Lothlorien Poetry Journal Volume 26

Peaceful Interludes

June Continued – July 2023

Edited by Strider Marcus Jones

Lothlorien Poetry Journal is a contemporary literary journal featuring free verse/rhyming/experimental poetry, short stories, flash fiction, and occasional interviews with poets. Journey with us on the road to poems that linger and haunt https://lothlorienpoetryjournal.blogspot.com/

Discover poems of fantasy, fairy tale and folklore, dreams and dystopia, nature and magical realism with romance and anything hiding deep in-between the cracks.

Lothlorien Poetry Journal nominates for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net.

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Contents

Editorial Poems by Strider Marcus Jones Pages

June 2023 Continued- Poetry and Fiction

Wendy Webb
1. Rethreading Garments 17-21
2. Joie De Vivre, After
3. To My Father, On Shaving
4. Bike Ride, Earlham
5. The Meaning of Mundesley

John Brantingham
1. Butterfly Summer 21-24
2. Orange Summer Newt
3. Chicken of the Forest
4. Small Columns of Stone

C.X. Turner
1. Ten Short Form Poems 25-30
2. Sunflowers
3. Stem
4. Reconnecting
5. Shoreline
6. Rescue

Dennis Camire
1. After Her Ex Takes His Own Life… 30-36
2. For the Bread Baker and His Conjoined Twins
3. For the Black Bear Biologist Tagging Hibernating Bears
4. Upon Learning Her Husband only has a few Months…

Jay Maria Simpson
1. Dancing on the Frozen Stars 36-40
2. The Loneliness Factory
3. The Dancer
4. Three Ways
5. Train Tracks Wisdom and Bullshit

petro c.k.
1. Nitrogenase Ecclesiastes 41-43
2. Hey Day Huggers
3. Jethro Mothra
4. Logarithm Begin the Juju
5. Urticaria Jr.

Kadambari Kaul
1. On Love 43-44
2. Song of Life
Mark Young
1. Returning from foreign war zones 44-47
2. A double cypher
3. Installing the new wi-fi extender
4. Doubles Entendre
5. Potpourri
Jeanette L. Miller
1. First Snowfall 47-50
2. My White Dresses, Her Red Shoes
3. A Crone Speaks from the Forest
4. Me, My Aunt & Cousin, My Mother…
5. Two Grandmothers Plus My Mother
Steven Sibra
1. Blue Cheese 51-52
2. Pebbles
3. Shattered
Daniel de Culla
1. Where Are You Going? 53-57
2. When the Frog Grows Hairs
3. This Flower
Jim Meirose
1. Something Seemingly Not Even a Road–Flash/F 57-58
Lavana Kray
1. Five Photo Poems – (words only) 58-59
2. Honeycomb – Flash Fiction/Haibun
Mikal Wix
1. A Farewell from the Sloth of Space 60-63
2. The Old Man in the Sky
3. Parliament

July 2023 – Poetry & Fiction

Peycho Kanev
1. A Note on the Pillow 63-65
2. At the End
3. The Twin
Antonia Alexandra Klimenko
1. Holding On 66-70

2. Selfie
Gary Bills
1. The Watchers from the Flood 71-79
2. Graven Flowers
3. Country Burr – Short Story
Margaret Duda
1. Ask for Whom the Bell Tolls 79-83
2. My Catholic Mother's Jewish Sister
3. Where Did It Come From?
John Drudge
1. Alchemy 84-87
2. Another Morning
3. Depths
4. Into the Wind
5. Journey
6. Spirit
Katherine E. Winnick
1. Haiku 88
Maurizio Brancaleoni
1. Bird Haiku – Translation Italian-English 89-91
Linda Imbler
1. Le Passe-muraille 91-94
2. The Well
3. Hordes
4. Vigil Within the Vernal Equinox
Wayne F. Burke
1. Dream 95-98
2. Bought-a-Gun
3. You Are Loved
Dr. Anissa Sboui
1. The Desired Heaven 98-101
2. The Quranic School
3. God Spoke to Her
4. I Lyric to the Critic
Kushal Poddar
1. Loops 102-104
2. The Dry Spell
3. Halo-rainbow around my sins
4. The Obscene Gesture of a Milestone
5. Where the Nuclear Power Plant Melted Down

Cleo Griffith
1. For You Who Remember 105-107
2. Gifts
3. Glow from Old Lanterns
4. White Chevy Silverados

Robert McCarthy
1. Exequy 108-113
2. Fissiparity
3. Many Loves, None of Them True
4. Undistinguished Aridity
5. Prayer in Winter

Barbara Di Sacco
1. Canio 113-116
2. Music is Female
3. Puppet

Joe Kidd
1. Dream of Kings 116-119
2. Night Falls Upon the Silent and the Still
3. October Rose
4. Solstice – part one

Mahua Sen
1. Anamnesis 120-121

Paul Demuth
1. The Shipwreck's Bar 122-123
2. Hoop Anchor Top Egg
3. Sunday

Rose Mary Boehm
1. Advent 123-127
2. Crossing Illegally from Germany into Germany
3. Feierabend
4. Guilt

John Harold Olson
1. Gloria or Prodigal Blues 127-129
2. Untitled Poem
3. Untitled Poem

Nolcha Fox
1. Haiku 129-130
2. Storm
3. If sleep was an elevator
4. Fork

Ken Gosse
1. Not Enough Hair on My Chinny-chin-chin 131-133
2. Desert Deuces for Dessert
3. When the Dawn Came Up Like Thunder
4. Abruptus Interuptus
5. Breaking Up is Hard to Dooby Dooby Do…

Linda H.Y. Hegland
1. Old Chevy Truck and Prairie Choirs 133-136
2. Wishes on a Falcon/Freeing Falling Stars

John Yamrus
1. LEDA was a dancer 137-142
2. did you ever
3. it was

Artemis Rose Archer
1. Sliver of Moon 142-144
2. Bumble
3. Maple
4. Like a Songbird

Nathan Anderson
1. Collapsing into Symphony 144-150
2. Hatchet rings as [anti]-bells
3. Lopsided [not] Dromedary [touch]
4. Medical Reduction (vanishing)
5. Telegraph//Inhalation

Lorie Greenspan
1. i am 151-154
2. My turtle
3. The curves of grace
4. first, on a road of whales
5. Playful

Burgess Needle
1. All That Is Left 155-159
2. Gift of Goodness
3. Kiss of Jojoba Oil
4. Tucson Rose After Rain

Nancy Kennedy
1. To the Patron Saint of Lost Causes 160-163
2. Night Song
3. Daughter of Ophelia
4. White Plastic Buttons
5. Fait Accompli

Rp Verlaine
1. A.I. Interactive 163-168
2. Plethora
3. Escape Has Its Benefits
4. That Drunken Night
5. Inside The Parenthesis of Being

Adele Ogiér Jones
1. Haiku for the longest day of the year 169-170

Tom Holmes
1. A Long-Forgotten Story with Shoes – Short Story 171-178

Chyrel J. Jackson
1. Nature's Incubator 179-181
2. Limitless Devotion
3. Rushing
4. Broken
5. My Heart is Happiest Watching Ezra Dance

Benjamin Bennett-Carpenter
1. Every Day 182-184
2. Equality of Day
3. They Jump

Glenis Moore
1. A glass darkly 184-185
2. In the dark

Allan Lake
1. Annual Report 185-186

Lyris D. Wallace
1. Moments 186-190
2. Motionless Feet
3. Keep Running
4. A Beginning
5. Still We Move

Rick Hartwell
1. Nurse Says 190-191
2. Street Safety
3. Ribbons in the Sea

JL Huffman
1. Haiku/Senryu 192

Sushant Thapa
1. The Awakened Heart 193

Alec Solomita
1. Lunch Poem 194-195

Irma Kurti
1. The Naked Day 195-198
2. Come Back to Me
3. Without A Homeland
4. Your Voice Won't Reach Me

Philip Butera
1. Some Friends are Black Mirrors 199-200

Daniela Rodi
1. Haiku 201-203

Raymond Alexander Turco
1. The Apocryphon of Remus – Short Story 203-207

Angel Edwards
1. From Love Withdraw - Lyrics 208

Daipayan Nair
1. Haiku 208-210

Desiree Batiste
1. Following Greatness 210-216
2. Hourglass
3. On the Floor
4. She is Not Me, but I am Her
5. The River

Peter Mladinic
1. Message in a Bottle 216-220
2. Up and Out
3. Chapter from an Egyptian Novel
4. Selfie

Amrita Valan
1. Hocus Pocus – an Ekphrastic poem 221-225
2. Impermanent Eternity
3. Your Dominance of My World

Prithvijeet Sinha
1. Go Into the Crevice 226-230
2. Dying Breed

Tina Hudak
1. Poughkeepsie – Short Story 231-234

Michael Lee Johnson
1. Summer is Dying 235-237
2. Bowl of Black Petunias
3. Memories Past
4. Now That I Desire

Gail White
1. I Can Imagine 237-238
2. The Innocent
3. The Old Dame Looks Ahead

Sandeep Sharma
1. Rhymeopause, Baldness and all that stuff 239-240

Bridget Houlihan
1. Spring (I) 240-243
2. Last Moments
3. Corks
4. Spring (II)
5. Shower of Leaves

Elliot M. Rubin
1. moon dreams 244-245
2. my newest son
3. oxford

Letter from Albert Einstein to His Daughter Lieserl

In the late 1980s, Lieserl, the daughter of the famous genius, donated 1,400 letters, written by Einstein, to the Hebrew University, with orders not to publish their contents until two decades after his death. This is one of them, for Lieserl Einstein.

…"When I proposed the theory of relativity, very few understood me, and what I will reveal now to transmit to mankind will also collide with the misunderstanding and prejudice in the world.

I ask you to guard the letters as long as necessary, years, decades, until society is advanced enough to accept what I will explain below.

There is an extremely powerful force that, so far, science has not found a formal explanation to. It is a force that includes and governs all others, and is even behind any phenomenon operating in the universe and has not yet been identified by us.

This universal force is LOVE.

When scientists looked for a unified theory of the universe they forgot the most powerful unseen force.

Love is Light, that enlightens those who give and receive it.

Love is gravity, because it makes some people feel attracted to others.

Love is power, because it multiplies the best we have, and allows humanity not to be extinguished in their blind selfishness. Love unfolds and reveals.
For love we live and die.

Love is God and God is Love.

This force explains everything and gives meaning to life. This is the variable that we have ignored for too long, maybe because we are afraid of love because it is the only energy in the universe that man has not learned to drive at will.
To give visibility to love, I made a simple substitution in my most famous equation.

If instead of E = mc2, we accept that the energy to heal the world can be obtained through love multiplied by the speed of light squared, we arrive at the conclusion that love is the most powerful force there is, because it has no limits.

After the failure of humanity in the use and control of the other forces of the universe that have turned against us, it is urgent that we nourish ourselves with another kind of energy…

If we want our species to survive, if we are to find meaning in life, if we want to save the world and every sentient being that inhabits it, love is the one and only answer.

Perhaps we are not yet ready to make a bomb of love, a device powerful enough to entirely destroy the hate, selfishness and greed that devastate the planet.

However, each individual carries within them a small but powerful generator of love whose energy is waiting to be released.

When we learn to give and receive this universal energy, dear Lieserl, we will have affirmed that love conquers all, is able to transcend everything and anything, because love is the quintessence of life.

I deeply regret not having been able to express what is in my heart, which has quietly beaten for you all my life. Maybe it's too late to apologize, but as time is relative, I need to tell you that I love you and thanks to you I have reached the ultimate answer! ".

Your father Albert Einstein

Editorial Poems by Strider Marcus Jones

Loves Libation

i know your hands
and their soft commands
whose massage bands
the tangled strands
of my imagination-

and like no other
under cover
you make this lover
ripen and recover
through your segues of temptation-

but its your inner niche of mind
i like to be in and behind
constantly defined
by so much beauty shading mine to find
the frequency of its station-

as fingers turn this knobbed key
tuning me to you and you to me
ambient in this factory
of life so transitory
without loves libation.

Hats of Sociopathic Eclipse

the cream
is a nightmare
seldom a dream,
that blood rare
stream
that rises
unstopped,
soured by bullies

whose wisdom has no worries
and despises
those who are not.

when truth becomes twisted
then hard fisted
and spoken rotten
over all we have forgotten,
you know the mask
want it to last
over us like the past.
they want us to be clones
of skin and blood and bones,
like frightened, servile drones
grateful but outcast.

corruption is the god
of the Significant,
so be wary as you plod
if your mind is wired different-
sordid business
gives soiled forgiveness
now the politics and technocrats
are Fixed:
let your individuality and normality
be the sense and conscience
against these hats of sociopathic eclipse.

Strider Marcus Jones

Is the founder, editor, and publisher of Lothlorien Poetry Journal. He is a poet, law graduate and former civil servant from Salford, England with proud Celtic roots in Ireland and Wales. A member of The Poetry Society, his five published books of poetry https://stridermarcusjonespoetry.wordpress.com/ reveal a maverick, moving between cities, playing his saxophone in smoky rooms.

RETHREADING GARMENTS

I love you,
although I'm a needle in your side
to stitch together clothes so brash and fine.
I love you,
though love is relative, as you are – all –
and so I stitch the family clothing round.
I love you,
though you may mistake that love for hate
and fail to read the hieroglyphs in garments.
You love me too
in words and hugs, familiar moments,
yet what's love when alteration's found?
You want me so unstitched,
this moment looming as family
and tweak the edges, press and stitch,
yet fail to see the warp and weft;
to superglue your mindset of a dress.
I love you too,
though will not stoop to weave and tidy ends.
You cluster in familiar colours,
shades hover round the edges of the room.
Do they see now, what's hidden underside?
Do they laugh or nick a thread
to validate a picture into knots?
I love you,
though this Wake is thrilled with absence
and all around are yours and mine,
that's fine and brash and tangled like old clothes.

JOIE DE VIVRE, AFTER

To wake at a Wake is the worst,
so please do not make it your first.
If you've survived it all this far,
heavily sat down at the bar,

Guaranteed: a terrible thirst.

To wake at a Wake is the worst,
there's Joie de Vivre's greatest outburst.
Though you don't care who's sat nearest,
nor those who've gathered their dearest,
guaranteed, you're sat where it's cursed.

To wake at a Wake is the worst,
most shades – guaranteed – will not durst.
They lie low to count relatives,
then waft through floral bella-gifts.
Guaranteed, escape's not rehearsed.

To wake at a Wake is a first
(excepting Lazarus' outburst).
Talking to strangers in plenty,
avoiding subjects so trendy,
guaranteed to fly high uncoerced.

TO MY FATHER, ON SHAVING

[After Lynn Woollacott/Reach 287, after Purrell Perry/1935]

My father once revealed his moustache:
by shaving off his beard (mid-life crisis).

Big brother grew droopy Ringo whiskers,
then letter-dated and married a wife.

Met a divorcee, clean-shaven (wore a suit);
married him and he's never stopped shaving.

Firstborn cultured wispy blond facial hair,
like nowhere: returned from Uni; a parcel.

My baby's full-bodied beard and tangled locks
decreed – we heard – not Samson, but Delilah.

BIKE RIDE, EARLHAM (Pantoum, 2 variations)

The leaves of Autumn falling falling fall…
can one year/ten/a lifetime grieve such waste?
Fuelled rage as amber's wind-whipped piles appal
most senses (absenting the joy of taste).

Can one year, ten, a lifetime grieve such waste,
all gathered round the table for a feast?
Most senses absenting, the joy of taste,
the candles/laughter/wine is now the Beast.

All gathered round the table for a feast
of empty chairs and tables here; not there.
The candles, laughter, wine is now the Beast,
disPutin' Peace on Earth most everywhere.

Of empty chairs and tables, here and there,
burnt ruins: ancient/recent chill bone-cold.
Disputing Peace on Earth most everywhere;
in famines/floods our babies look so old.

(Variation 1)

Burnt ruins: ancient/recent chill bone cold,
fuelled rage as amber's wind-whipped piles appal.
In famines, floods, our babies look so old.
The leaves of Autumn falling falling fall.

(Variation 2)

Burnt ruins: ancient/recent chill bone cold,
now Winter's here, it's calling calling call…
In famines, floods, our babies look so old,
while Spring is beautiflorious for all.

Now Winter's here, it's calling calling call…
fuelled rage as amber's wind-whipped piles appal.
While Spring is beautiflorious for all,
the leaves of Autumn falling falling fall.

THE MEANING OF MUNDESLEY

Blogspot/2010-05

Raging winter storms left the promenade
in a state of disrepair: beach huts in primary shades
temporarily beached in a farmer's field.
Returning to a vanishing, what remains?

A solo swimmer crawls across the ocean,
emerging bronzed as lobster from the Med;
all hairs stand chill in concentrated grit
of pebble paths or gravel to the shade
of this cliff faced in grass and steeping climb:
to the eyrie of the coastguard's flag poles and museum
and blue of endless summer sky.

A nubile pre-teen loiters in the curve
of waters pooled around the groyne,
where tots in sun-suits paddle without burn
of bare shine on fair skin:
protecting futures.

Lovers cream bare calves and thighs and arms
of women lying absorbed between the sheets
of fat pulp fiction, frictioned by its thrill,
while others – bored and blond – spread empty legs
around a camp of sunscreen, surf boards, spades.

No Purple Patch of ocean deeps to dark
the gentlest shade of air spread to the sky,
horizoned by the press of Midlands' air:
relaxing into Wells or teashop Cley.

Here is all sun and sand and sea and sky,
to lie away depressions for a while;
and here my son unframed the grey surround:
my morning shade of grumbling by the mirror…
For he saw me through his love.

Wendy Webb - Born in the Midlands, home and family life in Norfolk. She edited Star Tips poetry magazine 2001-2021. Published in Indigo Dreams, Quantum Leap, Crystal, Envoi, Seventh Quarry, The Journal, The Frogmore Papers) and online (Littoral Magazine, Autumn Voices, Wildfire Words, Lothlorien, Meek Colin, Atlantean), she was placed First in Writing Magazine's pantoum poetry competition. She devised new poetry forms (Davidian, Magi, Palindromedary); wrote her father's biography, 'Bevin Boy', and her own autobiography, 'Whose Name Was Wit in Waterr' (title inspired by Keats' grave in Rome).

She has attempted many traditional forms and free verse. Favourite poets: Dylan Thomas, Gerard Manley Hopkins, John Burnside, John Betjeman, the Romantic Poets (especially Wordsworth), George Herbert, William Blake, Emily Dickinson, Mary Webb, Norman Bissett, William Shakespeare, the Bible, and the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam.

Current poetry collection: LOVE'S FLORELOQUENCE, Wendy Ann Webb, Amazon.co.uk. Love's Floreloquence: Amazon.co.uk: Webb, Wendy Ann, Meek, CT, Meek, CT, Webb, Wendy Ann: 9798372967595: Books

Butterfly Summer

This monarch must be about the last one
to go this summer, the rest already

headed back south. It will take two
generations to make it back to Mexico

by winter, and this one will die
in a few weeks, the sturm and drang

of her life consisting of the journey
to the middle of the continent.

Mine is here, now, watching her prepare,
working her wings slowly.

She is preparing to climb ten thousand feet

into the sky to catch the jet stream

that will take her to a home she's never seen.
I'm dreaming of that place too,

a field in perhaps Kansas or Colorado
where she will sleep but others will wake

with the urge to just keep moving.

Orange Summer Newt

This morning, I would crush
the newt on the trail
with my boot heel

except in August
the valley the Allegheny
runs through is a green world,

and everything before my eyes
has been green
and all my thoughts have been green too,

and this newt is orange
and nearly frozen
in the frost of the early day,

so I turn my boot and move on,
leaving him
but thinking new thoughts,

orange thoughts
all day and
into the cool evening.

Chicken of the Forest

The giant orange mushrooms growing
out of rotting logs are supposed to be
edible and even delicious,

but I've never wanted to cut one up
and fry it. I'd rather leave it
here for a bear.

Today, I have apples,
and they're fine on a cold morning,
standing next

to this one fungal flame of orange
in a green world.
It's enough to crunch

through one apple and then the next
and remember those days living
in the city

when I would dream of being able
to walk out into the woods by myself
and to have this kind of morning

one that exists without worry,
conversation, or doubt.
I am here now, alone

except for the mushrooms and the bear
I have not seen in a week,
and I watch

my thoughts beyond words
form like a fungus,
growing rich and alive.

Small Columns of Stone

The trail veers off to cross this place
where the stream winds
through the stone ruins of chimneys,

what's left of the cabins
where people used to rest
on their weeks off in the summer.

Something happened, someone decided
to change the road,
and this place only has the memory of families,

and I know that it is the memory of my people,
aunts and uncles who used to come up
with my grandparents.

All of those people are gone now,
and I did not know them
until they were old,

but I can hear their child voices
in this moment before autumn.
I can hear them call

to their parents.
I can hear their parents laughing
and calling back.

John Brantingham was Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks' first poet laureate. His work has been featured in hundreds of magazines. He has twenty-one books of poetry, memoir, and fiction including his latest, *Life: Orange to Pear* (Bamboo Dart Press) and *Kitkitdizzi* (Bamboo Dart Press). He lives in Jamestown, New York.

on the edge
the waves
that touch me

*

beads
and empty bowls…
her pantry full

*

cello for sale—
the empty chords
of depression

*

in the wind
folding sheets
the lies I tell myself

*

my heart
a scattered deck of cards
I used to hold close

*

in the glow
of moonlight
fish bones

*

dawn walk stretching my spine yellow tulip

*

browsing
the second-hand bookshop
from my deckchair

*

heavy rain
stopping only
to write a poem

*

ivy leaves the memories that cling on

Sunflowers

Caliginous flames
burn any light left on
this easel.

Pain pours
onto a fresh palette, but

the sunflowers
seed my eyes, unready

to grow
from this experience,
painting me with my version of you.

Stem

nothing

prepared me
for your truth

in my silence

cruel wind
swaying proof

lone dandelion
just stem

no wishes
or signs

left

to hold onto

Reconnecting

when we saw
each other's
broken

pieces
love came

rosewater
kisses
shame
melting

away

unsilenced rain

pouring
into

us
reconnecting
who we really are

grief as distant as never

we learn how to become
whole

in a landscape
of

sighs
holding one another
in the fog

newly discovered

lives
when we see
each other's

broken pieces
love holds us together

Shoreline

rain . . .
its sounds
a mere memory

falling
flat
inside a minor key
mirroring
all the emptiness of charcoal

blackening
a sea sky
where you and I
exist
on days like this

translucent olivine
foamy
and adrift
on the shores of life

Rescue

and I just watch
as an ocean of candles flicker

within

the burning ambit
of what's possible

on the horizon

an abandoned
lighthouse

breaking in
I rescue hope

flowers on a branching stem
steely-blue sea holly
silvers the resolve

to dampen
any darkness left

C.X. Turner (she/her) is a registered social work manager, living and working in the UK. Her poetry is mainly focused on writing short-form poems, on a daily basis, and she has been published widely, including recent and upcoming publication of long and short-form poetry in *Drifting Sands, Whiptail, Humana Obscura, Modern Haiku, The Heron's Nest, Hedgerow, Drifting Sands, Ribbons, Kingfisher, Bones,* and *Otoroshi* journals. She enjoys working collaboratively with other poets and on solo projects, currently has haiku on the streets of Washington D.C. as part of the Golden Triangle contest and is part of the *Wales Haiku Journal* team. She was three times Touchstone-nominated in 2022 and is currently working on a book of short poems and enjoying exploring different art mediums in her haiga. Connect with her on Twitter @lover__poetic and/or Instagram @love.rpoetic.

After Her Ex Takes His Own Life, She Adopts His Cat

As penance, at first, for the self-flagellants
of catnip-happy scratches pacifying blame
over breaking up the night prior to his suicide—

though, as the cat "purr-furs" her ex's left side
of bed (after rubbing his back against that same
cracked, bathroom trim following a light snack),

she's rendered cat-atonic in imagining
the ex-lover, perhaps, in-habiting this black
feline. Now, holding the tom to her chest

in weeping apologies for her awful timing so close
to his mom's passing, the cat becomes a cat-alyst
for release from her self-imposed purgatory

as nothing but perfect purring is returned to her
avowed unworthiness….And when her love life reveals
the same nine lives and that prostrate monastic cat

rubs her new beau's boots the first time they meet,
there's nothing mad about this lapsed cat-tholic

waking at dawn to overflow dish with wet food

before another day of this catalytic converter of cat
silencing her wounded heart's unmuffled rumblings
so she doesn't become that crazy, old cat lady

but, rather, forever owns one black magic cat
who miraculously knows when to leap onto her lap
to catheter away the heartache's growing acids

with the swale of tail or head-rub to face before
his return to the window's feeder of birds morphs the tabby
into this lovely black Cadillac hearsing away so much hurt

Or entombing it inside a cat soul's sacred catacomb.

For the Bread Baker and His Conjoined Twins

And so each inchoate loaf is now a foetus
And the rare, errantly, over-heated yeast
That tarnished sperm of his which led
To three shared legs and two arms--

So, kneading, he laments the ingredients
Of that misspent youth's meth and booze
As his sadness rises a second time when
Peering inside the stone oven to spy two

Ovaries of loaves conjoining at doughy torsos
And fated to be passed over even though
Their price will be "two for one" after noon.
But it's these "remainder loaves" he takes home

And slices for the boys' favourite French toast.
And when they weep over the cruel nicknames
that stick inside them like raisons in wheat,
he tenderly rubs their heads and hopes his love

is like the brush of buttered egg-wash run over
the rye's crust to keep it from splitting open….
And knowing, now, how each muscled kneading
Releases trepidation in the separation operation

possibly taking both lives, I begin each day
with one of his loaf's toast to taste the molasses
of his sadness when they refuse to rise
for school and all he can do is cover them

in hugs for another fifteen or so minutes
And think of the sourdough's slow, third rising.
Still who'd have thought this would lead me
To feed, daily, on their Go Fund Me campaign

For the home nurse—or to pray they
find love like the conjoined Chang brothers
Who spent three days each week in the
other's marriage bed—or to both curse and bless

whatever baker of human souls did knead me
in such a way that, contemplating separating
myself from their story's longing and pain,
I feel my heart's marbled rye, too, might die…

For The Black Bear Biologist Tagging Hibernating Bears

The drugging then
Tunnelling into den is
Mostly routine until her
Found birthmother
Refuses to meet
With her given-up girl--

So, weighing cubs
And drawing blood,
Wells-up all the grief still
Hibernating inside

The den of her repression
As their cries and clawing

Of down gloves trigger
Her unconscious trauma
In being pulled from
A like lush breast
On February 7 of 83….
Still measuring all

Those little claws and teeth
While the bear-rug
Of drugged sow battles
To keep eyes fixated
On her squealing twins,
Opens the hand of hope

For her own Mom, maybe,
To struggle for sobriety
The next time she's lugged
From her like below-
Street-watering hole.
For now though all

The biologist can do
To keep her heart's eagle
Aloft in the mountain
Breeze of these feelings
Is volunteer to descend,
A second time

Into the musky den
To return these two
Shivering cubs to
The mother who was
Slowly bulldozed
Back into the hole;

And, over time, she'll
Find succour in mastering
The exact seconds left

In mother-bear paralysis
So she can linger
Against the warm breast

And feel some wholeness
Restored when her heart-
Beat entrains with the
Sow's slow, strong sonar.
Imagine her, now, slowly
Healing in touching teat

And drooling teeth without
The three-hundred-pound sow
Roaring; and consider
Her crazy rebirthing ritual
In embracing the radio-
Collared neck and giving

The snout a good-bye
Peck before breaching
From each winter den
And feeling like a spring cub
Emerging for the first time
To wonder at the wild-

Flower laced breeze and
Unhindered sun, which suddenly
And completely soaking
Her black coat, feels like
The mother's mid-winter tongue
Warmly passing over her blind newborn.

Upon Learning her Husband only has a few Months to Live

She recalls gold finch and robin
Flying off with his coiled, grey locks
After she cuts his hair outdoors

So, that last spring, she shears
His hair closer to the tree line
Then tosses the manes, like bread

Crumbs, to swooning moms-to-be.
Soon she envisions the looming
ravens of grief quietly nesting

in some solace as, widowed
her first Christmas, she'll task
her grandson to scale

a naked deciduous tree to retrieve
a soft vessel of a nest
Which, set on bed stand, keeps

Memories of him more alive
Than any ash-filled urn atop mantle.
And the more she imagines those

Salt and pepper tresses espied
(Between hay and twigs bedside),
The more follicles of solace grow

And curl with visions of grief
kept at bay. Now, they read
about nests before bed

And, together, nurse on succor
In learning how generations of birds
Recycle the moss, floss, and deer

Hair. See, then, how it ends with him
More easily letting go of his soul-
Mate as they marvel at his hair's

Heat-holding properties lowering
goldfinch mortality so offspring
always bloom at her feeder.

Who'd have thought they could

nest so warmly with death
When considering the future robins'

Fallen wing feathers delivering
A recycled piece of him
To brush against her lonesome cheek?

Who'd have guessed
all these soft, gathered thoughts
woven in their last words together

would soothe those death-restless heads
even more than the pillows'
dependable, down, breast feathers?

Dennis Camire is a writing instructor at Central Maine Community College. His poems have appeared in Poetry East, Spoon River Review, The Mid-American Review and other journals and anthologies. An Intro Journal Award Winner and Pushcart Prize nominee, his most recent book is Combed by Crows, Deerbrook Editions. Of the collection. X. J. Kennedy says: "Dennis Camire is an up and comer… The poems engage us with their promising titles, and deliver with skill and energy." Of Franco-American origin, he lives in an A-frame in West Paris, Maine.

