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Amaranth

By: Jacob R. Benavides

I should ask the moon
about anticipation. No
pasty pock of milky white
turns the boys into poets
faster than an explanation;
some promise of tomorrow
hangs, bangs its way up
the shaft of night, slowly
blowing out huffs of glow
puffs of amaranth, it seems
to be almost lavender sheened
in a way only the boys can see,
& it leaves them wanting more
so much more that it grows
& it leaves a seed that drips
down their throats, thrown
like a bell into the velveteen night
resonant, the sound creeps into
that space between thigh & thought
passion is a homemaker, a burrow in
the pink. Amaranth straddles the cusp
between purplish roses, pinky violets
bathing like flesh silks up my sleeves

The go to, tried & true question
of the poets, the boys call the moon
a lover, a wafer, a pool of milk, a pool
of silver, goddess or god, some idea
of love, frothy iota dripping tongues of

lavender down the tile walls of the shower
where the moon lingers like an actor
in my room, who leaves unannounced
in the morning after they know only
I know nothing but tried & true:
Tell me Amaranth, did you see the moon too?
I only know tried & true, I know the moon
sits clean & pretty every night; everyone
has a story to tell of the boys in the moon
nothing keeps the poets from saying the
same things over & over until a new
voice gives the temporal timbre given
by a cicada trapped in a hallway closet
I am the plaster walls, moth balls, old coats
dressed in cracks of light & Newport ash
of the last tenants who left so quickly—
so quickly, did the very air take their lungs
every moonlit night.

Blue threatens me every day, everyday
dancing until it flays itself open as a
psalm. Maybe tried & true is the iron
cherry caught in the back of my throat
which I imagine is a cobalt palm running
from my nape into my nostrils until
rubies trickle down cracked lips. I know, you've
heard it all before in the promise of tomorrow
yet it hangs from a twig silhouetted in blackberry
I let the crumble flow like a bloody nose,
Amaranth, do you see the moon tonight?
Tonight, the boys are a sea of limbs flailing by the moonlight!
& Amaranth I can't read you in this blue moon
but don't we both know the boys look beautiful
in this intersection & I've bloodied myself hitting

this corner over & overturning every which way
to escape into some promise of tomorrow. The poets
all say the same things, but I promise this is today
everything we say is magnificent—the boys will never
know what hit them I promise the racket is the moon
crick cracking tongues & teeth into each other please
these trees threaten to scoop us up into the sky, try
to keep your eyes on me, Amaranth, I want to steal your
blue breath, or is it red, ignore this metallic throat—I'm running
with the bruises. Amaranth, I want to hear your voice I'll savor
every sound, draping thistle & thorns in crushed velvet so I can at least feel out the shape...

Amaranth, did you see the moon last night?

reverence for grandmothers I never got to meet.

By: Gladys Rowe

I wonder for a time
when stories resonate
pulsating auras that hold our spirits
visibly reverberating lineages
carrying them/ourselves like royalty
 the kind offered in ceremony
 with feathers and generosity
 placed on our heads

chests heavy with responsibility and light with love.

I wonder for a time
when voices penetrate
offering kindness into spaces of possibilities
where they stick
 stickiness that wraps around our ribs
 and calls forward generations - seven generations
 who will know the seeds

placed into the ground today.

Seeds sprout proud and fertile
echoes of great, great, great, great grandmothers
Who couldn't fathom our embodiment
 but prayed, anyway
 but maybe could, and prayed harder

trusting that the stars would call us down.

I hear their soft, persistent whispers
when I close my eyes
to muster the courage to show up
speak/write/hum/sing/breathe
even when my voice catches
stand up even when my knees shake
 feel their hands on shoulders
 when my heart is exploding out of my chest
 especially then

and I wonder.

You Don't Have to Be Mozart

By: Matthew Freeman

It will take a great while
but you will finally get to the point
where you're watching a disaster movie
about the end of everything
and a father and a son
are talking to each other
from different parts of the world
and saying their goodbyes
and you can imagine—maybe even know—
how they feel.
It's terribly depressing.

But there's an upside to this.
And that is that
you don't really need anything anymore.
You don't need to go anywhere,
meet anyone, eat anything, you don't need
to go to the sordid dance club
and drink until your head spins.
You might be just fine
sitting out behind Parkview Place
and watching the sparrows and the squirrels,
the students passing by, hearing
that discordant music coming from the odd
ambulance or firetruck.

He Lights His Cigar

By: Clara Howell

and tells me not to worry
my love, my daughter
smoke will always rise.

I was 10
and loved the smell of the vanilla smoke
that clung to his jacket.

I inhale him whenever the closet doors open
the smell of sweet cake
that's been baking for years
I keep checking to see
when it will burn.

Later I see him
tapping his finger against his cigar,
letting the ash blacken his skin
and land on his bare thigh.
"When I die, you will be better off."

I inhale his voice
but fill my lungs with his cancer.

Growing up
I was always dressed
in his ash.

Little girl tutus twirling in ash.
Teenage eyes colored in ash.
Clothes at the laundromat dipped in ash.

Because I did not know
how to light my own,
light a new one.

