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Deathbed Sheets

By: Lindsay-Rose Dykema

It was just a (series of) misunderstanding(s)
starting with my saying *let's be mono* --
a few months later I started flirting with someone
you labeled it 'emotional affair' but I just figured
I'd forgotten to add 'for now.'

Is monogamy death or paying taxes?
(then you should have known it was only for now)
death, taxes, and the ennui
of never-ending Sisyphus laundry (you won't be done with it
until you're lying on your deathbed sheets)
and the greatest of these is lovers like leaves, lovers like these ones
meeting needs until one of them leaves
falling then floating, screaming then streaming
drifting apart no matter how tightly you squeeze
but should you sneeze --

My mother used to work nights;
as a child I deployed a (series of) antic(s), desperate stall tactic(s)
If you sneeze when you get there, God bless you, I once yelled
as her car pulled away and I waved goodbye.

Vanishing Colors

By: Jasmine Barber

The blackness of my curls begins to plummet
from the root to the end.

Layers itself in texture and shape
like a game of tetris.

I am playing against time
twist and turn strands.

Into a new design
this is a level up move.

I only get
better in time.

As I steep into my years
the colors slowly seeped out.

Revealed the stress of
too many attempts.

To win in
a hostile environment.

I used to pull out the evidence
straight from the scalp.

But it returned like rain in the winter
I found silver linings.

In the sliver of silver clouds
that rest in the sky of my fro.

Montana bluegrass

By: Sarah Durrand

Dream of me like
tall, overgrown grass,
subtle and attuned to the
breeze around me.

I'll dream of you like a
westbound train pouring over its tracks,
loud and complex and beautiful and
gone.

I'll bend a little deeper with the wind in your wake.

Perennial For Your Thoughts

By: Rebecca Thrush

Joke that she is busy.
That she has many blocks
to stack and to store.
Joke that you are basking in
the newness of quietude.
The trees are buttoned up around you.
Because you have scared off
her many wings.

The birdhouse matches the gate
and shutters.
Cold winds keep her at bay.
She shudders at the thought of
what you might say.
She jokes that you are green, to strangers.
That you are too green
to stay golden.

The joke is bathed in roses.
They are not sweet but
thorny and wooden.
Her soft fingers struggle to find
new green to grasp.
She wishes your green wasn't dyed.

And still you joke that everything green
one day dies.

thirty-three

By: Theresa Rogers

as a child in Catholic school
I was made to pray

in church I slid off the pew
to the kneeling board
to repent as I was told

a fat Bishop slapped my face
to welcome me I didn't believe

then you left in your Jesus year

it was not the blue hour or gold
but deep night when you walked
out into the world

to leave it and us behind

I would get on my knees
now and every day
not to pray but as a beggar

I might even be humbled
by the gift of pink streaks across
my cheek if it would matter

Morning Glory

By: Claire Haynsworth Coenen

Early November. The sunflower stalks lean like strung-out, skinny men against the vinyl siding of my house. The knock-out roses droop, hungover now. Zinnias sag from too much sun. Their yellow perms turned mousey-brown. On my way to fill the birdfeeder this morning, I've given up on shiny new arrivals.

Yet past the sleepy coneflowers and the burnt-out beauty bush, a spread of silky, heart-shaped leaves drips from the trellis unphased by fall, almost eager to celebrate a few more weeks. I planted the dust-sized seeds in May with tempered hopes for blooms next spring and today

the vines draw me closer with their charisma and glamour. I question the tricks of the light and my mind, seeing a blue jewel twinkle at the waistline of the green gown. As I walk closer, the mirage of color changes into blossom, glistening. I throw the bag of birdseed down, touch the periwinkle

diamond—its golden center glowing, trace the opal star stretched across the ornament of petal with giddiness in hand and heart. I only know to laugh and tingle with joy. I shout to the tired garden party and the cardinals who need their breakfast,

*Oh my God!
It's bloomed!*

“Oldtown, Tennessee”

-after George Scarborough's “Blue Iris”

By: William Rieppe Moore

Sorry as a suckegg dog and hot
with the possibility of fraud, I was

light as an empty bank note and
full as a college idea;

that's when I saw the shootin' star
break trail—uncertain if it

spent the light of the last quarter moon
or just multiplied the darkness

to another power. Elevated
to the height of the cuttin' room

just off the barn floor—untouched
by rain for ninety somethin' years

where the grain is stored—I move
easy as wind in squirrelpaw leaves,

for it is spring and the rains come
over the mountains and over

the creek the midges have hatched
swarmin' over the water.

A Son's Grief

By: Lance Kayser

It feels like
Taupe.
That's what I tell
him.
Eyes glide across my
skin
in search of cracks,
fissures of my
fragmented mind.