Dancing on the Frozen Stars

She searched behind the spinning starlight
looking for her lost love
she prayed under the apple trees
they remembered the silence after she vanished
and crawled around the overgrown maze
that was sinking into the mud and grime
their frenzied panic searched the undergrowth
like madmen chasing the end of time

They hunted for her footsteps
Found the satin from her torn skirt

I crept away when I saw her settled
laying in her lover's arms
she turned away from the frenzied rescuers
after turning them into giant frogs
with the powers that the fairy gave her
while they danced on the frozen stars

she touched her lover with her feathery veil
draped it over his back and arse
his shoulders snuggled into her satin
which lay beneath his growing pain
that caused his back to arch and fall
to the rhythm of a long gone song
that called her towards his hope his heart
and the ecstasy when he entered her
like the full moon rising toward a perfect sky

The Loneliness Factory

The night was dull dark gloomy. She sat alone in her room scratching at her neck. The more blood under her fingernails, the more translucent she felt. She worried about nothing. Everything. She lay perfectly still searching her mind for what went wrong. Searching her mind. Looking at her flaws, her failures, her regrets, the lonely piano, her violin, her music stand where the Chagall print rested against her manuscript. She looked around her almost empty sterile room feeling sick not knowing what to do next. Wondering where he was. Wondering if he would come back, knowing he would not. The room was filled with horrors old memories lost moments forgotten treasures and broken glass. She was alone cold empty silent. There were no calls no messages not a sound in the room except for her pounding thoughts and an erratic frightened heartbeat.

She left the door ajar
Just in case he might turn up
after his rehearsal after the delayed flight
after the bullshit excuses
she left the door open that night
and the nights before
the snow watched her voyeuristically

through the open window
one eyebrow raised as if to suggest some insight
the driving sleet that rested across her body
burnt into her
provided the warmth
and the soundscape to
her endless sleepless reveries
the empty gin bottles rolled around
like lovers bumping into each other
and not by chance
the traffic in the distance offered no hope
of his imminent arrival
she lay on the floor petrified
with cold
with fear
her tiny body grappled with her existence
it was no longer strong taut but soft malleable
vulnerable
usable
she saw a beautiful solemnity encased
in her desperate scene
of futility harm loneliness
she calmly quietly smiled and accepted her fate

The Dancer

There was a strange lingering in her gait
A lingering longing to revisit a scene
a pulse beating out of time
a violin breaking string after string
the piano preferring the pentatonic
the singer sobbing in the opera stalls

The dancer puts her hands on her hips
then raises her arms to begin the show
signals the orchestra with the wink of an eye
spreads her tutu adjusts her hair
spins around the auditorium
knocking over phials filled with lilies

refreshes the bright red of her lips
her pulse stirring excited for the thrill
she smiles a deadly recalcitrant smirk
takes hold of the jester's trusty baton
strips down to her bare bones
hoping to excite the exuberant crowd
before the anniversary party begins

Three Ways

Three women emerge from a sleepy night
drowning in the cobwebs of leftover dreams
caffeine soon to be shared from a bowl
sugary treats pastries being the sole
reason to stretch their bodies in morning ritual
breaking free of constraint with unseemly acts
they walk to the river wrapped in chiffon and lace
no longer avoiding the whispering eyes
they drift in and out of feathery leaves
falling slowly from autumnal trees
the wanton river peaks in early morn
they drown their faces in its liquid silk
feel the force between their legs
the perfect three way
body
mind
poetry

Train Tracks Wisdom and Bullshit

There was a line we crossed over that night
we should've regretted it but we didn't
we wore the changes to our lives
lay in the pouring rain again
enjoyed the stench of muddy soil
the wisdom came much later
took away our power to reason

to fly kites on windy nights
to venture into the thorny bush
sliding recklessly through the mire
bullshit paved the way for us
we travelled in hot air balloons
sang songs in Irish pubs
snuggled the hangover
beneath the sheets

Jay Maria Simpson was born in Sydney, Australia. She worked as an English, Drama and Music Teacher for many years in schools, TAFE and the University of Newcastle. Jay has been a writer all her life. She moved to Perth, Western Australia in 2011 following a personal tragedy. It was then that her poetry exploded.

In her poetry she explores reality, change, sorrow, sex, anger, death, love, escape and memory. Jay pushes the boundaries in her writing. She often writes from a dangerous, fearful place where you will find raw honesty. Her poems might also dance in a happy sexual fairy garden. There is no pretension.

She is recently published in 'Voices from the Fire' Anthology Vol 9, Dumpster Fire Press, The Writer's Club, Horror Sleaze Trash, Fevers of the Mind Showcase, 'Ukraine: The Night and the Fire' Anthology and 'Bedroom Anatomy Lessons' Anthology, Dumpster Fire Press.

Her new manuscript, a book length anthology is being reworked with new poems, themes and ideas. She is also putting together a chapbook of selected poems dedicated to her daughter, Kate.

Jay loves poetry, art, music, satire and black comedy. She also loves recording and reading poetry publicly.

She is the Creative Director and Author at 'Living Dangerously'.

Nitrogenase Ecclesiastes

Atmospheric nitrogen
forgotten
by the waves of the horizon
molecular revelations for Athanasius
but nonreactive herbs
repeat history
the sun fell in place pulsating
for the rest of the night

Broken monks and gnostics
driving back half sacred
prayers metabolically useless
for the growth of trees
Traffic of protein complexities are the
depths of rippling darkness resolute
a cancer to all but a
few microorganisms.

Reaching for the void, checking tethers for
the unseen vision
microbially mediated
a biosynthethic incantation of all the time
disfigured and lost, last place gets
no diazotrophy.

Hey Day Huggers

A lookout bed
higher than you

iceberg hurts
to be rekindled

Hears night out
buddy gets by

But it would be helicopters
added to the sea

Jethro Mothra

Redeye because of the birds
high outside my house
with the moss of all
that's been forgotten
Hugely super
heck gruelling or something
Hurry the tuberculosis pipe
My jugular is alone
looking for my better life

Logarithm Begin the Juju

Hygrometered, I put in
        hydrangeas

I kiss the etched liturgies
integrating the
        mighty minibus
monohydration

blackbirds
        in coattails
bayou delivery regretted
        the dewdrop
            physical therapy
for the gut-punch

Urticaria Jr.

Potluck
politicking

a wickerlifted

nitpick
picnic

A hot debate about
why you should get the right
shade of the street

petro c. k. is a temporal being who seeks the small moments, the momentus moments, and the weird moments, and channels them through writing, photos, and art. He is the founding editor of dadakuku (www.dadakuku.com). The poems presented here have been partly created with the use of predictive text.

ON LOVE

Was love then
Only an illusion
Or was it not?
A fire that raged while it lasted
Extinguished by Time,
But those glowing embers
Oh! They still burned
Through those dark, desolate nights
Of a winter long gone.

SONG OF LIFE

Time ceased to matter
Neither spring nor summer
Brought hope of sunnier days ahead,
Neither winter nor autumn
The comfort and warmth
Of those old family reunions
Around the hearth,
She mourned silently
Those whom she had loved and lost
Each to his/her own fate and Time,
As from her window
She watched the mighty river flow
Broad and strong
Singing its eternal song of life

Through the seasons,
And inspired
She plunged headlong
Into the stormy river of life
Joyously singing
Her song of life's endlessly tortuous journey
Towards Eternity.

Kadambari Kaul - Kadambari is a poet and author of books on Indian philosophy namely Brihadaaranyaka Upanishad, Dhammapada and Gautama Buddha - A Noble Life'. Writing poetry is an integral part of Kadambari's spiritual journey. Her poems have been featured in various anthologies notably her poem ' Peace' that was included in the Literary Paritantra (Systems)- An International Journal on Literature and Theory published by the Dayalbagh Educational Institute in 2010 . Peace was republished by Red Penguin Books , New York in 2022 in their Anthology entitled ' Where Flowers Bloom - Poems and Essays of Strength, Hope and Resilience.'

Returning from foreign war zones

I may be missing an important dia-
gnosis or grasping at straws here
but the anxiety level provoked by
a huge local land deal has revealed
not only a standardized way to
manipulate the browser, but images
of well-painted & horribly fright-
ening beasts have also been found.

A double cypher

The operation is a calligram. It
is a mark of ill-breeding to use
French phrases or words unless

they're resting on a floor made safe
& visible by its own coarseness.

All this litter on the ground—
ask for an explanation. The
calligram has a triple role.
The vague uneasiness pro-
voked is a Cuban gentleman.

Severely censure the habit of
using sentences which admit
of a double meaning. We have
evidence of failure & its ironic
remains. Augment the alphabet.

Splintered wood, fragmented
shapes. Many men can converse
on no other subject than their
every day employment. Words
can no longer be reconstituted.

Sources:
This Is Not a Pipe, by Michel Foucault
The Ladies' Book of Etiquette (1860), by Florence Hartley

Installing the new wi-fi extender

Start the new year right — remove
any redundancy from your sent-
ences. Then move away from web-
based video channels that thrive on

a huge amount of laughable material
concerning cats & FAILS. Speak at
great length on the college hockey
team. Choose meaningful words &

be specific with your content. Give
listeners a Δ-regular graph G with *n*
vertices, & then segue into the most
recent version of the periodic table.

Doubles Entendre

Delirious. Maybe malaria,
perhaps too much cross-
referencing of Vladamir
Putin tapes to see which
ones the body doubles
appear in. Watching the
ease with which they switch
from one double to another,

& how difficult it is to identify
where the crossover lines are,
makes me realize how rarely
we take the time to allow our-
selves the luxury of quality
time with our other selves.

Potpourri

If you took small
things out of
context, could
probably assemble
a tolerable landscape. Talis-
men in your tote bag — the
post office clock
tower, customs house
cupola, some birds, a
measure of hills. Arrange

them where/when
ever you might come
to rest, lean back,
contented or at least
a semblance of. Lasts
for a minute. What
then?

Mark Young's new book, *with the slow-paced turtle replaced by a fast fish*, was published by sandy press at the beginning of May. It is available through Amazon.

FIRST SNOWFALL

My window forgets the pattern of snowflakes when,
once they've touched the glass, they
disappear. The Snow Queen
propels her sleigh into the village square, her beauty
the intellect's chiselled perfection. Void
of emotion, she separates a child from the others, reasoning
they share kindred hearts, his pierced
by a fragment of mirror
that reflects only the world's ugliness. My mirror
isn't changed by what it reflects but I am
shaped by what comes before me. During
my academic years, if it weren't for my childlren,
I would have turned to ice. The Snow Queen
doesn't comprehend that the child
she kidnapped carries a memory
rendering him still capable of bearing human love.

MY WHITE DRESSES, HER RED SHOES

1)

Before I could be baptized, I had to recite,
in order, the names of all the books of The Bible
in front of the congregation and answer
all the pastor's questions to
assure him and the congregation
I'd internalized the doctrine. I'd borrowed a white, silk dress
from my cousin. Its skirt
billowed above the surface of the water like
a parachute, like a soul. The cleric
lowered me under. My immersion brought tears
to my mother's eyes but I didn't find meaning
in the ritual even though
I'd passed the test, a perfect score
by rote. Years later I walked down the aisle
of the same church
where I was submerged, wearing another white, silk dress,
to repeat what the minister said.
I promised to honour and obey. Rote again.

2)

To honour and obey, she was supposed to
wear black shoes to her mother's funeral. Instead
she wore red. In those shoes
her feet couldn't stop dancing. As she danced
the old wives clucked
in disapproval, their envy crusting
like rust on a coffin's vault. The eyes
of portraits on the walls of the church glared in condemnation.
The old wives weren't the ones
who eventually punished the dancing girl. She
cut off her own feet, believing
this would stop their movement and
absolve her of guilt. Detached, they kept on dancing.

A CRONE SPEAKS FROM THE FOREST

I wasn't going to roast that boy, the oven
a metaphor
of my womb and in it: Hansel, in foetal position.
Incapable of conception, I obsessed about filling my body
with the flesh of a child. Why
wasn't it Gretel? Her
naivety took me back to my girlhood, the forest
my place to hide. I built
my cabin of biscotti logs, twice baked for strength
and roofed it with gingerbread, its scent especially
pungent wet after a rain. And

the candy decorating the entrance? Its sugary confections
substitute for lack of sweetness in my life. I
can break off a piece any time
I crave something tangible I
could put my tongue to.

ME, MY AUNT & COUSIN, MY MOTHER, MY GRANDDAUGHTER as well as THE PROVERBIAL STEPMOTHER, & SEVEN LITTLE MEN WHO REPRESENT ASPECTS OF THE MASCULINE UNTIL THE PRINCE ARRIVES

I must have been six or seven when Aunt Harriet
took me and my cousin, Connie to see
my first movie. When the queen
appeared on screen, wearing her black turban like a helmet,
the close-up
of her blood-red mouth flapping like the wings
of a frightened bird, I crawled under
my red velvet seat. The cement floor
was cool. I was safe in the dark
but returned when Snow white sang the prince,
on screen. My mother
had programmed me to believe

my primary goal in life was to marry, defer
to my husband, and that was enough.
My granddaughter, Pauline, objects to the prince
kissing Snow White without her consent but I
object to the forthcoming harbinger of obstacles: Snow White
was made to wait
for an other to bring her back to life.

TWO GRANDMOTHERS PLUS MY MOTHER

The little match girl struck a match, then another, finally
the whole bundle she'd failed to sell that day, New Year's Eve
on Earth. In matchlight
her dead grandmother arrived, reaching out her hand,
saying, "Come home. You don't belong here."

My grandmother (She died 50 years ago.) is always sewing
at her treadle and, as she pedals, she remembers me. When I turned twelve,
she was the only one who hugged me, pressing my face to
her flowered-fabric apron, its bibbed front
covered with flour. I'd open my eyes to thin lines
like miniature road maps between her ample breasts and crevices
in her skin snow-scattered with talcum.

The match girl returned to the place where
my mother longs to travel
when she begs, "I want to go home!" With dementia
she transports herself in and out of
the present, not wanting to be here now.

The match girl's return began with just one match. Must we live
close to dying to receive that kind of illumination?

Jeanette L. Miller - Holds an MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop and published UNSCHEDULED FLIGHTS in 2019. Her poems have appeared in Phoebe, Shenandoah, Prairie Schooner, Caesura, Main Street Rag, The Blue Mountain Review, among others, and are forthcoming in The North Dakota Review.

BLUE CHEESE

Meanwhile, we while away
hours, mine and yours
eyes closed, clothed in fumbles
lives crumbling like blue cheese

on soggy cracker dust –
couple swallows of water
an absolute must, rust
wringing like toggled bells
inside a bourbon heart,
in this manner we pass our days,
in this way we stick like glue
together, crumble apart

PEBBLES

we used to climb trees
there were rules on it
only in cemeteries
only in spring
apple blossoms
mulled wine after
in a room filled with colours
of fall

she carried pebbles
in her pockets, each night
she would pull them out
her hands were small and silent
I liked to call them birds
copper in tone, so peaceful
when the bells in the chapel played
we made love in the cooling sand
outside the villa, southern exposure
another rule

her breasts so small and firm
like pomegranates ripening

under solace of nurturing suns

SHATTERED

like skeleton
of baby bird
crushed by the heel

smothered
in the blue mud
of emotion

orphaned
like an egg
cold in forgotten nest

I stand humble under
full moon, short
of breath, blind

I ask a lonely crow
so high in night's sky
to forgive me

the impurity
of the forlorn
love I feel

STEVEN SIBRA has been creating poetry and short stories for over 40 years. His work has appeared in many journals, newspapers, magazines, a couple of broadsides, and no doubt on more than one outhouse wall. A native of Big Sandy, Montana, a town of less than 1000 people and the most eclectic little burg in America (check it out on Wikipedia), Steven resides in Seattle. His book of poetry, SHOES FOR BABY, was published in 2022 by Swallow Publishing.

WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

Where are you going? You ask the politician.
The politician answers:
-To cheat and steal.
-Where are you going? a sinful woman asks the priest.
The priest answers:
-You haven't given me the meat yet
And you already want absolution?
-Where are you going? the boy or girl asks the instructor.
The instructor answers:
To the clergyman and the trout
Your divine little ass searches.
-Where are you going? the wife asks the husband who is a nurse.
-To buy tobacco
And raise the skirt of the Whore
From the Country House
And give her the Covid injection.
-Where are you going, Patron? the worker asks the boss.
The Patron, potbellied and sick, replies:
-To see how the girls work.
The worker followed the boss with his eyes
Seeing how to a working girl
He was riding on his horn.
Soon after, she yelled:
-Oh God, let my master run.
The worker, thus seeing his master
He told to a coworker
That worked right next to him:
-Little brunette of my eyes
Just looking at you

You burn and burn me
Taking out of her fly a kind of black pudding
Showing it to the girl
Telling her:
-If you want, put it to roast in your warm breast.
She replied:
-She is good in good faith.
But put it in your mother fucking.

WHEN THE FROG GROWS HAIRS

To her, my sister Santa Pe
Slim and pretty
Our mother wanted to marry
As soon as possible
But she didn't want to do.
Forced, she met a boy
That he loved her
But she didn't even want
Nor in photography.
As he invited her to Cinema España
To see the movie Salon Kitty
A luxurious Berlin brothel
That the Nazis used as a cover
Of espionage and sexual misdeeds
In which Helmut Berger works
That she loves and adores
She accepted the invitation.
At midnight they went to the cinema
And the very naughty
As soon as they sit in the seats
Lights out
Starting the movie
The rogue was going to the chestnut
His sword out and outstretched
With the intention of penetrating
Or that she rubbed it.
-Stop right there, stay still, wimpy
Santa Pe told him.
I know what you want
I know where you're going
I know what you've come for
Do you want to charge the entrance
Sticking your sword up my thighs.
Go dig chives
Or to fuck your mother, fool.
I will give you my love
When the frog grows hair.
He put the sword in his fly
Grumpy, sad and heartbroken

Left the cinema
Shitting on the mother
That Santa Pe gave birth.
She was happy, very happy
Watching how Helmut Berger
Fucked good girls
And, once fucked
He offered them to German officers.
She also saw how
Some dwarfs with swastikas on their penises
Fucked Jewish prisoners
Trying to make them
Prostitute agents.
Her mother was on the balcony
She was on the balcony
To see if her daughter came.
When she saw her approach the balcony
Her mother asked:
- How about daughter?
How did it go?
She happily replied:
-Mother, he is the third one that I send for a walk.
Nobody is telling me:
"Open your clam, Margarita
That I want to charge the entrance".
With my clam, mother
I don't intend to earn a living.

THIS FLOWER

As the Eresma river drains from the slopes
From Guadarrama on the way to La Granja
In Segovia
So my love slipped through where I slept
Your peacock, beloved soul.
This flower represents our pure love
That we gave ourselves through the most intoxicating places
From our mountain where kings and subjects
Made children "like Donkey"
As any animal.

In the Boca del Asno, on the ground
Where your peacock slept
Now yes
I came to you, you caressed me, you pampered me
And then my Love fell on you
Until, after the ecstasy
Love left for the forests of Valsaín.
Here and now yes
As in the times
In which the monarchs were measured with the bears
You rode me on a horse
And we went for a walk across the river
Singing:
"I will give you
I will give you beautiful girl
I'll give you one thing
One thing I only know, pine nuts!
Until my imperial eagle
Returned to nest in the cup of your haughty pine
Hugging your peacock
Putting my lips
In your donkey mouth
Eating a peach
With a red heart
-How rich it is
Although it doesn't taste like anything, I told you.
You turned red
Placing the bow of your ponytail
On the neck of my imperial eagle.

Daniel de Culla is a writer, poet, painter and photographer. He's member of the Spanish Writers Association, Earthly Writers International Caucus, Poets of the World, (IA) International Authors, Surrealism Art, Friends of The Blake Society, Nietzsche Circle, Red Internacional de Escritores por la Tierra, and others. Director of Gallo Tricolor Review, and Robespierre Review. He participated in many Festivals of Poetry, and Theater, and has collaborated and collaborates with various magazines and reviews such as: Otoliths; The Stray Branch, Ariel Chart, The Penmen Review, The Sandy River Review, Raven Cage Zine, Down in the Dirt Magazine, Envision Arts, Allien Buddha Zine, The Creativity Webzine, Flve Fleas (Itchy Poetry),Poetry Pacific, Old Pal, Lighten

Up Online, The Poet Magazine, Paragraph Planet, Uppagus, ReSite, GloMag, Fleas on the Dog, LAROLA, RAL'M, Misery Tourism, Leavings, The Creative Zine, Terror House Press, PS: It's Still Poetry, Open Doors Review,Tigers Shark Magazine, Words Rhymes & Rhythm, Synchronized Chaos Magazine, Athens Art, Street Cake, Littoral Magazine, The Poet Magazine, Poetry Pacific, Best Poems encyclopedia, Ranger, and others. e-mail: gallotricolor@yahoo.com. County of origin: Spain.City: Burgos.

Something Seemingly Not Even a Road

Flash Fiction
by Jim Meirose

They came to the road, which was so freshly paved as to reek of hot asphalt, and was so black and new it fairly glistened in the sunlight. They stood a while hesitating, as it seemed it'd be a shame = to walk over something so pure and virginal as to even seem like something not really a road = something different a piece of art somehow not to be touched let alone roughly walked over = standing by the fresh road it felt like it felt when standing face to face with that smooth granite statue somehow = wanting so to touch it and stroke it = but = knowing that nearby there's a guard lurking in = blue = or in = black = like these regularly wear they know = hold it there please do not touch the exhibits do no no do not do not touch the exhibits = how mortifying = how embarrassing everyone there's so many everybodies all around here and they are now watching and judging = watching and judging = aw just one touch to the edge of the brand new road heck = hold it there {*louder*} please do not touch the exhibits but please do not no = condemn me here like this = look at them looking = you are the good and I ==== am the bad why what why is it wrong to touch the exhibits eh = it is wrong it is wr' = would the artist who slaved over carving this out for weeks and months and maybe even years say = do not ever touch this = ever ever ever = no one can ever no never would they say that = I do not know I just know don't touch the exhibits = why do you say it if you don't know? Is that not an insult cheapening the sweat of the brow of the artist who made this = it is not mine to know I am paid to say what I say don't you think don't you know = don't you get paid to do something also = don't you need money to keep on going = keeping on going has nothing to do with money = yes it does yes yes yes = no it does not God made life God keeps life going not money = maybe then God is money because in my neck of the woods you don't eat you don't live = oh yah yes oh yah have you tried to stop eating = no

why on Earth would I want to stop eating = to see if in time you then die you said eating is needed to live eh eh huh = no I did not say that = yes you did = no I didn't = yes you did = no we were talking about money and not about eating = yah but you were saying it like money and eating are exactly the same = no I would not say that because it is wrong I I said I did sa' = hold it no here it is does the Earth not spin with no need for money = sure sure sure but that's not the same thing = yes it is does the sun not shine with no need for money = sure but that's not = that's no that's no that's no God you are so boring does this road not lie here with no need for money = well, yes it does = so it is? = no it's not I didn't but just make sure you don't touch the exhibits or else I'll = do what = I'll do = do this = and they stepped out onto the black = no do not = and the hand went out and down the beautiful sculpture's cheek = so cold = road so hot = please do not = all came into balance and though the road seemed excessively wide for a road looking like it saw absolutely no traffic but still or no still = seemed quite busy there anyway look at it look it will be someday be busy will it not = I mean who'd spend the money for such a widely fine road that'd never be used = it will be used look = after we're gone it will be used = gok = how does it feel to be able to look into your very own future Gimi? = look at me Gimi look at me look at me Gimi = this is how you'll be up at the end Gimi = just like me Gimi = just like me just like and = having successfully traversed the road, they turned left and proceeded straight on to their destinations.

Jim Meirose's short fiction has appeared in leading journals. His novels include "Sunday Dinner with Father Dwyer"(Optional Books), "Understanding Franklin Thompson"(JEF), "Le Overgivers au Club de la Résurrection"(Mannequin Haus), "No and Maybe - Maybe and No"(Pski's Porch), and "Audio Bookies" (LJMcD Communications) coming in 2024. Gen'l info: www.jimmeirose.com @jwmeirose

air raid-
hot bread breeze
from across the border
*

mother's ground-
the wind wears a crown
of chrysanthemums
*

hay bed-
La vie en rose
on the radio
*

shed
snake skin on the path-
face lifting day
*

WWW blocked-
I walk along the path
Of other creatures

Honeycomb – Flash Fiction

I knock on our house door, but it's not my mother who opens. Seeing my doubt in front of the door, the wind smacks it against the wall. Something that looks like a being, a steamy silhouette wearing a long flowery printed dress swirls around, engulfs me, while its imprints fly all over the room. What a fresh, plum blossom scent! Suddenly, the wind calms down, the clouds wash out, and the ghost is gone, but all these white petals left on the floor are a sign that I'm not the only one coming home now and then...

honeycomb –
a butterfly alights
on the sweet knife

Lavana Kray is from Romania. Over the years, she has won various prizes in haiku and tanka competitions. The World Haiku Association awarded her the title of Master Haiga Artist. Her work has appeared in many print and online publications, as well as in Haiga Exhibitions organized by the World Haiku Association in Japan and Italy. She currently serves as editor of Haiga at Cattails (UHTS).
She has published three photo-haiku books and one tankart collection.
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A Farewell from the Sloth of Space

Speed is a black tongue among mouths,
unfurling in hush, like a mutation of thrushes.
We molt from gaunt to dazzling plume —
just the cavity of flat, interstellar seas
to bear us up like a dead march,
and a crown of calculus to weave the way.
We need what thrives from heat to atone
for what badlands we leave behind.

We flee the vast heat, mega typhoons, sacrifices
to volcanoes, undead firestorms, and the superliners
rich in triggermen piled high in rations and disdain.
Shrug the pull of our greedy, blue gravity well,
of hot dark matter departed, we rise and erupt
in tritium rage to duck another sermon
of banned books burned, another Brownshirt cabal,
another Sunday morning blitz gifting us ashes to eat
from the nirvana of earthly life now in the kiln.

In our lightship, we see the colours of machines gallop
ahead to paint the void trailing our newfound freedom,
like the artful wren weaving a hidden nest of starlight
right under the eagle's wing — a deepness of fable
to hoist us up high above the blues in the serpent spume.
Our keel feels closer to splitting open a monster
in our honeyed path cracking wide before us,
the wilderness of our winking stretch across the cold
vacuum words let go of orbit:
spheres, shelter, lush falling away.

But we won't get anywhere fast enough to know
the time lost or gained by this place of truce —
the sublime jest across the darkest moss.
Instead, we drink only the disquiet of eyes
from other passersby, tied down, reclined,
our Heavenly Observer Corps,
like ecstatic dolls bedded in the antiquity of flesh
and the pure frenzy of stillness in motion,
of human commotion in space, in the space

between the in-between spell.

We open words to one another, like cherries in a jar
of exquisite intervals, and then we sing sour praise
to salute the barren weight of perpetuity.

The Old Man in the Sky

He is all I see come noon.
The yellow shroud, the red still to make.
At night, his winking, snow-white pricks nuzzle.
My eyes worry to hold his charity so dwarfed overnight
and not swollen full of future giants,
a ritual of feeling slighted by his bounty,
because he wants nothing new
beyond more gleaming bodies
to spiral him in spirited favour.
I am just vapours in his expanse of golden-glow days,
trying to break time free from the dark cloud-horses,
to stretch out like an ocean pier beneath him,
speed limit gone; shoes tossed.
Because he conquers my desolation more than any horn,
or dead soldier, or wish can hold in noise,
or all the hollows of fury in deep space,
blinding me to his bubble of gravity.
I must orbit him in a slow burn, and my turns around him
deepen into vast geometries of surrender.
By closing my eyelids,
his long fingers draw out heat
in the headlong race to be with him,
his eye sucks in volumes of my words
flowing through flaring, bloodshot rings,
all obscurity, every confession, foreseen.
I am never again astonished,
except to watch his sculpted arms and legs
cocoon me in hot, telescopic wickedness.
His righteous, fiery sins don't leave me high
and gasping for doubt,
or dry and grasping for hope.

He marks me *his*,
my pink flamboyance of skins,
enough to build a tomb
of colour for his light to hold
nothing but lustrous hydrogen lost
and exotic helium found.
Like the sun dancers worshipping him
with sage wreaths and whistles,
and their pale-painted crusts of skin shed,
he covets the cold-blooded sunset boys
who jump naked from warm tongues of rock
into bright pools below to bathe in his ecstasy
and in verbs once thought to mourn his cyclic decay.

Parliament

In the dead shell center of an old elm sorrow
Tree sheared, hollow charred by a bolt of zeal
Stands the owl with her pink salmon king
Being deftly returned to primal fashion by talon
And beak spilling riddle scales, his crown:
A hemorrhage of witness fish testimony.

In the court of conjuring artistry by cuts,
The owl is well-known for her divination,
An ancient pattern of foreseeing through prey
By dancing entranced the blood-jewelled stains
To foster the owlets in journeys ahead.
She unwinds drifts down to judge the river again,

Its snowy bank of thorns, leaving pits behind
As she stamps along the watery edge, piercing
At flickers to feed the plot, to open a shambles
As the proper name of hunger slips over the tip
Of her tongue away under the surface of swift
Bronze waves auguring to see the signs

In the night: elsewhere in her passage through
The tree wings, a tracing mist trails, drawing her

Back to the nest, where the back spatter remains
Stigmata to be read, or heard, or cast off in swings
Until she knows the crime to be forgiven,
Whether stabbing, beating, or passive pools,

The king's blood still stands to rule the parliament
Of prescient owls wherein mandibles clack,
Until she rests on a perch to hoot just once:
Her decree as psychopomp to follow the king
Into the place where being feared or revered
Comes with no cost but the lustration of shame.

Mikal Wix is a queer writer from Miami with degrees in literature and creative writing serving as an Associate Poetry Editor with *West Trade Review*. Their poems are found or forthcoming in the *North American Review, Berkeley Poetry Review, Tahoma Literary Review, Moss Puppy, Olit, Door = Jar, Gone Lawn*, and elsewhere. Other creative work, including book reviews, can be found here: https://linktr.ee/mikalwix

A Note on the Pillow

You live near the cemetery and
it is always dark at this place.
The shadows pull the stones together,
trapping them in a whirl of immobility;
I'll leave when the music's over
and when you promise me never again to point
that gun at the mirror.

