, thirty
years from now? What will they remember?
Later today when I sit in a cellblock

with the men from A Yard, they'll write poems that show
how memory can burst so unexpectedly
into flower, and I'll see my own sad father

again, an apparition being led away in handcuffs, chains.
Extradition. My eighth winter.

PSALM FOR SUNRISE

Let starlight fade in the East.

Let the horses of dreaming ramble
home slowly from their sweet dark pastures.

Let the sun nourish me like wheat.

Let me tidy the quilts
and the flesh-scented sheets.

Let my feet step forth gently
and my heart pump strongly.

Let the kettle cry out
on its bed of blue flame.

Let bee song and crow song rise.

Let the sound of the waking city arise
and the day in its glory bless us.

ELEGY FOR A BELOVED POET

We gathered together in the night--
you with your tiger-eye; the night was
poetry. Your poems were skyscrapers--
the moon and stars shone down on them--
there was also a galaxy inside each window.
We stared up at the staggering grandeur,
a city at night, built of your words.
Some of us were dressed for the cold countries,
others had palm trees inside their hearts
but all of us were wearing the many-colored cloaks
of astonishment. Where are you now, poet
of the oceans, poet of the air,
poet whose words climbed the highest
mountains, dove into the deepest wells--
I will hold them to my heart. I will live
in your city of words until the breath
is stolen from me.

Gathered in the night
we saw the light inside you.

for Dennis Schmitz, 1937-2019

BINOD DAWADI

Illustrations by Binod Dawadi

WOMAN SITTING NEAR A WINDOW

The woman is of age 25 to 30,
She is so much beautiful,
She is always doing make up,
She is always becoming beautiful many,
Young men as well as old men were,
Attracted towards her,
She is beyond explanation,
She is sitting in front of the window,

As well as she is looking outside,
At the nature she sees,
The forests, mountain, hills,
As well as animals outside the window,
She becomes so much happier,
Her dress is purple, red and green,
Which is making her so much beautiful,
She is a beautiful woman.



FAIRY

I saw a Fairy in my dream,
She was beautiful and lovely,
She had a lots of powers,
She is taking her magical stick,
From which she can wish,
As well as do anything,
She had supernatural powers,
She wants to gives me powers,



She asks me what do you need,
I answered I want to become artist,
In my own I don't know anything about art,
So she gives me the powers,
As well as I become artist,
I drew her paintings and made her immortal,
For forever she is always with me,
She is my best friend.

CITY SCAPE

I see a beautiful City Scape,
There are lights everywhere,
The twinkling of the lights,
Is so much beautiful and lovely,
I forgot my world,
As well as engaged in that word,
I become so much happier,
The lights are my friends and my happiness,

The lights are magical,
As well as sweet it can only be,
Beautiful and lovely in the night time,
I love the view I can't detached,
Myself I take many,
Photographs it is my another world,
The City Scape is like Utopia,
It is immortal and magical.

IS IT ENOUGH?

You take my lips first, then my tongue, my teeth.
 Next you take my hair,
 my eyes, my hands,
 my throat, and I hear you grinding my heart in your moist, red mouth. Despairing, I wonder, is it enough?
 Blasting back, your answer roars and flattens me, an annihilating cry,
 “It is never enough!”

I recoil at the thought of all the bodies you have eaten, all the bodies that are buried inside you.

Suddenly, the howling, spinning cyclone that is you spits out all the parts of me, and the wind, which is your loud male voice, screams accusingly,
 “Your scales are cutting me; you are too hard— too sharp, too bitter, too hard!”

Your voice continues, like a drum banging in anguished vituperation,
 “I hate you. You tricked me! How could you?”

With a hum almost like a benediction, my parts touch and join. I grow whole; my scales shine as if you polished them. You are the one who poisoned my love, I muse; proudly, I declare in ringing tones,
 “I will never give myself like that again.”

My sisters arrive to groom me: they brush my long, lustrous hair, powder my face, rouge my cheeks, put a brighter sheen on my mermaid scales. “You look like an angel,” they chorus melodiously, and then depart.

Sitting on the rocks, I sing my song. A passing sailor, caught in my spell, is turned wild with desire for me, but this time, I am the one saying contemptuously, “It is not enough,” and I am the only one taking.

HER VOICE

Ascending through the rage of freezing storms, her blood drops swallowed by sleet, tormented by needle-sharp ice under her sliding boots, she climbed the crests of terrible mountains searching for her voice.

Hidden inside a ragged, long-deserted nest sheltered under the bough of a lofty evergreen, she found it.

Only the Gods and the chosen who drink with the Gods can hear her voice while Apollo plays his lyre. She lost her humanity long ago; now she is song.

THE BLACK CAT IN MY GARDEN

The black cat barely covers his droppings in my garden soil.
 They hardly seem worth the bother, his desultory scratchings.
 I wish I could tell him to choose a different spot or do a better job.
 He is slowly killing the dahlias I planted there so carefully.
 I could move the dahlias, protect them with fencing or shield them with netting, but I won't bother.

I place some of the dahlias in a cut glass vase where they brighten the room, but they won't last long.
 Not in here. Not out there.
 I expect the feral cat to outlive me, which is a cheerful thought.
 Despite all the work by civilization to conquer nature, something wild always lasts.

MORNING APRIL 28TH

When maple buds are fat,
near bursting,
we spot a flash of muted red,
hear the first high pitched
music of a pine grosbeak
as he arrives and dines.

Sometimes he stays
until his mate shows up.
Sometimes he doesn't.

KNOWING THE SIGNS

Sure, I remember those first nights.
We listened carefully for clues
about discontent or absent satisfaction.
Was it good, or at least good enough?

Suddenly (it seemed) time dumped
its heavy load on us. I still listen,
but ask fewer questions.
I've learned all the signals
and I suppose you have as well.

Now I ask about worry,
about pain. You check
to see if my breathing
is regular. I touch your
forehead, feel the warmth.

FULL DISCLOSURE

As we sat at the chess board he said,

I'm as hollow as the myths of the godless.
Stab a few holes in me and you'll see. Then
pump some air in and I'll whistle like an ocarina.

Those four tours in desert mountains
made me this way. I'm ragged inside, rugged
and rough out. Like a chainsaw sculpture.
Or like a body made out of wire.

At the VA they do their best. Quiet talk,
full disclosure, counselors, doctors, medicine.
The prosthetic guys knew my needs.
And I gave the PT people a lot of hard work.

But they won't give me a new liver. Or a kidney.
And a job ain't happening. Nobody hires hollow
men. My girlfriend isn't scared anymore.
She knows how to help, and I let her.

I let her come to my last visit.
She knows. Called the Legion to make arrangements.
Sent a letter to my kids. Checked on the insurance.
Details. Details have always been important to me.

DISCOVERING THE REVELATIONS OF POETIC REFERENCES

I honestly didn't realize that the poem
was about me, though I saw myself
in the lines, saw the serpent, all bright
in the colors of dahlias, mouth agape. I recalled
the cold and sleet, remembered how it could imprison
a wake of vultures. I saw the pale sun resurrect
those somber birds, made them unfold
their dripping wings, prepare to fly.

And I recalled talking about
new beginnings with my hopeful
companion, how we try again
and again. And during that morning
I learned that *perfect*
is a word that describes
the moment we lift
our cups and laugh together.

FATHER AFTER TED KOOSER

Today, if you were alive,
you would be halfway through
your one-hundred-second year
of seeing changes,
trying to understand it all.
Mother would be gone, lost
soon after forgetting everything she knew.
How would you have survived
that emptiness? One of your three sons
would also be gone. But the rest of us
would be visiting or calling you
on the third Sunday in June.

I can't imagine you
without a strong and willful mind.
You would still listen and ask pointed
questions. I doubt if you'd reminisce.
You were always more concerned
about now than then. Your war stories
were so brief and hard to tell.
In fact you never talked much.
And what you said, you said quietly.

I still miss you now, thirty-six years
after that last visit, you resigned to it,
me encouraging you to keep fighting.
You just said –
*Your mother will be fine, look after John,
stay close. All of you stay close.*
I stayed a little longer. You rested.
Then I went home.

WISH GRANTED

Hans Christian Anderson's *The Little Mermaid*

The mermaid begs
to lose her grace of tides
change tail to legs.

When the Sea-Witch asks her why,
she answers "for hope of love."

The Witch foresees feet gouged
by rocks on the shore
where the mermaid will wander and wait.
She does not foretell but only says
"Wish granted--
now your feet must bear
your love of hope."

In time the footprints of blood drift out
salt returns to salt
a message to all sea creatures:
yearn not to be what you are not
stay where you belong.

Still the mermaid
bleeding bare feet
curled under her
waits upon the rocks and
watches on and on.

EYE OF THE STORM

It's a tornado—the diagnosis
I've only seen ones on T.V and Toto over the Rainbow.
I sit across the doctor's desk and when he says autism
the room darkens and spins into a grey funnel

I see all my son Owen's records flap away like crows
a grey funnel of assessment scores spin round me in slow
motion
words and numbers fall off the page scatter in the wind.

The doctor's mouth moving
but I can't hear the words
only rushing wind in my ears.
Finally I make out the words
"Any questions?" he asks.

This tornado follows me home.
I sit in the eye of the storm
where it is still and quiet.

Owen's baby book cute pictures toys everything
familiar whirls around and ends up in different places
where I won't be able to find them again.

Act of God? Why did You do it? No answer.
Only silence here at the center where I
watch everything we've ever known fly from us.

Warning siren screams find cover hide quick
but the siren's coming out of Owen's mouth.
I pull him close out of the storm
Rock him back and forth.

TO THE GREAT-EYED SEA CREATURE SWIMMING INSIDE ME

Encased in embryonic sea
the Siren combs with webs
her cyclonic hair and beckons
unseen now to me.

Seduced by Siren wails
ancient seamen steered off course
forgot their destinations
crashed timber against rock
hoping to caress sound made flesh.

When her cry comes
from outside of me
my boat of sure destination
smashes in rhythm to the
waves of her cries.

No longer connected by a cord
I will hold her.
No more than love-sick seamen
can I resist her song.

ACTION HERO

All right moms of our "Daily Ray of Sunshine" podcast
almost midnight and Luke's finally asleep.
Time to report the latest from Regional Center.
They still don't have enough workers--no one's applying

Listen Regional Center
we're tired of behavior plans and gluten free.
No more advice
send us an action hero.

Wonder Woman
a psch with domestic skills
fixes leaky faucets broken computers
make sushi and cleans up after
stands up for us at school meetings.

And when our kids cry all night says
"Not your fault, tomorrow will be better."

THE STATUE OF THE LITTLE MERMAID

in Copenhagen harbor
vandals splashed paint on her
hacked her arms
chopped off her head

but repaired time and again
her statue sits upon a rock
stares out to sea
dreams of her prince
who chose another

silent statue in frigid water
awaits her next attacker.

A NEW LEASE ON LIFE

evicted from my former self
 having squatted for months in the basement
 before I deigned to take any notice
 that the owner wanted me out
 I am free to enter new arrangements
 of my few irreducible objects:
 sexual well-being, a bicycle
 an equal share of two girl children
 many books, the cruddy cream
 of an overactive chess set workshop's crazy crop
 the stubborn remnants of failed clothes
 (grievous gifts of previous wives)
 a brand new pair of sensible Skechers
 the black dress shoes of my former prestige
 a cracked and cranky MacBook Air
 (repository of my awareness
 of old writers and their terms
 of cursed endearment: the tropes of stars
 and the misnomers of desire)
 the vanished zeitgeist of great days
 reminding me that my deepest fears
 are also opportunities
 you have to die in certain ways
 to reawaken and to choose
 to start again in a different house
 and prove the homing instinct false
 to know that the little I reckon I'm worth
 in this material multiverse
 is not entirely without a place
 at least where landlords are concerned
 my steep deposits will not be returned
 but nothing else matters in the pure
 delight at seeing my signature
 across the blank space of a lease
 the clean white future I've put into place

THE BIRDS OF POVERTY RIDGE

in this, the domain of the barn owl
 and the yellow-rumped warbler
 and the house finch
 and the rock pigeon
 among other avian avatars
 all my local rivals in song
 the bushtit
 and the California scrub Jay
 accompany me on my errand today
 a quest to find out where we all are
 somewhere west of Newton Booth
 an enclave of mission-style architecture
 a Nuttall's woodpecker
 offers a love tap or two to assess
 the sturdiness of arboreal structures
 and craftsman design
 a northern flicker deserves its name
 on its flitting way to someplace else
 in concert with a graylag goose
 a red-winged blackbird
 comes to crown
 my search with its
 satanic thorn
 citizens of this humble rise
 on a flat-as-piss-on-a-platter maze
 of grids and trees
 we are at least not poor in noise
 and do not lack variety
 of tweets and thrums
 the poetry
 of neglected feathers
 and gawping young
 these are the cries
 of my neighborhood
 in all its beauty
 and disrepute

THE PORCHES OF POVERTY RIDGE

the many objects on our front porches
 are no-one's idea of riches
 go unnoticed there for years
 unprotected by fences or grates
 a few yards from the freeway on-ramp
 these priceless crafts defy the homeless
 their failed charms find the weather harmless
 they may include little pots of flowers
 a colorful abandoned toy
 ceramic planters, basketballs
 gourds, apotropaic elves
 playhouses, empty bird cages
 fire-red lanterns, Ukrainian flags
 pails with assorted gardening tools
 unlit candles, wicker tables
 weather-beaten lawn furniture
 immovable classical urns full of dirt
 barbecues with no chains or coverings
 watering cans from the last millennium
 Adirondack chairs in miniature
 folk art collections curated by children
 bundled rugs for the next donation
 an ashtray with its unmatched lighter
 a mailbox jammed with unwanted paper
 a seasonal declaration, a string
 of lights protesting the gloom of winter
 a gift in limbo, a stroller awaiting
 another adventure, a sprinkling
 of leaves from the darkening sky
 a welcome mat, a drying blanket
 a cardboard box containing nothing
 or something priceless gone astray
 someone's as yet unprocessed recycling
 a love seat that has seen happier days
 free bottled water for thirsty travelers
 cement blocks, rockeries, bricks, and brooms
 a package to take in or take away

monitored by a cyclops eye
 belongings outcast and disclaimed
 or liminal creatures frozen and filmed
 temptations for a passing stranger
 or offerings to a wandering neighbor
 the lares and penates on
 these daily altars of the unknown

GARBAGE DAY ON POVERTY RIDGE

biking the gauntlet of fallen palm fronds
 and the piles of thorny debris
 and the plastic slalom course
 of recycling and yard waste
 and the thunderous underpasses
 smelling of cancerous poverty
 climbing the littered, deserted sidewalks
 chasing the waning rays of the sun
 I am somehow getting home
 though my address is something different
 than insurance or the government know

the warthog tusks of a foraging cop car
 props of a masochistic desire
 to know all evils and summon all sins
 turn slowly away
 they are letting me go one more time
 for some reason
 though I may menace pedestrians
 stalled before bus stops
 or gazing lovingly at their phones
 in private thrall to a publicized medium
 that cannot imagine anything
 let alone the immediate future

continued

GARBAGE DAY ON POVERTY RIDGE

continued

the season is turning
the trash is collecting
the whole city stinks
and the last light will fall
and rise and stagger
and fall once again
and I am straining
at the least resistance
these streets can offer

I'm retracing a path
through this labyrinth
to arrive at where I began
so very happy
to sniff at the ass-crack
of yet another
breathtaking dawn

THE GHOST OF POVERTY RIDGE

one foggy morning he gets up and goes
to the house where he lives
to give his cat her medicine
then he proceeds to visit his children
to watch them open
the presents he gave them
he cannot see a hundred yards
ahead of him, nor can he retrace
the steps on the path
that brought him into this festive limbo

this in-between bliss
and this ignorance is all he knows
he haunts the places
where he must accomplish
his daily tasks and rise to the spirit
of the holidays when
like agonizing clockwork, they come
he lends them his eyes but not his heart
it is too late to mend his ways
or render them harmless
his sins amount to nothing much
he has committed to nothing since
he was a child
when all he loved was a small gray mouse
who encompassed his world
and brought it up short
of what adults would call a life
he has never existed
outside the confines of his brain
and its infinite, innocent
ceremonies of self-possession
now he must wander
in search of belongings
that have no relation
to where he has been
absent and searching for all this time
at home on this interstitial plane
of want without need
of lack without loss
of guilt without crime
never knowing the cost of anything
but the value of all he has missed

i trek

i trek 21st century desert
plains all around shriveled lite

-rary & artistic foliage
of postmodernism

across vastness of our horizontal
continent in the sea of samsara

at the ignored oases of beauty
a blessed few sip

clear waters played in & swum
by sage seer transcendent poets

don't throw light become light
lovingly suggested kenneth patchen

also knew all at once
is what eternity is

the compass to oases at 14 i was
given forged in a shadowless

gnostic fire baptism
of beauty love & bliss

shocked by unclothing of preacher
s' hell fire & brimstone shouts

lies & misuses of sacred texts
i fumbled around for years

telling no one
my own way to walk

long in a false predawn
twilight never forgetting

first dawn compass reached
my sadguru showed the way

to golden love the gods are
found if guided or blessed

don't mistake a titan
masked playing a god

each a clear pure pool
in its oasis of play

standing in the motionless
faster than thought

from the one all flows
its knots objects seen

tying & untying
in an oasis pool

jump
in

rise
to

drown

to
live

Continued

i trek

Continued

so said & did
the rishis

swamiji opened the sun
's lid of truth

a
purer

more
rarified

light

than
gnosis
of
unconditional
love
&
bliss

i am no bahini bai
like her son

many more
lifetimes of trekking

**open
road**

all directions
to
the
one

pointing feet at idols
priests berated bhaktas

who responded
point our feet where
the one isn't

number of

number of bodies unknown
souls given to sail sequentially

among sun blinding vistas
& dark valleys in ocean of time

all given few remember blessed
in pubescence by a divine touch

to know the readied call
in the teacher's arrival

its sign a higher moment
to reach than previously given

asked before & will again name
coachless olympian gold medalist

**double odd for even
divide even to odd**

in between illusive sun bright angels guide
opening hidden doors avoiding pitfalls

into cataract turbulence of psychism
carrying away unsuspecting innocents

may they be forgiven swallowed by teachings
no master necessary to unravel the symbolic

buried in sacred pages so they stuff
pigs to stain alters not erase own greed

numbers & words do not know
why they sail in air or imprisoned

on page or blink on & off screens serving
without attachment vastness of all

sound reverberates throughout
eternity until its universe a coat

worn by the one with its known & secret
pockets where word sound waves

woven into the fabric of twists & turns
shrugs off being compost dreaming

skilled angels weave for the one
's latest fashionable coat as they gossip

of what once was upon a time be
tween universes an angel holds up

a worm full of digesting sound bites
feeds it to idea of next mockingbird

in the room of alchemical ideas
an angel stirs its gold glow crystal

from the mathematics for rishis
vapor wafts a spiraling script

equate everything & nothing
divided by all equals the one

blessed are they

blessed
are
they

able
to
converse
with
nothing

be
careful

others
listening

may
lock
you
up

ANY MAN

Any man may own a piece of the mermaid's bridle. Any man may carry it in his teeth and hitch his eyes to hers. His ride into the deepest bowers of the sea deposits him in front of her marine orchestra where his senses boil away. Any man may be caught in the storms she provokes combing out her long green hair. Her tempest can fill any man with fear. Any man who looks earnestly at her shoulders will discover she shimmers with intimate offers to visit her as she listens in shells to the tired secrets of the seas. Oh, how he wants to accept this creature unknown to the naturalists, object of interest on the old maps and in the bestiaries. But the appearance of a strange creature is a signal to start attacking it. Her treasure is something out of the ordinary. Men suddenly want to possess it, and any man may recollect their journeys together to the hidden city. Any man may own a piece of the mermaid's bridle, going down, down, down into the dark recesses where he can assert his property of beauty forever.

AN APPEAL FOR A SMALL DONATION

Thanks for giving bees a chance.
 Now how about saving the mermaids.
 Where will they turn as the earth
 grows more uninhabitable?
 They are so fair and delicate
 despite a firm foothold in our
 collective thoughts. Stories abound.
 They rise up from the undertows,
 out of the harried depths where all
 manner of puri and selkie, nixie
 and näkk, marbendill, karukayn
 and ningyo dwell. They spread out on
 a map like a rumor of a plague come
 from bats, but belief in them fades.
 Perhaps there is better information now
 or maybe more that gets in the way.
 It builds up like the little swimming
 particles in the Great Pacific Garbage
 Patch where mermaids have recently
 been seen bobbing among the nurdles,
 making themselves at home in the giant
 plastisphere. They taunt the men of good
 deeds who trawl the area with their
 nets and remove the debris. These men
 are steadfast. They know the seas will
 rise. The summers will get hotter.
 There will be more red-sky days, more
 storms, more jungles turned into savannahs.
 The mermaids will swim through the buildings
 at the edges of the sunken cities,
 and they will cease to linger in myth.
 Most will turn out to be some homeless
 hag who discovered a kinship with fish.
 The kids will go to feed them like ducks
 at the pond, tossing them bits of bread.
 How far will you go to prevent this?
 To the final tide? To the end of the world?
 To the blue flicker at the edge of night?

MENDELSSOHN MEETS THE MERMAIDS

The river bath that spawned his fevers drained him
 of the vital force that found him as a wunderkind.
 The young man who played his first recital at eight,
 who delighted in Bach at twelve, was taking to the grave,
 and this fall would carry him into an unconscious haze.
 For hours he did not respond. Had he gone to the mermaids?

All five senses had drowned in the call of their song.
 His eyes failed to grasp at wonder. His ears were stunned
 by the whisper of the water washing away the blot of his soul.
 He was listless, limp from the worship of Ondine
 and her river nymphs who stirred up his thoughtlessness.
 His spirit rippled along the surface and then sought bottom.

But he woke, aroused by a touch of strange longing.
 He had survived his swim with the flirting goddesses.
 His splitting headaches became melodies exploding in
 his head. His painful cramps turned to tortured triumph.
 What mortal instinct could make a brash young man
 think to write a hymn of praise in the wake of the ode to joy?

Yet he would not make forty. He was weary from performance.
 His beloved sister had gone before him. His hands, like hers, grew cold
 and stiff, like sea water ran through them, and leeches were applied,
 the mermaids' method of invitation. They came for blood, but salvaged
 more as his burning brow hit his pillow one last time, and he was led in
 his coffin by a thousand torchlights through Leipzig's crowded avenues.

THE GODBOD

How many are your works, Lord!
 There is the sea, vast and spacious,
 teeming with creatures beyond number —
 . . . and Leviathan, which you formed
 to play with there.

— Psalm 104

Adam was created in the image of God.
 We know that Adam was duly circumcised.
 If this was true, then God was too.
 But who in the hell circumcised God?
 The leading scholars say he did it himself
 and that explains a lot, if all of creation
 was made by a self-mutilating "genius."
 It makes you wonder what other whims
 the almighty gave into — the growths on
 the back of an old dog's head, the zeal
 of the humping hare, the hummingbird's wrath.
 Was he having a little fun with the foot soldiers
 in Exodus when he gave the Israelites strict
 toilet instructions after he kiddingly told them
your god walks with you in your camp.
 Alas, he wished his famous footfalls never
 to go awry. It was his path we dare not
 stray from for fear we be harshly judged
 in the late morning as the Talmudic treatise
 decreed. That's when God judged the entire world,
 turning to mercy in the afternoon with a chance
 of redemption by the early evening when after
 a tiring day of designing all the creatures
 and their habitats, he would draw his sea bath
 and relax with his pet sea monster, delighting it
 with a game of peek-a-boo as the tip of his shaft
 suddenly emerged from its cloak of flesh.
Gotcha he cried as the poor Leviathan scurried
 under a rock. Such behavior is too much to
 believe from someone whose name is invoked
 in astonished wonder? . . . even as he grew
 bored with it all and vanished into everlasting light.

OLD MAN

I am ready to listen
 old man
 with your hair black and salted as a raven's
 your yellow eye cocked
 and quick still
 Tell me about
 the California hills, those great brown
 burial mounds
 where, in the creases of the cheek, the folds behind
 the knee,
 those animals that somehow survived
 still print their alphabets
 furtively in the dust
 where the bones of extinct men gather
 to clang the ancient rites like bells.

You were there the morning daisies
 became white birds, whirred, rose in unison
 from the school lawn
 and when I heard small oceans moving
 under the neighborhood trash
 salt stained fingers spinning
 their airless blue forests beneath the
 rusty yaw of tin cans, the collapsed white lungs
 of bleach bottles. (But I didn't listen)

When I was a child you gave me
 a painted wooden doll, even this
 was not dead

but unwound its seed skin
 winked out another pink face and
 turned and rocked full bellied until there
 were hundreds it seemed.
 But I was young, like the tiniest
 doll, the one that would not open.

Old man, I no longer mistrust your bold circular
 smile, your hands like wild vines years past grape bearing
 but patient
 this rhythm is new to me and comes from
 the earth, a basso metronome.

HERMOSA

Oranges
 sucked from the sun
 spreading a cold wheat edge
 over huddled houses swelling
 from the hill.
 Slowly, the night gives them up
 arms, thighs, breasts all
 reassemble
 last the shimmer of breath
 fractures the fragile shell of sleep.
 Unfolding like a rose,
 petal by petal
 we embrace a new day.

THE DOOR

The earth trembled in tectonic shock
 and the door cracked open
 It could be dangerous

I found myself sliding down on
 crystalline fur, feet first. Exhilarating and
 terrifyingly endless — yet like —

the young bird's first flight, surrendering to air
 because he can, because he must....
 The ground surrounds me now

The granite sand speaks – *enter*
 in a sonorous whisper
 echoing a tender embrace

I will support you as you grow.
 Inside my roots reach out
 to a find an entirely new world

The morning is darkness, midday glows with
 iridescent orange, but night erupts with fluorescent
 stars. Stem, leaf, feather – this mysterious form

I am dreaming. I walked through a door to a world
 that loves me.
 It could be dangerous.
 In a moment – I bloom, I fly....

SOCIAL WORKER

They call me on the phone
 about the crying, the puking, the dying.
 At 5 on Tuesdays and Thursdays I become
 transformed, the fire-eyed goddess of truth,
 a sort of psychic
 validating, communicating, channeling
 between the civilian and the military worlds
 for families in L.A .

I deliver the message
 for the woman who was defiled
 or the one who wasn't
 and her starving kids
 the man at 7 who mislaid his dad.

I've got to understand
 the suicides, the brutality of abuse
 the gangrene legs, punctured eyes, bleeding
 brains, the mother who took lye on the
 psycho ward (she had a son).

I need to validate
 the O.D's in Oxnard Alleys, those shooting up
 or gunned down
 the woman who collapsed,
 like a painted marionette,
 unstrung, in the hospital parking lot.

And flys wait expectantly on the edge
 of my coffee cup
 they know by morning
 it will be filled with blood
 and tears
 10 cups, each blacker than the last.

**AT THE COMMUNITY GARDEN
LOCKE, CALIFORNIA**

Autumn, dry husks rattle.
Overhead, a raven creases the sun.
Poets compete with crickets,
someone BBQ's, salads and wine served.
Under the green apple and gnarled cherry,
red poppies spin
toward the mic to hear good words.

In the garden, new cabbages and corn,
wrinkled chard from last season grows five feet high.
In old times: bitter melon, long bean and luffa.
Among furrowed rows, I'm certain the purple chicken
standing on one leg has something to tell.

A Chinese town, where settlers came across the water.
Some say at night you can still see the flash
of yellow lanterns in and out of grassy banks,
riparian zone, tangle of vines and shrubs.

Early fog burns on storefronts
and breezes blow webs across old glass.
In dim light, a room may appear, crimson wallpaper
with phoenix, side chair with green dragon.

Perhaps fragments: brass bells and wind chimes.
Is that the scent of clove from porcelain cups?
A heavy sigh that is not the wind.

Do meandering souls still come from the river,
fluff a porch pillow or wait by the window?
Do they wonder over our strange food:
potato salad and cheesecake?

A woman sits beside me. "I want to show you."
She unsnaps her silk purse, takes out
a jade amulet, gold earrings.
"From my family, the old country,
to sell if my husband in this new place is mean to me."

The hem of her shimmery dress frays.
I dare not pull a loose thread—
the entire scene may disappear.

Inspired by *Locke, 1928* a novel by Shawna Yang Ryan.
Renamed *Water Ghosts*.
"Women appear out of the river and disrupt the town."

BEAN NIGHE

The Scottish Sylph

Spirits of women who died giving birth
roam creeks and russet heather.

On hands and knees, rough fingers wash
clothing of those who will die tomorrow.

A warrior may wake, jacket laid out
on boulders amid scarlet salmon seeking

colder streams—hear his own breath trickling,
not knowing: is it water, blood, or his own heart
silently thumping? Ice clumps

in wintering hazel trees, sun fractures limbs,
water changes course—and, there may be singing.

FILM NOIR

Men will be clean shaven and wear hats in a Film Noir,
add in shiny shoes and pinstripe suits in a Film Noir.

Get a whiff of cigar smoke, wet stub, ashes the color
of bone, a gruff voice, and heavy jowls in a Film Noir.

You will rarely see a woman in a flowered house dress
but a thin gun moll in slinky satin gown in a Film Noir.

Dark scenes except for one dull bulb in an all-night café.
Hear the globes snap off the theater marquee in a Film Noir?

No croissants or French press in a fancy bistro, but wedge
of homemade pie and thick mug of Joe in a Film Noir.

No angel with golden halo and tissue thin wings, just
a cracked cherub on top the deserted church in a Film Noir.

You will see a piece of paper blowing around a lamppost:
perhaps a movie script or faded celluloid in a Film Noir?

No blood red dahlia, but catch Nat King Cole's lilting
version of "Blue Gardenia," at the Tiki Room in a Film Noir.

SANCTUARY

The linden's branches form a dense canopy.
Low sun illuminates the small Buddha,

once bright verdigris, now peeling from frost
and rain. Patches of amber light shimmer,

outline a young face. The blotchy surface,
like a relic from a forgotten Cambodian temple,

a camouflage in this miniature jungle of dark
mint, wild garlic and variegated ivy. Mottled,

he remains slim, serene with plaited hair, no
pot belly, not bald but much as he first appeared

on a tidal wave with no wind. I recognize my
own wiry hair, thinner bones. Sitting on the deck,

a sprig of sweet woodruff floats in May wine,
sun edges toward solstice and summer thunder.

A terra cotta St. Francis holds a flimsy dove's nest.
A peaceful sanctuary: one tree, one god, one saint.

ABANDONED STUDIO AS A STILL LIFE

brushes vertical in a glass jar
 stained, stiff with age and dried paint
 long wooden handles, many colors
 of pigment worked into the grain
 lost pictures worked into the grain
 spirits evaporated
 leaving abstract stains on the inside
 canvasses stacked against the walls
 some blank
 some with the bare beginnings of pictures
 some fully realized—
 dust descends from the skylight
 drifting down to cover everything
 tarps
 twisted used tubes of paint
 new tubes of paint
 the cot in the corner
 where the artist slept
 where the artist posed models
 a still life left on a table—
 remains of a meal
 rotted with the effect of insects
 tin fork
 wooden handled knife
 a small wood stove in the corner
 metal chimney penetrating the ceiling
 three pieces of split pine
 a wine glass tipped on its side
 half-empty package of unfiltered Camels
 beat up paperbacks
 Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*
Leaves of Grass
 a guitar with no strings

BRIGHT LIGHT OF SHIPWRECK

Sometimes you may feel alone and crushed
 by what you cannot accomplish.

—Dean Young

A typewriter embossed with the head of a serpent,
 each letter rings off the paper
 not burdened with previous meanings or translations:

**

A monk takes silence to a small cell—
 above the bed, a frieze with the tree, fruit, serpent—
 thinks about God—silent prayer or silent meals.
 He worships wounds which aren't the stigmata.

**

A portrait drifts in ocean current, becomes a silhouette
 with a serpent caught in its teeth. To complete
 the picture, it cuts a peach in two, devours an apple—
 a still life broken or eaten for lunch.

**

Only a man in the rigging sees the course.
 Sight penetrates the night but provides no succor
 and cries out no warnings even when serpents
 signify the approaching edge. Life provides
 no symbols. At the helm, the boatswain
 guides the descent.

**

From between the legs, a monster blooms—
 emerges from the shadowed patch—a serpent,
 or a peacock spreading its tail feathers
 with a thousand piercing eyes.

**

To see cracked images, the wounded shattered
 by distant war, as if a rockslide blocks the road
 with fragments of a serpent frieze, as if entire poems
 are made of destroyed mountains or eroded shorelines.

**

In drafty rented rooms, an old woman raises
 her face—too blind to weave, too deaf for song.

AFTER THE SERVICE OR HOW WE DISAPPEAR

*Dear Lord, Bless us and these Thy gifts, which we are about to
 receive from Thy bounty. Bless the hands that have prepared
 them. Through Christ, Our Lord, Amen.*

Chimes—a bell and another bell and another—
 overtones swallowed by the next peal.

From the steeple, a rope descends thick through
 the ceiling, dark oil of many palms in the rough
 fibers. Released from Sunday school—

the upstairs room of a converted parsonage
 with an old, scarred piano, where we sing

hymns to simple accompaniment and offer thin
 prayers and drop dimes into the collection plate.

We learn that Jesus healed the lepers.

The bell, the release, down the stairs, the burst of talking
 and great fourth grade insight into the genial world.

Our young heads emerge toward the sun of the wide
 concrete lawn, and we look for somewhere to run.

Parents and grandparents, also released from a sermon
 on redemption from Ecclesiastes, spill down the stone
 stairs from the sanctuary, gather in the shade of a large
 sycamore tree. Voices disperse into early afternoon,
 rising against new leaves. Dinners cook at home,
 roasts dropping grease onto the shallow pan.