Why Taupe?
he wants to know.
His calloused hands
catching a thread
untethered
as he grips my shoulder.
His only language
for empathy.
Cuz death
doesn't feel like
Black.
It's Taupe,
the color of

numbness.

Crinkling forehead
like paper being
crushed
after a mistake.
His fatherly expression
I expected

But his response
--a surprise.
I feel like
Raw Umber
ground up
staining clay.
My eyes
lower their shades
to half mast
in confusion.

He takes a long, slow breath,
time to form words,
those pesky gremlins
he could never master.
I feel helpless
because I could not protect you
from death.

I soak in his
good intentions.
The corners of my lips
arching upward
stretching toward
a new feeling.
I think it's
Lavender.

The numbness
a seed
a sapling
a flower bud
a step toward
healing.

THOSE WHO DON'T BELIEVE IN GHOSTS

By: Julie Benesh

may or may not own a television
or allow children to eat ice cream;
might worship at the big white church
or the dark cathedral, at the altar
of consumer goods or dynastic fortunes.

must live in the present
as the slimmest of gifts,
mere stocking-stuffers;

or the future: master
the universe, smart
in-every-room,
die with all the jacks.

Deniers of empathies
or downright enemies

in your fancy-crap cars
off to your crap-fancy jobs
not making eye contact
with pedestrians who try
to cross the street in the rain
splashed by rushed puddles
of your pending redundancy.

Praise yourselves,
faking your making!

The lucky blessed:
among the haunt
or be haunted,
you, the haunters.

Mausoleums teem with your ilk,
despite the logical impossibility
—the irony!—of your legacy.

Those who

don't ever see	the ghosts
doomed to ever be	the ghosts.

GOD IS DEPRESSED AGAIN

By: Claire Scott

Moping about his streets of gold
 chugging communion wine as he plays poker
 with Peter and Paul
 tucking a card up his sleeve
no longer chasing nearly naked cherubim
 or savoring the seraphim's parasitic praise
sick of counting hairs
 sick of rescuing lambs
 sick of washing white robes
 stained with spaghetti sauce

Doubts hounding him like harpies
 remembering he took only six short days
 so he could watch the Super Bowl
he sees parched deserts, flooded cities
 people limping through diminished lives
 and swallows more Prozac

Is it our job to comfort God
 to soothe his regrets with flagrant lies
he who created NIMBY's
 focused on me, me and mine
he who created those who think welfare is a waste
 no one needs a leg up
what of a child crossing a dessert
 with only one sandal
a girl with burn marks on her belly
 a boy shot for ringing the wrong doorbell

I say God needs to resign and shuffle off
to Senescent Senior Living
after all he is over six thousand years old
he can do senior yoga sitting on a folding chair
drool pea soup on his pajamas
cheat at cards

And we will muddle along just fine without him
not really noticing the difference
although in the bleak of night some of us will still pray
hoping God remembers

Untouched.

By: Lumina Miller

Barrel is empty, because there are still three ounces of hope left in the right hemisphere.

The Mediterranean currents didn't come ashore yesterday.

It stung hot. Adore the way he looks at me,
like I'm magic. His hazy vermilion light me up
and saturate the soil.

Bored, unseen, discarded at this address.

Pushed, revered and respected thirty-two miles south.

Think about him on repeat, run fingertips over those ropey veins and arms, head rested
on his outlined chest.

It's all a fiction,

our bodies have never touched. His landed gaze fills me with thirst.

Eyes averted layer me with ache.

Buffalo Madman

By: John Dos Passos Coggin

This Indigenous man glories in the Shenandoah Valley. He lives ten lives in the sun and two more in the starlight. With his kin. With his history. In a radiance of autumn leaves he discovers a salamander's yellow spots. Among millions of brown shards of deadwood and pine needles, he spots one tiny circle of dark. A baby mud turtle. He carries his brother to the marsh, hurtless. When he hears a pack of rabbit beagles howling he howls back and the dogs scatter crying black notes of homesick. He hates hunting. Unless it's for the hens of the woods and oyster mushrooms that feed him. Gunsmoke conjures his other name.

Buffalo madman, U.S. tourists call him in Washington, DC, when he drums up another ballad of the wood buffalo's extinction from European riflery in Shenandoah. He raises a buffalo flag atop his pickup and sings in his language to hot dog 'n' ice cream summer tourists. He sings a timbre like low French horn and his audience shouts cusses cribbed from the walls of bar johns. He speaks of reciprocity and love in flat American English and they call him homeless. He silently prays and they sic the cops on him. He asks for a white buffalo to thunder down the peaks of Shenandoah and carve an alpine stream of wisdom with its gallop. Sacred water for Washington.

Loneliness

By: Kristin Maaskamp

I can't decide
on whether
I'm alone
all the time,
or if
I've yet
to learn the
curvature of my own solace

On whether,
I've tasted
the complexities of space
to know the difference
between the bitterness
of a second and a mile

The paradox,
Feels gray,
like this loneliness,
I haven't yet
gotten a chance
to embrace
or push away
Somehow,
its always a little too much
and yet
never quite enough.

