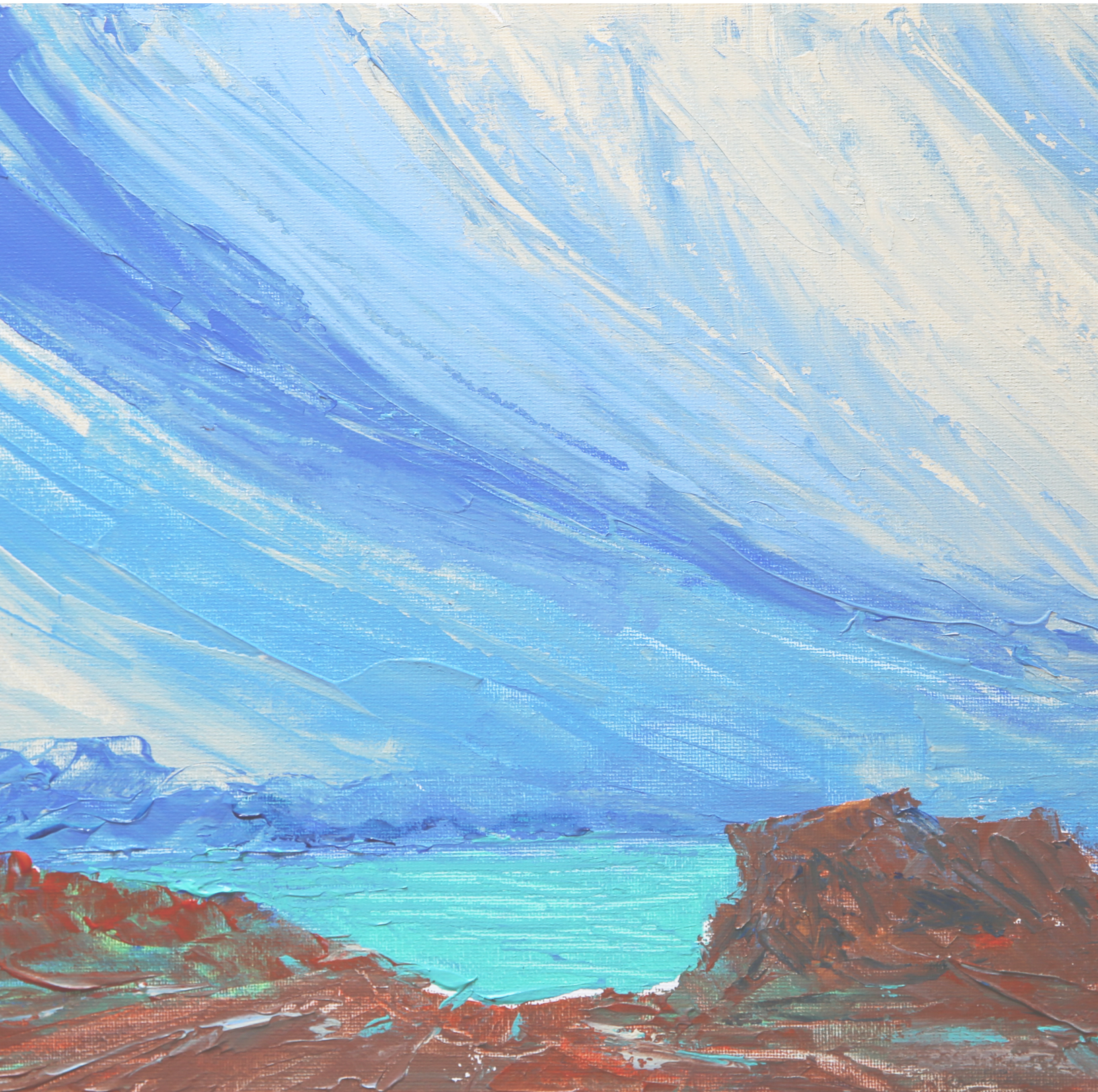


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UKRAINE POPPY

K. MARK SCHOFER



BELOW BEACH SANDS

ED HIGGINS

feeding sanderlings rush
along the tide's wet sand

sand-colored mole crabs
burrow quickly below the swash

maximizing their escape—
like the burrowing crabs

I sink below sloshing surfaces
backward into ovid breathing holes

barely remembering which way
is up, wanting protection,

leaving few marks to reveal
my fears, eyes alert

as predatory birds plunge
their digging beaks

HATCHLINGS

DAN MORRISON

My feet slid from under me as we stumbled onto the beach. I reached for Marie's hand, falling forward, and tumbling down. George had fallen behind us. We could hear him throwing wood into a pile. I rolled over, letting the cold, night sand poured down the back of my jeans. The moon made a halo around Marie's wind-blown hair. I was sorry to see her go.

"Do you see that?" she asked.

"See what?"

"That," she pointed past my head, "Over there."

In the distance there were what looked like small rocks crawling down the beach, to the black ocean. We pushed ourselves up, and hurriedly tiptoed towards the rocks, realizing they were sea turtle hatchlings.

"Oh my god, they're so cute. I just want to take one home with me."

"That would be a shock for the poor thing," I laughed. "Where's George? He should see this."

Marie gestured at the dunes, where George's stack of wood was waist high. He was pulling from a bottle of Jack, and I figured he didn't care about the sea turtle hatchlings as much as Marie. Marie was the kind of person who would adopt every stray cat in her neighborhood, just so they weren't jealous of the house cats. She'd do this whether the strays wanted it, or not. It made me wonder why she was throwing me back out into the streets, to become just another stray.

"Don't look at the water."

"Why not?"

HATCHLINGS

DAN MORRISON

“Just don’t,” I didn’t even want to tell her-it would break her heart to pieces. If Marie looked at the ocean, she’d try and take ever last turtle with her.

She looked and screamed. There was a line of sea birds, picking off the panicked sea turtles. The turtles were making a mad dash for the ocean, and most seemed to almost make it. Still, those damned birds ripped them off their feet over and over again. I lied to Marie, saying that the ones who made it to the ocean were safe. That’s when George screamed in joy-his bonfire lit up.

The turtles near the dunes turned and started to drag themselves towards the fire. Marie ran at him, screaming, “Put it out! You’re going to kill them!” George didn’t mind her. He was through with her, like she was with me.

Tomorrow, she’d be gone. I knew that already, but it didn’t help. She was getting out and leaving her old life behind. I was her old life. It was time to make her my old life too. It was time to go back to them and the bonfire exploding in the dunes behind me, but I couldn’t stand up.

It must be awful to be one of those turtles who makes it to the ocean, just for a crab, or some fish to devour you. I’d rather be taken on the beach. Put me out of my misery. Don’t bother showing me the safe haven.

UNTITLED

BEATA STASAK



PARADISE

after "The Water Lily Pond" by Claude Monet

BARBARA BROOKS

On the bridge of my paradise,
I watch the water lilies quilt together.
The coots paddle among them,
dive for wild celery.
If I remain still, they will swim past me.
Otherwise, they will paddle to a new opening
in the lily tapestry. The purple gallinule,
with its long yellow legs and toes,
limbs that let it float
on the lily pads, joins the coots.

In the green-brown marsh grasses,
a marsh wren trills. I can only glimpse it
as it flits among the reeds,
gleaning for insects.

Sprinting among the pads,
the water bug floats on the surface,
its feet making small circles as it oars about.
The decaying log holds the red painted slider
catching the sun. At the slightest movement,
it will slip into the water. Lurking in the water,
the snapping turtle lies in wait. Dragonflies
helicopter in the air as they scout for bugs.

Evening looms, the sun purples the clouds,
the pond closes to the day. Rafts of coots float
through the night, dragonflies and wrens hitch
themselves to the reeds.

But night brings new visitors to the pond,
the bull frog awakens to call across the water
for a mate. The raccoon and her kits
search for crawdads in the shallows.
The pond settles in shades of black, grey and white.
The night cools, the pond's guests arrive.

NATURE

MARC X GRIGOROFF

Jody found the baby bird beneath a maple tree in front of her house. Unwilling to abandon the helpless creature, she carefully scooped it up and hurried inside. Her mother agreed to let her raise it on the condition that—if it somehow survived—she would release it when it was strong enough to fly. Over the next few weeks, Jody cared for the bird with motherly devotion. Cupping it in her hands, she could feel its tiny heart racing and marveled at the power she held over life and death. One squeeze and it would all be over. Jody wondered if her own mother ever felt this way. At last, it was time to release the bird, and though she loved it, Jody wasn't particularly sad when it flew away. All that shitting and screaming and feeding. A few days later, when she discovered its lifeless body beneath the maple tree, Jody was overwhelmed by a sadness that lingered for the rest of her life.

