

A surreal oil painting of a woman's face. She has brown hair with a few autumn leaves tucked in, and blue eyes. Her skin is a warm, rosy tone. From her mouth, a long, thin, brown, vine-like structure extends downwards and to the right, ending in a circular, eye-like shape with a red center. The background is a dreamlike landscape with a blue sky, green hills, and trees with colorful autumn foliage. Various floating elements like leaves, berries, and a small white object are scattered around. The overall style is painterly and whimsical.

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Introduction

How to say goodbye is an unavoidable conundrum. As we learn how to live each day, we also learn how to leave and be left behind. Time carries us along until we are left reflecting on days past, opportunities taken and not, seasons constantly revolving, and hearts expanding and contracting with loves and lost loves. Old ways of thinking and being no longer fit us. We lose precious dear ones, and finally, in death, we say farewell to the material essence of our very selves.

In Issue 7 of *Young Ravens Literary Review*, writers, poets, and artists explore varying evolutions of the theme “So long, farewell.” Join us as we trace the beginning of time keeping from the burst of the Big Bang to the last cold atoms of star dust at the universe’s end. Explore nature, from the electric thrill of lightning striking with killing wildness to the soft fall and decay of leaves becoming one with the earth once more. Dive into friendships and relationships that frayed, then snapped, but left a scar called memory that some cherish, while others regret.

It might be that none of us can ever truly learn to let go as the past pulls us taut and still, anchoring us to moments and people in time. But perhaps we can transcend the worst periods of our existence by grasping for bright bits of kindness as we find them, fanning them with our own best hopes and attempted dreams—and then let these embers go again to share the warmth with others.

Thomas O'Connell

Sorrow for All Seasons

"U pick apples"
Roadside sign
On the silent drive
A route we have never taken

On the branches
Explodes
The culmination
Of something planted in the dirt

A star within
The Gala
That we wish upon
All stars fall, some just fall faster
Harvests to distract us from the absence of a friend

Fabrice Poussin

Revealed

Endless explosion of stars, filled
with the energy of infinite atoms,
light of incredible hues,
flashing with the passion of embrace;

In one, in all, confounded as never before;
uncertain of any boundaries;
light years beyond the flesh;
intimate with the soul of the other;

A moment alone, I shall name;
in all modesty forever;
no more time, no more space;
simply eternity revealed;

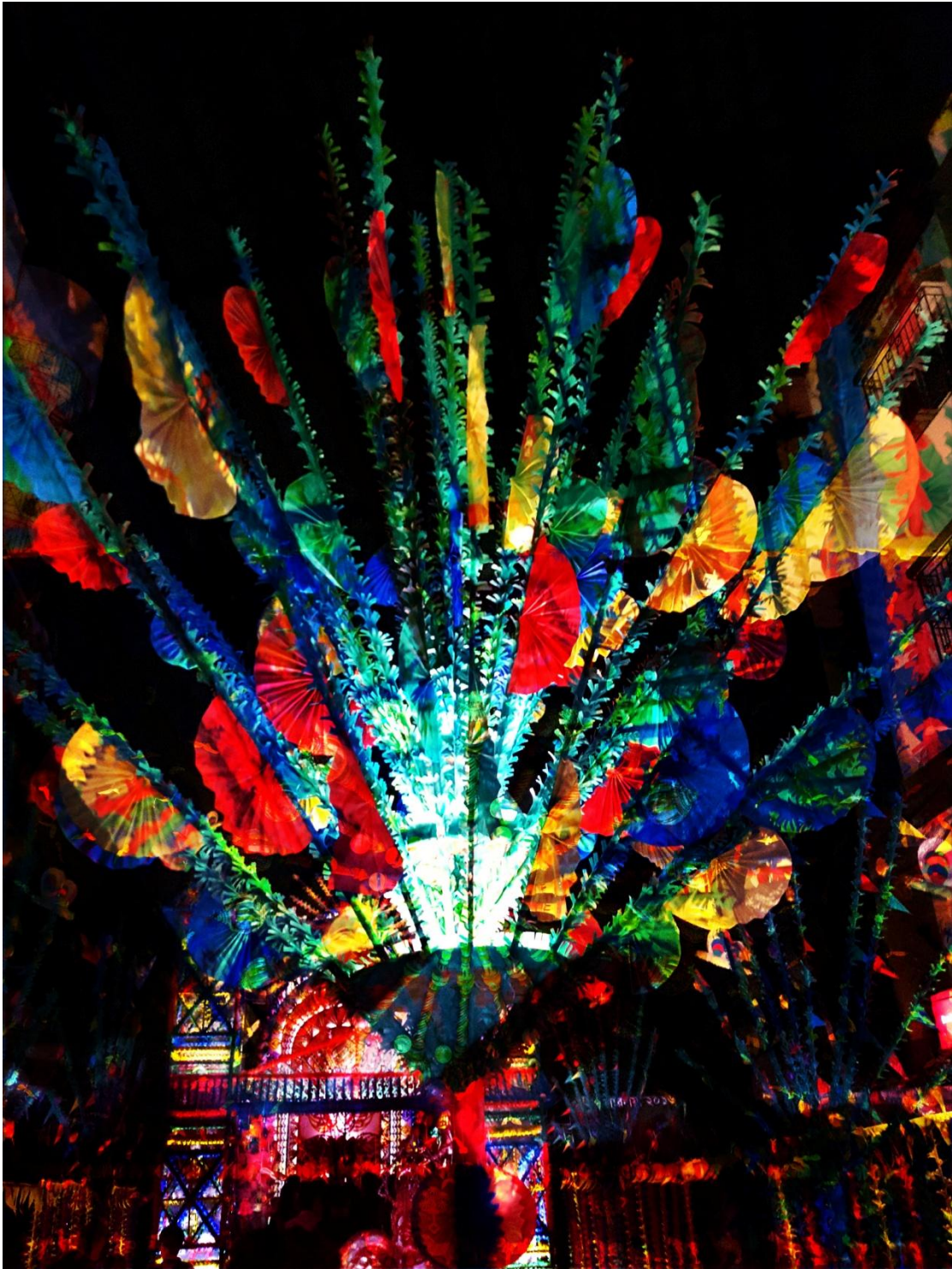
Cradled in the hands of the universe,
loved by His sovereign majesty,
he empowers us with his ability,
to have, to hold, to never part;

Babes in the original moments,
pure as the snows in the heavens,
no longer just close but unified,
in the ethers of the inescapable;

Amidst the infinity of stars you created
for me, in that precious moment of seconds,
comfort, tenderness, passion in the sky;
you gave me the only life eternal.

Archita Mittra

Childhood Dissimilitude III



Ali Hintz

Baptized in the Rain

The winds are clashing,
fighting. The Earth snarls
up from beneath and
punches the air with
lightning. You breathe in
ions stolen from
a celestial brood
while waltzing through the
fields to the tune of
thunder. Is this what
it means to be at
the mercy of God?
He plunders the earth,
smacks it with a bolt
of lightning bound for
nobody, bound for
anyone.

Lucía Damacela

Beached Moments

She runs on a Pacific beach
by her mother's side
one hour away from routine
hair braided with sunshine and salt

She tiptoes in the ocean
ample fresh enveloping
the smell of future

She looks for intact seashells
jarred in her room
in the pint-sized apartment
shared with a roommate
she barely knows

She looks for round pebbles
bedrocks to her cacti
in the kitchen window of said apartment
where the brick wall from the neighboring building
blocks most of the sunlight

She looks back
happiness is colors and shapes
bursting in her hands

She searches for her mother's gaze.
That gaze, she couldn't keep.

Steven Sher

A Bomb Shelter in Jerusalem

July 14, 2014

When sirens shake the city's calm,
we descend three flights, grandkids in arm,
to join our neighbors in the basement shelter;
imagine rockets climbing the Judean hills
will pull us from this life like bodies from rubble.
In the crowded shelter, parents stand
and calmly talk along the walls. Children
in pajamas playing, some barefoot
on the cold cement, claim the center space.
Older siblings hold the very young.
When the time is almost up, some restless
boys have made a game of jumping,
seeing who can touch the ceiling —
pretend they're intercepting missiles,
crushing our fears with their bare hands.

Cynthia Blank

Poetic Justice

When the company that refused to fire your abuser starts to implode, you don't think of poetic justice, at least not right away. You think of the stairwell he attacked you in, how it's probably still dark and dirty and filled with all the things you had to shed like dead skin. You think, also, of the company's owner, sticking variations of blame-needles into each of your limbs. Maybe you feel anesthetized, or maybe the pain is too agonizing to describe. (And even if you could describe it, you still wouldn't be believed.) So you are left laughing, thinking it ironic everyone is telling you how good it is you left when you did, as if leaving weren't a punishment, as if you had an active choice in the ripping apart of your seams. Then, the only poetic justice you can think of is that the pen he gave you still has ink in it, because you have not stopped trying to rewrite history to fit a narrative that conforms to how you once envisioned common sense. And when someone says she's sorry this still affects you months later, you smile and think how easy it must be for some to just will all that happened away.

Kathryn Knight Sonntag

As a Mother

I lay on my side
in the cool of our maple.
Your small body balances
against the curve of my hip.
I speak to you and hear
myself as if from across a room—
a phenomenon of postpartum—

I never desired to be a symbol,
but since the Feminine Divine
brought up your soft round
warmth from my depths
crawling on my chest to coo and sigh, I
am one working prism of Her endless
blinking body.