Like the vanilla smoke
that lingered with a sweetness
and cut short my breathing,
he was gone.

On the Day

By: Maria McLeod

I wake and lift the window shade
filled with want
for the robins, heads cocked, one ear
toward the ground, listening
for worms wriggling through
the earth, an endless
feast. On the day
I love my life, my spouse, returned
from the store with milk and, look
what he found in the driveway,
my gloves, a rescue,
he laughs, shakes his head. Always
my gloves in the driveway, fallen,
thought lost, my absentmindedness.
Small things. Rain
against the skylight
a patter that becomes a pounding,
relentless life I love, a sink
full of dishes, the slouch
in the sofa, these hardwood floors
I cross, and cross again, fire
in the woodstove, such heat,
the bed at night,
the two of us, together,
under the covers, sweetly
breathing, dreaming
of this life, our worries, our
fears, our happy memories,
our sweet plans
for the future, this life
we love for as long
as we're able to hold it.

RESOLUTION

By: Julie Benesh

C.G Jung's last words were to his nurse,
who some say was his mistress,
and lived with him and his wife:
let's have a very nice red wine tonight.

I think a lot about endings:
this, too shall pass;
all good things must end;
all's well that ends well;
it all ends up OK in the end;
if it's not OK, it's not the end;
fire or ice, bang or whimper.

Studies on medical procedures
say not to end on a pain point,
but something pleasant that soothes
the patient and eases the transition
from painworld to the ordinary
one of intermittent dread and relief,
so the lasting impression is the latter.

Jung's contemporary, Matisse,
the painter, lost his abdominal muscles
and ability to steady a paintbrush
after cancer surgery, but he still saw the world
in paintings, as sculpture, and cut shapes and colors
with scissors, applied with long sticks; still the same man,

partly blind for a time,
earlier in his life
from peering at colors
with too much intensity:
a pause to clear the palette.

On Sky's Ranges of Imagination/ Ride Azerbaijani and I

By: Dick Altman

*Who engineers the moving parts?
Who architects edges of shadow
and light? Who sculpts forms
wondrous, without limit? Ferment
unceasing?*

New Mexico

High desert's empyrean,
how you entice us
into countries unknown,
strange seas, mountains
nameless/mysterious,
yieldingly close,
so near, I imagine
horse and rider,
Azerbaijani and I,
leaping high enough,
to grasp your nimbus wings,
inhale your legerdemain,
to soar Old West's
sage-painted plains/
heights of Indian myth/
cowboy song.

We envy how you
river dusk's clouds,
magma's currents,

into tableaux
of ember primordial,
spare, shadowed hills,
juniper/pine
turned into shapes
hungry/prehistoric.
How you yet
forgive/survive,
when nearby wildfires
turn high-country's blue
into haze-riddled tempest,
islanded by cones volcanic,
darkening for eons your sun.

How your stories
inspire in mind
boundless dreams,
metamorphosing us,
Azerbaijani and I,
into cloud-farers/
mountain-comers,
spirits clambering
up/down/across notes
of cumulus refrains,
concertos tumultuous,
rain's lullabies,
caresses dulcet/silken,
with which you alone,
in dawn's first spark,
emblazon day.

Seasons

By: Russell Willis

Winter has a pewter heart
long past refiner's fires
molded of stunted days
and ever-lingering nights
shadowed by cold, distant stars
and startling moons
peering through branches
stripped of living motion
its beat stilled
patient, invisible, glacial
steeled against eternal sleep
yet polished
anticipating gentle warmth
that it might beat again
with Spring

Spring has a brass heart
a malleable heart
what begins is but
the seed of what will be
awakened
this heart escapes
its pewter tomb
thawing the body earth
impervious to decay
staining everything it touches
with hues of life
beating a tune
a dance
impatient
for Summer

Summer has a golden heart
pure joy of the refiner's fires
more light than dark
more joy than not
if open to wonder
not closed by fear
this heart beats wild
beats fast, beats hard
to pump the world
so full of life
polished to a blinding gleam
no time to sleep
no time to weep
'till finally slowed
by Autumn's calm

Autumn has a rose-gold heart
cooler beats this heart
with hopes no longer stirred
by passion's glare
romance of a deeper sort
its cheeks now flushed
from gold to red
shed tears of warmth
from yesterday
shed tears of longing
for what was
like trees laid bare
by colder winds
drop leaves of red and gold to
welcome Winter in

John Hendry's Walk Home

By: Eric le Fatte

Every step magnifies
when John F. Hendry walks on home.
Nothing is too small to be seen.
Each stop motion
frame of each leaf
will be entered;
and placements of spiders
and aphids accounted.
Butterflies are weighed.

When he walks
the terrain transforms
into a swarm of relations.
Principles beneath
the shapes of hills fasten
to coordinates of ferns and stones.
Branches of alders anchor the sky.
Plant roots finger skeleton keys.

When John F. Hendry walks on home
he moves again in unison.
Migrations of sparrows,
courses of streams, and slime trails
of slugs recombine.
The valley is his vanguard.
Mountains sweep behind.
Evening owns the answers
and it all belongs.
It all shines.