UNDERNEATH

MARC X GRIGOROFF

Today, I found out the Earth is flat. I kind of knew it all along, but now it's a proven fact. In school, they said it was like a big ball, but that didn't make sense. Even the kids who got it right on the test didn't believe it. Marcel belongs to this organization with scientists and data and he proved it to me. So why did everyone lie? I think it's because they don't want people to go to the other side, the underneath part. I bet it's this really cool place with all kinds of animals, maybe even dinosaurs! I told Marcel I want to go there, and he said I was stupid because I'd just fall off. But then I got to thinking, what if we could turn the Earth over, so the bottom is the top? Then all the buildings and people would fall off, and it'd just be me and the dinosaurs. I would have let Marcel come along if he hadn't called me stupid.

COPSE

KJ HANNAH GREENBERG



PURE GREEN

ALEXANDER ETHERIDGE

I walk further into myself---
inside a waking dream, I walk further into dark.
All at once the trees and sky here change,
becoming ten thousand years ago,
and I'm suddenly by a cold stream in this
immensely old, and immediately
present November. If I return to my world now
I'd be, in a way, centuries old.

Either I'm falling deeper into dreaming,
or the dream is overtaking the world.
I'm in a pure green place,
and rain falls through mist, echoing
in my bones. I was born into
these tiny sounds of growing stems.
Without knowing it I've always walked toward

the stars of this other world,
toward the mountains and snows
of this living fable. The darkness here
is filled with light, and led by
the mind of light. This dark
shines in a season of paradise, the first moment
of truth in the last moment
of my lost and blind wandering.

CROWS THANKSGIVING

TONI DIETKUS

There was an old woman who did not like people. We do not know why. She lived in a house in the middle of a square field that got a lot of sunshine. The soil was black and soft, which is good for growing corn. Seed corn she tossed into the ground sent roots down deep. Before long, thin green stalks came up. The old woman kept watch all day to catch anything that might try to damage her corn. To her surprise, nothing did.

The corn grew strong and high and leafy in straight, single-file rows. When the stalks were as tall as she was, ears popped out—big and green outside, yellow and juicy inside.

One morning she woke up to see a black cloud hovering over her cornfield. The black cloud was a flock of crows. They landed on her corn and began to fiercely peck its ears. "AWK!" she screamed. She ran outside in her nightgown screeching, "Awk! Awk! Awk!" At first, the crows were puzzled. She sounded like a crow saying, 'hello.' However, no crow alive would ever wear such a funny dress.

"Awk, AWK!" she shouted.

"AWK, Awk?" they inquired. But neither knew what the other was saying. She ran into the cornfield flapping her arms and hurling dirt clods. Even though that tender corn was the best thing those crows had ever tasted, they flew for their lives. The old woman stamped through her cornfield seeing all the damage done. She felt like crying. The crows, safe on high tree limbs, gazed at that glorious corn. They had gotten only a few bites. They felt like crying.

The old woman worked all day to bring in her corn. She scraped kernels from cobs, blanched it quickly in boiling water, and froze it up in bags. She cooked and canned it in jars. The smell of corn blew on a breeze into the trees where the crows were swooning on their branches from the sweet aroma.

CROWS THANKSGIVING

TONI DIETKUS

When she had used up all of her jars and bags, and her hands were sore from scraping kernels from so many cobs, the old woman wrapped up corn on the cob, and froze it up whole. She worked late into the afternoon. When she was finished, every kernel had been put safely away, and she had a pretty pile of scraped cobs on her kitchen floor.

The crows had waited around all day, hoping there would be leftovers for them. But no scraped cobs were tossed out in the trash. Not a single ear had fallen unnoticed from her basket as she trotted to and from the field. Nothing remained but straight rows of earless stalks. They knew because they checked. They flew over and around the field and back and forth between every earless leafy stalk. No leaf hid a corn tidbit. They paced the rows, looking down. Not one kernel was lost in the dirt.

The old woman had put her feet up on her footstool, and was having sweet corn for supper. She dumped a mountain of yellow corn onto her favorite big blue platter, and added butter and a little salt to make it taste more delicious than anyone could imagine. She chose her biggest spoon and scooped up huge bites. She ate huge bites for a long time. Then she ate large and medium-sized bites awhile. Finally, she could not swallow one more bite, even if it was small.

While she was washing dishes, she noticed the crows. They were bent over searching the cornfield, walking slowly. They "awk-awked" to each other, and others would answer,

"awk."

"They look sad," thought the old woman. "They look disappointed."

She looked at the pretty pile of scraped cobs. There were small bits that she had not gotten. It was so delicious . . . maybe it should not go to waste?

CROWS THANKSGIVING

TONI DIETKUS

The red sun was low in the sky when she heaped her apron with scraped cobs and walked to the far edge of the field where there was a grassy incline. She opened her apron. The juicy scraped cobs rolled downhill losing bits of corn, tumbling like kids playing, turning somersaults.

The crows, smelling the corn, watched anxiously.

"AWK!" the old woman hollered.

"Awk, AWK?" the crows shouted back.

She shook out extra little chunks that had stuck to her apron. "AWK!"

The starving crows fell upon the pretty pile of tumbled cobs. Sharp black bills jabbed deep into juicy corn goodness. They squawked, "Awk! Awk!"

The old woman sat down on the grass at the top of the hill and watched the crows eating eagerly. They sounded so happy and grateful. A teeny, tiny smile played around her lips. It was the first smile she had felt for a long, long time, maybe years. It . . . tickled . . . but felt . . . good. A teeny, very small, happy-seed sprouted in her heart. Little bitty roots wriggled out, making her giggle. Her giggle sounded somewhat like the crows' "awk, awk's" as they ate to their heart's delight.

Finally, the crows, with fat bellies, flew home in a crooked black line across the orange evening sky.

The old woman watched them go. She stayed and watched the red sun sink into its bed. Stars came out. She had not bothered to look at stars since she had been a little girl. She lay back on the grassy ground and gazed into the heavens. The happy seed in her heart sent up a stalk. A tiny idea—which looked a little like a tiny ear of corn—popped out.

CROWS THANKSGIVING

TONI DIETKUS

That November, on Thanksgiving Day, the old woman began to work in her kitchen. She put a large kettle on the stove and simmered buttery corn. She made round pumpkin cookies and decorated them with a frosting smiley face.

She watched her clock until its hands were straight up, noon. She put on her best black coat and carried the kettle of corn, cooled, of course, to the picnic table at the side of her house. She arranged the pumpkin cookies in a golden ring on her favorite big blue platter. She pretended not to notice the crows, who had smelled everything cooking, and who were hanging around on this or that tree branch.

She filled a plate for herself, heaped it until it was sky high. "AWK! AWK! AWK!" she shouted. She carried her plate inside to her own table near the window.

The crows' black eyes bulged. They jabbered questions at each other. Their shiny black heads flipped left and right. "Awk?" Is this a trap? "Awk, AWK, AWK." Stranger things have happened. "AWWW-www-WWKK!" Let's take a chance!

At that last idea, each crow nodded in agreement. They spread their wings, as if each crow wore a black cape, and glided down to the dazzling table.

The old woman dug in with her fork. The crows on the table dug in with their sharp bills. They bumped each other, scooping up bites that were too big to swallow. They ate corn that

another crow had walked on. They crisscrossed bills over the same cookie, getting smiley-face frosting up their noses, and cawed with their mouths full, showering each other with crumbs.

There was too much to finish on the old woman's plate. There was too much for the crows to finish on the picnic table outside. Finally, the crows had to abandon a bit here or there that they could not wedge in, and carried home leftovers in their bills. Some were so full they had to walk home.