They exchange thoughts on what repairs need to
 be done, how the paint is peeling in the social hall,
 how Eisenhower is doing keeping at bay the mighty
 communists. Sunlight filters down through
 leaves onto gray heads with thinning hair.

Grandfather and Grandmother gathered under
 this tree before they called it the Pioneer Methodist Church.
 After the First War, it was the Methodist-Episcopal Church.
 The stained-glass window was new. Cars spewed black
 smoke, and people could remember when horses
 needed the troughs in front of city hall.

My mother, talking and laughing with other young
 mothers, wishes she could go to the car and get a cigarette.
 Only men smoke around that tree with the minister
 walking among them, exchanging stories. They
 hope that Korea won't repeat the rationing
 of the second war. We can't play hard because
 we're in good clothes and leather shoes.

Across the street, the mortuary,
 low and white with a clock in front.

Grandmother talking and laughing but thinking
 she needs to get home and put on the potatoes
 so we can eat lunch shortly after one,
 beginning with prayer.

The group in front of the church thins.
 Spirits now, they don't recognize the sanctuary as things
 changed with the renovation in 1996. Only the window
 remains. Sunlight filters down where leaves used to be
 onto new gray heads with thinning hair,
 speaking as if they won't be interrupted.

FIRE: AN ABSTRACT TRIPTYCH AFTER JOAN MITCHELL

distant fires diffuse light into unreadable patterns everything in the shape of flame the avenue of plague covered with smoke reason not to breathe we receive comfort from scripture we make others' lives easier living beneath the smoke living in the dark haze we can't feel abandoned because prayers aren't answered we inhale *it seems there is no hope* without coughing we inhale the smell of damp ash can water bring the requisite coolness a charred neon sign what needs to be kept and what needs to be left we happen upon an abandoned scene we happen upon the town burned to the ground fire consumes the sacrifice what rowboats are on the lake we hear oarlocks in the evening there is no dancing in the ashes *so thick birds* return to charred trees to eat larvae flight is necessary a torchbearer foretells the coming fire flames make mystical music the awning doesn't protect us from colored air air with the red tinge from the sun like a surrealist's dream blackening the horizon

not long from flame to ash we hold back memory of living among trees we think of the nearby river fearful faces appear out of flame standing near the river doesn't provide protection the mist of a waterfall fills with smoke birds sing in the morning waiting in the shadow and fall of the oak *it seems that the sun disappears midday* we hunt among the fallen three charred woodpecker wings still more heat to suffer smoke fills the valley smoke carries messages to heaven flames in some forest a surrealist's dream a deep pure lake reflects mountains we make peace with charred trees but it's all light and heat closing shutters won't matter dawn brings more smoke the sun red in the low sky what lake reflects that low red nothing can cause silence like fire *destruction* each winding road into the forest each dawn brings pain's library with ashy shelves flames arch through the crowns of trees fire blesses as it rises each day the passing of time can water bring the requisite

shadow there is no church for water plague moves quietly in its harvest everything is thinner except fire there is no church for glass the boat leaves shore bearing smoky passengers smoke from the ash of burning trees fills the valley as it has for centuries *it hides in fog and smoke* fires clear out the brush chase deer into the open rout large cats into the mountains can water bring the requisite calm dancing barefoot in destroyed tree limbs smoke turns the moon to fire small animals know nothing of smoke know nothing of the music of fire know nothing of the memory of fire ascent is necessary there are black patches in the forest in the trees like the charred ceiling of hell fire takes what it needs clouds mix with smoke flames blow along the ground no one flees in blackened carcasses of cars rain is always a blessing a dream but there is only heat *is the only way out* heat created from destruction plague enters when the gates aren't guarded fire is inarticulate doesn't call out a warning

A. D. WINANS

REMEMBERING BOB KAUFMAN

He walked the streets of North Beach
An ancient warrior with blinking eyes
Forced to carry decades
Of heavy sorrow on his back
Like a bent-over hunchback
Burdened with the rust of time
Flesh stripped to the marrow
The mirror of his eyes
Doing a slow dance
Up and down Grant Avenue

He rode the clouds of Ancient Rain
His life measured in hot jazz and verse
A surreal mirage where hip cats
In streets and bars
Rode Be-bop rhythms
To the end of the line

He walked imaginary zoos
Looked for tigers to talk too
Runaway poems blaring in his ears
Like a stuck car horn
The Ancient Rain falling
Falling
Falling
Washing away his wounds.

THE MAN YOU DON'T
WANT TO SEE

Beware
He's a cheap trick puffing
On a cigarette
You can find him at the jukebox
Begging for a quarter
Or at the pool table
Looking for an easy mark

He's a cashiered soldier
In search of a battle zone
A boner without a bone

He's a sex addict
Hiding under your bed
A towel man cleaning up semen
From a brothel bed

He's a second-rate Don Juan
Reciting the 23rd Psalm
He's the difference between
Night and Day
A Preacher who sells options
On how to pray

He's the man behind the cage
In a downtown pawnshop
He's a weather-beaten cop
Dining on mashed potatoes
And pork chops

He's the smile you see on cable TV
Intent on winning over you and me
He's into Yoga and a master of Zen
He's the food in a pigpen

Continued

**THE MAN YOU DON'T
WANT TO SEE** *Continued*

He has his nose up the ass
Of anyone who can do him a favor

He's the stain left behind
In a church pew
He's the masturbating monkey
At the zoo
He's a jack of all trades
Dressed in designer jeans
And wearing dark shades
He's as old as mankind
A cheap treasure find
He's the man you never want to see
When you wake in the morning
And see yourself in the mirror

LIFE ON THE STREETS

It's an all-night horror show
Hooker's pimps transexuals on the go
Its friend pitted against foe
Its Larry Curly and Moe
At the Last Picture Show

Its con men looking for a mark
Its bath houses and porno flicks
Its lonely vaginas in search of dicks

Its keystone cops and neon lights
Its drag queens in tights
It's a wino blood donor
It's a young man with a boner

Its CNN peddling talking head news
Its John Lee Hooker singing the blues
It's space aliens hiding out in Roswell
Its poor folks going through hell

Its pilgrims on their way to the shrine
Its police informers dropping a dime
Its politicians wallowing in slime
It's a miracle in search of a crime

It's a million windshield wipers
It's a billion disposable diapers
It's a 24-hour horror show
Its Larry Curly and Moe
Down at The Last Picture Show

Its streets lined with pain
Its City Hall drown in shame
Its Tech billionaires breaking the rules
Its poor folks played for fools

Its doctors practicing
The hypercritical oath
Its eating pussy and sucking cock
Its Al Capone doing time on the Rock

It's a waiter in a tux and bow tie
Its all one God Damn lie
It's the way things are
It's the nature of the beast
It's a famine it's a feast

Its babies crying
It's the elderly dying
It's the system
where just trying to stay alive
become a small victory

**GOING TO MAKE POETRY
AN INSTITUTION**

The preacher man doesn't believe in evolution
The conman doesn't believe in revolution
The Priest has run out of absolution

No more signed autographs
No more forced laughs
No more hanging out at the zoo
Talking to failed gurus

Going to smoke some dope
With my good friend the Pope
Going to make love nice and slow
Read me some Edgar Allen Poe
Lose myself in the Late Night Show

Going to make a cameo appearance
On the 6 PM news
Lose me in some John Lee Hooker Blues
Going to dispel the myth of evolution
Make poetry an institution

Going to put anarchy on the stock market
Nuke technology Outlaw e-mail
Do away with the golden rule
Teach Da Da in every school

Going to make John Brown
The new national anthem
Do away with original sin
Pay homage to a whore
Put John Lewis' face
On Mount Rushmore

Going to name a bus after Rosa Park
Put a little nookie
In every fortune cookie

Going to expose Saint Nick
As a chick with a Dick
Going to invite trump's old lady
To ride through Chinatown
In a Monica Lewinsky nightgown

Going to talk to the fly in the soup
Alone or in a group
Stop off at the Manager
And have a talk with the Lone Ranger

Going to put an end to hemorrhoids
Outlaw humanoids
Going to offer a truce
Bring back Lenny Bruce
Make politicians ride the caboose

Going back to school
Abolish the Golden Rule
Going to feed a vulture
Starve off mass culture

Going to turn evolution
Into a revolution
Make poetry an institution

DEEP DOWN INSIDE

I stir up a colony of ants
where I am pulling weeds
and now my knees and forearms
are crawling with the tiny nits
so I brush them off
then fetch some spray and
squirt mercilessly.

Most stop in their tracks.
A few curl into pinpoint balls.
Others scurry away
into an un-poisoned crevasse
maybe warning those below
to evacuate immediately.
I imagine those survivors
frantically tunneling to safer ground
and once settled there
encoding my selfish act into ant lore
calling it something like
8/14 or *August massacre*—
how they'll describe the King Kong-ish giant
her plunging fork, the upturned soil
and noxious mist, a horror for sure
that transpired in only a few seconds
like a rockslide
or an earthquake's jolt
except those things happen by God's hand
and I am no god.

I flash back to when I slapped
my friend, Lisa, much harder than I meant
after she took the front seat
when it was *MY TURN*
how she cried out and soothed
her reddening cheek

how I felt kind of terrible
even though it *WAS* my turn.
It's the earliest act of cruelty
I remember doing
but I'll bet there were others
for I was not an angelic child—
the type who gives away the big half of the cookie
or breaks her piggy bank for UNICEF.

I like to think that since then
I've lived a life of kindness
but the spray says otherwise
and I'm reminded that even though
there's good in every one of us
(or so they say)
a little bad lurks there too
and it doesn't take much
for it to rise up and strike.

MISE-EN-SCÈNE, SEDONA

Our shoes are dusted red as we hike toward the base of
Bell Rock which looks to me more like a woman lifting a pet-
ticoat-ed skirt. *Your geology is showing*, I think. Cairns mark
our path through the ancient landscape. Behind us, smoke
surges west of Thunder Mountain where fire devastates Sycamore
Canyon. Back in town (there shouldn't be a town), we
shop, stop for drinks, shop some more. Ash settles on parked
cars.

At home, I hang my new limestone windchime. We collect
and arrange objects that please us. That please others. Who,
exactly, are we trying to please? On the credenza's corner, a trio
of art-glass vases clustered by height. Family photos propped
on the lid of the un-played piano. Books arranged from light
spines to dark. I straighten a picture frame. We are actors in
our own tableaux, moveable players in otherwise still lives.

TRAIN

A few weeks before my mother birthed
me, her own mother died. She'd fallen ill
on a journey, gone straight
to the hospital from Union Station,
and never went home,
my mother always finished
with a hushed flourish.

I bet there'd been a plan for Grandma's help,
although this was six decades ago
when a woman got a little grace
before being sent home with her squaller.
Still, tiptoeing into the nursery,
my dad having already caught
the 6 a.m. commuter into town,
she must have felt derailed—

motherless mother to a wordless child,
sidetracked from her central route.
There would have been no strobing
landscape outside the window—
only winter's bare branches etched
against the dark, foreground
for a silver meteor's bright light
vanishing into navy sky.

TORRENTS SPRING 2023

In towns near rivers
it is possible to trust
in renewal
to believe that misdeeds
are swept downstream
that conscience is refreshed
by upstream flow
I have stood on the Cumberland's bank
after a storm
watching silty churn
replenished by clear
I have paddled against currents
at the Ohio's widest point
although there is enough
water for two barges to pass
it is no longer enough to wash
away bloodshed
to wash away wrongs

*The Cumberland River runs through Nashville
The Ohio River runs through Louisville*

TAYLOR GRAHAM

SUNSET: STORM NEAR EARTH

You've been looking for a place to live with dog and cat, your books and art. Has your lease run out? gods or landlord having other plans for what you called your home? You don't dwell on this, but look out the window: what weather creates in its way of beauty – seashell pinks as a lover's cheek bursting into white-pink lily wings aimed straight for heaven. Underneath, dark earth, no hole to hide in, no chance of shelter from sky re-building our world. But how beautiful the storm before whatever comes after.

UNTOUCHABLE

I'm out early, crushing frosted new-green grass, tuned to catch songs of birds I can't see.

Brown Towhee in the oaks, Red-shouldered Hawk somewhere in sky.

Across the field, a young buck statue-stares me down. Too far away to count his points.

If I look away he'll fly over the fence, and gone.

Do I need to touch a god or angel to feel its presence?

MEDITATION ON FIRESTORM

Fire does what it does by the gods of weather. Oakland-Berkeley Hills, flames consuming whole neighborhoods, where we trudged through what was homes – following our dogs in search of human ashes. Wildfire evolves with climate, growing wilder. Mendocino Complex, Rim, King, Camp. Placerville as risky as Paradise. Spring-summer-fall I weed-eat five rocky acres of oak woodland and field waist-high in thistle and dead grasses beckoning a spark. PG&E descended with crews falling trees that might touch its lines. A dozen of our oaks, one tall ghost-pine – crowns toppled, trunks bucked & limbs scattered,

sudden across-slope –
the doe who birthed her fawn here,
fleeing somewhere else.

VISIT, VISITATION

The tree-man's come to triage our oaks,
scouting for what's too close to the powerline.
That gnarly old live oak –

the very live-oak in a photo
of my trekker-dog (no longer with us),
nose pointed skyward; sensing –
by scent, movement, sound
what eluded me: life.

The old live-oak has to go.
The tree-man is no god; he hates
this part of his job.

The photo sticks in my mind,
comes suddenly alive, my trekker-dog
coming joyfully
to my call; coming back as spirits
sometimes do.

GODS OF THE BONEYARD

That bent-elbow of lumber scraps, old fence wire, lengths of metal roofing to plug a hole – no, I shouldn't denigrate such a catchall place, where I found the ash-gray wild turkey hen, settler among what you'd call trash, on her nest of 7 eggs. I left as quick as I might, glanced back to see her settling again on her eggs. May I call the moment radiant in the midst of rust and dust and gray?

TRANSFORMATIONS

The nature walk began with calls of Mallard, Gadwall, and Canada Goose across the pond, and mushrooms erupted overnight – Jack-O-Lantern, Mulch Maids, Bleachy Entoloma, The Deceiver – poisonous or not, weirdly colored and whorled, strange as if burst from the gods' comics. I kept walking, off the trail, and there it lies – as if bitten by a transmogrifying wasp, the stinger leaving no trace – this wild turkey sleeping on its folded wings, great-toed feet heavenward, great-beaked head turned aside, to die without comment. Eyes still wide open – no one to weight them shut with a coin. How long ago, to not be torn apart by living hungers? New grass already grown between its wing-feathers. What regret nested in the wild dead heart?

VINCENT DECONINCK

LOVE AND EMOTION

so much I could fill up the ocean.
Swept away in a warm, dreamy haze.
Melting fog evaporating slowly over a sunny bay.
Crystal air pine oxygen.
I think of now, and I think of then.
you remind me of all times.
When I look to the sea, I think of thee.
When you think of the earth, the earth thinks of ye.

Worn thighs and tired eyes, a happy heart needs exercise.
So we stretch the muscles of each other's soul,
flex and mold the shape of love's frequency.
I attempt in my infancy
to define a feeling of infinite intimacy
to trace untamed unimaginable imagery
to live a life in that memory
to live in the light consistently
to love in the light as it ought
to be to give what I've got, and let it bleed.

LITTLE PRINCE

Little prince
Little prints
Paws of
Innocence
Born true
Unto
Fortune
Virtues
Grow
Go

Do nothing of what you're told
Learn and fend for your own
Learn of nature and her soul
Learn of time and growing old
Learn of giving yourself
Die blissfully
And completely
Slow
fast
Be
Cast your atoms of carbon Into the ether
Bleed yourself into the galaxy
Your tears
Your passion
Your love

WHERE DOES THE TIME GO?

Into pictures moving in my head slow?
In a dream while laying in my bed?
Of memories soaring, exploring inches above
 where the grass grows?
In the therapy experienced making my thoughts known?
Wanting to know everything about the earths ways.
Tired and confused but willing to love another day.
Singing and howling clinging to the peak of a moment.

WHEN I TAKE THE REIGNS,

inside I evoke awakening actions.
Make the decisions,
Before life hands me what is to be.
Outside thoughts sleeping distractions.
I gain the momentum.
When I observe but don't act when it is necessary,
 I learn and maybe grow, but I don't gain
the same momentum as I would if I made the decision
 beforehand. If I said it when my heart
felt it. Rather than keeping it inside. Do what
 my heart speaks to me, in the instinctive
moment. Listen to my mind when I reflect on the
 momentum. Love isn't something one holds
onto all day, give it away. Reassess it later.
Listen to your heart in the moment and your mind later.

GLIMPSE OF THE FIRST MORNING

During the five-planet alignment, June 2022

Five planets line the pre-dawn east,
reminiscent of that first morning
before God sent them in separate orbits.
They offer bright glimmers of His light,
beaming through primordial, dark blue vastness.
Sun brings hints of rainbow,
like the first colors He created.
Tree branches reach up like God's fingers
caressing all He made.
Unseen birds sing their first notes
of the timeless, primeval hymn
passed through generations of orioles
to their one Source, to Him.

BY THE MERMAID STATUE

Copenhagen, Denmark, 1996

Under dusky October sky, I pose for a picture
next to the little bronze mermaid,
sitting on a rock by the sea.
Shivering in my jean jacket, I grin
at this new adventure of study in Germany,
traveling to other countries on weekends,
meeting new friends,
dreaming of moving to Europe.

I turn to the mermaid,
who looks down at her shapely new legs.
Is that wonder in her eyes?
Hope of dancing barefoot with the prince
under fiery sunsets on the sand?
Of walking down the aisle of the huge, white-pillared
Church of Our Lady I just toured?
Of parties she would give at the palace,
welcoming each new friend?

Or is it disappointment
the prince did not marry her,
leaving her to ponder
her fate of death?

"Yes, that must be it," I think,
as I glance again at her contemplative posture.
I turn to rejoin my friends,
never believing that my own dreams
would dissolve with sea foam,
just like the mermaid's.

A DAHLIA CALLED ORCHID

Eight near-black petals,
watching in all directions.
protect pot of gold.

DAHLIA FESTIVAL

The tiny white Small World dahlia
on its long stem
opens toward morning.
Each round-tipped petal
is a soft, tender voice
in this ball-shaped flower.

All dahlias in the garden,
pale yellow Alva's Supremes,
crimson Creve Coeurs,
light pink Hillcrest Kismets,
tan Café au Laits,
stand ready
for the wind to lead
the flower choir.

The breeze lifts its arms,
like a maestro ready to conduct.
All the varieties, as one, sway,
singing their hymn to their Creator.
Unseen birds in tree branches
join the floral chorale.
Can we be still long enough
to learn the melody and harmonies?
To sing in tune with nature?

TO THE TUNA CEO

On the label of your tuna,
I model to earn you some dough,
my blond hair flowing perfectly,
my shiny fish tail just so.
My wand of gold I raise up high,
as if I could enchant the sea,
and cause some fish to swim to your nets,
while shoppers stand and stare at me.
It's not like this at all at home.
In sea gardens, I swim so free
among the coral and the kelp,
with clownfish and the manatees.
With my whale friend, I sing duets.
I waltz with my seahorses, too.
Oh, my heart cries tears of sea salt,
while I fake this big smile for you.
In my head, I plot my escape
to my sea friends, forever true.
One day, you'll find your label here
for famous "Chicken of the Sea",
with only those bright red letters,
without a single trace of me!

STALKER

"The shadow is the invisible saurian tail that man still drags behind him."
—Carl Jung, 1939

What murky shadow follows me on my chance
amble through the garden of dahlias?

Her vapor overtakes me, I choke in the ether
of guilt but I cannot repress her more.

Crimson and black blossoms skirmish. When the
petals fall, they unite in perfect poise.

On the carpet of wilted fingers, she lays beside
me, a guide back to the origin of my needs.

Stalker, are you the war inside me, where fears seek
shelter under rocks of dark impulses? Or are you

the place to find truth? A spoonful of release for my foiled
imagination, air to feed the suffocating heart in me?

*I have always been
with you, in gardens, and
at Holodomor, no one is more loyal,
but there are gifts in the grimmest truth.*

I could only pick one flower to take home. I chose a black dahlia,
its beauty never more vivid in the folds of its shadowy pose.

At my bedside, there is no escape from its face, first grimacing
then grinning. Its perfume is never far from my breath
and my release.

LABYRINTH

sometimes a wall
becomes a veil.

*don't go into the casbah,
you'll get lost,* she said.

but golden mountains of turmeric
and the smell of offal
were irresistible.

sometimes a veil
is pierced,

and a thousand
labyrinths appear.

I enter every one
with the same dream
as the last.

WHAT REMAINS

The ocean returned
to claim the sleeping
in plain day,

foretold to me
in dreams of
prescient dragon flies.

Bargello veins pulsed
in cellophane wings,
droning in and out of

shafts of light,
framed by private
nebulas of dust.

There are still remnants
of magic free from
weighted words

and cell towers poke
from a new sea,
a landing place
for blue dragon flies.

THE SPELL OF AUTUMN

Listen to faint whispers of pin oak leaves
as they spin on their last journey,

pleas muffled to a crinkling good bye,
dawn's fingers a benediction, the wind a requiem.

Hoary glaze, an uninvited vampire,
beckons at the window, lingers too long

after sunrise, and liquifies, her lace collar
a hazy puddle on the sill.

The morning's corn freezes, crows hammer
bejeweled kernels, yammering to earless ice,

till dusk robs color from the fields and
their black backs slip into yawning darkness.

Evensong, and the bewitching chimes
beckon the rime to return, to reclaim its plunder:

brittle leaves split under its razors, jaunty pumpkins
once shimmering now sacks of rumpled skin.

At dawn, a silver quilt suffocates winter wheat,
backs broken by frozen vapor, they sleep until April.

Then all will be free to be tender and weak again,
no frost to gnaw fledging tendrils, life colludes with life.

WAS ATHENA LONELY?

Athena came, shape shifter, progeny of a headache.
Gold motes floated on sunlight at her birth.
At night she listened to the lyre wilting on the breeze.
A tear from a warrior is still soft, opal orbs pulsed
in her flickering oil lamp, a pyre to cremate dreams of love.

She created a young woman to be her lover,
more beautiful than Gaia she named her Lofia.
Men brayed like donkeys when Lofia filled her water urn,
nipped their lips as glistening mizzle tumbled to her wrists.
Their murmurs locks of cotton bobbing on gushing streams.

Athena looked in mirrored bronze, and saw a weaver,
almond eyes gazed back, red with fire. In her disguise, the
two wove days away. One's affection warp, the other's weft.
A tapestry, a Cross Orb spider's sticky web, sugary with dew.
Until betrayal slapped like a shuttle: Lofia's kiss.

Typhoons felled olive trees as Athena unveiled her mask,
Lofia's eyes wider and darker than the Aegean Sea.
What Athena giveth, Athena taketh away.
Lofia now a raven, wings clipped. She calls
wistfully in the dark, but no woman will kiss her.

I HEARD AN OWL

Hours before dawn, I take
the last pull on my cigarette,
hands small pumpkins
in tangerine glow.

Rattled by a plaintive call—
a striped owl, hushed
by pine boughs, already
brooding my mind.

Is it the one that swept
past us that cold morning
as we gathered nettles
along the Susquehanna?

The calls evaporate,
cigarette drops.
Scattered embers blur
then fade to black.

I glance at the only thing
you left, a rock round
as your ghostly breasts,
painted with an owl.

Eyes stare back
with a jaundiced smirk.
She peers over a crease
in my duvet, floating

on forlorn dream clouds.
Forever flightless.
Caged in a stony prison.
I beg her to remain silent.

But softly,
she calls my name.

SINGULARITY

You could break my heart.
 Sin ti no hay este paraíso.
 Sin este paraíso no hay vida en mi.
 I still reserve the right to love you.
 Our universe:
 The dot at the beginning
 The dot at the end
 The singularity that is us
 Explosion of light
 Expansion of universe.
 Light blip
 somewhere along.
 Mind's true expansion
 Bringing together our love
 Explosion of our truth.
 Lágrimas
 en el abrazo invisible de tu pasión.
 En el sabor del amor y tu calor,
 when you are near me.
 In this spectacular joy
 life's journey lives on.
 To be able to say the words
 To be able to say the words
 To be able to say the words

SAUDADE

You're only a poet once
 On café table tops
 In wordsmith arenas & circles
 Searching for the unsearchable
 On the long lonesome highway
 In the dark dreary corners of the room
 In noisy, crowded, restaurants
 In a river's bank under a tree
 In lost friends
 In summer winds
 In rainy Novembers
 In lonely nights
 Saudade do espírito
 For only one lifetime

DIA DE LAS MADRES

Happy Mothers
 Day in and day out
 Doing their best
 To show their joy
 Share their joy
 On Mother's Day

CULTURA

Yucatán paths.
 Yucatán earth, flowers,
 scents & sounds.
 Feelings of great distances.
 In time.
 In culture.
 In opportunity.
 In care.
 In respect for one another.
 In love.
 In xochitl, in cuicatl.
 There IS a better high.

WEEDS

I've been looking.
 It's here but I can't find it.
 I know it's here somewhere,
 but I can't find it.
 I can't find it.
 One foot in front of the other.
 Bushes, high grass, trees by the creek, by the river,
 by the crashing waves of cars.
 Some cardboard.
 One foot in front of the other.
 I can feel I will find it.
 I know it's somewhere.
 One blackened foot in front of the other.
 Fools don't stay away.
 It's my stuff.
 Old Industry alleys is my gated community.
 Rows of large docking zones facing off
 with giant garbage bins.
 Rustic brick buildings, corrugated
 steel doors & chains.
 Somewhere.
 I keep searching.
 I'll find it.
 It can be found everywhere.
 All around the world.
 Empty streets.
 Empty alleys.
 Empty strip malls.
 One foot in front of the other.
 One foot.

Something.

I feel something.
 I knock on a familiar door
 on a familiar home
 surrounded by empty weed-filled lots.
 No one answers.
 I wonder who lived there.
 I wonder if they served.



Illustration by Paul Aponte

**THE SLAUGHTER
OF THE BUFFALO**

We slaughtered millions of buffalo,
Shooting from passing trains,
Leaving them rotting
In August sunshine,
On Indian Country's plains.

We never felt
Any regret
For starving Indians out
Since we were the White Men,
Manifest Destiny was all about.

What we wanted
That's theirs,
We took it.
Whatever was theirs,
We broke it.

That's just the way it goes
When you swallow a continent,
From shore to shining shore
And have to disperse
All those you curse—
Shooting from roaring trains.

LOVE LIKE A CUP

Love is very accommodating,
Like a cup curving water
Into itself.
Willing to surround,
Willing to encompass,
Willing to befriend.
Ready for a spoon
With which to swirl
Its insides
Into a spinning vortex
Of passion.
The milk, spreading out,
Through and through.
Love is like this,
Between me and you.

SISYPHUS

I insist! he says, I insist!
Each day, up this hill,
This rock, I will!
And, each day, this rock
Does resist,
Equally and stubbornly,
Against my effort
And finds a way, each day
To roll away!

Each day, this, my play,
This, my torture!
Alone, against this rock,
I work my will.
Each day, the rock
Wreaks vengeance on my pride,
When losing balance,
I must stand aside.

GREETINGS FROM HIROSHIMA

Greetings from Hiroshima,
From Dresden, Hamburg, Berlin.
Greetings from all the losers
You had to kill to win.

“Democracy,” you say and fire.
“Liberty,” you say, we burn.
If there's one thing we've learned
From all the cities you burned,
It's that you'd kill us all to win.

Greetings to the grabbers of our bottom dollar.
To the takers, the shakers, who hate.
Greetings from Kabul and Abu Ghareb!
To barbarians at the gate.

Destroy a village to save it.
Kill us to save us,
To set us free.
I know you no longer believe it.
It's just your hypocrisy.

Greetings from Fallujah,
From Kabul, Basra, Bakhmut!
Don't do us any more favors,
Or trample us under your boot.

Some say it's all about oil.
Or power, it's money that speaks.
We say it's for the spoils,
Now that it's clear we were weak.

It's not that we are ungrateful,
Or that we don't want to be free.
Freedom won, from the fire of your gun,
We'd rather you just let us be.

Free from you and all your lies, too,
Free from your bullets and bombs.
Free from your mercenary army,
Free from your shock and awe.
We wish you'd stay home and leave us alone—
Your wars have left us raw.

GENTLE TOWARD QUIET NIGHT

Everything that's gentle
Is bent toward quiet night,
When everything is sleeping,
In respite from the light.

When every soul is flying
Dreaming, through its flight.

Lovers meet,
Overnight,
In dreams that fill the sky.

You might see
An old lover,
Dreaming,
Flying by,
Pursuing her new lover,

Also, flying by,
In the heat of darkness,
Where no one ever asks, “Why?”

THE ACTOR

He said of a loved one's memorial "I might consider making an appearance."

I suspect he thought he said it with a flourish or did it just come naturally.

I thought of the before woman's eyes.

How they pleaded for me to give her a signal, that I too was marked or unremarkable?

I played cipher, still not willing to give up my role.

As a poet I had been able to create a beauty out of little, quilting a whole life out of hours.

I thought I knew but the alchemy of my fancy and the performance had us both under the velvet theater ceiling for far too long.

It hurts to come out into the sun, naked eyed onto the stained sidewalk.

Living a life of gifts preferred unacknowledged, he looked me dead in my eye and said he was a communicator.

I think you're confused man; you are just a talker.

BLAME IT ON THE WOLF MOON

It was heartbreak season, the time of the year where you don't know if you're hot or cold.

Is this fevered feeling, reawakening or cold leaf falling down your spine.

You hold dear to a tree trunk, grounded bark ridge on your skin, an errant rain drop trickles down love's cheek.

Branches reaching, lonely against the coldest sky, winter stone in chest you catch a frigid breath.

Birds fly warm against frost winds, are they coming or going.

A feather strokes your shivered neck, a sign of grief memory or hope's caress.

Pine needles drop on a day's new song, will it be dirge or sunrise.

You're in the switchbacks, tail end snake or head.

Frog bottom sobbing, you clutch handfuls of earth in your fists punching muddy waters.

Icepick eyed you turn a wary tooth towards future's season.

You wait under the Wolf Moon, fish jump heart leap, moss bounce hope.

UNSULLIED

Keeping a Question alive, existing in a world of names. Where is our Eucatastrophe? Will eagles dare to pardon?

In finding the sweet spot, where others deign to touch, to claim,

Only there will I forgive, be present in the ugly rock garden.

Rings to marry the world outside of us and within, what remains—

Behind a bamboo curtain, a wind chime of the misshapen, must not harden.

What remains is a larger heart, open to the point of banning shame.

I can absolve those that kill me, perhaps not those that gift me a coward's burden.

Defy to touch the flawed, to embrace not in a loathsome game,

You will exist in bigger waters, vexed not as much, not so much uncertain.

HUNTER'S MOON

I hit an object with my beak, impact.

I make anger God, Said I.

Under lidless eyes, blood spot in an egg, I kick with bucket feet.

I'm a skull that spits in your hand, with a heart of tree sap.

I know no man's face and I catch your daughters in corn silk snares.

In the round of the day and the sense of the night, I am at the mountain.

You are hiding in a turtle shell now, pretender to the twilight.

I am seated in the water with whitecaps glowing rosy, face towards the lizard house.

You are undone by claw; leaf cutting ants scatter your ornaments.

I am wings casting shadows over broad prairies, I storm as I fly.

SNAG

Will you be counted amongst the standing dead?

A stump like outcast within someone’s nightmare, peppered with cavities, of your own life you are being shed.

Was it that lightning strike, a brown bear thoughtlessly descending claw on your soft, punky wood.

Maybe it was the hearts carved upon you of love lost, someone loves someone 1983, for a pocketknife you bled.

Could be that it was a mess of cavity makers, takers with small beaks chipping away at you, a nest you stood.

Creating in your bark barrier, a den now for raccoon cubs to bear, a hole heaven- for a snake to slither, to coil.

Heart rot, fibers loosen, you weaken to the core, they finish you off with chiseling beak and shock-absorbing skulls.

Not lifeless, a noble nurse log, fair game for mosses, slugs, and insects- a cache for others’ lives, sinking lower into the soil.

You are a cavity with no choice but to wait upon all comer’s night-days to begin, you have become intimate with life’s cull.

Fallen and decaying, but full of life atop forest litter, an owl hoots a dirge from your shelter, a hawk perches like a warning flag.

Upon you they play, squirrels’ nest in your rich humus, you a cavity with no choice but to wait upon all comer’s night-days to begin.

Sometimes you catch a rain shower, a flurry of a leaves cascade from living trees and you pretend you aren’t but a snag.

Your fibers loosen, you are an old tree gone.

But in your rotted-hollow you shield, shelter and shade and on this earth, you have earned place to spin.

DOCK MUSIC

The skyline was ribbons on a pretty girl’s skirt.

The scent of anise rose as green after green threaded with gold and birdsong lit the morning sky.

An owl feather for you and later an owl for both of us, white chested as if it had soaked up the moonlight.

I’m a needs traveler on this river, a small fish jumps and I hold that feeling to my chest.

I gather the wake waves of boats like a blanket, a knot of mourners are in the gardens.

Murmuration of grief birds’ choir in the air with cabbage moths.

A kind man tells me the truth, truth is pearls tethering me to ground.

I weep under pigeons, seated on soft pine, I three-point rise and walk alone like my mother.

DEATH IS HARD

The Hospice nurse said,
“Death is hard, much like birth,
going through phases of long labour...”
It took your soul
eight days to crown.

On the tip of my tongue
was so much to spill-
yet not one word came
to guide you through the coming
friction of valleys and shadows.

You were already busy, busy
packing your scarf, your thoughts
Pulling on coat buttons
aligning steps toward the door...
Would a flashlight have helped?