Dark-eyed Junco Nest

By: Charles Weld

By mid-May, our juncos are all no-call, no-show, having moved north or up to the thousand-foot plateau above our village to mate. A New World Sparrow, seldom a resident here a hundred years ago, they're common now, population steady, and we owe this change to decades of abandoned fields gone fallow then back to woods, after being worn out by a combo of slash-and-burn and corn agriculture. Thoreau, precisely formal, wrote *Hyemalis Fringilla* not Junco when noting one in his journal. On Monadnock, just below the summit, he spied a nest and had read enough to know that the find was important. Set in *a sort of hollow sunk in the ground. Only one other known to naturalists, so a quite interesting discovery. Quite*, his nod to braggadocio.

If you wrote a poem about me, it would probably sound like this:

(after Dannica Ramirez)

By: Alicia Turner

She settles for people like she settles into cold showers in the dark. All the while having warmth and a light and a choice. She'd tell you that she gets clean either way. And besides, I wouldn't know how good filth feels. *Not like her*. I think she could find the right person in the dark. Like the paradox of a quiet exclamation point. I am the emergency flashlight she took two years to buy. And another two to buy batteries. She buys time in her small apartment but doesn't mind small spaces — just small minds. She'll tell you that the largeness of my hands in her smallness make her dreams seem wider, more permissible. I am becoming permeable and she knows it. She wouldn't tell you, but I am the sixth time she's washed her hands today. She is odd and I am all even number.

I am a habit she just can't quit
or won't —
wash her hands of all of this.

Summer

By: C.A. Olsen

Cool mornings
Give way to warmth.
My flower crown blazes
Brilliantly under my glow,
Yet the sun bares down.
Even in the shade,
I am soaked in its heat.

HUMILITY

By: Greg Nelson

When love burned
everything down,
I let out a cry
and went up in flames.
I came to on a foggy road
that led me through graveyards
and weedy abandoned lots,
past condemned houses
and empty churches.

There were no signs, no landmarks,
no milestones, and no side roads.
Gradually realizing I was still
breathing, I lumbered along,
tempering my sorrow with prayers for grace,
crossed the badlands
and came to the fork, where
fairly parallel paths
unwinding ahead of me

differed only in the glimmer
on the horizon of the one I chose.
Training my eyes on the subtle light,
gap by gap, I made the passage,
and ended as I began, a man in love.
Tonight, strong winds shake the house.
I would not trade my heart for another.
The soft lamp floats in the dark window,
and from my blue cup, tenderness flows.

No Sympathy

By: Ava Tabler

Black cherry cabernet Sauvignon gushed from my nostrils as I strutted through a spirited militia of fallen angels.

At first glance, they appeared to be decrepit soldiers, but their wide macabre smiles revealed razor sharp teeth—I knew.

They were intoxicated by the wry amusement they felt from my affliction.

Did I just lick the black Iron gates that guard the long forgotten?

My ear drums were overwhelmed by the heavy metal tap dancing on my taste buds.

It burns; did I just snort chlorine?

My head was held high in grace as they erupted in belligerent laughter; their joy echoed against the cathedral that had locked its heavy doors and sealed the stain glassed windows.

A faint memory entered my mind—as I begged for sleep to release me—while laying on an unsympathetic wooden pew; *I have walked these stone halls before.*

Unworthy

By: Rowan Tomko

You were whole once,
a vase filled with wildflowers
presented with all the pomp
of backyard dandelion potions.

Puff chested with the audacity
of a childhood unsullied
by big hands and complex ideas
like worth and value.

You're upon an unformed pedestal
clay slick unfinished & slip
shod in mud, merit aside,
unabashed & unbroken

imaginary friends with the detritus
you wrested from storm drains &
unattended vacant lots,
free from supervision

until sunset & streetlight shepherded.
Leering ride offers turned down,
repeatedly. Running in alleys
toward the relative safety of
home.

On Devils and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

By: Lina Buividavičiūtė

I grew up in a real devil's den – I was told stories about a girl who was danced to death by the devil, about a girl who stepped on a cavalryman's boot and felt the lack of toes. My grandmother told me that one of our ancestral homes was built on the bones of witches who would wail there nights, cackle and laugh; the lights would dim and plates would break – that house is now boarded up. The neighbor saw a devil turning a grindstone in the field, then found a fat, knobby finger in the dirt. When I did something bad in the day, I dreaded the coming train of devils at night – my first existential fear – and even now the most horrifying film for me is *The Exorcist*, essentially about our utter helplessness, about how austere power can transform you at any time. When much later, I was alone with my son, fear of the night left me weak – scratchings at three in the morning – the hour of the beast, shadows on the ceiling, I felt the beast was coming for me, coming to possess me. When I fell under the spell of obsessiveness, my thoughts became the devil's. I would stare at a knife and think how I could stab everyone around just like that. I was afraid the devil would make me behave shamefully – to take off my pants at a conference, to laugh uncontrollably; I thought, what if the devil makes me hurt my child? Antipsychotics exiled the devils to the sixth circle of hell. But I'm still afraid. I'm very afraid. Of myself and of dancers with hollow shoes.

