A black and white photograph of a man in a white shirt and dark vest sitting on a wooden chair. The chair is placed on a wooden platform or rooftop. The man is looking out over a dense cityscape with many buildings and a dome visible in the foreground. The title 'The Book of Jobs' is overlaid on the right side of the image.

The Book of Jobs

Poems About Work

Edited by Erin Murphy

Editor's Note

We received more than 3,600 poetry submissions, which means, yes, this anthology about work was a lot of work! But it has truly been a labor of love to discover new voices along with new poems from familiar voices. We present them to you here alphabetically by author, with the exception of the proem and coda.

In these pages you will find poems about a wide range of jobs, from coal miners to caregivers, farmers to flight attendants, union organizers to Uber drivers, engineers to exterminators, teachers to tech workers, artists to athletes, doctors to dunking booth clowns. You will also find the work of nonhumans—bees, voles, meerkats, birds, earthworms, donkeys, whales, dolphins, and dogs—along with the natural world itself in which “a little earth pushes up/ a little plant life also.”

You'll read about unemployment, discrimination, incarceration, unsafe working conditions, and chattel slavery. You'll also discover humor, tenderness, joy, pride, and appreciation for those who “[show] up/ again/ again/ again.”

This is intended as a soft launch of *The Book of Jobs*. An Open Access edition is forthcoming through the Pennsylvania State University Libraries Open Publishing in 2026. It will be fully accessible and will include easily navigable HTML and PDF versions, making it more convenient for personal and classroom use.

Thank you to all contributors for their “work work.” Thank you also to *ONE ART* editors Mark Danowsky and Louisa Schnaithmann for their labor behind the scenes to bring this project to light.

I will close with these words from Ruben Quesada's “Poetry Is Bourgeois”:

On the way home from work
On the northbound train
I heard a young woman say
Poetry is meant for the rich
Poetry is for the privileged
Poetry is for those who can spend
Time to write words meant for change
It is a life carelessly spent
Writing. This is a lie.

This anthology is dedicated to all workers and to the memory of my “Grampa Jim” (1923-2008), who is honored in “Elegy for the 30-Year Career.”

Erin Murphy
Editor, *The Book of Jobs: Poems About Work*
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*

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Zita Murányi

Painter

My grandfather was a house painter.
He rested his ladder against the edge
of the clouds, dipped our home into the sky
to paint the walls in soft, fading hues of turquoise.

Sharon Perkins Ackerman

My Grandfather Dug Coal

To be your granddaughter is to know
the mountain as torn, plowed,
blasted down to a darkness
different than night,
the kind where you dream
seams of garnet left by stars.
Not just a combustible hunk
of cold, not just one way out,
and a ceiling of shale ready
to choke-damp the tunnel
between you and your seven kids.

Because of you, the sky opens
into lapis, sun showers the gliding chair
where I sit and watch beetles
clamber from small shafts,
the voles soft ramble toward
an exit I can never seem to find.
You didn't know you'd die at thirty-three,
you just kept
swinging that big lamp
toward the outbye at quitting time,
burrowing up toward light.

*

Susan Aizenberg

Triangle Waist Company

Emma, aged 16

I do fine work, my stitches delicate
as an eyelash. This earns

me a spot by the window. Dirty
as it is, some light filters

through. Rosie's clumsy, her fingers
thick and fit only for rough

cloth stitched by gas lamp.
We buy our own needles, pay

the electric for our machines.
We rent the backless stools

we sit on. The bosses lock us in
and we're searched

when we leave. Some girls
do steal—buttons, ribbons,

even whole shirts. But not Rosie
and me. Now all I have left

of her is the famous photo.
She stands unsmiling

beneath hand-lettered signs
tacked to the wall—

*No back-talk, no stalling in the Ladies.
Don't come late. Don't leave early.*

*If you're not here Sunday,
don't come back on Monday—*

beside her, and taller than she,
towering stacks of unfinished cloth,

her day's quota, endless as the straw
the miller's daughter had to spin.

*

Derrick Austin

At the Grave of Patrick Kelly

I want my clothes to make you smile. —Patrick Kelly

Bitten by bed bugs, clothes ruined,
I ache to scorch the catwalk in your dress of Corvette red kisses.
I'd never seen couture like yours,
colorful, buoyant, and sage. Don't be sullen in sweet air.
Strut, cry your buttons! Twirl, cry your bows!
A swishy boy, I'd spin
an antique globe my mother bought for me from the thrift store
and where my finger landed was the place
I could be happy. You, too,
gave me a world to imagine without dullness or ignorance.
Your epitaph is legible and clean.
Blazing star, a metrocard, chrysanthemum, a pot of mint—
On this fifth day of the fifth month, I promise not to get lost again
when I return properly with a gift.