CROWS THANKSGIVING

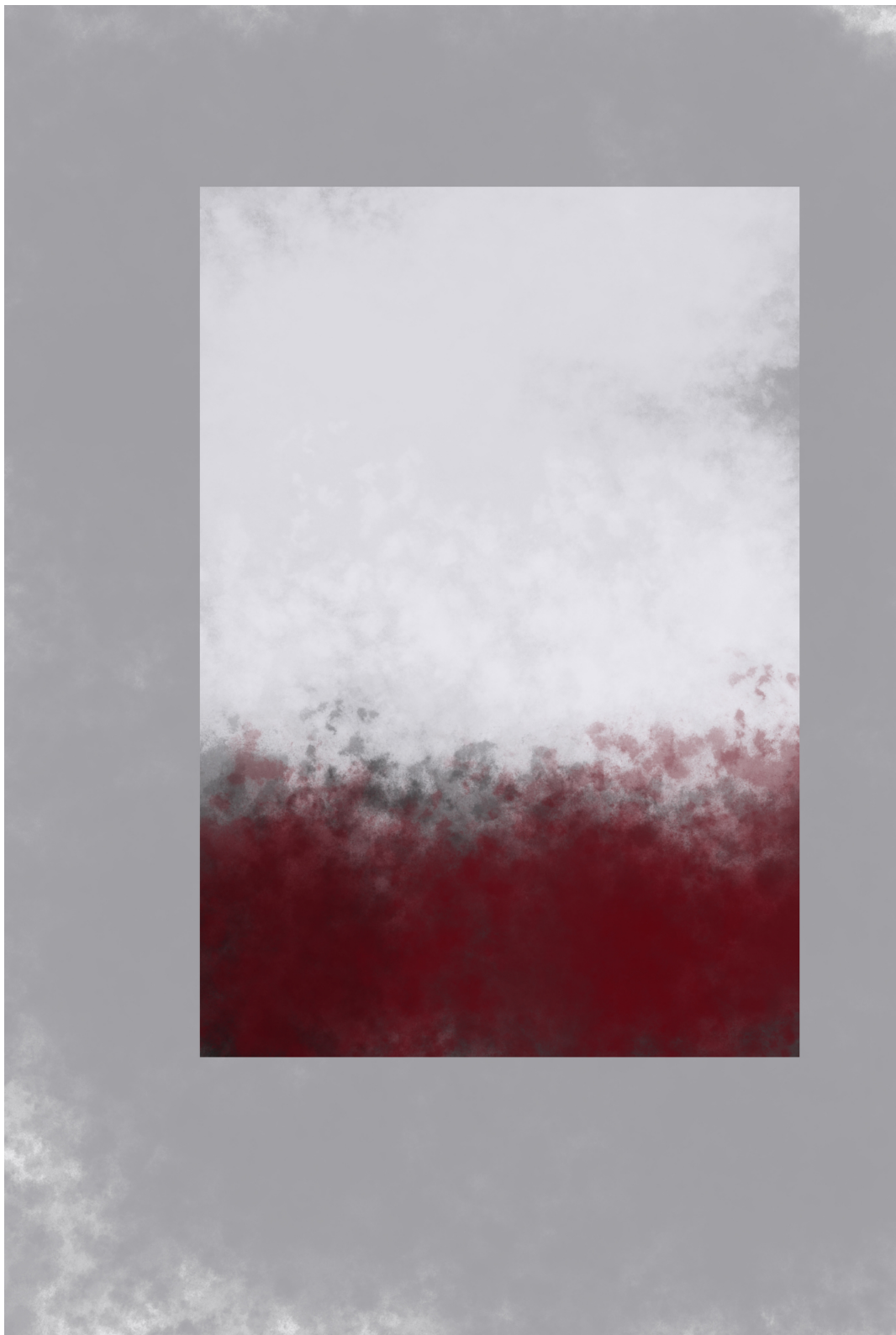
TONI DIETKUS

The old woman put her feet up on her footstool and watched them go. She watched the sun go down and the stars come out. Smiling at the stars, she fell asleep in her chair.

The stars smiled back.

ACROSS THE FIELDS OF OTHER DAYS

EDWARD LEE



WHEN THE SKY FLOWS THROUGH ME

ALFREDO QUARTO

When the storms overflow their banks of clouds
and blow with a fury from the south
they call it an "atmospheric river"
and I imagine a river running in white water
rapids above my bed at night where in slowing eddies
deep pools of dreams are formed to foam and drift
as flotsam swirling round in winding river's spume.

When dark rain clouds pass overhead
cascading under the purple prairie plume of sky
soaking the hills and alleyways till the extent
that our vision is stretched to its inward limits
and perceived distance of horizon seems so near
all thoughts turn to this wide watercourse of storm.
The wind surges through the spreading arms of evergreens
swimming in the quick spray of branches and needles
scattering the seeds that we feed to birds
by hand in random patterns left on snow.

The south wind has a fierce temper
bearing the hint of warm tropics
where palm trees sway in green mist
and me idle on some southern breath of beach
blinking rain drops with the storm gusting
through half-opened eyes
blurred with indecipherable visions
whose meaning still eludes me.

CONCURRENCE

CRAIG NIX

Jimmy whistles Jericho to his side. Together they sit: Jimmy in faded dungarees and t-shirt on a cool granite outcrop, Jericho on the scruff ground at the foot of his master. From the roost, both look down onto Fraser's Creek and at the narrow dirt trail winding from the boulder-strewn rise to the creek's ford.

From the height – some thirty feet above the channel – thirteen-year-old Jimmy feels larger than the world that surrounds him. The boulder becomes his throne, the soaring or crawling creatures his subjects, the plants his adornment. He scans the creek appearing from a tangle of cottonwoods, cattails, and brambles on his right, its thin trail of water meeting a dark pool formed from a menagerie of loaf-sized stones that is the ford. The crossing resembles a poison ivy rash, the ford's stones blistering the water, interrupting the pool's smooth surface. Fraser's Creek sits still, its water's flow undetectable, more like the painting of a creek in a country swale than a live body of water.

To the left of the ford, the creek's water collects in another pool larger than that on Jimmy's right, a pool produced by the accumulation of more boulders, as well as fallen androtting tree trunks, and a blinding mass of willows, forsythia, honeysuckle, and more cattails. Only when Jimmy looks further downstream does he notice the movement of water in the creek where broken terrain allows a humble fall and babble.

Jericho whimpers, either the dog's signal of impatience at remaining still for so long or the creature's giving vent to a flea's quest for blood.

Jimmy senses it too. A flying insect bobs near his ear; he recognizes only the buzzing sound and doesn't bother to identify the noisemaker. And the air rather than moving horizontally rises in a steady wave reminiscent of his mother opening the oven door while baking bread. Only the sweet dough scent is missing. In its place the smell of grit, as if the baked orange soil were exhaling.

CONCURRENCE

CRAIG NIX

So Jimmy stands, says "okay" – Jericho's release trigger – and watches the 4-year-old Border collie race down the slope, mindless of the trail. At the ford, Jericho breaks sharply to the left. Jimmy sees him leap into the air, sees him disappear behind the curtain of vegetation, and hears his dog's body strike the pool, the water absorbing Jericho's energy.

The sound lessens as Jimmy steps from the boulder. "He's found the cool spot," he tells himself. The boy cannot see Jericho, but he imagines him paddling effortlessly through the pool, mindless of the turtles or crawfish that, likewise, ignore the dog. It's an image of the natural world to the thirteen-year-old: unrefined, without consequence other than what Jimmy believes must be relief from the heat. For Jimmy, Jericho's dip in the pool as part of their trek home is unrelated to his mother and the dinner awaiting his return a mile away.

Having endured three miles of hiking through broken terrain, Jimmy zig-zags to prolong his exhilaration as gravity draws him down the slope. The cooling friction produced by his arms and legs slicing through the air restores sapped strength; the prospect of climbing the opposite bank finds no place in him. As he nears the ford, he leans back – a natural brake – his legs numb to the incline's force, his mind vacant to all but Jericho's buoyant splashing and the fading daylight in the vale.

The toe of his left shoe finds the shallow water of the ford as Jimmy reels himself back and glimpses Jericho bobbing in the pool. The dog's black and blond fur, vivid on land, blends with the dark water; Jericho fades, then dissolves as he moves in and out of the shadows or when he dips below the surface.

Now Jimmy bends his neck to the opposite, less imposing incline and the crooked trail rising from creek to crest. He feels smaller, wrapped in the valley. The world around him is still, as if holding its breath. The surface of the pool ripples

CONCURRENCE

CRAIG NIX

slightly and darkens. A faint floral scent evaporates. Jericho is nowhere in sight. Jimmy scans the banks on both sides. He bleeds his gaze through vegetation as dense as the water's blackness. Only when Jericho's front legs and back break the surface does Jimmy find his dog. So unlike Jericho. Jimmy bounds along the bank reading labor in his dog's paddling to the opposite shore. Jericho's snout spits water, and he whimpers meekly. His head bobs erratically as he churns the pool.

Jimmy's right sneaker is off, but his haste to remove the left knots the lace tightly at the tongue. He feels the teeter-totter of his steps as he charges the pool, acting as arbiter of Jericho's life or death. His plunging into the water, weightless, relieves the sensation, and he beats the surface to reach his dog.

Twenty feet across and six feet at its deepest, the pool transforms into a sea. The sun drops below the western bank, obscuring Jimmy's vision as he draws near to Jericho. He grabs his dog's hind quarters, and Jericho kicks to free himself, sending both he and Jimmy under for an unknowing moment. Jimmy's eyes open in the water. Water that appeared dark from shore now absorbs enough light to reveal a tangle of roots, a mottled microwave, unspooled wires around an indiscriminate metal frame, and split garbage bags spewing rusted cans, plastic wraps, and bleached bones. Then Jericho's familiar face briefly turns toward Jimmy before the dog rises in search of the pool's surface. When Jimmy breathes again he has Jericho's front quarters under one arm. Together, they kick toward the nearest bank, a flurry of limbs and water and gasps marking their scene as Jimmy reaches for a cluster of overhanging willow branches.

The embankment, overgrown with wild, thorny plants, rises perpendicular to the water. Jimmy heaves and urges Jericho through an opening in the hawthorn and forsythia's twisted spindle of branches, the dog's front paws digging for a footing.

CONCURRENCE

CRAIG NIX

When Jimmy weighs the anchor the dog manages to set, he slides his arm down Jericho's side, the boy's shoulder tucked behind his dog's haunches, his body submerged as he pushes against the water and the warped roots and whatever discarded matter rests along the bank. Only one of Jericho's rear paws finds a solid base, but it is enough to leverage escape from the pool, and he forces himself into the dense tangle surrounding him. He snorts and coughs, then crawls, forcing his way through the mass of limbs and tendrils, emerging seconds later into a clearing where he shakes his fur and coughs again.