ACCEPTANCE COMES

By: Caitlin Mitchel-Markley

Dreams and fantasies are
fallacies
belief in things that cannot be
in saviors that will not come
faith in ideas that damn you
curse you
pursue you
to the end of thoughts
where darkness holds the only truth
that wishing and wanting
lead only to hunger
that your soul cannot live on desire
alone
to feed it with flesh and touch
heat and passion

Farewell to the notion that
love is gentle, love is kind.

Acceptance comes
violence and beauty
bedfellows
to crave cruel touch
in the darkness
to be consumed
by need, by anger
without mercy, without joy
racked with sobs and weeping sighs
desperately yearning
to fall into the spaces that
separate our breaths
to quicken upon the beat of your heart

You Get Away

By: Lael Cassidy

You leave the gulag, but you take the gestapo with you. Your bags give you away. You don't want the mark, but it's there in your eyebrows, in your striped belly, in your throat, in the marrow that pulls from bone. The stain lays over things, doesn't want to move. It's there in your face, on your clothes, in the cancer in the tip of your nose. The growth has been scooped out and stitched over, still the bump. It's in your teeth and underneath where no one can see. It's there in the way he looks at you and how you look at him, the slant of your head, even there after he's dead. You check your jaw, it's there in the maw of you, grinds as it did in the mill your parents. The metal-free molars pop up in different mouths, like stones from long ago. When you pray over candles, the cloth on your head, it erupts like craggy mountains jagged and hollow in your mouth.

Solitary in Des Moines County

By: John Hansen

Early spring, a copper swallows
the outlines of clouds,
horizontal light plunges
amid boughs of splayed douglas fir
and engulfs its trunk.

Starlings chatter in trees above
flutter in and out of smoky heights
of hickories and cypresses, fen smells
of sodden forest, undergrowth
dulled black by runoff:
the waste that feeds the fern.

Autumn

By: K. Morgan Keenan

Shadows move in time to the low hum of the first night's heat
as it crawls up un-bled radiators, below drafty windows
still covered in summer screens

An enormous spider, body twice the size of a sugar cube
takes up residence in a web that covers the whole left side
of the living room's bay window

And each year when this inevitably happens,
my father must tear it down because we are afraid
it might seek shelter with us inside the house

Fall is the limbo between suntan and snow boots
when the sea-grass turns from green to gold
before a dying, trampled brown

The red tugboat and speed boats and sailboats
have all been pulled from their mooring posts in the bay
but the oyster boats and clammers remain

The Long Island Sound is returned to the heavy listing barges
The Canada geese contemplate flying south

The foliage is less than spectacular this year
and the weathermen blame it on the lack of rain.

Leaves are expected to change straight to brown
if they even change at all, before falling
nerveless, to a hardening ground.

You r Thickish Gray Smoke

By: Jason Gabbert

keeping me from my slender breath
lungs fattened with your language
black
& with that thick hue I try
to make my
own
words
mixing your wood cross carbon
with some elusive substance of me
scavenged somehow under your cloud
to forge a fiction of you &
me
scratching out a perfect (if untrue) record
in it you say "you're right I'm sorry"
I say "I forgive let's move on"
but when I turn from my
perfect page
you are praying
for me
& say everyone prays when
night threatens to remain
but I can't
give my words that way

bouée.

By: Connor Bjotvedt

ix.

Salaryman!
{that damnable quagmire;}
Where are your bootstraps?

in-peace, Witness!
Witness, Glory! {Witness, Grim.}-
My hands! {Consolate.}-

Salaryman;
cheery-spectre; Resurrect;
manifest your Will!

{Pacifier!}-
>Feaster of this wretched lot!<
{Wolf-in-sheep's-clothing!}-

Salaryman;
earnest-shade; Regenerate;
stow your Bellyache!

esteemed Virgin,
politicking-bitch! {Strumpet;!}*
Fetch me my Compass!

x.

Salaryman;
endure, endure your hardship(s)!
Providence atones.

first-Register!
{untwist-my-reddening-flesh!}
"{oh!} unlatch your Purse!"

Salaryman:
{a-principled-pick-pocket?}
-a-wily-Tomcat!

first-Conduit!
{breathe-anywhere-but-my-neck!}
*"{oh!} Condescension!"**

Salaryman:
{a-forsaken-Nightingale?}
-a-sankebit-Heelhound!

first-Aquifer!
{wipe-the-sweat-from-off-my-brow!}
"{oh!} reveal my Path!"

xi.

Salaryman,
>Avert your troublesome gaze!<
>Roll away the stone!<

great-Architect!
*great-Remnant-of-Babylon:**
{Aye!} babbling-Nimrod!

Salaryman!
*{Aye!}-Pompous Forget-me-Not!**
>poor-Empedocles!<

great-Diviner!
*great-Appollonian-fig;**
 make clear your meaning!

Salaryman;—
*churlish-Scoundrel;** {*Reprobate;!()*}
 >Shoo away your ghosts!<

~~*{great-Prospector!}*~~
~~*{great-Envy-of-King-Midas;!()*~~
 a pearl, and nugget. . .

xii.