The King of Shadows and that Devil

By: Paul Pruitt

Not to show unworthy candor here,
But it is a fact that a devil came to
Our house one late night last spring.
Maybe not Satan himself, maybe a

Subordinate, young-looking but
Solid in rage. This incubus, if that's
What it was, came to pound and
Pound on our front door—

Demanding, like Popeye's Bluto,
Admittance at once. Spied through the
Peephole, he was pounding, pacing, pounding,
Pacing, breathing vapor and weaving

Fingers in and out—your basic
Berserker prep. Like a fool I opened the door a
Crack and instantly he was pushing it, claiming he
Wanted directions.

Direction was what he got.

For at my side—no preliminary sound, no
Prefatory noise—the King of Shadows appeared
Sharing *his* contribution, certain-sure.
His growling was speech of sounds,

Separate but jointed somehow. It was a fabric of anticipations:
How the hot blood would taste, how, once the femur cracked, he
Would take the throat, rake a red drench. He promised last of all:
“When you are dead, Demon, I will bay my triumph

With all preternatural power, shout tidings of your
Destruction to the ever-moving stars.” K. of S. wasn’t
Thinking—he had merely tapped what was within him, loosed
The reckless puissance that he and his kind carry always.

One last vape of steam and the Demon vanished into night.
Mere seconds and King of Shadows was again the antic fellow we
Loved, the neighborhood’s Squire, the family’s familiar.
Seconds more and he was curled back up, sleeping tight.

To the field of statues outside the university

By: Brendan Thompson

Perhaps you left without thinking of how hard it would be.
You, carved of stone, could look over the river in the rain
And focus on the task at hand – overcome the dull pain
That started when you made the choice to stand, lonely
In a field with others like you with composure and purpose,
Believing that “being” was enough of a discernible worth.
True, now you do nothing but sink into the soft earth,
Erode in the gales and gusts, and hope for justice.
Do not forget, as you settle into the soil in your slow
Descent into oblivion, that although you left for the yard,
The people have followed and know it is hard,
But graciously walk amongst all of you, their burdens in tow.
Sometimes it is enough to know that someone
Is capable of standing in the rain for you, alone.

Applesauce

By: Susan Kay Anderson

They know their sagas well but cannot seem to say more than a few words
The light has left but there are lots of promises anyway for more to come
When I look up at the hills I see fog that is more familiar even in darkness
Far away the room is lit with soft guitar and candles under wooden beams
He sang the song about expecting and they were all lit up during the singing
Cheer what is still left out on the porch and with it the rosemary and cedar

The coyotes and big cats wait somewhere in a rainy cave for the day to end
I remember when he took off his glasses and I could finally see him clearly
Rounded fingernails with hands of strength and tired walks I miss thinking
Mossy lichen decorates the oaks like hair and this whips a windy afternoon
Take what was mine all in letters in photos and small fragments dropped
Do you taste it because it tastes like the fruit of something hidden in leaves?

Double Vision

By: Macy Schafer

Golden light
Is spilling across these pink walls–
And I can almost see her
I can almost see her dark shadow
Silhouetted in the sunlight
She's beautiful–
This darkness in the corner, it's beautiful
I can see her face,
The tears staining her sunken cheeks,
The fallen hairs around her feet–
It all looks so familiar.
But she is beautiful
I can see her bones,
Peeking through her skin
And bruised knees,
She's so ghostly.
But she is beautiful
I can see her brown eyes,
Her brown eyes,
And I can see me
But she is beautiful–
Beautiful everywhere,
All but her eyes.
My–her brown eyes
If only she didn't have those eyes,
She would be so beautiful.

I don't know in what key my mother hungers

By: Esther Sadoff

I know she sometimes thought of leaving, but who doesn't?
I know she believed in a fairy godmother,
a pumpkin-chariot cased in gold.
I know she thought a thousand hands were holding
my father back, a thousand ultimatums.
I remember my grandfather, quiet in his rocking chair.
I only knew he was there because he would meow once in a while,
a cat's hungry yowl to break the silence.
I know that hunger is passed down,
that my grandmother quit
a life of singing and settled for piano.
That only music could satisfy her.
After that she only sang lullabies in darkened rooms.
I know that my hunger sings itself to sleep
in the voice of my mother who can't sing
from all those years of smoking.
My mother sings anyway, not caring if she's off-key.
Whatever she can't sing, she makes you feel —
her hand at your back, bowing your head into the piano
so you can feel the depth of those falling keys,
the weight of so much emptiness.

homme à la mer.

By: Connor Bjotvedt

i.

Mark Antony!
Blest, comely Cleopatra!
Will your progeny!