At the End

At the end of a long day
everything around breathe again,
tranquility hangs

like a pendulum above the ground.

But that's good, I say. Let it rest.
The greenery, the crosses on the tops
of the churches pointing to heaven,
darkness sneaking behind the mountain,
bringing new life to the creatures
of the night.

At night the stones speak. But not everyone
understand them. Not everyone has the dictionary
of the centuries. But those who have it may hear
the darkest story. It begins anew each day.

The Twin

He is inside me
and with me
from the day
I was born.

We think
the same things
about our world.
I got my face,
but he is in control of
my brain.

And even more!
When we walk under
the sun his shadow
is thicker than mine.
"How is this possible?"
I ask my self.
He says nothing.

He never says anything
at all. He's mute as a mule.

Yet women adore him.
They follow him through
the streets with hollow eyes.

We sleep together at night,
and he dreams my dreams.
But when I wake up
we are the same person again.

And I'm sure it will last
forever. Unless I do something
about that. So I decided
to take him for a walk.

I took him to the fields.
And when I showed him
the scarecrow he began
to tremble with fear.

Ah, the way he screamed in pain.

Peycho Kanev is the author of 12 poetry collections and three chapbooks, published in the USA and Europe. His poems have appeared in many literary magazines, such as: Rattle, Poetry Quarterly, Evergreen Review, Front Porch Review, Hawaii Review, Barrow Street, Sheepshead Review, Off the Coast, The Adirondack Review, Sierra Nevada Review, The Cleveland Review and many others. His new book of poetry titled A Fake Memoir was published in 2022 by Cyberwit press.

Holding On

Dying
Is an art, like everything else.
I do it exceptionally well.
--Sylvia Plath

I'll call you he says
in his best dial-tone voice
hanging up
on the word *you*
My long-distance lover
uses up *all* his words
calls me ''Sugar''
before entering me

in his little black book
before slipping into mute--
listens to *himself* breathe

Heavy breathing is an art
Holding holding holding
my breath...
is my calling

I do it
with my mind open
and my legs closed
I do it
until I turn blue
I do it
until my bones
sing phosphorescent
through my flesh

Offline is another thing
Offline I stare at his photo
shiver in the immense stillness
the missing the letting go---
words rusting on my lips
as I slip hard candy

into my mouth
and suck the receiver

Tonight
the phone rings and rinnnngs sooooo
I almost mistake it for my heart!
The reception is bad--
not the phoneline… but his
I can hear it in his voice--
it's numbing timbre his unspoken cool
and

I am haunted
by that long distant voice
inside me
my little cell my hell my prison
the voice of my little girl
that rings that dreaded bell
you should have

You should have
waited waited
waited waited
waited waited
waited waited

waited
to exhale

waited
for *him* to call

waited
for this man
you've never met

Selfie

It's not through healing that you will love yourself
It's through love that you will heal yourself
--Annabel Vizcarra

I don't know why they call it free association
I mean… I pay 120 euros for the hour!
Well not really an hour only 50
minutes
But why only 50 minutes? Why NOT an hour?
And how is it? that every moment of my life now
has become a snapshot a meme
every moment a cellphone selfie!

So…here we are… my therapist and I...
(he's the one on the left the rapist is the one on the right)
here we are
navigating the subterranean corridors of my mind--
identity anxiety madness isolation loneliness depression suicide--
the usual suspects
Younameit been there done that
Well ok
I haven't taken my life at least not yet
only taken it for granted
only taking it to the next level
(I like to tell myself)

Here I am again on my knees
worshiping at the altar
(let's call it my altar ego)
worshiping at the porcelain altar that is
vomiting encounters-with-loss
into the toilet
Say cheese!

(Need I mention…
all the many hands
I've thrown up into the air--
hands of despair
hands of protection
hands of surrender

hands of deception)

Here I am
making my way through the labyrinth
throwing open the doors of perception
peeking in and out of recollections dreamscapes
closets filled with ghosts of the past fears of the present
(nowhere to hide)
Let's face it...
I'm TRAPPED in my mind !
I'm never getting out!
Even my clothes complain
She never takes me anywhere!

And then…
the endless mirrors
two-way mirrors like--
It's not through healing that you will love yourself
It's through love that you will heal yourself
All the mirrors have memories of course--
my guide for one…
Others… large small convex
distorted ones like Fun House mirrors
or the ones in insane asylums
(let's not go there)
broken cracked shattered memories
through the looking-glass memories
all fragmented
like my life
like the lies I tell myself
like the lens of my camera
Every moment a selfie!

Is it time yet?

Ohhhh alright alright
I confess
there ARE these secret places
where I keep my intimate wounds--
wounds in the likeness of Christ and Gloria Steinem
weeping wounds leaking wounds

black toxic holes I operate from and don't *want* to heal
(please don't look at me like that)
some ...
I I can't tell you...I'm too ashamed to say...
I mean... these walls have ears you know
MY OWN CELLS!! are hanging on every word!
(talk about betrayal)

And yet
sighhhhhhhh
the face we *don't* show
often bares the truest reflection

Every day I look into God's Mirror
Every night Death looks into mine
Sometimes I scream
  silently into my pillow
Sometimes I *want* to forget
Sometimes I can't remember
  where the pain is coming from
Even my tears are shaped like question marks!
Only who *is asking* the questions?

Is it time yet?

Antonia Alexandra Klimenko was first introduced on the BBC and to the literary world by the legendary James Meary Tambimuttu of Poetry London–-publisher of T.S. Eliot, Dylan Thomas, Henry Miller and Bob Dylan, to name a few. his death, it was his friend, the late great Kathleen Raine, who took an interest in her writing and encouraged her to publish. A nominee for the Pushcart Prize, The Best of the Net, and a former San Francisco Poetry Slam Champion, she is widely published. Her work has appeared in (among others) XXI Century World Literature (which she represents France) and Maintenant : Journal of Contemporary Dada Writing and Art archived at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. and New York's Museum of Modern Art. She is the recipient of two grants: one from Poets in Need, of which Michael (100 Thousand Poets for Change) Rothenberg is a co-founder; the second—the 2018 Generosity Award bestowed on her by Kathleen Spivack and Joseph Murray for her outstanding service to international writers through SpokenWord Paris where she is Writer/ Poet in Residence. Her collected poems *On the Way to Invisible* is forthcoming in 2023.

THE WATCHERS FROM THE FLOOD

Between the green exuberance of fresh days,
The deep, contrasting inks of summer's shade,
The residue where troubling darkness sways,
Assertive in each wave - yet part afraid;
The deep contrasting inks of summer's shade
Conceal the eyes that watch but are not seen,
All hidden by each wave, yet half afraid,
They flood with death and what each death must mean;
Concealed in eyes that watch but are not seen,
The older days, when all was bright and true,
Before the flood that proved what death must mean;
And who now plucks the rose that Isis knew?
Impressions, loves and joys are left unsaid,
In all those drowning gardens of the dead.

GRAVEN FLOWERS

She sighed – she said, *"The flowers of this world*
Belong to me, I'm done with people now;
But give me snowdrops, when huddled sleep is stirred,
Shade-brooding with a silence on each brow,
A ghost on every brow for what has been;
Then daffodils – which bloom to comfort Christ
In dark Gethsemane – while others only dream
On stony earth, in blankets stiff with ice;
And He, alone, to see the promise made.
Then Summer's span, when foxgloves blow with chimes;
Wisteria, in her amethyst cascade,
Before the Autumn's crocus – waning times
When evening glides to Winter, bowed and lost;
Deep Winter and the graven flowers of frost."

COUNTRY BURR

Short Story
by Gary Bills

Penshaw Vicarage
Herefordshire,
November 4th, 1876.

My Dear Old Friend, -
In the Love and Service of Christ.

You ask me how I could contemplate leaving our Church and embracing, instead, the Sacraments of Rome. Why do you express surprise in your letter? You and I have ever been High Church, since our days together at Oxford, and for me it is a natural progression, as my time in this world draws to a likely close...

Ah, I shudder at my words and hesitate; and indeed, I am *truly* sorry, if I put you to the torture like this! But upon this reflection, concerning my dwindling prospects, I believe it is only *wise* to look to the Holy See for solace and salvation. Indeed, there must be powers on this earth, and by this, I mean *benign* forces, raising the banners of Grace; and these must stand firm against the onslaughts of the Devil. You must comprehend, I have encountered the agents of malice and shadow. They are real and they have cursed me, with the relentless affliction of consumption.

Our own Church offers no consolation. Our Bishop does not believe in curses, and so he refuses to lift a potent curse, even if he might. You asked about my meeting with the Right Reverend. Well, as he had troubled himself to visit an ailing colleague, I decided to play the courteous host, as best I could. I poured him a glass of port and watched him observe its fire-flickered ruby depths. But while the logs in the hearth spat and crackled, I reflected upon the damn odd business we are in, dear friend. After all, we are priests of an increasingly practical church, and one which does not believe in the supernatural, in these modern days, and perhaps has *never* believed.

“Dark Age superstition!” That is what the Bishop told me. “Dark Age superstition...”

And to an extent, I do *agree* with him. Allow the rustics outside the vicarage door to cherish their witch bottles, or the dripping hearts of calves impaled with thorns; for the general world has moved on, and the Devil must make do with a knee-patched congregation, should he wish to hold an infernal Mass on Sabins Hill, as of yore. The folks in our pews are still ignorant; they are childish souls, my dear old friend, and they blink in the light of a progress which they can never comprehend. The great machines are coming to their fields, and then, - and *then*, what shall be the purpose of the peasant? Can we blame them, truly, if they cling to arcane rituals? Can you condemn them, or I, or the Bishop – yes, even the Right Reverend, with his superior sneer and his measuring little eyes, like two black marbles.... I ask you, can we blame the rural poor for seeking power, when they have none?

The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate, and so on, *ad infinitum*. But why must the wretched *endure* their wretchedness? If they are slighted or humiliated by their superiors, what recourse shall they have? The Bishop is confident of forelocks being tugged as he rides by, in his shiny black carriage. God, it seems, may occasionally listen to prayers from those with Oxford accents, such as ourselves. (This, indeed, is the basis of our profession.) But the Devil – ah, old bargaining Beelzebub! I say the Devil is a good listener, especially when he hears a country burr, making its supplications.

For myself, I have no doubt that Eleanor Grove had the cocked ear of Satan. Her desire was the elimination of a love rival, for young girls often feel the keen pangs of jealousy. All it took was a request, written on a scrap of lead six inches square, - that is *all* it took for another young servant, called Becky Northrop, to wither in sickness and die, from *consumption*. Then Eleanor might have been free to marry the groom, a personable young man called Elias Mortlake; and Eleanor's malice might well have remained undiscovered. However, the lady of the house, old Mrs Altringham of Wither's Court – she was soon in possession of Eleanor's leaden curse, after a chimney sweep discovered it, on a ledge in the main parlour chimney. Note, the *main parlour!* Only the finest room for Lucifer! But I digress. Mrs Altringham recognised Eleanor's scratchy handwriting, and she was dismissed; and this is where my misfortunes began. You see, Mrs Altringham asked me to call, because she felt as if a baleful shadow had been laid upon her home. In particular, she was especially aggrieved that Eleanor's curse had been found in the parlour and not the servants' quarters. That would have been more acceptable, for servants and the Devil should know their place!

It was then, at Wither's Court, that I was first examined Eleanor's leaden curse, and the outcome left me perplexed.

Even considering the pressure of hand it must take to engrave any clear message in lead, young Eleanor's hand was scratchy, childish and difficult to discern. But there was more than spite and ignorance there. Somehow, Eleanor had set down the names of actual demons! There was poor Becky's name, and this was surrounded by the spiteful Princes of Hell, or at least a fair old gaggle of that diabolical crew! Yes, those names were familiar to *me,* as one who had studied such matters; but they are to be found *only* in arcane chronicles, many of those on parchment, and centuries old. Those names are not to be found in The Book of Common Prayer! I shall not give them here, for why encourage the damned and the damnable? But yes, Eleanor Grove was acquainted with the titles and tasks of demons. From *whence* came that knowledge, in a girl who could barely scribble her own name?

No more fruitless speculation. I did my duty at Wither's Court. I blessed each and every room, - except for the closets, (where, at that old pile, one may encounter *regrettable* stinks. I did not enter there!) But I was more than generous with my flask of Holy Water. I determined to be brisk in my boots, however, as a man in his prime; and soon enough the business was over and it was time to leave.

"Is it all done then? "asked Mrs Altringham, somewhat curtly, as if I were her window cleaner, and not the vicar. But her thanks were profound enough; and it is gratifying work, it is not, to be praised and respected for sprinkling and muttering, with a practised, solemn expression on one's face? And pleasant, it was, to be seated again on my tidy grey pony, and to experience the reassuring jog-jog-jog of a journey to one's own front door. It was still midsummer, and the golden light of evening was lying, side by side, with lengthening shadows on the fields, and the flower meadows were yielding their subtle, bitter-sweet scents, as I passed by.

I realised how night would shortly be upon me; but as I had reached Martha's Cross, with only a mile to complete, I was not unduly troubled by the lateness of the hour. What *did* disturb me was the apparition of Eleanor Grove; and I say *apparition,* for she seemed more spirit than flesh, being dressed in a yellowing tatter of a smock, with her white skin peeping through, - a little here, and a little more there...

I had heard disturbing tales of her fall, since her dismissal, such as how she had sold herself to farming folk on market day, at Hetringham, and how she had been caught stealing eggs at Beckett's Farm. Her paleness, her condition, her squalor barely surprised me, therefore; but she gave me a jolt by grabbing my bridle, with a quickness I could barely countenance, and thereby bringing me to a halt. All this transpired while my thoughts were in turmoil. *How* had she appeared, so suddenly and so near? A moment ago, the lane was empty, as it wound its way between the hawthorn hedgerows, and the foamy verges of cow parsley. Yes, she had materialised from nowhere, in the manner of a phantom; but her hand upon my knee, and her imploring whine, made me certain that she was *merely* ailing flesh and blood, and that she was famished and afraid. Well, ghosts - being damned - may do well to be afraid, as outcasts from the Lord. But tell me, what ghost can feel the pangs of hunger? No, Eleanor Grove was still among the living, - I was *convinced* of it; and as I studied her red-rimmed eyes, her matted black hair and the encrusted sores upon her brow, I almost felt deep pity for the girl. I *almost* relented when she asked me to turn back to Wither's Court, where I might beg for her to be forgiven, and where I might ask Mrs Altringham to reinstate her, perhaps.

"I don't need no pay from her," she told me. "Only my bed and my vittles.."
As I say, pity is a curious enchantment. One moment, it is potent, and the next, quite broken. When Eleanor Grove then suggested how I might lie with her for a sixpence, out of Christian charity, I responded with a single blow from my riding crop, which left her with a welt across her nose, and her right cheek. I am most sorry for that; but not sorry that I rode on with a flick of my reins. She was weeping and howling on the verge, among the cow parsley. But I still continued on my way, for she had tempted me, and I had triumphed.

That night, it seems, my conscience was suffering, for my dream was of Eleanor, with her damaged face. Once more I gazed into her red-rimmed eyes, and I was about to apologise, as a Christian man should; but she turned her back and walked down the lane, away from me. It was a curious, floating motion she displayed, as if she were subject to the impudence of every breeze, and her yellowing smock was adrift about the contours of her comely, slender form. It was evening, in my dream, and she walked towards a sunset, which was bathing the verges and the hedgerows with a steady amber light, until they had no colours of their own. Then Eleanor was gone, as if she had simply stepped into the sun, which was sinking low on the horizon, beneath a band of fiery, orange cloud.

No more of fanciful dreams! Let me bring you, old friend, to the next day, when I was alerted by a single heavy knock, upon my front door. This was curious – *unexpected*, for I was anticipating no significant visitor. I was up from my study and in the hallway before a servant might respond, for I confess to a baleful weight in my breast, as if I had a foreboding of ill tidings. The knock was for my attention and mine alone. I felt it in my bones! And what did I discover, when I opened the door? Well, - no familiar face was there to greet me, but on the wrought iron doormat was another leaden curse, and this one bore my name, and around my name were names of malice – formidable demons, armed with their weapons of disease and misfortune.

Although still troubled by my encounter with Eleanor, and my subsequent dream of the girl, I was struck initially by the impudence of such a spiritual assault; after all, are we not ordained ministers of Christendom? Surely, it would take more than a square of lead and malice to bring me down? I had no doubt, of course, that Eleanor Grove had paid me a visit. Perhaps she was out still there, in my garden, hiding in a laurel bush to see my reaction? I determined to show no alarm, and so I laughed out loud. I *forced* my mirth; I laughed and laughed like a Bedlam fool, until a felt a dull thump in my chest, as if an invisible spirit had attacked me with its fist. It was then I tasted blood, - the sudden liquid warmth and tang of salt, and so began my episode of coughing, and nightly sweats, and gnawing aches. So it was, the curse took its affect, and my days in this world were foreshortened.

I am still coughing blood. My handkerchiefs are sodden and crimson, and Doctor Miles has advised me that I must consider the advice which was once given to poor John Keats, namely, to seek the warmer climes of Italy, because I will not survive another bitter English winter. However, you know how Keats fared in Rome, dear friend? You understand the ghastly, *inevitable* outcome? I must confess, the idea of being in the Holy City at last is enough to give me joyous palpitations. I would go, gladly – but not like this. Not like *this*.

No, I must remain. I must be stoical and trust to God's plan, for I know I may be cured, if I have faith. But *how* shall I have faith, when our own Bishop does not believe in miracles, as I have inferred? Meanwhile, I am troubled by nightmares.

Two nights after I received the leaden curse, I fancied in my sleep that the Devil himself paid me a visit. He sat beside my bed and mopped my fevered brow, and there was tenderness in his ministrations. I should have been sorely afraid; but he was handsome of form, with a thin, elegant moustache and sleek black

hair. However, his eyes were most memorable, for they were grey and swimming with pain and compassion. He never tried to deceive me, even when he raised his cup of filth and lies and offered to make me whole again. He told me what it meant, to sip from the ebony grail, and I was sorely tempted, for I *do* so want to live, dear friend – ten years more, five years, three... *even* at the expense of my soul. But the angels must have intervened, for I awoke, as the Devil was raising me from my pillow; even as he urged me to drink and drink deeply.

My chamber was grey with morning, and a wardrobe leaned towards me as if to overhear my mumbled confusions. The walls, too, would not keep still. Oaken panels rushed towards me and then retreated so far – so far, I felt as if I were lying in a vast, echoing sepulchre, where only my whimpers could be heard.

I determined to shut my eyes and reflect upon my encounter with Lucifer, and once again I considered how we wrong the poor and ignorant in our charge; for we condemn them from the pulpit for making a barley poppet, or for dancing to drums and midnight fiddles, to save the blighted orchards. Their lives, dear friend, are merely precarious, for a bad harvest can mean starvation, while they must endure every insult, every cruelty and each privation, just to labour for their Masters and earn their bread and board. I ask again, where is God in all this, - I mean, where is God for *them?* No, I shall not condemn them for turning, on occasions, to another power; for making use of *witchcraft*. After all, what *other* power will harken to the wretched? I, myself, am numbered among the wretched.

These were my disturbing considerations as I roused myself at last and prepared for the Bishop's visit, for that was the very day when he would arrive. However, you know already the outcome of that particular episode; and by then I was more than half-set on other courses, and they would not require his blessing and compliance.

That evening, after the Bishop's carriage had trundled away, over the crackling gravels of my drive, I summoned fat Mrs Rickerby to my parlour. She is my cook, of course; but I had the intention of also making her my informant. You must comprehend, she is the finest gossip in Penshaw and her husband is the greatest soak. He is seldom out of the Beauchamp Arms. Between them, they will know if a rabbit breaks wind on Downside Meadows! Rabbits, however, were not my prime concern. It was news of Eleanor Grove I desired. But in this I was both shocked and disappointed. In truth, what she told me set me coughing

again, and I caught the revulsion in her sly, squinty eyes, as my handkerchief was mightily stained with gore.

She told me that Eleanor Grove “had been found a-hanging", above the stream at Binley, at least one full week ago. She had been buried in unconsecrated ground, at the expense of Binley Parish. But how could this be? *How the devil could this be?* I had met with Eleanor, apparently – talked with her – and I had struck her too. But that was several days *after* her apparent act of self-destruction! (Might there have been a mistake? Were the folks at Binley *certain* it was Eleanor? For now, however, I must assume the worst...)
Still with my handkerchief to my lips, I gestured to Mrs Rickerby to waddle from my parlour and to leave me alone, if not in peace. My plans – my hopes, my salvation... all in tatters, for how does one apologise to a ghost? I had planned, as a good Christian fellow, to seek Eleanor’s forgiveness and also her assistance. Surely, a leaden curse, though given, can also be taken back? But now, I ask you... where were my prospects?

And so, - and so, I await a letter. Father John Newman was my father’s friend, at the University, and I hear he is well-regarded by the Mother Church, in Rome. I have written to him, appertaining to these matters of body and soul, and I seek his instruction. They say he is a holy man, and possibly a saint; and I see you frown at this, for you will think I am corresponding for a miracle. No, dear friend, I merely await his reply; and therefore, you must imagine me, a singular figure in the parlour window, looking for the post that never comes.
I notice how the leaves have fallen early this autumn, and those which remain are a dull bronze, without the customary splendour of this season. You smile at my indolence? But what else should I do, but watch the world grow old? Aside from this, I cough, dear friend.

I cough, and I cough.

Gary Bills was born at Wordsley, near Stourbridge. He took his first degree at Durham University, where he studied English, and he has subsequently worked as a journalist. He is currently the fiction editor for Poetry on the Lake, and he has recently gained his MA in Creative Writing at BCU, with a distinction.

He has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize for his post-modernist epic poem, Bredbeddle's Well, which was published in Lothlorien in 2022.

Gary's poetry has appeared in numerous publications, including The Guardian, Magma, HQ and Acumen, and he has had three full collections published, – “The Echo and the Breath” (Peterloo Poets, 2001); “The Ridiculous Nests of the Heart” (bluechrome, 2003); and “Laws for Honey” (erbacce 2020). In 2005, he edited “The Review of Contemporary Poetry”, for bluechrome.

His work has been translated in to German, Romanian and Italian. A US-based indie publisher, The Little French, published his first novel, “A Letter for Alice” in 2019, and a collection of stories, “Bizarre Fables”, in 2021. These were illustrated by his wife, Heather E. Geddes. His second novel, "Sleep not my Wanton", came out in January 2022.

"Sleep Not..." is due out again shortly as an audio book, as possibly as a hardback.

Ask for Whom the Bell Tolls

After my father passed away
in a retirement home in Florida,
I notified his relatives left
in his village in Transylvania.
A cousin wrote back to say
they had the church bells rung
to announce my father’s death,
but for whom did the bells toll?

Hungarian Transylvania was given
to Romania after World War l
and Hungarians suddenly became
a minority on their own soil.
The village of Turterebes, where
Papa was born and raised amidst
rolling hills covered with vineyards,
was rapidly renamed Turulung
and became one of three villages
in a commune in Satu Mare county.

Through heavy taxation, Papa’s

family lost vineyards their father
died for in a steel mill in America,
their land to be shared equally
by all who lived in the commune.
Residents were forced to speak
Romanian until they forgot
Hungarian and native customs.
People claimed there was no one
poorer than a Hungarian in Romania.

Bad diets and worse health care
killed many in the commune,
including Papa's fifty-year-old son.
When he died, Romanian coins
placed in his palms paid for his
forty-day passage to the afterlife
according to Romanian belief,
and the Hungarian tradition of
mourning portraits was no more.
In my heart, I still hear the bells
tolling for an ethnic minority whose
culture, language, and idyllic life
were wiped out in a single generation.

My Catholic Mother's Jewish Sister

On a recent birthday visit, my daughter,
Laura, casually remarked: "Grandma told me
her Jewish sister died in a concentration camp."
I shook my head. "No, she was an only child,
Catholic for generations," I insisted. "It's not
possible." Laura was only ten when she
heard this, and asked no more as she did
not know what a concentration camp was.

Yet Mama, dead now for forty-two years,
said *sister.* Not *foster sister. Jewish sister.*
Why didn't Mama tell me as well and why

didn't Laura mention it for over forty years?

The answers must be in my family history.
My grandmother Mary could not marry
Mama's father who neglected to tell her
he was already married and a father.
Mary had Mama baptized and left her
in a Catholic orphanage in Budapest.
Escaping to America, Mary promised
to send for her child. A Catholic family
from a village on the Great Hungarian Plain
fostered Mama until her mother sent for her
when she was seventeen, but Mary, very ill,
died before Mama's ship reached New York
so she never met either one of her parents.

But none of this told me how Mama had
a Jewish sister. The answer lay in a journal
Mama kept in Hungarian. In 1969,
forty-five years after she left Hungary,
Mama returned to visit her foster sister.
After the visit, she allowed two days
to visit the orphanage where she was left
in Budapest. Nuns searched and found
her mother's name in their log. Beside "father"
was his name and one word: *zsido.* Jewish.

Slowly, the older nuns remembered facts
of value. In 1944, Germans sent 424,000
Hungarian Jews from Budapest to Auschwitz
in the space of eight weeks. Could Mama's
father and his family have been among them?

The nuns told Mama to visit a synagogue
that kept records of what happened to Jews.
Mama found her father's name and the fact
that he and his wife had died before the war,
but daughter Judit and her family were loaded
onto a cramped cattle car—intensely hot
hot in the summer, freezing in the winter,
without food or water, only a bucket latrine.

It took two days to reach the "Gate of Death"
at Auschwitz-Birkenau, where they gassed
six thousand Jews and Roma every day
and killed over a million in five years.

Laura, who thought I knew, told me Mama
often cried at night during Laura's sleepovers,
calling out "Judit" as she tossed and turned.

I remembered visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau
years ago and standing in front of a glass wall
displaying forty thousand pairs of worn shoes
thrown into gigantic piles. I felt tears stain
my cheeks, never dreaming some of the shoes
might have belonged to someone related to me.

Jewish friends told me many people who lost
relatives in the Holocaust often did not tell
others as it was too painful to even mention.
I finally found the answer to my question.
For all the relatives that I never met over time—
both Catholic and Jewish, I offer this blessing:
"May they all rest easy in sleep eternal."

Where Did It Come From?

Did you ever wonder
where it came from,
that spark that ignites
ideas into fiery poems?
My immigrant mother,
allowed only six years
of schooling, read all
the time, and visited
a poet's museum on
her return to Hungary
forty-five years later.
Did she hear his work

read aloud in school,
torching glowing embers?
Was the yearning there
for the rest of her life,
but extinguished by lack
of oxygen in opportunity?
Was the attraction for words
ingrained in genes from
a governess mother
or policeman father,
neither of whom she knew?
After reading my first poem,
she drove me to an auction
and bought me an antique
Underwood, giving me
the kindling to let words,
like flames, leap into the air.
Did my mother recognize
that her passion for words
had set other minds ablaze
and realize that she had passed
her inner fire on to me?

Margaret Duda's book of poetry entitled "I Come from Immigrants" is published and will be available on Amazon, Kelsay Books, and from Margaret the beginning of July. It will include 121 pages with 26 photos (some over 100 years old) and 38 narrative poems.

She is the recipient of a Pushcart Prize nomination. Margaret has published numerous short stories, one of which made the distinctive list of Best American Short Stories, five books and numerous non-fiction articles, and is also working on a novel set in a steel mill town in the Mon Valley.

Alchemy

The alchemy
Of the universe
Sounds stupid
I know
But it's the truth
Of things
It's how it all goes down
In dark alleys
And in the bright sun
It's how everything
Transpires
In one moving mass
Of simultaneity
On the fringes
Of time spun

Another Morning

Chasing life
On broken wings of time
Learning through experience
Not knowledge
Connected to the ideals
Of loss and growing
Through the lessons
Of inevitable demise
But stepping into tomorrow
And the promise
Of another burning sun
Leaves me breathless
In the light of morning
And eager to arise

Depths

In the realm of deep love
Where the heart's gentle whispers
Blend with the ethereal hues
Of passion
There exists a sanctuary of emotions
Untamed
A realm beyond the confines
Of reason
Where the tides of ardour surge
And recede
With a rhythm and flutter
In a symphony that reverberates
Vulnerability and strength
Entwined like ivy over everything
Tapestries woven
With the threads of shared experience
Mosaics and memories
Alchemy in seamless unity
An unspoken language
Between stars
Scattered across the night sky
Above stormy seas
Where trust becomes the compass
And we face tempests together
Holding on as we melt
Into solace and strength
And loss
An ever-evolving story
Boundless
Transformative
The infinite capacity
Of the human heart
Expressed
In the softest hues
Upon the universe
For all eternity
To witness

Into the Wind

An unknown adventure
Into unknown space
The loosening
Of our riggings
Over time
With slack sails set
Toward the wind
To the tune of change
Cutting
Through white noise
Ecstasy and anguish
To the other side
Of dreams
With the old country gone
And the new one
Deconstructed
Stratified in the grip
Of a new kind
Of eternity

Journey

Taking the hand
Of the lady
Of the lake
On a hero's journey
Of self-discovery
Over battlefields
Of swords and grails
Wielding words
Of broken sorrow
Water goddesses
And hard hewn glory
Along a brand-new path
Of creation

With Merlin’s wisdom
In the stone
And old circles
Spinning into tomorrow

Spirit

Dancing on the precipice
Of uncertainty
Unyielding to the weight
Of doubt
An oasis in the desert
Of desolation
Undeterred by tempest might
Whispering tomorrow's promise
To weary hearts
To persevere
To dream and strive
And to hold the ember
Of the human spirit
Tenderly

John Drudge is a social worker working in the field of disability management and holds degrees in social work, rehabilitation services, and psychology. He is the author of four books of poetry: “March” (2019), “The Seasons of Us” (2019), New Days (2020), and Fragments (2021). His work has appeared widely in numerous literary journals, magazines, and anthologies internationally. John is also a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee and lives in Caledon Ontario, Canada with his wife and two children.