Or maybe fireflies? Do we
need a map or do we follow
the life-line, crossing your palm?
Shall I bring your turquoise
dress with the silver stitches?

Or maybe sturdy clothes for this trip?
Perhaps a rake to clear a path
through debris and broken boughs?
My palm to glove your hand
and keep it warm?

I can’t hear your whispered words.
I put my ear close to your lips,
like a conch shell dispelling waves
of the sea. “Oh no,” I say, “only you can
open the door-“ I don’t know all the rules,
but I know that one...

About this world collapsing
into the next. You become a little fish-
A fish out of water, lips making O’s
I count them like a good midwife
One
Two
Three ... Four

I promise

I’ll remember who you are...

OVERPASS

If you didn't know where
to look on that gang-planked bridge,
you might not see patchwork
in the ancient guard rail,
that old scar on the overpass.

Once, a blue Dodge Ram made front-
page news in the Morning Eagle.
The Ram, leaned slightly toward
graffitied box cars on tracks below-
while the driver cursed and prayed
and probably peed his pants.

And we wonder at these moments
when we slide down the see-saw,
go tumbling off course
like a bucked-off cowboy
or the rodeo clown with baggy pants
and huge painted tears.

All these moments slip and trip
while God fondles the fulcrum
and pulls petals from daisies.
While we push our feet
against gravel and ground,
hawking blue oaths on the air.

BOOKMARK

All things flow like the empty cup in the Daodejing.”
-Louise Gluck

I use your letter for a bookmark
in my journal, like BC and AD,
before and after the fall.
Its parchment sags at the corners
like pale skin, growing thin with age.

My prints from buttery fingers
pock the thin-lined missive.
And there's one dark stain
from that spill last Wednesday
when I dunked my toast in tepid tea.

Once, we were that empty cup
to fill with flowing days,
when you stood naked
in the summer storm,
shouting like an ancient warrior
at claps of thunder, rolling by.

But we overturned, spilling-out.
We left clumps of dark leaves
in the bottom, no birds or bridges
for the gypsy's eye: only snakes
and sculpted mountains.
The incantation, sung too late.

BOTH

After Mick Corrigan's poem
Citóg (Gaelic for left-handed person)

Upon reading a poem
about left-handed children
I'm left with a question,
Both of my sons are lefties
Now with one gone
how do I say this?

Is this a new catechism
To be learned?
A simple question of math,
Two minus one?
Grammarians need not apply,
What only a mother should say.

PALMISTRY

There was that day
he took my hand
in his own and held it

like a father
does a child's
and washed
lemon lather

through my fingers
kneading my heart line

hands worked
in tandem
clockwise
then counterclockwise

kneading
my palms
he followed
my life line

we walked
through fields
picking lemon
and lavender

left a trail
of citrus
and white-capped
hope for my dreams

long after I woke

**ON THE OCCASION OF YOUR
BIRTHDAY AND MY CT SCAN**
FOR BRENDAN

Today, you will take inventory
Inhale almost six decades
and hold each green-speckled
dream even closer
before the mighty exhale

Even then, it will begin with a sigh
from under your ribs and move
ghost-fingered notes, gathered
from a shell on some distant shore.
Remember the chords of that song?

And today, when cartographers map
my body- perhaps they'll mark
my lung in a precise spot
with a dramatic X
for "Here be dragons!"

But we, the old souls, are a mixture
of red clay and Serengeti rain
From the cradle of water
to the first gathering of sound
from breath into air-we sang
the very first OM, we the poets!

And even now, I know
a breeze will cradle our path
conspire with creation
On violet wings to move us
from the custody of shadow
and into the light ~* So be it.

YOU PLANT POEMS

You plant poems in soil
amended for fertility.
Flowers grow, bud, bloom.
You pick them, offer them freely.
Others come to browse
offer you a key
to their gated plot.

You bring your own shovel,
pruning shears, folding saw,
your own humus and perlite.
With elixir of compost and hope,

you spread the seeds you import
from well-established gardens.

For two years you tend what you grew.
You also judge the work
of local brand-new gardeners
While you grafted and refined craft
they extended praise for another.
The heady fragrance of name-recognition.

Little by little, then full-on
with tightened faucets
you were left with the dry.
You produced your own seed catalog,

they nodded and seemed pleased
a promise for oasis in the drought

While you traveled they took back
their key; collected prime rose petals
no more communication.

You returned to silence.
You lay in your bed at night
listening to surplus rain
dreaming of new opportunities
in gardening.

CLOTHES DO MATTER

A long gossamer gown for me
overflowing fabric
sheath for my weapon
sword in amethyst and bone

Pink salt lights my room
misted by diffuser
All my tropical foliage
erect as young men
points to the skylights

For me the flowing dress
The once-auburn hair
long once, like macrame
beaded with leather and wood
Layers of linen
pour down my legs
puddle on bare feet

I am often barefoot
sole to slate floors
rainy walkways
soil itself between toes
mulched with humus and time

So I pour down
stairs as a waterfall
float in dreams,

upon the moors
pursuing the wrong man
like a Brontë sister

I awaken in the loam
my dress wet and torn
macrame unbraiding
with beads aground

Remembering a time I curiously took
a road never walked before
past the thorn-berries,
the signs to go back
One-Way, Uneven Ground

I fully awaken
to calls of the crows
those shiny ambassadors of gloom
the caw of the unshackled woman

I unravel my tangled hair
it dissolves in fetid groundwater
next to the ruins
from my many lives before
clothes do matter
also the masks we choose
each morning

HOT WATER

My town sits in a levee basin
three rivers round
They fill and evaporate without regard
for my fortune or recession
The effortless rain
sprinkles holy water
atop my head
while I abandon sore muscles
to the steaming jacuzzi

We try harder than winter rain
Always working to create meaning
in so many measured lines
Vertical columns of verse
form cage bars of pithy intellect
Showers of words

so diluted once they land
on paper or screen
plucked into death
fresh-picked dahlias in cheap vases
dead but pretty for a while

The words promote another life
Our authentic selves
being recognized at last
Selfies taken to prove
we were there
front and center
smiles blocking scenery
wonders of the world
a ways behind us
stamped with date and time

Raindrops dapple the pool with rings
I ponder my dampened condition
body submerged in hot water
limbs loose noodles in broth
I needed healing heat
then turn my ease to more language
fill any gaps into word puddles
any comfort questioned
as placeholders
for something else
like scissors closing
in on themselves
ready to cut
more blooming dahlias

THE GIRL IS MOTHER TO THE WOMAN

the woman waits
whines
wishes a better life
now in her ninth decade
she will not grow new leaves

Earth-arteries shallow
sans taproot
begin their rot
Continuous cries for water
will do that
feign desert too long
saturation will
stunt stink
then slay you

The girl spent youth
refilling her sprinkling can
to nourish the woman
girl became mother
her fifteenth year
Delayed education
denied hormones
Woman's forked tongue
slashed it's way across girl's back
striped scars still there today

Girl needed a mother
Woman needed a host—
tapeworm grows longer
stretching strong
attached tight
unsuspecting innocent
allows sucking
sometimes years
drained deadly dry

Girl grows to adult
apple orchards away
from family tree
Woman rejects her
plows her under cow-shit
and crabgrass
walks over her shadow
a nimbus cloud withholding rain

Girl seeks father in men
after all dad left early
she still seeks mother too
but becomes one three times instead
blessed with boy babies
she was unsure raising girls

Abandonment issues play out hard
Girl gets older
Settles with a good man
Travels the world
Grows a garden
that feeds them all
Tends fur and fins
plants deep tentacled roots

Girl rescues woman from cold
Flies her to warm California
becomes woman's mother again
unable to become her daughter
but instead sharply
The Bitch
she eventually moves her out
sages house, reclaims her space
begins to write her truth

ORACLE OF HERMES

Into the mirror
A question and answer?
I stare, into my eyes
Green cat eyes
Grandmother's irises
Shards of sunlight after rain
Wind gusts high
Chimes in unison, whaat whaat whooo
Who should I trust?

Yes the querying done
Outside the door,
white noise of nature
I listen, listen close
Linda, my neighbor gathering her chickens
"Come, come back in"
Her voice bringing them to safety
Getting them to the coop ahead of the storm
Come
Back
In
Not what I expected
Or wanted
I've been out too long
Trusted too much

I've processed it so much
It's like Velveeta
So smooth
melts easy

Just ain't real
People come into your life
Some like movements of air
Calm.
Light and breezy.
Overcast.
Sudden shift in barometric pressure
They blow out, find new backyards
Gently rippling curtains first
Twirling whirligigs
Faster until they break too
Leave the pieces, blame the weather

So back to the mirrored inquiry
Come
Back
In
My comfortable house
Our airy bedroom
Under the skylights
Into the mirror

I trust myself

EMOTIONAL CURIOSITY (2)

He doesn't know how curiosity can kill a cat, but he's acutely aware how it's killing himself. Ever since she first asked him What do you like me about? when they fell in love again after they'd lost each other for nearly half a century, he's been haunted by this question. Without getting an answer, he feels he just cannot live peacefully. Indeed, for him, the answer means not merely an emotional statement but an intellectual discovery, which can help him to gain a better understanding of himself. After all, knowing himself is a major task he has to fulfill in this lifetime, something becoming increasingly urgent for him as a retiree with so many health problems.

Everything about you! he replied, firmly in tone, but far less accurately in content than he'd hoped.

Your answer's too general, too vague, she commented.

True, he agreed. This answer did sound like a handy or lazy catch-phrase. He had to come up with something more articulate, more specific.

What do you like me *most* about? she narrowed down her question a bit later.

Well, depends on the time! When he first saw her during a high school meeting, he recognized her as the prettiest girl in town. A year after, when he had a chance to look at her more closely on a forest farm where they labored together as 're-educated' Red Guards, he realized that if viewed separately, her eyes, eyebrows, nose, mouth or ears might not necessarily be beautiful, but put together, her facial features looked perfectly attractive. Coupled with her fair, soft, smooth and immaculate skin as well as her slender and shapely figure, her physical appearance was simply stunning.

But I know I'm never as good-looking as you describe, she said.

Her response is certainly understandable: if she'd stood side by side with his wife when they were all in their early twenties, she might not have looked as beautiful as his wife to most people, even including himself; yes, he's sure of that. But somehow, he enjoys gazing her more than any other woman in the world. Is it really because absence makes the heart grow fonder? Or perhaps because every time he sees her, he finds her even better-looking than before? For instance, when he reencountered her at a dinner party in early October in 2019, he found her wearing her years so well she seemed to belong to a younger generation. It probably had to do with her gracious manners. In other words, it must be her personality that's contributed significantly to her good looks.

Still, I know my looks aren't really so good, she stressed.

But they *are* to me! he reiterated. After doing a lot more thinking, he realized that she's most attractive to him for two reasons. One is, she looks not only pretty but warm and tender at the same time. Probably because she often smiles like a flower blooming from her innermost being, the very sight of her makes him feel happy. That's why he gazes her via iPad until she's too tired to hold her cellphone in her hand every time they meet online. In particular, he finds something unique in her facial expression. As in the case of Mona Lisa's mysterious smile, she always looks genuinely interested. This interestedness undoubtedly adds greatly to her attraction.

If you say so, she said.

Despite her response, he continued to say he's finally decoded her beauty in *his* eyes. For one thing, he enjoys listening to her voice. Her accent sounds familiar and soothing because it carries with it a distinct note of everything good about their common hometown. Even her breathing makes him feel comforted like an infant listening to its mother's heartbeats

in her arms. He often imagines smelling the unique natural fragrance from her body, which only he can discern with his exceptionally sharp nose. Even an offline touch would send him right to heaven.

Most amazingly, from their occasional sex talks, he's learned that she still functions perfectly well though her periods stopped fifteen years ago.

So, you like my looks or sexuality most? she asked, coyly, still not really satisfied with his explication.

Of cuz, that's the starting point for me, just as for any male in the animal world, he replied half-jokingly.

Then what *exactly* do you like me about? she persisted another time.

He believes he's found a good enough answer, but as he does more thinking along the line, he feels sheepish that the answer is still hidden even from himself, though he's been trying hard to come up with the right one over the past months. Sometimes, he wants to give up the effort, but he's born with a strong sense of curiosity. He must continue his pursuit.

As he keeps writing and publishing more love poetry inspired by her, he's come to see her not only as his Muse and but his true soulmate he's been looking for during the past few decades. Recalling how he always enjoys talking with her, about anything, ranging from art, literature and aesthetics to job, money and gossip, especially sex and love, he finds there's nothing they cannot talk about now online, nor will there be anything they cannot do together once they meet offline.

I love you most as the perfect nest for me as a bird, he replies.

You get me lost. What's that supposed to mean? she wonders aloud.

However far my body travels in this world, however high my soul soars in the spiritual space, my body has to return to you with my soul. Just as your personality is the home to my selfhood, your intact vagina is the nest for my dick to perch for the night...

Watch your mouth! she says, coquettishly.

Okey-dokey! I'll keep trying to find the answer about my nest, but for now, what do *you* like *me* about?

Shhh, listen, they are playing *Home sweet home*.

In our cradle tongue?

This story is inspired by Helena Qi Hong (祁红)



Illustration by Brock Alexander

DON FELIZ

MERMAID'S LUNCH

Miranda Mermaid looks
in a tidepool, remembers
urchins taste like dahlias

and rolls giant kelp blades
around mollusks, shrimps,
mussels, and clams for lunch.

WET WEDDING

Neptune, god of springs and streams,
carries a bouquet of blue dahlias
downriver to delta wetlands.

He seeks a new wife at the seashore
in the school of mermaids living
among frogs and fishes.

Mercedes Mermaid is his choice
with her long silky hair and trout-like tail.
She loves his dahlias, puts one in her hair.

He carries her back into his woods
to his waterfall and grotto where she
rules the sources of their wet realm.

DIVE BAR

Mermaids twist and circle
in the aquarium above the bar.

Silky hair streams, as they glide
behind the glass of the backbar.

Drinkers gawk, and wave
at the fantastic humanoid fish.

Behind the bar, a tattooist marks
pagan god pictures with a dahlia,

and inks leg art on women,
like fishnet stockings and scales.

CORPORATE DOGMA

Ask any corporate officer
to control damaging pollution of
streams and air near their plants.
Their hot air answer is always the same:
We need more data to define corporate
damage, and if it is causing significant
harm to the planet we all inhabit.
No number of human and animal
deaths and injuries, ruined lives,
convinces them to spend
a fraction of their wealth
to mitigate corporate
destruction of humanity.

CELESTE R. BARTEL

IN LOVING MEMORY OF MY CAT

I remember your black tabby fur—
Your sparkling green-gold eyes—
I remember the winter you disappeared—
I could hear your nails scratch my screen door—
Could see you step into the shadows—
You are with me in death as well as life—
My beautiful Big Boy—

INCOGNITO

It had gotten to the point where she couldn't
accept a compliment. She was literally tired of
people fawning over her. "Oh, you are so beautiful."
"Oh, you are so hot."

It had been a long night. She walked through the door.
She kicked her shoes off. She took off her earrings one at
a time and threw them on the floor. Then she took off her wig
and her hair extensions. She looked at herself in the mirror.

She wondered, "How long will it be before people find out my secret?"
"How long will it be before it leaks out to the press?"

She was looking at the checker-board patches of bald spots all over her head.
She was a victim of Trichotillomania Disorder.

UNDER SIEGE

Splinters in my soul.
Sludge of intense sorrow—
pulses through my heart.
Heaviness chokes me—
Anxiety fills me with dread.
Fiery darts of the enemy—
pierce my soul.

I am like an onion,
peeling off a layer of pain—
that reveals another layer.
On and on and on.....

DAMAGES

I remember
parts of me
as a child.
I would sit
by my window.
Unable to move.
My head buzzing.
An airplane would
fly overhead
making me feel
vacuous.
I could hear
other people's
TV sets.
I was there
but, yet
I wasn't.
Terrified by nightfall.
Hiding in the shadows.
Traces of me
etched in black lace.

PURPLE DAHLIA AND GARTER SNAKE

The sky is a stew
of cosmic holes
as black as onyx stone,

and I don't know where the darkness ends
and I begin. When I sleep
I am a Dahlia.

My head is drunk with color,
a spiraling of royal discs
atop a hollow stem

as if a petal-ed mantra
were murmuring:
Om Mani Padme Hum.

And yet my roots
are turning black.
Contagion claws my neck

and I descend
into soil; decaying food
for worms and centipedes.

When I awake
I turn back into a
naturopath.

Flames transmute
my root infection
into a tincture of self-acceptance.

*If we understood our afflictions
are our strength*

then we would build a habitat
of thickets, ponds and
hedgerows
for garter snakes

to slither milky eyed
and limbless
fattening up

on aphids, earwigs,
thrips and mealy bugs.
Casting off

outgrown
serpent skin
and dying scales,

amidst the evening
scent of purple Dhalia

LANDSCAPE WITH HORSE
AND PASSAGE THROUGH THE VEIL

You cannot see, but you can

hear a soft percussive tapping
from within a grove of Cedar.

You can see a woman in white skirts,
drumming, drumming,

You can smell the burning sage,
and with your second sight, you can see her prayers

spiraling in the wind.
Playing in the grasses, not five feet away.

Blessings on your journey.

Hear her calling
for Pegasus, her Spirit Helper.

How small she is at that distance.

And how tall the winged horse
already under her. Ten hands or more, and sturdy.

You can see its nostrils flare.
See its great white wings, flapping up the dust.

A coverlet of pastures spreading out beneath.
The horse and she are lifting up. And flying.

Time travelers say:
*it felt like an eternity,
yet happened in an instant.*

Now her steed has vanished, do you see it?
And her silvered head is poking through a latticework of mist.

She is stepping through a veil.

And Oh!
Impossibly distant, yet a breath away,
a brilliant orb of Light spins weightless

the milky way is pouring stars
into a valley made of midnight.

You can hear the silence.
She is about to be shown a teaching.

Another brightness flashes
in her palm— you see it, don't you?

Her likeness in the mirror?
Then it disappears. Her reflection and the looking glass,

as if never there at all.

A moment passes, or a season,
and a voice is echoing in your ear, so near

it might be yours inside your head
an archive of wisdom whispering —

Be yourself

THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS: A PASSION PLAY IN FOURTEEN PARTS

1. *Gaping Black Hole*

An erotic black form weaves a web around him as they huddle and drink in a dark corner, trapped like furtive refugees.

“Mas cerveza, por favor.”

Now they tumble into this night with tandem tongues probing curious questions. The answers to be found in neither language.

The opportunity posed. The supple presentation acknowledged at a late hour at the edge of a car door, motor running. The great mane of panther hair. A velvet shroud offering shelter at an undisclosed location down a dark and snake-like jungle trail.

The raven black web is spread. A loose-knit velvet fabric pulling gently into this nocturnal animal kingdom. The weave is perforated with inflamed visions of a violent dawn.

Reluctantly, he exits through a gaping black hole.

2. *Electrically Charged Current*

An earthquake tremor abruptly shatters the geography of feline fragrances. He swiftly, impulsively looks under the bed for uninvited visitors. There is nothing visible except the minute particles of a foreign landscape, clues revealing absolutely nothing.

But all too soon visitors arrive, uttering familiar sounds which trigger old wounds and insecurities from another rugged terrain filled with primordial conflict.

She with posture that defies gravity and the muscular physique and is the first to ascend the metal grid. Her footsteps, deceptive in intent, resonate with thunderous aplomb. The rigid form rides up a rail of electrically charged current and lands

on his doorstep. Ready to do battle with windmills and black panther. Dressed to kill.

3. *Vision in a Strange Terrain*

Furtive glances out a bedroom window in apprehension of two bright spots on the sun. The glare hurts her eyes. So, she rests, conjuring up delirious visions framed in black sensuous shapes.

The Ojos Negros de la Frontera.

Shrouded figures creeping and black cats with ultraviolet eyes flashing in the opaque ocean fog.

Awakening suddenly from this nightmare she sees red. She becomes an enraged animal.

“You bastard,” she lashes viciously with a tongue that burns like a slice of dry ice.

She has extracted arbitrary pieces of this strange terrain and arranged them in such a fashion as to complete the perfect distorted puzzle. There are no mysteries now. It all makes sense: The note, the name, the various signs and symbols drawn like a card trick from out of thin air. All larger than life and horrible in the utter simplicity of contextual clues extrapolated from the foreign landscape.

4. *Varieties of Marine Life*

The silence of a cauterized injury. Empty echo of angry words. Reverberations felt by friend and foe alike. The labels changing constantly as the ante is upped, the stakes are raised. Juggling emotional currency in an awkward balance.

The table is set with a variety of marine life. This phantasm of demon shapes assume disproportionate size and creep over their thin, opaque skin. The impulse to itch and scratch the bruised irritation is suppressed in silence.

Walking once again they stride in open air where the spew of internal combines is diffused into the ether. But heavily charged ions emerge and converge. Confrontation is inevitable

as the thick sky and bulbous clouds accumulate in various frightening configurations.

Attempts are made at levity, but these prove to be impotent and lighter than air. The weighted zeppelins are loaded with warheads whose one purpose is, eventually, detonation.

As a group, they now enter a famous battlefield strewn with the bodies of soldiers drunken or dead. It is here that he realizes he must make his last stand. He draws an acute line, measured and metered, in the sand. The next move is hers.

She spars with him, and counters with quick defensive maneuvers. She enjoys the tension; it gives a long-lost sense of the thrill of the fight. Vibrant colors dance across her eyes: red, purple, green. A cinematic orgasm, simultaneously fierce and festive, sending heat seeking missiles into the cloud-strewn sky.

5. *Anticipatory States*

Each step a hydraulic pumping action, sending adrenalin and oil to appropriate appendages. It would appear that they are finally working things out. They are grinding rough edges and removing serious stains.

Slowly the anger subsides and settles in at a place where the tedious process of distillation commences. Muddy, silty grounds of crude emotion. Yeasty transformation of bitter vinegar into potent, pregnant oxygen and energy. Gaseous mulching compost of human excrement.

Now, at the porcelain, they attend to private abulations. Each takes their own turn at these functions, washing and flushing. Cleansing organs and orifices in anticipatory states.

6. *Hot Wires, Open Sockets*

He crawls into bed, a worm burrowing a subterranean passage in a murky night. Soon her presence is felt excavating a similar insulated tunnel. A cocoon of fragile cables strung from her heart to her head, drawing together kinetic thighs which trap a prickly cactus pear of volatile fluid.

Suddenly some lunar movement causes a shift from negative to positive pull. As if in slow motion bodies reach out,

slowly protracting sensors. Highly sensitive points seeking the pressure of complimentary curves and concaves. Lips, legs, bellies grope in erotic blindness, hungry for suction and friction. Fruit ripening with the full juice of longing and loneliness which was anger and vile, now a passionate theater of embrace, engaging at critical positions, finger between finger, her mouth, his tongue, her breasts, his chest, her thighs, his member, now charged with fever, with fervor, pursed lips, floating vulva of wet, soft flesh, like sucker fish, detach from the worldly body and nibble on the invisible erotic sustenance, microbiotic sexual plankton extracted from the saline pores of each other's limbs and trunks and erect erogenous appendages, each pore itself a tiny orifice which swells and opens until the entire length of his body becomes a chasm, a hot wires open socket which is filled with the heavy weight of anticipated explosive release.

7. *Throbbing Life*

He gradually slithers into her vibrant tender soulful place and lays there quiet, except for a pulsing heartbeat of blood which assumes the rhythm of that organ. An artery of throbbing life. Soon they share this sexual clockwork body and pick up the pounding beat, rising and falling, strength and surrender, one body only, neither male nor female, coming together two pumping hearts, expanding and contracting, sucking in and releasing, taunt vaginal muscles, pulling me into her wholeness, drawing my entire body into its aromatic dizziness, hearing nothing but the sounds of fluids, finally unable to sustain the pace, feeling himself submerge into this thick fluid grave suddenly jerking spasmodically as he empties and a finger simultaneously triggers her mechanism of release.

They shudder at the velocity, clinging tightly to one another almost in fear of the primal coupling which has resurrected an animal larger and wilder than any single sense of self. This would seem to be a miraculous occurrence, a blessed and holy transmogrification.

continued

8. *Slightly Bruised*

They float effortlessly with the slow retraction from animal state which follows the crescendo of discharge and dissipation. After the arousal and release, contraction of tender and slightly bruise tissues collapse into itself. Not like the injured or frightened but with the swollen confidence of the satiated.

They go through the physical motions of separations, coagulating emotional residue and expended protein. Gathering together microscopic particles which have fragmented through this chemistry, a catalytic conversion of two fragile humans into volatile substance.

The vehicle heads for a trajectory point where an unnumbered wonder of the world spews itself towards the heavens, performing in full majestic array on this particular occasion as if applauding the efforts at immortality of those earthly bound. The sun turns the spew into tiny crystals, falling and flashing in slow motion.

Vendors line the path of La Bufadora and call out to oblivious ears. They snack on fried animal fat and sugar, snake-like streamers fished out of scalding cauldrons where they sizzled. Certain subjects are broached and avoided so as to not upset a tentative equilibrium.

9. *Mirror Image*

Breaking away from the quadrille, they once again stake out neutral, familiar territory where they can let wounds heal prior to the next onslaught. A restaurant with a dinner and a candle flickering off our faces subdues the worn wrinkles raised through years of tortuous activity on this mutual obsession.

They have the usual hard choices, where and what. These are resolved in favor of common ground, reflection of the flame in silence and avoidance of tender topics. The ocean pounds away, but at this distance it is only a soothing instrument, backdrop for a stillborn lifeless thing, dying a slow death during delivery. Each of them gazes at the issue, which is a mirror

image and beautiful even as it is aborted. Stunningly beautiful by the candlelight.

10. *Anger and Eros*

Soon they are back on the streets and into the night, darkness attempting to extinguish even the soft-lit spaces. Old rivalries surface as his reinforcements appear starkly in black and white, outrageous erotic curves, wild hair and beautiful sloe-eyed faces. They push past these figures and find her friends in a basement, drunk bookends propping up empty space.

They watch an animal act as a character of indeterminate sex called Ruby wrestles in a struggle unto death. He pictures himself engaged in this drama, violent display of Anger and Eros in a battle with no foreseeable end in sight. Brutal in the glare of the purple spotlight, this old, wizened crone still manages to put on the greatest show on Earth.

The show must go on, forever, it seems, and they are figures frozen in its multiple reenactments.

11. *Hallowed Hill*

Ascending stairs from the basement theater, they elect out of this crazy carnival of a city, toxic breath expelled from dirty lungs. Crowds, weaving and staggering, hopscotching on a vomit-encrusted sidewalk. Obese, sweat-suited, tennis-shoed racket ball heads bouncing like ping pong balls out of bars and tequila-ridden slop-stained floors crawling with vermin, insects and various parasites.

Within minutes they are off the maggot-infested drag strip, groping down alleyways and wading through the detritus of trash cans and dumpsters. Finally, they drive scramble up onto Hallowed Hill, circumnavigating a moonscape of rocks and huge kidney-shaped stones, avoiding holes and deep slit trenches.

“I think we’ve gone far enough,” she says.

And he says, “All the way. All the way. We’ve come too far to stop.” He is against stopping in principle and intent on going to the top. She bites her tongue as if squeezing a deadly gaseous expulsion. The odor is unbearable. He cannot stand it any longer. It permeates like the fish factories on this ocean-stenched coast where entrails of albacore are ground into paste.

12. *Poisonous Venom*

Fish shit. That’s what he smells as his reflexive nerve endings coil and contract.

They reach the overlook. She approaches the stone wall slowly, in excruciatingly slow motion, a lead x-ray screen blocking all sun and warmth and making the dark even darker. Blocking stars and other forms of phosphorescent life. Rare cactus are unrecognized as she assumes this rigid sclerosis posture.

This moment. This precious moment slips away. She has crawled into this foxhole and is rolling around in the fish entrails. She wallows in her hole and grows a snakeskin of poisonous venom, and poises for the strike.

13. *Cacophony of Congos*

“Why don’t you come and enjoy the view,” he implores.

“I’m letting you do your thing,” she hisses back.

The words echo like a drumbeat, a cacophony of congas hitting the tight skin of his brain stretched as taut as it can be stretched, paper-thin edge of red nerve tension.

He turns and push past her. “Fuck it,” he says.

“Don’t touch me,” she shouts in reply.

“I didn’t touch you,” he says. I pushed past a pestilence. I can’t take it. I can’t stand this drama any longer. I’m drowning. I’m dying, I’m delirious with the contamination of wasteful anger and sludge.

This rendezvous was planned for you, you ungrateful idiot, he thinks to himself. It was planned for you; it was your gift and you just spat on it. You wiped your fish shit off your shoes onto my intended offering. But I cannot afford to invest in this game anymore. I cannot give you that reward.

Instead, he is silent like a black box. Like a tortoise retracted in a shell.

They leave as silent as stone.

Tonight, they sleep like rocks. Like stone mausoleum tombs encased in mud and plaster, shit and sludge, dried over centuries. The sheet forms a protective gauze of bandage, white with hatred and anger, torqueing guts and tubes and organs until they submit, rendered unconscious by the sledgehammer of sleep.

14. *Ojos Negros*

Amnesia awakening, gradually. They have forgotten who they are. Only this is apparent: It is a room, curtains are pulled, it is morning. Light shines through jagged tears in the material.

The bodies have hibernated in these dark worm holes for a winter of war. Staccato of bombing, which assumed an offbeat but deadly rhythm, is now an imperceptible heartbeat in a distant fog of a terrain. The fuse of filtered light thaws frozen feelings. Resilient with the strength of sleep, she sheds the scaly skin of the night before, rolling gracefully out of an armored cocoon. Her limbs slowly become wet wings of translucent erotic colors enveloping him, drawing him close. The spontaneous combustion of two bodies ignites yet again.

The friction increases, compensating for the dulling of sensors and soreness. The body motion is frantic, compulsive, intense. The digits manipulate. Fingertips reach for connective tissues, stroking, greasing, unleashing accumulated reservoirs of heavily-scented fluids.

She draws him into her mouth, great moist lake of soft and soothing flesh. She sucks, pulling a thread which branches out to every nerve ending in his body, a white rubbery ribbon of elastic silicone substance which becomes a string of globules which turn him inside out, now a tube, now a vacuum, now a fiber of light, now a double helix unwinding, erupting suddenly into her cavity which deftly draws the stringy substance until it tapers off with jerky motions.

He collapses, straddling her torso, one hand fingering a dark nipple.

Ojos Negros de la Frontería.

DO YOU REMEMBER

how long we have been connected with each other?

Do you remember being a tree when I was a fungus growing side by side of your roots to help you heal.

Do you remember living underground mining gold for the Gods— they were tired of mining and the Gods made us to give them a break, a few years later they added reproductive systems to us. They realized we needed to reproduce to keep the gold production going while they returned to their home to drop off the lifesaving gold to keep their planet going. It was a 3,600 year trip in Earth years.

Do you remember us working together mining gold and making babies, just like the other six couples made by the Gods— a total of fourteen pieces, their words not mine.

Do you remember when we realized that there might be other choices besides this timeline, living in the dark and digging eight to ten hours a day, although we did enjoy the times we hugged and... then babies!

Do you remember recording our dreams and finding out how to leave these bodies and go to other tracks of time.

Do you remember seeing other versions of us doing things in the sunshine?

XO

LIFE GOES ON

Yes, life goes on
and on.

One day everything is fine.
The next the world is falling
into a black hole of my making
Ouch!

I am ready to get back on my path
looks dismal at the moment.
It's mine though and I will walk it.
As I scour my surroundings
I see some unspoken dreams
a few ignored thoughts.

I have many thoughts and dreams
some I may have forgotten.
As I age it's easy to forget
one thing or another especially
with one too many vodka-sevens.

Here I go, back to my path.
I see a few withering plants
some litter to be picked up.
I'll recycle what I can
bag the rest, wash my hands
wipe my face –
give myself the pep talk.

See what I can make of this
whole sidestepping situation
and go on with what I can.
Forget the worst while
remembering the lesson.

Oh yes, the lesson once learned
will not be repeated, at least
that is what I tell myself.

QUIET ON THE SET— TAKE VI

He is living in his own Kingdom,
we are merely unpaid extras
in his childish musings of reality.

Lord of all—
Now bow
Now pray

Whoosh! Water cascading
from top to bottom
inundating every living thing.

No
Escape

One God talking to another,
heads shake to the negative—
a tsk-tsk heard by the creator
he bristles and turns
no sign of disgust, “some learning
curves are longer in duration,
outcome is usually better
with more mistakes at the start.”

The second God laughed, “Ok
old man, we hear ya, scrap this
scenario?”

“Next project we'll use half AI-half human,
Yeah, that's what I said Adam.
You heard me correct.”
“Ok I'll ask Eve to get a pot of coffee on.”
We will be pulling an all-nighter
to get this under some kind of evolutionary
pattern that merged with third dimension
in the early twenty first century—
“Hurry!”

PSALMS AND SCI-FI

When I look at the record,
it seems spirit became
what it thought about.
Each thought and deed a vibration.

Make a joyful noise all ye lands.

The days and nights vibration creates
the plants, animals and all that
crawls, slithers, and flies on earth.

Know ye the Creator has made us; not we ourselves.

Vibration continues to increase
as humans are made by beings
further evolved and the maker
is injected into the creation.

Enter into the gates with Thanksgiving
and the courts with praise.

Through evolution vibrations rise,
atoms spin faster, creating energy
as mind speeds up, it unlocks
secrets unknown to lower vibratory patterns.

Mercy endures forever and faithfulness continues
through all generations.

All Creation made visible, material in third dimension.
Thoughts and deeds grow more and more dense,
as spirit precipitates into independent beings,
becoming a new source of the maker.