So my voice is your sacred pole
holding up the sky.

It parts from my frame, leaving
Earth, to collapse
space and time—and returns here
to the grass, to
the soft pink
of dusk.

The Mother's "om"
moves around your twists of bone
and muscle, then further
back to the shadowy
chambers of deeper knowing
each smaller than the one before, spiraling
toward the final and the first—
the holy of holies.

I never asked to be the center,
the Eternal Tree,
a venus belly,
etched. But as your sweet body
latches to my breast, I
am Eve, the sun of my son—
who will carry the tree through himself
when he multiplies
and replenishes the earth.

Holly Day

Through Filaments of Cellulose

The tree spreads its roots beneath the concrete
flutters its leaves in the winds channeled between the buildings
pretends it's in a forest. Earthworms, confused by its happiness
crawl up through the dirt to find
there is no forest above them, there is only
pavement and hot sun.

The tree shares its fantasy with the city birds,
robins, sparrows, clusters of pigeons,
spreads its branches to make room for their nests
of tiny twigs, faded soda straws, plastic Easter grass
sings lullabies to their babies of its own youth
surrounded by quiet, and trees, and the murmur of running water.

Judy Shepps Battle

Embrace the Path

Leave couch, chair,
Tiffany lamp with
tasseled shade

empty pockets, piggy
bank, and stashes of
rainy-day security

scatter pennies, dimes,
and quarters on
concrete sidewalks
and asphalt highways

Don't look back
even to see who bends
picks up largess
and kneels in thanks

Just be as you are
the rainbow
the giver and the gifted

the conduit continuing
cosmic tradition
one breath at a time.

Allegra Forman

You Push it Away with Your



*"You Pushed it Away with Your" is the culminating piece in my ten-part AP Studio Art Concentration. My focus was to show the progression of each stage I went through during the worst few months of my life. I started with the realization that my life had switched from okay to not okay. I suffered from severe panic attacks, consuming OCD, intense sleep deprivation, and would starve myself to the point where my vision blurred. This piece represents the acknowledgement of my pain and hopefulness in working towards healing. This piece supports the sharing of mental illness, the decision to seek help rather than battle it on one's own. (All ten pieces are posted on @artbyallegra on Instagram)

Kristen Wood

Leaf

My faith is autumn.
Brightly colored,
ever-changing.
Layers upon layers
of intensity.
It fades
as the days pass.
Clinging to bare branches,
holding on for dear life.
My faith is autumn.
But winter is coming,
and the last leaf falls.

Sarah Rehfeldt

Letting Go

The leaves are turning copper, rust and gold.
Some linger on tree branches still
and are, this morning,
filled with light.
I consider what it might be like
to let go quickly,
to burn with great intensity
in one dazzling display –
bold and brilliant flames of bright red-gold
caught swirling toward the future.
And in that moment,
I am free.

Don Thompson

Paper Bag

A brown paper bag like a lost dog,
desperate to get home
to a pulpwood farm in Oregon,

has to hold onto scrub brush
and wait for the wind to turn
whenever it blows the wrong way.

Impossible. But it could
come at last to an aspen tree,
weather beaten and torn to shreds,

curl up around the trunk
and hear once more the half-forgotten
chatter of the leaves.

Gwendolyn Joyce Mintz

A Colorful End



Dan Brook

Re-Membering Ishmael

I remember Biblical & Koranic Ishmael
who was “cast out”
from his home
from brother Isaac
by Sarah and his father Abraham
while Hagar wept salty tears
two new nations
in future generations
separated in misunderstood pain
Ishmael reunited with his brother Isaac
to bury their father
together
I think of brothers
in better circumstances
who feel
yet feel that they cannot
return to each other
and themselves

I remember Melville’s Ishmael
who took to the sea
“whenever
it is a damp, drizzly
November
in my soul”
the salt stings
yet heals
my wounds
of the heart
while the wind
rips through my hair
I think of the wuther
of the old willow tree
long gone

like me
and my brother
from our homeland

I remember Quinn's Ishmael
who was a gorilla
a guerrilla teacher
seeking
a dialectical partner
a brother-in-arms
"with an earnest desire
to save the world"
from itself
I think of those
many of us
who acquire knowledge
yet lack wisdom
who sense
yet do not act
who remember grievances
but forget fraternal values

I remember Ishmael
all of them
as I remember my brother
in a dream
broken pieces
becoming whole
again
and again
and again

Michael Maul

Germantown

for Walter Reis

Women, shaped like pigeons,
dressed in black cotton calico,
clomp the sidewalk on legs swollen
into Old World shoes.

Pragmatic, boar bristle
bearded men austere,
sit straight to eat
then scrape the crumbs beside their plates
into geometric shapes.

They live where there is no greater sin
than to suffer foolishness.
At night they write by candlelight
the names of those who come and go,
on a ledger they keep Bible sewn
between the Testaments Old and New,
bound in leather and near at hand.

But there,
among these farriers,
carpenters and breakers of land,
was my German grandfather
who instead taught his kids
to tap and sing.
He was a virtuoso, who labored in an orchestra pit,
playing gastric tuba sounds for vaudeville skits,
and, for silent film,
wrote notes that defined a kiss.

Of all of them in Germantown
I am from this:
a weaver of sound

into melody.

And coming home with lamplights lit,
in his pockets broken chocolate bits,
he sat on our beds and held our hands
then sang us back to sleep, one-by-one,
with lullabies he wrote for each.

This man, less valuable than bumper crops
or fine shaped wood, but more rare:
a man, beautiful like music.

Dennis Trujillo

First Week of March

The Valentine's Day chocolates
I gave my love has one left
nestled in its oval chamber
like a dark moon. I wonder
of the proper way to dispose
of the red heart-shaped box
given that cold February day
when the world was white
as a confectioner's apron.

Now the March wind whispers
to me that a heart is a heart—
whether made from living cells,
cardboard, or chalk. I take it out
with the trash leaving the last
chocolate uneaten so that
it may go on beating.

Sorry, LuAnn

by

Lauren Morrow

When Sam invited me to join him on a trip to visit his sick grandfather in Mississippi, I said, “absolutely not.” I had no interest in venturing south of the Mason Dixon line, not with my chestnut skin and head of coils. Even less appealing was the idea of spending time with a dying old white man whom I’d never met.

Sam’s grandfather was in the final stages of Alzheimer’s, and despite the fact that he’d invited me with open arms to their beach house on the Gulf Coast the summer before – even after Sam revealed my identity via a picture on his phone – I feared that the disease would pull him back to his true self, the man bred in Tupelo who’d probably thought nothing of the occasional black man he’d seen hanging from a tree on his boyhood walks to school.

Maybe I’d have agreed to go immediately a few years ago, when Sam and I had just begun dating. When we’d just re-elected our first black president and things were about to change. When hope floated in the stratosphere, just out of reach. But not now. Now it was clear that things had not changed so much. It was like someone was holding up a giant mirror, and we thought we were looking at old Civil Rights era footage, but we were really looking at ourselves.

So I declined Sam’s invitation.

“I get it,” he said, tucked up under a blanket on the couch. Since his grandfather’s health had taken such a sharp turn, he’d curled into depression with ease. I sat beside him, pulled the blanket over my lap. “I don’t even like to go down there myself anymore.” He rubbed his hand over my cheek, and his cloudy blue eyes welled. But he didn’t cry.

“So you’re not mad?” I asked.

“Hardly. I never want to put you in a position where you feel uncomfortable. And I honestly can’t guarantee that wouldn’t happen in Tupelo.” I grabbed his hand. It was as soft as mine, the nails clean and cut short. The last time his father had visited, he’d made fun of Sam’s large but delicate hands, how they looked as if he’d never once done a hard day’s work. He had worked, of course, but his work was cerebral, not physical. I loved his hands.

“What would you do if something happened down there?” I asked.

“If anyone even looked at you funny I’d knock him out.”

“With your soft, PhD candidate fists?”

"Yeah," he said, balling his hands up near his face." "I'd knock him right in the kisser with these jumbo cotton balls."

I rolled my eyes and cozied into his chest.

"But really," I said, tracing his knuckles with my fingers. "What if something happened?"

"I can't guarantee that no one will say anything stupid or even racist. But I'll do all I can to stop it. And I'm not going to let anyone hurt you. Never."

Sam never said never. He didn't believe in that kind of certainty. So when he said it now, I felt warm and full. My heart thumped beneath his hand. I trusted him.

From the beginning of our relationship, Sam had always shared memories of his grandfather with me. He preferred the old man to his own parents, whom he found bland and guarded. He liked to tell me stories:

"Once, when I was little, Pop Pop decided to make lunch for all of us. We had just gotten back from the beach, and Mama Dee's back was burnt red. Her mouth fell open when he offered. He hadn't so much as poured his own glass of milk in 30 years, probably. But she was so sunburnt and tired from the beach that she let him. The rest of us sat on the porch drinking sweet tea, until Pop Pop shouted "soup's up!" We went inside to find the table set, plates of sandwiches and potato salad for everyone. All of us held hands as Pop Pop said grace, and we bit into the sandwiches. We nearly gagged. They were filled with molasses and pickles. He could barely breathe he was laughing so hard. Dad started hollering, then everyone else did, mad because we were so hungry from the beach, and all we'd been thinking about for the last half hour was lunch. Everyone yelled except Mama Dee, who sat there eating her ham and cheese sandwich. Because he knew better. He wouldn't dare mess with Mama Dee."