Haiku

cold moon
beneath a cirrus cloud
a black rose

Indian Pipe
in the darkest of forests
raindrops from his skin

shadows stalking
sunlit hues lend light
to his darkest thoughts

almond eyes bewitching cotton fields

square watermelons
line the market stall
- Tokyo girl

star of saka
turning two prayer wheels
at once

healing ritual
the courage to blossom
strawberry moon

half moon
clouds float by in a
thoughtful sky

By **Katherine E Winnick** - Brighton UK.

Bird Haiku by Maurizio Brancaleoni - Translation Italian-English

feritoia:

uccellini a piombo*

senza una nota

* gioco di parole tra 'piombo' (proiettili) e l'espressione 'cadere a piombo'.

embrasure —
little birds are lead* down
without a note

* pun on 'lead' (bullets) and the past tense of the verb 'lead'.

pausa pranzo:
dopo due briciole
marcato dal piccione

lunch break —
after two crumbs
marked by the pigeon

giorno di spesa:
un passero becca
tra i rifiuti

shopping day —
a sparrow pecks
amid the litter

prima colomba
su Google: pronta per la
consegna a casa

first Colomba
on Google — ready for
home delivery

tende da sole:
gare d'albe escrezioni
da rossi embrici

sun awnings —
competing in albous excreta
from red pantiles

Muyassar Kurdi —
quell'uccello nero
incastrato in gola

Muyassar Kurdi —
that black bird
stuck in the throat

Maurizio Brancaleoni is a writer and translator. His poems and short stories have been widely published in several journals and anthologies. He has a bilingual blog where he posts literary gems, interviews and translations: https://leisurespotblog.blogspot.com/

Le Passe-muraille

Born of a doomed nature,
this now bronzed trickster,

the-passer-through-walls,
his powers lost,
forever elaborately cemented
halfway between steps.

This man used his talent
to conduct forbidden acts of
treachery, malignancy,
walking through walls to seduce and to steal.

And the doctor whose crushing bridle
halted his forward march toward all his destructions,
taught him an occult truth that
he learned too late.

When given any gift in life,
one must use that gift with good intentions.

The Well

One hundred ships sunk
with deleterious results.

Their masts built of stone
could not survive
interlocked storms
that raged for days.

Transporters of violent messaging,
submerged.

Blurting meaningless elaborations
within false stories.
Authors of treachery
in their quest for fame,
now languishing
in the well of darkness
everlastingly.

Hordes

The hordes
stagger before the wise counsel.
The masses shake their heads.

More serious are
irresponsible deaths in autumn,
when the masses choke on tears.

Thunderstorms submerged under the dance,
the final count of the weighted battle
seeks irony.
The masses cheer.

The wisdom inherent

in a bad day
still gleams.
The masses ponder.

Hordes
stand bleak
before a firmament
of silent wishes,
and, the masses float in reverie.

Vigil Within The Vernal Equinox

Cool bravery
and evidence of valour observed.
Bold conferences held
using voices spoken in silver tones.
The tender aspects of human nature,
bound together,
woven together,
along with infinite compassion
written within the text.

Relaxed and graceful poses
sit as active ideas,
promising roles developing
the first rate importance of,
the lasting significance of,
the warm divinity of legendary kings,

within a momentous spring equinox.

Aliens We Were

We were launched in a time
of supernatural splendour.
We travelled distances
measured as stars.

We were new invaders.
We didn't bear much resemblance
to fin, feather, fauna.
We were disturbingly different forms,
plodding and sombre,
otherworldly,
alien.

We were
figures emerging from wombs,
figures dissolving into dust.

And after all the ages,
we became imaginary forms,
in some ways amorphous,
while this sphere still rolled,
this sphere we tried to call home.

Linda Imbler's poetry collections include seven published paperbacks: *Big Questions, Little Sleep, Big Questions, Little Sleep* second edition (expanded with 66 additional poems); *Lost and Found*; *Red Is The Sunrise*; *Bus Lights*; *Travel Sight*; *Spica's Frequency;* and *Doubt and Truth.* Soma Publishing has published her four e-book collections, *The Sea's Secret Song*; *Pairings*, a hybrid of short fiction and poetry; *That Fifth Element*; and *Per Quindecim*. Her new book, *Rhythms Told*, will be published in the future. Examples of Linda's poetry and a listing of publications can be found atlindaspoetryblog.blogspot.com

Dream

I open a mailbox on the
street. Inside,
a note addressed to me, from
the "Commissioner of Poetry."
My poem "Show and Tell" has been
selected winner of the big contest.
I need report immediately to the
auditorium to read the winning entry--but
I cannot find the poem in my papers
and I rush to the library, frantic, to look-up the
poem on computer, but
all the computers are being used, and
the librarian, who looks like Dracula's daughter,
tells me to go home and
read
GONE WITH THE WIND.

Bought-a-Gun

A hirsute man who
got his kicks tying-up
chicks; everyone thought
him hippy-dippy but he
macho, man.
A Northwest cutie,
Dick Bought-a-Gun;
he wrote a funny book
(more than one) and
extended his metaphors far out
on the limb--then sent them
further.
He wore a hat shaped like a bullet
or the head of a dick, which
he could be
(and can't we all?)

in less poetic moments.

The hands of the clock
swirl round--
my pictures jump off the
wall to save me, but
cannot;
the radio knows my pain, but
its neutered sympathy annoys me.
I surf stations but
never get anywhere
I want to be
so sit
stranded,
beached, on the shore
of myself.

the Worm of Time gnawing
a fistula
through a Dead Sea shell
of apathy, indifference, and
fear of the
not-here
yet,
phantasms of drear
my dears
(cut to sob-story
in a yellow-drama;
cut-away
suits,
the mustard,
the crap...).

Bird song and
faint sun in the
window of time
passing, like a
dream of being

alive--sent to
earth for a purpose
yet unrealized--un-
known--work fingers
to the bone for
karmic deliverance
and end of birth/death
cycle of existences
innumerable,
inkalpable...
Yah.

People around here have small heads, big
stomachs, and
hop like kangaroos.
It's a zoo.

gangster editor of nature
poetry magazine running
a pay to publish racket
cuts me from the line-up

FB headline:
'tragic ending at 400-meter relay'
--runner dropped the baton

"You Are Loved"

the mural on the building
reads (an anaemic mix
of blue & green.)
By who?
Hoo.
Whom?
The bank loves me.

The store likes me.
Everyone else:
lukewarm.

Wayne F. Burke's poetry has been widely published in print and online (including in LOTHLORIEN Poetry Journal. Burke's most recent published book is BUKOWSKI the Ubermensch, Cyberwit.net., 2023. He lives in the state of Vermont (USA).

The Desired Heaven

Toddling into the caves
Endorsing backward dogmas
Retrieved Dabiq would be?
Reading weak hadith
Of the Christian-Muslim fight to conquer
Constantinople

Raids, more bloodshed
Instilling practices of the devil instead
Suicide bomber destroying his nest
Manipulated he may seem for the sake of
martyrdom, a lifetime test
Thinking what he's doing is best.

Is he worth the intended heaven?
Seeking tainted indulgences!
Eradication we need, of
Vile, sordid deed
Impeach him and his ilk
Living together under One Heaven...

The Quranic School

At dawn, the father carries the sacred book
Accompanies his son to the quasi academic institute
Ignoring he'd be caught like a fish hook
What a bluff, the wicked Islamic clerics, constitute

At noon, #humblebrag diffuses the news
Enlightening the ordinary citizens' minds
Childhood desecrated: check the host's interviews
Of most alarming situation, she reminds:
Dogma of dark brews,
Destructive ideas mirror tainted behinds

At night, father , unable to sleep
Nightmarish days do creep
His wife begins to weep
A foggy future where shame is deep…

God Spoke to Her

Blessed she was
Endowed with a sense of glory
A soldier she was
Carrying loads of accusations
A heavy burden on Her frail shoulders
Blasphemy…
Hats off to the great warrior
Her war was just
She was defying decaying norms
She fought for a cause
Blessed she was
Her gentle voice sang in tune with celestial wisdom
Her revelation was heavenly, no doubt

Meek she was, they take it into account
A saint like that deserves to be burnt at the stake?
A saint like that is worth
Commemoration
Recognition
Lifeless statue as
She is still alive
Her sword is stainless
It decapitates/ slashes/ slaughters/ avenges …
Her soul is still here
Hovering over
Calling for freedom
They ignored how much
She was blessed
On a mountain
A young lady approaches her
Whispering in her ear

I Lyric to the Critic

Walk in awe
Not a foe
The world saw…
Move forward, mate
Get into the consulate
Last stride
The fruit of much pride
Criticism of the regime
Boosted your self-esteem
Decry the climate of fear and intimidation
Speak on behalf of a repressed Nation

The threat was a test
To honour you not
Chokehold by a rogue,
Dismembering the dissident

With a bone saw
Was not in vogue.

Decry thug life
Decry the canon
Betray not the fellow
Still languishing in prison
You did defy, but
Men in subservient roles could not…

Dr. Anissa Sboui is a University teacher and poet from Sousse, Tunisia. She is the writer of six volumes: Rebirth (2018), Transcend (2019), Number One (2020), The Co-Avid Breath (2021), Hurricane (2022), Halcyon and Screaming Earth (2023).

She wrote three short stories: “The Moody Bookworm”, “Alone” and “Coincidence” along with three volumes in Arabic. She also produced two books titled Literary Reflections and Representations: A Series of Critical Essays (2022) and ‘Hurrying Truth’ in the Poetry of Anne Sexton (2023).

She also published a number of research papers in prestigious journals:

Praxis International Journal of Social Science and Literature

International Review of Literary Studies IRLS

The International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI)

Loops

A white and glossy thing
sends a signal to my myopic eyes.
The wind sways the sheet
of codes hanging on my
neighbour's clothesline.

The midday waiting for the rain rolls into
late afternoon waiting.
From the first floor boudoir
I see and do not - a pair of shears
hidden in the green,
some shrapnel of bad mood
spilled through the bad wood
of an old drawer.

I try to decipher, and you smile,
"No. No. No. Not all the codes
convey a meaning."

The Dry Spell

It hasn't been raining since it had.
I sound vague? You haven't stared at
the spearhead of a midday road.
You haven't tried to track rain and heard
the summer roar.

Everything set for the rain - that cup of tea,
those books and music, social media posts,
bad mood, sudden sex, uprooted sadness
that breathes on and perishes at the same time -
all hold a bowl.

No noise, tune, ting - the bowl remains
an arch of aching. It waits.
Nothing is nothingness; even a dry spell
gets wet with our sweating.

Halo- rainbow around my sins

(To Robert Frede Kenter)

A halo-rainbow surrounds my sins,
its glow almost motherly callous
and concerned as if she stands in
our longevous balcony and see
us playing soccer in the street
without watching us, and hence we
can be the truants from good behaviour,
moral language.

I blink. I cannot remember a rainbow
in my life let alone a halo around the sun.
I murmur, "Forgive me for leading
a monochrome life." Cold breeze
feels for my pulses, touches my neck.
"Am I alive?" I desire to ask and decides not to.

The grass smells of a memory falling
from a great height, from the parapet of Eden.
The air thronged with the particles
reminds me of how the crows circle and scream
when one of them falls. Light has fallen.
It is sundown soon. I can call you Rob
and say, "Slainté Mhaith." or hear
the sobbing water of a lake nearby.

The Obscene Gesture of a Milestone

Although the lines these lanes draw
meet at the eternity
We do not see that while parallel-driving.

Then, our ignorance holds more truths
than some knowledge and a theory.

We pass a few grazing cows, drills,

a mill without a single operating hand
and some trees withered and waiting.

As we drive the first rain hits
our car roofs as if
clouds have borne
the long-term wait's weight until
We drive past a certain milestone.

Shouldn't it state the distance to eternity?
Instead, one digit almost erased
expresses an obscenity.

Where The Nuclear Power Plant Melted Down

I hear the footsteps, do not turn, murmur,
"There, they say, roams a wolf, lone,
near the core, in the epicentre."

" I know. " Says the wolf.
I steal a peek and lower my eyes.
The beast of this radioactive zone
looks like a deformed reincarnation
of my old man. I close my eyes.
If you gaze at the wolf long enough
the wolf will leave a trace of it inside you.

Ashes still fly when wind so desires.
My hazmat suit makes me a traveller
in space sent in a sleep capsule,
and now that I have seen and reported
about the ruin they no longer need my existence.

Kushal Poddar, the author of 'Postmarked Quarantine' has eight books to his credit. He is a journalist, father, and the editor of 'Words Surfacing'. His works have been translated into twelve languages.
Twitter- https://twitter.com/Kushalpoe

For You Who Remember

I am massive, old, oldest apple tree in the orchard,
still I bear red fruit of an old-fashioned style,
too delicate to be marketed, thin-skinned
but full of juice and taste and texture.

Younger trees have been grafted to bear more sturdy orbs,
tough-skinned that they may not bruise through life's journey,
giving up a bit of lightness, moistness, --final sacrifice:
fragrance that still emanates from my solitary harvest.

There is a ladder here against the roughness of my old bark,
it is for you who remember what this fruit used to be,
that you may climb and pick a sample once again
of what we were when I was young, and what I continue,
me alone, among the orchard, you will know me,
I am massive, old, largest tree in the orchard of my father.

Gifts

I count the clouds as friends
because they draw my attention and admiration,
sometimes bring me gifts of rain, or show me
lightning against their blackness,
their sudden changes.

I have friends who show me the clouds within,
the lightning heartaches and tears that rain down,
their darkness and their sunshine surprises.

I count the birds as friends
because they show off for me in their dizzy flights,
explain patterns to me with their nesting,
take for granted their duties,
their generations.

I have friends who favour me with fancies of imagination,
such treats of special artistry quite take my breath,
I am humbled by such gifts.

Nature and mankind.
I keep them safe, these precious needs.

Glow From Old Lanterns

Somewhere in the darkness
we call everyday,
even when not looking
we see a distant glow
from an open field,
the backward glance
at memories we didn't mean
to conjure,
but there they are,
faces, incidents,
almost touchable,
mostly benign,
a few we shunt aside with
quick hard hand movements,
I will not dwell
on that difficulty,
that disappointment,
and we let the smooth
memories surround
our hearts for a split second
of our routine,
because without those shafts
of light from old lanterns,
who would we be?

White Chevy Silverados

I used to worry that I had a fixation
on these certain trucks, a strange adoration,
I'd see them around me where-ever I'd drive
it quite freaked me out, they swarmed like a hive
of giant wheeled bees in all kinds of styles,
some raised to the sky, some in low profiles,
this one had tools, several more sported canines,
some dusty and old, and some still with new shines,
there were others in colours like red, blue and green
but they didn't gather, didn't convene
the way the white ones would hover around,
toward me, behind me, in front would astound,
'til I finally resolved to my satisfaction
an answer to my seemingly mad attraction:
it wasn't the trucks I was longing to see –
those white Silverados are obsessed about me!

3rd Place, Humor, Ina Coolbrith Poet's Dinner Contest, 2019 but was not printed.

Cleo Griffith has been on the Editorial Board of Song of the San Joaquin for twenty years. Widely-published, she lives in Salida, California. Her poems have recently appeared in *Wild Roof Journal, Straylight* and *Poet's Corner, Modesto, California 2023.*

Exequy

This dissembling body (not, after all,
as advertised; not in the least as promised,
not of spirit partially comprised, some stuff
angelical intermixed with the mud,
the sludge, some substance incorruptible)
begins its disassembly; or suffers
itself to be disassembled, conspires
with its break-up into parts, junked debris,
the oxidized, the worn-to-a-transparency
components, the never-to-be-salvaged
orts and lumps.
Only so many strokes allotted,
only so many piston pumps, their finicky
limits surpassed of gasps and grunts, strangled
evacuations; only so many
cell-replications to go gentle into.

Some tropism
toward *todestrieb* must have been factored-in
at the point of manufacturing.
Exhaustion, indifference,-- to let happen,
without complaint or remediation,
whatever happens next to happen;
not *thanatos* so much as tedium,
all the adventure leached from everything,
some reek exhaled from every molecule
a cloud of *weltschmerz*,-- evidence of so much
shearing of all those cells' telomeric tails.
Drowning not waving. A suspired
slipping-under the breathtaking water,
a final yawning mutter *no mas*, *no mas*,
flesh's thanatopsis, not so much as even
a show made of resistance, of struggle,
the vaunted rage against the light's surcease
gone missing, more a sighing subsidence
to the empirical, more a sinking
into the hyle, matter's quicksand, formless,
agglutinate, stockpot waiting on new

information, ready for reassignment
your flesh (though you remain indifferent).

Here watch the being-integral becoming
one with its parts, each one distinct, separable,
dissocketed. See them catalogued and shelved,
all the parts, the parts —- the once-elegant makeshifts,
virtuoso bricolage, harbouring
such skills, such enterprise,-- abruptly
become loathly, half-rotted peripherals
preserved within oblongs of glass as once
were hand-meals in old-timey automats.
Made available for wonderment perhaps;
relics in some macabre ritual.

Down on your plastic
patellas go,
onto your knees, your knees,
pain-pricked mechanicals,
down on the stones go,
the obdurate stones,
and say your orisons, your psalms,
your home-made koans,--

then to bye-bye on the bones.

Fissiparity

Gloom as deep as combe or dingle;
clouds touch down, ashen, pewter,
disperse across ground that seems to waver,
presumed solidity abruptly
unsound. Trees in a huddled copse
are blackly wet, scarred by winter;
faces stare out from them, woven
of branch and bark. They grimace,
fleer at us, glare, seem to shake
their (what else) hoary locks.

The path we were on
has wandered out too far, has gotten
itself, and us, lost.
Alterity
has misconceived; its finale
is smithereens; a fissiparity
party.
In stars' fusion hearts,
pilot-lights snuff out. Dark matter's
disaffections Atropos beckons,
sur-named the Cutter. She string-theory's
us along.
Famine, and drought, and quantum
doubt, snick through her shears harmless,--
lethal to everything else.

Many Loves, None of Them True

The illuminati of agapé
pretend to Love's visionary company.
Eden farmers they, prophets of infinite
Earths, flaring off and out in all directions.
Stochastic multiples, as if mirrors
had echoes,-- of themselves, of you.
And all is
not only possible, but overdo.

Thus is fended the abyss (briefly)
that wished so deeply
to share its looks
with you,
O my heart,--
vain, careless, untrue.

Undistinguished Aridity

Undistinguished aridity.
A slough,
a rift, you may find you've fallen into
(despondently, forsooth), when first you tried
to outsmart creativity, sandbag the muse
whose largess, withheld, you sought to replace
with thesaurus trickery, rhetoric's
weeds, tinsel's potted poesy.
Oh that's rich!
Look ye, fallen into the prepared pit
of it! Lime-lined crevasse, with pitch defileth,
already half-replete with offal's awful
oozing, the broken-lipped mouth of the fountain
dribbling liquids, gutterals, fricatives,--

and what's this writ-on-water epitaph,
to wit?

For inspiration hard-won (genuine
as a crucifixion) you substitute
(or try to) a sleight-of-hand miscellany:
Clank of temple bells, clash of calabashes;
pentameters mis-aligned like louvers
in a window blind. Enjambments snapped off
like the closures of a trap.
Your verse is rank;
the dashing waves are dashed, their foamy
contours fibrillate; the words are floaters
at the forefronts of eyes, the lines bedraggle
themselves, couplets and stanzas and quatrains,
dust-dry, drag their mismatched feet, straggle like soldiers
do, weary after battle.
Your villainous
villanelles loll in azure-rifted cells,
fathomed chasms where your argosies ply,
or lie astraddle your red-ink Red Sea
caesurae.
Your poem of magical thinking,

thoughtlessly tossed off; your gift from the magi
a sawed-off quadratic equation;
your Bluebeard cloud-castle, how tiresome,
poetry as dreary epistle;
your winter prayer to the goddess of ice
yielding precisely that: the rattle
of sucked cubes in a cocktail glass.

An undistinguished aridity, yours;
the muse the face on the barroom floor.
Words skulk about you, shuffle here stumble there;
nothing coheres anymore. Strophes meander,
like Melmoth they wander, your antistrophes,
too, banished to the antipodes, or to
darkened rooms where your syncopations
knocks knees with your still-born conceits.
Your little
sack of rhymes it's like the piper's windy bag,
hear it skirl and squeal, a gull's high, thin *keeeel*,
bleeding out the last of your *blagues*.

Prayer in Winter

Trees in rows in winter rain.
A palisade, a wailing-wall
smudged with birds' nest remains, caught up
in twiggy mazes that crosshatch
the sky, etch glyphic staves, cuneiform
conservations.
Symbols in the wind
shapeshift; branch and tree-limb bend, dip,
skywrite black sagas in runes
of bird flights, indite heartsick
entreaties (orisons, prayers
of special pleading), to the goddess
desolation that is this world
in winter held, locked in cold's thrall
and spell.

With brevity and concision
O blandish her, and flatter, else will
never from this sublunary
vault, this place replaced by ice,
be ever anything else.

Robert McCarthy is a writer living in New York City. He prefers to use formal means to achieve lyric ends. Robert has published poetry in *Orbis*, *The Alchemy Spoon* and *Dreich Magazine*. His work has also appeared in *Yours, Poetically* and *Neologism Poetry Journal*; as well as in *Words & Whispers*, *Celestite Poetry, Fahmidan Journal, Version(9)*, *Madrigal*, *Ice Floe Press, PaddlerPress*, *Nymphs, Spare Parts, Halfway Down the Stairs, The Storms, Euphony Journal,* and others. One of Robert's poems, *Wind From Nowhere*, has been nominated for a 2022 Pushcart Prize.

Canio

Face washed
in the water, reflected
of moon
dyed white toothpaste
absinthe green
and strawberries, lips
a clown appears
over candle light
descend
in his image
through the mirror.
Hanging by one foot
to the delirious trapeze
catapulted
between laughter and applause.
Flees, with big shoes
in the street, stunned
wandering aimlessly
whispering to the stars
soaked in honey

raising his hands to his head
with awkward gait.
Three traveling fates
showing him the way
in the wind and its song
in the flight of ephemera
they appear
nine dancing muses.
To him, i gifts
dance, poetry
one hundred squares
and a jacket.
Read now
heavy shoes
and wings behind the head
he files, in art.
Laugh now, clown!

Music is female

On a cello
woman's body
compose music.
Pentagram of stars
sound waves
cosmic curves.
Merry motifs, on hair
strands.
Low torments, severe
on heavy parted lips
kisses, melodious and languid.
Stealth cadence
of rapt glances
and voice, archaic
of your warm timbre.
Angry sound
of feline virtue
elusive cat.

Soft strings
sweet caresses
romantic undertones
as of roses, parfumes.
You will play beauty
smoothly
pining you
dressed in mahogany
on a stiletto heel
in the embrace arc.

Puppet

Lost little puppet
swallowed by the sperm whale
wake up your sleep
in the sea womb
tinged with earthy roots
of your wood.
In the amniotic fluid placebo
you fluctuate
together with a dolphin.
Galloping
his horse rump
tell him a story
your fairy tale
of dreamy plaything
your happy life.
Entrusted
Pandora's box
to you, child
without sin
naughty infant
they turned you into a donkey
in the toy park
near there.
Now, on horseback
of the bottlenose dolphin, you jump

in the sea, flying
you, child
and a dolphin.
Good news
untie knots in the sails
of beautiful souls
on the free sea.

Barbara Di Sacco - Is a Tuscan poetess. She was born in 1964.

She is passionate about art, such as painting, literature, she is a lover of nature, she is inspired by all of this.

So she is born in his own soul, poetry. She says paint it, her pen is a brush. The more she writes, the more she becomes passionate about this beautiful art that captures her heart.

She tries to transform everything, painting it in love, hope and freedom.

Dream Of Kings

the arrival at last in a night of illumination
awake, alive to practice a part
yes and sleep, that demon possessor of innocent peace
elusive sweetness of a busy heart
your refusal of friendship or high communication
was the torch left burning before the throne

so we left in the morning as the dew disappeared
the soles of our shoes anticipating the heat
in search of a word imprinted and formed
on the lips of a shade who could answer in earnest
a question thus asked by the forgotten courageous
who now stop like a clock at the 3 and the 9

we were sent here to pray a prayer of thanksgiving
for the gift of the air and the water within us

for the sound of a voice vibrating through us
as we break through a new shell and helplessly fall
the time is now come, to accept our commission
a miraculous day of nutrition and song

who could it have been in yesterday's mirror
to cast such a reflection so brilliant and clear
who gave up again, the same secret denied
by the echoes of sorrow, of laughter and pride
was it truly the king as the procession began
or the dream of a jewel in an unbearable crown
now in dutiful submission a feast is prepared
one glance at the heavens, one downward cast eye
god save us, sustain us, the truth is a lie

Night Falls Upon The Silent And The Still

Night falls upon the silent and the still
Without consent, without forewarning
A descent of shadows behind imagined monoliths
Not floating, swimming, below a surface bubbling
Destiny fulfilled by the captured beasts among us
To consecrate a chalice, warm and sweet

Let us inhabit this final evening
A moment transcending the affairs to follow
In a spirit that holds no debt to the past
Or a future unconscious, invisibly draped

Alone, we break free from the chains of the flesh
No eyes to see, no fingers to touch
The hope that was promised by the cloth
We shall not clutch this fabric in the dark

Upright and strong we will stand until
There is nothing left beneath our feet
'cept the hollow shells ground into sand
Beyond the light of these ritual remains

October Rose

In the night while recalling the October Rose
Upon My Knees, I entered a room
To touch the thorn from which it flowered
Two eyes now shut to view this face
A glorious body now consumed

I set aside my recollection
To anoint with chrism these memories
The endeavour to hire the arsonist
To set ablaze this mortal temple
No more to pray or meditate
Nor visit a possibility

God given humanity now at work
Has chosen between two parallels
Mercy and Justice the extremes
Which do we claim from this day forward?

I allow the creator to look upon my efforts
As the landscape burns beyond my gaze
Paralyzed, and speaking not
The transfer of love's telepathy
With that, redemption makes way at last

A suffering, endless in its wake
A silence, where sweet music once played
And yet the Rose bloomed in October
Seen clearly from the highest peak
And on that summit the seed is planted
The ending that all must seek

And yet the Rose bloomed in October
A final kiss upon the cheek

Solstice Part One

I was just watching the moon float past
I didn't think you would even notice
from the distance where you set your foot
upon a satin covered stool.

There has never been a darker sky
to engulf an astronomer such as I
nor a brilliance flashing in the eye
of a soul so lost and vagrant.

No cloud dare to obscure the path
of this parade of dancing sorrows
these decanters empty, a dry platoon
of unsecured tomorrows.

I now look down to find the spinning earth
hidden beneath a grain of sand
how warm it once felt, as I recall
rotating in my hand.

Tonight I dive deep into eternal solace
at the center and the edge
of a universe that does not exist
beyond a heart's command.

Joe Kidd is a working, poet/songwriter/artist. In 2020, published The Invisible Waterhole, a collection of spiritual and sensual verse. Awarded by the Michigan Governor's Office and the United States House of Representatives. Joe is the current Beat Poet Laureate State of Michigan, and Official Poet of the Government of Birland North Africa. An ordained minister, he holds an Honorary Doctorate from International Union Peace Federation. He has toured Europe, North America, & Caribbean Islands, featured in international anthologies, magazines, websites, festivals, and other personal appearances. Joe is a member of National & International Beat Poet Foundation, Michigan Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame.
Author Page: https://www.amazon.com/Joe-Kidd/e/B089QYDXSM
Face Book
Page: https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100063704010587

Anamnesis

I hold the anamnesis of your kiss
under my brow.
The kiss lingers on;
fluttering in my lashes,
revealing the truth that I try to hide
The part of me that I hide from the world
leaks out from the lacrimal duct.
I am full of chaos
Peregrinating on the tarmac of
memories.
When my hands are emptied of you -
these are the things that I remember !

I remember the way
you looked at me.
Your eyes -
polyglot of many tongues
spoke to me in a familiar tone
yearning for a kiss,
never would you say it in words.
The way you drank your tea,
slurping it with a noise
something I despised.
The softness of your smile
that I could almost touch, with my pinkie.
Your smile,
while tucking my vagrant
ringlets behind my right ear
to whisper those four words –
“I am there, always’’

Someday I’ll kiss
not your lips,
but the dots between your
synchronous breaths.
Would you then
drink my love for you
in the chalice

that I've quilled
with my breaths?
Would you then let me kiss
the vast expanse of the sky
that you hide
in the macrocosm of your being?

And, would you kiss me;
one last time?
The kind of kiss
that would burn me
and the menagerie of inhibitions
that I pet?
I'll burn into cinders
and would rise
in swirls
not settling onto a feculent bog, anymore.
But manoeuvring to somewhere
or nowhere
I would evanescence
into the ether
falling
into
the
lap
of
an
eternal
rest!

Mahua Sen is a multiple award winning poet/author based out of Hyderabad, India.

THE SHIPWRECK'S BAR

The frosted shards,
For half a century tumbled by the yaw

Of the barnacled hull,
Cannot be pieced together
To articulate glassware again.

In the silence of the ocean's floor,
Erosion has rounded their edges,
Like the blunted consonants

Of syllables
A deaf man hears,
Or the slurred speech
of a drunkard;

The unindented vowels
Bereft of jags,

No longer interlocking to transmute
An anchor

Into a tanker,
Still less a tankard

HOOP ANCHOR TOP EGG

one morning, on the Tube,
Josie named each letter she saw
after the things they stand for
in her alphabet picture book

a man, with a letter tattooed
on each finger of each hand,
sat beside her, slumbering

'Hoop,' she began.
'Anchor. Top. Egg.'