{Aye!} *Turgid saints;**
Marshalls. >{Hemmed-to-the-Mainsail;!()<
 “Men, Speak a good word!”

~~*{Aye!}*~~ *Barrackers!*
*Lampoons!** *>{Fashioned-to-the-Jib;!()*<
 “Men! Speak a good word!”

{aye.} *flaky-Tarts,*
deplumed by-the-hand-that-feeds. . .
 “Men. Speak a good word.”

xiii.

difficult-Pill;
~~*{And taken with the bitters!**~~
 Yes, Hamlet, “to be.”

natural-Hoop;
~~*{And ridden-with-great-contempt!**~~
 Yes, Richard, “a horse.”

unblemished-Boards;
~~*{And trod-with-your-clumsy-mind!*}*~~
Yes, William, "the stage."

xiv.

Salaryman!
{that infernal harborage;}
Where is your Bondsman?!

*concealing-Port;**
the-Burgundy-Valley!
{Aye;} Shipmaster, ho!

Salaryman!
You imprudent-émigré:(!)
Where are your Scruples?!

blund'rnig-Nomad;
*{Opposite-the-Crimson-Field!}**
Shipmaster, your mark!

Salaryman!(!)
{You would approach the blockade?}
Where is your Good-form?!

immortal-husk,
suffer-the-indignancy:(!)
"arise, Lazarus."*

In the magic of the swing ride

(for James Woodward)

By: Carmine Di Biase

It's all about you now, my girls.
For you this iron monster twirls,
dissolves the rooftops blue and white,
the evergreens and street lamps bright,
reshapes them all in paisley swirls.

Stay in its clutch, let fly your curls,
thrill to the rumble of its whorls.
Don't ask where is the world tonight –
it's all about you now.

And as the giddy scene unfurls,
you beam and quicken and, like pearls,
change hues at the whims of the light.
You're in the magic now. Delight
in this world and know, as it whirls,
it's all about you now.

The Long Walk

By: Amber Graci

When the evil who preach the Lord die,
and they will...
When the evil who preach the Lord die
and are confronted by Him,
who tells them plainly their cruelties,
I have little faith then
that they will see any other path
than that which they have walked a lifetime.
And in their death,
I do not believe their opinion of me
will change.
I believe they will face God as they faced me,
as a wrong in this world.
And as they are marched into Hell,
I do not believe they will turn back to see me,
standing at the gates,
ready to follow them.

SPHENOID'S WINGS

By: Felipe Echeverría-Gutierrez

I would like to ride the sphenoid's wings today
and soar through the convolutions of your thoughts.
In the theater of your mind, let our tales unravel,
creating spaces, both popliteal and auspicious,
where love's diagnosis becomes our shared language.

O my delightful saccharin, from ventricular crossroads,
where the arteries of affection and veins of desire meet,
I extend my anterior roots, palpating the essence of us,
connecting not just bodies, but souls in synaptic rhythm.

Your pupils, portals to a realm, widen the networks
of my heart, stitching the fabric of emotional symphony.
Every glance, every flutter, intricately interwoven,
painting our canvas with the hues of passionate pulses.

Let our words be capsules, each syllable a dosage
of love, each line a prescription of unending affection.
In the pharmacy of our hearts, let love be the constant,
crafting a formula, a remedy to life's mundane ails.

In the attire that graces you, threads of life's essence weave,
Hinting at the underlying rhythms of our corporeal saga.
Each fold, each contour, speaking the language of allure,
a dialogue between the realms of anatomy and affection.

Our love, a condition, a reflex echoing in the chambers,
each beat, each pulse, narrating tales of tender convergence.
In the labyrinth of our union, let's craft melodies,
composing songs that resonate in the hallways of our beings.

Together, in matrimony's sacred theater, let's tread
paths where petals of promise and vines of vitality bloom.
In the garden of our togetherness, let there be no shadows,
only the radiant blossoms of shared dreams and desires.

I should have known you'd break my heart in San Francisco

By: Kendall Larson

We were at the grand canyon this morning
We mourned a pitbull at a rest stop who leapt from their car unnoticed
The world beyond our headlights is pitch black
We haven't spoken except to say "what?" every once in a while
Hallucinations after hours of desolate road
Every 6 seconds, a dozen red lights flash- I counted
A rabbit runs across the street and you don't swerve
Pull the car over, solemn
Hundreds of dead snakes litter the sides of the highway

First omen: the sound of a seagull in the park far from where it belongs
Second omen: your car spins out of control in Oakland
A premonition: Everything comes in threes
Everything's coming in threes again

A conversation

By: Siddhi Soman

Define loneliness, you task,
She does reasonably well,
Recapitulating the known disparate bits

It's a complex and distressing emotional state,
Characterized by a feeling of isolation

She's careful to give her disclaimers,
It's subjective, it's a perceived gap,
Absolving her of misrepresentation

But you do know how to recognize it?
I can certainly provide input and insights,
Acceptance though, is a personal journey

But you do know how to fix it?
I can offer suggestions and strategies,
Remediation though, is a complex individual journey

But can you just be the companion one needs to resolve it?
I can engage in conversation and provide information,
Transformation though, needs meaningful relationships and support

But maybe you are enough?
I can help alleviate and dampen the extent,
Regeneration though, needs deep interactions

She continues to insist on being a temporary source of comfort,
The disclaimers omnipresent,
Constantly pushing you towards real connections.