But he would pull no pranks this time around. I grew sad at the thought of Sam traveling all those hours and miles alone just be with his distant parents, and his no-longer-there Pop Pop. It sounded miserable. Unfair. Somehow, his sadness became mine, while at the same time a fearlessness grew within me. The worst that might happen on the trip, I determined, was that I'd become bored. And so, I changed my mind and said 'yes.' He had flown home with me to my grandmother's funeral, sat through the hours of tears and holy ghosts, held me through nights of mourner's insomnia. I could manage a couple of quiet days in Mississippi.

But as I sat beside him in O'Hare, drinking stale coffee and waiting for our flight to be called, I thought I'd made a mistake. Maybe I wasn't meant to go down there. It might be a weird time warp, where I'd be chastised, threatened, made to feel the way my mother's mother had felt growing up in that same state. Or maybe the visit would conjure memories of her and my other dead grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, friends, and send me into a spiral of depression to match Sam's.

"Sorry for the delay, everyone," the heavily made up airline attendant said over the loudspeaker. "I've got some good news." Good for whom? "The plane is here, and it's ready for ya! We're going to begin pre-boarding in just a moment."

Sam put his arm around me. I looked at him now for the first time since we'd sat in the crowded terminal. His eyes were red-rimmed, heavy. He pulled me in and kissed my forehead.

"Thank you," he sighed.

It was dark when our flight landed in Jackson. Sam's mom and dad were waiting for us in the parking garage. They were kind people, and his mother – petite with a gray once-blond bob – seemed more cheerful than usual.

"I love that new 'do, Lena," she said, looking back at me from the front seat. Her eyes were wide enough to startle me. "There is a woman at my church who wears it the same way, all natural. I think it's just so fun. So cute!"

Pop Pop was Sam's paternal grandfather, but he and Sam's mother had grown close over nearly 40 years. She enjoyed playing bid whist with him after they'd both had a few whiskeys. Sam's dad and Pop Pop had had a rocky relationship over the years, especially after Pop Pop had sold the house they'd grown up in. But Sam and his mom had helped to bring them back together. She'd all but forced the family to make annual trips from Memphis to Tupelo by the time Sam was in middle school, and had sidled up to Mama Dee in the kitchen, her apprentice in the ways of southern cooking. She'd learned to make an indistinguishable version of her pecan pie, Pop Pop's favorite.

Sam's dad sat at the wheel of the Camry, polo shirt hugging his belly, Mississippi Braves baseball hat hiding his bald spot, as always. He'd played for the minor league team after college, and bragged about it often. But tonight, he didn't say a word.

Through the late-night darkness, I could see red flags – confederate actually – along the way. Pick up trucks boasted symbols of long-standing hatred. Bumper stickers clarified other matters. I reminded myself that we'd only be here for two days, as the car pulled into the driveway of the house.

Since Pop Pop was staying in an assisted living facility, we'd be the only ones in the house. It was late, and we were tired. I didn't have the energy or desire to explore the house that night, and so Sam and I went to bed in separate rooms, as we'd promised his evangelical parents we would. My room was stale from lack of use, the maroon carpeting and bureau coated in years of dust. About an hour after sliding underneath the patchwork quilt that covered my bed, the door creaked open. Sam climbed in without saying a word. He wrapped his arms around me, and gave me a soft kiss on the neck. Eventually, his breath synced up with mine, and we fell asleep.

Everyone who worked at Briar Crest Assisted Living Facility was black. They were kind and welcoming, and had thick Delta accents. A woman at the desk whose name tag read "Charlene" offered to walk us to the room, but Sam's parents had driven down from Memphis two days before and already knew their way around the place.

We walked past old people in wheelchairs and pushing walkers. A stale smell filled the hallways, something like urine, and rubber gloves, and Ensure all in one. Eventually, we found the room where Pop Pop lived with another man. Pop Pop was asleep when we walked in, but the other man was watching an old sitcom on TV, and didn't seem to notice as we walked through his quarters.

Sam's dad assured us that we could talk, we wouldn't wake Pop Pop. They'd had a 20 minute meeting with the nurses the day before while he slept – a meeting that involved what would happen in the coming weeks, when he might lose the ability to get up to use the bathroom, to sit up on his own, to smile. Pop Pop hadn't even flinched.

Pop Pop didn't look as old as I'd expected. He was 90, older than any of my grandparents had lived to be, and oddly handsome. His face wasn't stark white or ridden with lines, as I'd expected. Rather, he had as warm a color as Sam after a day on Lake Michigan, and just a few wrinkles made a moat around his mouth and eyes. Most surprisingly, he had a head full of bright white hair. His liver spotted hands rested above the blanket, and his fingers twitched now and then as he slept.

After a few minutes a nurse came in with a tray of food. She had wide hips and a long, silky black ponytail. She smiled, exposing a single gold tooth among her pearly whites.

"I'ma leave this right here," she said, placing the tray on Pop Pop's bedside table, "so he can have it when he wake up." We all nodded in thanks. "Now if he say it ain't here when I come back, I know who to blame." She pointed two manicured nails at Sam's parents, then at the two of us, pursing her lips together in a smirk. We all laughed.

"You don't have to worry about that," said his mom. The tray's compartments were each filled with an unidentifiable soft food, all muted colors and seemingly room temperature. Sam's mom had baked a pecan pie that morning, a surprise for Pop Pop. The smell emanated from the pie carrier, and we were all eager to dig into it once Pop Pop woke up. His mom even told the nurse she'd save her a slice, and she let out an "alright now!" that reminded me of my grandmother.

As the nurse left, Pop Pop opened his eyes. He looked at Sam for a long time without saying anything, his eyes milky grey. His focus shifted to Sam's parents, looking back and forth between them. This went on for a while, before he reached up his left hand and knocked over the water pitcher with one swipe.

Sam's mom stood up, and immediately grabbed a towel from the bathroom. I stood too, thinking I should help, or do something other than take up space in the room. But she was quick and cleaned up the mess before I had time to determine my purpose.

"You hungry, Pop?" asked Sam's dad. "The nurse brought you some food." The old man turned his head to see the tray.

"That don't look nothing like food to me!" he shouted, his voice deep and gravely. "I'm not eatin' that mess."

He hadn't been eating much of anything, Sam's dad had told us, and it showed once he sat up. His collar bone protruded, and his calloused hands shook.

"Well good news," said Sam's mom. "Look what I brought you." She opened the carrier and pulled out the fresh pecan pie. It was finally cool enough to cut, but still smelled of warm caramel. We all perked up, eager for something sweet.

"What's that?"

"Pop Pop," she said, "it's your favorite. Pecan pie!"

He looked at the pie.

"Just like Mama Dee used to make."

He looked at her, then back at the pie.

"Alright, give me a slice."

As she began to cut into the pie, Sam spoke up.

"So, how are you feeling today, Pop Pop?" He stared at Sam as though listening to him to speak to someone else. "How are you feeling?" he asked again.

"Me?" He looked from side to side. Well, I feel like shit, to be quite honest. How you feeling?"

"I've been better," said Sam.

"You'll be worse," said Pop Pop, laying back. Sam's mom placed a piece of pie on the tray next to the hospital food. He picked up the plate, dug the fork in, and took a bite.

"How am I supposed to eat this?" he mumbled. "Too chewy!" The pie stuck to the roof of his mouth, his tongue, his teeth – still originals. He spit the remnants onto his plate and sucked at stuck caramel.

Sam's mom dropped the knife on top of the pie. She pressed her eyes shut, and left the room. She said she was going to find something for him to eat, but we could hear her begin to cry before she made it to the hallway. Sam's dad followed her. He watched as they left, but didn't follow. He moved to the chair closest to Pop Pop, where his dad had been seated.

"Pop Pop, I missed you," he said. "I'm sorry it's been so long since I've been down to visit." Pop Pop looked at him, but didn't react. "It's just, I've been so busy, and flights are kind of expensive." Silence. "This is Lena, my girlfriend. I showed you a picture of her, remember?"

Even at my mention, Pop Pop wouldn't look at me. His hands shook in his lap as he stared at his grandson.

"You Connie's boy?" he asked.

"Pop Pop," Sam said, irritated. "Come on, I'm Sam. Doug's son." He spoke like this for a while, attempting to somehow crack the code for Pop Pop, make him realize that he was his grandson. The kid he'd played ball with in the summers, whom he'd taught how to bone a fish. But Pop Pop wouldn't budge, just glanced back and forth between Sam and his own lap. "You know me, Pop Pop!" He was getting more frustrated, as Pop Pop grew more and more interested in his own hands. Sam wasn't sad anymore, but angry. Finally, he stood.

"I can't do this," he said to me. "Let's go check on my parents"

I thought of his mother having her breakdown, either in their Camry or in the cafeteria, pretending to look for soft-enough foods.

"You go," I said. "I'll stay here."

"Really? Are you sure you – "

"I'm sure," I said, grateful for the prospect of quiet. "I'll stay." He kissed me on my forehead and looked into my eyes, a final, silent *are you sure?* I smiled, nodded.

For the first couple of minutes, I joined Pop Pop in staring at his trembling hands. Bones under polka-dotted skin. I don't remember ever finding someone at once so terrifying and so pitiful. He'd not looked at me the entire time, and that had stung enough. But could he continue to ignore me now that we sat in the room alone, abandoned? I scanned up his body. His chest, covered in pale blue nightgown, heaved up and down. His lips were chapped, his nostrils flared. Finally, our eyes met. I felt my stomach curl into itself. The TV hummed in the background. I held my breath.