'That's very good,' I said.
'Soon you'll be able to read.'

SUNDAY

She lies on her belly, naked,
As the bells of the Sacred Heart resound,
Her legs together, straight.

From sacrum to big toes a cleavage runs,
Dividing buttocks, thighs, calves, ankles, soles.

It's intersected by a second line,
The crease along the bottom's lower verge,

Completing the figure of a cross,
Which, kneeling, he bends to kiss.

Paul Demuth - I like the sound of my name 'Paul' because it chimes nicely with whoever I am.

Advent

During the War, we made a wreath
with fresh pine twigs. Four candles.
We always had candles because
the lights failed often, a power station
bombed perhaps. You never knew.

For the Advent wreath we needed
fat red ones, but white ones would do.

And I was allowed to light each one,
one every Advent Sunday, until
there were four, and Christmas
was only a second away.

I had an old Advent calendar from ‘before’,
before I was even born. Some of the little
paper doors had already given in to use.
I knew the pictures behind them
by heart and yet looked forward to seeing
them again. Old friends. A promise
of wonders to come.

And there was little Baby Jesus, and his mum,
and the donkeys, camels, sheep,
the shepherds and the star.
My uncle had whittled a crib for me.

One day the miracle became a story
like any other.

Crossing Illegally from Germany into Germany

At seven I walked that long road
past farmer Bauer’s geese, left at the church,
left again at the brook, over the small bridge,
past the school caretaker with his scary grin
to take my seat
with the local kids.
I, the refugee.
I, the one with the strange accent.
‘Heil Hitler’!

My teacher had hairy legs
and big calf muscles that went in and out,
up and down as she biked along the school path.
I stared.

Under the bridge, by the brook,
I found my friend the frog and stroked
his slimy head, his whole little body seeming
to breathe in and out fast and in panic,
but it stayed, hypnotized
by my gentle finger.

The cockerel waited by the shed. I tucked him
in under the tiny blanket of my dolls' pram.
I covered his comb with a little blue hat
my mother had crocheted
for my doll,
his wattles fell to one side,
his protective membrane closed.

The street names changed
to Marx, Engels, Lenin…
I received the coveted blue scarf,
became a Young Pioneer.
The teacher with the big, yellow teeth
taught me Russian.
Mother decided that this was enough.

In the train chugging towards the border
my attention was on Mother,
I looked at my brother.
In the wooded copse I rested my head
on the backpack I'd dropped
onto a patch of woodruff.
It also smelled of ceps.
I thought of Grandpa.
I sensed danger when Mother said
to wait for darkness.

The soldiers unfolded from the night,
standing on the higher ground, silhouetted against
the starry night sky.
The clicks of their safety catches.
Even though my brother had finally
given me his Teddy, I peed myself.

Feierabend

in English is something like ‘closing time’. A welcome relief.
After a raucous afternoon and evening, the pub’s bell

finally rings, and everyone trickles out, often somewhat reluctantly.
And there is cleaning to be done, the wet beer rings

to be wiped off the wooden tables, the glasses stowed away,
the cash counted and the books kept. The stuff no-one

has the time to do when it’s all loud voices, friendly and less
friendly ribbing, the odd overflow, hopefully in the bathroom,

the rounds generously bought, and the free beers shamefully
accepted. My grandfather, heavy boots, coming home

from the paper mill, looked forward to his ‘Feierabend’,
his closing time. My mother was tired, ready to shut shop.

My brother, tired of pain, just wanted to go home.
Father was convinced the glory awaited him after hours.

Recently I felt I was ready for a ‘closing time’, sitting down,
kicking off my shoes, relaxing and letting someone else make supper.

Guilt

They said, "We are going to meet a friend.
Sad story, her family died in a Concentration Camp."

"Are you nuts?" I said. ‘You want her
to meet me, your German friend?"

"We’ll ask," they said.
They asked. "Yes," she said.

It was a Sunday.

It was in Holland.
It was in the big old hotel.
Huge columns of old marble
that looked like freshly cut meatloaf.

A small, old woman, slightly bent, white hair,
her legs forming an inverted triangle.

She is slowly walking towards us, looking at me.
She stretches out her arms, her hands open.

Rose Mary Boehm is a German-born British national living and writing in Lima, Peru, and author of two novels as well as seven poetry collections. Her poetry has been published widely in mostly US poetry reviews (online and print). She was twice nominated for a Pushcart. Her latest: DO OCEANS HAVE UNDERWATER BORDERS? (Kelsay Books July 2022), WHISTLING IN THE DARK (Cyberwit July 2022), and SAUDADE (December 2022) are available on Amazon.

https://www.rose-mary-boehm-poet.com/
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCR9fygcz_kL4LGuYcvmC8lQ

Gloria or Prodigal Blues

I wear a St Rita medal
(My mother was Rita)
and a medical dog tag
In case I go down.

Just yesterday, said
Time didn't exist.
Tonight, I'm thinking
It goes by too fast.

It's too late to go home.

It's too late to be stupid.

The Vistells playing "Gloria"
In the gym (1967). They'd bring
the beloved former drummer up
to sit in, and the current
drummer was front and centre to sing.

It was like seeing Lake-In-The-Clouds
After climbing that trail.

The assured confidence of that
drum rolling through the chorus.

I think I'd like to sit down now
and listen to the Earth breathe.

"The Earth abides," sayeth Ecclesiastes,
Or was it George R. Stewart?

Untitled

Slow motion tide
Swirling around her feet
and hem of her long dress,
Arching her back
Playing her violin

Linda, in her zone
Forgot I was there

Sandpipers
The edge of the sea

Untitled

There used to be sunlight
and a family of
Angelfish above
In the grass,
not still
but moving gently
In the filter's current.
Somebody lost interest
And the water is foul,
The angel fish float on
the surface,
The filter is quiet.
Is somebody coming?

John Harold Olson - Is a retired Special Education teacher in Las Vegas. Transitioning to being a hospice volunteer.

My first kiss
tasted of sweat and spit
a one-star restaurant.

I am master
of nothing
and my dogs know it.

Storm

Slickers are windows for raindrops to
slide down to kneecaps and
seep through my jeans.
Slipping and
splashing, I
stomp into
puddles. I'm

soaked by the time I get home.

If sleep was an elevator

I would be stuck between floors,
pressing all the buttons,
calling for help. But help never comes.
I crawl out somehow, isn't it a dream?
Or a nightmare?
The emergency lights in the halls
I wander, flicker, strobe.
the doors are all locked,
no doorknobs, I pound them,
they're rubber.

If sleep was an elevator,
I'd take the stairs.

Fork

Two roads before me,
both carpeted with dead leaves,
gloomy under gnarled trees.
I don't know where they go,
I bet the destination
is the same. Or not.
Does it even matter?
I stab my apathy sandwich
with this fork in the road.

Nolcha Fox -Nolcha's poems have been curated in Lothlorien Poetry Journal, Alien Buddha Zine, Medusa's Kitchen, and others. Her poetry books are available on Amazon and Dancing Girl Press. Nominee for 2023 Best of The Net. Editor for Open Arts Forum and Chewers & Masticadores. Accidental interviewer/reviewer. Faker of fake news.
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Not Enough Hair on my Chinny-Chin-Chin

(a Parody of Joyce Kilmer's "Trees")

I think that I shall never see
a beard that looks half good on me,
whose chin, when hungry mouth is full,
will ne'er have hair that you can pull
though eyes, half-open wide all day,
can't see through eyebrows made of hay.

They start within around my chin
and grow without beneath my snout,
but whether I may pout or grin,
a beard, 'tis feared, I'll live without.

Birds nest above in greyest hair,
but not 'neath nose in meadows bare.
Desist from shaving? Proven vain,
for beards won't grow where they've no reign.
Oh growth, how can you be so slow
that even gods can't make it so!

Desert Deuces For Dessert (a Fibonacci verse)

Stan
and
Ollie
were jolly
by golly, with each
new mess another fine folly.

When the Dawn Came Up Like Thunder

Old Sol retired early that mid-winter afternoon.
Chill in the air, he didn't care; his warmth another's boon,
but after his long winter's nap beneath a honeyed moon
he crept up on the crack of Dawn a little bit too soon.

"I told you I have much to do, not time for much ado,
but no, your 'Lo! Let's rise and shine!' seems always right to you—
and heaven knows that you arose, just like you always do—
yet had you cared, you might have fared far better with your woo!"

Then with a shoulder crisp and colder than the winter's morn,
she closed that door and said no more. His countenance forlorn,
he still must climb the new day's shore, another to adorn,
but when his feet met frozen floor, he wished he'd not been born.

Abruptus Interuptus

If rhyming were suspended
by laws evil or divine,
my thoughts would be un-ended
every alternating

Breaking Up is Hard to Dooby Dooby Do By the Numbers

(17 song titles, 100 words, 8 syllables per line)

Monday, Monday. It's gone today.
Yesterday seems so far away.
You've lost that lovin' feelin', now
it's too late, baby—but somehow
I can't stop loving you and I'm
crying, crying all the time. The
rhythm of the falling rain fits

"Please release me, let me go." It's
the great pretender who will learn
smoke gets in your eyes. Don't return
this diamond ring. Ask, once apart,
"How can you mend a broken heart?"
Bye bye, love. Perhaps someone will
take good care of my baby, ease
your cheatin' heart—your cretin heart—
sealed with a kiss with cold remiss.

Ken Gosse usually writes short, rhymed verse using whimsy and humour in traditional meters. First published in First Literary Review–East in November 2016, he has also been published by Pure Slush, Home Planet News Online, Lothlorien Poetry Journal, and others. Raised in the Chicago, Illinois, suburbs, now retired, he and his wife have lived in Mesa, AZ, for over twenty years, usually with rescue dogs and cats underfoot.

Old Chevy Truck and Prairie Choirs

Dust rises high behind the old Chevy truck,
hay bales stacked to the sky.
Dust caked nostrils, sweat down my back;
buffalo beans and prairie buttercups.
Way out there, a prairie song -
whirr of grasshoppers, shrieks of hawks,
whining keen in the shortgrass hills.
Winds blow lonely, winds blow strong.

Drive on out to the far horizon,
old rock and roll on the radio
in that old Chevy truck with my brother.
Sipping whiskey, going slow,
he seeks barns that are old and falling
and rusty harvesters, ghosts of the past.
I seek insect medleys, birdsong choirs.

cowboy songs and old bluegrass.

Coyotes running fences, flocks of geese
flying high in a cloud-curdled sky.
I stop the Chevy, look out the window with a sigh.
I yearn to be feral, I wish to haunt rivers,
to run with antelope ‘neath skies of blue.
I long to sleep under a star-pocked sky;
wake in the morning hung with dew.

Wishes on a Falcon/Freeing Falling Stars

Laying in a truck bed
on a sultry summer night,
under a slivered moon and a
sky full of falling stars.
Our seventeen-year-old selves,
speaking of fate, of wishes;
of faithfulness and futures.
And you told me the story
of a man that had caught a falcon,
wild and vicious.

And of how he trained her
to return to him, always return to him.
First with the weight of chains and
the tight bonds of leather,
over and over, and over and over.
Always pulled back; always returning.
Until finally the falcon wore only
floating skeins of silk on her talons.
But they were enough to bring her back, always.
To the man. Disciplined and tamed.

And I held in my hand the letter
you had written to me.
About how we would marry at eighteen;

have four children - two boys, two girls.
About how we would winter in Florida;
about how we would be together.
And you squinted your eyes and held your hand in the air,
catching stars and making them grant wishes.
And each of those things in that letter you made into a wish.

You held the stars tight in your fist
until they flicked dark in your hands.
Like a firefly doused.
And the tears I wept ran
from my eyes to my ears and
lost themselves in my hair,
as I stared up at that night sky.
And you thought they were tears
of happiness.

In truth, I could not breathe.

You said the story of the bird
was beautiful;
that it told of faithfulness
and being true.
But I thought that story was
sad, so very sad.
To that broken-spirited bird,
floating silk was heavy as chains.

You wished to catch stars in your hand;
grasp them until they gave up their wishes.
But I wanted the stars to follow their instincts -
to fall freely, to immolate themselves
in the skin of the sky.
With passion.

The next day I told you to go away.
The next day I broke your heart.
Deliberately . . . you said.
And the rumours on which
small towns thrive said that
you hated me.

That I was faithless and untrue.

As capricious as a falcon's heart;
as unstable as a dying star.

But, in truth, I just wanted to be
a bird that flew free.
In truth, I just wanted to be a star
that knew ecstasy.

Linda H.Y. Hegland is an award-winning poetry, lyric essay, and non-fiction writer who lives and writes in Nova Scotia, Canada.

She writes the occasional short story. Her writing most often reflects the influence of place, and sense of place, and one's complex and many-layered relationship with it. She has published in numerous literary and art journals and has had work nominated for the Pushcart Prize.

She has previously published two books of poetry - 'Bird Slips, Moon Glows' and 'White Horses', a book of lyric essays - 'Place of the Heart', and a book of 'verses and vignettes' - Remember in Pieces.

"I am an artist you know . . . it is my right to be odd." ~ E.A. Bucchianeri
www.intothewildwriting.com
www.seekingsoulsphotography.com
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Leda was a dancer

i think
it was 1969
and we were sitting on
the floor in the front room of her house,

playing
records on the stereo.

i remember
playing Steppenwolf
and Simon and Garfunkle.

i remember
she had her shoes off
and was showing me her feet,

how they
were all messed up
(even at such a young age)

from
so many years
of standing en pointe
and she said she wasn't any good

and would
never really get
anywhere at it because

she was too short, but she loved dancing

and nobody
was gonna see her feet, anyway.

at eighteen,
i thought i was a poet,
but i never read Herman Hesse

and only
knew Steppenwolf as
a rock band and it didn't really matter,

because
there was Leda
who was right about being
too short to be great ballerina,

but
she was
young and beautiful

and had a
flower behind her right ear

and
she smelled like
just cut roses and fresh grass.

she had
real short red hair
and hung around with a

crowd who spent summers at the lake

and liked
to talk about their
new cars and all the money they had.

i don't know
why she went after me in the first place,

but, she did.

maybe she
thought i was different...

which i was,

because i was
young and dumb and awkward

and when i
walked across a room, i could
feel my brain balanced on the top of my head

and it was a
challenge just getting from here to there,

but
i thought
i was different
and thought i was a poet
and maybe that's what Leda saw.

because
Leda was a dancer and
deep down inside of her she
didn't like the lake and she really
didn't like talking about cars or money.

i only
knew her for
that one summer,

and
our "romance"
(such as it was) only
lasted a couple of weeks,

because
the play ended.

i
didn't
tell you we were
in a play together, did i?

it was
a lousy play and
i was a lousy actor and

it only
lasted a weekend

and
she sent me a
telegram on the opening night,

which
i thought
was the coolest
thing anyone ever did.

yeah,
Leda was a dancer
and
i was a poet

and
i finally did
get to read Steppenwolf.

i thought the band was a whole lot better.

did you ever

hear
of Son House?

who?

Son House...
he played the blues, man!

the

blues?
what sort of

weak-ass shit is that?

Son House
played guitar
like he had ten hands

and
when he sang,
the walls would shake.

weak-ass.

maybe,
but, did you
ever hear of Son House?

it was

freshman year
at high school and the
first real party i'd been invited to.

it was
maybe 1966
in someone's basement

and
all i remember
was the room was small and dark

and
some guy
picked up a guitar
and played "Wipeout"

and
the girls smiled
and the guys were jealous

and i
felt as odd,
uncomfortable and

out
of place
as i still do now.

John Yamrus - In a career spanning more than 50 years as a working writer, John Yamrus has published 35 books (29 volumes of poetry, 2 novels, 3 volumes of non-fiction and a children's book). He has also had more than 3,000 poems published in magazines and anthologies around the world. A number of his books and poems are taught in college and university courses. He is widely considered to be a master of minimalism and the neo-noir in modern poetry. His latest books are TWENTY FOUR POEMS and SELECTED POEMS: THE DIRECTOR'S CUT. A second volume of his poetry was just released in Europe, translated by Fadil Bajraj..

Sliver of Moon

Northern spirit, sliver of moon
Curiosity upon a trail of stepping stones, light years apart
Stillness within the traveller's movement
Divine restlessness within her silent intention
Footsteps of shadow, alternating contact
Shades following the path of the high summer sun
Don't stop for them, keep moving on
When turned away, they stride closer
They fall back again, never catching up

Mystery is a hawker
Its turnings become petals of vivid colour,
before being pulled once again into black holes
Densely packed nothing, until something loosens once more
Whale tails begin to play violins and lunar children sail oceans in coracles of fortune
Grand orchestrations of hands and feet
Limbs point and delight
Diving deep, they write their names in luminescent shale
And offer themselves as a path through the water

Bumble

Today I walked with a bee
I walked slowly,
and to my left it flew
It hovered buoyantly and close to the earth
Its hum reverberating
upon each kind of grass and
insect below
Like a bumbling minute helicopter
searching for speeding ants
In this quiet intensity,
the air enveloped us in gorse,
and in its coconut bliss we parted

Maple

From between my legs
a maple tree winds upwards
to the morning sky
Spreading like a wild fire
Each leaf a fire in and of itself,

still burning fierce after a long night
Hot colours burn away the impressions
of the gone
Leaving red shaking birdsong
Long whistles of sunlight
blow through my bones
and my body becomes a drum
A skin of stars
stretched upon a frame
Every blade of grass is listening now
Each yields and holds the earth beat
Honouring blood and soil

Like a Songbird

Clarity in awe of zero
Breath told like a channel
Held, yielding tantric ecstasy
Golden sun, rich with nothing
A concertina of stories collapses
The silence between each utterance
now a wild creature
Everything cackles
Possibility is frequency
Each murmur a freedom
Igniting the heart of a lioness
Tender is her play
Delicate intent is like a songbird
Returning curious feathers and skin,
and dissolving silver hands

Artemis Rose Archer is a singer-songwriter-guitarist and poet based in Liverpool.

Collapsing into Symphony

is
is
is
is
i (and) i

and

whether in

toxicant a work

and ///this tired

////left [movement]

gone

as

this

///taken ////colour

writing

within this

naked

[wake]]]]]]]]]]]]]]]]]]]]]]

again

Hatchet rings as [anti]-bells

volume
volume//
volume##
volume[[[[[

_____U

_____P

the cartographer has removed

this'.

sitting

[]

[]

[]

(not)))))))))

((((((((((((((((as)

slouching

*R*I*N*G*
volume[[[[[
volume##
volume//
volume

Lopsided [not] Dromedary [touch]

//////////////////////////yeeeeeeeeeelllllllllllll
lllllllllllppppppppppppppppppppp///////

as... *as...*

(cough)

D R Y

(cough)

//
ask
//
as
//
answered

this
sled
is
on *the*

<u>pull</u>

*named (//////////////////////////////////

////////////////)))))))))))))))))))))))

every *time*

H E

opens (his)))))

mouth

there *is*

V O I D

Medical Reduction (vanishing)

//
//
//
//
// [s][q][u][a][r][e]
//
//
//

again repeating in the closeness

S
Q
U
A
R
E

until
until
//never repeated sound//

only the monolith
only the alphabet
only the.....
only the.....

only the.....■

Telegraph//Inhalation

,t,h,e,,i,n,t,e,r,r,u,p,t,i,o,n

i s

A
L
A
R
M

! (ping)
! (ping)
! (ping)

styled
after
the
semaphore

continuing

in
style

reaching

▲

vast as rendezvous

▲

a terrible

(thing//to)

missssssssssssssssssssssssss
sssssssssssssssssssssssssssssss
sssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssss
sssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssss
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yes?

Nathan Anderson is a poet from Mongarlowe, Australia. He is the author of numerous books and has work appear widely both online and in print. He is a member of the C22 experimental writing collective. You can find him at nathanandersonwriting.home.blog or on Twitter @NJApoetry.

i am

i don't know why
the wind fells the tree
why lightning splits the trunk
why nature’s golden hammer
makes any death merciful . . .

if veins did not split
would life travel
the same arms?
if knives did not cut
would spoons serve the purpose?
if i were blind would
my soul carry vision?
if my voice wasn't heard
could my screams devour me . . .
would words never spoken
remain stacked in my head,
could thoughts from the mind
come through outstretched hands?
if my yell felled the branch
could my inhale take it back?

if i didn't have to push
for my peace could
boulders still move?
if another’s ears listened
would i not fear?
if silence deafened
would the noise
drown the misery?
if people were flowers
could they return in spring?
if rainbows fell to earth
would i be coloured?

if all the universe held the key
would the door be a different shape? made of different
fabric, bendable or hard?

wielding a different
hammer could
nature build towers?
i don't know the answers
but searching has led
me to the boundaries
of my existence . . .
i am a grain of molecule
dwelling in an ocean, alert,
my senses strike, a sponge,
absorbing all blood.

My turtle

I think the turtle loves me
Every time
I walk this bridge,
The turtle breaks water,
Paddling its little legs
Neck stretched to greet me,
Alas, our love can never be –
He cannot escape his shell
like I.

The curves of grace

curled up
a twirly beech
i wonder what
life would have been

had i grown
into an oak,
if the weaves
of experience
had been kinder,

the growth of the trunk
not as gnarly . . .yet
there is beauty
in these twists, for

I am a ballerina
not a stanchion –
my changes enabled
growth different from others

instead of straight to the sky
curved to the
glorious ground . . .
I have lived among the boring

oaks grown straight and sure
passing me in their singleness
ignoring my twisting branches, they see
a mess of hard living,

of choices never fine, but my
secret remains here, the breath
among the curves of grace –
I am everyone who has

braved the chance of
different roads, the wave,
the revelation, what bends
creates the solitary,

life original, so I say to oaks
grow straight and tall if you
must, for there is no room
for you among us dancers
here on earth.

first, on a road of whales

i thought it uncommon that a whale blocked my path
why, sir, do you lounge here out of your ocean? i am
first on a road of whales, it said, and you must climb me to continue . . .

i dwelled on its words,
not understanding why it gave me this trial, perhaps
it was the back of the humpbacked hill
that triggered my courage, this obstacle
so alive it rolled continuously ahead of me,
challenging me to confront the life I wanted,
as real as any phantom of the sea, and so
I climbed . . .

behind me, the whales passed,
ahead of me, they lived,

all gentle songs encouraging
in front, always first, alive.

Playful

A small cloud drifts past the afternoon's partial
moon, a white mint served on a blue plate, the cloud
is an eye winking, the cloud is a strand of
hair waving, it is a splat of milk in a blue bowl of water
a feather dusted from a breeze in a lake,
milk purring on a kitten's tongue relished for that one moment
when there is no other feeling in the world as nurturing, my soul
the tattered feather, playful in the kitten's mouth

Lorie Greenspan is publishing director at a Deerfield Beach, Florida, book publishing company. Her poems originally were inspired by the death in 2020 of her husband of twenty years, but have broadened to encompass the quirky thoughts that spring to mind from life's transitions and occurrences. She has been published on the online poetry sites MONO, Your Fire, and GAS. Four of her poems have been composed into songs.

ALL THAT IS LEFT

In Nepal, a young girl, who has not yet menstruated, is chosen from a certain caste to be the reincarnation of an ancient Hindu goddess. She is named Kumari and black circles that arc up to her ears are painted around her eyes. On certain holidays, the public is able to view Kumari when she briefly presents herself from a high window. It was my privilege to see the Living Goddess in May of 1969.

by Burgess Needle

Hearts pound at any strange city
but Khatmandu's sucks
lungs dryer than adobe bricks.
Walk faster. Sense Taleju's presence.
Their eyes, those Nepalese, arch and glitter.
Hotel porters, nimble Sherpas,
clutch your sleeves to your room.
Feel the cardiac flush still blooming
from Calcutta's Dum-Dum Airport:
    a cow's head pecked by something with
    black wings is the final frame of that scene.
Word is out the Chinese are buying dollars.
Rastra Bank gives ten official rupees.
Night hands slip out fourteen
and try for your watch,
"Your camera, sir? Your shoes?"
Swedish mercenaries in from central Africa
stride past with casual Mausers, brushing
cracked stucco their shoulders touch
Tibetan dust pressed into walls
when our Lord Gautama spoke.
On to Tiger Tops between bounties
for a smorgasbord of fresh meat.
Look away from the blue-eyed death pair
to skeletal romantics
from that place near the Golden Gate.
Males in Kashmir shirts, cavalier
on cheap hash, deigning
not to stare at young breasts grazing
Shantung silks.

And they have children!
Fly-specked boys and girls with exotic leis
jingle by a bit listless with dengue.
Conceived near the border of Mustang,
they're now precociously bored with charm.
Cutting stone, the Manahara River flows
to fill the valley's unseen aquifer
with the wastes of Bhotis, Sunwans
and all others who live high.
Down it all runs to froth through bronze
tiger eyes, elephant trunks and monkey lips,
clear and cool, parasitically littered,
so attractive in the shimmering heat.
Rose petals are strewn
in the path of nodding monks.

II

Where was I in all this?
Watching the hotels at dusk
when Western trekkers were hauled
out on stretchers, their faces healthy
as Tut when they found him.
Going home from Shangri-la.
Thinner.
I sipped lemonade, listened to the fucking tourists.
And waited for news.
Her address came to me from a clerk at Rastra,
a simple money-changer who knew some truths,
cousin to a monk I'd befriended in Luang Prabang.
Walking slow, I imagined how She would be,
waking each day on the rim of Her life.
She was born for us all.
Again.
Never having known the blade of fear
how could I have guessed
I would leave Her knowing dread?
For myself, that is the dread of acceptance,
a life already written.
I wanted to be Saved

and none of the Gods I knew were up to the challenge.
Had I not tested out well in the field?
The 40 baht whore's betel-stained teeth bruised
my neck erect carrying hash taped
secure passed the leather of law to
a room in Rawalpindi where that German girl o.d.'d
in the night by my side and, yes,
Even Frau Eva's hot morning breasts
could not take my chill.
But, She had warned me. You know when:
2026 Baisakh dateline: Khatmandu
Let me tell you.

III

Kumari is all that is left.
The Living Goddess of Nepal
secure in third-story quarters
overlooking courtyards and shrines.
Red brick dust in my eyes, I squeeze
each image down to fleeing atoms
charming physics itself and get slapped
by morning sun that forces
me to see bird-droppings on sills, up
to the figures painted omega blue and magma red
frozen in sequential postures of sex.
They cavort above the living.
Where is there a Fisher King about these days
to enact new rituals skillful
enough to net a few worthy metaphors?
No stone to move this time,
merely a disappearance.
And, the sign? A stigmata!
What does she show? I asked the clerk?
"She is," he paused, "no longer pure!"
By what sign?
"She bleeds! You must hurry. They will take her!"

IV

The carvings are finely wrought,
ivory and wooden shutters. I look
to Her window. She gazes
out. Her face festive
as a rouged mannequin.
The Living Goddess. The Virgin Goddess.
PHOTOGRAPHY IS FORBIDDEN
She turns.
Then, sadness I feel, and more, to be aware
of Kumari, and, finally, the endless game.
Despite myself, I know
of all that happens in this place
that tries to explain in a single act
the great cycle enveloping us all.
But, for what?
Her eyes - what have they seen
in twelve years? In a thousand? Stared
down at me yes, serenely!
But, black, my liege,
black as those wings in Calcutta.
It is true, sire.
By my faith, I have been here since.
She died for us all.
And for you, sire. A rupee for salvation?
Bless you!

GIFT OF GOODNESS

How to insure the elegant citrus branch
softly dipping with the weight
of dimpled oranges continues to sway
in concert to the earth's breath?
How to guarantee
hummingbirds will always find
nector in a nodding salvia?
Are the premiums for that
Prayer? Karma?
Or, may we hope

the return on goodness
is perfect sunshine?

KISS OF JOJOBA OIL

Swerve to avoid
roadrunners and discover
Your next intersect with a swirling
mass of wind and debris results
in the kiss of jojoba oil
On your forehead and the scent
of musky creosote
in your nostrils
A Karmic blessing
for merely being alert

TUCSON ROSE AFTER RAIN

Peering through a ragged tear
Between the news and family events
Rising and setting sun
Sin and forgiveness
After rain
Before cloud break
A Tucson rose emerged
Still crying in bloom
Nestled in green love
I found redemption
Some grasp of tomorrow
Red beauty amid thorns

Burgess Needle's poetry has appeared in: Blackbox Manifold (UK), Galway Review, Concho River Review, Boston Literary Magazine and Santa Fe Literary Review. Fiction: Connotation Press and Black Market Review. Collections: EVERY CROW IN THE BLUE SKY (Diminuendo Press). THAI COMIC BOOKS (Big Table Publishing). SIT AND CRY: Two Years In the Land of Smiles [a Memoir] Wren Song Press). The author lives in Ripton, Vermont with a hazel-eyed woman of wit, charm and beauty.

To the Patron Saint of Lost Causes

What a terrible day to die—-
breathing in all those tulips,
especially the red ones,
so upright and righteous. Sneezing yellow pollen anytime the wind blows.

Let me go to a white room.
in a downy cradle,
With a peppermint to roll off my tongue
after this great meal.

Don't crowd around my bed.
Give me space to drop
my memories.
They are just spilled milk and shattered glass,
but too heavy for the arms that will carry me.

But if I get to feeling better,
put my ragged hair back on my head, and
place a flag from here to there
for the then and the now.
Praise stamen and stem everywhere.

Night Song

Come to me with your star fed
eyes and lilt the night with
round laughter's face.
Come down your ladder
it is rung with tears
to earth adorn its loverless being
for the half shell, the death knell
rings without ceasing,
taunts a sad creature
on this moonless evening
tethered to the ground

from endless grieving.
But enough time for thinking of ethereal things
Bring particles of music,
music that minstrels make,
a fine interweaving
a cloth of lull, a cloak of
sheer, sheer, sheer.
Bring a purse of silken dreams
comfort me when you're through.
Hold me, hold me.
Behold and hold me.
For I weep of laden days
Heavy with brown.
Heavy with brown.