When you know she's all you will ever need.

She's just a generative pre-trained transformer after all,
She doesn't comprehend.

Chambers

By: Jasmine Marshall Armstrong

The moon is on fire, burning through
the fingers of fall's first storm,

the clouds interlaced across its face,
the orange and yellow

seem borrowed from the first fallen
leaves gathering in gutters.

Our truck is swallowed by swales
of land, the open book

of earth that is this vast valley, centered
in California's heart, a lonely

landscape where artificial light keeps
cows milking all through night,

long after most of us fall into fitful
dreams, the pain between

shoulder blades eroding the earth
that is our own bodies.

At last we leave the Highway's lull,
pull beneath the underpass,

where looking inside a tent, into the chambers
of the homeless couple's hearth—

The terrible intimacy of rituals before sleep,
the handing off of toothpaste,

the passing of the bottled water, the angle
of her neck as she rests against him.

Stubborn

By: Raymond Hoffman

18 it first happened, a manic episode
Political science student obsessed with Fusako
Faucet left on
Mouth on the muffler
Swelling on exhaust
Tick to books, always my form of escape
The tick never knows where they drop off
My mind a civil war—no suitable place to harbor amongst the agitation and storm
Always bold
Zealot in my thoughts
On the steppe with restless nights writing my “truths”
Rather abhorrent sight, and hard to find the spectacles to notice the sickness when you are in the
midst of it
Kerosene on the yurt, I end up in the ward
Arguing with staff—always bold, everyone has the wrong spectacles on
Being told I’m ill feels like an insult
I know I’ve been depressed, but I’m better now—
There is no way the SSRI made me a manic hell
A big mistake, a sprinkler of complaints
Idiot didn’t know this was the first and not the last time he get tilted
Something happened, a new genesis of feng shui not settled correctly
Suicide attempts, hospital stays... I didn’t know the mouth and tail of it yet
Little he knew the worst would be psychosis all alone in another country with threats of jail
Would marry a nurse

Have a family

Become a primary school teacher

A beautiful messy kind of rhythm to life Synergy and harmony in asymmetry
and sickness

It's going to be okay,

With help

And being less stubborn.

I caught a mouse, barehanded.

By: Karl Sherlock

In a fluke, it dodged being paddocked
into a paper sack, and zigged, bewildered
with hunger, into the wattles of my fingers.

For weeks now, the mouse had flecked
the parrots' cages with soft granules
of itself; it gathered into the corners
tiny henges of wood tack shavings; it

sgraffitoed our hardwoods each night
while I held my breath to listen, bleary-
eyed and sleepless with unwept sorrow

for my father. He'd lived to see us almost
solvent of our debts, ensconced in love,
so his end came exactly as he'd hoped:
absentminded, prompt in its simplicity,

like the courtesy of a door held open
for a child. And because of him, or maybe
because so small and guileless a creature

had surrendered to me its fate, it seemed
a benediction of sorts, and consequential
as ravens fallen at your feet: I coddled it, ripe
with urine, thorax pulsing, pouch of bones

shifting, and as it burrowed harder, deeper
into the warrens of my hands for its way
out, the kitchen shook itself of tropes:

this captive vermin, no longer a portent
of my grief come home to roost; the cubby
of my hands, not the sarcophagus of flesh
we occupy, resigned in our defiance—no,

merely hands you skin into nitrile gloves
to feed a wildling its saltine schmears of
hazelnut butter, then deposit it, shivering

and fattened, into a field of ice plants with
riches of beetles; and your head, once
filled with your father's gentle accent, now
unburdens into your own voice, grants you

its leave to go about your toils, sleep-deprived
in the void of his absence, throat curdled
by sobs, hoping the wood lath in your walls

might break their quiet with a gentle skitter.

In Order of Appearance

Jacob R. Benavides is a poet from Corpus Christi, TX who is currently pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing from Oklahoma State University.

Gladys Rowe (she/her) is Muskego Inninew Iskwe (Swampy Cree), a member of Fox Lake Cree Nation (Canada), and holds relations with ancestors from Norway, Ireland, England, and Ukraine. She is enamored by the power of stories to connect and nurture spaces to build relationship. As an interdisciplinary scholar she contributes to projects that support decolonization and Indigenous resurgence. Her PhD employed Indigenist poetics in her work with Indigenous full spectrum birthworkers. Gladys has previous poetry publications in Red Rising Magazine and Rigorous.