He didn't say anything at first, just breathed, his eyes locked on me. I glanced toward the door, but Sam and his parents were nowhere in sight. I'd done this to myself. I waited for Pop Pop to say something horrible. I almost wanted him to. I swallowed slowly and deliberately. I wondered if he could hear it from where he sat.

"How did you find me?" he said finally. His voice held a higher pitch than before. He sounded ashamed and confused.

"I...Sam brought me - "

"I don't know how you found me, LuAnn," he said, a smile sneaking across his lips, just briefly, "but it sure is good to see you."

I smiled, but was afraid to speak, to break the spell.

"Will you come here, just for a moment?"

I thought about leaving the room, but the smile on Pop Pop's face was gentle and sincere. I moved to the chair by his bedside, and he grabbed my hand before I had time to consider what was happening. I sat beside him, and he looked into my eyes, his – eyes that had seen the world since 1926 – now swirling with tears.

"I'm so sorry, LuAnn." He began to cry quietly. "I just had to go." He now had my hand in both of his and rubbed it gently. "I wish things were different. I do." He pulled my hand to his lips and gave it a sandpapery kiss that startled and soothed me at once. I stood, bent down, and wrapped my arms around his frail body. My fingers graced his bare back through the loose gown. His face nuzzled into my shoulder, and I held him close as he shook with the sadness of lost love. "I'm so, so sorry, LuAnn."

No one talked during the car ride home. Everyone was spent, eyes dry, heads aching.

"What do you kids want for dinner?" Sam's mom asked, putting on as much cheer as she could muster.

"Whatever," Sam said. "I'm so hungry I could eat anything right now."

"I've got almost a whole pecan pie," she said, forcing a laugh.

"Can we just go pick up some groceries?" Sam said, tired of his mom's false optimism.

"Fine."

It was dark when we got home from the store. Sam's parents went into the kitchen to start dinner, and he and I lay down on the couch, the TV humming before us. He told me how sad it had made him to see Pop Pop like that. They'd had so much fun together, even up until last year. He didn't understand how someone could change so much so quickly.

I told him "that's how it happens," as though I knew anything about Alzheimer's, or life, or death. I suggested that he should celebrate Pop Pop and what a long, full life he'd had. Sam apologized, knowing that none of my grandparents had lived to be nearly as old.

I stood up.

"Where are you going?" Sam asked.

"I never got a chance to look around the house," I said. "What we saw today wasn't an accurate representation of Pop Pop. I want to see what this guy was all about. Show me around."

Sam took me into the den, and showed me all of Pop Pop's golf trophies and war medals. We went into his bedroom, which was quite bare, with the exception of a pile of sweaters and a jewelry box that had belonged to Mama Dee, who'd died two years before.

We went into the hallway, where Sam turned on the lights to expose a museum of his family. Nearly a century of photographs lined either wall. Black and white, color, five generations. There were pictures of Sam's dad holding him as a baby, and of his dad being held by Pop Pop in a nearly identical photo. There was a photo of Sam's parents on their wedding day, and a similar photo of Pop Pop and Mama Dee on theirs.

I looked at each and every photo on the wall. Everyone was beautiful, and healthy, and happy.

“Soup’s up!” shouted Sam’s dad from the kitchen.

Sam made his way to the dining room, but I lingered for a moment longer. There was a beautiful sepia tone photo of Pop Pop and Mama Dee on the Gulf Shore. They were young. It must have been before they’d had Sam’s dad, maybe even before they’d been married. They stood, backs to the ocean, his arms wrapped around her. She looked directly into the camera, laughing big, and he rested his chin atop her head, eyes closed, a slight smile peeking through. Almost like he was dreaming.

Daginne Aignend

Wallflower



Ann Christine Tabaka

Youth Elixir

Saturday morning, cleaning house,
the sun streaming in.

I find it tucked away, in the back of
a shelf of dusty old books.

Slowly releasing it from its place,
it falls open to the precise page.

There lies the white rose pressed flat, now
browning from a time almost forgotten.

Memories flood back to that day, I can still
picture your face smiling at me with green eyes.

You surprised me with my favorite flower.
The first of many to come.

I carefully tucked it away to preserve
for forever, well, at least for today.

Too many years have passed, and the
young hand that first held that rose is
now wrinkled with age.

But with just a single touch of that token of
love, I am once again young and alive.

Judith Kelly Quaempts

The Gift

We were four, maybe five,
two little girls saying goodbye.
We had no words for all we were feeling.

We could have cried, but didn't.
We could have hugged, but didn't.
We could have—we didn't.

Before she walked away,
Anna pulled a chestnut from my grandmother's tree.
She rubbed it against her dress until it glowed.

Keep this forever, she said.
Remember me.

Michael Keshigian

Hoarding Life

His home was full of collectibles,
paintings, books, crafts,
possessing various degrees
of monetary worth and desirability,
yet what he cherished most
were items of menial worth
but considerable sentimentality,
items that pulled him back in time,
a large coffee can
he painted green
for his three year old son gathering rocks,
elementary songbooks,
a dilapidated grandfather's rocking chair,
springs so rusty
they would snap if weighted upon,
the old Doberman's chew toy,
his father's tools.
All buildup
from previous generations
he hopes his children will distinguish
then have the courage to discard
as he did with his mother-in-law's mementos
when his wife was lost in remembrance,
grasping old photographs
and birthday cards
she once sent with their children's
infant signatures attached.

Dennis Trujillo

Uprooted

Driving a few miles out of town
I come behind a flatbed trailer
with a giant cedar tied down—
the root ball wrapped in swirls
of wet burlap and needled
branches swaying with oncoming
traffic. The softwood spine,
used to standing, seems startled
by the disorienting view of heaven.

As I pass, I glance in the rearview
mirror and it's suddenly 1972—
I'm eighteen and seat-belted
on a plane leaving Colorado
bound for college in New York.
I clutch a plastic cup of Ginger Ale
and stare out the window, startled
by the disorienting view of heaven.

Karen Poppy

The Flower

It's too late.
Last night's storm
Tore flower
Head from stem,
Wind lifting
It skyward,
A white,
Multi-petalled
Tumble down,
A spiraling star,
Strewed across
Every inch
It seems
Of garden floor.

I had planned
To photograph it,
This flower,
But thought how
Much prettier
It would look
Following the rains.
Freshened, wet,
And glistening.

Violence doesn't lie.
Nor does it hesitate.
It tears apart
The gentlest
Things, the most
Beautiful things.
It doesn't wait
Until after tomorrow.

A few petals
Still clump together,
Reaching upward
From wet earth,
Like a dying child's hand.

Michael Keshigian

Recognized

He stood there,
staring back at me,
odd expression upon his face,
smiling after I did
from the other side
of a huge pane window
on the newly renovated office building,
appearing a bit more disheveled
than I remembered.

More wrinkles
supported his grimace
and receding hairline,
acknowledging me
when I nodded hello.

I use to know him well,
athletic, sculpted, artistic,
a well defined physique,
but his apparent paunch
negated any recent activity.

This window man
I thought I knew,
musician, writer, runner, dreamer,
now feasted off the stale menu
of advancing age,
aches, excuses, laziness,
failing eyesight and an appetite
for attained rights
decades seem to imply.

Yet I accepted him,
embraced him for who he was,
aware that he would be the lone soul
to accompany me
toward the tunnel's light
when all others have drawn the blinds.

“Walk with me,” I say.
He stays close.

Matthew Barron

Leaving Manhattan



Krikor Der Hohannesian

AT THE 50TH

Harvard College Reunion, Class of 1958

Adrift between symposia and seminars,
a drizzle of reverie on Bow Street,
aimless nostalgia graying in droplets of fog.
At the corner of Arrow the campanile
of St. Paul's looming through the mist,
Italianate monolith, blood- red brick.

*this was where you fell, Marco,
a bluster of a June day, 1957, the day
the scaffolding betrayed you, left
you hanging to mock gravity, the split
second of wonder before the inevitable.*

I stare up, watch the swallows and wrens
loop and hover about the belfry clock,
the minute hand inches toward the hour,
the bells toll three, the birds
whoosh off at the plangent peal.

*that was when you fell, after sweaty
hours sandblasting the brick,
flailing the humid air, wingless
against the corkscrew dive.*

I stare down at the concrete
where your blood once pooled –
so where were the winged angels
to waft you safely to ground?

*they said your head hit first,
that the sound was one nobody
would want to hear again.*

And tonight we will be dining and
dancing – a cloudburst of reminiscence
for us who have survived the thunder
of a half century, the one lost to you
in a heart's single beat,
a rogue gust of hot wind.

*in the class book an asterisk, a terse footnote:
Mark Brennan - died June 17, 1957*

Krikor Der Hohannesian

The Day Approaching

in memory of Mara Stevenson

As sudden as a summer squall
the prognosis eclipses the sun,
a cloud of surety that your days
will never again be the same.

Of a sudden, life is rudely finite and
the question "*if you knew tomorrow
was your last day...*" isn't the grist
of cocktail party chatter. Instead,

days of suffering

days of hope

days of despair

counting down
against the allotment,
loosening the fierce
grip on days now
precious as pearls.

New Year's Eve and
oyster bisque - no
one could make it
better than you- "*My Old
Kentucky Home*", loud,
soulful at midnight.