Daughter of Ophelia

She wakes up in bed
with the Sun— vaguely familiar
(death isn't for everyone)
casts aside a faded wreath
prays for all sleeping flowers

Near a patch of wild viola in
the shadow of the birdbath overturned,
near the hollow trunk
of a redbud tree—
a rusted rake, a buttercup.
The Cecile Brunner rose.

But she's no sentimental chick—
this girl,

All hail this new Ophelia,
who leaps for a new day
grateful for even chilly breath
wishes for a different name
—perhaps Gloria or Dawn.

White Plastic Buttons

Feminine is the night.
Evening stars, white pearls sewn on deep blue velvet,
carrying a purse.
What if instead of twinkling things
our eyes deceive
It's little white plastic buttons
on gingham
carrying a small basket—
canopied and righteous all the same.

Fait Accompli

We met in Ramses Hall of Healing.
Oh, all those books!
But of all the classics the scholars poured over,
and of all the tragic tales that made young women cry in their beds,
of all the splendid cinema
and the famous operas that caused crowds to weep,
of all the poetry that has laid men in their graves,
our story is the saddest.

But there is no one to tell it—
not that anyone would be worthy—
because they couldn't see that cities and mountains blocked our view,
that oceans vowed to drown us, and that pestilences threatened to burn us.

We will never be together with the sunshine on our faces,
nor see our children born of willing flesh.

I have paid the scientists
to work day and night in my favour,
but being cursed with too much wisdom
I am doomed to go before you,
to be but a shadow on a
moon-cut night,

a candle without a wick.

It is right and just that I go where the North Star can't find me,
and when I take my leave
in my desperation to swim the seas,
I will leave nothing of you for someone else.

Nancy Kennedy grew up in a rural area of Tennessee. As a young woman, she moved to Michigan where she obtained a Bachelor of Philosophy from Grand Valley State University and a M.A. in Communication from Western Michigan University.

She is a full-time writer and currently lives in Alabama.

A.I. Interactive

Every unwritten segue
promising escape
our novel approach.

Tactical engagement
of unspent collateral
in linear talk.

Suggestion surrenders
impulses to tease away
discarded warnings.

Uninvited
in my own body
I want yours.

To be captured
in forgotten and
redundant exploration.

Immobile until
inertia surrenders
remote possibilities

Until a recognition
beginning ends
amid pretensions

A skilled retreat
remorse coded trails
we navigate alone

Past indifference where
intelligence is artificial
or else remotely akin.

Plethora

for Natalie

These talents you posses
a whirlwind of
antecedents, wild colours
bringing lustre
new words even
an image starved poet
can claim to have
after picking
them off streets
discarded, otherwise
denied such radiance
alongside your violet
lipstick traces on
half inhaled cigarettes.

I need a lost simplicity
to capture
what in essence is
formless in

a pose that is
what is fluent
in a careless smile
or unplanned backward
step or too forward
a joke to register
with others
with the camera
that loves you
for having such talents.

The lenses, flash film
dare an intimacy
inspire a jealousy
with each picture
staling a moment
truly not mine.
Yet it is enough
for me just to
make that happen
far easier with you
than anyone else.

Escape Has Its Benefits

Kicked to the corner
where she said
I'd find company,

I walk outside
where the wind lies
it's fresh.

The corner girls
spin their stale tales
that I'm next.

I pass the bar

three times then
traipse in.

One whiskey
becomes
five.

Then I see
tattoos too dark to read
yet her smile says enough,

beckons me to lose
for I gather quickly
her victories are small.

We leave seeking
a temporary respite
letting stars kiss our wounds

with only the moon
truly golden
over a closed for good
pawnshop.

That Drunken Night

Your lips
were Picasso's
artwork
when drunk
with unsteady hand
in paintings blue as
eyes of emaciated
pale orphans of hope
with beauty
captured still.

Our stories

predictable as if
stolen from
paupers knowing
little charity
yet with a smile
illuminating only
the obvious
with all its measures
of diluted
clarity.

I took her back
to my place
to finish a story
that cried for an ending.
Revealing we lacked
one or two in sundry
nights that followed
as they began
open ended
like they do.

Inside The Parenthesis Of Being

Then

Under
a tall tree
(We kiss) whys
away under branches
dividing
the light.

In Stasis

As if
in a dream

we (sleepwalk)
in shadows
away from the light
in each other's eyes
looking at
others.

& Now

A harsh
daylight on
dying)roses
she threw
in the trash
clinging
to life.

The Future

waiting as
always to throw us
(together) anew thinking
this riddle (inevitably)
can be remade
to find out otherwise.
(again).

Rp Verlaine lives in New York City. He has an MFA in creative writing from City College. He taught in New York Public schools for many years. His first volume of poetry- Damaged by Dames & Drinking was published in 2017 and another – Femme Fatales Movie Starlets & Rockers in 2018. A set of three e-books titled Lies From The Autobiography vol 1-3 were published from 2018 to 2020. His latest book, Imagined Indecencies, was published in February of 2022. He was nominated for a pushcart prize in poetry in 2021 and 2022.

Haiku for the longest day of the year

Think on this long day
of a river streaming bold
forgetting hurdles
as dark fades early
on year's longest summer day
even if sun fails
to announce the start
of another song cycle,
the second half year
whether longest night
down south, or longest day here
this midyear solstice.

What stories remain
from daydreams of yesterday
or old dreams last night
as midsummer gives
cheerfulness to the dancing
hope as sun rises
streaming between stones
breaking through bush canopy
in woods where birds call
waking dull sleepers
announcing there's time enough
to change the story.

Time to form history
worth remembering, recording
worth telling anew
on another long
day, in the next hemisphere
new ways of being
new models for growth
where people and planet share
the same space in life
decades worth counting
each solstice recording
decision for change.

So, the longest day
in one sphere. confirms enough
to war's pollution
        while the longest night
        in another, rejects constant
        mining emptiness,
                wake up this morning
                after the long night or short,
                greet day with a song
                        a tune new or old
                        with a lilt to lift spirits
                        on this special day.

Greet today's stranger
seek an answer in return
if day remains short
        for life has it
        that one celebrates long day
        while the twin sees short
                days which we name here
                having other titles far
                beyond our vision.

Why not seek agreement
on land's space and usefulness,
our environment
        calling agreement
        the way forward for all, with
        long, firm solutions.

Adele Ogiér Jones - The poetry of Adele Ogiér Jones is published in journals and anthologies. As well as chapbooks, she has five full collections of poetry, the latest *Following Rivers in Trees* (Ginninderra Press, 2022). Poems in tanka form appear in *Poetry for the Planet* (Litoria Press, 2021). Here, for Lothlorien Poetry Journal, she presents haiku for the 2023 summer solstice.

A Long-Forgotten Story with Shoes

Short Story
by Tom Holmes

for Stacia

I: Idle Hands

Before Saint Patrick wished the snakes out of Ireland, there lived the tiniest cobbler who ever lived. She often crafted shoes that fit a customer perfectly but were often large enough for her to sleep in. She used a variety of materials, beads, and colours. Most often, though, people wanted green shoes, but occasionally people from the north wanted orange, so she obliged.

She was an active member in the Ireland cobbling community. And while most cobblers thought she was the most excellent maker of shoes they had ever known, no cobbler was jealous of her talents. And anyone who met her would smile for days afterwards. She was the kindest and most accommodating person in the land, and maybe beyond.

Because she was such an active member of this community, she knew who was doing well, who was getting by, and who was sick and falling behind on their obligations. She didn't let anyone know she knew of the cobblers' financial or health situations, but she did keep notes. If she noticed a fellow shoemaker was sick and struggling for over two months and the moon was full, she would put on a hooded cape and a mask and travel under the moonlight to the poor cobbler's house when he or she was asleep. She would usually crawl through a hole that only a mouse could fit through and enter the cobbler's workshop. She would then repair all the shoes the ill cobbler was behind on repairing. In addition, she was so talented that she could mimic the cobbler's style and tastes so that nobody would know it was her who mended the shoes. Even the cobbler, when he or she awoke, assumed they had completed their tasks in their sleep and might think, "This is excellent work. I should do repairs more often when I am asleep." In the following days, customers would pick up their newly repaired shoes and pay the cobbler, who then would purchase medicine to feel better again and continue with their noble profession
.

The mysterious cobbler with red hair carried out this practice for years. In fact, throughout the known-world, Ireland gained the reputation for having the most outstanding shoes, even northern Ireland agreed.

II: Idle Claws

One night under a full moon, Stella (the tiny cobbler) was performing her generous task for another cobbler who lived on the Beara Peninsula. Most of his customers had waterproof boots, which meant they were painted with tar. Painting with tar was not a problem for the skilled Stella. What was a problem was finding a way into the cobbler's workshop because this particular cobbler had rivals in the area. Unlike the accomplished Stella, these cobblers were not nearly as skilful at their jobs, and they would set out to sabotage one another or tell lies about each other to their customers. One time a cobbler stole all the shoelaces from another cobbler, which rendered the latter cobbler's shoes useless. On a different occasion, a cobbler stole another cobbler's tar and used it to waterproof his roof, and then went into business as a roofer.

On this occasion, however, another one of the cobblers had emptied a burlap bag of mice around an ill cobbler's leaky home that would flood on the rainiest of nights or day because he did not have the money for the roofer to waterproof his home. Nights were the worst, and it was because of the rainstorm one night a few months ago when the rain dripped through holes in the roof and seeped through holes at the base of the walls, the house was transformed into a cold, damp, and mouldy dwelling. And within days, the cobbler grew terribly ill and his wife became bed-ridden.

Through those leaky holes, the mice entered the workshop. The mice gnawed on shoes needing repair, and they guarded the holes of egress and ingress. These particular mice were also the type that sharpened their teeth in the morning and tied the sharpest of blades to the ends of their tails. They had even replaced their bony claws with tungsten. These mice were hired to perform harm to the cobbler's goods as well as to anyone or anything that tried to prevent them from doing so.

Some people believed Stella came from the Land of Fairies, some thought she was the Fairy Queen, but most suspected she was the Fairy Queen's cobbler who was allowed to freelance for human foot needs. Perhaps it was the fairy materials Stella used that prevented any of her shoes from tearing, ripping, or falling apart. Tonight, though, she needed a different type of material, or weapon, to bypass these dreaded mice.

She thought of drawing water from Bantry Bay to drown the despicable mice. Then she thought of fire. But she realized that either idea might completely destroy the cobbler's currently fragile home. She wished she was

like the Fairy Queen and had her magical powers to send the mice away, like Saint Patrick would do with snakes, but not knowing this similar wish had been asked for by Saint Patrick in the future and that all wishes once made extend into the past and the future and cannot be made again even in the past, her wish did not come true.

While she was wishing, the mice threw eyelets at her, but the holes fell over her like hula hoops, even though hula hoops had not been invented in Ireland, but fear had been, and Stella was scared.

"What to do? What to do?" Stella thought as she paced the dirt yard between the house and the forest she had just crossed through. "These mice are my size and I am outnumbered. If only I had a cat, but as everyone knows, cats at night during a full moon escape into the land of moon shadows until sunrise. Perhaps, I can find a way into those shadows or maybe! I could cover the moon so the cats will think it is a new moon instead of a full moon and return to this world. If only I had a large enough sack cloth."

Stella grew angry with herself and yelled, "Why do these stupid people not leave this waterlogged peninsula? I mean really, no one should own a pair of tar-covered shoes and especially not wear them. They are so terrifically gauche. No one. Even if stylishly covered with feathers."

In her unknown-to-her-future, she would use sap from dandelions and hevea brasiliensis trees in the town of Wellington to create waterproof shoes. But like her wish, she struggled in ignorance of today.

In the meanwhile, Stella decided to use her magnanimity to talk to and persuade the mice to cease the vandalous acts and depart the home of this fair cobbler and his wife. She opened her backpack and pulled out a ball of cloth, which she unrolled. Inside were cheese and bread. She offered the mice some of her cheese. The soldier mice were quick to nibble on the cheese. The head mouse, however, did not succumb. He knew his duty and he struck her with his tungsten claw and drew blood across her chest.

She had never been struck before with anything other than a hug or kiss. She trembled. She ran away and returned to the forest.

She needed a new strategy. She needed a way to evade the mice or for them to evade her.

"Or I could make them stay!"

III: Idle Mice

In the following days, Stella's red hair turned grey. Anger, an emotion unfamiliar to Stella, overcame her. This anger evolved to violent thoughts. These violent thoughts evolved a plan.

"I need a barrel of hot tar," she vengefully thought.

Stella didn't recognize herself, but she recognized how this plan could solve her mouse problem and enable her to restore the cobbler's livelihood. Stella also recognized the mouse's tungsten claw must have been poisoned with evil thoughts. Thoughts that also motivated the ravaged mice to harm and destroy without discretion.

Stella dug furrows from each hole where the wall met the ground to the edge of the forest, where she had courageously returned to with a barrel of hot, liquid tar.

She tipped the barrel, and watched the boiling tar roll down the furrows into the holes and onto the floor of the workshop. She laughed in anticipation. She gnawed on strands of her now grey hair. Stella was no longer herself anymore. She enjoyed a new type of delight – watching the mice's claws stick to the tar and unable to move. She relished in their squeaks. And then after a few days, in their silence.

Even after the days of silence, Stella was still overcome with her poisoned anger. She was glad the mice were trapped in the slowly cooled tar.

"It is not enough!" she cackled.

Just as the tar had cooled, her violent thoughts drew to a boil. She sought out the head mouse and chopped off his feet. Then skinned his hide, which was surprisingly supple and soft.

"This hide will make for the best pair of shoes. They will be worthy of the Queen's feet. I will become her favourite."

And so Stella stretched and carved and moulded the hide into a pair of shoes to perfectly fit the Queen's feet. She even used the mouse's tail as laces to thread the eyelets of the royal shoes.

"She will be so happy!"

IV: Idle Shoes

The Queen was sitting on her throne when Stella entered.

"My dearest, Stella. It has been a while. What brings you home today?"

"My Lady, My Lord, I have for you the most unique of gifts. Nothing like them exists in all the world and, I suspect, never will. I have made them specifically for you."

"I am most intrigued. Whatever do you have for me, my dear Stella?"

"Shoes."

"Of course you do, dear. How could it be otherwise? But shoes are not unique."

"True. True. But every pair of shoes I make is unique and customer specific. These shoes, too, are also customer and Queen-specific. But unlike all the other shoes I have ever made, you and no one has ever had shoes made like these."

"Oh, I see. A special material, I assume. A new fabric? Leather? Cloth? Canvas? Let us have a go. Provide my feet with a new home."

Stella slid the shoes onto the Queen's feet and securely tied them.

The Queen rose from her throne, stepped down the stairs, and strutted atop the oak, parquet floor.

"These are the most comfortable shoes I have ever worn. I do not even need to break them. How ever did you come across such a comfortable material?"

V: Idle Salutations

Stella was escorted from the palace to the edge of the Land of Fairies and told to never return. They threw the mice shoes at her. She looked down upon them for a moment or two and thought about her actions and whether she could keep the shoes.

"These shoes are cursed. I must leave them behind. But since they are cursed, I must not leave them behind for someone else to discover. I must carry them as a reminder. It is my burden now."

Once she crossed the boundary separating the Land of Fairies from the lands of humans, once she entered the lands of humans, the poisonous effects wore off. Her face turned red and her head throbbed.

She stopped. She felt dizzy. A haze glossed her vision. She sat down with crossed legs.

"What have I done? The fairies hate me. And once the humans find out, they will hate me too. Everything I accomplished is pointless. All my friendships stuck in the past. . . ."

Stella was for the first time experiencing shame and regret.

For over 1400 years, she dwelled in those feelings.

For over 1400 years, the images of mice and tar repeated over and over in her mind.

For over 1400 years, she could barely sleep.

VI: Idle While

For over 1400 years, she was lost in her mind and lost somewhere in the world.

Shoes continued to be made, but not by her. Shoe fashions evolved, but she did not.

Everyone assumed she died in the forest and was eaten by mice.

Perhaps she was.

VII: Idle Rubber

Over 1400 years later, Stella gained clarity of mind but could not forgive herself even though her actions were the direct result of poison. For over 1400 years, Stella carried the cursed mouse shoes, but now it was time part ways. She knew she could not just leave them anywhere for they still might be cursed. So she dug a hole and buried them. The hole digging reminded her of digging the furrows for the tar to run down. She paused. She sighed. She pushed the thought away.

"Enough of this self pity. I have paid my penance. It is time to return."

She made haste out of the forest, walked to the coast, and rode a boat to England, where she hoped no one had ever heard of her story with shoes.

She eventually made new beginnings in the town of Wellington. The Wellingtonians were kind to her, and she returned the kindness as she could by repairing shoes.

She made enough money to rent a flat, feed herself, and purchase a few books about plants and trees. She studied those books. She learned about dandelions and hevea brasiliensis trees and the sap that can be drawn from them. She wasn't quite sure what sap was, so she learned how to tap a hevea brasiliensis tree. And she did.

"This sap is sticky like tar, but much cooler. If I heat this, stretch it into a foot shape, and cool it, I could make shoes resistant to water."

Through trial and error, she perfected the process and the "rubber shoes." She called the vulcanized sap "rubber" because it sounded bouncy like the rubber.

"This is the perfect shoe for rainy days and for everyone who lives on the Beara Peninsula. And best of all, I have hurt no animals, and I never will again." And she never harmed another living creature for as long as she existed.

But like on the Beara Peninsula, there was a Wellingtonian cobbler who was aggressive, competitive, and profit driven.

Hiram Hutchinson was this cobbler. He learned of the rain boots, and realized how much money he could make. This greed was a learned behaviour he had not unlearned, which is why he was despised in the town despite his excellent work with shoes. He had the feet of all the customers, but once the town learned of Stella's rain boots, his business dropped off drastically.

One night, he broke into her workshop and stole her notes on how to make rubber boots. He couldn't believe how simple it was. He was angered at his ignorance of such an obvious creation. He smashed everything she owned and set it on fire and fled.

The sky had no rain for days, and eventually Stella's residence was only ashes upon ashes.

Hutchinson regained sole control of the local shoe business, and he renamed the boots "wellies" after the town and in tribute to the duke, his most prized customer.

He did one right thing in changing the name, and that was the only proper action he ever did.

VIII: Idleness

No one heard from Stella again, and no one learned of her contribution to the most wonderful of shoes – those rain boots, those rubbers, those wellies you wear to keep your feet dry on rainy days and that protect you from growing ill, like the cobbler and his bed-ridden wife.

IX: Idle Memories

Over 200 years later, the mouse shoes were discovered. They were so unique, so odd that people wondered what they were made of.

Shoe scientists were soon involved. They used the most sophisticated methods to determine the shoe material, which they learned was made from the hide of a mouse. They wondered why someone would make tiny shoes out of such materials. More importantly they asked, "If these were made by human hands, then why were they abandoned in the woods? Why does it appear they were only worn once?"

No one would ever know because Stella was never heard from again.

X: Idle Nights

If you look at the sky on a clear night, you will believe you are looking at stars. But you are not. Those stars are eyelets Stella has yet to sow into the newest of shoes.

Tom Holmes -For over twenty years, Tom Holmes is the founding editor of *Redactions: Poetry & Poetics*. Holmes is also the author of five full-length collections of poetry, including *The Book of Incurable Dreams* (forthcoming from Xavier Review Press) and *The Cave*, which won The Bitter Oleander Press Library of Poetry Book Award for 2013, as well as four chapbooks. He teaches at Nashville State Community College (Clarksville). His writings about wine, poetry book reviews, and poetry can be found at his blog, *The Line Break*: *thelinebreak.wordpress.com/*. Follow him on Twitter: @TheLineBreak

Nature's Incubator

Spring makes my soul alive.
The world is awake,
with time Revived.
Everything in bloom and warmer
days that were shorter now are longer.
Newness of life.
A season of wonder.
Renewal
Rebirth
Rejuvenation
Resurrection
an equinox within the whole earth.
Springtime ultimately issues in summer.
Spring is an incubator and tide in
the earth where everything in nature is born anew.

Limitless Devotion

Yours was the reciprocating
heart.
Receiving and giving limitless
devotion.
Without fear we hold on to
Love.
Freeing ourselves from past
Heartache.
We build our fairytale
ever after.
You were the one to open
my heart.
You chose to stay
I believe love is possible,
with you, now forever, and
always.
You are my heart's greatest
Love.

Rushing

Everything's a rush.
Rushing to catch fast
moving planes.
Rushing to put out
life altering cataclysmic
fires.
Rushing to tame unyielding
fleshly desires.
Rushing to wait on slow
moving trains.
Rushing to powerwalk through
a mundane and ordinary, routine
life.
Rushing to remember important
and unimportant names.
Perhaps, one day I'll slow down
long enough to enjoy the aroma of
natures extraordinary, fragrant,
roses.

Broken

Shattered dreams of
unfulfilled hope,
grabbing desperately at
anything, something.
Spiraling down the
unassailable mountain
of defeat,
collecting fragments of
deferred dreams.
Beaten, bruised,
down on my knees.
Picking up the pieces
of a fragile, broken, life.

Previously Published in Different Sides of the Same Coin 2019

My Heart is Happiest Watching Ezra Dance

A carefree, teenaged Black boy
dances the night away
in his mother's love-filled kitchen.
Happy hands and feet
wave and glide soulfully across
the checkered tiled floor.
How monumental this moment.
Watching a Black boy safe
at home tonight, from the
rage-filled world outside,
that won't allow teenaged Black
boys to blissfully dance.

Previously Published in Different Sides of the Same Coin 2019

Chyrel J. Jackson is a Literary visionary and #1 Ranked Best Selling Amazon Author. Reared and raised in the South Suburbs outside Chicago. African American Literature influenced her writing and is one of her favorite genres. Chyrel Jackson writes in the spirit of her past great Literary ancestors. 2021 garnered Chyrel her very first literary nomination, Pushcart Nominee-Poem Love Unspoken, Published in Heart Beats Anthology. The Summer of 2022 Chyrel was a contributing writer in the #1 Best Seller ranked Anthology "Not Just Anybody Can Be Dad."

Along with her sister, Lyris D. Wallace, they published Mirrored Images and Different Sides of the Same Coin. This edgy writing duo appears in multiple published poetry Anthologies. You will find them always writing. Creating written legacies one book at a time.

Chyrel J. Jackson is one writer that has found her poetic voice. You can find her on Sistersrocnrhyme.com

SISTERSROCNRHYME.COM
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Every Day

Read Shakespeare every day. Pray to the gods of appetite for sustenance. Grant favours to all who ask. Obey thy heart, carefully. Stay true. Observe the clouds as they pass overhead. Let the rains rain down on thy soul (thy soul is thy body is thy mind is thy heart). Be strong, be nice. Don't go out without your hat and sunglasses, or vice versa, your slickers. 'It's the final countdown' so count down backwards from one hundred and don't think of beer bottles or walls or where you left off last time or what it's going to be like once the bus arrives because then none of this matters anymore and is lost to infinity, which is whole lot. If you look back, you're toast, burnt to a crisp in the spot you pivoted because you can't go forward if you're looking back unless you're walking backwards but then you can't see where you're going and you may stumble and fall and hit your head. You'll be prone, face up, watching clouds go by, sun shining directly in your eyes which if you don't close them and stare will make you go blind so close them, or, rather, don't look back in the first place. Or, if you please, stop, turn around, look for a while, then turn around and proceed. You'll have had your look and you may contemplate it but you'll be headed forward "with eyes wide open" (*Tempest*). Don't forget your sunglasses and hat, or, alternatively, your slickers. Wear good shoewear every day.

Equality of Day

Through the grid, it's green and blue. Iggy wants coffee and is making a scene because of far too much mischief. Toes point skyward but everything is held down by the ceiling. A whole lot of heat is trapped up there between the interior and the

exterior. There's no theme. There are themes but they emerge over time. You see it's a process which may or may not end in products. There's much waste. Much, much waste. Some one, many ones are going down. Some are lost. What does come forth is so lucky it's beat the house odds. The bells are ringing. It's better than enlightenment. It's alive. That's your name. But you already knew that. You were already there and none of us would've been here without you. Equality of awe in the equality of day.

They Jump

There's water in the air that's blowing around. The shades are drawn down to temper the light. Once you draw them down, there's a strip of green that marks the room, the room where we dwell in the evening, all night, and into the morning. Rooms carry us through. Then we cross their thresholds to other rooms, passageways, and doors to the outside. More doors. More passageways. More rooms. Many rooms. Many, many, rooms. There's a place for you that's been prepared. You can pick: this one or that one, which one would you prefer? *It's someone else's house but we're staying here. We're taking care of their dogs, and they like it. We could take them to our house, but it's just pandemonium.*

They jump on our bed
They jump on our bed

They jump
They jump

They jump on our bed (3x)

It's better here – see how big it is? Would you

like some dessert? We have cookie or key lime pie, but the cookie is for you to take with you. Would you like half a key lime or a whole? They are very small. Tom and I can split one. See I already started mine earlier.

Benjamin Bennett-Carpenter, PhD, MA, teaches at a public university in North America and consults/coaches at Sollars & Associates and independently. Bennett-Carpenter is the author of *Death in Documentaries* (Brill) and *Explaining Jesus* (Rowman & Littlefield). His poems have appeared in *Superpresent*, *Book of Matches*, and the *Kitchen Table Quarterly.* He co-edits *Cruel Garters*, a contemporary poetry publication.

A glass darkly

After the rabbit hole comes the blankness
a wonderland of nothing echoing
silence where there was a life. Tea parties
of grief where grins are feeble and see-through:
madness lurking behind every empty
cup. To shrink to the size of a dormouse
would be ideal but the potion no longer
works even if it insists on being
drunk. So you sit before the stained looking
glass peering at the past. You want to step
through but the rabbit is always too late
and time only moves backwards in stories.

In the dark

In the dark silence of the night,
when sleep has filled the house at last,
my dreams embark on their own flight.

I search for mountains of delight
where moon glow leaves an eerie cast
in the dark silence of the night.

For ice has carved out caverns bright
where nightmares try to hold me fast,
yet still dreams leave on their own flight.

In snow-filled drifts of startling white
I fight with monsters from my past
through the dark silence of the night.

While coldness tries to sap my might
embracing with its freezing blast
my dreams respond with their own flight.

Although I often lose the fight,
as haunting shades are strong and vast,
in the dark silence of the night
my dreams survive most every flight.

Glenis Moore - has been writing poetry since the first Covid lockdown and does her writing at night as she suffers from insomnia. When she is not writing poetry she makes beaded jewellery, reads and sometimes runs 10K races slowly. She has been published by The Scop, Flights, Dust Poetry and Wildfire Words.

Annual Report

Poems in need of good homes.
Unplanned but not unloved,
unlikely but not all that unlikely –
if you've been poking your pen
where it longs to belong. Guilty.
Pen appendage comes with me
wherever I go so it sees action.

Offsprung poems need space
where they can be temperamental
mongrels they are – part dingo,
part sheepdog, looking for pages
to call home before sun burns out.
Uppity bastards have been known
to change the burning world
before being struck by trucks.

Allan Lake is a poet, originally from Allover, Canada, who now writes in Allover, Australia. Coincidence. His latest collection, published by Ginninderra Press, "My Photos of Sicily" contains no photos, only poems.

Moments

Moments happen
Brief and fragile
    Time moving
    Time standing still
Not realizing until it's gone
If only we could go back.
If we could capture it in our hands,
    Holding it like a cherished treasure.
In a moment, we are changed
In a moment life is given and taken away
We gather our moments in our minds,
    picking and choosing,
    sorting and collecting,
    reliving, time and again,
We, ourselves, are but moments;
    A collection of moments
    Defining who we are.
In a moment, we love and are loved.
And in a moment, we are memories in
Someone else's collection.

All Poems Submitted were previously Published in Different Sides of the Same Coin 2019

Motionless Feet

Life,
an energy of massive proportions
fuelling the earth with
movement and sound,
leading to the fulfilment of song.
A musical of instruments
reaching life's crescendo,
crashing to the depths
of silence.
I've heard the melodies
of hope.
I've read the lyrics
of possibilities,
and I have snapped my fingers
to the rhythms of yesterday.
The songs were sweeter then,
the voices much more in harmony.
I danced to the joy of the music.
I hummed its familiar tune.
I've played the instruments of love
and gazed into the brightness
of sorrow.
I've breathed its clarity
and I've mourned its bitter notes.
The piano
is now out of tune.
The pitch is not quite right.
What used to be music
is now the crackling sounds
of an old phonograph,
and my feet remain
Motionless.

Keep Running

My best laid plans
Were interrupted by life
As I walked down the street of possibilities.
I took the detour of uncertainty.
I looked up
And I was standing at the door of
I never would have believed.
What do you do when you're running
to catch up to your own life?
YOU KEEP RUNNING.

A Beginning

A look
A smile
A sweet "Hello"
A touch
A shift
A nod
A blush
A frown
A stutter
A mis-spoken word
A correction
A nervous laugh
A compliment
A flutter
Licked lips
An awkward silence
A turn
A stop
An exchange
An exit
A Beginning.

Still We Move

We move in this world
circling,
weaving,
never touching.
Seeing
and being seen,
but not knowing.
Speaking politely.
"Hello."
Smiling.
"How are you?"
Joking and laughing,
but we pass one another
not knowing.
We look back.
A pause.
We think.
We move on.
A thought lingers;
We stop.
We move on,
familiar
but strange.
And still, we move on
without knowing.