Jericho gallops to the ford where he stands, tail wagging, watching Jimmy clutching at the willow's thin branches hanging over the pool. He whimpers as his master attempts to land the bank, Jimmy bobbing repeatedly, his chest barely rising above the water's surface. The dog steps a paw into the water only to withdraw it. And he barks.

Jimmy turns in the cool water. "Hey, boy," he calls before going under. His head and shoulders breach the surface a moment later, and Jimmy shakes his wet hair and, smiling, wipes a wet hand across his eyebrows. "Gonna have to swim to ya, I guess," he sputters through intermittent breaths. "Side's too slick, an' nothin' to grab."

Jimmy's first stroke toward the ford ten feet away sees him go under again. He rises once more choking on a mouthful of the creek's pool. "God damn, I'm stuck," he says after catching his breath. He looks at Jericho: "I'm caught. Damn foot's caught on something."

When Jimmy dips again, Jericho barks, not once but twice. The dog dances beside the ford, then halts and stands attentive, his tongue hanging from one side of his mouth. The pool's surface boils for a moment. A small box turtle scales a half-sunken log on the opposite bank and waddles to a burrow fashioned into the mud. Minnows school in the shallow in front of Jericho, and a katydid lands on a cattail beside the dog.

CONCURRENCE

CRAIG NIX

The quiet has returned. Jericho keeps his eyes on the pool. He prances to the thicket and back to the ford, back to the pool. The still pool. He whimpers, shakes himself, then barks at the scene. He looks across the ford and bounds to Jimmy's sneaker on the opposite side. With the shoe in his mouth, Jericho crawls back through the thicket, drops the sneaker on the bank, and lies down, his chin resting on his paws.

- END -

TOO LATE

FABRICE B. POUSSIN



EXILE

MICHAEL PATTERSON–JONES

The slash of red of cardinals playing in the snow,
Conflicts with memories of the Africa I know.
My mind drifts away from winters cold and cruel,
To summers where the bright sun is the fuel
That fires the growth of grass and fever trees,
Egret perches, and where giraffe can feed with ease.

In a world of snow and slush, I cannot smell,
Like I could where in the land I used to dwell.
The sweet scent of first rain on arid earth
That brings the flying ants to end the dearth
Of food for fiscal shrikes and swallows,
Who swoop the swarms as oft as daylight allows.

There is another scent, offensive as it seems
At first brings back memories of acrid smoke and beams
Of light piercing the thatch of mud hut roof,
To show cold embers on the floor, the proof
Of fires that cooked pots of meal and cobs of corn.
These are the scents of that far land where I was born.

In a land heavily covered in a carpet of snow,
Sounds are muffled and seldom grow
To match the sounds from that place afar,
Like the sad call of the road squatting night jar
And call of the weaver, baby eaten by a snake, and bereft.
These are the sights, the sounds and smells of the land I left.

FEBRUARY

MUKUT BORPUJARI

I'm crawling out of this season of hard cold winter,
That stayed long enough.
The bottom of my feet kicked up dirt on the hard asphalt.
When I planted a mango tree it smelled of raw earth —
Pulsing sun, dirt, and water.
I do remember this. I pinned summer light upon my back
And made no apologies for the space I took up —
Barely clothed and sun-burned.

Now, a ball of cotton in the grey sky.
The sun rolls low on the horizon, hangs,
Then dips behind a city block;
Wind howling us into the night.
Inside in the erratic rhythm of this flickering
Shadows and light,
I conjure up the potent sky of the longest day;
Seeds, with a whole galaxy inside them.
Cicadas vibrating outside
On the branches of a giant neem tree.

I never expected to find myself in such a cold place,
My hands dry out against the cold.
I let the memory out, let it linger on the horizon,
Some kind of flying like a kite — again and again.
I loosen the buckles of my mind to fly back in time,
To the days of dried out paddy fields, and herds of cattle —
I let it stay there.

OCTOBER FLIGHT

CYNTHIA HAMMELL

Several monarch butterflies hover over the butterfly bush, lingering.
Don't they know that it's October? They have less than a month to arrive in Mexico.
Where humans believe they are the spirits of their ancestors on the Day of the Dead.
Is it climate change that deceives them?
Or are these butterflies destined to live out their days in New Jersey?
Forgotten with the fall leaves.
Are there butterflies in Heaven?
Pollinating flowers even more beautiful than those below?

THE MORNING MEETS OUR SMILE

EDWARD LEE



THE DAMNED TRAIL

TIARA W. DIAS

Bloodied feet limped through the scorching deadlands. A mother with her small child against her chest, the last semblance of safety he knew. Warm and comforting, nothing could touch him when he laid in her arms of steel.

The owner of those bloodied feet smiled in spite of her pain, for the little boy that stared at her as though she made the sun shine. The owner of those bloodied feet dragged herself leaving a red trail behind her with her eyes set on the horizon where freedom would be waiting for them. Aching back and parched throat, her smile, as graceful as it was, never portrayed her true sentiments. A mask of iron, it was, that hid all the angst and agony she felt. An actor in her grandest performance yet.

Little boy

Sleep in peace

Close your eyes

Dreams and bliss

The little boy

slept with ease

no ache in his belly

he dreamt of sweets and jollies

The sun had said goodbye and the moon took its place. The frigid breeze replaced the unbearable heat making the mother's body shiver in an attempt to warm up. She tried to shield her boy from the cold as she kept walking, seeking for a safe place to take refuge under in the night. Her sight was blinded by the dark and she knew that no more steps could be taken.

THE DAMNED TRAIL

TIARA W. DIAS

Another defeat to add to her ever growing list. Placing the boy on the ground and removing the heavy bag from her shoulders, a wave of relief she felt. Her husband had been the one carrying a bag with all their belongings before they got separated. Tears brim in her eyes as the possibilities of his whereabouts, one worse than the other, begin plaguing her mind. She was thankful for the dark, as her son couldn't see the concern on her expression nor the pain in her eyes.

Kneeling on the hard ground, she opened her bag and took out the blanket she and her son had been using. It was dirty and grimy but it was warm enough and all they had. She then took out a rolled up shirt to act as a pillow for her and her bottle of water and a pack of saltine crackers. One thing she and her son had in common was their dislike for those damned crackers but what else could they eat, it was all they had left. The pair had fallen into a routine of eating a half a pack of saltines at night and the other half in the morning with a few gulps of water. As miserable as it was, the mother was thankful for how well her son behaved and accepted the miserable circumstances. Sitting down was worse for her, it allowed her to feel all the pain she had been trying to ignore. Her back, her arms, her feet, her mind. All ablaze but nothing beat the pain in her heart and soul. A pain she could hide so well for her little boy just to be able to move on. As she laid on her back, coddling her sleeping child against her chest, she stared at the sky that seemed to have lost some stars. She thought back on the first night they had slept like that and she noted all the changes that had occurred since then. Her husband, who'd warm the both of them at night.

The stars that brightened the sky. Her will to continue. All gone. She pulled her son closer to her, inhaling his scent so she wouldn't forget it like she forgot her husband's. She could almost smell a bit of the shampoo she used on his curls the last time she washed his hair. It was there, among the scent of dirt, she could smell it.

THE DAMNED TRAIL

TIARA W. DIAS

The last bit of their past life, the comfort and security. Restless slumber was all she knew now. Sleep was not as it used to be. Fearful of her surroundings, she daren't let herself fall too deeply. Lulled between awake and asleep, her body rested yet her mind ran. The crickets in the night, the whistles on the wind, her own heartbeat in the ears, her son's steady breaths. She wondered if her son still dreamt, if he still remembered his father's face, his love. Haunting thoughts burdened her and restless sleep plagued her. Silent sobs and loud tears in the night were the only form of release she had.

Mother,
oh, Mother
Sleep now,
rest
dwelling in your dreams
might be the peace you seek,
the solace you lost.

Seven steps. The pain was unbearable, but there were only seven more steps. Her feet glued in place, lips painfully chapped and arms almost limp. The boy held her calloused hand, ignorant to his mothers sentiments and confused at her actions, or lack thereof.

Just seven more steps but the pain would still be there.

Were these steps worth it?

They were what they fought for.

Such a beautiful number, seven was. She hoped those seven steps would take them to the freedom her feet bled for and husband died for. Those seven steps would add onto her son's years of life, they would be the beginning of the end of their suffering. But her feet refused to move as she stared at the open horizon. Just seven more steps.

THE DAMNED TRAIL

TIARA W. DIAS

“Mama,” that tiny soothing voice, called from beside her. She forced her eyes from the view before her to look down at the source, “come on.”

She stared at the boy's face, the features he took after his father glaring back at her. She couldn't answer him as her eyes began to sting with tears. The little boy watched as tears escaped his mother's eyes. A smile grew on her lips but for the first time the boy could see the iron mask break and her true feelings show. That, however, didn't falter the boy. Seven steps was all they needed, so he took a hold of his mother's hand into his small ones, his fingers barely closing around hers, and he took the first step.