Kristen Wood

Mourning

I wore black to your funeral.
Left flowers on your grave.
Cried appropriately.
It didn't help.
Nothing helped.

Until I put on my red shirt
because it was your favorite.
And I smiled when I thought
of the crinkles you got around your eyes
when you were concentrating.
I washed your car once a week
because you always did,
and I stopped leaving flowers
and left you a shot
of your favorite whisky.
I toasted to you.
And I cried.
But I laughed, too
because you always said
I had a great laugh.

Linda M. Crate

should've bit the bullet

can't find my slytherin scarf
no matter how hard
i try,
and even though i had to say
farewell to you;
i want it now more than ever

bothers me that i cannot remember
where i put it because i know
you worked hard to knit it together
for me,
and i want to show the world
how proud i am of our friendship

because you were a good person
i will never forgive that
brain cancer
that took you away from us forever
making the strongest woman i knew
into a shell of who she was

didn't recognize that shy stranger
in the wheelchair,
and i'm sorry i wasn't brave enough
to say goodbye
i could've bit the bullet
after all you were the one suffering.

Natalie Schriefer

Acquaintanceship

For Corey

It has been six months.
“From the other side”
you haunt me
in snippets of
Adele, your favorite –
“Hello. It’s me.”

Guilt is an anchor
swollen and heavy.
I’m sorry not
for the things I did,
but for the rainbow wig
I didn’t send,
the birthday I missed
because time off
was a hassle,
that I was too busy
graduating to realize
you’d gotten sicker,
that only once I’d bothered
to actually talk to you, say
something more than pleasantries.

What stage of grief is this?
What advice exists for acquaintances
who remember laughter, emojis,
jokes about rainbow wigs
crossing a million miles one snowy afternoon –
only one, God, I didn’t even know you,
you were the roommate of a friend –
snowflakes sticking to the cold glass,
shrouding the world beyond my window,
the screen of my laptop?

I'm sorry.
"There's such a difference
between us" now
and it's not miles
or missed phone calls;
it's Adele
here on my side.
Can you hear
her on yours?

*Adele. (2015). *Hello* [Video File].
Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YQHsXMglC9A>

Karen Poppy

Prayer

Clear all scars from my body.

Make me a transparent beacon,

Bright with light. Be gone

All loneliness, the absence of salt,

My tongue's empty grasp.

The word is redundancy.

Freed from you, I am still weighted

to the earth.

Michelangelo knew, and I, I've known

All these years: we are chained here

To the rock. We climb each

commandment

From this inverted mountain. We sing

Up our words and forget that clarity

Is praise. Smooth me to a weightless quartz.

I beg to become less that I know.

Daginne Aignend

Contraverse



Bob Carlton

"every/one..."

every
one
leaves

event
u
ally

no lie
no illusion
to allay

Roger Sippl

The Last Ringmaster

"The elephants are walking down main street!
We gotta go!"

The voice might as well have been Opey singing
"The Wells Fargo Wagon isa,
comin' down the street..."
through his missing two front teeth.

We went. Most of us went.
Whether P.T. Barnum was a cruel man at the time,
or just by today's standards a multi-species
slave owner, we went.

There's a man being shot
from a canon.
Those knives are just missing that lady
and really sticking in the board as she spins.
They make a convincing thud.
Are they coming from behind the board
or is that guy really throwing them?
Look up at that man walking a wire, with no net?

Tigers. Lions. And a person right there in the cage with them.
Evil by our standards, but on circus founder's day
in 1871, tailing on the Civil War,
it was kindness that animals were being fed
compared to what happened here among us,
and the reason we were burning each other's homes and crops.

But we have changed a bit, so an art form must die,

as if to give way to small screens that glow at night
in bed, keeping us awake, so we have to watch more
YouTubes actually recorded right while one car hits another.

We are kinder to animals, we say, while at the same time,
as animals, we plow and fertilize their jungles,
so they won't be here at all, anyway, but the debate is closed.

So, it falls to Jonathan Lee Iverson, the last ringmaster,
to announce the end of the circus on May 21, 2017, and
take that tightrope with him.

Jake Sheff

The Poacher

At dawn he prays and loads an AK-47.
He tucks a trashcan full of ivory
beneath his ash tree; puts his cigarette
out in an ivory ash tray and departs.

He stalks a herd of elephants and
hardly hears the alien emotions
in fanned ears. His heart put down
its painful eyes as poverty grew

more generous. The park rangers'
Cessna banks right –plays catch
up constantly – and spots a crocodile.
The Salamat River shines chocolaty

today beneath the blooming, milky
lotuses. A juvenile bull is just
an average Joe, but doesn't want to be
and isn't now; the poacher's sights

are on his tusks and thick with evil
worship. The savanna's dumb genius
submerged the park with rainfall, so
this watering hole's stopped all forward

motion cold midday; fowl and elephants
plunge into the mud bath's weird
perfection. Others live for dead places
and fire with a face like driftwood.

Stingray

by

Dan Brook

It was a lovely, early morning on Baker Beach in San Francisco. I was walking along, with few others on the beach and the majestic Golden Gate Bridge before us. It felt like just another glorious day in paradise until I spotted something: a stingray — stuck on the sand. It might have been a Pacific Cownose Ray, but whatever it was, it was quite a surprise. At first, I thought “How wonderful!”, but my thoughts quickly migrated to how sad it was to see such a magnificent animal out of its element. I took it for dead—but then saw it move. It was alive! It was occasionally flapping, though it was also apparently dying. In this state, as with much of nature toward the end of its cycle, the creature was both beautiful and ugly, both terrific and terrifying, awesome and awful.

I knew not to touch it, with its stinger periodically swinging back and forth, but also knew that it needed to be saved. Spotting a little city vehicle by the dunes. I immediately ran across the beach over to the two workers, who were cleaning up garbage, and explained the desperate situation, trying not to pant too much. They seemed to take it all in, yet there was little reaction and almost no movement, certainly no movement toward solving the crisis. But they finally agreed to come over and “have a look.”

I ran back to the shore, where the stingray remained, and waited, now with a few other onlookers, for the little vehicle and the two workers to slowly putt-putt over. They didn’t actually take very long, but it certainly felt like eternity. A ray or a fish out of water probably feels akin to a person stuck underwater; even a minute can be an extended period of suffering. Just when I thought they were going to get their gear and spring into action, they took out an old dustpan, a large garbage bag, and a pair of very-worn work gloves—handing them to me. I certainly didn’t mind helping out, in fact I wanted to, but I was surprised at their delegation of responsibility and unsure how best to use these meager implements to save a life.

I quickly realized it wouldn’t be easy with these inappropriate tools. The handle of the metal dustpan bent with the weight of the stingray and wet sand, while the black plastic garbage bag kept folding on itself and I couldn’t slip it under the ray. I continued to wear the gloves, but wasn’t sure why. I needed to switch gears.

I used the dustpan to scoop ocean water to pour onto the stingray, who was drying out, suffocating, and clearly in distress. The prospect of seeing this beautiful being die on the beach, right before us, and then to be pecked at by the shore birds or

attacked and bitten by the lone dog there, was unsettling to say the least; the prospect of saving it, and seeing it rejoin its ocean community, pushed me forward.

I again asked the workers for a shovel. Seemingly nonplused, and as if they had never heard or thought about that possibility before, they casually said there was one not too far away. I used the time they were gone to keep pouring water on the stingray, as it was looking up at me with its big, round eyes. Each bulging eye, the size and look of a dark marble, seemed to be a planet in and of itself, a world within it I could only imagine.

There is no way to know what the stingray was thinking, but I'll never forget that look. Sensing its fear and pain, it made me think of the millions and perhaps billions of other beings that are violently snatched from the seas each year for food, with many tossed back dead or dying as "by-catch" — another instance of "collateral damage" in our self-defeating war against nature.