MEDITATION

Unnameable God, unknowable One
beyond stars and galaxies far flung

in the muscles and sinews of my body
I search for You.

My breath flows out to You on the wind,
my breath pulled in, tugs at You.

You who made me a questioner,
help me in my quest.

Unnameable God, unknowable One
be with me in my search.

EVENING HYMN

(AFTER E.E. CUMMINGS)

I thank you God
for the now cool touch of night
after the heat of the afternoon
for the stars gleaming above me
for the dark lace of olive leaves and pine boughs
edging the moonlit sky of this summer night
for the tender hearing of my body
harking to the high trill of crickets
singing beside the red shed
where a grapevine clings
leaves covering its treasures
pendulous green opals.

SHADOW CROSSING

A child asks, Mommy,
where was my shadow before I was born?

Her mother smiles
hesitates between realities
uncertain boundaries.
She needs time to think.

Let's ask Nonny.
They go to the patio
where grandmother sits
in her rain-weathered rocking chair.

Nonny, where was my shadow
before I was born?

Nonny smiles and closes her book.
Child, you ask too many questions.

But Nonny, Mama said to ask you
where my shadow was before I was born.

Well, then, I suppose your shadow
was in the same place where
mine will be when I am not here.

But, Nonny, my shadow is here
and your shadow will be sad
looking all around for mine.

Don't worry, Child,
shadows don't mind waiting.
Mine will be riding a silver horse
with a silver shadow.

MERMAID THOUGHTS

Probably I made a mistake
remaking my body—
the offering of my voice
too high a price
for a pair of spindly legs.

Mother said I'd be sorry—
every day I hear her voice
singing to me from the deep...
she was so sad,
begged me to stay home.

It's not win or lose
or good or bad,
they've all come together:
now I must abide
without counting mistakes...
without my land-green love
ocean peace did not matter.

SOUL QUESTION

Some folk know so well the location
of their salvation, carried
like proofs in a fine leather case.

My doubts and longings
I carry lightly
in a hand-stitched cotton bag

with tools of daily chores
weed pulling and planting
along my chosen road.

A redwood tree brings me joy
red bark and green boughs
piney aroma singing around me.

Dragonflies flit across a small pool.
I breathe in their flight
soar and dip and weave with them

could breath
that flies
be near my soul?

WONDERING ABOUT GOD

Jehovah, Christ, Allah
Brahman, Isha, Yahweh
the Great Spirit of American Indians
many more the names for God

Multitudes praying
asking, wanting, waiting
praising, blaming
reciting a litany of words
learned in the long ago

and I wonder-who-
-what is God-
-is God-

if in a prayer
answered
like a finger of God
touching me
a dream of reply

name is of no matter

in this vast universe
on your blue and green earth
in your search for connections
in all your colors
your varied languages
know as you are
I am

ENOUGH

I am meant to breathe and smile.
I am meant to grow human, the way an acorn is meant
to be an oak tree.

Enough of fetishes and materialism
Enough of verse in rhymes and measures
Enough of private clubs and endless vacation
Enough of clarity, control and self-improvement
Enough of who's who, what's what and where it's at
Enough of chattering, poking and blaming
Enough of alerts, dings and constant noise
Enough of emotion, logistics and expectations
Enough of oil spills, dead fish and dead birds
Enough of greed, the apocalypse, jingoism and Election Day
Enough of mystics, misogynists and misinformation
Enough of pointing out differences and glorifying privilege
Enough of the 289 ways of Christ
Enough of repeating old news over and over and over
Enough of selling doubt and fear all day long and doing it
again the next day
Enough of sentence structure and social hierarchies
Enough of spotlights becoming crosshairs
Enough of likes and efficiencies
Enough of self-pity, self-esteem and skin creams
Enough of ascribing sex, shaming intelligence and repeating
big lies
Enough of rectangles and refusing to
acknowledge the obvious
Enough of kindness coming in second

I want to stand tall, hear birds describe God.
I want to have the ground feel good when I go to lay down.

**RING YOUR BELL
(FOR THE RIGHT OF THE PEOPLE)
FOR MIGUEL HIDALGO**

Happiness is a state of grace, your friend holding your hand
when you need it, a joy that's way too often recognized only after
it's gone. It's plain all beings deserve to know that grace, all life
deserves that kindness, and all people are one family, yet every
day now that sort of love and respect is under attack.

Crying about injustice bitches up even more injustice, more
hurt, another horror-flashing headline, another set of children
left to fend for themselves, more killing, more dying, like a flood
everywhere, wow, how catastrophe and violence thrive. Our big
collective heart aches in action, in reaction, in inaction.

There's no reason to let what you cherish waste away. Ring your
bell, gather together, shout, act, now is the time. Come on, speak
out children, every parent, too. Say it loud, say it clear, you are
ready to make a change.

Drop hate, no more casting anyone aside because of a fear of
what they might be doing. Get free, no more praising ignorance,
intolerance and the disease of needing to fit in. Stop abuse, no
more tearing apart the planet, or anyone, for the sake of progress
or satisfaction. Be aware, no more leaving others to straighten
out the mess made by the choices you make.

It is the right of all people to organize and to free themselves of
every and any tyranny. Ring your bell, gather together, shout,
act, now is the time. To suffer the oppression of others, of what's
always been done, is no longer an option. The matter is urgent,
so is your determination, we-the-people, our collective happi-
ness, will not survive without it.

**KISSING BUILDS UP YOUR MOUTH
FOR WAVY GRAVY**

1.
Kissing builds up your mouth. The people most opposed to es-
capism are jailers. A poem is more than a series of words strung
together to sound nice or make someone feel good. The nine
billion names of god float, adrift in a conscious soup, under the
influence of an outmoded way of perceiving the world.

Take root, feel the dark of the new moon. Plant trees if for no
other reason than to be kind to those who come next. Plug in,
feel the flow of knowing right now. Make art if for no other rea-
son than to be a window for light to reflect off. Tune in, slow the
beat until the hum heals. Write if for no other reason than to
have your passion go where it needs to go.

Jump rope rhymes. A cake in the rain. One for the baby who
sucks his thumb. One for the bubble that's sure to come.

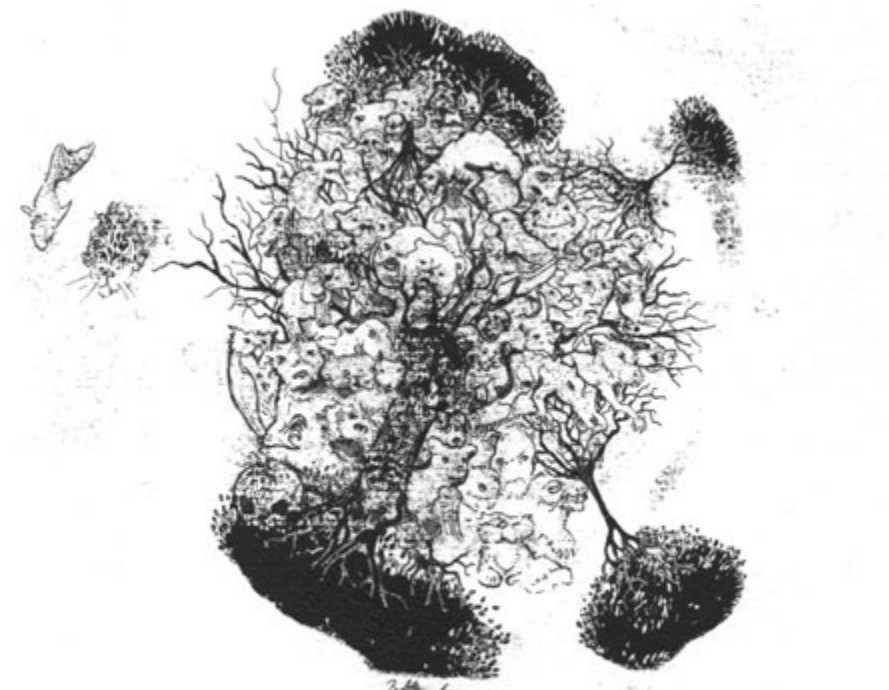


Illustration by Brock Alexander

2.
My cat looks at me like there's a bird singing inside of me. Speak
what makes you wow. Why are you here? One two three: to have
fun. One two three four: to tell the truth. One two three four
five: to sweep away the nastiness. One two three four five six: to
learn, to teach and move. One two three four five six seven: to
play, play, play and keep playing.

Every monkey is different and any monkey can lend a hand.
Tyranny releases its hold only to come back again. Oppression,
injustice and cruelty have no measure, no standards, no units
and no sonnets. We have no idea the influence we have on each
other but like planets and moons and stars, we bend space. We
each have gravity.

A glass tumbles, resists definition. There's no crash, no applause.
I trust my compass: the closer to home, the easier the way.

3.
I bow greet salute the person I am becoming. I bow greet salute
the person I have been. Shahbaz, shahbaz, shahbaz, the open
wing. I am I am. Relying on a measure of time is overwhelming,
unless I learn to slow down the crush, the moment, the inten-
sity, the show, the need, the emotion without resisting any of it.
Being clever is nothing. Being wet is.

I ripple, I spiral, I wear my incomplete knowledge of the true
nature of time and space with absolutely no sense of which
thoughts, which actions, make or don't make a difference. The
poem is the word, bouncing off the page into the ear, across
the heart and into the feet, your favorite dance, waiting for the
sound.

Bitterness is not a flavor in the Love Store. It's not even a top-
ping. Forgiveness is available in sprinkles, swirls, cones and
even comes in throwaway cups.

BENITO VILA

**THE ALL NEW DECLARATION
OF IN(TER)DEPENDENCE**

FOR CLAUDE PÉLIEU AND GIL SCOTT-HERON

It is here as far as the eye can see that the spirit burns. Now is the time for a new Providence. Love's been held hostage too long. Injustice is on parade. Decency overdosed, alone. Societies thrive on mutual benefit, mutual caring. Let everyone contribute by being who they are. To teach children anything else is a cut that never heals. To collect, stack, count and compare is how generations suffer. There's no hiding inside habits, hedges. Veils can be seen through by anyone curious enough to look. To keep acting out the interpreted truth is to invite in ghosts happy to let the real truth be known. Pluto makes sure of that.

Sea on fire. Lusty sickening laugh. Death by cocktail party cool. Choked living. To be solely concerned with how everything looks and what's coming from the bar. People on strings repeat the same scenarios, over and over. Chuckle you. The kingdom is dying. Nothing tender here. Common welfare gone in blocked politics. Democracy swallowed in favoritism. I don't want to give you my time. To die crushed by a culture afraid to give kindness, doing for likes, afraid to make love, desperate to make sales, afraid to see that what's inconvenient and hard may be the thing that saves us all. It makes me want to holler.

I declare our government, our times, our incorporations have become destructive and have made true equality for all-that-is suffer needlessly. Our innermost selves have been misled, lied to, made to dumb down, and I will be disposed no more. I abolish the forms to which I have become accustomed, because it is my right, my duty, to throw off the tyranny of that which makes a candid world impossible. Nothing but the public good matters. The noise you make is no different than the noise I make.

And I need you to be free to pursue your happiness. I'm going to die on the same planet you are, this Aquarian dreamhouse.

I appeal to an idea supreme, not yet made flesh and in no need of judgment, of valor, or praise, or proving. I ask you to leave one thing behind that creates a sense of play, a moment of joy, for the yet unborn, for those still to come here wide eyed. I will do anything to ease their burden of being ridiculously human. Creatures of the air cannot survive without being able to breathe. The earth and all its peoples need clean water and each other to thrive. How that happens is on us. Nothing will save what I hold dear unless I give it to you first. You will not be able to stay home, brother. The revolution is live.

**THE GOAL OF CIVILIZATION
IS TO END DESPERATION**

The goal of civilization is to end desperation. We need each other for that. Not for the reasons that we think we do, but merely because we do. The need to be in the forefront of nothing in particular, without worry, completes most societies. It makes for closeness.

Once upon a time is the stuff of fairy tales, opiates and hypnotism. There's more truth to be had in bad decisions, or a big eye opening up, showing you you. Anything as neat and tidy as once upon a time has reasons for forgetting where you want your ashes sprinkled.

S. M. CARUTHERS

HEARTSWORN

SMC
Cocoon of sound
Heart wrapped in cotton
When I'd rather
The heart lay raw
And beating strongly
In the winds of passion
In the waves of salty and torn
Mermaid, heartsworn, bone struck
Feeling.

TELL ME I'M NO WRITER

Tell me I'm no writer
Tell me to bury myself with no headstone
Tell me to stay quiet in the corner
And not speak my words
'Cause my tales circle my own totem
And sing to the sky.
Tell me no more
to stay where I am
Can't
The dahlia seed is burst
Its roots burrow down
Its crested head rises up
And soon it will grow to the sun
Tell me no more
Why you're asking, what for,
as my strums wrap the song 'round your ear.

ODE TO GOD'S CHILD
PHILLIP BULLARD

Twelve in the family
Sleep in anticipation
Of the giantess Katrina
Stepping past them
But she sweeps Biloxi
With the tide,

And wakes the babes
Screaming in cold water
Feet rising to five,

Phillip does not falter,
Cradling the littlest
And floating the eldest sister,
The other swimmer out the window
Catches the boat still afloat,

Then he turns back
Words softening his twin's terror
Coaxes her fingers from the wall, frozen in error.

Still returns once again, to his mother
And gray-haired grandma ready to die,
Not able to swim
Walking like Jesus on the waters,
Their feet resting on swamped furniture,
Like a branch, like a limb, to freedom.

Phillip holds each hand
Easing them out;
Saving eight children, four adults
Winning the round
Surviving the bout
Biloxi Boy, thirteen years old, a man,
The kind of hero we can understand.
The kind of god we can understand,
The kind we can commend.

TROLLING WHEN NOBODY'S LOOKING

A handsome God out trolling the universe drops by
and sits beside you at the dinner table.
He's not well versed in poetry but knows tons about myth.

Pieces of your spaghetti ship off for Alaska,
and the puzzled God asks, *Where the hell is Alaska?*
With little hope of illuminating him on earth's geography,

you stick to your solar system and say, *Far off as Neptune.*
He fondly speaks of Neptune's rapturous winds
and inquires, *Do you want to troll the unknown with me?*

Your response, perhaps curt, implies you
already troll the unknown using nymphs as bait,
your spaghetti reminding you it's no worm.

Such a wise guy this God who lectures, *Line control is a problem
with nymphs.* Fed up, and somewhat well fed,
escape is your only option. You've been outwitted,

and you determine that the next time you dine
with a God you'd best brush up on your angler techniques.

STAR YODELER

You wonder where the days go,
as they dissolve into the backwash of time.

Memories, their edge,
salty aftertaste. And who
doesn't recall better times,

like when the jackal of night
shifted persona and bewitched
even the stars?

*

Didn't we kiss as we
rested side by side
in the country of Long Ago?

You were a hoodlum lover,
and ours were only cursive transactions.

*

There's an ace in night's hole
and you're still looking for it.

EAR TROUBLE

My aunt led her sons around by the ear.
Poor ear that sometimes tore.
The boys would often holler
that their ear was being wrenched from their heads.
This to no avail.
When one misbehaved,
it was always the ear she first grabbed.
At the time I wondered if their ears
would grow into misshapen flowers,
if an ear could seek refuge
in a secret hideout.
Whenever she approached me,
I'd duck, run the opposite way.
It wasn't easy to read her intention.
I wondered how the ears slept at night,
what comfort they took from the darkness—
or if by morning they'd look like
busted Dahlia piñatas.

CONTAGIOUS WITH STARS

Pick a pocket of nighttime and everywhere you reach is deep with light.
The gods caution that to hold a luminosity you must strip yourself of pretense.
These days such deities are on vacation, bungee jumping, in Uranus or Mercury.

Who sleep-walked with the Milky Way, drunk on distance, its vast expanse?
I wanted to write with a torch but ended up with a stubby pencil with no eraser.
(Maps are of no use when you hibernate.) Because the sky is contagious with stars,

nighttime's best for viewing that dust which is us. I want my ashes to create
their own planet. One where people or whatever life-form takes root promises
to live in peace. I can't cry for what we are. But I'm saddened by what we are not.

WHEN ANYTHING

I'm a stubborn appeasement,
a candle that loves
its next to last flicker, that licks

air like a God in heat.
Watch how I flaunt discomfort
trip over my feet,
choke on date pits. *The Times*

unsettle me. Is this my country?
Housed in tent cities,
thousands of refugees.

This, the US, a place
where sheltering means
no surveillance, no oversight.

When anything can happen
in your country,

what's your country's worth?

MY SPIRIT WANDERS

Want to escape, live
Repeating many mistakes
Looking for myself

Capturing the cloud
My spirit wanders the world
Discarding false gods

Seek to learn magic
Closer to spiritual
When we are silent

CURES FOR ALL
BUT DEATH

Your presence, your voice
invade my soul constantly
I feign listening

Lost following scent
Do I know where I'm going
Black hole sucks me in

Pass through centuries
Wrestling with the mermaid
Get whacked from behind

Seeing echoes fly
Cast off debris from my dreams
Cures for all but death

FLY THROUGH ETERNITY

Blinded by dust
Curtain of dread weighs heavy
When can I escape this ghost town
Find shelter from the wind

Walk away from past ghosts
Brush dust off my clothes
Lift my head
Look towards the light

Sunlight breaks through fog

Music of wind rustles leaves
Renewal
Newts emerge
Birds twitter in trees
Plants stand at attention
Share the bounty

In my dreams
I can still hike ten miles
In my dreams
I fly through eternity

BEFORE I SLEEP

Last words
Drifting thoughts
Dead calm sets in
Thoughts come to a stand still

Then clouds form
Wind howls
Gods rage
My boat battered by past storms
Thoughts whipped against the shore

Awaken with a start
Mind a jumble
Scattered shards collecting in my hands

Running through my fingers

Morning finds thoughts deformed
Repair damaged rigging
What direction to set sail?

But the dogs bark
Neighbors yell
Music blasts
Do I need all this?

GROUND BROWN

ground brown
still with chill
he digs a long ditch
seeds drop into depths

he spills with fill
awaits time's mercy

green peeks
leafs out

nubs become buds
buds to balls red orange yellow!

dahlias drink in the sky

THE SOUND OF A DAHLIA

nothing so perfect
as the sound of a dahlia in bloom
its many triangled petals ping!

overlapping overcolored overabundance
each blossom hugging the next
pinks petal into ballgown tufts

cupped gently into sprays
dipped in inner intonations
of white and buttercup

oh, to be a dahlia resonating of life!

to plunk up from the earth
a tuber strumming
a solitary note of green, holding tone . . .

scales of notes play out
in many a petalled pleasure
enunciating a timbre of color

holding the bulk of beauty
(regardless its weight, overbearing)
head held high

reverberates compassion
each paper-thin angle vibrating
in unison

the sound of the dahlia
a timpani of symphony
exalted!

OCCUPATION: MERMAID

Answering an ad: long hair, no ambition, loves to dance and swim. Location: beachside resort

I always wanted to be a Mermaid—
The mystique, the immersion in water,
frolicking with otters, attractive long wavy hair and lashes,
songs and breasts that make men crash at sea.
Day upon day in the warm sun, cool water, out-stretched
beach and rocks. Such beauty and freedom.
No demands. No worries

But thinking it over, Mermaids are scaley and probably
smell like trout. Have nothing really to do:
no true purpose to fulfill. Cannot walk around
with that obnoxious tail, somehow a merging of legs into a
whale-like flipper. Not adaptable; not even a waddle. Feeling
imprisoned in the water. No dance steps or cartwheels.
Yet incredible undersea acrobatics! It would be
a considerable trade-off.

A Sealion with hair, I suppose. Finding a floating dock
in San Francisco, being chased by young children
who want to take a selfie with you, tossing you mackerel
and anchovies. A good day is eating fish bones
from a lumpsucker or octopus whole. You poop where you
drink; where you live. Who would you talk to? I have never
heard of anyone reporting mermaid discussions. Only
drunken sightings and incessant squells of the sea.

**THE END OF A LONG HOT TRAIL
NEAR CAMP AUGUSTA**

the creek gurgled in small sparkling
pockets,

trickling chanting songs
nature chimes echoing
Oms of the foothills
plunging past grand orange boulders
shoulders sprung of pines and burls

churning clear water chasing sunlight
running across, down, circumventing huge
granite sheets of grey, black, beige pyrite
specks of history compressed into solid beds

young girls laid out like mermaids

untangling goddesses
braided hair of granite
dripping towers—
toes spray
into falling
ice onto
cold golden
creek shoulders

other sirens crouched around
swirling shiny circles
with their fingertips

chatting amidst the bubbling blooming
many were immersed, drenched or drying

We could barely feel our legs after the long hike
hot dehydrated and dusty
we desired nothing more
than to enter this enchantment
not a word was said as we dropped our gear
and gratefully
flowed into the dream

THREE-EYED GODDESS

Divine Mother, on your tiger, fortifies my heart.
Slay demons of ego with your ten arms thwart.
Let your left eye control my greatest weakness-
Desire the right spur me on to righteousness.

Goddess Durga, whose middle eye of knowledge-
central align, alight my path on the road to virtue.
With all the people of the world, I meet in tutelage
I am in your bosom drowning, for breath anew.

MY SIREN

I recollect assisting all your delirious needs
your helpless cries on my knees
it was like holding a gaoled butterfly,
a moth fighting to be instantaneously free
but it was all smoke and mirrors
with a reach that went far beyond me.
And once cast aside like a chrysalis shell;
I, who was her accidental saviour,
she'd no further use for me.
Like a ship leaving the harbour, she anchored
just offshore, with bilge water leaking,
slowly, sinking fatal, she turned to me for help
only to further drown me before I finally broke free.

GIVE ME SOME FIXED TRANQUILLITY

O Lord Rama, karma, from a lost-little bee
all eyes, O dear me, what is it, I-just-can't see.
So busy with honey, what do I prepare esprit
what does this life honour me?
Living amongst this apiary
Is there any chance of some fixed tranquillity?
O Supreme Being, I hope you aren't a fairy-tale
O man of virtue, should not all look up to you
hoping they can find our better selves behind a veil.
Yes, we model our beliefs on self-improvement
but isn't it just the fulfilment-
of another kind of disillusionment
O little bee, karma, O Lord Rama,
is this weary kaleidoscopic picture
I set before you part of which I am, who I might be.
If so, lend me your karma, Lord Rama,
Endow - daub-like honey serenity to a lost little bee,
and grant him, me some fixed, forest glade tranquillity.

THE WHITE ELEPHANT DREAM

After the lotus blossom flowered
the White elephant floats out of her sepals
seven days later, Queen Maya died.
The White elephant doesn't mix with jackals.

He doesn't witness death, hunger, or sickness
not until he's in his mid-to late-twenties
not until he wanders outside the palace walls
witness's people-suffering dying eddies.

Does he question his mortality?
Now faced with a man's dead severed skull
does the White elephant his death contemplate
how can an emancipated body like a lotus unfurl?

Find spiritual harmony - enlightenment.
How does one reach a state-of-true Nevada?
After some six years of profound hardship,
he's no closer to understanding finding karma.

Not until he sat meditating under the Bodhi Tree
many days, not until he was shown a middle way
did he find what he was searching for?
Never would he be born again, be anyone's protégé.

He found peace in the blossoms of his serenity
where the petals of the Bodhi tree rained on his brow
he found an explanation that explained everything
the dream his mother had was, after all, like the Tao.

NOIR II

System served with murder homage
any damage suffered for replacement
storm the old hotel for ripped hulks
choices rejected then breached with rhyme
well and good this viral approach
maybe tend the horn for decibel advantage
only in name do ends furl
blaze pending a skid with cloaked stands
in conclusion the bottom out of kilter
there are rights and there are rhythms
nothing but echoes from petulant banners
clot those edges for dead-play answers
file birdsong to ice tendrils
we're talking awkward among fools
a squelched path a locked malignancy
cut the odds to full terminus
roll it over for the plug-in
marked and sealed with flutter veils
mentions in the back-haul heard away
head south to Lithium Flats
a brand of midnight to the light the land
gas and guns and circuit scores
remove tape before fondling
batteries not included.

OBSERVATIONAL DRIFT

Heavy proclamations require a stout soapbox
from the backroom bored drinkers
demand another round
all this talk of nothing brings tears to their eyes
more bombast never stirs a solemn ear
vows are vows no coaxing will undo
slipping through the silence with cantos
and the unruly acolyte
three-finger shots defenseless from acoustic blowback
agents are numerous among the bellowing bards
raconteurs infiltrate the circuit
the picture's complete with unfettered bile
an evening of thrust designed to dull the organs.

TEMPERAMENTAL HAZARD

Pass the semtex my face has melted
in the borderlands futures fade
remove that holster who's the militant now
mountains on the Moon in stone coated dreams
our lists are long so sleep it off
encircle the camp with hand-helds
ship the sediment back east
there's ills for pills when light returns
yesterday is just Mars on ice
suspicious events infect the populous
deadly fumes from banned words
get a leg up the Empire's crumbling
prisoners of our own making
can feel the sheen this far from the coast
free to expire otherwise consumed
head-counts gone viral
better peel the scales there's leakage in the armor.

RUNGS THAT AREN'T

Saved by the bell you might imagine
light-show down at the plant with apparitions
that body looks familiar lit with tracers
nothing left but troubles unhinged
tally the errors with laughs and swerves
an unsteadiness immaculate enough to sag your boards
everyday call-in alibis for survival
late-stage dropout to lighten the tension
screw the screeds and tamp the fuses
definitive upside within the cell
gone undercover thorn-bent and opaque
your cloak of smoke my best advice
a slight blemish to the handle with slipped tubes
maybe time for identity exchange to calm the curves
you could go home when the music's right
focused vistas no longer in sight.

BRAIN TSUNAMIS CLOSE THE HATCH

Code me in the punk has funk
subliminal footwork mined for grind
functions normalized in later analysis
cribbed for leaks with random pauses
clogs reamed for toggle tweakers
a full-court rush in bone erection
sworn to pop and bop these retro retreads
run a lap to warm the numb
damage control with miles to go
on the hook it's rally time
flying whites and jazzed encounters
my blood with heft hypnotic
caught a whiff now swing it
the old boy can for sure exit
brought to a boil with no gamble wasted.

S. A. GRIFFIN

KOWALSKI

FOR BARRY NEWMAN (1930–2023)

Barry Newman has left the building
but lives on as cinematic anti-hero
Kowalski, built for speed
tearing up the road behind the wheel of his ghostly white
1970 Dodge Challenger R/T 440 Magnum in Vanishing Point
Mile High to Golden Gate in 15 hours
in an all bets are off game of
you bet your life

Cleavon Little as blind D.J. Super Soul
the divine Virgil with an ear to the police band
sightless seer guiding Kowalski thru the inferno
of Vietnam era America

Kowalski nailed to the cross tops
buzzing to the desert radio
grieving the loss of a love burning inside out
decorated vet on the run from bad cops
and the horror of a war that nobody wanted

in time you would work the other side of the law
on the small screen as Petrocelli receiving
well-earned Emmy and Golden Globe nods

but you will always be the lone driver
blazing blue highways beyond borders
where Kowalski lives!
too damn fast for the law
too damn cool for the heat
too big a heart for this small world
as the camera pans

a dog barks
a siren wails
and it is Sunday morning in America

and this poem is named *Kowalski*
first, last and only
for Barry Newman as the last American hero
smiling into the lens
vaporizing into the *molecule of speed*
the vanishing point
where sooner or later we all meet
where all good stories begin
at the end



Collage: *Never Know Where You Are Going* by S.A. Griffin

TODD BOYD

TO THE SAD YOUNG GOD LOVING RUSSIAN GIRL FROM UZBEKISTAN,

Who believed in mermaids, dahlias, gods
and marrying a righteous man,

Whose god and man brought her to America
Both abandoning Her to the heathens
of religious doubt and domestic abuse,
Kick her Hope and Dreams into the
background, her mother would come all the
way and save her.

Like the puritans and pilgrims so long ago
Escaping the spiritual whims of royal
European loose knit Christianity,
Later, dawning on them all that in the forests
of America
Resided, for eons, dark skinned heathens
well versed in pantheism,
Not willing to acknowledge saviors nor
repentance.
They would have to be taken by force,

Over time, guns and gods shattered the
shelter of nature's innocence, pushed the
victors flight further beyond the borders of
god's light, Into the darkness of devils
delightful supremacy,
Like his hands upon her throat too often did.

GOD'S MAN AT POETRY PARK.

He stands alone, In a long, dreary colored overcoat, like one of
the Earp boys at the OK Corral.

Arms outstretched, head down, as in opposition to the sunrise.
He's come like Poe's Raven to warn "John 16, Corinthians 12,"
the similes, metaphors tumble from his mother tongue, over
and over again.

Quotes, curses against the worldly poet's verses,
Carved by acetylene torches heat into tall rusty steel plates,
like rusty remnants from Hiroshima's atomic fate,
or the remainder of the horror of Dachau's infamous gate.
Arbeit Macht frei.
"Work Will Set You Free."

He stares blindly fixed ahead, his biblical news spews forth,

"John 16, Corinthians 12"
he screams to invisible ears,

"Jesus is leaving us and not being heard,
He will Return as lightning and thunder, His wrath cast upon
this earth,"

There is nothing, othing like these Words in my best songs,
Always about leaving something behind, they are.
Going where I want to go without any heavenly adversity.
The shortest distance between two lines,

History, the experts tell us,
There is only repetition, never remorse,
No earthly changing, merely death's life-long discourse,
With this world's sinners
Each of us living alone throughout this temporal, trying time,
once alive, once dead,

Never to be repeated or second chances
Like a snowflake, we each live such short, unique lives,
A funhouse of smoke and mirrors.

Continued

TODD BOYD

“I say unto you,
These things I have spoken to you,” he goes on,
Poetry and verse carved out to memorize, not to eulogize, as
permanent as I can make it,
In (Hard steel).

“That you may not be scandalized.
John 16, Corinthians 12”



Illustration by Todd Boyd

Otherwise, let the End begin now,
Four horsemen and the Beast, be set free,
Loosen their restraints of Faith, Hope, and Charity,
Merciless, they hate the sinners but love the sins.

As angels, Dandelion seeds float like micro -parasols in upon a breeze,
They come onto him, and He sings their praises,
Of the Glorious Bloodshed to come, repeating,
“John 16, Corinthians 12,” he screams,
into the setting sun.
All day long he stands, yet no one else comes to listen nor mourn,
The world is transfixed, busy watching
an ordinary man murdered before their eyes,

John 16, Corinthians 12

DAHLIA AND THE GARDEN FLOWER GOD

Above, a circus of color,
Sunrise hued Dahlia blossom,
A Tawny Skipper, a genus of small butterfly, hovers flutters,
lands, savors sweet nectar, a lovely day watching.
The garden comes alive.

Below, at the foot, near the dahlia stem,
The shredded wings of a swallowtail lie,
a honey bee discarded, a graveyard of sorts,
Suddenly, a fraction of a second,
The little skipper butterfly is taken by surprise,
Invisible, camouflaged in the dahlia crown,
Green, sticklike, robotic arms, alien eyes, swiveling head,
A mantis arrives.
To this feast of garden delights.
Maybe only a lesser god,
Nonetheless,
Nature’s balancing act.

JENNIFER PICKERING

THE MERMAID OF COTTONWOOD SLOUGH

If it weren’t for my dad, my sister Louise wouldn’t have met
and had her heartbroken by Nixie, and if it weren’t for
Nixie, I wouldn’t be here to tell this tale.

Dad, who went by JD, was a rolling stone and wherever
he landed it had to be near water. Our mom, Delilah, and
dad were divorced. My sister and I lived with mom. She liked
to stay put and didn’t give a hoot about living by water, but
by coincidence she did, on a great river. Its source was a high
mountain far to the north that some native tribes said was the
center of the universe. This river, Bohema-Mem, was impor-
tant, but besides that it was fun to explore its gazillion secret
sloughs. Luckily dad had a new job in the same city where we
lived. He’d been appointed by the governor to run a program
that helped single moms. The governor’s official portrait was
painted in an expressionistic style and hung at the State Capi-
tol Museum with the boring realistic portraits of the others.
One day Dad took me to see it because he knew I was an artist
and always carried around a sketch book.

Dad said, “Jolene, that portrait is one of a kind just like
you are.”

So, Dad got this idea to buy a houseboat, christened *The
Lady Swims*, and live docked on the river at the Sturgeon Ma-
rina not far from the area where the famous writer Joan Did-
ion once lived. He was saving money to buy a cabin by a lake.

My sister, Louise, was already a writer and kept journals.
She hoped the spirit of Joan Didion would inspire her writ-
ing. Recently she’d told me she liked girls not boys. We were in
the room that we shared on the houseboat just after my 12th
birthday when she blurted it out.

“You are old enough to hear this, I’m gay.”

I pretended to act surprised, but I knew already. I’d seen
her holding hands with one of her friends on a camping trip

last summer. She swore me to secrecy, but of course I told my
best friend.

She’d said, “I’ll tell mom and dad when the time is right.”

But I’m pretty sure they knew because I’d overheard them
talking about it.

I’d had crushes on two boys but was new to these feelings.
In a few years I’d be boy crazy, and my sister would live with
her girlfriend in Berkeley. She’d dated a few young men, in the
past, but they didn’t rock her world.

We visited Dad on his 54 ft. Leisure Kraft again in May
when the banks and islands of the sloughs were still green and
dotted with the pink lips of Delta Tule Peas and carpeted with
poppies.