TRICKERY

FABRICE B. POUSSIN



CONSTRUCT

MEGAN DIEDERICKS

Every day feels like a year,
but one morning I wake to the summer sun
and two season-cycles have already passed.

Minutes are hours
and in corners, my bad memories, she
cowers. My mind devours
the tick-tock in slow motion and speeds it up,
all at once.

What time is it? That late?
The year? Since when?

I can't remember when time
felt normal; flowing gradually,
instead of waves crashing
all at once, all the time.
Maybe it was when I was a child,
back before I knew how to read time; where
every day was worth more than a dime and it
wasn't a crime
to spend it however you like.

I'm still young but I have grown
older now, and the world has shown
me that it never stops spinning,
even if I'm standing still.
Time is a construct
in the sense that the
calendar says one thing,
but my bones feel different.

BUDDHA'S TEST

inspired by Nicholas Roerich's "Buddha's Test"

T.M. THOMSON

Way down way down way down
sliding along walls of golden fish
sunlit dolphins tawny-finned sharks
octopi with tentacles licked by sky

& shadow a sinuous braiding
& unbraiding like flames through brine
in these depths that flow from shallow
azure to abyssal cobalt & finally

shift to the most profound black—
bottomless cosmic.

Drift & sink drift & sink drift & sink
drink each wave each surge of opaleye
& periwinkle every swell of sea stars'
piked arms & jellyfish's ballet dome

gulp & watch them grow into your halo
brighter for the murk that surrounds you
feel your fingers curl into ocean *mudra*—
fingertip to thumb palm to palm electric

connection a howling *dervish* cupped
in creases of sun & heart.

THE SNOWFLAKE

BRIAN TERRELL

I awake and I'm standing at the window pane
Staring out at a cold, December rain
All the grass is brown, the flowers are dead
And all I'm left with are the voices in my head
Voices of the past, of days gone by
Voices that whispered those sweet, delicate lies
Like a bitter, poison pill I swallowed every one
Unknowingly partaking til the damage was done
And now I'm floating, floating out into space
Floating alone with things I can't bear to face
The burning, the yearning, all of it so unconcerning
Sucked in, caught, stuck, and trapped
The prey in the web so skillfully wrapped
Nowhere to turn, nowhere to run
No one to call, no one to come
A shake of the head, I'm back at the window, I'm awake
And amongst the rain I see one lone snowflake

TO AVALON

FABRICE B. POUSSIN



DEEP

LOUIS FABER

Deep beneath the Arctic ice
the whale songs shimmer
in the harsh light
of a frozen sun.
We strive to hear them,
hear nothing, hear only
our thoughts echoing
through cavernous memories.
With thoughts of what was,
what we wish had been
we are ambient noise
in a universe which
cradles hope, craves silence.
Dolphins dream of days
when the sea was theirs,
lives lived in a slow paradise
a world the land bound
would never comprehend
even as they laid waste to it.

THE HIDDEN GEM

GEORGE BROWN

While sitting in a park
On a beautiful day,
Watching people
And children at play.

I saw Marigolds and Glads
That created an edging
Worthy of
A Monet Painting

And roses by a statue
Caught my eye
Their vibrant colors
Caused me to sigh.

And then I looked down
On the ground underneath
From where I am sitting
And to my disbelief...

Was a yellow flower
Growing close to the ground
So tiny and dainty
Not easily found.

This miniature flower
Could hold its own
Against all the glads
And the marigolds

It didn't stand out
Like the rest of the flowers
But was pretty enough
For my eyes to devour.

THE HIDDEN GEM

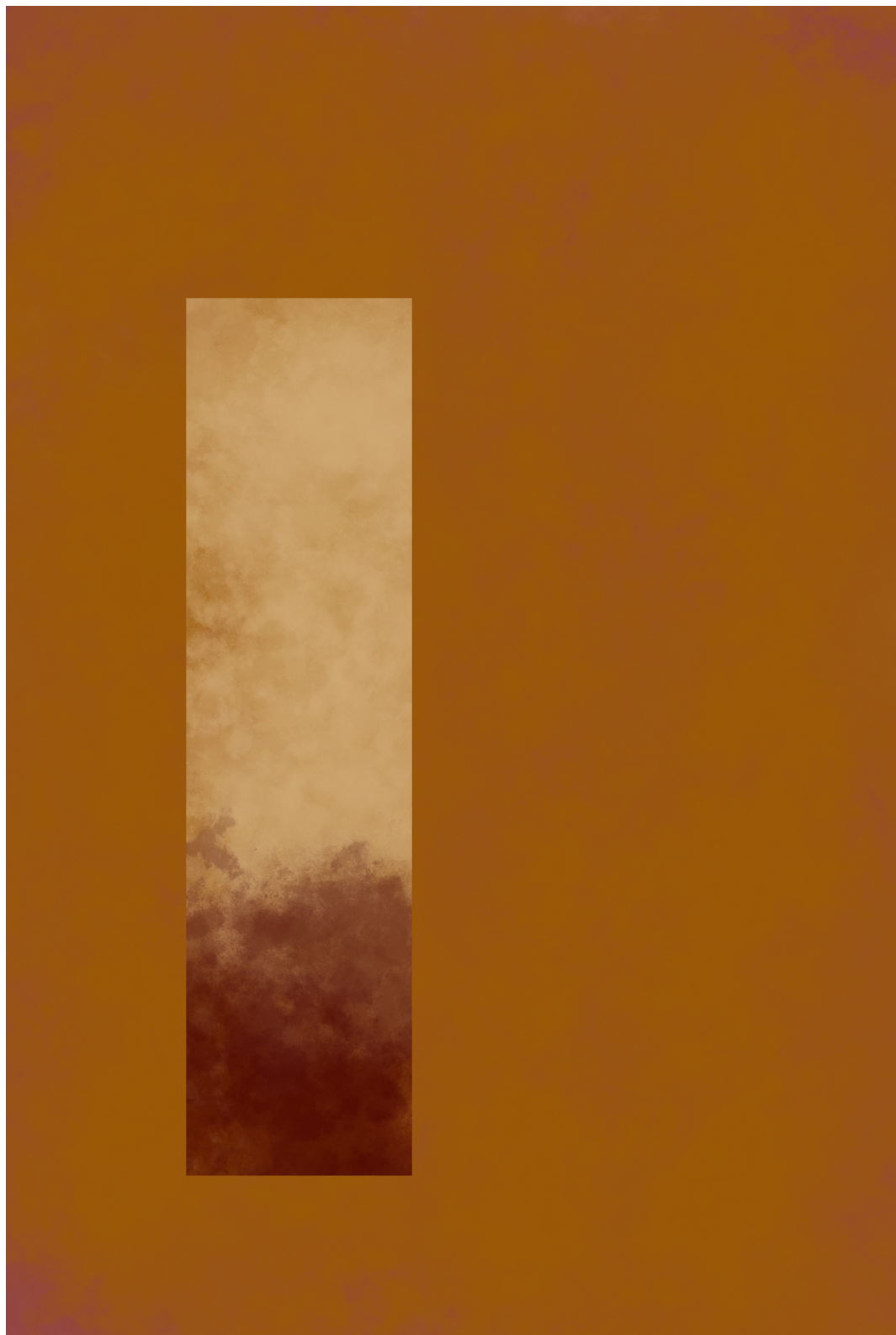
GEORGE BROWN

It just goes to show
Little gems like these
Don't have to stand out
In order to please.

So, as you walk
Gaze down at your feet
Your eyes might pick out
A very special treat.

SUMMER FELL

EDWARD LEE



THE WATERFALL

L.C. RAKER

The gleaming of aqua cascade
Upon the stony rise
Into the earth it fades
Beauty to a looker's eyes
Left with softly cries.

SEPARATION

MORGAN BOYER

raindrops glaze the window-glass
as I awaken for another day

a day that doesn't feel like a day but is a day
to the rest of the world

a world that I've been separated from by
a few rogue cells lying in my chest

NATURE WALK

ERIN MCDUGALL

“There’s probably a bear in that dumpster.”

Cousin Carter, a heap of outdoorsy know-it-all in gangly teenaged form, laughs way too hard at his own joke. Jill rolls her eyes. He sends the rock he’s been kicking all the way back from the video store skidding across the empty street. Their other cousin Henry, flinches when it clangs off the side of the green metal container.

Carter smirks at the ‘townies’, his city cousins. They don’t have stories about scaring off raccoons with hockey sticks on their way to school or needing to tunnel their way out of the house after a massive mountain snowstorm.

“You scared Jill?” he taunts.

Jill glowers back, scoops up a handful of gravel from someone’s front yard, and chucks it at the dumpster. “Terrified!”

Carter winces but tries to hide it. Jill winds up for another throw and he dodges out of the way. “That was a loud one!” Jill says between tosses. “We townies are soooo scared! Aren’t we?” “Cut it out, Jill, we get it.”

“Better not be a bear in there!” As her last rock ricochets off the corner, something dark rises up from inside. Two somethings as big as Carter’s head.