Salaryman!
Pitiable Hack! {Samson!}
Weave your seaman's yarn!

Oh, Elijah!
Oh, great Anachronism!
Herald the Judgement!

Salaryman!
{Proselytizing dandy!}
Belay your croaking!

Fair Beatrice!
*Fine instrument! {>Possession!<}
*Be Orchestrated!**

Salaryman!
Pestiferous scrutineer!
Shore up your moorings.

ii.

Thunder! Lightning!
Quick! Scramble the beachcombers!
Please, rescue my craft!

Salaryman!
*Unshackle the Libertines!**
*The Old Debauchees!**

Stop! Pilferers!
You: Thieves! Scoundrels! Privateers!
Please, unhand my men!

Salaryman!
Cowardly homunculus!
Stand on your tiptoes!

Mary Celeste!
My future; Carried away!
Please, Jove, release them!

Salaryman!
Chin up! 'Hands at ten-and-two!'
Raise the dead elsewhere.

iii.

Puissant tease!
Celebrated bon vivant!
Please, revive my clique!

Salaryman!
Abandon the metaphor!
Bon-joie de vivre!

Impressionist!
Apologetic Waffle!
Please, spare me the row!

Salaryman!
Delectable Myrmidon!
Injudicious Trout!

Vulgarian!
Pigheaded Rhetorician!
Please, quell the maelstrom!

Salaryman!
Rage against the dominion!
Lambaste the Author.

iv.

Shepherd! Shepherd!
Summon my compatriots!
Summon Phlegyas!

Salaryman!
Spy: The Plutonian shores!
Hideous jongleur!

Tremoring Babes!
Unsupplied for all this time!
Please, sack the storehouse!

Salaryman!
unconscionable Castrate!
Blasphemous poltroon—

{Silence} Shylock!
Sly, Cantankerous parrot!
Please, Jove, muster them!

Great Quixote!
{Capitan!} Look, what this way comes!
Venerites! Gentiles!

v.

*{exquisite Wit!
Well, ineloquent Patois:
Secure my passage!}*

*Salaryman!
Linger among the Idle,
the Morbid Stable!*

*>Machiavels!<
Mallards! Egrets! {Prolepses!}
>Flock!< {Literatim.}*

*Salaryman!
{Alas!} Their Standing-Orders!
Fastidious Pricks!*

*Ferrous pillars!
Stalwarts! {Languorous fibers!}
Slip into my hand!*

*Salaryman!
So much for the afterlife!
Merry, are the men.*

vi.

*>Time!< Prospero!
Mischief Maker! {Mister Hughes!}
Please, pardon the State!*

*Salaryman!
Pardon Me, "Mighty Sumer!*"
Bestir the Waters!"*

*Controversy!**
{Sage!} fabled Inquisitor!
Please, *sharpen my Tool!*

Salaryman!
*{Lonesome Mariner!} Sexton!**
Desert the Undead!

Father! {םשח!}
Infinite-stellar-plexus!
Please, *unbridle Me!*

Salaryman.
Tightly-packaged-tinderbox!
“Shanti;” be relieved

vii.

**nourishing eau,*
once invigorating spring;
please, *bear! {Temperance!}*

Salaryman.
Rise! Rise to the occasion!
Rise! Tempered Phoenix!

**commanding mein,*
once infatigable stone;
please, *bear! {Fortitude!}*

Salaryman.
Rise! Rise, powerful Stanchion!
Rise! Fortified Sup!

**languishing palm,*
once indispensable seed;
please, *Janus! {Prudence!}*

Salaryman.
Rise! Rise, undulating Spume!
Rise, gentle Poet.

viii.

Felon! {Felon!}
To arms: Schooners; balladeers!
Avast, ne'er-do-wells!

Salaryman!
Surely, He accommodates!
Send for Charles-Henri!

*Son-of-a-Bitch!**
Rapturous heart, cease Bleating!
Please, grant Me courage!

Salaryman!
"Kingdom, Glory, and the horse!"—
profuse, profound Shroud!

Winsome Reaper,
inscrutable Egotist;
Please, excuse the dogs;

Salaryman!
"Paymaster!" {"dutiful Hand!"}
Execute the Lot!

Lightening

By: Jeff Burt

Her arthritis bent the most forward
knuckle of her index aslant
that you couldn't tell
what it was she pointed to.
When her hands would shake
raised above the diaphragm,
my father would hug her from behind,
wrap his hands around her hands
and hold her for a time
until the shaking stopped.
Such a small thing
one can do for another.

My father lost his thumb's knuckle
nearest his palm making slippery
all things requiring a turn,
or pressing a small button
through a shirt's tight adit,
his nails trimmed well and orderly
on his left hand, snub-cut,
angled, and sharp-edged on his right.

When she knew he needed a jar-top
of jam or a Mason jar of nails unscrewed,
she'd prep the night before,
turning out lights and in the dark
gripping the lids with that bent
finger and a quarter-turn
to loosen so he would not struggle.