*

John Peter Beck

The Photographer

Before the Shroud
of Turin, there was
the veil of Veronica,
who gave Jesus her cloth

to wipe his brow
as he bore the cross.
He returned the veil, filled
that instant with the image

of his face. St. Veronica,
often when I shoot a wedding,
I think of you, that first
photograph and your patronage.

I angle to catch all their smiles
and hopes for future
happiness. Later, sometimes,
I must turn the camera

away to make sure I do not
catch the drunken vacant stares,
the simmering family arguments,
or the small signs of infidelity now

or to come. You cannot blame
the camera for what
it captures or the film
for the images now forever

held there. In the staged
shots at the church,
the wedding party
line up and smile.

I tell them to say "sex"
since it always gets them
to laugh and smile. Sex works
better than cheese anytime.

*

Mihir Bellamkonda

Volunteer Firefighter, Antigua

Noon breaks red
off obsidian cobbles and
as the mountain smokes my eyes are open to a life
that demands fire as a sanction for love.

The beer is salted. The sun erupts
along darkening curves of shoulders. Sweat,
sweat and sweet peppers to glance against the lips.
Burning life, I will be as wood—

perdón, perdón, I have stumbled against a man
reclined against the low yellow house,
yellow bread in his mouth alongside apology
for my sunblindness.

He pats the earth in welcome. I share
my water. And for a time we speak as birds,
our language more sound than definition.
And there is beauty in the way we look at the ground.

A bull dances in flames
between two frowning heroes
on his shirt. Underneath: *Bomberos Voluntarios de Antigua*.
A long minute, ten, and we companions part.

Evening unites blue
the heavens and earth;
there is rain as hummingbirds' wings,
perceptible only through softness,

and I believe as I believe in uncomprehension
nothing in this wide green world is on fire.

*

Joan Bernard

My Mother Taking Over My Father's Package Store

One drink ushering in the next,
he couldn't see the red in the ledger,
the stack of bills on the desk.

They had four kids to feed and dress.
It was up to her to make their lives better.
One drink ushering in the next

increased her distress
at meetings with creditors,
at the stack of bills on the desk.

She ran the store with success,
hoping he'd stop his surrender
to one drink ushering in the next.

Long days absent of rest,
she needed relief from the pressure,
the stack of bills on the desk.

She wanted to give back his business,
if only he'd stay sober,
that each drink ushering in the next,
wouldn't breed bill after bill on the desk.

*

Jennifer Blackledge

Remote Layoffs

When little moons bloomed
next to names
in the team chat
we knew

then we burrowed
into the directory and
one by one blindly
felt our way through
the company tree.

Signal sent, wait for response,
either *I'm OK* or
the automatic boomerang message
that lodges in your chest:
no such account exists.

In bedrooms and basements,
we pinged people and
rechecked our electronic keys.
Does this portal open?
Still welcome here?

Then back to names:
Are you ok? You there?
Furtive and urgent,
we took stock,
like a meerkat chirrups
Danger, man down to
what's left of the colony.

*

Todd Boss

The Farmer Speaks to Her Children of Work

And the farmer's children, weary from the fields in the middle of a long, straight windrow, cry:

Speak to us of work, and why we have to do it,

And the mother reaches for the appropriate memorized chapter of Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet* and clears her throat,

And the angels of that village gather round as she quotes, errorlessly, in the imperious tone she reserves for reciting poetry:

You work that you may keep pace with the Earth, and the soul of the Earth, etc., as it is written,

But lo, it does little good, for the kids continue to complain of itching clothes, and their red hay-fevered, watering eyes, with much rending of garments and throwing down of gloves, so vexed are they,

And interrupt her vociferously, refusing to do another lick of a chore not of their choosing in the humid hundred-degree heat of mid-July (their friends all gathered at the river, sprayed by waterfalls), while the John Deere baler kicks dusty 60-pound twine-wrapped hunks of harvest at them where they climb among the others they've already stacked on that flat-bed wagon:

Why! they plead through tears—

So she shifts gears, tries a smile, and summons from the cloudless sky a length of Lutheran hymnody they too know by heart by now:

Hark the voice of Jesus crying, who will go and work today?

Fields are ripe and harvests waiting; who will bear the sheaves away?

Loud and long the mother calleth bundled lines of poetry:

Who will answer, gladly saying, "Here am I, send me, send me?"

And thereupon the children settle back into a rhythm not unlike the one that rocks their laden wagonload to the barn's packed-earth approach,

Up which ramp, crookedly, heavily, backwards,

Into the mow's hushed cathedral tent,

The rewards of generations of labors went.

The tractor knocks dead,

And an 80-acre blessing of silence sloshes over the canopies of the farmyard trees, and stays—restorative and sweet on the breeze as the slug from a jug of ice-cold lemonade.

Wordlessly they worship in that barn-swallow-swept shade till the work is done, the weary wooden wagon empty, and another winter month's worth of livestock feed stored away like faith won the hard way. Like money made but saved. Like seed.