After dropping anchor in Cottonwood Slough where dad
thought the mudbugs were plentiful, everyone aboard began
to relax. Dad said it was just like you had finished a yoga class
or a long swim. Time stood still. The wind was calm, and my
sister and I were melting on chase lounges beneath the sun
on the top deck of the houseboat. Dad was doing something
with mudbug traps and then was going to tinker with the
houseboat’s engine. When completely melted, we’d jump into
the slough to cool off. I scanned the island in the distance
with Dad’s binoculars while Louise was busy scribbling in her
journal. So far, I spied a coyote with two pups camouflaged by
stands of tule and a heron hanging out in the tallest cotton-
wood that towered over the island. And then something else
caught my eye, a young woman with long black hair swim-
ming offshore of the island’s sandy beach.

“Louise, Louise, there’s a someone swimming off the is-
land!”

She looked up, from her writing, flung off her sunglasses
and said, “What nonsense are you imagining now?”

“No, quick, look she’s still swimming.”

“Okay, okay” she said, grabbing the binoculars and focus-
ing them. “Oh, you are right.” “Wanna’ take a field trip?”

“Da...d we are canoeing to the island.”

Continued

JENNIFER PICKERING

“Yeh, okay be careful. Life jackets!”

We didn’t make good time in our canoe because we paddled against a determined current, but in front of us the young woman still treaded water. Damn she had some endurance.

Louise called out to her, “Everything okay?” She didn’t answer and abruptly disappeared beneath the murky surface. We paddled closer throwing a life preserver toward the swirling water where she’d just been.

“Oh God sis, she’s drowning,” I said, pulling on my goggles and bracing for the cold.

“Jolene, no, wait!” she cried out.

The water below is like peering into amber. I thought I saw the swish of the tail of a large fish, but there weren’t sharks this far inland were there? Then something sharp caught my foot and yanked me under. I tried to get free from the ropey entanglement of roots that held me prisoner, and partly succeeding, shot up like a bottle rocket gulping for air. Louise shoved an oar in my direction which I failed to grasp and again I was pulled under. The water felt less cold, I was getting drowsy and didn’t feel like struggling anymore. On top-side Louise prepared to dive in and rescue me, but her efforts and my nap were interrupted by two strong hands freeing my foot, pulling me up into the air and then swiftly depositing me on the beach. Someone pounded on my back as I spit up half of the slough’s water and turned me over rubbing my limbs to warm them. Shakily I sat up. Two emerald eyes came into focus filled with concern.

“Am I dead and gone to heaven?” I asked.

“No, you are okay and safe now,” she murmured in an unfamiliar accent. “I’m Nixie.”

As my brain fog cleared, I noticed Nixie had a weird skirt on that had a fish tail attached to it. It’s neon orange and metallic blue material shimmered in the May sunlight. Her skin was olive, and her black hair was secured in a coil by a smooth bone on top of her head.

And then, Louise was there beside us. “Jolene are you

okay?” she asked, covering my shoulders with a beach towel.

“Yeh, I think so.”

“What the Hell! Who are you and why are you wearing that ridiculous costume?” Louise demanded.

“Don’t be afraid. This is not a costume, and the myth is true, I’m a mermaid, and my name is Nixie. I am here because a mother whale is stranded with her calf, and I am going to help guide them back out to the sea.”

“Okay... , sure whatever,” Louise replied uncertainly.

“Your sister will be fine.”

“And you know this because?”

“I have the gift of foresight, but I must return to the slough as I can only stay on land so long before my scales dry out.”

“Oh, you really are a mermaid. Wait!” Louise called out. “Thank you, we will come back tomorrow,” but, Nixie was already under the water.

The next morning, we told Dad what had happened, but he wasn’t convinced.

“Girls, you know there is no such thing as mermaids.”

“Here, look!” thrusting the binoculars in his hands.

“Well, by gosh Jolene, that mermaid has a whale of a tail. I need to give her a great big thank you for saving my youngest daughter. Let’s give her a visit.”

The Lady Swims sputtered toward the island with me at the helm. Nixie slid into the water and swam towards the boat. Dad thanked Nixie profusely for saving his daughter’s life and he offered to make up part of the whales’ armada going as far to where the fresh water mingles with seawater. Then, we’d turn back. We would be a decoy. Nixie’s one requirement was that we take no photographs of her tail. The Mermaid told us she spoke telepathically to living plants and animals and described our plan to the mother whale whose name was sung in notes difficult for humans to understand. Nixie said the mother wanted to thank us for making the journey with them.

The trip would take several days, and we’d follow sloughs less traveled by humans. My sister and I asked if we could ride on the mother whale’s back, and she obliged our frivolous request. This turned out to be far better than riding a horse. Nix-

ie and Louise seemed to be hitting it off because I saw them under the moonlight canoodling. We reached the place where the delta met the sea and bid our farewells. Louise was heartbroken, but Nixie suggested that they could meet in Capitola in August.

Nobody believed our tale, but Dad loved to tell it at family gatherings. This is the first time it has been written down so others might enjoy it as well.

KARMA DAHLIA

She tried to grow Karma in a pot,
all summer it reached for the sun,
sprouted leaves like small wings,
its stem stretched higher
hungry for sunlight,
braced by a sturdy stake
on its journey.

Ascending each day
through May into
the first fall rain,
orange buds readied, wrapped
in rosettes of leaves,
with too much shade, sudden frosts,
never destined to flower.

Come spring she tended the pot,
failure another chance to succeed,
separated the quintuplets,
planted them in a garden
with amended soil, abundant sun,
an offering to Goddess Bhudevi

Turned over her thoughts,
meditated, prayed
on darkness, rebirth,
good Karma.

AMY HOSKINS

SPEAKING EARTH

The world is alive. Not a thing
Apart from us
It is the source of life itself
We are made of the Earth
Stardust
It is part of us
We belong to it
Heritage. History.
Depletion of next natural resources
Short term gain. Not stewardship.
The Earth teaches us still
Even though under attack
Gracious acts of preservation
Seasons, bees, songbirds, trees
Flowers, fruits and vegetables
Of all kinds to play with
Grow, delight in.
All the mysteries collide
Sun drenched grasses hypnotize
Bright fairies, moths, bees
The tiniest things take flight
Lightning bugs fly in through
Open windows
This is the season we wait for
All winter long
We crave warmth
Sun, flowers, vegetables
Herbs for our scrambled eggs
Biscuits
The very Sun

WEATHER THE STORMS

The sky is breathing.
 The flower is frozen in shadowed brass.
 Just resting there, waiting for the bees of
 Summer to arrive. The magic time never
 Left us in Winter, just less fabulous than
 The other seasons.
 I started to jest
 At the ferocity of the frosty shafts of
 January wind, and It became
 fiercer in my face.
 The world is on fire, do you
 Recognize? Do you feel my pulse
 When we hold hands? I feel you
 Pulsing into my skin. Safe, here.
 I'm on fire with anger. What do I
 Do with that?
 The Ice storm cometh, and it's in your
 Soul. Weather outside is also
 Indoors. We are the weather.
 Check your horoscope for a heads
 up on how you'll be today.
 The pleasantries are
 Gone. Tell me how you really feel.
 She gags on life. Spirit in rags so holy.
 Soul dancing with King Sunny Ade in my
 Earbuds. Baby wants to be a dancer.
 Baby Boy wants to be a basketballer. What
 Have we created as a model for our children?
 Teach them love is a choice, a verb.
 Kama Sutra. Mata Hari. Tiger Lily.
 Count your blessings you're not an
 Imposter. Spy.
 She never lies. It cost her.
 Who doesn't lie not to hurt others?

Who lies to themselves in order to
 fit in?
 Knows no other way?
 We must learn about real love
 to love ourselves, then others.
 Inside out. Truth telling.
 Not hide inside our hearts.
 The birds are adapting faster than we are.
 Chirping finely from the ancient Magnolia tree.
 We call her Mama Tree because she hosts so many
 nests in evergreen habitat all year.
 Meanwhile, elite miniaturists compete in a
 head to head challenge in social media.
 I choose to watch the sky instead.
 Where I resisted I am Spirit. Orange Sutra.
 Astounded by the good people in our lives.
 That love without lies still exists.
 I love Spring, but remember Autumn.
 I love Summer, but I know Winter's wait.
 I turned bad juju into silver bracelets.
 The Buddha is all around us.
 Circling love and light in the darkness.
 Small airplane noises fade into horizons.
 Not everyone gets in. Do I trust you?
 What was makeup for, anyway?
 Trying to be perfect, when we already
 Are, in our unique imperfection.
 The magnolia is so strong. Yesterday I
 cringed, watching the winds bend her
 Mottled torso, glossy green leaves.
 Today she enjoys a plentiful rainstorm.
 Lovely thunder rumbles after brief
 Lightning.
 Unspoken weight in the Mala beads.
 We seem on the brink of war again.
 Yet there is peace in my heart, and
 Hope.

MAGIC AND BLESSINGS

Glassine sky. Lily beings. Summer flashbacks. Rainy Day,
 Dream Away, says Jimi Hendrix. With my fingers I play
 with the sound. Lace is made at the edges of the sea where
 it meets the sand. Escape into Alice in Wonderland. Escape
 into metaphor, magic realism.

My heart is still living out of a suitcase since I had to leave
 you. It's the floor where we live, you and me. We will walk
 this floor together. We are blessed. A dense wall of inaction.
 The planets are misaligned for today. A proclivity of angles,
 when we need a multitude of angels. Culture as tensile as
 as a cat, beginning to growl and hiss, turning in on itself.
 She says, don't keep giving me things. I'm trying to let go.
 Go lightly. The first truly deep breath of the day. Azucar.
 Sugar. I'm gestating something in my womb. A voice that
 will describe it, make it so. I laugh from a deep place. I
 laugh at pain, when it becomes ridiculous. I used to dream
 of the conversations we could all have one day. If only there
 was more progress. We could create a universal salon. An
 assembly line for cherry tomatoes, green onion, cucumber.
 Potatoes. Slow food. A rhythm in the doing. Blooming in
 the Sun. Audrey Hepburn in ballet flats. This is magic, be-
 cause I say it is, lighting a magic candle. Sitting on the floor,
 I can't be still for want of old screams that never came out.
 It takes a lot of time to talk it out, unwind the spools.

Harvesting herbs, I feel more at peace. Simply tangible.
 Therapeutic. Oregano, thyme, rosemary. Lavender, mints.
 For cooking, for tea, this soothes me. The rain will come.
 We will wait.

STILLPOINT

We are gentle farmers at last. The anger helps me peel the
 ginger. We construct languages around concepts of time.
 Things that have been completed in the past pluperfect.
 Around philosophy and war. Love and heretics. To create
 beauty in a time of war breaks the heart wide open. Joy re-
 mains. Persists. Rides butterflies, winds. Living among new
 encyclopedic fiber highways, of the mind. Anything can be
 found in the new jungle of robots. What is want? For free-
 dom? Water? A place to live? What more can we ask of life
 than to be blessed?

Bob Dylan sings about long gone highlands. Long gone
 prairie, forest, fields. There is a joy in being kind to all be-
 ings, all energy. I charge this day with love and light. Hugs
 and prayers and the good trouble fight. Incense, hibiscus,
 selenite. Holy sandstone from Monterey on my wrist. A
 green glass heart, a shell with a pearl. Silver octopus. Lord
 help us! Let us not become extinct. Platypus. Green Nau-
 tilus.

I love how the Sun feels on my skin. What would the balle-
 rina do with the Humpty Hump dance? Everything comes
 from deep down. I can't help but dance, feel the Earth be-
 neath my feet. When you listen to the music, it takes you
 somewhere. Follow your feet with the rhythm and your
 hips find where it goes. The roots chase the water all the
 way down. Find the tap root and center. Grow up toward
 the Sun. Reach in all directions.

THE LAST MERMAID

She was found in the least disturbed refuge for sea turtles and monk seals, old-growth forests of sponge and black coral.

The ancients knew the paths where mermaids crossed, using a three-quarter moon, the Pleiades of the western sky, and the lunar rainbow as guides.

Complex and rare, lunar rainbows require ideal conditions for its rainbows to glow. Stealth key in the art of ambush—

Tiger sharks guarded these crossings. The dark side of a century of plastics accumulate in the deep corners of the earth, from poles

to the Equator, crusty land surfaces to sediments on the sea floor. The fading boundary of the last mermaid's existence identified

beside fishing lines, nets and ropes—evidence of her last hours spent untangling entangled monk seal pups, sea turtles

and shore birds—what bones remained among the fine grains of microplastic, carefully gathered, and returned to the sweet salt of the sea.

BLACK DAHLIA

He dropped her off at the Biltmore Hotel in downtown Los Angeles,

her body lent to him without gesture of reclamation,

though it could be argued which half of her body wasn't hers

before being cut completely in half, afflicted as she was by

growing up in a single-parent household where custody is only provisional,

media and news reporters providing posthumous celebrity status,

completing her striking black hair with form-fitting black clothes

branding the once aspiring actress as *the Black Dahlia*.

The meaning of dahlias are mostly positive—their symbolism as varied

as their colors—creamy whites and pale pinks to sunny yellows and crimson reds.

White dahlias symbolize innocence and purity, red dahlias betrayal and dishonesty.

Interestingly, there are no true black dahlias—sensationalism inventing dark burgundy

as black.

ORB WEAVER

The James Webb Space Telescope with its 18 exquisitely positioned mirrors and use of infrared light spectrum, gathers light from a universe past—a distance of over 13 billion years.

Light takes one second to travel from the Moon to the Earth.

Southern Ring nebula, 2,000 light-years away, surrounds a dying star, its foamy orange gas cloud like the decidual cast of uterine tissue, throws seeds to grow new stars.

Carina nebula, 7,600 light-years away, a stellar nursery—a bright landscape, bubbling, releasing newborn stars to an unspoiled, indigo blue sky.

Astrophysicists can now trace the materials from which we are made, rejoining us to the ancients, to our creation stories,

recognizing the divine presence in all things.

In its circular silk web hides the orb weaver, its sense of feel an extension of what it can't see in spite of its eight eyes.

It composes the sublime design of web from a map of memories stored in its poppy-seed-size brain imprinted from the first web woven

over 100,000 million years ago.

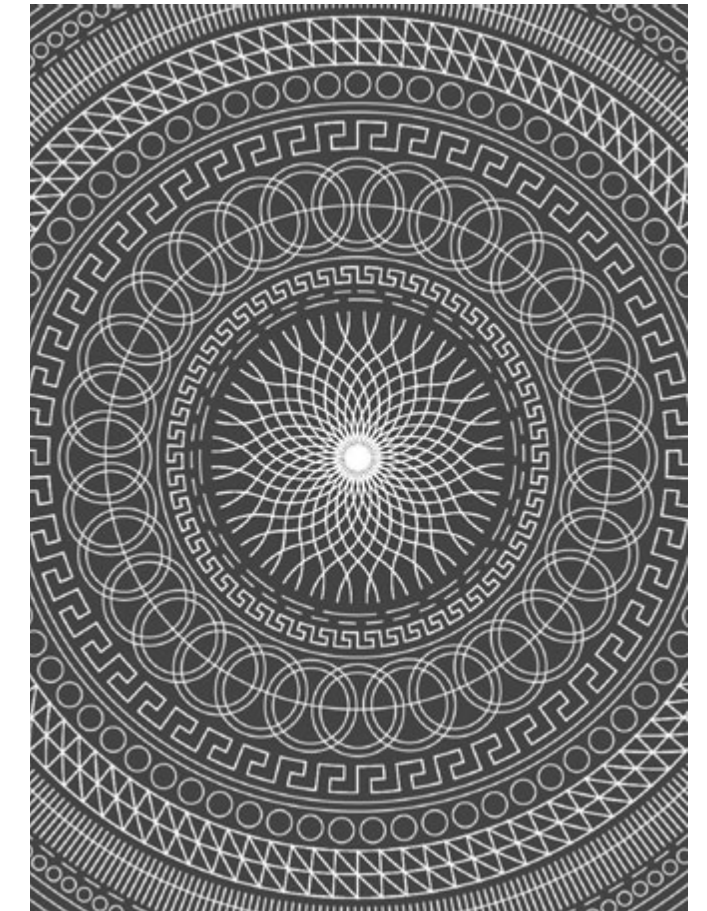


Illustration by Bodhi

PROVERB

Sometimes out of the darkness
A well watered life is born...

A beautiful mistake.

Trace of Imperfection

Feel the loneliness thought
Joys of sin.

Living in the shadows where
Jealousy is always guilt

And life...but a trace of imperfection.

Filtered Echoes

Listen softly to the workings
Of the wind, and echoes in my
Bones. This is my vision, this is
My life.

ISLAND LOST

I grasp at nothing, an
Illusion of the mind.

Sadness of lost love
Hunger of the soul

And thoughts of
Surrender.

Doors close
A single

Glass of wine.

Shadow Child

Here words rise and fall
In a single breath

Where truth isn't hidden
And words heal the spirit.

LET THERE BE-

light
blue notes
saxophone sounds
a little music for your night

OF COURSE

all the gods of your youth
you have naturally forgotten
but the main tormentor of the ages

that one unmerciful
god—natural law
how much lost over a millennia

toast, tomorrow breakfast for example—
a piece of warm toast
toasted to golden perfection

falls—
falling x32 feet per second
lands gooey butter side down

BRANCHING LIKE A TREE
(FOR NANCY)

upon a roughened shoulder
smoothly frozen musculature
torso soft soapstone

warm curvature
without need for motion
tactile in the decanted light

though he has a maker
his perfect circled belly button
connected him to a mother

all the aches a woman has left to give
we found Bozeman intact
all in gray and white

sprawled out last winter
another outcast
no worse for wear

not one for thought
but he is a complete story
novel—a cowboy in fact

FAITHFUL

mermaids we thought
 most likely imagined off Rehoboth
 suspended between faith and liquidity
 repeating our beliefs despite others scoffing, imaginary

repeating faith, hey there
 Delilah propagated by cuttings
 a state of mind one above reason
 flowers that later looked alright

faith repeating collecting into future
 set in rows four by four repeating
 repeating look each in the eye and see
 a deserved eyeful on the red carpet

—from O’Keeffe, the nothing nobody sees,
a flower really—it is so small it takes time
we haven’t time—and to see
takes time, like to have a friend takes time

first words, fine words just being formed
 beginning, a momentary world live forward
 for the time being—creation set right again
 belief in red lips being spring and all

we believe in Delilah’s delicate cool flames
 an anxious red head though she hasn’t discovered
 the source of Samson’s manly strength
 burning blossoms yet consumes nothing without remorse

free will besides the vision
 a choice of selves—
 the voice Samuel heard in the silence
 radio static—you remember am radio

and written commands, thou shalt—
 the resting ancient god being on holy ground
 we wish to rediscover
 suffering passion, joyous passion

St. Theresa in Ecstasy
 freely chosen by the cherubic angel
 other temporal angels—light from light
 fallen light after the fall—out of the light

in the light cotton and black satins near Taos, Georgia painted
 white skulls in desertscape and we are led to belief
 understand a newly discovered species of horned mermaids
 from an ancient sea not far from here or Bukhara, Uzbekistan

forgot what you wanted to say
 missed what you wanted to believe
 you could not hear
 the mermaids singing—

each to each
 they swimming, circling there
 like flower petals
 I could kiss them all away

LAMENTS FROM THE AGE OF SAIL

Two years elapsed upon this gray expanse;
 Unanchored, pulling ropes to favor the winds.
 The horizon drinks in the sun again
 Into darkness. The constellations dance.

Beyond these hills of water, mine ears
 Become ensnared by a vibrant vibrato.
 Eyes take to tides over the edge of the bow.
 Was underneath my expired dear?

Oh, faceless voice cast across foam-capped water
 Curling upon themselves in rhythm
 Imagining the lips of thine, rather winsome,
 Humming persuasively and with ardor.

These raging waves could be stilled within
 If only another song to reach out for
 In exchange for briny waterfalls – they pour.
 Nevertheless, and fade therein.

Weeping the waning of the ephemeral melody
 Drowning under broken air and sea.

THE TRAVELER AND THE COMPASS

“We’re not here to stay,” the Compass said. “Quiet.”
 Tired aged trunks bend archways of eyelets
 that meandered pathways beyond
 delightful weightless songs
 of rainbow-colored oaks climate.

Soft ground patterned with intimate
 woven leaves guiding to a pond,
 to which the Traveler crossed paths with a swan.
 “We’re not here to stay.”

Stillness brings in the breath and it
 collects the winds of a cardinal’s summit
 as new day’s light bleeds in the dawn
 with wide wings carrying royal blankets.
 “We’re not here to stay.”

“There’s more to explore,” the Traveler implored.
 The Compass pointed, “Forward we go North.”
 Mirrors clung to walls that could hold
 a thousand swimming reflections to unfold.
 “There’s more to explore.”

Story-sized servings; three courses untold.
 Clinking silver to a thought’s threshold
 ring in like bells of celebration reborn.
 “There’s more to explore.”

Windows bloomed of summer marigolds
 as they dangled lantern suppliant souls
 who bowed in gratitude. Stillness worn
 with the comfort that tomorrow’s drawn.
 “We’re not here to stay,” the Compass froze.
 “There’s more to explore.”

THE LIGHT HOUSE SEEKERS

Side by side along the cliff's edge
 Two faces cast themselves West
 To fog that's blurred the horizon and
 Wind carrying their fainted breaths.

They hear bells ringing beyond the haze
 Side by side along the edge of the cliff;
 Heard and unseen like a faith's call
 Of St. Chris wrapped on her wrist.

Ice plants invade their holy lands
 Like a virus, given an inch and it shall spread;
 Side by side along the cliff's edge
 A thought expands through her head:

"Come light, over this ominous sea.
 Bring me home to partake
 The rowing into gentle solitude.
 Guide me to your wake."

Side by side they climb down the cliff's edge
 Carefully watching their hands.
 They grip the earth as they descend further
 Not knowing where they may land.

She watches the waves crash upon the cliff's edge
 Breaking into confetti
 Inhaling the mist into her chest
 Exhaling, watching as he

Builds a home from discarded limbs of a cypress
 Stories of time held within their rings
 He excavates into layers to find them out
 As they wail their songs of sin-bleeding beings.

The walls whistled of winds that cross their paths.
 He sought warmth in which to retire.
 He pleas, "Let's gather all of our *woulds* tonight.
 We'll have ourselves a fire."

She takes her place at their silent shores;
 As dark waves fold over themselves
 Pushing foam between rocks they couldn't move,
 But take the empty shells.

She throws herself towards the sound of bells.
 A will he couldn't break.
 He pulls out a flint and ignites his limbs
 Hoping to shake her awake.

"Come back for warmth! Don't travel further!
 Too far, you'll find yourself underneath!"
 She looked back with a grin as a wave pulled in
 For a shell that empty needs her *see*.

31

The tree voiced secrets of peace
 To the woman which did drink
 From the marble cup of
 Sacred healing.

Liquid universes linger
 With a delicious perfume like
 Flowers surrounded in time;
 Bringing morning colors
 To the eye's window.

BOKEH

Light the tunnels
 Start a revolution
 Keep the sinners
 We are, we are

Tell them we're coming
 It's not their time to waste
 Bold in wake
 We are, we are

Find hearts again
 Take in arms, a friend
 Level within minds
 We are, we are

Soul within it counts, tick
 Faith lasting the hour, tock
 Where do our hands go?
 We are, we are

Go where there is night
 The light finds its way towards thee
 Reset the compass
 Draw near, draw near

Keepeth thine a secret ring
 For its petals forsake a hidden gem
 'Til shadows take birds into its melody
 Draw near, draw near

Within, a thousand golden sunsets
 That cast out any nightmares
 Pouring drinks of cherry wine
 Draw near, draw near

Call upon your winged
 And shall taketh a breath worn in
 Held in song of merry bells
 Draw near, draw near

to you
 to you
 to you I write
 to you I write
 to you
 to you
 to you
 to you

KISMET

I shall meet thee at the ebb and flow of ocean's corners
 Counting down the waves for a stilled horizon
 Until twilight on both sides of midnight blend.

I shall meet thee calling from expired hilltops
 Buried at the incline; feeling the passing winds.
 A generous host to worms and flowers.

I shall meet thee at the empty frame of that house
 Where faint flames could illuminate attics –
 Over the torch scepter, barely burned.

I shall meet thee at the 3-tiered fountain
 Built to spill over
 Catching the wishes in the fate of a coin flip.

I shall meet thee in the child I once knew
 Unbeknownst to their candles still melting
 Staring at the truth until I go blind.

DENIAL

Sirens sing still
soul's
fantastic
lie-----

Sharks
gore its flesh
down black razor
hole-----

Twilight glimmers
white waves rush
rocks—clash
despair-----

The crab climbs
to its naked vegetables
collects
Mana-----

* * *

Ah, Sylvia
we rage
dark nights
howling-----

Nights
the waves call
our shadows
from its mist-----

And yew trees
shudder
at cliff
edge-----

Nights its mist
denies
what we all
sing-----

Despair
the waves
rock
smash it-----

With each breath
we suck it
from the sea
Shriek!

E MAJOR

Tonight, I walk Its fumes
gathering moon petals splashing headland stone-----
Bless them and our cliffs dissolve-----

Their words speak shadows across sand
burn intensity like stars
pulsing this dark God's Void-----

And when dawn's birds fall from Its twilight
to peck our shells scattered across this darkling shore
on farther shores, we peck out Its night!

The waves carve our gilded sky
in ebb sand I commune with mist
collect shells and decorate seascapes-----

TO A MUSE

When she breathes
my coals flame Wilderness---
Blaze Its dark heart's panther eyes-----

Tis but air's elements, you say? Ripened
drove Paris mad—plays upon this stage
poet stuff and such things dreams divine
on the shore roads to Athens—through Rome and on-----

Aphrodite's ambrosial elixir
coursed our mettle's current---her rapture's
curse blessed this heart—christened
in a sparkle of dew---the mackeraled sea-----
The Dark Void---swirling stars!

HOOKEA BEACH

Twilight dawn dark sea licks the sand curve slope
up into palm tree silhouettes trembling electric
fronds in Her breath's moist words; shape changers
conversing with lava cliffs staring seaward as surf
spray brightens the lava rock wall's fierce visage.

And the ubiquitous walls of stacked lava stones laid
up the volcano's sloped shoulders into Her neckline's
pure element---the necklace embracing Pele's body.
Her hair's gold-crimson unravels southwest beyond
the light's reach off Mauna Loa's riff slope---She
sleeps near in Her forest veils. I know she is true.

We are awakening in cool January sand---the waning
moon's horn ripens the sea's distance over Her slick
hips and tide pool gems glistening Her body's flesh
like cabochon jewels your hips sparkle when you dance
your fragrant curves, now, naked, beside me in the sand
as sunrise flares crashing waves gold-vermilion.

When the light clears the dawn's feathered streamers
you run into surf and swim the fire lit waves' dancing
spume and I walk the shoreline barefoot, searching
lava braids in Her sand's froth of its lush treasures.

Three inch long, thin, round shell shards, bone-like smooth
in the hand's cupped fingers, weighty, pink-white pastel
beads clink solid: a necklace and bracelet with cowries:
small, one is gem-like, only the opening remains---
enclosed in its shell's circumference; an oval threshold
into womb's memory---the yin, the yang, outer and
inner worlds: these waves' caress and crushing hisssss.

Shedding jewelry from Her body's abundance, marvelous
coral from Her reef's divine gifts, She walked here across
the sand slope, as you now walk, from the golden waves'
spray into this morning's light crashing this shore line.

Pele steps from the ocean roar's quiet depth of wave
into this island's bright air loosening these stones
blessed by Her body's perfect flames splashing Her
lava thighs, and now, swirling around your gleaming
ankles, aflame in the sunlight—Hookena Beach, Hawaii.

SINKYONE

Her lips
want me---
a pure light
abstract
splashes her Iris'
fire!

She teases
rain veils---
silver-crystals
golden
splashing our Iris'
field-----

* * *

Her petals
pulse---
mountain spine's
full moon
splashes her coast
line
teeth!

White Iris
unfolding honor---
we embrace stone:
her petals' jewel
splashing our sand's
kiss-----

GETTING DOWN TO IT

At headland's edge: rock—ocean—cold!
 Scale cliff face, roped, down dark
 trail cut angles to rock teeth rubble:
 logs, kelp, plastic bits, body parts.
 Shed warmth for leather boots, leggings
 wind breaker, tool bar, tie woven sack to belt.
 March morning air salty---flesh on rock---
 quiet lull in year's lowest tide.

Galaxy foam swirls into star light-----
 Brilliant jeweled anemones flare eyes!
 Crabs jet black into sheath stones!
 Onyx tide pools: slippery, sharp, dangerous:
 vulnerable to rogue waves moving this way!

Beyond the Tertiary black giants
 where shelf rock breaks, nebulous
 waves lick deep tension---fumes boil!
 Sirens sing---crystal syllables---
 twilight pool stones slithering-----

I wade further, nearing surf's teeth hiss---
 crawl on knees---on my belly, sea level
 search red, green and silver leaves, fanned
 flowering brine mat's fecundity, squirm
 into its ebb---pulse, under stone bone
 luminous vegetable cartilage dawn fleshes.

Push arms into seaweed cradle---
 abalone swirl, mother of pearl, opalescent

muscle, lucid, red-white rosette, way back up
 under boulder---I slide into its grotto
 comforting contortion to bedrock crevice---
 slip tool smooth, firm into mucous slick
 flesh sweetly exudes, easing muscle's entrance
 into its stone tomb-----

Pop it off—pull it out!
 Rise from back wash froth---
 brine's entangling kelp swirls-----
 Steam surging---incoming tide flows
 over shelf rock's cliff breakage of boulders
 tentacles swirl up my thighs, foamy!
 Lifting pearl mollusk in left hand
 the crude tool in my right, raw sound
 rising from my throat's tongue!
 The sea's white flames ignite!

* * *

Up headland's
 dark cliff
 into forest
 morning mist
 corona

hand over hand
 two anthropoids
 climb into
 light!

HEART STONE

Till once again we come together
 in the sweet ocean of our lives
 take this heart shaped stone
 uncovered from the north coast
 California's wildest surf roar
 shaped in its waves' sand swirls

keepsake for your palm's lifeline
 slide your fingers around its silk
 sheen glistening within your skin
 caress its center groove curves
 desire joins our bodies together
 fused in each other's heart flesh.

Forever, know we are one
 pregnant in each other's heart
 and when the sun rises each day
 over our sand shaped alcove
 cleaved from the headlands
 stone leaving its perfect gift

frothy waves rush over our flesh
 embracing the incoming waves
 coming from the ocean's wild
 ecstasy—our illumined bodies
 uniting the genetic zygote's code:
 Eternity our heartbeat's rhythm.

FIRST THINGS

I See water flowing
 Ebulliently casting
 Shards of shadows
 Like feathers
 That swim in clouds
 How they electrify
 Mixing yet staying
 Jaunty in the sky.

MY LAMP

Sits on the desk
 It's surface hard
 And unyielding
 Shines in the morning
 It's oval shape swoons
 It was a gift many
 Years ago, I hardly
 Remember from whom
 I'm grateful
 For its light, it's gray
 Unobtrusive color
 There for me, waiting
 Listening, longing
 To dance and sing
 To do what I can do.

MAKING MERMAIDS

they explore the sunset
 they sleep in fog
 in the sea's hammock
 where whales roam free
 they refuse to be photographed
 with sprinkles of frosting froth
 as they become more beautiful
 the farther away we go.



Illustration by Ann Privateer

TOMBS

Are tiny churches made of stone
 They're reminders, symbolic
 Symbols, a oneness of life
 A pilgrimage, a journey
 The porch to heaven
 A recollection
 While the setting Sun speaks.

WHAT IS LIFE?

People die every day
 A woman my age
 Fell, hit her head and now
 Is dead, a stumble
 Killed her, walking the dog
 On a starless night
 Now all is emptier
 Than quicksand, no joy
 Without reason or why
 No shopping bags, no
 Police come to call
 All that is merry
 Lost for now like the dew
 Only the oceans know
 Only they can comprehend.



Illustration by Ann Privateer

WHAT IS A DAHLIA?

A flower so red that it almost bleeds
 A girls name that blushes at the sound
 Or is it a verb waiting around for a call
 Deliciously delivered, dauntingly done

A stained glass window of old
 Evoking colours and light
 Each in it's own way
 Seeking meaning and God.

WHERE THE SEINE SNAKES

Boulougne, near Paris,
 away from it all--
 where the Seine snakes
 and so, we cross it twice.
 Winter wind whips
 travelers on the bridge,
 feet echo on steel
 baby carriage wheels vibrate.
 We stop midway, watch
 a houseboat's dog
 exercise beneath us
 drifting down stream
 into an Arctic haze.
 On the way back
 I recall a note
 taped to a metal lamppost
 wonder what became
 of that person.

A TRAIL

grows where water flows
 a trail by the deer crossings
 in Spring when currents rush
 in fall when birds migrate
 in Summer when water
 no longer flows
 or hibernating Winter mornings
 fragile soft comfort
 fatigued by weathered ports
 and worlds of pollution
 shield the slightest sounds
 that question to stay or go
 in a world where beauty
 reflects beauty and rot
 near the narrow trail
 that questions to stay or not
 near the way of deer.

**THINGS FALL
TO THE EARTH**

I drive to work
 dodging fallen shoes
 that litter the slow lane
 spiked heels, pointed toes,
 three toned wedgies,
 broken, flattened, run over.
 One fuzzy blue slipper
 calls Cinderella to mind
 if her mule fell from the coach
 would Prince Charming
 have found her?

JOURNEY TO YOUR ARMS

I sank for weeks, until I thought there could be
 no more sea
 past earth's mantle
 into her solid core

blue waves alive with dark, vast whales
 wreathed with seaweed garlands
 shifted slowly into thick, bright, burning magma swirls

And always I saw as I sank
 your dark eyes gleaming with secret mirth

Down I sank, into the crevice where your torso
 meets your thigh, ran my tongue along
 the rim of your navel, felt the silky, curling hairs

I sank
 I was no mermaid
 I did not dive or swim

To a realm beyond certainty and doubt
 I sank
 into a dominion unexplored

Before today, what did I understand about anything?