These were not compensation, she said.
She would not call them gifts, or grace,
or sacrifice. Lightning,
she said, with the second syllable
forgotten so that it sounded
like a strike that could illuminate
a dark and imposing field
and open it, if only for a flash.

Cooking in the Dark

By: Molly Seale

On the counter:
garlic, onions, gold potatoes, broccoli,
lentils, stock, bread, ruby tomatoes,
arugula, red leaf lettuce,
all rest there as the late afternoon light
cradles, holds them.

I wait.
I listen—the quiet outside,
the quiet within.

I find utensils: cutting board,
knife, wooden spoon,
the green bowl, a deep skillet.
I line them up, begin as
light falters,
peace settles.

In twilight I search,
fingers flexed,
vision muted.

I chop with care,
dice precisely.
I pause—sheer panic
rising. I resist the urge to
flip on the lamp, to bathe
nightfall in brightness.

Yet light is not all it seems,
often revealing what I fear
to see.

So I remain, explore in the
faint shadows,
gently, tentatively,
breath guiding, heart leading,
whole body attune
to time, rhythm, tone.

Dusk obscures
the light, then
defines it.

I question myself,
finger tracing the sharpened edge
of the knife. It's not the dark,
but the fear of the dark
which flings my joy
into shadows.

I proceed,
create with no recipe.
I am cooking in the dark.

Deep

By: Ervin Brown

i plunge naked into the ice-cold waters
where time slips away

i swim to the bottom
and write something in the sand with my finger

the seaweed surrounds me
and i can hear the ocean without any sound

i float back to the surface
where the entire plane starts to shimmer

my eyes peek through the waves
and i take a deep breath

the stars & the moon reveal themselves
and i can finally read their stories

i stay there for a while, under the midnight sky
watching them unfold

Yeah, Covid

By: Lisa Delan

Yeah, so when I got Covid it was a big thing, before vaccines and all that, just pure terror like you were playing Russian roulette and the first five chambers were empty. And no one knew a lot of chaff hitched a ride on the virus' back; big, bad wolfy waste like *why can't I remember* and *panic disorder* and *ground-glass nodules*. I had a husband (I don't have a husband now) and he pretty much thought I went crazy (and turns out he was really not up for *that*).

I was singing a concert in New York when I got Covid. Can we talk about *irony*? Every breath I lured to my lungs like wind driven waves carried corona. SARS surfing the stream, coasting the long ride, wiping out in my windpipe. Breathing became a *thing*. That pretty much splintered singing, notes burrowed in the Persian rug under the piano, camouflaged as shards of light. I swallowed songs in my sleep. I swallowed fear with gulps of fetid air.

But fear kept upping like bile, staining the corner of my glass-walled ER room, damping the mile I couldn't walk, fueling the car I wanted to drive off the road. The one who is not my husband called our marriage a *Covid casualty*, like he had no agency in its flatlining. He couldn't hear *help*, because it was *not about him*. But I get it now. We all boast of *better*, but no one really ever knows what *worse* looks like. No one wants to know *that*. Covid was like *that*. Like *out of time*.

Time proved Covid the putrescent precursor to my storm, not the squall itself (I was lucky, droves were dragged under that greedy tsunami). But Covid thickened my skin like the walls of my lungs, front loaded my loss, pushed me through the *eyewall* to the *eye*, where I could watch in stillness as raging swells disappeared my life. In time the spectacle shot me to shore, sand in my throat and ankles leashed in kelp. And still I walked. And still I *breathe*.

The Second Ring

By: Jaclyn Griffith

She's in the kitchen with your sister. The guys are vaping again, blowing sweet smoke across the back deck. You cough and complain but I am not breathing, only buzzing.

You are telling me again about her. Again again again I say. You are miserable. I am a recurring apparition of what your mother wanted for you. You admit this to me but you do not act on it. Oh, tell me again how miserable she makes you. I promise I'll tell you another joke, something darker this time. Only you would laugh. It's an even exchange until it isn't anymore.

What do I do with all this desire? Please, I say, alleviate my guilt. Go ahead, craft another story for me. I'll wait. I'm in the upstairs bedroom hiding from the noise. Knock twice when she's gone. You do and then I call your name until I'm blue in the face.

I climb over the sleeping bodies, muffle the floorboard creaks. I sneak out the back door but can't drive home. I will end up in the East River and she will wear a navy dress to my funeral. You will squeeze her hand as you walk into the church and say oh, she was good to have around. Funny too.

I sleep in the dirt until morning, call you for a ride and you pick up on the second ring.

Full

By: Beth Marquez

He pours the cream into his tea
until it is exactly the color of my shoulder.
He holds the mug to my skin,
we make a dance of this each morning.