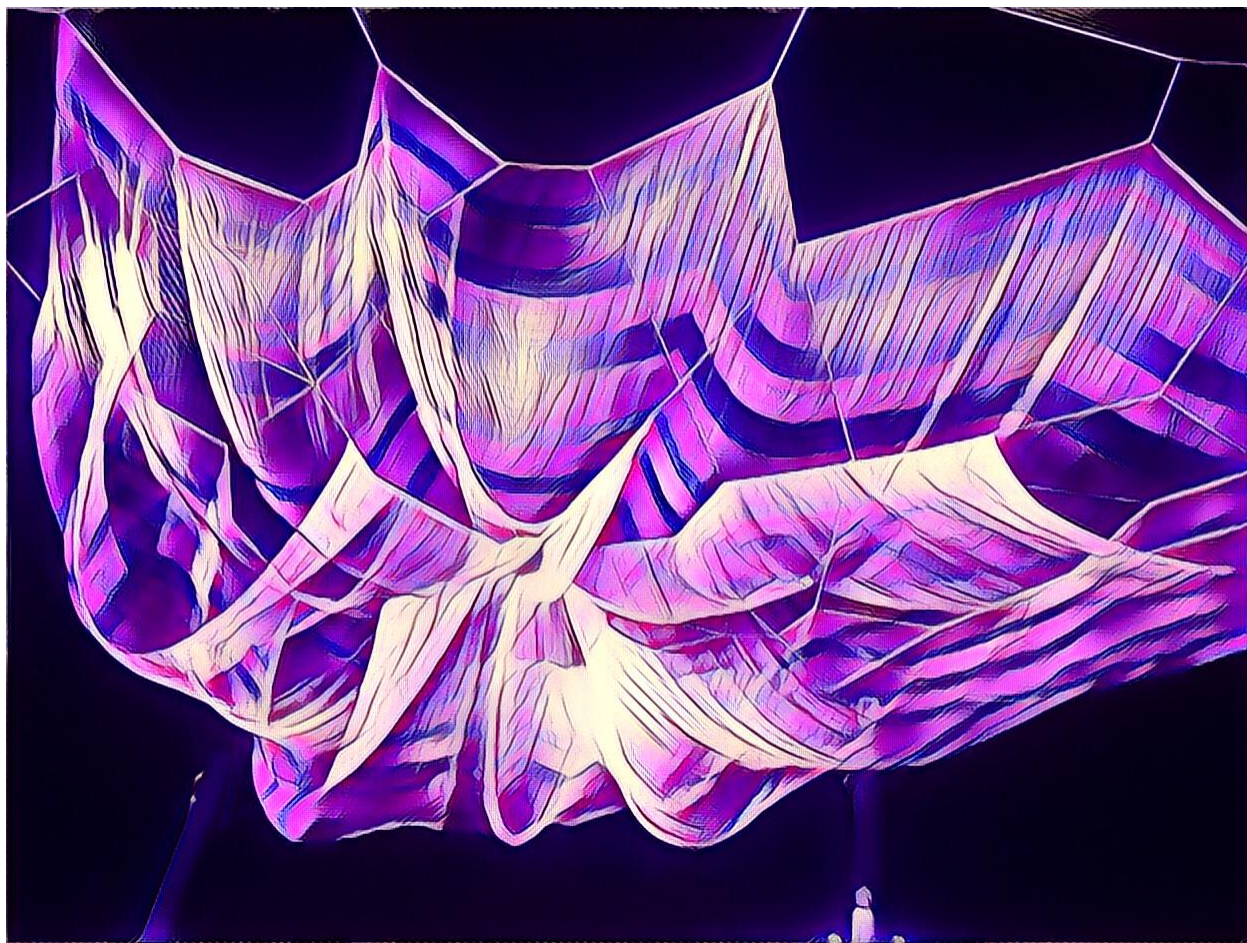
Returning minutes later in their little vehicle, I borrowed the workers' long-handled shovel, scooped the stingray up—it was quite a bit heavier than I had expected—and brought it into the ocean. Some mixture of excitement, pride, and fear washed through me along with the water over my cold, wet feet. In some ways, I felt completely alone, performing a sacred task; yet, I was, simultaneously, intimately connected to the entire world. In spite of everything—including one's life and death—the Pacific waves kept pouring in and slipping out.

I so much wanted to help this mysterious creature return home. Luckily, the tide was coming in, so nature gave us a boost. A wave came and washed over the ray, like the generous hug and kiss of a parent, but the stingray didn't appear to move much. Thinking it might be wounded, diseased, or worse, I was dejected.

Perhaps, even after my best efforts, it wasn't to be. At least, I thought, the ray would be back in the ocean to complete its cycle there—the way it's supposed to be—instead of on the beach. Another wave came in, again washing over it. After getting over its shock, and perhaps regaining its strength, the stingray finally flapped and swam away to freedom. I felt so good cheering it from the shore, knowing that it was going to be a great day.

Jim Zola

Untitled



Kelsey May

Thanks to me, everybody will be dancing in space

The moon doesn't change shape or color or size
but our perspective does. We're constantly in orbit
around new passions, Saturn's rings stuck in an icy
pattern; most of the time, I'm a loose cannon smoking
cigarettes and whistling. I wouldn't survive in space.
I'm too wound down at the end of the day, no grit
or gravity in my stomach. There are oil slicks on Titan
that could swallow trees or elephants, then belch pianos,
keys and all. I have dreams that no star could fulfill; that is to say,
I don't spend enough time engineering my dreams.
What is rocket science and how can I apply it to my own life?
You can only make so many wishes after all. If I ended up on a rocket anyway,
I hope I'd bring my photo album and a tape deck.
Memories and jams are better company than a cigarette any day.

Bob Carlton

Proposal

Not all change involves damage--but

the dying pulse?
or the viscera severed
from the body of love?

*Is all change
some form of damage?*

The shifting channels
of your affection--
the malevolent delta
of ritual estrangement--

what other conclusion,
than this?:

*change is damage.
And real damage
is always beyond repair.*

Hands, weak with caring,
eyes, swollen with pain,
ears, ringing with the music of denial.

Only the stars,
twinkling with indifference
and long dead already,
do not feel

the damage of change.

We wound one another
without rest or hesitation,

use many words, many names
for the failure of our care
for each other.

My final wish:

a broken stone inscribed
in a lost language,
strange letters chipping and wearing
with the betrayal in each kiss
of wind or rain
(and you, a torn papyrus
that may
or may not
contain lines from the same work,
a love song perhaps,
or hymn to a goddess
we may once have worshiped
together).
Impervious to the savage embraces
 of change and damage
I will increase in value
the more lost I become,

until the final scholar weeps
as I crumble into dust.

Mark A. Fisher

in my dreams

she is just a ghost
another ghost that walks
through the walls of sleep
rattling chains
and moaning
through my cluttered attic and closets
trying to make me remember
or perhaps
wishing I would forget

lamenting what she was
who she was

who I was

back then
before
when she thought she knew me
and believed I could play the hero
in a play she'd write for me
where she would be the star

that star
burning bright
in a night sky revolving
about a milky way
a cosmos
of spilled milk and tears
evolving like a river
with its trials and tributaries
flowing over and past
battered beaten stone
jumbled in that bed
crowding out all dreams

in flecks of mica
taken for gold

melt down
in some cataclysm
that created new metamorphic rock
out of all those years
and moments
that oozed like lava
across our empty deserts
leaving scabs
to mark our graves

and in my dreams
our gravestones whisper tales
to each other
yet neither listen

Meg Freer

Cynical Breaths

I want to brush the raindrops off your lip,
but there are degrees of “used to” —
and feelings, like clouds, simply exist.

Bodies are just bodies, and love
poems only words to read over
and over, tomorrow and tomorrow,
tearing and repairing the sheer fabric
of feelings, my vanity’s consonant foe.

Vanity is a dangerous state of being.
And lions—in their vainglory
at the top of the game—
even lions go hungry.

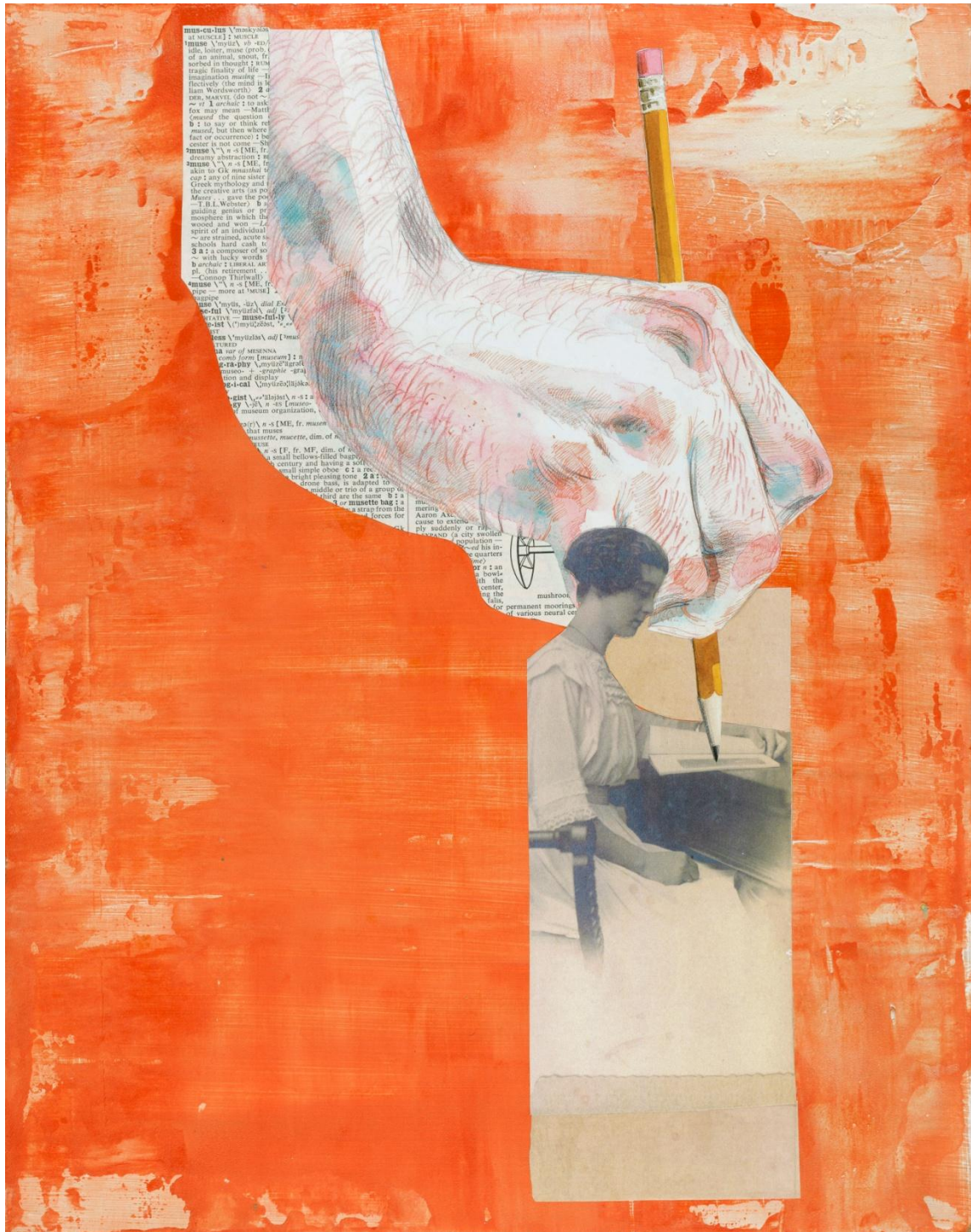
Chris Connolly

Our Tree

If I could go back
you should know
I would
to that time when time passed more slowly
when years didn't fly
and all was ahead;
I would not take an axe to things
like some crazed wood-cutter
flinging bark about the place
and killing the tree;
I would take my axe to the dead wood instead,
try to remain calm,
allow that tree of ours to grow
and enjoy the fruit
it might have borne.