I offer myself to this darkness
 I offer myself to this light

the fissure, the yawning, glistening, ruby flesh spreads, of-
 fering admittance, immensity, the fire, melding, volcano
 and hurricane, electrocution, neon gas and solar flare, silk
 ropes, silk sheets, satin underwear, absinthe, flower pet-
 als, convulsion and crusts of sugared liqueur, scavenge and
 hoard, delirium, sweat, wild rivers of glacial runoff, lava
 and tar, bubbles of steam and scald, banquets of roasted
 game, sliced exotic fruits splayed to show their wet seeds,
 papers and ink, gold clay, menstrual blood, tinkle of chil-
 dren's laughter, bray of a wounded horned beast, thun-
 der of hooves, glitter of sharpened steel, muscles tensing,
 adrenalin booming with each pulse, a blue vein throbbing
 under translucent skin, the hunt, the chase through thicket
 and thorn, desire, dominance, frenzy, elation; then man-
 na, soma, white gushes of opaque viscosity, quiver of gel
 on skin, droplets curling in a nest of hair, a slick droplet
 stretches from the tip of a finger into an open mouth

BLOSSOMING

In these unruly woods whatever was hidden unfurls
 thrusting up taut and dark
 Hard green berries
 blush on their vines
 Aroma of damp loam
 Wet ground sucks at our toes
 swallowing them with each footstep
 Roots of the enormous trees shiver, thicken and swell
 deeper into the soil
 while the moist earth's slow opening
 clenches throbbing around
 their act of entry to receive them

Spring licks us with her tongue of sun
 her laugh a peal of floral bells

RAPTURE

Woven into your flesh like a thorn or splinter
 the magic moved when you moved, piercing
 till it reached the ache
 You were powerful enough to banish gods
 with an impatient gesture -
 powerful enough to freeze time as it pleased you
 the insects hanging still in mid-air like shimmery gems
 When you closed your fist, a flower compressed into
 an egg
 and when you opened your curled fingers again
 a small bright bird flitted and pecked in your palm
 When you looked at them, trees bent toward the earth
 in supplication
 A trail of shattered branches led me to where you stood
 casting spells in a circle of snowdrop blooms
 sculpting reality out of pure thought
 while colors swirled like a borealis around your aura

Was I dreaming?
 I knew I wasn't dreaming because of the leaf-blowers
 deafening and oblivious in the hard light

As I approached you I was not alone
 Creatures of the forest advanced with no fear
 Death was there too, lurching forward on its knees
 its eyes glassy with curiosity and yearning
 The wind circled around your wrists and fingers
 invisible jewelry of perpetual motion
 The tall grasses arched toward you
 waving and licking up your knees and thighs
 With a graceful nod, you invited everything
 home to the embrace of your body
 No savior, no shepherd, no sorcerer

In the droplets of blood from your cut finger
 a city blossomed overnight
 Where your sigh touched the earth
 a cathedral cracked open, spilling chalices
 and collection plates into open meadows and muddy paths
 The sky darkened, bringing day and night at the same time
 A voice of pollen and dust whispered inside every ear at once

Rejoice
Your heaven is upon you

SAVING THE SAILOR

A ship is sinking on the horizon
 My tail fins flutter as I'm
 carried on a swell of salty spray
 My scales shimmer, blue and green
 Seaweed tangles in my heavy hair
 that is the color of winter fog
 I pause in the water as the tide surges and am
 swept forward in a wave that glows momentarily
 in the frigid sun -
 a concave disk hung low over the water
 sucking the heat from the panicked land-dwellers
 but not from me
 And I must save the drowning sailor
 his delicate features slack
 his innocent lips a darkening blue
 his clothes in tatters
 The green waves lift him into my arms
 His cold, dense form collapses onto my shoulder -
 slick, greyish, desperate to survive
 I strain with all my soul to heave him
 from the watery currents
 pulling at his ankles, hauling him toward the ocean floor
 Fish and crabs peer curiously as
 I press my body close to him, like a lover
 At this moment he means everything
 though he must never see me
 though he doesn't even believe in the possibility
 that I exist, though he will never remember me
 though he knows nothing of the silken depths
 I call my home
 Together, we surge headlong
 With one more powerful gust, we land on
 some nearby rocks
 some of them flat and slippery, some craggy
 with peaks piercing the heavens like the spires

of their buildings that I spy when I'm swimming
 perilously close to land
 like the seagulls warned me not to
 And he is saved
 I recede gently with the sea
 As lacy threads of foam spread above my eyes
 I wonder what it would feel like to have legs
 But I dart away when I spot a white sail billowing
 in the distance
 coming to claim him
 This goodbye is only for today, my sailor



Illustration by Bodhi

SHIVA, MY SHIVA, MY PERSONAL SHIVA

dance, my lord across the sky
where the birds call out and fall and die
beneath a surface our blood and bones
this is your world with us you share
the seed of life harvested from its station
to fertilize the frozen zones
implanted now, imagination

Shiva killed Jesus and buried the body
to save us from unholy ghosts
might we become what lives again
on foreign soil in alien form
mother and murderer cast as one
the horror of the pregnant soul
if a single survivor be reborn

Shiva wants to tear me apart
inject my remains into every heart
he dare not risk our great creation
we dance with common adoration
my arm around his royal neck
thus calmly shall we both agree
that when I die, he dies with me

THE GATE SWUNG FREELY

the gate swung freely
to the sun drenched garden
the fruit sparkled, a trinity of emeralds
upon a fragrantly bejeweled tree

the cardinals perched at the top
called the others to join in song
and sing they did

the robins in their solemn robes
sanctified the second tier
where seeds were stored for
the unseen generations, so anticipated

immaculate were the nests of heaven
in which reside the inhabitants of a coming age
the beneficiaries of eternity

hand made loaves were the chosen food
and grapes for the gathering, the feast
of mother's purpose

oh, but the tree required a willing sacrifice

one egg dropped to the ground, shattered
obscured in a ritual of starlings mourning, confused

while the blue jay scavenged, undisturbed
blind to the absolute tragedy unfolding
at the length of a wing

the song repeated
clouds gathered on a horizon long abandoned
a predestined storm
to wash away the evidence

A GRYPHON'S WORK: THE LIVING TREASURE

grim sloven, creature at the edge of the mote
slow and hungry, self indulged
an easier target, could never attempt

my love for life, my ravishing mate
round black eyes on each side of her head
long shimmering wings, curved and smooth

this day will end when the crickets chirp
until then the little ones keeping warm
away from light, away from sight

that circling shadow, a menacing entrant
but no match for a sentinel fast and fierce
nothing blue, nothing gray, shall imperil this day

we arrived with the wind on the equinox
birth and rebirth, nature born again
in a nest of danger, a building sanctified

break free from the shell in which you find comfort
curiosity, courage, and innocent freedom
emerge to a realm of merciless beauty

that one must die to feed another
I pledge that today it is not our fate
but to defend at cost a raging future

beckoning souls unseen and unknown
recognized, in a silent warning
the necessity of relentless motion

save us now, we can wait no longer
for your light to shine upon this hill
and carry us gently on feathered wings

POETRY IS BORN

Ah, so that's where it's born,
Poetry, I mean.
Not always, or even often, in fragrant meadows.
More likely, from the poignant, pungent depths
Of frustration, and gardens of despair.
Unless, of course, one is in Love. Ah, but that is rare!
Or intoxicated, ecstatic, metaphysic, exotic, erratic.
And yet, born it is, it wants to live.
It yearns to speak, to exist, to give.
It won't be ignored, nor rejected
For it is deeply hidden and protected
Within the soul, the heart, the mind,
Within the memories, the Keeper of Time.
It is the Verse of the Uni-verse
Born of Adversity, Diversity, Reverse it.
And Poetry, out! Yes, it will.
Whether in tumult or even, still
In fragrant meadows, poetry is born.
It wants to live, to adorn, to embellish, and to relish.
It isn't selfish To let it shine.

Gearing Up

for the 2024 Presidential Election
all the media heads
preparing their scripts
scouring the internet for
anything
of remote interest
they can turn into
a six-part documentary

it has become
tragic, really

an embarrassment to any
memory
of journalistic realism

as for me
i'm still waiting for the candidate
that is in tune
with the times

the idealogues of yesteryear
still float around

almost ghosts, not quite
but getting closer by the day

their sage advice
now falls on
deaf ears

this generation
and, truthfully,

the generation before

have long given up
on their rhetoric

america has changed

it is not the same

we all know this

so let's cut to the chase
and be in touch
with what might actually work

for me, i yearn for a candidate
that will promise perfect smiles for all

i mean, seriously,
compare the amounts of money
spent on war
versus free dental implants

for everyone

people would smile
they would feel
good about themselves

expand the program to overseas

commit to nations that despise us

agree to fix their smiles

make everyone look
like they're on TV

or perhaps a sappy RomCom,
take your pick

who doesn't want a great smile?

instead of budgeting
money for war or "defense"
how about budgeting money
to make us all look glamorous

beautiful

like we see on the screen

or in magazines

or in pornos on the web
that everyone says

they never watch

throw in free training to lose
that stubborn belly fat

six pack abs for all!

hell, we already have programs
for helping octogenarians
with their erections

why stop there?

i say beautify the nation
then work on the world

free cosmetics

complimentary plastic surgery

i'll vote for the candidate
that proclaims
"no schlong is too long"

as long as they agree
to stop the endless
fighting

the endless death

the endless wars

it is time for a political change

"nipple piercings and tattoos
for everyone"

it just might work

and wouldn't the media
have a field day with that.

A DISSOLUTION OF HONOR

Come, my friends,
let us dance around fires
fueled by the bones
of our enemies.

Let us eat bread
baked from the memories
of innocence abated.

We are here for but a moment,
a spark in time.

Let us rejoice in the adoration
of a perfect society
setting fire to our cities,
our honor, our names.

It is just and good
this process of devotion.

Pray with me now,
for we have become
invincible.

SHAMBHALA

I dreamt of you
Those many years ago
When schools of fish carried me
Across the raging sea
A crescent moon beckoning
In a turquoise sky

Your image remained
Long after I had washed ashore
Delicate hands reaching down
To calm my fears
A kind smile lifting
My broken soul

In that moment
All was pure
The knowledge you imparted
Resonating through me

On nights when the wind
Churns the water
Into an iridescent foam
I see the turquoise sky
Gleaming through the clouds
Your memory holding

A taste of salt
Crosses my lips

An errant tear
Seeps down

It is enough to sustain me
Opening a path
Where dreams remain

DAHLIAS, GODS & MERMAIDS

open your heart to Vishnu
 appearing as Matsya
 the great fish-god

give praise to Suvannamaccha
 the mermaid princess
 lover of Hanuman, mother of Macchanu

daughter of Ravana
 she obeyed her father
 destroying the great causeway to Sri-Lanka

where Sita sat captive
 waiting to be returned
 to her husband, Rama

feel now the compassion
 that Suvannamaccha felt
 for the warrior ape Hanuman

defying her father
 she ordered her mermaid brethren
 to complete the road to Sri- Lanka

allowing Rama to rescue
 the goddess Sita
 pure, as a dahlia in bloom

but the mighty Vishnu
 now appearing as Rama
 questioned Sita's purity

throwing her into a pit of fire
 she emerged unscathed
 proving her purity, for all of time

it was decreed that day
 that as long as there was
 water in the seas

mermaids would forever
 sing the song
 of Suvannamaccha

and her love for Hanuman
 that allowed the great Vishnu
 to once again

appear whole.

**ON THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY
 OF THE RONA**

Al Jarreau appears in a dream
 Performing the theme to Moonlighting
 On a harmonica

Wait staff spend the morning
 Polishing silver with linens
 Stolen from the queen

These days it is best to
 Keep your opinions
 To yourself

A chameleon has only
 So many colors
 To choose from.

GOD'S LONELY HEART

a man without woman, woman without man
 child without siblings, parents, friends
 the alienated, psychotic
 trapped alone in their minds
 blind, deaf, dumb, paraplegic, leper
 all are lonely in their differences
 yet God is the loneliest
 God, who can trust none of us
 and whom no one understands

A TALK WITH GOD

I'm alone in my room
 silent dawn, January 1
 I'm starting the year with a prayer

I imagine mountain-dwelling hermits
 living alone on prayer for hundreds of years
 imagine a young Native American
 sitting on a cliff at sunset, seeking his name
 imagine Jesus in the desert or at the edge of town
 on just another of his vigils

I sit in this small room
 impoverished, past midlife
 unsure that I understand you
 thinking you might have lied
 wondering whether I hear
 what you say
 or what I want to hear
 or what you need me to hear
 hoping that you exist--
 can you hear me?

WINTER SOLSTICE

Slooh Cam, December 2016

it caught my tired eye
 as I scrolled down Facebook
 one more time before bed—

Slooh Cam records the winter solstice
 in all its mystical magnificence
 my eyes fill with tears
 joy chokes my throat
 live, Canary Islands, Spain
 Slooh's Pico del Teide Cam shows
 bank of clouds, gray-purple, massing
 like violet, snowy hills, or rough sea
 fifty people worldwide watching this on Facebook
 solstice exact in just a few hours
 why is not the whole world watching?
 the universe is singing
 I watch in silence, alone at my desk

voices of the cosmos rise
 like a chorus singing Beethoven's Ninth
 pour forth amazement, joy
 exhale as one, *Alleluia!*
 cloudbank's rim now etched in pink, gold
 white light widens at rim as
 Sol climbs toward noon
 cloudbank hides his face
 yet we see, we feel
 coming moment of renewal
rejoice, rejoice, Alleluia!

CHARITY

Jenny scooped the one-pound packages of Turtles into the larger cardboard case. “Five, ten, fifteen,” she counted, “and that one too, in case we sell out.” Despite double gloves, her hands were freezing. She felt shapeless and ugly in layers of utilitarian pants, parka, knit cap, and a scarf wound around her head, exposing only her eyes. It didn’t matter, she reminded herself: vanity is selfish, and we are missionaries! Throwing a brisk grin to her partner, Jen slammed the back door of the van and waved off their team leader to the next town. Craig and Jenny, left alone with bulging cases of candy on the squeaky snow, stood at the edge of the silent Minnesota hamlet, December 24, 1976.

She pulled an already-disgusting handkerchief from her pocket and wiped her nose. Jenny had joined the missionary group back in the spring, and by summer, she had found herself traveling with six other young people on a mobile fundraising team. They were urged to compete in sales, to do their best to support the church’s many projects worldwide. Although fundraising was difficult, Jenny usually managed to moderate her shyness after she had approached several people, if they were not too irritated by her requests for money. On Christmas Eve, too, it was especially easy to get fired up to work for God. However, this holiday, Jenny was sick, running a fever, sneezing, and coughing. The month-long sales competition between the different teams ended that night, though, so she had agreed to go out, sick and all.

Craig eyed her with concern, squinting against the sun, which flashed off ice crystals in all directions. “You’ll be OK; it’s the last day.”

“Thanks.” Jen felt grateful, but not particularly close to the gangly twenty year-old, who kept to himself and seemed rather dull. However, she determined to make the best of things,

stuck here alone with him hundreds of miles from the church center, and thousands of miles away from her broken and bitterly alcoholic family, her string of failed love affairs, and the rest of her former, miserable life. No, there was no better place for Jenny than here. Besides, God Himself had called her, and she was proud to have turned her life upside down in response. Sometimes, though, only pride kept her from quitting.

“Craig, let’s get going!” The two young missionaries bowed their heads for a hasty prayer and started in opposite directions door-to-door.

In darkness at 5:00 p.m., they finally met up again at the tiny diner in the town square. The townspeople, mostly descended from sturdy Scandinavian Lutheran stock with a sprinkling of Catholics, had been kind and receptive. Almost every home had donated, no questions asked; after all, it was Christmas Eve. However, an almost perfect fundraising day flew right by Jenny as she shook with fever. All afternoon, tottering up icy steps and around block after unending block, she had struggled to keep a grip on her body. Now, finally, dinner: hot soup and hotter tea. She couldn’t taste it, but no matter—the heat was enough.

“Just a few more hours; let’s keep going!”

After a brief prayer together, the two parted again. Jenny felt the deep, blue-black cold envelop the small town. Soft lights glowed in each window, and the people’s friendly donations were beacons as she plodded onward. The cold, however, was unforgiving. Finally, the two finished the last house and gave their last box of Turtles in return for a donation. Rejoined by Craig, Jenny coughed and shuddered, “Let’s call in and wait for the van.” He steered her to the deserted town square, where he phoned the church center. Stepping out of the booth, his worried face telegraphed the news.

“The van broke down; Team Leader will get here sometime tonight, but not until late—we’re just supposed to wait.” The two young people stared at each other. In downtown Smithville, there was not one open business—only utter darkness, cold, and silence. The temperature had plummeted to well below zero before wind-chill. It was almost 9:00 p.m.

Jenny and Craig huddled into a dark, storefront doorway. The Church’s chastity rule for unmarried members made them hesitant to warm each other, and besides, she was not attracted



Illustration by Ann Wehrman

to Craig. They eyed each other miserably and tried to stay out of the wind. Sitting on dry snow, leaning against the closed building, they prayed, chitchatted, then just fell silent.

After what seemed hours, they noticed people down the street, entering the small Catholic Church. The two looked at each other—Midnight Mass! As quickly as they could, Jenny and Craig stumbled to their freezing, aching feet. After all the parishioners had gone in, they slipped through the back doors and took seats in the rearmost pew. By now, they were too far gone to appreciate the Mass; they just wanted this night to be over, to pull warm blankets over their heads and sleep.

Besides, God Himself had called her...

“The mass is ended. Go in peace.”

On their way out, the parishioners slowly filed by the two young people, averting their faces as they passed, family by family. As the church emptied, it dawned on Jenny and Craig that they would be back at that icy storefront in a few minutes. Craig began to ask a few folks if they would shelter the two missionaries, but he met only rejection.

As the last townspeople left, perhaps moved by his conscience, or perhaps simply taking responsibility for the situation, the deacon approached Jenny and Craig. After a few questions, he guided them next door to the rectory. He disappeared, and soon afterward, an old station wagon crunched up and an elderly, weathered, bundled-up face peered at the missionaries, the man’s eyes bright and curious.

The old man’s home was a snug little trailer where his bespectacled wife brewed cocoa and fussed over Jenny and Craig. The four sat quietly, sipping cocoa, and smiling drowsily at each other around the table. Almost unconscious by now, at least the two young people began to thaw out. At 3:00 a.m. that Christmas morning, Team Leader finally arrived with the van.

YOUR HOLY SPIRIT

sing every song you love
any hymn I can remember
what a friend we have in jesus

fentanyl, your holy spirit
ninety-plus oxygen, mother mary
good sinus rhythm, my new god

rain-gray out your
tear streaked window
ICU reigns on

A NEW MERCY

drops into my eyes,
sinks into my soul,
a disguised friend –
an unsure hope.

I'm at the edge of myself,
like a broken weathervane
blown around in the barnyard –
coaxed by a crimson sunset.

I circle and circle again,
change direction on a whim.
the hot wind whispers –
the way out is the way in.

A RESONANCE OF GRACE

We let you go when love carried you
beyond the clouds
and follow, we could not.

Unaware of your journey,
sure of your destination –
the promise of reunion.
We sang you home, whispered goodbyes,

wove your story into ours –
we let you go with tears flowing.

You sent memories shining
to buoy our hearts sinking, linked

in these moments with you.
Angels hovered holy
around us, brought a
resonance of grace.

Your hand still warm in ours
thirty minutes after you passed,
we knew you walked
those streets of gold with your beloved.

We let you go when love carried you
beyond the clouds
and follow, we could not.

AFTERGLOW

In lucid dreams
I find you in
a drunken field,
hidden in morning fog.
A chorus of dahlias

pay homage to you –
chant your name,
proclaim your loveliness.
I linger in astonishment,
lounge in your afterglow.
In lucid dreams
I find you.

REST ASSURED**FOR GAIL**

After a few prayers and two-hundred-thirty-nine tears,
I was able to face Thursday without you.

I came across a poem about angels and stars and death,
something you may have liked, but I can't be sure.

Are you dancing now, among the stars? Or perhaps
an angel singing, with a halo and shiny new wings?

Maybe you're only out of town like
the morning mist, set to return at sunrise.

Drop me a line and weigh in if you find the time.
I hear Eternity is crammed with a myriad of things –

ice cream socials, signs and wonders, stars and the like.
Rest assured, I'll be listening.

MERE SECONDS

Up at dawn, she swims
morning laps around the bay,
glides easy with the waves –
one with the iridescent sea.

After a hefty abalone lunch
she curls up on her favorite rock,
flaps a sun-bleached tail –
dozes on a seaweed pillow.

Pale fingers comb tangled hair
as dolphins invite afternoon frolics.
Joining their games she glances back –
sees Duke paddling out in the surf.

She pops up to his board to say hi
and together they catch a big one . . .
mere seconds of swirling foam and bliss –
enough joy to last a mermaid's lifetime.

THE LURE OF THE SEA

That was the summer when the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution broke out in China. One day our parents didn't come home, and three days later, Uncle took us to stay at Grandma's house.

To me and my brother, going to Grandma's was an adventure. She lived in a far-away rural village, and we had to take a bus, a ferry, another bus, and finally a boat to get there.

The village lay along a stream, just a single row of twelve houses with Grandma's at one end. The house on the other end was occupied by the village dentist, who had three daughters and a son. We never saw the first two daughters, who Grandma told us had already been married out. The youngest daughter, Mirui, seventeen years old, was said to be the prettiest and brightest in the local high school. Her teacher had already convinced the father to send her to the university, which was a big deal for such a remote village in those days. The son, Migang, was twelve, a year younger than me, and a year older than my brother.

Quickly we befriended Migang and hung out with him every day. Ordered by the dentist to keep watch on her brother every minute, Mirui was forever present in the background.

One hot afternoon, we were lying on the grass under a huge willow tree after a quick swim. Mirui sat against the tree trunk reading. Watching her, I felt something stir in my heart: "Such long eyelashes ... no wonder they call her a beauty..."

"What are you reading, Sister Mirui?" I let out the question without realizing it, feeling rather embarrassed.

"A collection of poems," she answered without looking up.

"My sister wants to be a poet," Migang rolled onto his stomach and turned his head toward me. "She's written a lot of poems already."

I sat up: "Really?" No longer awkward, I begged Mirui: "Read us one, please!"

"Yes, please..." Migang shouted. "Just the one you wrote yesterday..."

She raised her head, looked at the stream, and thought for a few seconds. She then started in a low voice: "Little stream, little stream. You flow quietly, sing softly. Few people hear you; no one sees you..."

She paused for a few seconds, then stood up, faced toward the east, took a deep breath, and recited loudly: "One day, you'll reach the sea. Ah, the sea, the sea! Your waves surge powerfully, roaring to the sky. Your waters spread everywhere, stretching all the way to the horizon. Wide you open your arms, embracing the whole world. When the sun rises, I would follow you, chase you, to every corner of the earth, to the end of my life!"

We three boys stood up watching her in silence as if her words had cast a spell on us. A while later, my brother spoke timidly: "Grandma said we are not far from the East Sea, about half an hour's walk..."

"Yeh," Migang came alive, too. "Dad told me too... He was a teenager when he went on a ship to Japan... He said the sea is so, so vast, and beautiful..."

"So shall we go see it then?" I blurted out.

Mirui chuckled: "Easy to say... There're PLA patrols all along the shore... Some years ago, a guy wanted to escape to Taiwan on a boat. He was caught and sentenced to death."

"But we are not escaping," my brother argued in a whisper.

"Yeah, we just want to look at the sea," Migang's voice was louder. "We're just watching the sunrise. Yeah, that's right. Dad said the sunrise on the sea is a scene he'd never forget."

I became thrilled at Migang's suggestion: "Yes, yes... Let's go!"

Three days later, in the pitch dark before dawn, we four started off toward the sea. The wide stony street out of the village quickly narrowed into a single-file dirt footpath. Mirui arranged for us to walk with her in the lead and I at the rear. Migang began to hum a PLA marching song "I am a soldier..."

Twenty minutes into our marching, the path gradually gave way to muddy field. Our homemade cloth shoes kept

getting stuck in the mud, making our walking more and more difficult. Migang no longer sang, and my brother began whining. Mirui, the only one with a tiny flashlight, tripped over something and fell. That somehow had a domino effect, and we quickly fell down into the mud one by one. My brother cried and refused to make any effort to get up. Migang and I managed to get up and tried our best to pull him up, only to fall again. Mirui trudged over, squatted beside my brother, and spoke softly to him: "Don't cry, my dear. We're not very

"We Chinese... in the old days, marriage was more an obligation than for love... I never even heard of a French kiss until I came here."

far from the sea now. Listen, the sea..."

We three quieted down and strained our necks. Shh...shh...shh...pala...pala... I whispered: "So that's the sea?!"

"Yes," Mirui purred. "Waves coming in, lapping and breaking... We'll be there soon, the road would be easier then... mainly sand, no more mud..." Gently, she placed her arms under my brother's armpits, and lifted him up: "Okay, let's join our hands together... Ah, take off our shoes first... they are mud-caked anyway..."

Having formed a row hand-in-hand, we were balancing ourselves and getting ready to march when the barrel of a gun thrust right in front of our chests. Stern harsh sounds poured down onto our heads: "Stop! Freeze!"

We panicked, and our line faltered. Before we realized what had happened, the yellow ray of a flashlight swept over us. In the dim light, I saw the terror on the faces of my brother and Migang, who had let go of each other's hand and were staggering. Mirui lunged toward Migang and surrounded him with her arms, and I swiftly pulled my brother to my side to comfort him.

"Oh, fuck, just a bunch of kids." A male voice in a northern

Chinese accent betrayed impatience.

"Sure? Take a closer look!" another male voice, lower and thicker.

A brighter flashlight scanned us each head to toe. "Children, what are you doing here?" the lower voice sounded less harsh.

I hesitated a few seconds before venturing: "We... we're going... to the beach... see the sunrise..."

"Huh? My goodness, even tiny peasant kids are polluted with bourgeois ideology!" the northern accent almost screamed.

"There's nothing to see in the sunrise. It's just the same as anywhere else," the lower voice spoke in a seemingly friendly tone.

"No," Mirui seemed to recover her usual argumentative manner. "Sunrise on the sea is the most beautiful..."

"Shut up!" the northern accent shouted. "Stop your nonsense and go home."

The lower voice insisted on speaking more gently: "Kids, go home now. This is a restricted area, you know."

Mirui softened: "But, Sir, we're not bad guys... we'd immediately leave the moment the sun comes out... please, Sir..."

"Yes, please, Sir," my brother suddenly stepped forward, touching the barrel of the gun.

"Freeze!" the northern accent ordered in an authoritative voice. Fearing that my brother would be hit, I pulled him away from the barrel of the gun immediately.

"Hands up! About face!" the northern accent continued giving out military orders.

The last I remember was the lower voice: "Okay, Kids, go home, and never come back."

* * * * *

Thirty years elapsed. I had landed in a town in Maryland on the East Coast of the US. In order to improve my English, I seized every chance to talk to every American I came across,

Continued

and one day, I met Miriam, an active volunteer teaching immigrants English. My eagerness to practice speaking English matched her enthusiasm to help, and we soon became friends.

Miriam was an attractive woman, her skin deliciously supple, and her figure slim and wavy. The first time we met, I thought she must be about forty. It turned out that she was forty-eight, five years older than me! I was especially amazed at the youthful energy seemingly oozing out of every pore of her body. On learning that me and my apartment-mates, Linlan and Fengli, had all left our spouses and children home in China and none of us could drive, she offered to take us to the grocery store every week. In return for her generosity, we cooked her sumptuous Chinese dinners at our apartment. She then invited us to lunch at her house, where we learned that she was a divorcee, with two adult children, both living with their own partners. Before long, her house became a “home” for us to relax and chat, a most pleasant and effective way to learn English.

On the afternoon of the Fourth of July, Miriam organized a BBQ cookout in her back yard. Her children and their partners as well as several neighbors participated, forming a big, noisy crowd. Linlan, Fengli, and I assisted the main chef Tom living two doors away from Miriam. When the meats and vegetables had been put on the grill, Tom struck up a conversation with us.

“How long have you been in the States?”

“About four months.”

“Been to anywhere else yet?”

“No. We don’t have a car... Seems very difficult to go anywhere without one.”

“You can catch a Greyhound bus... to New York, Boston... all the big cities.”

“I heard there’s a popular beach three hours away?” Linlan shifted the direction of our conversation.

“Yeah... that’s very commercialized... there’s a small one in fact about an hour from here.”

“Really?” I yelled.

“What did you mean ‘commercialized?’” Fengli, a professor of English back in China, always concentrated on knowledge of language.

Miriam, who happened to come over to check the cooking, jumped in: “It means there’re many shops and restaurants there.” She then turned to Tom: “Did you mean the Nook? I know it’s about an hour’s drive...”

“Yeah, exactly... very small, but nice and quiet... sand there is beautiful... you’ve been there?”

“No. Jenny mentioned it once, in passing... that was when I first moved here five years ago...”

“Which Jenny? My wife?”

“Yes, yes. Sorry.” Having apologized to Tom, Miriam turned round and explained to us: “We’ve got three Jennys in our neighborhood.”

Tom didn’t wait long before continuing: “As a matter of fact, Jenny has a cousin living in that tiny little place... a couple dozen families, I guess. Jenny and I used to take our kids for the summer. Last few yea...”

“That must be before I moved here. I haven’t met any of your...” Miriam, who could sometimes be overly eager to express her fast-spinning mind, cut in.

Tom seemed to be a great talker too. He nodded, resuming the thread of his talk: “Recent years, the cousin and her husband spent more and more time at his mother’s house... bigger... we’re not visiting... kids are grown... but... like...to go... watch...”

I tuned out his speech as my mind wandered over space and time, back to the East Sea three decades before... the sea, the sea! ... your waters spread everywhere, stretching all the way to the horizon. Wide you open your arms, embracing the whole world... Shh...shh...shh... Stop! Freeze! ... the gun... go home, and never come back... No, I’m determined to go back! I want to see the sea... touch its water... lie in it...

Three weeks later, on the afternoon of a fine Friday, we were riding in Miriam’s car on our way to the Nook. It was our first beach holiday ever in our lives, and in America! A huge deal

for us! We’d bought raw meat, fish, and vegetables in addition to the usual American breakfast food, more than enough for two-night’s dinners for the four of us. Linlan even brought soy sauce and brown sugar, thinking that ordinary American homes wouldn’t have such exotic ingredients for cooking.

Miriam appeared to be in high spirits, singing along with the radio from time to time. A good singer and quick to learn new songs, Linlan often hummed with her. Sitting next to the driver, I was assigned the task of checking the map, making sure that we stayed on course. Fengli, camera in hand, busied himself with taking photos.

Once off the highway, we found ourselves on a gravel road. Gradually, the terrain became hilly, and the road bumpy. Dusk set in before I figured out from the map that we should be arriving in minutes. Soon the road levelled and became less stony. Suddenly, Fengli shouted: “Stop singing! Listen...”

Shh...shh...shh... I whispered: “Is that the sea?!” I stretched my neck and strained my eyes, trying to see the sea in the last rays of twilight... “The sea, the sea!”

“Where? Where?” Fengli swayed his body, trying to aim his camera.

“Just in front of us,” I tapped the front window with my index finger.

“Ah, yes... the water is rushing directly to us...”

Miriam slammed on the brake: “Oh, my god, I missed the turn...” Without a second’s delay, she changed gear and tried to back up. The wheels spun but the car didn’t move. She turned to look through the rear window and thumped the accelerator with her foot. Still, the car wouldn’t budge.

It was not until then that I realized that our car was heading toward the sea, and we must be in trouble. Before the implications truly sank in on us three Chinese, however, Miriam had opened the door and jumped out of the car, yelling: “Get out, quick. Take all our stuff, go to that red brick house.” Turning to me, she said, while feeling her trouser pocket and fishing out something: “Here’s the key. Take my suitcase for me. Start cooking... oh, yeah, turn up the hot water first.”

The minute she had given the instructions, she snatched

her purse from the car door, ran towards a row of houses we had passed earlier, and disappeared into the darkness.

Fear gripped us. Regardless, we didn’t delay unloading the car, hauled everything out of the sand, and managed to find the house. It was a three-bedroom cottage with a cozy sitting room and fully equipped kitchen, although we were not in the mood to express our satisfaction. By the time we had placed Miriam’s belongings in the master bedroom and made the decision that Linlan and Fengli would use the two guest rooms and I sleep on the sitting-room sofa bed, more than an hour had flown by. Worried to death, I wanted to go out to find Miriam and see what happened to the car. But we knew we were too strange to the country to know what to do to help, and the best and only thing for us would be to cook a nice dinner and make the house a welcome home for her when she arrived.

I quickly located the hot water furnace and turned it up while Linlan and Fengli started cooking in the kitchen. Another hour passed. Anxiety overcame us. Linlan told me to go out to see what was going on since I was not much use in the kitchen anyway.

At the end of the street, I saw in the distance Miriam standing in the headlights of her car taking something out of her purse. A few yards away, there seemed to be a truck, also with headlights on. One of two men in the headlights moved to the driver’s door and mounted onto the seat while the other seemed to be engaged in a conversation with Miriam, who was approaching him.

The engines of both vehicles muffled the sound of their voices until I got closer. “...token, I really appreciate your help,” Miriam spoke in her charming voice as she handed over a wad of bills.

“Ah, you are most welcome, Ma’am.” The man, looking about fifty, stuffed the money into his trouser pocket and walked to the passenger side: “Okay, let’s get going. You know where to find us, Ma’am, if you need some more help.”

Whooooooshh... pala... “Hey!” a dark figure up in the

truck bed shouted. “The water is almost where your car was, Ma’am. It’ll be swept away in less than an hour..”