Love is the music of strings, the taste
of everything, my lover's jaw in sleep.
His calves are the torrid kindness of spring:
I hold them against me in the bath.

This is one way we say, 'love is an echo'.
Our bodies against each other in sleep,
or apart as the night progresses,
form the letters of an alphabet.

Each letter is a word unto itself:
my head against your chest is the song
a whale sings into the earth's ear,
the arches of our feet meeting is the sound

of laughter. Love is the spell woven
from my dismantled armor, which is a dress
that arsons the heart. He learned to sleep with a gun
between his legs. He kicked the sergeant in the teeth

in his sleep when he tried to take it from him.
I sleep in the gun's place. This is the language
we form together. Love is not knowing
the next word, but trusting it will taste

of cardamom and honey.
It is the lost wolf's prayer to the moon.
It is the pause in which I wait
for the moon to answer back.

Helium

By: Raymond Hoffman

Dissolve

No ceiling

How I go “away”

Confusing when I’m there but my mind an aggravated hive

Infusion of energy within melancholy

Launched as a missile looking to self-destruct

Dancing alone amongst a crowd

Internally submerged amongst people

Urges pop up like acne—aggravating!

Impulsive and pissed when everything is an obstacle

But nobody can see what’s pedaling—

My mind a thousand stickers stinging and got me pulling

Prophetic views gets me uprooted

It’s an abundance of helium

So lost in the sweep I don't know when I'm lost
Nomadic with my movement—no sleep and roaming
Planting on trains
Ping ponging the city
Flinging to strangers like a fly to a ceiling trap
Always floating
So much done but really nothing
Hours choking me as I get more uncomfortable
Claustrophobic with myself
So lonely and miserable when lost in this anguish
Never rest, just keep moving
Extinguish, dissolve—have to be apart from all of it!—have to melt out
Kerosene, vices—embers flaming up
Agitation, celebration—spinning like a windmill to fall into a million parts
Buoyancy set for delusions and projects
Aloof and unaware what is going on around me
Gravitating along to orbits that grab me

Waiting to be dissolved

Wanting to be dissolved

Get relief from the intensity

Dome to shatter

Nothing to salvage

Liquify myself—let me roam off!

Hungry and wanting

By: Maia Brown-Jackson

I'm so fucking hungry for love,
to have my skin peeled back
by someone with gentle hands
who will watch the darkness pooled in my veins
dissipate once touched by oxygen
and not turn away.

I would devour the pomegranate whole
and promise myself to the god of death
eyes open, trapped beneath the earth,
crushed by dirt and unable to breathe
to fill that vacant spot that still haunts my soul.

I want what the poets write about,
I want what the artists sing about,
I want to feel whole in a way I haven't in years,
safe and understood and accepted
for and despite everything I've done.

But I'm so cautious now
that your hands might bruise
I don't let them settle at my waist.
So fucking hungry for love,
yet still like a child,
clutching at its skirts,
watching wide-eyed and wondering
and wanting,
wanting,
wanting.

An Unsteady Dance.

By: Thomas Mampalam

All those who are labor of the knife
are important but this one is the same age
as my daughter who just graduated college.
As I unravel the turban dressing to reveal
her shaved scalp and the arcuate scar,
she turns her piercing eyes and asks,
“Is the tumor all out?” I should whisper:
there are some prayers God cannot answer.
The sun cannot shine when the moon must rise.
She is a perfect rose that bloomed too early
and must soon fall hard to frosted earth.
She is a goddess who must return
to the underworld at the end of day.
I am a snow leopard, a ghost mantis.

I tell her that I removed all that I could see
but she will still need radiation therapy.
I unfold the walker, she straightens her gown.
We start an unsteady dance as I clasp
her elbow and she pushes forward.
The present still has endless possibility.
She should listen again to the garden birds
and feel the strong wind up from the ocean.
She should wonder what causes
the northern lights and the rings of Saturn.
I should exchange her hospital tray for
homemade pasta, zinfandel, and chocolate.
I should recite a poem to make her smile,
this goddess who submitted to my knife.

In Order of Appearance

Lindsay-Rose Dykema, MD (she/her/hers) is a queer psychiatrist, prison/police abolitionist, and founder of Uncaged Minds, a mental health and wellness resource for low-resourced Detroiters with neurodivergent conditions and marginalized identities. Her work has been published in leftist and mental health journals, poetry anthologies, and Slate Magazine. She lives in Detroit.

Jasmine Barber is a Portland based Writer, who is located in Portland, OR. Jasmine is a Black woman poet, print-maker, and multi-textural artist. She is also the co-owner of a Mushroom Farm, known as Pharm to Body. Her multi-discipline passions fuels her approach to her poetry, which is inspired by her past, current, and future life. Her poetry is themed in her experience as a Black woman, her work encompasses her identities and her experiences with family, grief, bad careers and anything that comes her way.