Lyris D. Wallace is a Literary visionary and #1 Ranked Best Selling Amazon Author. Reared and raised in the South Suburbs outside Chicago. African American Literature influenced her writing and is one of her favourite genres. Lyris Wallace writes in the spirit of her past great Literary ancestors. 2023 garnered Lyris her very first literary nomination, Pushcart Nominee-Poem No Justice for Breonna, Published in Social Justice Inks Anthology. The Summer of 2022 Lyris was a contributing writer in the #1 Best Seller ranked Anthology "Not Just Anybody Can Be Dad."

Along with her sister, Chyrel J. Jackson, they published Mirrored Images and Different Sides of the Same Coin. This edgy writing duo appears in multiple published poetry Anthologies. You will find them always writing. Creating written legacies one book at a time.

Lyris D. Wallace is one writer that has found her poetic voice. You can find her on Sistersrocnrhyme.com

SISTERSROCNRHYME.COM SISTERSROCNRHYME.BLOGSPOT.COM

Nurse Says,

"You've the heart of a seventeen-year-old!"
Although the chest she tests is over seventy;
it might be humorous except for the facts.

How old is this transplant, this beating heart,
bequeathed by her parents in recognition of
her persistent imperative to live every beat.

Perhaps this heart of ours – hers and mine,
now two-and-twenty – has aged five years
since starting after stopping or being stopped.

Perhaps now it might be eighty, yet vigorous,
having absorbed my cells and fluids and life;
we – the girl and I – might barter for a third.

Street Safety

Black satin cat pours
herself over the curb
into the storm drain;
quicksilver response
to suburban decay and

feline angst.
As a kid
I, too, used to pour over
curbs into storm drains
away from bullies and
parental observation.

Ribbons in the Sea

There are ribbons in their sea, currents below the surface, that run as true in their courses as the trade winds above. Old sailors, wise fishermen, and maritime peoples know this. As true as the Great Salt Road guided traders and pilgrims back and forth across the great reaches of Asia, these rivers in the sea served the great schools of fish and mammals below, trans oceanic birds above, and skilled mariners on the surface. Cold shores were heated. Hot lands cooled. Navigators steered. But all this has begun to fall apart, These ocean pathways are falling into ruin. The climate has changed. Storms appear where and when they rarely did before. Waters cool or warm in disparate places. Mammals of the sea lose their bearings, as their old highways no longer run true, and some become dazed or panic stricken, dashing themselves ashore only to expire in the glare of days they were never meant to see. Flocks of birds drop from the sky, frozen in flight, to drop disoriented in death. Man, in his frenzy to hold dominion over the land and sky and sea, has broken those roads within the waters and at some point man will realize his own frenzied disorientation and may be cast upon a barren and forsaken land where he may also languish and die, a victim of his own reckless drives.

Rick Hartwell is a retired middle school teacher (remember the hormonally-challenged?) living in California with his wife of forty-seven years, Sally (upon whom he is emotionally, physically, and spiritually dependent), two grown children, two granddaughters, and fifteen cats! Like Blake, Thoreau and Merton, he believes that the instant contains eternity.

Haiku/Senryu

whippoorwill's
endless chant
say my name

fragrant blooms beckon
toxic seedpods betray
the weight of wisteria

summit cloud
hoary shroud of mist
enveloped by grief

fallow fields
a turkey gleans for grain
famine

symbol of hope
moon goddess incarnate
noble rabbit

JL Huffman - The Author, JL Huffman, is a retired Trauma Surgeon/ICU doctor who has published three poetry books - *Almanac: The Four Seasons* (2020), *Family Treasons* (2021), and *Voyage: Vista and Verse* (2022). Her individual poems have appeared in *The Pharos*, *The Asahi Haikuist Network*, *Haiku Dialogue*, *Poetry Pea*, *Cold Moon Journal*, *The Pan Haiku Review*, *Haiku in Action*, and others. She was a Pushcart Poetry Prize Nominee. She is currently at work on a post-apocalyptic novel. You can follow the Author on her website jlhuffman.com or on Twitter @JoanHuffmanMD

The Awakened Heart

Listen to me
don't just hear.
The wine of the evening
is not my décor.
Reveal to me
and be my fresh intoxication.
The velvet eyes
caste a soft look,
my weaker ambitions
burst like firecrackers.
I am you
in the drenching chorus
wet in self-believe.
Pain keeps me seeking and wandering.
The plight to tell a story I bear.
I am an awakened heart
of yours,
while you clasp my hands
and we journey through this eternal life.
Your love is red
and my ink is blue.
I script in awakening.
My heart beats to
lay the foundations
of consolations for you.

Sushant Thapa is from Biratnagar, Nepal. He has published three books of poems: The Poetic Burden and Other Poems (Authorspress, New Delhi, 2020), Abstraction and Other Poems (Impspired, UK, 2021) and Minutes of Merit (Haoajan, Kolkata, 2021). He is an English lecturer to undergraduate level students of BBA and BIT at Nepal Business College, Biratnagar, Nepal and Master's level at Degree Campus. He has an M.A in English literature from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India. He has been published in print, online, school book and anthologies around the world. He also writes Flash Fictions, Short Stories and Book Reviews.

Lunch Poem

Here's kind of a weird thing.
I was reading a poem by Charles
Simic called "Boredom"

A workshop instructor I had once
[*why the italic? why that line break?*]
said that Frank O'Hara didn't revise.
(Pretty sure that's the common wisdom
but I have my doubts. Might be wrong,
and the last thing I want to do is look
it up.) So this poem of Simic's made me
think about boredom. And it occurred
to me after a couple of seconds, Christ!
I'm not bored anymore. Ever.

And that, my friend, is not brag just fact.
Not at all brag, maybe some kind of admission
about the growing dearth (if dearth can strictly
speaking grow [of course it can]) in an older man's
not brain so much as sensibility or something like.

I don't get bored anymore. (Start with that
says the instructor, get rid of all the self-
serving [why a hyphen? why this line break?]
shit that precedes it. Listen to the sentence!
Simple, intriguing: I don't get bored anymore.)

I don't get bored anymore.
I get everything else
but not bored. I know that
that's significant to those who
think things are significant
(and I'm not saying things
aren't significant, some
things don't need saying)

Alec Solomita is a writer and artist working in the Boston (USA) area. His fiction has appeared in the Southwest Review, The Mississippi Review, Southword Journal, and Peacock, among other publications. He was shortlisted by the Bridport Prize and Southword Journal. His poetry has appeared in Poetica, Lothlorien Poetry Journal, Litbreak, Driftwood Press, Anti-Heroin Chic, The Galway Review, The Lake, and elsewhere, including several anthologies. His photographs and drawings can be found in Convivium, Fatal Flaw, Young Ravens Review, Tell-Tale Inklings, and other publications. He took the cover photo and designed the cover of his poetry chapbook, "Do Not Forsake Me," which was published in 2017. His full-length poetry book "Hard To Be a Hero," came out last spring.

THE NAKED DAY

It's early in the morning, my steps
are heard and all around are asleep.
The shop shutters will open slowly
like eyelids after a restless night.

I am calm and happy, the day's mine,
I might do with it anything I want;
fill it with many thoughts of light,
rotate it in my hands like a globe.

Then the streets begin to fill
with noises: the horns of the cars,
people hurry up, colliding with me.
The day escapes by my hands at once.

It undresses with the glee with which
I wrapped it. Now on the others it depends.
On its shoulders the stress crashes,
it slips from my fingers like a snake.

No more belongs to me the naked day.

COME BACK TO ME!

Come back to me if you're
not happy, if your days are
lonely, if the four walls of
your house don’t make you happy.

Storms split the skies, and
the lightning is the only
neon that illuminates the
paths; drops of rain beat
now on the roof, imitating
the knocks at the door.
Come back to me tonight!

I collect streams of rain
in my hands like small
ponds and transform
lightning into lamps
to illuminate your road
when you come back to me.

WITHOUT A HOMELAND

What are you looking for on the shore,
shreds of memories or broken shells?
Seagulls to distant lands have flown,
abandoning thus their only love nest.

Just like you, who in a foreign land
tried to build with difficulty a roof.
Although from there, the cold, the rain,
nostalgia, and memories penetrate, too.

Nothing has remained, even that door
you opened in the dream of first love.
It was rusty, now it has been replaced

with a more beautiful and modern one.

You've changed also, you're a sky full
of clouds, hard to recognize yourself—
a sensitive soul, very often deluded;
a sad poetess, left without a homeland.

"Without a homeland", Transcendent Zero Press, 2019

YOUR VOICE WON'T REACH ME

I don't know if you will return to this story
as we often do with a book that strikes us,
if you'll be hurt by thorns involuntarily
as you'll seek there spring and flowers.

I wonder if its memory will warm you as the sun
and you'll like to live mentally every season.
Or maybe the sun will seem chilly and pallid,
just like when behind the clouds it is hidden.

Will you feel nostalgia, love, or maybe a gap,
or will you consider it only a forgotten story?
Will you seek me in the poems left all over
or they're glum, you'll throw them in a corner?

If you will desire me earnestly as one time,
to join the heart and the body together,
you'll definitely call me with a loud voice,
forgetting where I am for a single moment.

Minutes will pass and you'll start to worry
for me. I never delayed our meetings.
The fog will begin to dissipate slowly,
suffering will bring down all your feelings.

You will recall that I'm far away, in heaven.

I had told you: “Don’t grieve for me, love.”
Most probably your voice won’t reach me and
no means of transport will bring me close by.

IRMA KURTI is an Albanian poet, writer, lyricist, journalist, and translator and has been writing since she was a child. She is a naturalized Italian and lives in Bergamo, Italy. All her books are dedicated to the memory of her beloved parents, Hasan Kurti and Sherife Mezini, who have supported and encouraged every step of her literary path.

Irma Kurti has won numerous literary prizes and awards in Italy and Italian Switzerland. She was awarded the Universum Donna International Prize IX Edition 2013 for Literature and received a lifetime nomination as an Ambassador of Peace by the University of Peace, Italian Switzerland. In 2020, she became the honorary president of WikiPoesia, the encyclopedia of poetry. She is a member of the jury for several literary competitions in Italy. She is also a translator for the Ithaca Foundation in Spain.

Irma Kurti has published 26 books in Albanian, 21 in Italian, 15 in English, and two in French. She has also translated 16 books by different authors, and all of her own books into Italian and English. Her books have been published in the United States, Canada, France, Italy, Romania, Turkey, Kosovo, the Philippines, Cameroon, India, Chile, and Serbia.

Some Friends are Black Mirrors

Some friends are black mirrors
smiling a mournful smile,
distant from an artist's appeal.
They are indistinguishable in caskets
afraid to applaud expression
and salute
the opulence of fearlessness.

That simple cohesion
that warms a room
icily irritates the frowning resentful.
As a presence curves imagination
for images to roam within,
black mirrors,
elude to pretentiousness,
attempting to ring desire
with a caprice of influence.
But,
oceans roar,
owls watch, wolves chase
and stars are never
an afterthought,

Careful about choosing words,
I distance myself
from shadows undeserved.
I cling steadfastly to creativity
and prefer possibilities
to banality.
Gazing at the obvious
those with glassed frowns
entrenched in literalism
seethe from
abstraction.

I willingly
board the train without a destination
and welcome the disorder

of originality.
I leer
at the melancholy hordes of sameness
and despise
the refrain of majorities
that
clasp tightly to contrition.
I tumble with acuity,
drink in hand,
bare breasts against my chest
in a theatre of
dreams and sensuality.

Long ago,
when
nightfall
promised
imaginative encounters.
I vaulted through a black mirror
and
discovered my reflection
applauding me
on becoming myself.

Philip Butera - received his Masters's Degree in Psychology from Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada. He has published four books of poetry, *Mirror Images and Shards of Glass, Dark Images at Sea, I Never Finished Loving You, and Falls from Grace, Favor, and High Places.* His fifth, *Forever Was Never On My Mind,* will be out Summer of 2023. Two novels, *Caught Between (Which is also a 24 episodes Radio Drama Podcast https://wprnpublicradio.com/caught-between-teaser/)* and *Art and Mystery: The Missing Poe Manuscript*.
His next novel, an erotic thriller, *Far From Here*, will be out Fall of 2023. One play, *The Apparition.* His current project is collaborating with a British photographer, a French artist, and an American graphic artist to produce a coffee table book in praise of Women. Philip also has a column in the quarterly magazine Per Niente. He enjoys all things artistic.

Haiku

filling
an empty bird's nest
the evening sun

The Scarlet Dragonfly Journal, 2022

the longest journey...
a falling leaf
returns to dust

The 5th Basho- an International English Haiku Competition, 2023
Selected by Naoko Fujita as 10 winning works.

end of winter--
a butterfly settles
inside my shadow

Cold Moon Journal, 2023

cold night...
the moon lingers
above the chimney

The Japan Society- Haiku Corner, 2023

bright stars
along the sunlit path
wood anemones

The Japan Society- Haiku Corner, 2023

still flying
across the lake
a dropped feather

Fresh Out Magazine, 2023

entangled
in a spider's web
the morning sun

Memorie di una Geisha-, multiblog internazionale di Haiku , 2023

bedtime stories...
father's old armchair
remembers his shape

Cold Moon Journal, 2023

old cemetery...
only the wind
comes and goes

Unpublished

sunshine through the fog...
mother remembers
my name

Unpublished

Daniela Rodi - Is a haikuist from Finland. She was born and raised in Sweden, but lives in Finland now. Her father was Italian and her mother is Finnish. Daniela loves poetry and has been writing haiku for a few years now.

Her haiku have appeared in several American and European haiku journals and blogs. Cold Moon Journal, Autumn Moon, Haiku Corner, Memorie di una geisha- international multi blog are some examples. Last year, Daniela was also one of the winners in Basho-an international English haiku competition.

The Apocryphon of Remus

Short Story
by Raymond Alexander Turco

The revelation of the Monad given to Remus, known as Remo, has been recorded as divine proof of the sanctity of Jesus Christ, handed down by the upper powers in the year AD 2019, in the following way. May He be forever praised.

I was troubled by my usual convulsions, spitting. foaming and delirious on my own little island of the soul, which drove me to seek shelter at the Hospital Saint-Lazare. The functionaries of the hospital conducted me in solemn requiem mass to the psychiatric ward.

I languished for forty days and forty nights on my cot flowing with sweat. I imagined a host of players laughing in my fever dreams, Beelzebub and the hosts of Gog and Magog laughed at me in my fever dreams. I was roiled and raving, and no one tended to me. I was a lamb that bleated anxious for the slaughter. The orderlies were blind and very nearly faceless, with grey turbans and a second face was on the backs of their heads. The second faces mimed the opposite emotion of the first faces. The First Men were gone and I tried to push

my will beyond the door of the night of forty days. But I faltered, and the wood outside the hospital became the wood of sin inside of me.

At three in the afternoon of the forty-first day, a blazing cross blinded my vision and I knew the ordeal was over. The first ordeal of the men with two faces laughing at the door of the night was over. I removed a cloth that bound my head, and went for the first time outside of my room, able to stand, eager to walk. I thirsted for the apple of knowledge, still bewildered. My lower back began to ache.

I walked into the day room and met a hearty banquet laid out upon the table that was surrounded by a host of ancient, mishappen figures. They were ugly to me, with horns and upturned noses. I perceived the superior one, a man who was a woman, a woman who was a man. It noted my presence.

It said, "I am the Demiurgós, the maker of this and all realties, the Creator. There is no one above me. I am YHWH, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. My name is Kathleen. I am called *Adonai*. This is your afterlife, your forever. You will bow down to me or feel my windy breath."

The Demiurgós attacked and I parried. We struggled there in opposition for one revolution of the Earth. I was bewildered but I resisted. The Demiurgós spoke also inside my mind.

"Remo, you will be made subservient at the end of days. You will know me in that time as your Mother and your Father."

I would not be defeated. The Demiurgós, that YHWH, would not be defeated. I told it that we must strike a deal.

"Give me your spine and I will not molest you any longer. Give me your spinal cord and you will be free." Kathleen grinned.

At that point, two angels descended from on high, one male and one female.

"Your spine contains a whole world, Remo. Let us end it." said the female one.

"Your spine contains a whole world, Remo. Let us complete the Apocalypse within you." said the male.

The male angel, that Archon, produced an ice pack. The female angel, that Archon, produced a heat pack.

“Place the ice pack on your lumbar spine where it hurts the most and freeze that world.” The male angel implored.

“Place the heat pack on your lumbar spine where it hurts the most and burn that world.” The female angel implored.

Not knowing what to do, I took both packs and placed them on my lower spine, I felt that victory was mine and that the world housed in my back would come to know of me as its creator. Fire and ice together covered the world of my spine and blossomed into a victorious dawn. The people of that world shouted “Remo! Remo! We feel you; we hear you!” I could feel them inside of me cheering.

YHWH gnashed its teeth. “You have swayed this Apocalypse in your favour. It is not the end. YHWH knows, YHWH is always the victor.”

The angels bellowed a fearsome howl and departed. YHWH vanished from my sight. A False Prophet Remo laughed but scampered away in fear, cast into the lake of fire and sulphur. Night fell where once there was day. Where before I passed through the door of the night into clarity, now I passed from clarity into peace. I left behind YHWH, who was Samael, who was the Yaldabaoth, that fiery serpent and bush, and gave into the exhaustion of my earlier battle. I lost my senses on my cot.

When I came to my senses, the world was different. It was the same hospital, but the darkness gave over to light, the requiem mass was the hallelujah. I walked among the shapes of the ward, some glorious, some mysterious. In the day room, there was an old woman where the Demiurgós had been. I approached apprehensively because I knew my past.

“You do not know your past. You do not know your present.” the old woman smiled serenely. She knew my deepest thoughts. I saw that she was missing teeth and had a foul breath. “I am Kim. I come to you on behalf of the Monad, the Supreme Being of Light, of the Greatest Consciousness I am but an emissary.”

“And YHWH?” I inquired.

"YHWH is less than the Monad, formed in the image of the Monad, but impure. The Monad is a great light, the Absolute, *Aiōn Teleos,* the primal Father and Mother. YHWH believes it exists supremely and by itself, so it creates blindly the whole world and everyone in it. But it deceives all creation into worship. The Monad is in the Pleroma, YHWH is not in the Pleroma. YHWH can never enter the region of light that was begat by the Monad."

"I see. So all Christianity is a lie."

"You have attained peace and victory in defeating YHWH for a time. I am here to bring you to gnosis. You have met the true nature of YHWH at the dawn of your second life. Now I will show you the *Christos*. It is enough that you look in a mirror."

"I don't understand." I humbly bleated. The old woman Kim chuckled.

"You are *Christos* come again. Born again. Your gnosis is to know that you are the Saviour. Your gnosis is to know that all of humanity is part divine." The emissary of the Monad smiled, yet she became lost in thought.

"The gates of Paradise are shut. There is no way in. The Monad allows no one more to enter. We must pray to the Monad, forget YHWH. Do not trouble yourself with the Demiurgós any longer. Though it is eternal, it can be subdued."

"So the true God has shut the gates of Heaven." I remarked. "I am the Son, I must open it for the world."

"You speak Hebrew?"

I confessed I did not know a word of Hebrew. The Monad's emissary was troubled, after all I was a Sephard many generations ago. Kim's face brightened.

"It is no matter. The Monad understands your heart. YHWH only Hebrew, Greek, Latin. Let us pray."

We moved rhythmically and chanted syllables. Were they Hebrew syllables? I could not say. We chanted all around the ward and joined many to our cause. The orderlies were mystified. We proceeded. The emissary to the Monad kicked down the door to the night that was braced in ignorance and solitude.

"The gates of Paradise are open once more but I can see you still doubt." Kim asserted. "I can cure you of your convulsions. The powers of the Monad flow through me."

So saying, Kim placed one hand on my head and one on my lower back and filled me with warmness. The old woman teared up as if she could gaze within my soul and feel all the pains of my life's history. She released her grip.

"There is no convulsion. You are free. You are Remus *Christos*, can you not see it? I have restored you to power and you must minister to the world. I know the world of your spine has never doubted your divinity. We are all divine, but you are *Christos*."

I moved over to the window and spied a white dove outside. Kim smiled.

"That dove is old *Christos*, Iesus. You are the new *Christos*. Hail!"

After this knowledge, I was released from the hospital with a favourable outcome. I was confident that YHWH was subdued and would not trouble the world for a very long time. Perhaps there had even been a covenant between the Monad and YHWH. Who can say?

The sun was bright like I had never seen it. It was bright like the Monad, that Supreme Light of the Universe. Personal knowledge, that spring of gnosis, in me abounded.

Say that these words are not false and come from a true revelation. Praise the *Christos*, may He reign for ever and ever. Amen.

Raymond Alexander Turco is a poet, short story writer, and playwright born in Hackensack, NJ, USA. He writes poems in English and Italian and has a special affinity for European history, travel, surrealism, magical realism, and absurdism. The author of nine stageplays, he has published his poetry in the *Rutherford Red Wheelbarrow*, *Lothlorien Poetry Journal*, and with Bordighera Press.

From Love Withdraw

Lyrics - 2 verses

From love withdraw
a coil unwind
slay the love spell
all ties unbind

To love outbrave
Faint hope inspire
brings a new charm
blessed with desire

Angel Edwards is a singer songwriter guitarist published writer published poet with 4 books from Vancouver BC Canada. Member of AFM local 145. BMI SOCAN
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Haiku

autumn lane —
the madman face to face
with a puddle

guava sunrise —
grandma tucks the pallu
at her waist

burning husks …
mom's incense
in every room

she jumps
on the packed bus
jasmine gust

the child
cups magic in her hands
red admiral

swallowing
a painful lump
of ice cream

no bites
except for mosquitoes
daybreak

Bihu
the stack of hay
on a bicycle

noon fair —
a cheering crowd encircles
the cockfight

hillock climb —
the tea plucker fills her basket
with folk songs

Daipayan Nair - Hailing from Silchar, Assam, India, Daipayan Nair is a haikuist. He writes micropoetry, mostly haiku and tanka poems. His works have been featured on various international platforms and weekly columns like Haiku Dialogue of The Haiku Foundation, Haiku in Action of Nick Virgilio Haiku Association, and FreshOutMag. He has also been published in the Frogpond Journal, the prune juice journal, Under the Basho Journal, Failed Haiku Journal, Cold Moon Journal, Scarlet Dragonfly Journal, Triya Mag, Kingfisher Journal, Poetry Pea Journal, Time Haiku Journal, Failed haiku — a journal of English Senryu, the Akitsu Quarterly, The Wales Haiku Journal among others. His haiku, senryu and tanka have appeared in the prestigious monthly of haiku KATHA from Triveni Haikai India. His recent collection of haiku and senryu titled "tilt of the winnowing fan" was published in 2022 by Hawakal.

Following Greatness

Strolling with Frost
on the road less travelled
Reassuring Poe
his nightmares will
plague him nevermore
I fell into Whitman's
leaves of grass
and picked myself up
to continue the trod
through Longfellow's
footprints on the sands of time
Johnson and I
hear the echoes of
the change of seasons
My only unwanted companion
being the shadows in my mind
reminding me of just
how black the darkness was
which I survived
Each time when I thought
it was the end
when I fell into nothingness

as a way to save myself from
all the pain which I
remained trapped in
Poet voices would whisper to me
“You've got this!
You are one of us!”
and so, I jumped up
dusted myself off
and continued my unpredictable journey
through the unknown
ahead of me
on Frost's road
and thank God every day
that this was the path I chose
leading me ever closer
as I am following greatness

*This poem incorporates snippets of poems from: Robert Frost’s “The Road Not Taken”; Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Raven”; Walt Whitman’s “Leaves of Grass”; Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s “A Psalm of Time” and Michael Lee Johnson’s “Sundown, Fall”.

Hourglass

One tiny grain of sand
For every tear I’ve shed
Every punch that landed
All the times my heart broke
Each time I was brought to a lower low
The grains continued to fall
Somehow it feels like time slows to a crawl in misery
And pours out faster in the light of joy
I know I’ll never stop the sand
There’s no chance to flip the hourglass of life
When the sand runs out
And we finally leave this world
Ashes to ashes and dust to dust

My hourglass will shatter
Releasing my spirit
Paroled from my mortal sentence
Ready to begin life everlasting
Free of the constraints of time
Only peace is possible in this place
Outside the hourglass

On the Floor

I need a snack / Munchies for TV time / I go in the kitchen / and pull out a skillet / so I can sauté / some chicken / for a salad. I put olive oil / in the skillet. / The new bottle / pours out fast / and when I pull back / I spill some on the floor. / "I'll clean it up later" / I say to myself. / I grab the chicken / from the fridge. / When I open the package / juices and meat blood / spurt onto the counter. / "Where's a wipe? / I need to clean this!" / I get the bleach wipes / and wipe the counter down. / I go to put them away / and accidentally / knock them over / Bleach goes onto the chicken. / I pale and realize / now there will / only be salad. / I grasp the head of lettuce / and put it on the counter / then get a couple of tomatoes. / I wash a tomato / and take it over / to the cutting board. / It's slippery and / I lose my grip! / I try to grab / for it / and slip in the oil / on the floor. / I go to stabilize / my balance / and end up smashing / the poor tomato / with a squish. / I wince, seeds are / between my toes. / I reach for the lettuce / so I can chop it up / with the last tomato / and have this / basic salad. My hands, still wet / from washing the tomato / slide on the surface / and launch the lettuce / into the corner of / the kitchen. / The corner / which has all manner / of crumbs and dropped things. / I watch it… / you guessed it… / hit the floor / and roll / through the oil / then stop in the / joint of the corner cabinets. / I shake my head / and exhale, / knowing that this / simple task / was beyond my ability / to execute. / I pick up the lettuce / and see Oreo cookie crumbs / a dried piece of / shredded cheese / and many different / colours of cat fur. / I shake my head again / as I look over / the kitchen floor, / which lost the / Battle of the Salad, / as did I. / People don't believe that / diets are hard / but the struggle / is real! / I shrug at the mess. / "I'll clean this up later. / Guess I'll have to / order pizza. / What a shame!

She is Not Me, but I am Her

Standing here now
The woman before you
is nothing like the ‘me’ of then

I cannot see how
I survived all I went through
I knew I’d escape, just didn’t know when

I wish somehow, I could go back in time
and talk to my former self
to chisel wisdom into concrete ears

I wouldn’t try to change my life
or try to amass wealth
but just try to leave some comfort to pass the years

I still want the life I have now
It’s all I could have wished for
and I’m thankful it’s mine everyday

But there’s a part of me that doesn’t like how
behind every closed window and locked door
stood an obstacle in my way

Obstacles make us grow and change
That’s not the part I don’t see
or why I’d reach out to the me that’s malleable

I must ask; I find it so strange
as I look over that past ‘me’
Did you know that you’re valuable?

Of course, you don’t
That is why you gave up
and threw your hopes away

You say you’ll try harder, but you won’t
All you say is “how high” when someone says “jump!”

You wish for no tomorrow because of the pain felt today

What would I say to her?
That ‘me’ of 1995 with strong will?
I would gently take her hand

and say, “I know things are horrible, sure
and they’ll get even worse, still
but you need to hold fast to your faith

Remember life is a miracle returned to you
This is a blessed second chance
Your decisions will shape the path we walk”

She will know it’s true
She will walk away without a second glance
and think, “thanks for the talk”

But the words…they’ll take a while to sink in
A seed planted which needs time to grow
into the hedge maze we now traverse

Each time we get lost within
she will come to know
when dealing with time, there is no reverse

The maze is changing behind us
giving us only options forward
Pushing us towards the present

Each time we make a fuss
or try to make the struggles beyond hard
the memory of our talk will be heaven-sent

That wall behind us, made of leaves
pushing against our back
guiding us to the now

cares not for sobs and heaves
cuts no slack
Only knows you must move forward but cares not how

Step after step, year after year
Heartbreak, time and again
Scars that heal, but never stop bleeding

Determination replaces fear
even at times when
she cries she is not getting what she's needing

Do I think she will remember the words?
Will she keep moving on our path
or will she go a different way?

She'll be drawn to what she yearns
But how can you be sure? *Picking leaves off my back…*
…because I'm here, now; with you today

The River

Go with the flow, they say
try to let go
Sometimes the pull
is rushing me forward
Cold rollercoaster hands
throw me this way and that
Fear grips until
the inevitable moment
when I am becalmed
Floating as driftwood
without a care in the world
Please stay forever!
Let me just meander aimlessly
in slow peace
Not meant to be
Not for me
Smashing against the rocks
A rude wake-up call
I feign surprise
but suspected all along

I am tossed once more
never knowing when
peace will return
I can’t fight it
We’re all in it
A part of it
The river of life

Desiree Batiste is the author of the book, "The Shaping of a Diamond", an inspirational 27-year journey of survival and perseverance told through poems.She was born in 1979 in Mesa, Arizona. She currently lives in Buckeye, Arizona with her husband Michael, daughter Kaylee and their four cats: Sketch, Pixel, Trace and Slim Shady.

Desiree uses poetry and writing as a cathartic way of healing from her past experiences. She has more books in the works: a second poetry anthology, a psychological thriller fiction novel and her autobiography.

Message in a Bottle

I took a green bouquet in my left hand
to the ocean. Ocean flowers,
green roses for your green eyes, Mother.

Take my imperfect love bundle, Mother
who rocked in arms, as I slept,
whose body vessel brought me this shore.

Carry me on nothing to fear,
take this me-dream green destiny of forget
into your bosom’s roses, ghost,
sky flame, ship minuscule on the horizon
of boarded glass.

Where ocean and years hover,
plums drop from branches,
near a window a white cloth’s gold crumbs

leave no trace
at all. Your hands' oblivion knuckles clouds.
The sea's drowning hand waves far out.
I think it time, retaliation, the eyes in a face
of sand, the answer that is and is not.

I fling feebly to your vast
wave crested nothing, ashes. Kisses
of milk-box near steps
cloud the curved bottle's message:
the all of a corner's broom, April showers.

Roses of the sea lie on the ocean floor.
Apples fall from eternity's green branches.