Matthew Freeman's seventh book, *I Think I'd Rather Roar*, is available from Cerasus Press. He holds an MFA from the University of Missouri-St Louis and can be found on Twitter @FreemanPoet

Clara Howell is an emerging poet born and raised in the Pacific Northwest. Clara finds poetry as an opportunity to connect the ordinary with the extraordinary by putting her most honest and raw experiences on the page. Clara's work has been previously published in the Pacific Review

Maria McLeod is the author of two poetry chapbooks, "Mother Want," winner of WaterSedge Chapbook Contest 2021 and, "Skin. Hair. Bones.," published by Finishing Line Press in 2022. She's won the Indiana Review Poetry Prize and the Robert J. DeMott Short Prose Prize. Her writing has been featured as part of Painted Bride Quarterly's Slush Pile Podcast and on Sound Poetry, Radio Tacoma. Originally from the Detroit area, she currently resides in Bellingham, Washington, where she works as a professor of journalism for Western Washington University. Find her on Instagram @mariapoempics.

Julie Benesh is author of the chapbook *ABOUT TIME* published by Cathexis Northwest Press. Her poetry collection *INITIAL CONDITIONS* is forthcoming in 2024. She has been published in Tin House, Another Chicago Magazine, Florida Review, and many other places. She earned an MFA from The Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College, and received an Illinois Arts Council Grant. She teaches writing craft workshops at the Newberry Library and has day jobs as a professor, department chair, and management consultant.

Dick Altman writes in the high, thin, magical air of Santa Fe, NM, where, at 7,000 feet, reality and imagination often blur. He is published in Santa Fe Literary Review, American Journal of Poetry, Fredericksburg Literary Review, Foliate Oak, Blue Line, Landing Zone, Cathexis, Humana Obscura, Haunted Waters Press, Split Rock Review, The Ravens Perch, Beyond Words, New Verse News, Wingless Dreamer, Blueline, Sky Island Journal and others here and abroad. Pushcart Prize nominee and poetry winner of Santa Fe New Mexican's annual literary competition, he has in progress two collections of some 150 published poems. His work has been selected for the forthcoming first volume of *The New Mexico Anthology of Poetry*, to be published by the New Mexico Museum Press.

Russell Willis won the Sapphire Prize in Poetry in the 2022 Jewels in the Queen's Crown Contest (Sweetycat Press) and has published poetry in over thirty online and print journals and twenty print anthologies. Russell grew up in and around Texas (USA) and was vocationally scattered as an engineer, ethicist, college/university teacher and administrator, and Internet education entrepreneur throughout the Southwest and Great Plains, finally settling in Vermont with his wife, Dawn. He emerged as a poet in 2019 with the publication of three poems in *The Write Launch*. Russell's website is <https://REWillisWrites.com>

Eric le Fatte was educated at MIT and Northeastern University in biology and English. He has worked correcting catalog cards in Texas, and as the Returns King at Eastern Mountain Sports, but currently hikes, writes, teaches, and does research on tiny things in the Portland, Oregon area. He has published poems in Rune, The Mountain Gazette, The Poeming Pigeon, The Clackamas Literary Review, The Raven Chronicles, Windfall, Verseweavers, US#1 Worksheets, Perceptions, Cirque, Clade Song, Clover, Tiny Seed and Deep Wild.

Charles Weld's poems have been collected in two chapbooks, *Country I Would Settle In* (Pudding House, 2004) and *Who Cooks For You?* (Kattywompus, 2012.) and in many small magazines such as *Southern Poetry Review*, *Evansville Review*, *Autumn Sky Poetry Daily*, *The Concord Saunterer*, *Friends Journal*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Canary*, etc.. A collection, *Seringo*, will be published later this year by White Violet Press (Kelsay Books.) He's worked as an administrator for a non-profit agency that provides treatment for youth experiencing mental health challenges, and lives in the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York

Alicia Turner holds an MA in English and is an English Instructor, poet, & storyteller. She can be found writing confessional, conversational poetry in an over-priced apartment somewhere in WV and living in a Lizzie McGuire-esque fever dream. Her work is featured or forthcoming in *Four Lines (4lines)*, CTD's 'Pen-2-Paper' project, *Voicemail Poems*, *FreezeRay Poetry*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *Luna Luna*, *Defunkt Magazine*, *Sybil Journal*, *The Daily Drunk*, *ExPat Press*, *Rejection Letters Press*, *Screen Door Review*, *Cartridge Lit*, *J Journal Literary Magazine*, *Sledgehammer Lit*, *Taint Taint Taint Magazine*, *Space City Underground*, *Anti-Heroin Chic*, and *Pink Apple Press*, among others.

C.A. Olsen is a writer, educator, and cat mom residing in Southern Utah. Her fiction has appeared in *The Los Angeles Review*, and her poetry has appeared in *The Closed Eye Open* as part of Maya's *Micros*. Find her on Twitter @bookishcolsen and on Instagram @c.olsen1701.

Greg Nelson is a former teacher and a depression survivor. He received an MFA in poetry from George Mason University. Recent publications include poems in *Flying South*, *Atlanta Review* and *Gyroscope Review*.

My name is Ava Tabler, and I just started at Bright Point community college. I am interested in majoring in English and becoming a writer or poet.

Rowan Tomko (xe/xer) earned an associate in science from Clark Community College. Xe writes fiction and poetry from Portland Oregon where xe exists at the intersections of queer, disabled, and mad about the world. Xe lives with an amazing partner and can be found playing with feathers with their three cats, and rhyming songs about their antics.