Sarah Durrand resides in San Diego, CA. Their work has been published in Sad Girls Club Literary Review, Maya's Micros, and In Parentheses. In their spare time, they enjoy reading, rollerblading, and talking about the birds that visit their bird feeder. Email them at sgdurrand@gmail.com.

Rebecca Thrush currently works in property management. Select artwork and poems have appeared with a variety of publishers, both in print and online. Many pieces have been shared on her Instagram (@rebeleigh92). Her poem "Strawberry Seeds" was recently nominated by 300 Days of Summer for the Pushcart Prize.

Theresa Rogers is a Vancouver-based poet and teacher who spends part of her year in Wellfleet, Massachusetts. Her poems have appeared in the English Bay Review, Uppagus, The Cape Cod Poetry Review, Cape Cod Times poetry page, and The San Diego Reader. She recently won second prize, emerging poets, in the Vancouver Poet Laureate City Poems Contest. She received an MFA in poetry from Antioch, Lost Angeles and serves on the board of poetry in Canada. theresarogerspoet.com

Claire Haynsworth Coenen, LMSW, is a therapist and writer living in Nashville, TN. She is also a Kripalu-trained yoga instructor and SoulCollage® Facilitator. Her work has previously appeared or is forthcoming in The Nashville Scene, The Write Launch, Beyond Words Literary Magazine, and Light of Consciousness.

William Rieppe Moore is from Richland County, South Carolina and moved to Unicoi County, Tennessee with his wife. He teaches high school English and earned an MA in English from ETSU. His poetry received a Pushcart Prize nomination from American Diversity Report, finalist honors in Driftwood's In-House Poem Contest, and appears in James Dickey Review, Still: The Journal, Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture, and Terrain.org.

Lance Kayser spends his days helping students become better writers. As an English Professor, he teaches composition, literature, and creative writing. Lance has published his poem "Confession of an Only Son" in the anthology Beyond Queer Words (Feb 2023). When he is not teaching or writing, he is enjoying the California sun with his husband and dog.

Julie Benesh is author of the chapbook ABOUT TIME from Cathexis Northwest Press. She has published work in Tin House, Crab Orchard Review, Florida Review, Another Chicago Magazine, JMWW, Maudlin House, New World Writing, Cleaver, Sky Island Journal, and elsewhere. She is a graduate of Warren Wilson College's MFA Program and recipient of an Illinois Arts Council Grant. Read more at juliebenesh.com.

Julie Benesh is author of the chapbook *ABOUT TIME* from Cathexis Northwest Press. She has published work in *Tin House*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Florida Review*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *JMWW*, *Maudlin House*, *New World Writing*, *Cleaver*, *Sky Island Journal*, and elsewhere. She is a graduate of Warren Wilson College's MFA Program and recipient of an Illinois Arts Council Grant. Read more at juliebenesh.com.

Claire Scott is an award winning poet who has received multiple Pushcart Prize nominations. Her work has appeared in the *Atlanta Review*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *New Ohio Review* and *Healing Muse* among others. Claire is the author of *Waiting to be Called* and *Until I Couldn't*. She is the co-author of *Unfolding in Light: A Sisters' Journey in Photography and Poetry*.

Lumina has a BA in English from the University of Iowa. She works as an ER nurse, enjoys letting her imagination run rampant, and would rather be outside. Her work has been published by literary magazines *Allegory Ridge*, *Limit Experience Journal*, *Moonstone Arts Center*, *Equinox Biannual Journal*, and others.

John Dos Passos Coggin is a writer based in Alexandria, Virginia. His poetry has appeared in *Half and One*, *The Blue Mountain Review*, and *Pangyrus*. His nonfiction has appeared in *The American Scholar*, *The Baltimore Sun*, and *The Tampa Bay Times*. He also co-manages the John Dos Passos literary estate and serves on the advisory board of the John Dos Passos Society.

Kristin Maaskamp identifies as a poet, artist, and parent. She shares her poetry and prose as a reflection of her personal journey in growth and in being human. Her poetry is inspired by her daily life, somatic experiences, self awareness, and growth.

Pruitt is a law librarian by trade, an historian by training, and a writer by compulsion. He has published recently in *Literary Heist*, *The Birmingham Arts Journal*, the *Dillydoun Review*, and *Triggerfish Critical Review*.

Brendan Thompson is a writer from Edmonton, Canada. His fiction has been published in *Burning Water Magazine* and *Border Crossing*. His plays have been performed at the University of Alberta and the Edmonton Fringe Festival.

Susan Kay Anderson lives in southwestern Oregon's Umpqua River Basin near remnants of the oak savannah and camas prairie landscape. Anderson works as a caregiver to her parents. She is the author of *Mezzanine* and *Please Plant This Book Coast To Coast*.