Paws.

With five, long pointy claws clang down on the edge of the dumpster. An enormous shaggy head with a long nose and twitching ears hauls itself up, eyes glinting as it looms down, less than fifty feet away.

“You dumbass!” Jill whisper-yells as Carter and Henry yank her back by the jean jacket. “You knew it was in there!”

“Just messing with you, swear to God!” Carter says. Henry’s head whips around to the rustling bushes as a bear cub tumbles from the bushes and sits squarely into the spotlight of the streetlamp. The cousins freeze, caught between a dumpster and a baby bear.

NATURE WALK

ERIN MCDUGALL

Claws scrape on metal as the mama bear scrambles to climb out to her baby. Jill shoves her cousins down the nearest dark alley. "Run!"

Feet skid on the gravel as they run blindly into darkness, away from the bears but probably towards some other wild creature lurking just around the next shadowy corner, behind this pile of firewood, or that rusty old car. The porch light flickers on as they burst through the gate and collapse on the grass of their Grandpa's backyard.

"Um, did that just happen?" Henry gasps.

"Did we actually just run away from two bears and a dumpster?" Jill asks. "Um, yeah." She pushes herself up on an elbow and rolls her eyes at her cousins again. "Not so bad for your average nature walk with the 'townies'."

TEMPLE

FABRICE B. POUSSIN



HOME

CATHERINE A. COUNDJERIS

Maple trees with their sweet syrup
shelter the yearning of my soul
for nectar and beauty.
Like a guardian spirit,
one stands outside my mother's bedroom.
A single branch framed in the lattice of the window.
Upon its branch sits a cardinal that doesn't
realize it sees its own reflection,
but it beats itself against the pane
again, and again in the morning hours.
Luckily Mom is awake and
eating breakfast.
Her wheelchair pushed against the oak table.
She is quiet as she tries to remember
her name and mine.
We trace the same steps each day.
Her silence growing and
my frantic mind seeking words
to comfort and console.
She thought she saw the Hudson Valley
instead of Middletown, Maryland
off the deck outside.
I don't correct her.
I let her think she is back home again.
I am a vague memory she cannot place,
but she seems happy enough
to spend time with us
until the night falls
and her unease grows
with the shadow of the maple
over her bedcovers.
I want to go home, she says
and I tell her she is home,
but my reassurance is no help.
I want to go home, she repeats
but I know her home no longer exists,
as she remembers it,
but now lies on a distant horizon
where the morning star rises
above the maple outside her window.

C-SECTION, SEE-SECTION, MY SEA-SECTION

MARIA MOLTON

One of my favorite poets Arthur Rimbaud wrote, "I've found it Eternity. It's the sun mingled with the sea." If I may so humbly add, "I've found it, Eternity. It's the sun mingled with the Hamptons Sea." On March 9, 2015 I gave birth to my first and only child – Chloe Rose Rena Molton. I spent most of my pregnancy with my mother, at my summer home in Southampton. My husband and I had been in the middle of a huge home renovation in Manhattan; and while our new home was in its third trimester of germination, I was in my first trimester of pregnancy. He lived in a small apartment we rented in Hell's Kitchen during the work-week and came out to Southampton on the weekends. I made my way into the city for monthly doctors' appointments and other family obligations.

The Hamptons has always been a part of my soul. I have been coming out with my parents and two brothers since I was a child and long before it was the "it" place to be. For many of my childhood years, my parents rented small homes right on the beach in Montauk and Southampton. I remember one home in particular, in Montauk, the brown paneled walls framing the windows, which looked out onto the white expansive sand and brilliant blue ocean. Since I've been cognizant of my existence, I knew that my parents, like that wild Hamptons ocean, had a very tumultuous relationship. When I close my eyes, I can so clearly see my two brothers and me running and playing on the beach. I can feel the warm sun caressing my back and hear my father's anger piercing through the violet-colored sky. And that's the way it always was.

C-SECTION, SEE-SECTION, MY SEA-SECTION

MARIA MOLTON

And here we are now. I'm 41 and my parents recently divorced after 43 years of marriage. The end result resembled the ravaged beauty of the Hamptons beaches after a spectacular storm. For me, these visual masterpieces, my Hamptons Seas, are intrinsically laced with the varying tides of life. So as my parents' wave danced its final dance, moved and crashed, I found out that I was pregnant. Life, the ironies, beginnings and endings -- always watering our lives. The great magnitude of these two events colliding and overlapping truly felt as though I was being pulled into one of those powerful currents during a daring swim in my Hamptons Sea. The only sight, the only See, the only Sea that gave me some semblance of peace was looking at this magnificent Hamptons ocean, in its different moods and seasons as this special life was growing inside of me. And as the months rolled on, September, October, November, my belly took shape, its own ocean giving life and breath to my coming child.

In January I was told by my doctors that I should stay close to the shores of the city as my due date approached. So I bid *adieu* to my other wild lover, my sensuous Hamptons Sea. As I swam into my final few weeks of pregnancy, I encountered some dangerous waters; extreme fatigue, swelling and soaring high blood pressure. Inducing me did not work. Natural childbirth was not going to happen. So on March 9th, my cheerleader obstetrician Dr. M. informed me that I was having a C-Section. With the same instantaneous power of a wave splashing its salty water on my face, I was on the operating table surrounded by masked men and women.

C-SECTION, SEE-SECTION, MY SEA-SECTION

MARIA MOLTON

I recognized my husband David only by his twinkling, smiling eyes. I could hear Dr. M. say, "Here we go," as my legs disappeared into a sea of numbness. Beneath the shore of semi paralysis, I could feel tugging and pulling, as if the current of the Hamptons sea was pushing me out – only it was pushing my daughter out. In those surreal, urgent moments I thought about my parents and those gorgeous lonely Montauk dunes, and how now there was an ocean between my mother and father. I thought about my husband and me, the two of us walking on Flying Point Beach and in just a few minutes, we would be three. And finally, the moment came. In my anesthetized awareness, I could see the blood palette of birth: blues, yellows, reds, greens, all meshing together in a sea of extraordinary beauty.

There it is Mr. Rimbaud, *my Eternity* revised...*looking into the eyes of my daughter, hearing her soulful cry and seeing her dive into the ocean of life.*

So here I am back at Flying Point Beach. My beautiful six -week old daughter in my arms, my husband by my side. My mother is going to be alright. My father is part of my history. And a tear streams down my face; it is one of joy, pain, and overwhelming emotions...parallel to the depth and mystery of this great ocean before me...*C-Section, See-Section, My Sea-Section.*

GNOME HUTS

KJ HANNAH GREENBERG



SPRING

MADISEN BELLON

Amber rays peak through thick cumulonimbus clouds
Cardinals and Bluejays serenade bundles of daffodils
and from the green-brown earth, tree tendrils sprout
The wind encompasses me and whispers, "Be still."

Cardinals and Bluejays serenade bundles of daffodils
An old woman sings and tends to her peonies and roses
The wind encompasses her and whispers, "Be still."
Past May showers and April flowers, summer approaches

An old woman sings and tends to her peonies and roses
Amber rays peak through thick cumulonimbus clouds
Past May showers and April flowers, summer approaches
and from the green-brown earth, life re-sprouts.

DAY'S COURSE

NORBERT KOVACS

He's a west-walking man. He tries to walk down the shadows that stretch before him in the dawn. He steps through their dim outlines; leaving one, he is eager to cut across the next. The sun rises overhead, and the shadows shrink toward his feet. He is proud to stand over every piece of shade. He feels the midday warmth and loves the brightness in the trees, the grass. Then, he sees the sun that created this light descending the sky. He follows it, meaning to go where and see everything it does. He walks quickly as the sun appears from behind the clouds; he sees it make the house windows shine.

Finally, the man gets the nearest the sun he can as it reaches the horizon. He looks on its face, hoping to know it in every detail as he might a friend's. But the light is fierce; it burns, denying him, and he has to turn away. The sun sets, and the man is left to ponder its departure in the remaining dusk.

ALOE 6

KJ HANNAH GREENBERG



FRESH AIR

SHERYL GUTERL

The outside wafts in through window frame,
perfume of sweet apple blossoms,
damp leaves, and mown grass.

Rich black dirt in Daddy's garden
lies raked and ready for planting. It collects
white petals floating to the ground.

A crow squawks his presence,
a robin responds,
simple symphony of sound and scent.

ANTLERS

CATERINA BALDI

Each twisting path among the pines looked the same. How would we get home?
"Whoa... look! What do you think it is?"

The carcass was immense. The land around it had receded to make room for the newcomer. Time and soil had swallowed more than half of it, but the head and torso were still visible.

"A deer?"

We bent down to peer in.

The flaking ribs hosted small animals and insects. Blades of grass twisted all around, making that transitory den cosy and soft. The entrails, now dry, had wrapped like the mountains around a miniature city. Grey and brown veins drew the contours of a completely new place, where the rules of its inhabitants, microbes and bacteria, changed second by second.

Alfredo grabbed a stick and teased the skull's hollows, and gasped when a lizard came out in a flash.