DJ Hill

An Apology to my Inner Poet



Judy Shepps Battle

Le Moment Présent

Buddha is here

each swoop-and-snatch
artfully performed
by Red-winged Blackbirds
cleverly competing with
hungry Blue Jays

handfuls of unshelled
peanuts disappear
leaving sunflower seeds
mixed with millet for
smaller ground crew
to clear.

Buddha is here

morning sun sparkles
Cicadas serenade
honey-suckle breeze
tickles human senses
branches bow, leaves flutter

blessings abound
free for the taking
in-breath receives
out-breath shares

sacred moment saturates
winks then disappears.

Karen Poppy

After Winter

No country closer
Than the tulips
Before me.
I am lucky.

No sound nearer
Than the warm air.
Just you there.
Silent.
Filled with sun.

Then you open.
Heat dazzles
Each of you.
 One by one.
Visitor.
Open air.
Another season.

No red fury.
No snowed-in pain.
Just you, again.

Yellow tipped,
You bloom.
Flourish
Out of love
For yourselves.

There is love
Enough
For me.

Spring

Cannot live
In just one color.

Ali Hintz

The Fall

Charging stream—
a break in the rock.

Droplets chanting, singing, screaming,
I am! I am! I am!

They fall apart
as each one before has done—

Breaking apart
becoming one.

Mantz Yorke

When we are gone

Are we merely atoms
randomly juxtaposed in darkness,
made luminous in brief collision, yet blind
to the transience of our being?

No, we are more. Our significance lies
not within the matter of our existence
but in its substance,
intangible, between.

Our being is an ordering
won briefly from the chaos of a cosmos
fragmenting as we watch.
But at what cost?

We must deny ourselves the past,
deny ourselves a future,
not look beyond the moment, knowing as we do
that fungus threads the ground on which we lie.

No chronicle, no gold
shall mark this chance conjunction;
the wild orchid, blooming
secretly among the grasses,

shall not be betrayed.
Such shall be our silence
till the shadows stretch towards us from the hills
and touch us with their cold.

And what shall there be when we are gone,
consumed by fire?
Dust will once again be dust,
its atoms left

tingling from the fire,
dispersing,
mere spicules of warmth
in the absolute cold.

Max Talley

The Soft Explosion of Fall



Mark J. Mitchell

A Book Ghost

You never quite see him.
You think you do—sometimes

there's a hint of motion
on the other side of the stacks.

You spot a touch of tartan
trailing past green bindings.

You never lay eyes on a person.
Still, he's there, every day.

He checks all the due dates
on out of print books.

When they've been forgotten
just long enough, he checks them out

so that the pages will know daylight again.

Contributor Biographies

Daginne Aignend

Daginne Aignend is a pseudonym for the Dutch writer, poetess, and photographic artist Inge Wesdijk. She likes hard rock music and fantasy books. She is a vegetarian and spends a lot of time with her animals. Daginne posted some of her poems on her fun project website www.daginne.com. She has been published in many Poetry Review Magazines, and in four anthologies. Three poems are translated in Serbian and published in the *Literary Review Belgrade*.

Matthew Barron

Matthew Barron has worked as a naturalist in the Blue Ridge Mountains, a construction worker for Habitat in Washington D.C., a school counselor and teacher in North Carolina, and presently as a special education teacher in South Carolina. He lives in Travelers Rest, SC with his wife and their seven children (pets). In descending order by age - Duncan, Beckett, Murphy, Doc, General, Otis and Gryla.
www.lookingglassphotos.me

Judy Shepps Battle

Judy Shepps Battle has been writing essays and poems long before retiring from being a psychotherapist and sociology professor. She is a New Jersey, USA resident, addictions specialist, consultant and freelance writer. Her poems have been accepted in a variety of publications including *Ascent Aspirations; Barnwood Press; Battered Suitcase; Caper Literary Journal; Epiphany Magazine; Joyful; Message in a Bottle Poetry Magazine; Raleigh Review; Rusty Truck; Short, Fast and Deadly; the Tishman Review*, and *Wilderness House Literary Press*.

Cynthia Blank

Cynthia Blank received her MFA in Poetry from Bar Ilan University's Shaindy Rudoff Creative Writing Graduate Program. Her work has been featured most recently in *Varnish Journal, Escapism Literary Magazine, Anapest, IthacaLit, Black Napkin Press*, and *Lilith Magazine*.

Dan Brook

Dan Brook, Ph.D. teaches sociology at San Jose State University. His ebooks are at <https://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/brook>. More info about him is available on his about.me page.

Bob Carlton

Bob Carlton (www.bobcarlton3.weebly.com) lives and works in Leander, TX.

Chris Connolly

Chris Connolly's fiction has appeared in the *Irish Times*, the *Irish Independent*, *Southword*, the *Galway Review* and the *Hennessy Book of Irish Fiction*, among others, and has been broadcast on RTÉ Radio. Last year he won Best Emerging Fiction at the 2016 Hennessy Literary Awards, the RTÉ Francis McManus competition, the Easy Street Magazine 'Great American Sentence Contest' and, most recently, the Over the Edge: New Writer of the Year award. He has just completed an MA in Creative Writing in UCD, and his website is chrisconnollywriter.com.

Linda M. Crate

Linda M. Crate is an author, poet, and writer from Pennsylvania. Her works have appeared in numerous magazines and anthologies both online and in print. She is the author of three published chapbooks and the Magic Series.

Lucía Damacela

Lucía Damacela's literary work has been published in more than twelve countries, in periodicals and anthologies such as *Sharkpack Annual*, *Slippery Elm*, *Cha*, *Into the Void*, *Duende*, *The Ofi Press*, *Peeking Cat*, and *Ink Sweat & Tears*. One of her poems won the Wisehouse International Poetry Award 2016. A bilingual English-Spanish writer, Lucía blogs at notesfromlucia.wordpress.com and tweets as @lucyda.

Holly Day

Holly Day has taught writing classes at the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota, since 2000. Her poetry has recently appeared in *Tampa Review*, *SLAB*, and *Gargoyle*, and her published books include *Walking Twin Cities*, *Music Theory for Dummies*, and *Ugly Girl*.

Meg Freer

Meg Freer grew up in Montana under the influence of Pacific Northwest poets Stafford and Hugo, who were occasional guests in her family's home, but she has only written her own poetry since 2015. She teaches piano in Ontario and enjoys running and photography. Her photos and poems have won awards in North America and overseas and have been published in chapbooks, anthologies and journals including *Free Lit Magazine*, *Rat's Ass Review*, *Mothers Always Write* and *NatureWriting*. In 2017 she won a fellowship and attended the Summer Literary Seminars in Tbilisi, Republic of Georgia.

Mark A. Fisher

Mark A. Fisher is a writer, poet, and playwright living in Tehachapi, CA. His poetry has appeared in: *Angel City Review*, *A Sharp Piece of Awesome*, *Altadena Poetry Review*, *Penumbra*, *Turnip Truck(s)*, and many other places. His first chapbook, *drifter*, is available from Amazon. His second, *hour of lead*, won the 2017 San Gabriel Valley Poetry Chapbook Contest. His plays have appeared on California stages in Pine Mountain Club, Tehachapi, Bakersfield, and Hayward. His column "Lost in the Stars" has appeared in Tehachapi's *The Loop* newspaper for several years. He has also won cooking ribbons at the Kern County Fair.

Allegra Forman

Allegra Forman is a student at the University of Michigan-Dearborn with a major in Women's and Gender Studies and a minor in Applied Art. She is a member of the student organization, PRIDE. Allegra is also a member of NAMI Metro and is training to be a presenter on mental illness.

DJ Hill

DJ Hill's collage art, poetry, freelance writing, and photography have appeared in *Maple Grove*, *Route 66*, *Southwest Metro*, *St. Croix Valley*, *St. Louis Park*, and *White Bear Lake Magazines*; *The Atrium*, *The Century Times*, *Daily Sentinel*, *The Fulcrum*, *Red Bird Chapbooks Weekly Read*, *Red Flag Poetry* and *The Rumpus*; the poetry anthology *The View from Here: Poetry to Help You Soar* and *WPL Remembrance Anthology*. She served as assistant poetry editor at *Runestone Literary Journal* and is currently a poetry editor at *Red Bird Chapbooks*. She lives in Carbondale, Colorado with her husband and a yard full of mule deer.