Macy Schafer is a rising high school senior in Binghamton, NY. Blessed/Cursed with a writer as a mother and eight siblings who offer endless material, she hopes to one day write part-time while teaching elementary-age kids. She also has seven cats and cannot possibly handle one more.

Esther Sadoff is a teacher and writer from Columbus, Ohio. Her poems have been featured or are forthcoming in *Little Patuxent Review*, *Jet Fuel Review*, *Cathexis Poetry Northwest*, *Pidgeonholes*, *Santa Clara Review*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, among others. Her debut chapbook, *Some Wild Woman*, is forthcoming from *Finishing Line Press*.

Connor Bjotvedt received his MFA in Writing from Spalding University. He was awarded the Charles E. Bull Creative Writing Scholarship for Poetry by Northern Arizona University where he received his BA in English, Literature, and Creative Writing. Connor was a 2018 Pushcart Prize nominee and his work has appeared in Rain Taxi, the Santa Fe Literary Review, the Haiku Journal, Three Line Poetry, Cathexis Northwest Press, and The Wayfarer, among others. His debut collection, *A Contemporary Portrait of the Southwest*, is published by Unsolicited Press.

Jeff Burt lives in Santa Cruz County, California. He has worked in electronics and mental health administration. He has work in *Williwaw Journal*, *Rabid Oak*, *Willows Wept Review*, a chapbook from Red Wolf Editions, and one forthcoming this fall from Red Bird Chapbooks.

Molly Seale has published memoir, short stories, and poems in *Hippocampus Magazine*, *New Millennium Writings*, *Hotel Amerika*, *Into the Fire*, *Connotation Press*, *Humans of the World*, *Months to Years*, and *The Write Launch*. She lives in Makanda, Illinois.

Ervin Brown is a twenty-one-year-old storyteller and poet from Coney Island. His works have appeared in *The Dillydoun Review*, *Willows Wept Review*, *The Closed Eye Open*, *Beyond Words Literary Magazine*, and *Wild Roof Journal*, among other places. He is currently a master's student at the University of New Hampshire.

Lisa Delan's work has been featured or is forthcoming in *American Writers Review*, *Burningword Literary Journal*, *Cathexis Northwest Press*, *Passengers Journal*, *Poetry Super Highway*, *Poets Choice*, *Viewless Wings*, *Wild Roof Journal*, *The Write Launch*, and other literary publications. She was been nominated for a 2023 Pushcart Prize by Cathexis Northwest Press. When she is not writing poems, you can find the soprano, who records for the Pentatone label, singing art songs by American composers on texts of many of her favorite poets.

Jaelyn is a writer, teacher, and pop music aficionado from New York. You can find more of her writing in *Witches Mag*, the feminist literary magazine she founded, and in her extremely long Instagram captions. When she's not writing, editing, or publishing, she is probably crying over a singer-songwriter in the last row of Madison Square Garden, or reading in a quaint coffee shop while drinking exclusively Arnold Palmers. You can read more about Jaelyn's feelings at <https://medium.com/@jacgriff>, and on her Twitter and Insta, @jacgriff.

BETH MARQUEZ has been published in *Moontide Press*, *Valley of the Contemporary Poets*, and *Ugly Mug* anthologies. Her poems were selected for *Damfino* literary journal's debut issue and the *Like a Girl* anthology from Lucid Moose Press, which nominated her poem *Shedding* for a Pushcart Prize. She is a 2017 *Pink Door* Fellow. She holds three mathematics degrees, has been writing and performing poetry for over half her life, and was once stranded on a deserted island.

Raymond Hoffman has a background in political science and Southeast Asian Studies. He has taught in China for many years and currently is a fifth grade teacher in the Midwest. Poetry writing has been used by him as a coping mechanism for bipolar disorder for over a decade now. Sylvia Plath has always been a great source of inspiration, as has been Albert Camus and Osamu Dazai. He has previously been published in the *Humans of the World* literary blog, *Beyond Words Literacy Magazine* and *Sad Girls Blog*.

Maia Brown-Jackson has been writing nonsense since the age of four and slowly grew a bit coherent; now she bleeds printer ink. Working for a time in Iraq shifted her vocational direction to international affairs, and She's currently a program analyst at the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. *Insomnia* gives her time to write fiction, poetry, and academic papers, which have been published in titles ranging from *Fantasy and Science Fiction Magazine* to the Islamic Think Tank of Counterterrorism to award winning episodes of the *Return Home* podcast and more.

Thomas Mampalam is a neurosurgeon in private practice in Northern California. They write poetry and short stories informed by my medical, immigration, and family experiences. They have poems published or forthcoming in the Journal of the American Medical Association, Neurology, The Healing Muse, Intima Journal of Narrative Medicine, Ailment: chronicles of illness narratives, The Avalon Literary Review, California Quarterly, The Cortland Review, Metonym, Good Works Review, and Iris Literary Journal.