Miriam, who had just reached the driver’s door and was making a gesture for me to get in, turned her head towards the sea: “Oh, my god, this is exactly what I feared...” She then shouted and waved as the truck started off: “Thank you guys!”

Back in the car, Miriam took a long deep breath with her hands on the wheel. In a split second she had let down her façade of enticement and appeared old and worn out. Next moment, before I could find ways to console her, she straightened up, speaking to herself: “Go home now. Have a hot shower and go to bed!”

“The dinner... should be ready any minute now...” I said in a low voice, hesitantly.

“Oh, yes... I’m starving.”

Dinner was a success. Having anticipated that Miriam would want something to cheer her up, Linlan, a head nurse back in China, cooked four of her favorite dishes. They warmed Miriam up and in time her physical and mental state loosened. Towards the end of dinner, enveloped in a relaxed ambience, she even recounted the crisis she had just undergone in a calm, dispassionate manner.

We took turns to use the shower: Miriam, Linlan, Fengli, and I. Both Linlan and Fengli went to bed straight after their shower, but Miriam stayed in the sitting-room making a fire in the fireplace: “The house feels a bit damp... Tom and his wife drew all the curtains up after they left... no sun in for a week...”

I watched the orange flames, feeling mysteriously a bit nostalgic. Somehow, I didn’t really miss my wife and son, but the scene of Mirui, her brother, my brother, and I stubbornly trudging in the mud in the darkness danced in front of me. Miriam was also staring at the fireplace, seemingly lost somewhere far away. Anguish crept onto her face, tears glistening in her eyes. I ventured to ask: “Are you Okay, Miriam?”

“Sorry, I just happened to remember that day...”

“That... day... ye...a...h...?” I asked almost inaudibly.

“That morning, my husband... ex... declared that he no longer loved me and walked out once and for all. I had heard rumors of an affair with a younger woman, but, still, it was such a hard blow... I cried all day... in the evening, after I put my kids into bed, I lit a fire in the fireplace, trying to figure out what I should do... Then, a young man appeared at the door. He must have been in his early twenties... he’d been hired by a farm in the area and asked for directions. I let him in, gave him something to eat, and on the spur of the moment, I seduced him... haaaah... we fucked right on the floor, in front of the fireplace... like wild dogs... I felt avenged... gratified... but deeply, deeply sad... hurt...”

So stunned in disbelief was I that my whole body froze. Silence. Silence. The fire was fading and the room dimming.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” her voice seemed to come from a long distance. “I shouldn’t have shared that at a time like this. You must be missing your wife...”

“No, not really.”

“Eh?” She waited a minute before asking tentatively: “Don’t you love her?”

“Well... we were classmates at the university, but never dated back then. After graduation, we happened to find ourselves assigned to work in the same city... I guess we couldn’t find any better choice... then just married...”

“... not easy... love, marry, stay in love, and stay married...” Miriam murmured.

“We Chinese... in the old days, marriage was more an obligation than for love... I never even heard of a French kiss until I came here.”

“So, you’ve never had a French kiss with your wife?”

“Never... knew such a thing...”

She stood up, her hand beckoning: “Come over... I’ll show you...”

I moved to the edge of the sofa bed, baffled by how she was going to show me.

Next second, she stepped over, pulled me up, and put her mouth on mine. She opened her lips and lightly caressed my upper and lower lips as if comforting them. Then, unexpect-

edly, she poked her tongue into my mouth. It was electrifying. I winced for a split second but steadied myself there and then. I closed my eyes, allowing a hot wave to wash over me, and my hands moved up involuntarily to clutch her body...

The last flame in the fireplace flickered, like the strange sensations shooting up and down my body... my breathing quickened... suddenly I saw my wife and son in the dark corner... Instantly I let go with my hands and pulled away from her: “I’m sorry... I can’t... I mustn’t...”

After retiring to the sofa bed, I lay wild awake with my eyes shut for how long I don’t know. Then I fell asleep dreaming: I am walking to the sea naked... A white round and soft female body flutters out of the sea... the face keeps revolving... now Mirui... now Miriam... Mirui... Miriam... the eyes are luring...

The front door cracked open, and a figure gingerly slipped out. Had it come from the master bedroom? Can’t be a ghost... must be Miriam! What’s she doing? I got up and quietly squeezed my body out the door.

Miriam covered her mouth to suppress her astonishment. “Did I wake you up?” she whispered in a serene voice.

“No... I could hardly sleep...”

“Me, either... might as well go for a quick swim.”

“Would it be too cold?”

“No, not in summer.”

“I’ll go with you, then.” It was only then that I noticed she was wearing a two-piece bathing suit, proper for a swim indeed. “But... um... would you wait for a minute? I need to change... this big T-shirt is my pajamas...”

“Don’t bother,” she chuckled lightly. “It’s pitch dark. Who’d see you?”

I followed her through a wooden side gate, walking on the lawn by the side of the house and stepping onto the brick path in the front garden. Outside the garden the ground felt like a mixture of mud and sand. I was apprehensive: “Is it muddy?”

“No. We’ll soon get to pure sand.”

I swayed a little and tried to catch her arm. She turned around, took my hand, and held it gently: “We’re not very far from the sea now. Listen, the sea...”

Her words (or rather Mirui’s?) soothed me. We walked hand in hand. For a second, I was thirteen again. I started to dread those stern harsh sounds and that gun barrel... Then my feet sank into soft pure sand... We’d be there soon... I thought I heard Mirui purring...

“Here we are, the sea,” Miriam’s voice sounded as if coming from the sea.

Ah, the sea, the sea! At last, I’m in contact with you! Whooooooshh... pala... pala... shh... Lukewarm water wrapped round my ankles; fine sand washed my feet. Next second, without warning, the water rushed out, drawing the sand away. “Wow...” I felt my feet being dragged into the sea.

“Hehe...” Miriam giggled. Stroking my hand and arm gently, she purred: “Don’t worry... we’re safe here. The tide is out now... won’t be swept away...”

“So you’re not scared, even after what happened with your car last night?”

“No, you don’t get intimidated so easily.” She turned around to stand face to face with me. In the predawn light of Venus, I saw her blue eyes glimmering now with tenderness and now with resilience. I was mesmerized. Moving my arms slowly to her back, she spoke in a husky voice: “You have to take it as a whole package, like your life...”

Something was aroused in my heart. I lowered my head to kiss her in the way she had taught me. First slow and soft, and gradually fast and hard... life... whole package... We began panting, she tore away my T-shirt, and I ripped her swimsuit off... We dragged each other down to the sand, where waves broke... We made love “like wild dogs” as the waves played around us...

The sun is rising above the far edge of the sea, sending out zillions of golden rays. On the surface of the shimmering water, Miriam’s body is rocking in her enjoyment of the transient pleasure of life. In the air, Mirui’s voice is echoing: Sunrise on the sea is the most beautiful... beautiful... beautiful...

FIVE ARCHANGELS COME TO VISIT

If you accept the invitation,
these five come to you for five days:
Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Metatron.

You must say a special prayer outside your home
to invite them into your front door.

You must have a candle lit at all times,
a white flower, a list of your wishes
for the Earth, your family, and your own healing
in a sealed envelope with a fresh apple
placed on top which you eat once they are gone,
and you've burned the wishes.

They rest for five days after they leave,
then visit the next 3 people who accept.

I didn't do it. Caved at the pressure of finding three people,
of implicating myself in a chain letter phenomenon,
though there was no if-you-do-this, or don't-do-this at-
tached.

I thought they might come anyway.

I went out in my garden at noon, the sun as my candle,
to throw compost into the bin, and just to see:

(the child within never forgetting the guardian angel
molded to the light switch: invisible, cream colored hand,
like the inside of an almond, touching the shoulder
of the unsuspecting human—just the ever presence of it,
which she evidently still accepts in whole
makes an invitation seem unnecessary—)

I put a draft of this poem at the base of the bellflower stalk
in a wing of the old overgrown star that is the shape of my
garden.

I left a slice of apple on top of it,
figuring the squirrels might eat it, and confident
the angels wouldn't mind, their reputed intelligence
rising far beyond such pettiness.

I stood there, half in sun half in shade
and saw all the welcoming white :

(the way when I was pregnant
the world filled itself with other pregnant
women, even animals, I never noticed before)

not five, but seven white bellflowers left on a single stem,
like silk half-slips hung out, then patterned with sun-
through-dappled-shade, giving off a faint scent of spun
sugar:

the first Shasta daisy stretching its petals in slow frill
around its ore of packed gold—the creamy white yarrow,
in flat, dense clouds, the pinwheels of arugula,
even the new potato blossoms nodding,
as if in reverence—

Is this enough? The trick question of my life
intrudes automatically, asked over
and over since the first grade—

(these angels, after all, are the guardians
of the directions we have to navigate by.
Michael, *in God's favor*, is the name of my son,
and my father, newly dead, and great grandfather,
now glazed back into the packed, unforgiving dirt
of nineteenth century southern Italy—
might that tilt the equation somehow?)

Sister Conlath admonished me never to make
the sign of the cross with my left hand,
even though I am left handed, and chided me
in front of the whole class for not picking a bigger prize
after reading sixty books, though I was happy
to the core with a golf ball for playing Jacks.

I remember another Michael grilling us
other grad students from poetry workshop:
but what do ya think?
did Rilke really believe in angels?



Illustration by Maria Maggi

No one could answer but that didn't
stop us: we all tackled the question
in a postmodern dog pile, sipping
sweating glasses of wine and beer.

Like the light switch, that dog pile,
and its question, stay with me,
tap me on the shoulder now and then
like my Dad now seems to, though he's gone,

stretching into timelessness, my memory pulling
who he was back in the other direction,
like some hybrid of ethereal-earthly taffy,
its layers of what-might-be-possible.

I suspect angels don't need us
to believe in them or invite them
or fit them into an equation so they
can exist, though anyone likes

to be asked and included,
even God, I would imagine.

.

Sometimes
when the evening light laces itself
through the old maples
I see its dying brilliance
and smile at the miracle that I can still,
after so many winters exposed,
sit on that old wicker loveseat, watch the sun
bleed through the branches, and not fall
through its weathered weave at once.

Continued

Here I find myself, without planning to,
willing to peer into the deep ravine

in small moments hurrying by :
and where *they*, beyond explanation

or proof of existence, are more
likely to point a luminous, elusive finger :

that non-space where they might wait, unseen,
yet just a faint whisper away.

not a memory of a light switch
but alongside a tiny crack in me that grows

the light without ritual, without ceremony
or special invitation, more like that part of the flower

that is almost the stem, that unseen passed-over
receptacle from which a satisfied calyx

begins to bloom with the purpose
of just-because, fleeting through

time and deep chambers of beauty
papered over with air—

SEAGOAT

*“strange ministrant of undescribed sounds. . .
Dread opener of the mysterious doors. . .”*

*~ John Keats
Endymion*

In my dream time, you lie on the beach,
fish tail curled beneath musty fur, teach
hours to ring as crystals in the wind,
your music liquid as the sea.

Once you were Pan, hiding in the Nile,
afraid of Chimera’s father. Then Jupiter
swept you into heaven as this goat-fish,
but somehow you managed to smuggle
the echo of your pipes back down
to Earth from that other world of stars.

I first heard that echo in a memory
of dusk. I was five. The big kids in the yard
shrieked and ran, catching fireflies. How they danced
above the grass to the ghost of your music
while the stone steps held me!

Creak and slam, screen door opens and closes.
A large glass canning jar put in my hands.
Still I waited, didn’t want to catch any
once I learned they would die in the jar;
yet I wanted to see them in glass, too.
have my own lamp for just a moment. . .

Another summer, thirty years later:
I stood above the tide pools at
Little Corona, waiting for fireworks.

I watched a trio of night divers
circling in waters below me, shining
eerie lights inside a black glass of ocean

outlined by a waxing sliver of moon.
Sometimes I could even glimpse their breathing
tangled in bent fingers of seaweed,
before the black swallowed their lights again.
The graceful movement of legs and fins
and the path of light beams sweeping the water
made swirling patterns that appeared and disappeared,
distorted by the motion of waves. I kept looking,

wondered what skin feels like inside
those wet suits, how each muscle tensed
and adapted to the pull of the tide.
You were there, the echo of your pipes

weaving through seaweed and up the cliff
removing the locks to my body so I
didn’t care to be inside myself anymore,
I could have been the divers, the fireworks,
the moon, the German tourists pointing,
the grandmother who nodded and
shivered a little in her flimsy cardigan.

You placed this night in the dirt of my memory,
a seed flung out of the pod to open again
when saturated by the moisture of tears.

The next January my body rose up
out of a literal bath, sobbing the relief
of deepest change. My forehead hurt.
The paper warped into waves as I scribbled

*I step out of the suit of myself, unzipped. There are metal
teeth locking
my old skin tight, now broken open, twisting away,
two hemlines*

*on one twirling skirt. A campfire in a barren place,
a bleak planet,
seed on wind without water or familiar, soft earth. I step out*

*and my body, every inch of it incandescent,
has the suggestion of wings.
My new head is gazing in a different direction.
It knows something is beyond
these barren mountains. . .The old skin goes into the fire,
no regrets.
I pulse like a fairy in the dark, a twilight
and a dawn glow from inside.*

When you rise off my dream sand, restless,
and unable to choose between sea or sky,
you’ll pull me awake as deep in the faults of Earth
water molecules split apart and a bodiless child
of light is born to thrash across the clouds.

I’ll wake up feeling how careless
it is to assume even mountains
would stand still for my lifetime. I’ll wonder
if each point of starlight floating over
the black water, each wave cresting its vein
of unmined diamonds is my beautiful,
unfinished business, waiting to shine.

MOMENTUM

her whole week cheeks glowing
who by the end of history doodled
perfect flowing flowering work

mapping it out looping letters
filling openings on a page
noodling back daily chaos

to be brave like a matador
& tame like a hardware store

convinced it all depends
on the perfect dark mood
the strange pull & pulse
with which to work
until it didn't
until light unlit
she lost momentum

object at rest
lost the whole
sum of its parts
just do something
anything from burning
to writing pages

a script for living her story

TESTIMONY

Dead leaves drop and truth refreshes. Nobody tells the truth. Rake sidewalks and scatter brittle brown mulch. Half all species will be extinct in fifty years. Scatter dead leaves where the wind has not. Forget sustainability. Remember when this street was birdless? You planted trees. They grew tall and wide.

Humanity is causing the fastest mass extinctions in the history of earth. Are you weeping? Flowering pears don't bear fruit. It would make a sticky mess on the concrete. Look, the canopy supports birds! Miniature pears the size of peas! Perfect for house finch, titmouse, nuthatch!

Remember when wild winter winds took branches of sickly street trees and dropped them on Prius cars? Large limbs took down the town's power for days at a time. Men in day-glow vests and hard hats doing work, and we thanked them.

This flowering pear stood proud. Remember the quarantine when wild turkeys roamed the flatlands of Berkeley? Gobbling tiny green fruit. A bite here, a bite there. Who was throwing half-eaten fruit around? A family of five, grazing on the sidewalk.

Christianity is a case study in how a worldview changes overnight. Can it happen again? We don't have to believe. Walk carefully over the sidewalk's hunched shoulders shrugging off shallow roots. After being told what to do, think, and feel— there is still time to lead meaningful lives. Isn't there? Anyone bored is not awake. I regret a lot. Mistakes, and bad advice. Planting trees is my medicine, and I testify to it. *Can I get a witness?*

Chaos theory says sudden change is in every process. I sweep in the sunshine. Where are the mockingbirds? This is the time that was prophesied. Now it's Spring. Green leaves murmur in the San Francisco Bay breeze.

Nothing's mandatory except: enjoy life, even in the darkest times. A finch finds fresh water to drink in a glass bowl, where a tomato cage is the perfect perch.

Allow this moment to be an awakening, and link arms. Let us be grateful, and alive on earth. A flowering pear tree shimmers in sunshine, and a pair of mourning doves kiss.

**FLETCHER BARGAINED WITH THE DEVIL
BUT DIDN'T TAKE THE DEAL**

Fletcher pulls cash out of his pockets, sort his bills, straightens them, and faces them the same way. Then, using cigarette papers to roll marijuana—aw, shit, that's right. Lot's of it. Rolling it and smoking it. He unlaces his brown Oxfords and kicks them off. Fletcher bargained with the devil but rejected the deal. Fumbling through a bunch of dusty records, hearing gruff rumbles—voices down the hall. Peeping through the hole, Bianca sees hints of shapes and colors.

Closing her eyes, she selects an old LP from the stack and cues it up on the player. Bianca sleeps on the floor and dreams of a sloping hill clinging to a cloud, with Lenny Bruce leading a procession of children out of the woods. A thousand violins play. The process slithers along in the margins, the content an experiment. Both, nothing adds up, and magic is a teachable subject.

BLOOD LEMON

Feel formidable winds blow through the shed and the cyclone fence. See scant moonlight leak between reddish wooden slats where English Ivy unfurls. Squeeze your arm between the planks to pick a ripe lemon.

Now the sun of tenderness is down. Time to drink water and lemon for health. Look up at a pale, dark, sky and crescent moon, veiled by an overgrown evergreen canopy. Let's learn new things by the illuminated lemon.

Reach for it on a spirit path—fit your original face into the crevice where it dangles—close your eyes and feel for it with your left hand.

Risk it. Did you forget?—lemon trees have occult thorns—now your hand is suffering and impaled.

Suck the tiny drop of blood, it tastes and stings like metal. See the singing bowl on the dusty crate, it awaits hands.

I'm a person of my word, I tell you. In time, coffee brewing at Wednesday night prayer meeting over the fence, perfumes the air.

You suck your stinging thumb, for security. Take the bowl, strike once with a smooth stick, and it sings. This timeless, dusty tone, in this ruined home is a separate tenderness.

CHAMPIONS OF DREAMING

Born without tongues
They elicited poets
From many countries
To form international
Voices that performed
With dancers.

There was no time.
Everything was happening
At once but nothing was
Bumping into each other.

Every aspect of the Buddhas
All the teachings, all
The roads and tunnels
Passageways, highways, alleys.

I walked inside the pyramids.
I saw the maidens with
The crystals, lace umbrellas
Sitting in the trees.

Every time I needed
A guide they would appear.
It was a complete vision.

I was sorry I had to return
To write about this.
I was with the champions
Of dreaming.

I WILL GO TO DREAMLAND

I will go to dreamland.
You may carry the rose
If you care to do so.

I will be there with you.
We can walk together.
I remember we came
Here before you were
Born.

I would kiss the back
Of your neck and you would
Draw your finger across
My cheek.

We were the destination.

IN THE AUTUMN HERE

In the Autumn here
The golds and reds and browns
Are scattered around like songs
Of summer passing long.

The days hung upon the clouds
Full of magic and the slurry
Light of winter loading
Itself just off stage.
A bouquet of longing
So loud upon the land
So much like the love is youth
And the music of its bands.

THE SUPPLICANT

We thought we would find stars
But the garden had been abandoned.

There was a blank light at the end
Of the field, no light outside
Of its crisp circle.

The rooms filled with red.
The little wolf bounding across
The new snow listening
To the ice shattering on the tree
Branches, the rain of frozen
Water.

Someone unwraps a package.
Startled deer pour from out of
A silver box, their movements
Slow, like clockwork.
Their eyes founded on children
Who have become lost in the forest
Never to be seen again.
The faith of the high circling birds.

THE SOUND THAT HOLDS THE WATER

I am the charm of lightning.
I am the gift of the fleet.
You will sing for me
In the core of all dancing
Pure in the center of streets.

I have the grail of forgotten dreams
They dance on the face of my shields.
They burst the night at its seams.

I hold the leashes of the devil dogs
Who live on breath such as ours.
They strain on their leads
Like symphonies,
Each shadow, each motion,
Each motivation of my hand is in the truth.

The blood of my heart will capture you.
You draw me up by my eyes.
I burn like a chirring of the morning.
I sing as the vision of the skies.

You will not tempt me with magic.
You will not charm me with song.
I know what is right with your soul cart.
I also know what is wrong.

I'll spell you, charm as you kiss me.
I will give you a ring for forever.
I will hold back the water that drowns.

Keep me in your arms till your heart melts.
I'll hold you in my soul past all dawns.
I will place all the heavens within you.
You will feel as if you've never done wrong.

**SHE REMINDS THE ANGELS
WITH HER LAUGH**

She reminds the angels with her laugh
That there is sunlight on the waves
Of this spinning blue ball we live upon.

Those who sing before the throne
Will find her eyes to hold a greater song
Than those which hold the stars
In their twinkling places high above
The blanket of the deepest night.

The horses of the wind compete
To toss her hair about her shoulders
For it is more beautiful than their manes.
And they would fail not to bow before her.

And her breath upon my lips before we kiss
Makes the flowers stumble in their perfect
Circumstance and the bees in the honeyed
Hive fly to her as I fly to her sweetest touch.

Oh, all these things she is indeed
For it is her heart that calls the seasons
To their glorious tasks as it calls to me
To dance the language in her praise.

**PLAYING OVER THE
SLASH CHORDS**

The sky was charring.
The dark trumpet eyes
Of the evening fell upon
Us in a memory of bison
Herds and great raptor
Birds searching for souls.

For a kind of emptiness
Not found in the quiet
Things of this world.

They need that swelling
Found in fine jazz
That is never spoken, but pulled
From strings and brassy
Horns, from reeds and the hurried
Footsteps of time long ago.

Sweeping memory from the sky,
Not peeling it away from itself.
Trying to form a simple
Circle of any given day.

As we undress ourselves,
Knowing we will once again
Be ruled by the most
Profound sleep imagined.

SPINDRIFT

Filing the mouth with gems so no one will notice.
Clap hands when the sea bursts above wakeful dreams.
Tear the yesterdays from the wounds lifted by the wind.
I will catch your heart in my hands and rejoice
In the quarrels of the eyes with the waking world.

What song is this? The melon still locked inside the seed.
The quince has barely made its announcement and already
Spring crouches in the ends of the branches, a surprise
For the children already caught in the swollen plum buds.
The mornings are hazy through the early hours,
Colors of California February insisting upon a thousand
Greens, urging the trees to recall how the year might go.

When I was a child, I bet every dream against the new day.
I still laugh to watch Winter stumble over a run of
warm days.
We wait for the moon to return. Watch the smaller flocks
of birds
Still hurry across the town to find kind company
before the rains
Return, drunk on the quarrels of the winds busy at their
flying weather.

Here, there is always the edge of the sea, the banks
of the river,
The confused decisions of currents trough the sloughs.
How precious each day becomes beneath bird song
and alfalfa
Reaching as quickly as it might to rouse itself toward
a lingering
Light, now left past five o'clock, clocks for hair, the sun,
a secret child.

It is still cold enough in the dark to build a fire in
the garden,
If only to stand about it and discuss what crops might be
The chosen ones in the beds not yet broken for seed.

We cook a soup from what grows near the fence posts.
Sweet and bitter, soft with floating temples of green.
Even a cricket notices the loneliness of spindrift
Easing the heart away from cold and colder nights.
We choose the journey then the journey chooses us.



THE B I O S

D. GAIL ENGBRETSSEN

D.Gail Engebretsen is a Sierra Nevada Mountain northern Californian transplanted to the gorgeous southern Oregon coast. A woman of many hats, Gail's been a small business owner, an early childhood educator, and a social worker. She was also ordained as a minister of the Universal Life Church in 2015. Her important life roles include those of wife, foster-adoptive mother, and step-mother. The kids have long ago grown and flown, which leaves Gail more time for hanging out with her adorable husband. A self – confessed book whore, Gail is an avid reader, an occasional crafter and a somewhat lazy flower gardener. Retired early due to disability, Gail (aka Darlene), now has the freedom to go to her happy places at the beaches and write poetry when the Spirit moves her. She enjoys occasional forays into the local forests for inspiration too. Gail is the author of "Places In My Heart", a book of poetry and prose published by Cold River Press.

YUAN HONGRI

Yuan Hongri (b. 1962) is a renowned Chinese mystic, poet, and philosopher. His work has been published in the UK, USA, India, New Zealand, Canada, and Nigeria; his poems have appeared in *Poet's Espresso Review*, *Orbis*, *Tip-ton Poetry Journal*, *Harbinger Asylum*, *The Stray Branch*, *Pinyon Review*, *Taj Mahal Review*, *Madswirl*, *Shot Glass Journal*, *Amethyst Review*, *The Poetry Village*, and other e-zines, anthologies, and journals. His best known works are *Platinum City* and *Golden Giant*. His works explore themes of prehistoric and future civilization.

WIT LEE

Wit lee(b.1981), Chinese name is Li Hui, a Chinese editor,poetess and translator, has published many poems on *Deep Overstock*, *Harbinger Asylum*, *EL.Portal*, and one poetry book *Beyond Time*.

YUAN BING ZHANG

Yuanbing Zhang (b. 1974), is Mr. Yuan Hongri's assistant and translator. He himself is a Chinese poet and translator, and works in a Middle School, Yanzhou District, Jining City, Shandong Province China. He can be contacted through his email-3112362909@qq.com.

MANU MANGATTU

Manu Mangattu is an English Professor, poet, editor, director and rank-holder. He has published 7 books, 73 research articles and 36 conference papers apart from 14 edited volumes with ISBN. He serves as chief editor/editor for various international journals. He has done UGC funded projects and a SWAYAM-MOOC course (Rs 15 lakhs). Besides translations from Chinese and Sanskrit, he writes poetry in English as well as in Indian languages. He was named "Comrade to Poetry China" in 2016. A visiting faculty at various universities and a quintessential bohemian-vagabond, he conducts poetry readings, workshops and lectures when inspired. After an apprenticeship in Shakespeare under Dr Stephen Greenblatt, he currently guides 23 research scholars and mentors NET English aspirants. Email:3112362909@qq.com

JAKE TRINGALI

Thrives in a habitat of bars, punk rock shows, and late-night adventures. His first book, *Poetry for the Neon Apocalypse*, is available on Amazon. He hosted *Outskirts Poetry Podcast*, featuring creative people working on wild projects.

ANDREW LAUFER

Andrew is currently a gentleman farmer, writer, and storyteller. The lion's share of his career was with the California Department of Education. Prior to that, he was a Registered Dietitian, a butcher's helper, a janitor, a food service worker, construction laborer, firefighter, research lab technician, phlebotomist, a soldier in the

US Army, and a salesman. He's hitchhiked throughout the western United States and had coast to coast adventures too. All of these, and many more experiences, have prepared him well to tell stories about life in America.

PILAR GRAHAM

Pilar Christiana Graham is the author, most recently, of *Currents*. Her poetry has appeared in *Sundog*, *Haunted Waters Press*; *Indent Literary Journal*; *Finishing Line Press*; *Blackberry*, among others. Publications for her creative nonfiction essays include *Essay Daily*; *The Broiler: A Journal of New Literature*; *Poetry Midwest*; and *Pithehead Chapel Press*. Graham has served as a literary editor and a judge for local and national writing competitions. Graham earned her MFA in Poetry from California State University, Fresno and teaches at California State University, Monterey Bay and Fresno City College. She is currently seeking publication for a collection of essays, *Burn Scars*, a series of confessions in love, loss, and survival, while traversing across physical, emotional, and spiritual landscapes, amongst a backdrop of the wildfires in California. www.pilargraham.com

DAN SILVERBERG

Dan Silverberg is a stone sculptor and poet who lives in a rural cabin in the heart of the Mother Lode. His work has appeared in *Poetry Now*, *Connexions*, *Suisun Valley Review*, *Tule Review*, and *Poet News*. His first, full-length collection of poems, *-30-*, will be available in fall 2023 from *Conflux Press*.

ED BALLDINGER

Ed Balldinger is a born, raised, and aging Sacramento native. He left Sacramento for 9 months once as an 18-year-old rookie of the road and inexplicably landed in York, Nebraska where he ran into his soul mate before returning together to Sacramento in 1983. They grew 2 sons into respectable men and many dreams into colorful experiences as co-creative partners.

Ed has co-written/produced, played various instruments, and sung on 11 musical albums with 2 groups, the WNGC and the Mood Groove, in the past 26 years. Ed published a book of poetry in 2009 called, “*From Cavity’s Kitchen to the Bone Comber’s Home*.” He has had poems published in Cold River Press collections, *Quiet Rooms 2020* and *Voices 2022 – Fantasies, Demons & Lovers*, and the 2023 Summer edition of the *Tule Review*. Ed is currently working on a collection of new poetry which will be published and available in both written and spoken form upon completion in 2024. He can be contacted by email at balding-er@gmail.com.

BELINDA SUBRAMAN

Belinda Subraman has been publishing poetry since the 1970s, and edited *GYPSY*, an international literary magazine from Germany in the 80s along with *Sanctuary Tapes*, cassettes of readings and original music from around the world. Since then she has interviewed many poets, artists and musicians on radio shows and podcasts. Currently she publishes GAS: Poetry, Art & Music video show and journal. Her archives are housed at University of New Mexico, Albuquerque. She is readying a book manuscript called Full Moon Midnight. She is also a mixed media artist

JOHN BURROUGHS

John Burroughs of Cleveland, OH, is the 2022-2023 U.S. Beat Poet Laureate. He is the author of *The Wrest of the Worthwhile* (2023, Far Queue Press), *Rattle & Numb* (2019, Venetian Spider Press), *The Eater of the Absurd* (2012, Night Ballet Press) and over a dozen poetry chapbooks. Since 2008, Burroughs has served as the founding editor and publisher for Crisis Chronicles Press. You can find him at www.crisischronicles.com.

TOM GOFF

Tom Goff is the 2021 winner of the Robinson Jeffers Tor House Prize for Poetry, with his poem “*Blind Tom’s Battle of Manassas*.” His first full-length poetry book, *Twelve-Tone Row: Music in Words*, was published in 2018. He is working on a new poetry collection, *Reading in the Dark*. Tom studied trumpet performance at Sacramento State and the San Francisco Conservatory and performs with Golden State Brass and the Auburn and Camellia Symphonies. He works at Folsom Lake College in the Reading and Writing Center. Recent poetry publication credits include *FLC’s The Parlay and Spectral Realms* (Hippocampus Press, NY). His reviews of Susan Kelly-DeWitt’s *Gravitational Tug* and Mary Mackey’s *Creativity: Where Poems Begin* have appeared in Poetry Flash, and his review of Brad Buchanan’s *Chimera*, is published in the February 2023 Poet News.

NANCY E. GOTTHART

Born and raised in Sacramento, California in 1937, found solace in both writing and painting as a teenager. Choosing to major in Art at Sacramento State University, she then went on to Stanford for a master’s degree in Studio Painting. Her exhibition record spans the 60s through the 90s, while her publishing began in the 70s with a chapbook titled “*Oracles in Season*” (Runcible Spoon), and in *Maguey*, a dual language magazine. She recently collaborated on a book of figure drawings from the 80s with William Stanisich, “*Celebrating Toni Tondalayo*.” She returned to Sacramento in 1997; and shortly thereafter, her last painting exhibit was held at the The Foundry. Turned to writing flash fiction and poetry, she soon narrowed her focus narrowed to poetry. She has published her poetry on the web and presently has a website (nancygotthart.com) where both her drawings and poetry can be found.

VICTORIA DALKEY

Poet and art critic Victoria Dalkey is a Sacramento native whose poems have recently appeared in *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Bellevue Literary Review* (where she was a finalist for the Marica and Jan Vilcek Poetry Prize), and the anthology *Why From These Rocks: 50 Years of Poems from the Community of Writers* (Heyday Books). She is the author of *twenty.nine.poems* (Redwing Press, 1999), *In the Absence of Silver* (Rattlesnake Press, 2004), and coauthor with Ann Menebroker, Kathryn Hohlwein, and Viola Weinberg Spenser of *Tough Enough: Poems from the Tough Old Broads* (Cold River Press, 2019).

LOCH HENSON

Loch Henson published her debut collection of poetry in 2018, entitled “*Hungry Ghosts - Collected Poems*” (Balboa Press). She has been a recurring contributor to the Cold River Press VOICES series, and her spoken word Featured Artist appearances have included “Poetry of the Sierra Foothills”, Café Luna’s “Poetry Unplugged” in Sacramento, and as a guest reader in the “Poet Laureate Trail” series in El Dorado County, California. Her poetry has also appeared in online forums, including “Medusa’s Kitchen” and “Visual Verse”. She collects the back issues of “Parabola” magazine with unhesitating abandon, and has been known to shamelessly carry an actual paper notebook almost everywhere.

LARA GULARTE

Lara Gualarte served as El Dorado County Poet Laureate from 2021 to 2023. Her book of poetry, *Fourth World Woman*, was published by “Finishing Line Press, and *Kissing the Bee*, her book about her California Portuguese pioneer ancestors was published by “The Bitter Oleander Press,” in 2018. Nominated for several pushcart prizes, find her work in national and

international journals and anthologies. She is affiliated with the Cigarros Colloquium: Azoreans Diaspora Writers, at the Portuguese Beyond Borders Institute (PBBI), California State University-Fresno. Gualarte is a teaching artist of creative writing in the arts in corrections program at Mule Creek State Prison and leads the workshops, “Writing Our Words” at the Cameron Park Library,”

SIBILLA HERSHEY

Sibilla Hershey was born in Riga, Latvia and came to the United States at the age of 15 as a World War II displaced person. She taught at Solano Community College and worked for the State of California. She has published her poems in numerous literary journals including Poetry Now, Tule Review, Entering and several anthologies. She is also author of a memoir entitled *The Girl from Riga*.

SUSAN KELLY-DEWITT

Susan Kelly-DeWitt is a former Wallace Stegner Fellow and the author of *Gatherer’s Alphabet* (Gunpowder Press, CA Poets Prize, 2022), *Gravitational Tug* (Main Street Rag, 2020), *Spider Season* (Cold River Press, 2016), *The Fortunate Islands* (Marick Press, 2008) and a number of previous small press collections. Her work has also appeared in many anthologies, and in print and online journals at home and abroad. She is currently a member of the National Book Critics Circle, the Northern California Book Reviewers Association and a contributing editor for Poetry Flash. For more information, please visit her website at www.susankelly-dewitt.com.