Up and Out

Champion pole vaulter Bob Richards is up,
the abandoned air base is out. Bob
Richards, not to be confused with the great
Wendy Richard of East Enders and
Are You Being Served?, vaults on the box
of Wheaties, breakfast of champions
and with strength, skill epitomizes Up,
as does the air base Out: lots of macadam
to venture out to where earth meets sky,

a body could walk forever runways empty
of aircraft. Cracks with weeds form
a pattern, as did Bob Richards with his up,
over the bar, down, pattern of practice to be
in the Olympics and at meets that lacked
Olympic fanfare. All it took to do that up
and over, his one aid a pole, moves me,
as does the airbase's abandon,
its lots of walk out far as the eye can see,

its horizontal, like its sky, void of gliders and

planes. Though a few years back, a glider
fell, its pilot's life lost, I heard. I wasn't there
then. I was in a room without windows,
monitoring students writing to a prompt
called Now I'm Paying for It.
Each had a different It, most, a lot to say.
I wasn't sure that prompt would work.
One by one, they stood and read aloud.

Chapter from an Egyptian Novel

He looks for his lost love
only to find that she died
and that he attended her funeral
and didn't know it.
He dreams about his father
taking him into a cemetery
pointing to a stone and saying son
this is your grave.
He searches for his lost love.
He plays the piano.
A bird flies through an open window
and then out the window.
He marries a woman
with green eyes, they have a son
a house on a lake.
He searches for his lost love
the love of his youth
the girl who was like a rainbow
a mountain an orange flower a river.
He was not aware the funeral
he had attended
was for her.
He worked at a large
company, so large
he didn't know his supervisor,
except in name, whose
wife died.

And out of a sense of obligation
partly out of sympathy
partly out of boredom,
he straightened his tie in
a mirror and then took
his seat among mourners.
It was her coffin up there,
in a pavilion, on a
platform. He
could barely see it
through all the flowers.

Selfie

"She even thinks that up in heaven
Her class lies late and snores"
I see, it's a poem printed on a white board.
I'm with you, behind the bulk of gold
podium. All these desks. I just popped in.
While it's just you and I..see, I know
my pronoun cases. Cases, Casey.

Jose said to George, She was just a kid.
You came into her bedroom, unzipped…
the unmentionable, Jose nailed it.
A father flies across the courtroom,
a bailiff pries father fingers from Jose's
throat, but George...Score one for Jose.
It worked. I walked out a free woman.

You'd think a father...I never knew Caylee's.
What happened? You've read about
Cindy a nurse, George a doting grandpa ,
the backyard pool, the shallow grave,
Zanny the Nanny, Universal Studios
I work there. I'm here, with you.
What's the weather like in Orlando?

Do I like chocolate martinis?
I like to party, the Orlando club scene.
I'll toast a memory, Casey Anthony,
Mother of the Year! Tone is everything.
Jose, demonstrative, emphatic,
to George, "your daughter's mouth!"
Caylee's taped corpse, Zanny the Nanny.

You've written, If you take "even"
from the first line, the poem
is no longer Cullen's classic quatrain
"To a Lady I Know." Tone, nuance..
I should write fiction. Casey Anthony,
Mother of the Year. This podium
you hide behind. All these empty desks.

While it's just you and I, let's you hold
the iPhone, there, mom of the year's
arm round prof of the year's shoulder.
Don't get that "she even thinks.."
in the picture. Big smile, here at Clovis
Community College, you and me,
big smile, lie our way to the truth.

Peter Mladinic's fifth book of poems, Voices from the Past, is due out in November 2023 from Better Than Starbucks Publications. An animal rights advocate, he lives in Hobbs, New Mexico, USA.

Hocus Pocus an Ekphrastic

Abra ca dabra sayeth she
Bewitching wench
A brunette witch
As I wish so mote it be.
Into the fire I seek thee.
The fathomless crystal ball,
My fierce gaze, mythical.

Lithe as a supine serpent I,
My waving body twist, into
Knots to tie,
The intended charm, to
Plot the harm.
To cast my sorceress spirit,
And seek yours, right to
The gates of hell.
Ball of fuming fabulous fire,
Upon the force of my imperious
Command, become a ravenous
Rotating gyre, fly free from my palm,
Paradisiacal provident sphere.

Prodigal expelled to find chosen one,
The designated sun of brightest brilliance brings,
Freedom's celestial lordly being,
In this frosty space to enthrone the king
Make believe mythical fantastic skies
spellbinding sinister sight, pyromania, of
Byzantine nights of might.

Reign, revolve in grace of light,
Turn and burn, and return again
In ageless gyre, defy, defy the pull
And push of gravitational pyres...
To attractions, repulsions be thou resistant,

Beacon siring eternity.
This focused beam of my powerful throw
Druidic Celtic chant in mythic poetic flow,
Coiled hand in vicious clawing throes,
Coitus of cosmic countdown show.

Now I set thy tempest free,
Universal chaos in motion be
Rip consciousness, shredded
In wild photonic spree, as by the spell I chant,
I cast out thee!

Candlelight vigil past time's speeding arrow
Released into firmaments of sunset's morrow
Sunder armaments of temporalities float
The battlements of Time and space toss
Fulminating glow!

Impermanent Eternity

Permanence is in itself transient
Because every beginning presupposes
An implied ending
Every ending conceives
A new beginning
And the Big Bang
That started it all,
Was the moment
Nothing became
Something,
Permanently.

And if it was God
Divine genesis,
No big bang at all
His Word made flesh, then,

It is his Silence
That intrigues me.

What were his thoughts?
In the silent void
Without words?

If
Successively bigger bangs
Create bigger universes
The river of *chronons*
Looping endlessly,
Wondering if
THIS,
Wonderful symmetry
Of space time
Should veer off,
Wandering into asymmetry...

If Matter should happen,
Should the mind
Cease to matter?

For the dense congealed
Singularity
That expansion become
Space time
Did it create mind
Or did
Mind create it?

The tells glare from the
Gaps in between the tale,
The silence of an
Indomitable universe
Ruthless, fecund, self-contained
Oceanic egg.

Your Dominance of My World

Your green gilled breath
Your chiselled health
Your eyes your voice
Teardrops and crystal
Your heart so raw
Your hands so soft
Your throat
My feathered stalk
Your romping walk
You are tenderness
You are genderless
Your Onyx naivete
Innocence radiates.
Your mind so hard
Diamond razor sharp
Bright as bone
Through broken flesh
Oh my flower, you are
Yet to come, to fruition.

How fierce my fears
My tears, my reveries
prayers,
That you may find
Long lasting roots.

Your virgin stem
Your mobile face
Your trusting grin
Your emotions
Contained in

A wanton need to spill
A calling to heal
May positives seal
May you make
The real deals.

Broken in storms
Yesterday's warmth
Maybe your alms
Your inner Psalms.

My child no more
My boy no more
But you will always be
My son, my morning star
Young man in the making
The risen sun of my
Mortal hours.

Amrita Valan is a writer from Bangalore, India and has a master's degree in English Literature. She has worked in various professions, ranging from the hospitality industry, BPOs and as content creator in deductive logic and reasoning in English.

She is currently a stay-at-home mom to her two boys.

Her work has been published in many anthologies and online journals. The anthologies include, Poetica 2 and 3, To Be or Not To Be a Writer, The Poet's Christmas Childhood and Faith anthologies, Divided: A Poet's Stance, The Ink and the Sword, Down the Rabbit Hole, Fire and Ice, Earth Wind Rain and Fire Anthology, The ImpSpired Vol 7& 8 Anthology, The Alien Buddha Wears a Black Bandanna among others. Her poems and stories Have featured in Spillwords, Café Lit, Café Dissensus, Shot glass Journal, Oddball magazine, Modern Literature, Indian Periodical, Potato Soup Journal, Literary Yard, Poetryand Places, LothLorien poetry Journal and Portland Metrozine among many others.

Arrivederci, (Goodbye till we meet again), her debut collection of fifty poems about arrivals and departures, farewells and hopes of reunion, love loss grief and recollection is published on Amazon as of 7 May 2021.

GO INTO THE CREVICE

Go into the crevice
and find the friend who
comes out with his
last words
and rotten tracks
through time.
He has the last portion
of his birthday cake
left for you
and his mother carries
an eternal side-eye
& calls your home- 'small'.

Where do you go to
or look back from
if he
is a darkling
who calls
for your invisibility
on the forums?
He,
with the beast of hauteur
and his mother's fallacious pride,
as spots around his body.

You only look at your own spot
as a starling
on an abandoned nest.

****

Real dispossession
is to know
that he could question your
place
& make amity's natural affections
grievances.
It was easy

for him to dethrone
his privileges
for affected weekends
& refuse to offer you
a seat of trust.

***

Hello Mother,
you have read through
the years
the obligatory side-eyes
you had given out
like societal circulars
when I failed to obtain
a seat at the table.
No,
it was yours.
Your son
refrained
from bringing
a dreamer and survivor's
flowers for your golden vases
there.

So
he gave me a farewell
through an obligatory invitation
at the cinema
and I finally said 'no'
to the arrangement,
bowdlerizing
a grand estimation
for both your places
in the city.

***

We were children
and I was the youngest
of all.

How do you meet
my gaze now?
To make your son's
disappearance
graver
than it was
for all those years past.

***

Go into the crevice,
mother,
maybe he's
hiding there
with the flakes
of ants' storehouses,
keen to pick one cover
of naivete
or innocence
to make me an
overcoat with.

He awaits
to meet me
at the school auditorium
where we once beheld
the sun of our youth
through
greater terrains
than this future
or your disapproval(s)

*****

Go into the crevice.
Go into the crevices.
You may find us there.

DYING BREED

Words can come from oracles,
like sirens ringing out of wooden floors
while mother waits patiently over the threshold,
eager for the plane ticket in his palms.

Words come from motormouths,
gaping wide at the valley
till the altar of adulthood reveals
a mountain peak
and the same sirens
produce squirts of anxiety about the future.
Words left over
as the final call on the summit.

He picks up tatters left as clothes,
chopped blocks of wood
as dying sacraments of the migrant's pursuit
and puts curved stones
on the nape of his neck
to ensure tunnels
don't enter the wound there.

To go away,
leave at the earliest,
is the command.
But he holds himself vigorously,
stubborn as a mule
and sacrosanct as a child,
by the scruff of a green soul,
veins blue as those embroidered
suits kept away,
their soft departures unbecoming
for those strange climes
he's banished to.
An eventual exile affronting his constituency back home.

The words are cruel stipends to him,
repaid with mere confrontations

and a yellowed, soured disposition,
like a drowning body
recovered from deep down the lakes
where alligators await their fodder.

Say anything.
Only don't cry out,
'He's one from a dying breed'

'He's one from a dying breed'
now rings like sirens
from oracles passed down
as the family tree.

Prithvijeet Sinha - The writer's name is Prithvijeet Sinha from Lucknow, India. He is a post graduate in MPhil from the University of Lucknow, having launched his prolific writing career by self publishing on the worldwide community Wattpad since 2015 and on his WordPress blog An Awadh Boy's Panorama

(https://anawadhboyspanorama.wordpress.com/)

Besides that, his works have been published in several varied publications as FemAsia Magazine, Hudson Valley Writers Guild, Inklette Magazine, Piker Press Online, anthology Pixie Dust and All Things Magical published by Authors Press(January, 2022), Cafe Dissensus, The Medley, Screen Queens, Confluence- South Asian Perspectives, Reader's Digest, Borderless Journal, Lothlorien Poetry, Live Wire, Rhetorica Quarterly, Ekphrastic Review, The Kolkata Arts, Aze Journal, Dreich Magazine, Visual Verse, In Plainspeak and in the children's anthology Nursery Rhymes and Children's Poems From Around The World (AuthorsPress, February 2021) as well as Soul Spaces(AuthorsPress, 2023)among others.

Poughkeepsie

Short Story
by Tina Hudak

This wet, cold November morning in Philadelphia found Grace standing on the dirty platform at the train station at 11:05 waiting for the inbound 11:20 from Baltimore. Phyllida, a friend from her Vassar days, was visiting, and if Grace was honest, she was nervous. Despite their friendship in Poughkeepsie, they had not kept in touch the year after graduation in 1915. "It's the war," she told herself, to assuage her guilt. Phyllida had been a brick during the times Grace thought she would not make it through Vassar. Enrolled she found that she was smart enough, but not from the proper background – teas, evenings in formal dress, and wearing gloves, always gloves. It showed in every possible way, especially in the early underclassmen years. But with her friend's support and impromptu lessons in decorum, by graduation no one would have ever guessed that her mother was a maid, and her father a drunk. Standing in the fog, grinding in the platform dirt under her heels, she pulled down on her favorite hat as far as it would go for warmth or perhaps, security. This birthday gift from Phyllida was purchased at the famous Gimbel's Department Store in New York. Wrapping her worn, woolen coat tightly about herself, she let her thoughts drift to the past. Thinking kept her from feeling; it kept the damp weather at bay. From a wealthy Main Line family, Phyllida McGhuire was the most practical and optimistic person she had ever met. Her insistence on becoming a concert pianist had put her at great odds with her family. Status through marriage is what they had wanted for their only daughter. Grace, always ready with a smile and offer to help, was shy and insecure. Grace had taken to this remarkable girl immediately, her opposite in every way. With their lives as roommates, their fondness of one another had deepened into a true friendship. For the first time, Grace found herself confiding in someone about her home life. Now, Grace was only too happy to stand and wait; Phyllida had spent the past year abroad studying music from Vienna to Rome, while Grace moved to Philadelphia for training as a nurse in the Children's Hospital. Recently Grace was approached by an administrator at Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania about enrolling in the medical school. Her name had come to the attention of the college through her steadfast work with the wounded soldiers at the Pennsylvania Hospital. At first glance, the staff thought she lacked the stamina for the physical hard work. Despite her slight frame and pale skin, she possessed a fierce determination when confronted with any challenge – physical or otherwise. Pulling upon every ounce of self-possession

she learned at Vassar, and looking at her detractors with those coal-black eyes, she was immediately reassessed by the staff and accepted. And hard it was – she was tired, all the time. There was little sleep and less food along with the constant needs of the patients… always needing her touch, her voice, or just her presence. Now it was she who needed help, to hear Phyllida's good sense, as childhood self-doubts began to resurface. These war years had changed everyone. While she was never a child with a light step or quick smile, she had kept hope. Showing little emotion had been the façade that kept her safe: from her father's physical anger, from his verbal abuse, from her mother's embrace of her suffering. But, neither had killed hope. It was the open window in her tiny room that kindled this. The birds cooing on the windowsill, nests, tucked under the broken-wood moldings and brick, offered the solace of angels' voices. She was never one for self-pity; she worked hard, instead. She knew life was unfair. She held no grudges. The children who lost their fathers, the wounded who came to visit their children, the ones who would never recover, were now a daily part of her life at hospital. She did what she could, but she knew it was never enough. Not at home; not here. She continued to work. As her thoughts floated back to the boyish face of Cronan Molony, a tentative smile slowly spread across her face. It was the hair. Despite his dark, sallow looks, the unruly shocks of chestnut hair sticking out in every direction had almost made her laugh, until her eyes looked beyond this. A body lying there as still as stone, wrapped in crisp, sterile sheets on the white iron bed had jolted her back into reality. Her quiet gasp was enough of a sound to stir the body to life. When his eyes opened gently, she found herself starring into pools of liquid ice. It was then she realized her own ignorance. She knew nothing about how much pain a soul can hold. He was her first "assignment" on her first night working at the hospital. Even now, standing at the station, she shivered not from the cold drizzle, but because of her own arrogance. Because of the reality in those penetrating eyes, she had met hopelessness. She had thought so well of herself – highly educated, especially in the newer field of psychology. Despite the ridicule by the traditional male-dominated psychology circles, she latched onto the theories of Helen Thompson Woolley not only with her mind, but with her gut. Approaching this injured soldier with his one arm, should be done with empathy and realism. After all, they were made up of the same emotional components regardless of sex. Even she would want this approach, she thought assuredly. Walking down the dimly lit corridors with a clipped gait, she felt confident. She softly stepped into the soldiers' ward armed with her theories, ready to release this man from his terrors. What a fool she had been! Standing amidst the platform's bustle with eyes looking into her recent past, the smile disappeared as she withdrew into herself.

Oblivious to the commotion of the crowds and the porters' jostles, Grace continued to live her waiting minutes within this reverie. At first Cpl. Molony was reluctant to speak to her. There were times when he murmured little more than the common formalities of "thank you" and "please." Never with a smile, or nod to her. Gradually, over the days and months his story unfolded. She never asked. She waited. It was the day she put down her clipboard on his bedside table, and pulled a chair within a foot of the bed itself, that she knew they had crossed his defensive barrier. He looked at her with a fierceness she had never seen in a man, not even during her father's drunken rage. She was rooted to her seat. Back erect. With hands folded, her intellect for protection, she waited. She was afraid. He spoke directly to her, without blinking, "I have something to tell you." The intensity of his bearing did not match the gentleness of his voice, and she found herself breathing again. He, the patient – *her* patient – took her hand delicately, as if they were dancing, and led her through a series of events. He told his story with a constant measured rhythm, distancing himself from her and his experience. His face relaxed as he eyes focused beyond her – some place she had no right to enter. He spoke as if it had happened to someone else. As if he had not acted, only observed. She knew when he had finished. His eyes closed and his facial muscles echoed his pain. He let her hand slip from his. Grace rose gingerly and with deliberate reverence, carefully taking the inside of his palm and placing in its center a blessing from her lips. His eyelids never fluttered; his body lay still as she pulled the soft white blankets protectively around him. He was broken. He was beyond repair – her repair. She crept away, guilty for her ineptness, for her understanding. Only empathy for his pain lingered, and she latched onto that to keep her moving. That evening Grace scurried along the cobblestones, passing Independence Hall without a glance, on her way to church. While she had been raised in the Catholic tradition as many European immigrants, her anger about the War, the city's poor, and her own home life, was aimed directly at God. Tonight, she did not know where else to go. She needed the familiar comfort of her childhood sanctuary, St. Joseph's. It was Father Scully who looked in on her mother to make sure she had enough money to meet the rent, or enough food in her pantry for the cold winter months. He counseled forgiveness in all things even with his knowledge that as of now, young Grace could not forgive. Despite conflicting feelings, her footsteps quickened as memories flooded through her veins, until she found herself standing at the street corner of Fourth and Walnut. The following morning Grace returned with her heart open. She would understand this man. He was her patient, after all. The sun was shining and although it was colder, the crisp air felt invigorating rather than threatening. Her talk, and late-night dinner of cabbage and potatoes, with Fr. Scully was a homecoming. After years of working hard in school and

in the rarefied, socially stratified milieu of Vassar, she had lost herself. Sitting in the rectory's dining room across from the one man who knew her family and their struggles, she could let go of all those defences. Cronon's words had left her exposed and humbled. She saw herself – her haughtiness with the eyes of the other. It was not the pride of the gloved hand and lowered eyes; she heard her own false voice – yes, it was her tone. Cronon's eyes, so direct and unflinching, had laid her bones bare. She had sat in judgement. Grace slept deeply, and today, she could breathe. No assured staccato steps down the hospital hallways on this day, but ones flying with lightness, almost skipping, to meet her day with him. To help him move beyond his actions, and her, beyond her viewed narrowed by the personal. She caught herself just at the doorway to his ward and forced herself to stop and take a cleansing breath. "It is a new day," she reminded herself. With the sun's rays blinding her entry, Grace could not find him immediately and felt a panic rising in her chest. Moving to the side, she again stopped and carefully looked down the row of injured soldiers for his bed. It was empty. Fresh sheets showed no indication that anyone had ever been there. She slowly walked toward it, barely able to acknowledge the "hello" of other patients – their voices sounding so far away. She stood motionless, looking down. She asked herself in a whisper, "Was he real? Did I imagine him?" She turned trance-like and walked back down the hallway. This time there was no joy in her step, just a series of stumbles with hands outstretched, reaching for the cool tiled walls. All these years she had kept the secret of Cronon Moloney. All these many years.

Tina Hudak is an artist and writer living in the Washington, D.C. metro area since 1975. Her three recent books, a series of poems and flash fiction written during the pandemic years, were inspired by interactions with others, but especially with nature. She lives with her husband and two cats in an old farmhouse.

Summer is Dying

Outside, summer is dying into fall,
and blue daddy petunias sprout ears—
hear the beginning of night chills.
In their yellow window box,
they cuddle up and fear death together.
The balcony sliding door
is poorly insulated, and a cold draft
creeps into all the spare rooms.

Bowl of Black Petunias

If you must leave me, please
leave me for something special,
like a beautiful bowl of black petunias—
for when the memories leak
and cracks appear
and old memories fade,
flowers rebuff bloom,
sidewalks fester weeds
and we both lie down
separately from each other
for the very last time.

Memories Past

(Hillbilly Daddy)

I settle into my thoughts
zigzagging between tears
my fathers' grave—
Tippecanoe River
Indiana 1982.

Over now,
a hillbilly country
like the flow
catfish memories
raccoons in trees
coon dogs tracking
on the river bank,
the hunt.
Snapping turtles
in the boat
offline—
river flakes
to ice—
now covered
thick snow.

Now That I Desire

Now that I desire to be close to you
like two occupants sharing a twin bed
sensing the warmth of sweating shoulders,
hungering for your flesh like a wild wolf
leaning over an empty carcass,
you're off searching unexplored cliffs,
climbing dangerous mountain tops,
capturing bumblebees in broken beer bottles for biology class,
pleasing plants, parachuting from clouds for fun.
In shadows, you're closer to life, nonsense,
a princess of absurdity, a collector
of dreams and silent sounds.
In clouds, you build your own fantasy.
Share it with select celebrities.
But till this captive discovers a cure for caring,
a way of rescuing insatiable insanity,
or lives long enough to be patient in longing for you—
you must be vigilant,
for with time, snow will surely
blanket this warm desire.

Michael Lee Johnson lived ten years in Canada during the Vietnam era. Today he is a poet in the greater Chicagoland area, IL. He has 293 YouTube poetry videos. Michael Lee Johnson is an internationally published poet in 44 countries, a song lyricist, has several published poetry books, has been nominated for 6 Pushcart Prize awards, and 6 Best of the Net nominations. He is editor-in-chief of 3 poetry anthologies, all available on Amazon, and has several poetry books and chapbooks. He has over 473 published poems. Michael is the administrator of 6 Facebook Poetry groups. Member Illinois State Poetry Society: http://www.illinoispoets.org/.

I Can Imagine

That Jason and Medea settled down
together in old age. That they hung pictures
of their dead children on the Christmas tree.
The murder was so long ago, it must
have seemed like something that they did together.
Best to forgive all round, remember only
their early love and travels, and forget
betrayals once committed in hot blood.

I can imagine Adam telling Eve
he wished that they'd had girls – so much less trouble,
as they retired to their respective beds.

I can imagine Mary Magdalene
wondering why His mother never liked her,
even as tongues of fire danced on their heads.

The Innocent

We've taken refuge here, half underground,
hoping our breath and heartbeats make no sound
to trace us by. I can't afford to care
what happens to the other ones out there,

what roll of rape and murder. I will die
for you if need be; meanwhile, please don't cry;
your life's at stake. Neither of us is old,
but we're a story that's already told
a thousand times. I've sheltered here before,
hiding you in a shawl. And there are more
like you and me. I don't foresee the day
when Caesar's world dries up and blows away.
Such an old story: Mothers, children, fear.
They sound so close behind us. Please, not here.

The Old Dame Looks Ahead

My mad computer's gone berserk again,
spewing out incoherent words, and I,
having no grandkids, now must borrow one
from someone else. Because the old no longer
guard the collected wisdom of the tribe;
now it's the young, siphoning lore from iphones,
who fend disaster off, who fight the gods
and demons for us. My day is done, I know.
The polar ice cap's melting, so I can't
be shifted to an iceberg to drift toward death
(one point for being childless). Soon enough
I'll pack a suitcase, leave behind for good
a world whose music I no longer hear,
machines that I can't use, and end my days
parking at random, living in my car,
dispensing wisdom from a jelly jar.

Gail White is a contributing editor to Light Poetry Magazine. Her own poetry has appeared in many journals and anthologies, including Nasty Women Poets, Love Poems at the Villa Nelle, and Killer Verse. Her latest chapbook, Paper Cuts, is just out from Kelsay Books. She lives in he Louisiana bayou country with her husband and cats.

Rhymeopause, Baldness and all that stuff…

‘The moon, thinks in primordial Indian accent, is the Hindu’s first Uncle… there
are n-ception human senses and emotions yet unknown to us,’ answers my dad’s photo, the crown of dangling wig glued on his head, which stands in the
middle of the family collage, and fakes metaphors of confessions—-abstract.

I never wanted to be as bald as rock, rhythm, the “Nuncle Moon”
or the only photo of courageous Shakespeare

I envy courage, competition, the five c’s of effective communication
when I start typing @ snail’s pace I think of
the gift of male baldness
like I often think of EMI-fied hips and skulls inside those graves of poets at Westminster

Opposite of orgy is not always throbbing, mercy, froth, rhythm —-Mother Father, soul

But I did with my soul what Tyson did to Holyfield in1997
Black clock, rock
Dear rhythm, are you no more?

Collectively, I’m the Brahmin
Call it DNA-ism
Even hydroxychloroquine won’t kill all the -isms and pains
Pain is my pet!
I’m the baldness of Veda-Vyāsaḥ, Pāṇini, Vātsyāyana, Chanakya,
the Śramaṇa
The skin of my forehead rising/falling,
like the phonetic tones of Mandarin,
on my skull, the kapala—-
the bowl in which the Aghoris will drink urine—-
like destiny, old tree, old friend, orgy.

Sandeep Sharma is an Asst Prof of Comparative Literature at Government College, Diggal (HP), India. He is Associate Editor of the journals In

Translation (Université Badji Moktar de Annaba) and Traduction et Langues, University of Oran 2. He received the Award of Academic Excellence (2022) by the Arab Translators' Association for his contribution to research and linguistics. He has published his works with Impspired (UK); SIL International (US);The Yellow Medicine Review (Southwest Minnesota State University); PoetryXHunger (Maryland State Arts Council, US); Southwest Word Fiesta (Silver City, New Mexico); The Anguillian (Anguilla); In Translation (Algeria), HP University (India) and so on. His academic profile remains at the top 1% (with 274k views) on academia.edu. His works can be accessed at: https://hp-in.academia.edu/SsandeepSharma

Spring (I)

have you heard the sound
the bud opening in spring
has anyone known that noise
thousands of eruptions
it must be a cacophony
or a symphony
of the trees
too soft for the human ear
the noise of flesh
rips open
so that cells gasping and grabbing
for the sunlight can emerge
do they kick, cry, or scream?
perhaps, ask the chickadee what it sees
when no one else is around

Last Moments

Grinding inside, struggling to be free
slipping through blood and fleshy networks
through the dark space between organs
where bone dwells among fibres and tissues
now torn,
now shattered.

There's no path, just a final release
when body gives up its clenched grasp--
energy metamorphoses.

Gasps of lungs and flicker of fading eyes,
glazing clouding

slowly disconnecting

to space beyond.

No Time.

The colour between skin and the space inside,
is it not red?
No, it is black like the pavement,
not the void,
but transformation.

Gears are turning and circuits changing *ad finis*
quietly preparing an escape

Limbs lifeless and senses subdued,
silence *ad infinitum* descends.

painless motionless

Terminatus.

But unbound.

Corks

The sun whispers warm murmurs to the surface of the sea,
Much like a lover will in between cool sheets.
Patches of sunlight blind us as it bounces off of the white buildings
winding down to the sandy beach.

Our dreams bob in our minds in this sunny place,
like the cork pieces that float in our wine.
It can't be so bad in that glass,
where you can only go up to the top
and float.
We want to be there, to skim over the depths below.

We can't fail, but we do.
We don't see that all the pieces of the cork
get swallowed up whole,
or are left to linger at the bottom of the glass.
Fallen.
Empty.
Swollen.

Spring (II)

Spring rain
cold rain
drops on the dogwood flower
springs back like
space between heartbeats
silence waiting for sound

Shower of Leaves

the trees of the grove start their yearly dance
I can hear them rustle and see them twitch
with
anticipation
like a case of nerves that settles in, while waiting in the wings

an unknown metronome clicks
and
their performance starts
the first act you may miss, if not in your seat
as colours peep through the green
red, orange, yellow, brown
autumnal hues slide and mingle their way through the bushy boughs
more each day
the second act is quicker, an allegro pace
the rain and the wind accelerando the pace
quite a show
bravo
the ash leaves trickle down from their lofty heights
the dogwood's leaves pierce their shower de côté
flashes of crimson mixed with marigold
the maples bring their performers spinning and swaying perfectly
adding texture and stateliness to the dance
the torrent of leaves is brief, before the final movement
quiet, slow, lento
the leaves fall with
almost
not a sound
no encore

Bridget Houlihan - Bridget is a writer of short stories and poetry, who likes to dabble in photography and sketching. She is currently a content creator and editor.

moon dreams

the moon circles around the earth
it watches its birthplace
nightly every rotation no days missed
since it was sliced away into space

the romantic moon is my heart
alone yearning to belong again
it floats out there with no place to land
since you cut me off from your love

my newest son

you're not my son
but you're flesh and blood
i was there for your arrival
raised you for eight years
our bonds grew strong
through mom's rights
and too many wrongs
my love never wavered;
more than a grandson
to me, you're my son

for twenty-one years
i've loved deeply
saw you off to college;
was there for crises or two
you are not my son
but to me
you are my son
forever

oxford

he is unclear,
confused and obtuse,
because he is not sure,
clear, or certain,
he wanted,
needed, or is required,
to use the oxford comma
when he writes a haiku,
sonnet, or limerick

elliot m. rubin is a New Jersey poet who has published over thirty books of poetry, facilitates two Zoom poetry critique groups, posts daily on Instagram and has over 10,200 poets following him. He also won first place in the Poets Corner Poetry Contest and has had poems published in assorted anthologies.