"Look here!"

A raven had signaled its participation in the banquet with its shiny black feather, stuck in the centre of the entrails, like a flag. Little further down, a crater had formed, perhaps in place of the liver, and young cyclamens had sprouted in there. A ladybird flying over the crest of a hip at that very moment shone like a ruby set in stone. We had never seen a dead body so close. For us, it was fun, but not for the grown-ups. When we told them at home, they said the wolves would return.

FOR LIFE

FABRICE B. POUSSIN



AFTER THE RAIN

CHRIS A. SMITH

After the rain
the sun bright but cold
breath etched in the air and
grass squelching underfoot
the wind tearing through the trees

The coyote
lopes across the trail
just down the hill from Lincoln Avenue
and its groan of traffic
he's dun-colored and shifty, limbs rangy
cute but wild
maybe dangerous—who knows?

Frozen in our tracks
we glance at each other
then look away
walk on
each going our own way.

THE GREEN DOCTOR BOOK

JEAN ROVER

Next to the Bible, the most important text in our house was Mom's green doctor book.

It was actually called *Modern Medical Counselor, A Practical Guide to Health*, written by Dr. Hubert Swartout and published in 1943 when preventive care was unheard of and health insurance was in its infancy. It's dark green, leather-like hard cover with over 900 slick pages and many medical illustrations added to its importance. Mom mail-ordered it during World War II, because our small, rural town didn't have a doctor. Even when it did, she continued to rely on her "doctor book" to care for her three small children. Mom's answer to staying healthy was Epsom salt in water or a dose of cod liver oil with orange juice, which she squeezed herself.

Whenever I had the slightest tickle in my throat, she'd reach for her precious volume which she kept secure on the top shelf of the built-in cabinet in our living room. As she read, I'd study her eyes and the way she pursed her lips to learn if I was going to die or live to play another round of blind man's bluff with the kids up the road. "I'll fix you," she'd finally announce, and then stick a thermometer in my mouth or fill the hot water bottle.

She fought congestion and deep coughs by dumping a few drops of Eucalyptus oil and mysterious, dark Tincture of Benzoin into a pot of water she placed on a hot plate near my bed. Then she'd hold her open umbrella over my head, so I could inhale the medicated vapors while I slept.

What I really dreaded were those mustard plasters she made, followed by a layer of gooey Vicks VapoRub which she spread on my chest like she was basting a turkey, leaving me smelling like a gigantic cough drop. Mom swore by Vicks, and she kept a fat blue jar of it at the ready in the medicine cabinet. When Toby, our cat, was off his food and hardly moving, Mom dabbed Vicks under his nose. "I fixed him," she proudly announced. Toby bolted up and took off like a herd of coyotes was chasing him. Got well, though.

THE GREEN DOCTOR BOOK

JEAN ROVER

I developed a lot of respect for Mom's doctor book. After all, it was older than me, and she relied on it to pull me through bronchitis, a serious bout of kidney infection, chicken pox, measles, mumps, influenza, numerous colds, bee stings, scraped knees, and whatever.

Even so, like Eve in the garden, temptation got the best of me. I'd cunningly wait until Mom wasn't around, stand on the arm of the big easy chair to reach her book, and sneak peeks. There were all kinds of strange words in there ending in *ectomy*, *rhea* or *itis*. I stared at the color illustrations, which showed what our bodies looked like inside and shuddered at the ones on skin diseases. All those blotches and rashes left me anxious for days. There was also a section on war-gas injuries. Could that musty odor in our basement be mustard gas, I worried? Could eating mustard kill me? And speaking of the basement, I learned a thing-or-two about sex from that book, too. The picture of a child in the womb shocked me. I had no idea we were upside down in there. In fact, I couldn't fathom how we got in there in the first place.

Holey moly, there was more. I constantly looked over my shoulder every time I viewed the illustration titled, "The Pelvic Organs of the Male" which was only a few pages away from the chapter on diseases of the female sex organs. It blew my mind to learn how many problems people could have "down there."

Mom never quit relying on her special book, even when she approached ninety and had heart problems. She was leery of ultrasounds, angiograms, stents, and the tons of medications that she had lined up on a TV tray by her couch. She raised a skeptical eyebrow at doctors who were younger than her. "What do they know? They're just kids," she'd say, dismissing their advice with a wave of her hand. Then, I'd catch her flipping through pages of her doctor book.

THE GREEN DOCTOR BOOK

JEAN ROVER

After mom passed away, I cherished her precious book. It was so symbolic of who she was—independent in her own way, and a loving mother who put her family first.

Whenever I have a lingering cold or unexplained symptom, I search its contents for practical remedies. Other times, when I'm missing her, I thumb through the yellowed-pages and read the notes she scribbled in the margins. I see her standing at the edge of my bed, her face concerned, her comforting hands reaching out, taking care of me—
still.

UNTITLED

BEATA STASAK



IT'S A WONDERFUL WORLD

MILTON P. EHRLICH

Your choice.

You can pay attention
with all your senses
like a jacaranda rose
about to unfold
with self-awareness
beauty, and a sense
of wonder of it all
or you can hibernate
your way through life
like a lumbering bear
or living mannequin
shlepping it's way
through the quicksand
of an unlived life.

Or join the camaraderie
of like-minded folks
to enjoy the infinite range
of spontaneous pleasure
of feeling fully alive,
including the possible
ecstasy of wild desire.

JUST ANOTHER TIDE

ANA DABMIAN

Hear the big waves growling in
the distance
Like a war drum whispering: "We're close"
Feel the moisture rising in the cool air
Soft like arms of the embracing ghost

You close your eyes and whisper: 'I am
alright
'Cause every grain of ground here knows
my feet
I know this wasteland like it knows the
dreams it took away
The wind has no trick left to play on me'

I know I can hold on
'Cause this river has flooded me
A thousand times before

The first time it scared me
The second time it took me
The third time it drowned me
But the thousandth
It won't touch me

It's just another tide
Just another raging memory
It's just another airless day
Another earthquake's symphony
It's just a tiny wisp of scent
Of a long-gone enemy
Brought by the wind
To play chess with my sanity

UNTITLED

BEATA STASAK



CONTRIBUTORS

Caterina Baldi was born on 6th March 1983. She is an Italian children's books illustrator, author, translator and English teacher for little kids. She never misses an episode of her Neapolitan soap opera. Swimming in the winter sea is the year's purpose, but she has not found the courage yet. Her picture book, "Three Cats in the Sink", will be published by Settenove in May 2022. She is eager to write thousands of new stories and tales.

Madisen Bellon is currently studying to get her masters degree at Chatham University. Her poetry has also appeared in Cold Moon Journal.

Mukut Borpujari was born on 25th December, 1989, in Jorhat, Assam. He graduated with a major in English Literature from Arya Vidyapeeth College, Guwahati, and completed his Masters in Computer Application (MCA) in 2015, from Guru Ghasidas Central University, Bilaspur, CG. He started writing poems and articles when he was still in college, and his early poems were published in various local newspapers and magazines. His other hobbies and interests include Computers & Internet, Playing Cricket, Listening to Music, and Reading.

Barbara Brooks, author of "The Catbird Sang", "A Shell to Return to the Sea", "Water Colors" chapbooks, is a member of Poet Fools. Her work has been accepted in Avalon Literary Review, Chagrin River Review, The Foundling Review, Blue Lake Review, Third Wednesday, Peregrine, Tar River Poetry, Silkworm among others.

George Brown - Two of my poems, "The Test" and "A Cosmic Event", were in the November issue of Amulet Poetry. Another poem, "My Turn", was featured in the January issue of Amulet Poetry. My short story titled "Grandpa's Birds" will be in the June edition of Thema. Another short story, "Feed My Birds", was in the July issue of Conceit Magazine.

Morgan Boyer is the author of *The Serotonin Cradle* (Finishing Line Press, 2018) and a graduate of Carlow University. Boyer has been featured in Kallisto Gaia Press, Thirty West Publishing House, Oyez Review, Pennsylvania English, and Voices from the Attic. Boyer is a neurodivergent bisexual woman who resides in Pittsburgh, PA.

Catherine A. Coundjeris- Catherine's poetry is published in literary magazines, including *The Dawntreader*, *Paper Dragons*, *Kaleidoscope*, *North of Oxford*, *Halcyon Days*, *Shift*, *Blue Moon*, *Jalmurra*, *Cholla Needles*, *Last Leaves*, *Bewildering Stories*, *The Raven Review*, *Open Door Magazine*, and *Loud Coffee Press*. She also has stories published in *Proem* and *Quail Bell*. Catherine is passionate about adult literacy.