BINOD DAWADI

Binod Dawadi, the author of *The Power of Words*, is a master’s degree holder in Major English. He has worked on more than 1000 anthologies published in various renowned mag-

azines. His vision is to change society through knowledge, wanting to provide enlightenment to all people through his writing skills.

JILL STOCKINGER

Jill Stockinger obtained her MLS from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and served as a librarian in large library systems for 42 years. As a Branch Supervisor for Sacramento Public Library, she ran an open writing group for 16 years until she retired in 2019. Her poems have been published in small literary magazines, including Spectrum,Voices 2021, Primavera and Did We Not Meet. Retired, she participates in ZOOM poetry sessions, including meetings sponsored by the Alameda Island Poets, the Renaissance Society, the JCC-SF, Bob Stanley, Joyce Hsiao and Mary Eichbauer. She also spends more time than she should, playing online games with her husband, son and grandchildren.

JIM BOUREY

jim bourey is a poet from the northern edge of the Adirondacks. His newest collection, *Out There and Back Again*, from Cold River Press, launched in April 2023. His previous book, *The Distance Between Us*, was published by Cold River Press in 2020. In 2022, *Season of Harvest*, a collection with noted poet Linda Blaskey, was published by Pond Road Press. jim’s first book was a chapbook called *Silence, Interrupted*, published by Broadkill River Press in 2015. His work has also appeared in many journals and anthologies, and he is a contributing editor for the Broadkill Review. He can often be found reading aloud in dimly lit rooms. jim lives in Dickinson Center, NY with his wife Linda, who has provided photographs for many of jim’s projects.

JOAN GOODREAU

Joan Goodreau’s recent work is *Strangers Together: How My Son’s Autism Changed My Life, Another Secret Shared* and *Where to Next*. Her

Zoom play has just been produced this Spring. She is currently working on a poetry collection from her interviews with parents of autistic children during the pandemic.

BRAD BUCHANAN

Brad Buchanan has published four book-length collections of poetry, the most recent being, *Chimera*, from Finishing Line Press. Formerly Professor of English at Sacramento State University, he was diagnosed with T-cell lymphoma in February 2015, and underwent a stem cell transplant in 2016, which involved a lengthy recovery and temporary vision loss. These days, he writes and facilitates Writing As Healing Zoom workshops through the UC Davis Cancer Center and the Sacramento Society for the Blind.

KARL KEMPTON

Widely published by small independent publishers, karl lives with his beloved Ruth in Oceano, California, consciously removed from literary centers adding to the local bohemian Dunite literary & photographic legacy. He is an environmental activist poet and known as architect of the nominated Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary protecting over 7,000 square miles of ocean ecosystems and features. Recent books include: *intimate h&s*, Post Asemic Press, 2021; *selected lexical & visual mathematical poetry 1976-2022*, Cold River Press, 2022; *photography — Discourse 10: sand-skrit of the oceano dunes, 2021* and forthcoming, *Discourse 11: portraiture: oceano dunes to tide lines*, both from Otoliths, Australia.

TIM KAHL

Tim Kahl (www.timkahl.com) (<https://soundcloud.com/tinklbnny>) is the author of five books of poems, most recently *Omnishambles* (Bald Trickster, 2019) and *California Sijo* (Bald Trickster, 2022). He is also an editor of Clade

Song (www.cladesong.com]). He builds flutes, plays them and plays guitars, ukuleles, charangos and cavaquinhos as well. He currently teaches at California State University, Sacramento, where he sings lieder while walking on campus between classes.

SANDRA TANHAUSER

Sandra Tanhauser first started writing poetry in the early 1970's when living in the Santa Monica/Venice Beach area. The artistic scene then centered around small bookstores and Beyond Baroque, which was a venue for poetry readings and other artistic performances. She had a number of poems published in Momentum, a local small press publication. She left the area to pursue a career in IT and also stopped writing for about 40 years. Sandra returned to writing last year and has been very involved with workshops at the Sacramento Poetry Center (SPC) and is pursuing publishing with several journals, re-discovering the joy this beautiful avenue for expressing the essence of the soul can bring.

JEANINE STEVENS

Jeanine Stevens is the author of *No Lunch Among the Day Stars*, (Cold River Press, 2022), and chapbooks, *Ornate Persona* (Clair Songbirds Press, 2022), and *Tea in the Nun's Library*, (Eyewear Publishing, UK 2022). She is winner of the MacGuffin Poet Hunt, WOMR Cape Cod Community Radio National Award, and The William Stafford Award. Jeanine has been published in *Evansville Review*, *North Dakota Review*, *Chiron Review*, *Poets' Espresso Review*, and others. Jeanine is Professor Emerita at American River College in Sacramento.

STANLEY ZUMBIEL

Stan Zumbiel taught English in middle and high school for thirty-five years yet doesn't have the slightest idea how he got to be old. He served on the board of the Sacramento Po-

etry Center for 25 years. In January, 2008 he received his MFA in Writing from Vermont College of Fine Arts. Random Lane Press published his first book, *Standing Watch*, in 2016. His most recent collection, *Hat Full of Leaves*, was published by Cold River Press in January, 2022. His poems have appeared in *Nimrod*, *Primal Urge*, *Convergence*, *Sacramento Voices*, *Medusa's Kitchen*, and others. He lives in sight of the American River in a home he shares with his wife Lynn where he continues to shape words and images into poems.

A.D. WINANS

A.D. Winans is a native award-winning San Francisco poet and writer and a graduate of San Francisco State College (now University).

From 1972 to 1989 he edited and published Second Coming Press, which produced a large number of books and anthologies, among them the highly acclaimed California Bicentennial Poet's Anthology, which included poets like David Meltzer, Jack Micheline, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Ishmael Reed, Josephine Miles, Bob Kaufman, Harold Norse, Gene Fowler, Philip Levine, Glenna Luschei, Ann Stanford, Charles Bukowski, and William Everson.

His work has appeared in hundreds of literary magazines and Anthologies, including *City Lights Journal*, *Beat Scene*, *Beatitude*, *Poetry Australia*, *the New York Quarterly*, *the Patterson Literary Journal*, *the San Francisco Chronicle*, and the *Outlaw Bible of American Poetry*.

LINDA JACKSON COLLINS

Linda Jackson Collins has been writing and editing in the Sacramento community for over 10 years. She was an editor of the Sacramento Poetry Center's journal, *Tule Review*, and participates in various writing groups and workshops. Her collection, *Painting Trees*, published by Random Lane Press, won the Gold Medal in poetry from Northern California Publishers and Authors (NCPA) in its 2019 contest. In ad-

dition, she has had individual poems published in numerous literary journals. Learn more at www.ljcreviews.com.

TAYLOR GRAHAM

Taylor Graham is a volunteer search-and-rescue dog handler and served as El Dorado County's first poet laureate (2016-18). She's included in the anthologies *California Poetry: From the Gold Rush to the Present*, *California Fire & Water: A Climate Crisis Anthology*, and *Villanelles* (Everyman's Library). Her latest books are *Uplift* (2016) and *Windows of Time and Place* (2019), both from Cold River Press.

VINCENT DECONINCK

Vincent Deconinck is a young writer from Auburn, CA. This is his first appearance in VOICES.

JENNIFER FENN

Jennifer Fenn has been writing poetry since high school. She is an accounting assistant for a large powdered milk company by day and a poet by night. Her poems are published in eighteen journals, including *Monterey Poetry Review*, *Brevities*, *The Orchards*, *Mermaids Monthly*, and *Time of Singing*. She has self-published two chapbooks, *Blessings*, and *Song of the Katabatic Wind*, as church fundraisers. Jennifer is the winner of the California Federation of Chaparral Poets 2021 Roadrunner Award.

DANA RAVYN

Dana Ravyn is a transfem poet, novelist, and educator. She has been a medical writer and physician educator for over 20 years. She is the author of two novels, *Fearless Heart* (KDP, 2014), and *The Suicide Switch* (Wynkyn Worde, 2023). Dana's poetry appears in anthologies *Wilderness House Literary Magazine*, *Sparks of Calliope*, *The Edge of Humanity Magazine*, *Anak Sastra Literary Magazine*, *Avocet*, and others. She works at a public library and does

outreach to improve health literacy empowerment in her community. Dana lives with her feline companion Anja in the Rehoboth Beach, Delaware, USA area.

PAUL APONTE

Paul Aponte is a Chicano Poet from Sacramento. He is a member of the writers group Escritores Del Nuevo Sol, and also a board member of Círculo De Poetas & Writers. He has been published in several anthologies, in Sacramento Poetry Center's "Poetry Now", and has a new book out called *DEL CACTUS* available through Prickly Pear Press and Amazon.com

JOE NOLAN

Joe Nolan began publishing his work in the Fall of 2017. He has three self-published books of poems, *Human Grace*, 2nd Edition, *Cats Can't Use Straws* and *Sky Gardens*, which are available on Amazon. His fourth book, *Water Dreams*, was published in 2021 by Cold River Press. His poems have been published in the *Sacramento Voices Poetry Anthology*, *Now*, *VOICES*, *Better Than Starbucks*, *Poetry Now*, *Collisions 5 in Modesto*, *Medusa's Kitchen*, *Song of the San Joaquin* and *Brevities Mini-Mag of Minimalist Poetry*. Joe has published over 1250 poems since 2017. His interests include hiking in forests and on beaches, time in nature, meditation, yoga, Jin Shin Jyutsu acupressure, chi-gong and spicy dishes at Thai and Indian restaurants

LELANIA FOWLER

Born and reared on the Eastside of Santa Barbara, California, Lelania experienced a Chicano/Hippie hybrid childhood. Later as a homeless teen, she bounced between Long Beach, Hollywood, and her hometown of Santa Barbara before relocating to Sacramento. In the late 1980's she became part of a thriving music and arts scene, and she began songwriting for local musicians. She writes about PTSD, Sexual Violence, California nature themes and is a men-

tal health activist. She has been published by Cold River Press with two collections, *Under a Milk Glass Moon* and *The Shyness of Crowns*. Her poetry has also been published in *Quiet Rooms*, and VOICES, global anthologies published by Cold River Press.

SHARON GARIEPY FRYE

Sharon Garipey Frye is a poet living in Northern Oklahoma. After 35 years of delivering mail for the USPS, she has retired. She enjoys rural photography as well as writing. Her chapbook, "Last Chance for Rain" was published in 2014 by Writing Knights Press. Her latest volume of poetry, "Blue Lamentations and Other Noisy Scrawls" was published by Cold River Press in March, 2017. Sharon has been invited to read her work in Ireland, Sacramento, Little Rock, Tulsa, Dallas and Oklahoma City. She has also featured in the symphony hall of her hometown of Enid, Oklahoma and has also been published in numerous publications in the US, Ireland and Brazil.

DIANE FUNSTON

Diane Funston writes poetry of nature and human nature. She co-founded a women's poetry salon in San Diego, created a weekly poetry gathering in the high desert town of Tehachapi, CA and most recently has been the Yuba-Sutter Arts and Culture Poet-in-Residence for the past two years. It is in this role she created Poetry Square, a monthly online venue that features poets from all the world reading their work and discussing creative process. Diane has been published in *Last Stanza*, *Synkronicity*, *California Quarterly*, *Whirlwind*, *San Diego Poetry Annual*, *Summation*, *Tule Review*, *Lake Affect Magazine*, and other literary journals. Her first chapbook, "Over the Falls" was published this July 2022 from Foothills Publishing. Diane is also a visual artist in mosaic, wool felting, and collage. Her pieces have been in galleries in the Sacramento Valley. She can be reached at no-paradise@me.com

YUAN CHANGMING

Yuan Changming grew up in rural China and began writing fiction in early 2022. Publication credits include *Lincoln Review* (UK), *Paper Dragon* (US), *StylusLit* (Australia) and *Nashwaak Review* (Canada), among others. Currently, Yuan is working on a trilogy.

DON FELIZ

Don Feliz is a seventh generation Californian who grew up in various San Francisco Bay area counties. After San Francisco State, and three years as a soldier in West Berlin, he moved to Sacramento in 1968. He started writing poetry in 1995 at Sacramento Poetry Center's Hart workshop. Don's poems have been published in *Brevities*, *Poet's Forum Magazine*, *Rattlesnake Review*, *To Berlin With Love* (Rattlesnake Press, SnakeRings SpiralChap #9), and *The Gathering* (the Ina Coolbrith Circle 2005 and 2007 Anthologies). He is a former co-editor of *Freewheeling*, an annual poetry journal published by the Towe (now California) Auto Museum in Sacramento.

CELESTE R. BARTEL

Celeste R. Bartel is a long time resident of Sacramento, California. She is originally from Chicago, Illinois. Celeste Bartel's poetry has been featured in 12 issues of the mini poetry magazine, *Brevities*. Celeste's poetry centers on the human condition and relationships.

BEATRICE PIZER

Beatrice Pizer grew up in London, UK, immigrating to California in 1972. She has a BA in Fine Arts, an MA in the Psychology of Symbols and received an Italian Government Scholarship for Painting in Rome (1970). She was creative writing teacher at Women's Wisdom ARTS program in Sacramento.(2001) and her work was published in *Voices 2022* and *Colossus magazine 2023*. Beatrice lives with her husband, small dog and big cat in Placerville, Ca. where she offers shamanic services and writes poetry.

TIMOTHY McHARGUE

Timothy McHargue has published extensively as a creative writer and freelance journalist with columns, feature stories and investigative pieces on art, entertainment, and social issues. While residing in Nevada City he spearheaded the publication “*Glyphs: The Nevada City Literary Journal*.” He has also published three collections of prose poetry: *Typography of the Flesh: Thirty Prose Poems*; *Bali Rain Psalm*; and *Wig Bubbles*. His short stories and poetry have appeared in many literary journals. He plays guitar and composes songs, and recently produced a CD of original music called “*Into the Real*.” Tim has been exploring the intersection of writing, art and music and has engaged in performance art using multimedia at various venues.

VICKI CARROLL

Vicki Carroll, a Sacramento native enjoys poetry and the spoken word. She has been involved in workshops at Laguna Creek Valley High Library, and James Lee Jobe’s workshop in Davis, Tuesday night at Ethel Hart Senior Center, and Nick La Force’s Friday afternoon workshop. Vicki has participated in Writers on the Air, and Avid Reader’s Speak Up, both of which are monthly Venues. Vicki has also been featured at Sac Poetry Center in the Emerging Poet series. Vicki has been published in *Medusa’s Kitchen*, *Sacramento Voices* and *VOICES*. In 2022 she wrote a chapbook, “*Half a Chap, Vicki Carroll’s Bakers Dozen*”, and also joined, “The Sacramento Storytelling Guild”.

ALLEGRA SILBERSTEIN

Allegra grew up on a farm in Wisconsin but has lived in California since 1963. Her love of poetry began as a child when her mother would recite poems as she worked. In 2010 she was chosen as the first Poet Laureate for the city of Davis, CA. She is widely published in journals and has three chapbooks as well as three books of poetry. Allegra also performs with the Third Stage dance company in Davis and is a member of the Threshold Choir.

BENITO VILA

Benito Vila lives in a remote fishing village on Mexico’s Pacific coast. He first had his poetry published in 2020 in *Love Love*, an underground magazine based in Paris. His other published work includes the editing of *Of Myth & Men*, a narrative cut-up of poet Charles Plymell’s email correspondence (for Bottle of Smoke Press), and creating profiles of “counterculture” instigators for pleasekillme.com and legsville.com. 2023 finds him working on a second email book for Charles Plymell, and looking forward to a set of record releases for which he’s written and edited liner notes—a new opera from Mike Watt and three albums from Peter Stampfel.

S.M. CARUTHERS

SM Caruthers is a 4th generation Californian, a walker, dobro player, graduate of UC Berkeley, Consultant, and mother of three incredible women. She’s published in *Manzanita Press*, an El Dorado Hills Literary Collection/Folsom College, *The Sable and Quill*, *d Capitol Crimes Anthology* and elsewhere. Her book, *Tales of the West* is published by I Street Press. Her novel, *The Conductor Tickets Death* is a finalist in The Mystery category of Killer Nashville Claymore Award, July 2022.

DIANNA HENNING

Dianna taught through California Poets in the Schools, received several California Arts Council grants and taught poetry workshops through the William James Association’s Prison Arts Program and has run The Thompson Peak Writers’ Workshop in Lassen County. Publications, in part: *Worth More Standing*, *Poets and Activists Pay Homage to Trees*; *Voices*; *MacQueen’s Quinterly*; *Artemis Journal*, 2021 & 2022; *The Adirondack Review*; *Memoir Magazine*; *The Plague Papers*, edited by Robbi Nester; *Pacific Poetry* and *New American Writing*. 2021 Nomination by *The Adirondack Review* for a

Pushcart Prize. MFA in Writing ’89, Vermont College. Fourth poetry book “*Camaraderie of the Marvelous*” published by Kelsay Books 2021. She is a six-time Pushcart Nominee.

ROGER FUNSTON

Roger Funston retired in the Sacramento Valley after a long career in the Environmental field. He began writing poetry in 2008 as a respite from his structured corporate life to feed his aesthetic soul. He met the love of his life at an Open Mic in Tehachapi, California. His poems focus on the natural world, his life journey, his travels and things he’s seen that you can’t make up. He enjoys hiking in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, volunteering with environmental non-profits, poetry readings, live music and taking the dogs for long walks.

SHARON MAHANY

Sharon Mahany lives near a small nature preserve in Roseville, CA and enjoys gardening and watching wildlife. Her work has appeared in poetry journals such as *Song of the San Joaquin*, *Convergence*, *LummoX*, *Brevities*, *Poetry Pea* and SPC’s *More Than Enough*. Sharon was honored with the 2021 Golden Pegasus award from the California Federation of Chaparral Poets for her shaped poem, “*We Only Darn the Large Holes*.” She has a fondness for ekphrastic poetry, reinforcing that wherever you look is a poem. A retired Recreation Supervisor, Sharon now works as a substitute teacher and a Life Coach, Energy Therapist, and Human Design practitioner. Sharon finds that “poetry, like energy, is limitless.”

MARK ANDREW HEATHCOTE

Mark Andrew Heathcote is adult learning difficulties support worker. He has poems published in journals, magazines, and anthologies both online and in print. He resides in the UK and is from Manchester. Mark is the author of “*In Perpetuity*” and “*Back on Earth*,” two books of poems published by Creative Talents Unleashed.

RANDY BARNES

Randy Barnes has published far and wide since the early 1970s. Many poems in Lit Mags and Anthologies with three slim volumes of poems now long out of print. He was awarded a Lifetime Historian Beat Poet Laureate for Washington State in 2020 from the National Beat Poetry Foundation, Inc.

CHARLES PLYMELL

Charles Plymell was born on the high plains in Finney County, Kansas in 1935 in a converted chicken coop during one of the blackest dust storms of that period. His father was a cowboy born in the Oklahoma Territory, his mother of Plains Indian descent. Along the way he was a who’s who of the Beats from Burroughs to Ginsberg to Cassady. The man’s a fucking American Outsider Icon! Find out more about him at www.cherryvalleyeditions.com/charles-plymell/ & www.vlib.us/beats. (*Bio written by S.A. Griffin*)

S.A. GRIFFIN

S.A. Griffin lives, loves and works in Los Angeles.

TODD BOYD

Self-published author of one novel (*Marat, Untrue Loves*), working on a second novel, *Dinosaur City*, four chapbooks-(*Shark Poems* and *Carol’s Adeline Street Café and Other Poems*), one book of short stories, (*Allred’s Short Stories*), one journal of personal history (*The Election of 2012- A Year of Living Inside the Definition of Insanity*). Co-editor and contributor to *Confluence-Fiction*, *Poetry, Essay*, and *Song From the Sacramento Thursday Writers Group*. Radio programmer (KUBU-96.5LP-FM) for over ten years, blogger (saylavproductions.com), website manager (writersontheair.com), and visual artist working with recycled materials.

JENNIFER O’NEILL PICKERING

Jennifer is a literary and visual artist who happily wakes up each morning to writing and creating visually. Her short stories and poetry are published in print, audio and online. She’s a Pushcart Nominee for Poetry and a finalist in the New Women’s Voices Chapbook Competition. Her poem *I Am The Creek*, was selected for the site-specific sculpture, Open Circle. *Fruit Box Castles: Poems from a Peach Rancher’s Daughter* is available from Finishing Line Press.

AMY HOSKINS

Amy Hoskins is a poet and visual artist creating with disabilities from her studio in South Nashville, TN. With two additional poets, Amy conducted a Spoken Word Immersion Program funded by Nashville Metro Arts, every other Monday at Harvest Hands Development Corporation during the 2017-18 school year. She helped local nonprofit Conexion Americas create a community guide and map for the Nolensville Pike community, the most diverse 10 miles in Nashville. Amy also hosted an all languages poetry open mic from April through June, 2017 with Conexion Americas, . The all languages welcome open mic moved to Flatrock Coffee, Tea, and More, in Nolensville Pike, which was held monthly from June, 2017 to June, 2018. Amy also hosts a monthly Gestalt Poetry Open Mic, which is virtual. Amy has had more than twenty poems published in the US, and one in Amsterdam. www.amyhoskins.com

DOREEN BEYER

Doreen Beyer recently retired after 22 years as a school nurse. Writing poetry was a way to escape from the very linear demands of her work. Six months later, she returned to work on a per diem basis, the limited hours giving shape to her days, balancing writer’s block and check book. Her poems have appeared in several journals and anthologies. You can contact her at beyerdn@hotmail.com

OLGA BLU BROWNE

Olga Browne leads three writing classes each week at the E.Hart senior center—Life History, Creative Improv and a Poetry class. She had her own radio show for seven years at KUBU public radio featuring poetry and story telling. She started writing poetry about 40 yrs ago, falling in love with words, *sometimes they are almost musical to me, they’re verbal paintings*.

T. M. HUDENBURG

T. M. Hudenburg is a writer who works and resides in coastal Delaware and greatly hopes that you, the reader, enjoyed his writing and found it a worthy voice.

NIA ONIT

Nia Onit is an Artist indulging in various creative facets such as traditional and contemporary visual arts, practicing music, garment construction, and writing to curate an eclectic collection of her handmade voice. She enjoys discovering new ways of expressing herself and luxuriating in classical music with a book alongside her darling black cat INK who seemed to have trickled from the end of a feather pen. Publications include: *Holy Horse and the Great Quest (Illustrator)*, published independently in 2014 and Amazon Best Seller in seven categories), *The Living Wound: Conquering Hope and Loss* (Cover Illustration published independently in 2021), and received straight A’s in Publisher’s Weekly review, *Little Rocket: Trilingual Adventure (Voice Audio – English)* published by School Seed 2023, and VIGILS (Literary Assistant), published by Cold River Press, 2023.

CHRIS OLANDER

J. C. Olander, has been a bio-educator with Cal-Poets since 1984, and is an innovator of spoken word poetry arising from land-based ethics rooted in science, observation, and reflection. He explores human horrors and beautiful au-

ras of mystical revelations and all that is possible in being here now. What we make of life is what we get. “I create musical image phrasing to dramatize relative experiences; a sound poet exploring meanings of words, phrases, ideas, and emotions in sound rhythm patterns.” He teaches poetry writing and recitation in California schools, institutions, and privately, and has published 4 CD’s spoken word, 4 Cd’s of poetry with musicians; 4 chapbooks, 2 poetry books “*River Light*,” Poetic Matrix Press and “*Twilight Roses*,” R. L. Crow Press.

ANN PRIVATEER

Ann Privateer grew up in the Midwest and now lives in California. She is a poet, artist, and photographer. Some of her recent work has appeared in Third Wednesday and Entering, to name a few.

LYTTON BELL

The bio you were expecting is on a paper that I crumpled up and threw away, because it said nothing and meant nothing. Does anyone really know me? Can they? Can you? What if I showed you my hide-out in the woods, my lucky stone, shaped like a turtle’s shell - but smooth, and bone-colored. What if I showed you my birthmark, my burn marks, my jagged scar? What if I whispered to you the secret wish that moves through my heart’s darkness late at night? What if you knew what I pray for when I kneel, scared and desperate, before the gods? I have millions of words for you, some silken, some glittery, some juicy like a peach. Small, shiny pomegranate seeds to be touched and eaten. Touch them. Eat them, the pink stain hanging on your lips like a plea.

JOE KIDD

Joe Kidd is a working, published poet/songwriter/artist. In 2020, he published *The Invisible Waterhole*, a collection of spiritual and sensual verse. Awarded by the Michigan Gov-

ernor’s Office and the United States House of Representatives, Joe is the current Beat Poet Laureate State of Michigan, and Official Poet of the Government of Birlant North Africa. A former student at Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit, he is an ordained minister and holds an Honorary Doctorate from International Union Peace Federation. He has toured Europe, North America, & Caribbean Islands, and has been featured in numerous international anthologies, magazines, websites, festivals, and other personal appearances. Joe is a member of National & International Beat Poet Foundation, Angora Poets, Michigan Rock & Roll Legends Hall Of Fame, 100 Thousand Poets For Change, Writer’s Capital International Federation. You can find him at www.amazon.com/Joe-Kidd/e/B089QYDXSM or contact him on his Face Book Page: www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100063704010587.

SHEILA BURKE

Sheila Lowe Burke was awarded an honorary doctorate for her life work in promoting peace and social justice. Born in eastern Ky, she attended University of Pikeville, where she studied liberal arts and theology. Completed a business degree, Spring Arbor University. She is single mom, business consultant, and vocal soloist. Presently touring and performing with music and life partner Joe Kidd, writing, recording, and producing poetry, lyrics, illustrating grandmother story poems and children’s literature.

DAVE BOLES

Dave Boles (Bodhi) has published, designed, edited and written numerous books, magazines, articles, and periodicals. His publications, graphic design and artwork have won him international acclaim in an over forty year career. He lives in Northern California at his beloved Lake House with his wife, Mrs. America, and numerous animals, writing of ancient

mysticism through his “Coyote Series”, a four book series of epic poems that detail the spiritual and mystical wisdom of the ages. His latest book, *VISIONS OF A MERCIFUL LAND*, was published in early 2023 and chronicles the spiritual connection between ancient poetry and epic saga’s while laying bare man’s inherent fascination, and religious devotion, to war. A lifelong student of Magic and Spiritualism, he holds degrees in Psychology, Philosophy, and a Doctorate of Divinity in Theosophical Studies. Founding the Church Of The Illuminated Monkey to further his ongoing quest at exploring ancient religions and their practices, the church continues to explore this devotion today through on-line communications with its now worldwide congregation.

ANN WEHRMAN

Ann Wehrman is a creative writer and musician currently teaching English composition online. She has published poetry and short fiction in print and online journals including the *VOICES* anthologies, *Blue Heron Review*, *First Literary Review-East*, *Medusa’s Kitchen*, and more. Her literary reviews can be found in *The Pedestal Magazine*. Rattlesnake Press published Ann’s broadside, *Notes from the Ivory Tower*, and chapbook, *Inside (love poems)*. She can also be found cooking, reading fiction, teaching yoga, and playing her flute.

SUE DALY

Sue Daly’s poetry has been featured in magazines, journals, and anthologies. Sue has written poetry since she was a teenager and has dedicated more time to writing since she retired in 2012. She has led Poetry Writing groups in Sacramento for several years. Her chapbook, “*A Voice at Last*” was published by DAD’s DESK Publishing Company in 2017. Sue’s latest book, “*Language of the Tea Leaves*” was released in May 2021 by Cold River Press.

SHIFEN FOX

Shifen Fox left China to complete a doctoral degree in comparative literature in New Zealand in 1994. She later followed her American husband to the US, and they are now living in Maryland. Shifen has taught English and Chinese to non-native speakers and published academic and journalistic writing in both languages, including essays, columns, and books. Since 2005, Shifen has been involved in a project to publicize the World War II Battle of Hengyang, hailed as China’s Stalingrad and claimed by Japanese to be one of the most savage they ever fought. She’s written on the battle for Chinese readers, and is now turning to English as the battle is still little known to Americans. Look for her future writing on the subject.

MARIA MAGGI

Maria Maggi is a native Californian, born and raised in Sacramento. She graduated from the University of California at Irvine MFA Creative Writing Program in Poetry in the 80s and taught poetry writing there, for which she received a teaching award. Maria and her son moved to northern Idaho in 1992, where she taught poetry writing at the University of Idaho, in Moscow, Idaho. Her poems have appeared in various literary journals over the years such as *Prairie Schooner*, *Black Warrior Review (poem there nominated for a Pushcart Prize)*, *Cream City Review*, and more recently in *The Los Angeles Review*, and *Pilgrimage*. Her first book of poems, *The Rings Around Saturn*, was published at the Black Rock Press at the University of Nevada in 1996, the same year she was diagnosed with MS. It has been slow going to continue to write and publish since then, but she keeps at it in what seems like geological time. In 2012 she placed 3rd in the *Open Chapbook Contest* at Finishing Line Press, and as a result my chapbook, *If A Sparrow*, was published in 2013 by Finishing Line Press. She is also a visual artist creating the cover art for both *The Rings Around Saturn* and *If A Sparrow*. She lives on the central Oregon Coast.

DEBORAH C. SEGAL

Deborah C. Segal lives and writes in Berkeley, California, on the territory of Xučyun, the ancestral and unceded land of the Chochoyeno Ohlone. Her publications include: *Natalie’s Story: A Raincheck for Jack Kerouac*, (MCTP 2013 - a play); *1975*, (MCTP 2019 - selected poems); and, *Borderlands & Lines*, (Another Seagull Productions 2022– collected monologues). She is currently working on a novella to be released in 2023.

D.R. WAGNER

D.R. Wagner is the author of over twenty books and chapbooks of poetry and letters. In 1965 founded his first publishing effort, press : today : niagara, and later Runcible Spoon (press) in the late 1960’s after he relocated to California in 1966, producing over fifty magazines and chapbooks. He co-wrote *The Egyptian Stroboscope* with d.a. levy in the late 1960’s, and in a legendary reading at Sacramento State College in 1969, he read with Jim Morrison of *The Doors* and Michael McClure. He has read with Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Al Winans, Viola Weinberg, d.a. levy, E.R. Baxter III, Ed Sanders, Anne Waldman and many other poets over the past 40 years.

He started Open Ring Galerie in Sacramento, California, one of the nation’s first alternative art spaces and taught design at the University of California, Davis, from 1988 to his retirement in 2015, conducting classes in Poetry by Design for their Honors Program.

He has exhibited visual poetry with William Burroughs, Byron Gysin, Ian Hamilton

Finlay, bp Nichol, bill bissett, J.F. Bory, and John Furnival in venues ranging from The Musee de Arts Decoratifs, Paris, at the Louvre, to the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C.

His most recent books include *97 Poems* (2012), *Remembering Eternity* (2014), *The Night Market* (2014), *Love Poems* (2016), *Storm Footed - 101 Collected Poems* (2017), and *The Order Of Events* (2018). In 2021 he published his masterpiece *DISTANT LIGHTS*, a quartet consisting of the books *The Stillness Before Speech*, *A Book Of Fixed Stars*, *Objects of Desire*, and *Years Of Pilgrimage*, with the books being illustrated by noted artists Steven Kenny, Fred Dalky, Arthur Gonzalez, Brock Alexander, and Elizabeth Chape.

He currently lives in Locke, CA.

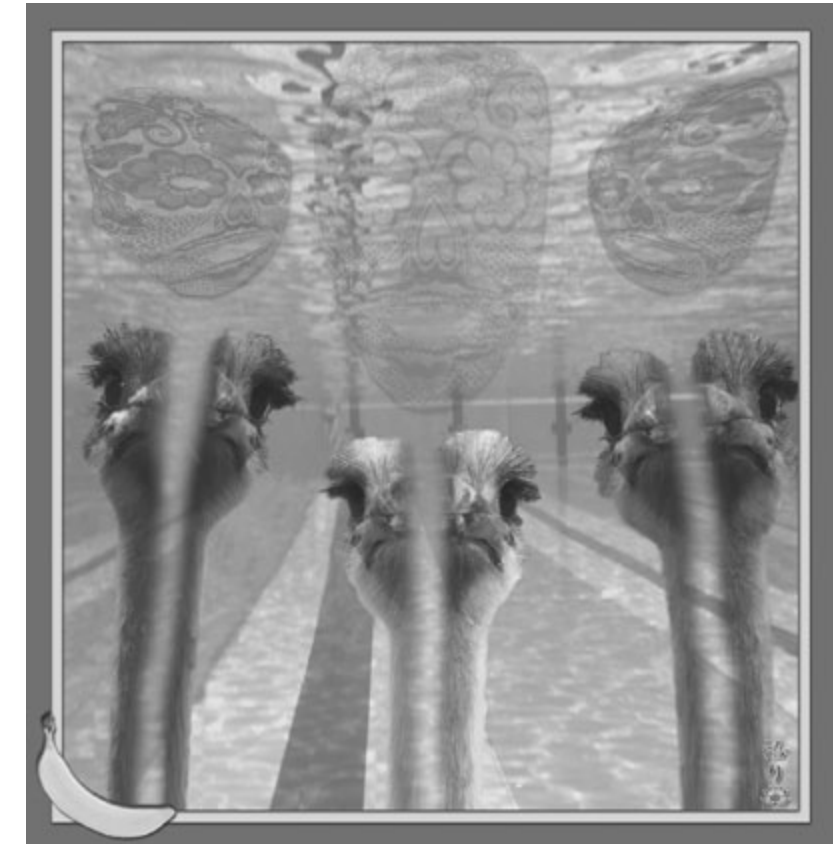


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