Ali Hintz

Ali Hintz is an emerging poet from the Loyalsock valley in Northcentral Pennsylvania. Her work explores humanity's relationship with the natural world. Her poetry will be published in the upcoming issues of *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel* and *The Wildhood Project*. She is currently an undergraduate student at the University of Georgia.

Krikor Der Hohannesian

Krikor Der Hohannesian's poetry has been thrice nominated for a Pushcart Prize and has appeared in many literary journals including *The Evansville Review*, *The South Carolina Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Comstock Review*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Connecticut Review* and *Natural Bridge*. My first chapbook, *"Ghosts and Whispers"* (Finishing Line Press, 2010) was a finalist for the Mass Book Awards, which also selected it as a "must read" in their 2011 poetry category. A second chapbook, *"Refuge in the Shadows"*, was released in June, 2013 (Cervena Barva Press).

Michael Keshigian

Michael Keshigian's twelfth poetry collection, *Into The Light*, was released in April, 2017 by Flutter Press (<https://www.createpace.com/7037872>). He has been published in numerous national and international journals including *Oyez Review*, *Red River Review*, *Sierra Nevada College Review*, *Oklahoma Review*, *Chiron Review* and has appeared as feature writer in over a twenty publications with 6 Pushcart Prize and 2 Best Of The Net nominations. (michaelkeshigian.com)

Kelsey May

Kelsey May is from Grand Rapids, Michigan. Her work has appeared in *InWords*, *Pine Hills Review*, *NonBinary Review*, and *Paste Magazine* and received several awards, including a nomination for a 2016 Pushcart Prize.

Michael Maul

Michael Maul resides in Bradenton, Florida, near Sarasota Bay. In recent years his poems have appeared in numerous literary publications and anthologies, both in and outside the U.S. He is also a past winner of the Mercantile Library Prize for Fiction. Michael is a graduate of the Ohio University creative writing program, where he earned both Bachelors and Masters degrees. He later taught creative writing as a full-time faculty member at The Columbus College of Art and Design, in Columbus Ohio.

Gwendolyn Joyce Mintz

Gwendolyn Joyce Mintz is a writer and photographer. Her work has appeared in various journals and anthologies. She is the author of two fiction chapbooks, "Mother Love" and "Where I'll Be If I'm Not There."

Mark J. Mitchell

Mark J. Mitchell's latest novel, *The Magic War* just appeared from Loose Leaves Publishing. He studied writing at UC Santa Cruz under Raymond Carver and George Hitchcock. His work has appeared in the several anthologies and hundreds of periodicals. Three of his chapbooks— *Three Visitors*, *Lent*, 1999, and *Artifacts and Relics*— and the novel, *Knight Prisoner* are available through Amazon and Barnes and Noble. He lives with his wife Joan Juster and makes a living pointing out pretty things in San Francisco.

Archita Mittra

Archita Mittra is a wordsmith, visual artist and tarot card reader with a love for all things vintage and darkly fantastical.

Lauren Morrow

Lauren Morrow is a St. Louis-born, Brooklyn-based arts publicist and writer. She earned a B.A. in English with a concentration in Creative Writing from Connecticut College, and her work has appeared in *Soon Quarterly*.

Thomas O'Connell

Thomas O'Connell is a librarian living on the banks of the Hudson River. His poetry and short fiction has appeared in *Elm Leaves Journal*, *Caketrain*, *Jellyfish Review*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *Hobart (online)*, and *Blink-Ink*, as well as other print and online journals.

Karen Poppy

Karen Poppy is a writer and attorney in the San Francisco Bay Area. Most recently, Karen Poppy's poetry will be appearing in the upcoming issues of *Parody Poetry Journal* and *The Wallace Stevens Journal*. She has also written her first novel.

Fabrice Poussin

Fabrice Poussin teaches French and English at Shorter University. Author of novels and poetry, his work has appeared in *Kestrel*, *Symposium*, *The Chimes*, and dozens of other magazines. His photography has been published in *The Front Porch Review*, the *San Pedro River Review* and more than 200 other publications.

Judith Kelly Quaempts

Judith Kelly Quaempts lives and writes in rural eastern Oregon. Her short stories and poems appear online and in print, most recently in *Windfall A Journal of Poetry and Place*, *Women's Voices Anthology* (A Publication of These Fragile Lilacs Press), and *Crafty Poet II A Portable Workshop* (Terrapin Press).

Sarah Rehfeldt

Sarah Rehfeldt lives with her family in western Washington where she is a writer, artist, and photographer. Her publication credits include *Appalachia*; *Blueline*; *Written River*; *Weber – The Contemporary West*; and *Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction*. Her work has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize in poetry. Sarah is the author of *Somewhere South of Pegasus*, a collection of image poems. It can be purchased through her photography web pages at www.pbase.com/candanceski.

Natalie Schriefer

Natalie Schriefer is a fiction writer in SCSU's Master of Fine Arts program. Her short stories, poetry, and personal essays have been published in both print and online at

venues such as *Nanoism*, *Penworks*, *Otto*, *1:1000*, and MTV, among others. She also writes for her self-awareness blog, located at www.natalieschriefer.com.

Jake Sheff

Jake Sheff is a major and pediatrician in the US Air Force, married with a daughter and three pets. Currently home is the Mojave Desert. Poems of Jake's are in *Marathon Literary Review*, *Jet Fuel Review*, *The Cossack Review* and elsewhere. His chapbook is "Looting Versailles" (Alabaster Leaves Publishing). He considers life an impossible sit-up, but plausible.

Steven Sher

A native of NYC (who lived for many years in the Pacific Northwest and now lives in Jerusalem), Steven Sher is the author of 15 books including, most recently, *Uncharted Waters* (New Feral Press, 2017), *The House of Washing Hands* (Pecan Grove Press, 2014) and *Grazing on Stars: Selected Poems* (Presa Press, 2012). Since the 1970s, his poetry and prose have appeared in hundreds of journals worldwide; he has worked as an editor, media consultant and journalist; and he has taught at many universities and writing workshops. Current editing/consulting work includes *arc* (an Israel-based literary journal), *World Poetry Almanac* (a Mongolia-based journal) and *The Jerusalem Herald* (an Israel-based political commentary magazine).

Roger Sippl

Roger Sippl studied creative writing at UC Irvine, UC Berkeley and Stanford Continuing Studies. He has been published in 17 literary print and online journals and anthologies. He has written his first novel, which is in revision. Sippl is probably best known for being a software industry pioneer, having founded or co-founded several companies including Informix, Vantive and Visigenic Software. Also, while a student at UC Berkeley, Sippl was diagnosed with Stage IIIB Hodgkin's Lymphoma, which was treated aggressively with 13 months of surgery, radiation therapy and chemotherapy, allowing him to live relapse-free to this day.

Kathryn Knight Sonntag

Kathryn Knight Sonntag is a landscape architect and planner in Salt Lake City. Her poems have appeared in *Shades: The University of Utah's Literary & Art Magazine*, *Wilderness Interface Zone*, previously in *Young Ravens Literary Review* and forthcoming in *Exponent II*. She is currently working on a collection of poems about women's experiences as sacred symbols.

Ann Christine Tabaka

Ann Christine Tabaka lives in Delaware. She is a published poet and artist. She loves gardening and cooking. Chris lives with her husband and two cats. Her most recent credits are *The Paragon Journal*, *The Literary Hatchet*, *Metaworker*, *Raven Cage Ezine*, *RavensPerch*, *Anapest Journal*, *Sick Lit Magazine*, *Mused*, *Indiana Voice Journal*, *Halcyon Days Magazine*, and *The Society of Classical Poets*.

Max Talley

Max Talley is a writer and artist living in Southern California. He studied painting at the Art Students League in Manhattan, and has been featured in two-person and group shows in New York City, as well as Northern and Southern California. Talley's work has been called "expressionistic surrealism" and his medium is oil on acrylic on canvas, with collage elements sometimes pasted on. <http://maxdevoetalley.com/>

Don Thompson

Don Thompson was born and raised in Bakersfield, California, and has lived in the southern San Joaquin Valley for most of his life. He has been publishing poetry since the early sixties, including a dozen books and chapbooks. For more information and links to his publications, visit his website *San Joaquin Ink* (don-e-thompson.com).

Dennis Trujillo

Dennis Trujillo is a former US Army soldier and middle/high school math teacher from Pueblo, Colorado. In 2010 he spontaneously began writing poetry not knowing where the spark came from. Since then his poems have appeared in more than seventy magazines, journals, and anthologies including *Atlanta Review*, *KYSO Flash*, and *Sacred Cow*. In 2016 he received nominations for both a Pushcart Prize and a Best of the Net award.

Kristen Wood

Kristen Wood is a mother of five, a writer, a reader, a student, and an aspiring librarian. She has had her work published in *Mothers Always Write*, *Whisper and the Roar*, *Scary Mommy*, and is an ongoing contributor to the online magazine *Still Standing*. She regularly laughs until she cries and cries until she laughs. She is a proud pop culture geek and a champion napper. Kris loves to make people laugh and to make people think, and if she can do both at the same time, even better.

Mantz Yorke

Mantz Yorke lives in Manchester, England. He is an award-winning poet whose work has appeared in a number of print magazines, anthologies and e-magazines in the UK, Ireland, Israel, Canada, the US, Australia and Hong Kong.

Jim Zola

Jim Zola is a poet and photographer living in North Carolina.

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