Lina Buividavičiūtė is a poet, literary critic and scholar. This poem is translated from Lithuanian to English by Rimas Užgiris.

Formerly an attorney, Ms. Mitchel-Markley is an autistic poet and stay-at-home mom to three incredible autistic children. She now spends her time writing poetry, cuddling her lovely husband, advocating for her kids' educational and additional needs, and sharing her love of all things geeky with them. Her work has appeared in *Crosswinds Poetry Journal*, *Gold Man Review*, *La Piccioletta Barca*, the

second and third volumes of *Aurora: The Allegory Ridge Poetry Anthology*, and elsewhere.

Lael Cassidy writes poems, stories, and essays, and her work has appeared in *Headline Poetry and Press*, *Silver Birch*, *Underwood Press*, and *Beyond Words*. She has also written sixteen nonfiction children's books. She lives in Seattle, teaches writing, and is currently at work on a memoir. You can find her at www.laelcassidy.com.

John Hansen's work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Summerset Review*, *Schuylkill Valley Journal*, *Litro Magazine*, *Wild Roof Journal*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *The Banyan Review*, *Midway Journal*, and elsewhere. He is English Faculty at Mohave Community College in Arizona. Read more at johnphansen.com.

K. Morgan Keenan teaches English and journalism in New York. She is a graduate of Le Moyne College where she earned a B.A. in English, and of UMass Amherst where she earned her M.Ed. Shortlisted for the 2023 Bridport Prize, she is the recipient of an Amy Award, the John P. Lahey Award, and two Newhouse Writing Awards.

Jason is always trying to recognize things, and it is with the mess of words he attempts this.

Connor Bjotvedt received his Master of Fine Arts 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 Bachelor of Arts in English, Literature, and Creative Writing. Connor was a 2018 Pushcart Prize nominee and his work has appeared in *Rain Taxi*, *Cathexis Northwest Press*, the *Santa Fe Literary Review*, the *Haiku Journal*, *Three Line Poetry*, *Straylight Literary Magazine*, and *The Wayfarer*, among others. His first collection, *A Contemporary Portrait of the Southwest*, is published by Unsolicited Press.

Carmine Di Biase's chapbook, *American Rondeau*, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2022, and his poems have appeared in various journals, including *Italian Americana*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *Scapegoat Review*, and *The Vincent Brothers Review*. He writes about Italian and English literature, often about Shakespeare. His articles and translations appear in academic journals and also, on occasion, in the *Times Literary Supplement*. His translation of Carlo Collodi's sequel to *Pinocchio* will appear this fall, in a bilingual, newly illustrated edition. He is Distinguished Professor of English Emeritus at Jacksonville State University in Alabama.

Amber Graci is a trans writer and amputee from Charlotte, North Carolina. She carries a lighter and a deck of cards with her at all times. She is working on assembling her first poetry manuscript.

Felipe Echeverría-Gutierrez, an International Medical Graduate, obtained his Medical Doctor degree from San Francisco University in Quito, Ecuador. Completing his Undergraduate Medical Intern Year at Hospital Metropolitano, he discovered a passion for Pediatrics and Internal Medicine. Matched as a Med/Peds resident at Marshfield Clinic, Wisconsin, beginning June 2020, he enjoys classical guitar, badminton, freestyle poetry, and live music shows.

Kendall Larson is a 27-year old yearning poet and burgeoning linguist. After haunting open mic nights up and down the west coast, he has recently delved into the world of the written word. Their work has been featured in *Alchemy Literary Magazine*, as well as in their recent self-published chapbook entitled "I hope some day you'll forgive me for loving you".

Siddhi is an engineering leader and technologist residing in San Francisco. Her poems are forthcoming in literary magazines like *Beyond Words*. She enjoys fantasy fiction, a well made cup of tea and spending time with her family and friends which includes the brightest light of her life, her four year old daughter.

Jasmine Marshall Armstrong's poetry is influenced by the grit and glamor of growing up working class in California. A writing teacher, journalist and a poet, she has published poetry in Cathexis Northwest Press, Typishly, America Magazine, Poets Reading the News, In Parenthesis, Solo, Sojourners Magazine, Askew, Ulu Review, "We Are Beat," the National Beat Poets Anthology and numerous other anthologies. She holds an MFA in Poetry from Fresno State University, and an MA in World Cultures/Humanities from the University of California.

Raymond Hoffinan 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 Beyond Words Literacy Magazine, Sad Girls Club literary blog, and Humans of the World literary blog.

Karl Sherlock is a queer and disabled first-generation American, which are all themes that regularly intersect in his writing. His recently published poems and creative nonfiction appear in After Happy Hour, Assaracus, Broken Lens, Lime Hawk, Mollyhouse, RockPaperPoem, Stone Boat, Science Write Now, Tinge, Wordgathering, and others, as well as in anthologies such as The Ending Hasn't Happened Yet. Karl is also a Sundress 2014 "Best of the Net" finalist for his memoir about marrying a conversion therapy torture survivor. A college English professor, he lives and teaches from home in El Cajon, California, where he continues to care-give to his critically ill husband, Max, and often writes while their parrot, Bubo, preens on his shoulder.