CONTRIBUTORS

Ana Dabmian- I was born in Zagreb, Croatia. After my second year of high school, I quit regular education due to mental health issues. I graduated with top grades from Correspondence Educational Center "Birrotehnika" in 2016. By now, I've attended several acting, singing, and filmmaking courses and workshops, as well as three Erasmus+ programs. During the time of my correspondent education, I volunteered as a co-leader of forum theatre workshops which were based on short theatrical pieces I wrote, and held as a part of field practice classes for students of Nurse School "Vrapče". In 2019, my debut theatre play "The Coconut Cutter" premiered in Kruševac (Serbia), produced by ATP "Čkalja" and in association with artists from four countries. Besides being its author, I also contributed by composing original music, acting, and taking part in the design and crafting of costumes. The play is planned to be on the repertoire again this year (after the Covid break). My short experimental movie "Souls of the Soulless" premiered at the international movie festival FUSE, in Karlovac, in 2020. My poems "Just Another Tide" and "Ode of the Morning" will be published this year by Zephyr Review and The Journal of Undiscovered Poets. Currently, I'm studying singing at the music school "Rock Academy", composing and arranging my own music, writing lyrics, poems, and short stories, and rewriting my novel.

Tiara Dias - I am a young Angolan writer living in Hungary for my university studies. I currently write primarily fiction, poetry/prose as well as short stories and have done so for many years now, always exploring various themes and styles of writing, and further growing in the art of writing. I, unfortunately, have no published works as of yet but am actively looking and working for the opportunity to showcase my pieces.

Megan Diedericks - I am twenty years old, and situated in South Africa. Writing has been my passion for many years now (even though my spelling was probably atrocious as a child.) I currently have my first poetry collection available on Amazon, under the title "the darkest of times, the darkest thoughts". I have also been emailing publishing houses in regards to my very first novel, which is a combination between new adult and historical adventure fiction. You can find me on Instagram: @/megandiederickspetry.

Toni Dietkus is a lifetime writer of novels and a memoir [of longhaul trucking titled Riding Shotgun in an 18-Wheeler] and various children's books. A historical novel Ghosts of Winter is being published by Pegasus UK sometime this year. She currently lives near Seattle, WA in a small NW mountain town with partner Nick and a few stray cats.

Milton P. Ehrlich Ph.D. is a 90-year-old psychologist and a veteran of the Korean War. He has published many poems in periodicals such as the London Grip, Arc Poetry Magazine, Descant Literary Magazine, Wisconsin Review, Red Wheelbarrow, Christian Science Monitor, and the New York Times.

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Alexander Etheridge has been developing his poems and translations since 1998. His poems have been featured in *Wilderness House Literary Review*, *Cerasus Journal*, *The Cafe Review*, *The Dawntreader*, *Abridged Magazine*, *Susurrus Magazine*, *The Journal*, and others. He was the winner of the *Struck Match Poetry Prize* in 1999.

Louis Faber is a poet, photographer and blogger currently living in Port St. Lucie, Florida. His work has appeared in *The Poet (UK)*, *New Feathers Anthology*, *Dreich (Scotland)*, *Tomorrow and Tomorrow*, *Erothanatos (Greece)*, *Defenestration*, *Atlanta Review*, *Glimpse*, *Rattle*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *Eureka Literary Magazine*, *Borderlands: the Texas Poetry Review*, *Midnight Mind*, *Pearl*, *Midstream*, *European Judaism*, *The South Carolina Review* and *Worcester Review*, among many others, and has been nominated for a *Pushcart Prize*.

KJ Hannah Greenberg tilts at social ills and encourages personal evolutions via poetry, prose, and visual art. Her bold, textural, colorful images have appeared in various places, including, but not limited to: *Bewildering Stories*, *Foliage Oak Literary Magazine*, *Kissing Dynamite*, *Les Femmes Folles*, *Mused*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Stone Coast Review*, *The Academy of the Heart and Mind*, *The Front Porch Review*, *Tuck*, and *Yellow Mama*. Additionally, her art is featured alongside of her poetry in *One-Handed Pianist* (Hekate Publishing, 2021).

Marc X Grigoroff- After receiving an MA in Mass Communications in the US, Marc X unknowingly began a career as an advertising copywriter. His work would take him to Japan and eventually Singapore, where he has resided for the past 25 years. He currently enjoys writing short stories and micro fiction – trying, trying to make every word count.

Sheryl Guterl writes from New Mexico and New Hampshire. Retiring to the Southwest after a career as an educator in New Jersey, she appreciates more sunshine, higher mountains, and less winter ice. Her cabin on a lake in wooded New England provides inspiration and refreshment with cooler summers.

Sheryl's poetry is found in *The Ravens' Perch*, *Iris Literary Journal*, *Deep Wild*, *Bethlehem Writers' Roundtable*, *Capsule Stories*, *3 Elements Review*, and several local anthologies.

Cynthia Hammell has been a book reviewer for *Booklist* and other publications. She has been published in the *Haiku Journal* and in local New Jersey anthologies. She has also written articles for *The Encyclopedia of New Jersey* (2004). Rutgers University Press. She has a Master of Library Service.

Ed Higgins' poems and short fiction have appeared in various print and online journals including: *Monkeybicycle*, *Danse Macabre*, *Ekphrastic Review*, and *Triggerfish Critical Review*, among others. Ed is Asst. Editor for *Brilliant Flash Fiction*. He has a small farm in Yamhill, OR, raising a menagerie of animals—including a rooster named *StarTrek*.

Norbert Kovacs lives and writes in Hartford, Connecticut. He has published microfiction in *Blink-Ink*, *Nanoism*, *50-Word Stories*, and *101 Words*. His website: www.norbertkovacs.net.

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Erin McDougall loves the possibilities of the short story: writing contests, reviewing theatre and dance, plus snapshot bookstagram reviews on @thattowerofbooks. A background in the performing arts and her time living in France inspire Erin to play with different perspectives and texts in her writing. Her work has been published in Toasted Cheese Literary Journal, The Culture Trip Paris, and the anthology WonderShift.

Maria Molton - I am a Mother, Painter and Writer who lives on the upper west side of Manhattan and Southampton, NY. My works, both visually and literary, are an ever-changing mirror of my human experiences.

Dan Morrison - I am a graduate of the University of Massachusetts, where I earned a B.A. in English and a Letter of Specialization in Creative Writing. In the past my work has been published in journals like The Green Light and Zoetic Press, among others.

Craig Nix began life in Paterson, New Jersey. He currently spends time in Indiana where he has helped to raise a family, worked a variety of inspiring jobs, hosted a monthly audience-prompted (short) story open-reading event, and fought off influences that might have cut short his life and the lives of others.

Michael Patterson-Jones - I am a retired chemistry professor, I live in the UK but spent most of my life in various parts of Africa and in Upstate New York. I have had two novels and several poems and short stories published.

Alfredo Quarto is an environmental activist and poet living on an organic farm in the foothills of the Olympic Mountains in Washington. He's been published in numerous poetry publications including: Poetry Seattle, Catalyst, Rainedance Journal, Piedmont Review, Haiku Zashi Zo, Paperbag Poems, Seattle Arts, Spindrift, Arts Focus, Arnazella, Dan River Anthology, Amelia, Americas Review, Vox, Middle House Review, The Closed Eye Open, Elevation Review, Montana Mouthful, Tidepools, New Verses News, and Wild Roof.

L.C. Raker spent her childhood in the south suburb of Chicago, now resides in Northwest Indiana. Rhyming has always been a knack of her as far as she could recall. She writes better than speaks most of the time. Her love of poetry came from her love of Shakespeare. She used Shakespeare and Chaucer to help her pronunciation. This made her grow fond of these writers. She also enjoys a good poem from Plath, Whitman, and Poe. Her works are an expression of her emotions based on an element presented in front of her eyes. The primary aspect of works usually revolves around love and heartache, though recently have venture into soul love.

CONTRIBUTORS

Jean Rover is the author of *Touch the Sky*, a heart-rending novel, filled with intrigue, about a missing child in Oregon's backcountry. Her writing has received awards or recognition from *Writer's Digest*, *Short Story America*, *Willamette Writers*, *Oregon Writers Colony*, and the *International Association of Business Communicators (IABC)*. Her work has appeared in various literary magazines and anthologies, including the *Saturday Evening Post's Great American Fiction Contest Anthology*. Other stories were performed at *Liars' League* events in London, England and Portland, Oregon. She has also authored a chapbook, *Beneath the Boughs Unseen*, featuring holiday stories about society's invisible people. Her manuscripts, *Ready or Not*, (novel) and *Then Spring Comes*, (short story collection) were semi-finalists in *Chanticleer's International Book Awards* contest. She lives and writes in Oregon's lush Willamette Valley.

Chris A. Smith is a writer in San Francisco. Though trained as a journalist--he's reported on topics ranging from African acid rock to killer asteroids to revolutionary movements--he also writes fiction and poetry. Find him at chrisasmith.net.

Brian Terrell - He currently lives and resides in Mississippi. Brian works full time for a state government agency and writes whenever he has the chance. He mainly writes poetry but has also completed a novel.

T.M. Thomson's work has been featured in several journals, most recently in *Fauxmoir*. Three of her poems have been nominated for *Pushcart Awards*. She has co-authored *Frame and Mount the Sky* (2017) and is the author of *Strum and Lull* (2019) and *The Profusion* (2019). Her full-length collection, *Plunge*, will be published in 2022.

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