*

Mark Brazaitis

Laundry

Hector runs the laundry room.
He speaks to us from behind a counter.
Machines whirl behind him.
The room is hot and thick with humidity
and he's sweating,
but it's okay, he says,
because—hey—it's cold outside.
He likes his job; it's one of the best
an inmate can have, he says.
“A lot of times,” he says, “you don't have nothing
to do.”

He must be thirty-two, thirty-five.
His face is lined, however,
and his black, curly hair
is sprinkled with gray
or maybe only with lint.

He explains his work:
He gives each incoming inmate
a bed roll (a sheet, a blanket, two towels),
five shirts, five pairs of underwear,
five pairs of socks,
five pairs of pants.
He gives each a “hygiene kit”:
a disposable razor,
a tiny can of shaving cream,
a tube of toothpaste,
a toothbrush.
If an inmate wants anything else—floss,
mouthwash, balm for chapped lips
or dry hands—
he has to buy it
at the commissary.

Over the course of a week,
Hector and the men he oversees
wash the entire prison population's clothes,
each article of which is marked, in black,
with the inmate's number.

Hector gazes at our group,
wonders if we have questions.
I sense he wants to keep his audience,
so I ask him three.
He works, he says, eight to ten hours a day.
He makes 40 cents an hour.
He spends most of his money on phone calls home.

A phone call, he adds, costs \$3.15
for fifteen minutes.

I calculate: to make a half an hour call,
he must work fifteen hours and 45 minutes.

He asks for more questions.
No one has them. The group
shuffles out of the room.
I linger. He catches my eye, says,
“Every week, if I can, I call my daughter.
She’s eight. I’ll ask her questions, but
sometimes we don’t have much to say
to each other.”

I offer sympathetic words.

“It’s okay, man, it’s okay.
As long as she’s on the other end,
I don’t mind paying for silence.
Besides, every so often,
I can hear her breathe.”

*

Gloria Bromberg

The Addiction Counselor Considers Her Job While Reading *Leaves of Grass* on the Bus

Last night, two hours overtime, waiting
for the ambulance, completing admission forms

in hard copy, chart notes online. I check *danger to self*,
unsure if that refers to the despondent client

or the culture. Or both. So many suicides,
accidental ODs, each time back from vacation

I ask *Who died?* This morning, so tired
I could miss my stop & ride all the way

to Fillmore at Broadway, look down
at the bright & blue Marina glistening

at noon. I could walk to Marina Green,
sit on the grass, unwrap tuna

on whole wheat, sip my Diet Coke; maybe
nap in the sunlight, breathe deeply, commune

with the lawn, be at one with every atom
of every blade of grass, feel deep & abiding

connections with animal, vegetable, mineral,
then return to my job a little late

but with renewed appreciation
for the interdependence of all things.

What really happens is, I get off
at my stop, dodge a dealer

hustling crack in front of McDonald's.
At my building, I wave a magnetized ID

across a pad & the front door
buzzes open. I unlock my office door

with a nonreproducible key, and before
taking off my coat or opening the blinds,

I boot up & log on: dependence
on the machine, the network, departmental

applications. Incessant information, mechanization,
lies and half-truths, all reducible

to a microchip—the human element
once, now twice removed. I can't start

from Paumanok, I can't cross Brooklyn Ferry,
I don't hear America singing. I hear America

crashing in on itself, shooting up, barfing up,
living down and out under the freeway, the body

electronic, transmitted via cable, satellite,
gigabit fiber, a spear of summer grass

on a screen in the privacy
of our own rooms.

*

Sarah Browning

Oh radiant happiness

A large man walks into Zig Zag River Runners on a Thursday afternoon, books a Saturday group trip. *Name? Steve Drown. You're kidding, right? Haha no. Scared of water, too. But—ya know—my conference buddies want to give it a go.*

Saturday morning—as every Saturday morning—I stand by my boat holding my paddle aloft when Steve Drown comes up over the bank and spots me. *Let's get in Sarah's boat!* I just barely shake my head... as they come stumbling down to the muddy shore: six men and one woman, all white, middle aged. We'll have an uneven boat, but that's OK. I'll manage.

On the slow, quiet stretch of the Wenatchee, we practice our strokes and my commands. We sit quietly a moment as the other rafts catch up. *So, what kind of convention are you here for?* Making small talk. A small silence. Then the lone woman chuckles: *They're in underground novelties. What, sex toys?* One of the men: *Haha—no, we're undertakers.* Longer pause—I've got a boat full of undertakers and their leader's name is Steve Drown. I could not make this up. I will dine out on this story—as I do now, writing it—the rest of my life.

Haha—OK, then! And we're off. Steve Drown slips off the boat twice—the only one tipped overboard all day—and twice I haul him in. I have grown strong, in this new way.

We stop for lunch above a small dam and as we eat, I learn where they're each from: Des Moines, Minot, San Antonio. After we clean up our sandwich wrappers and chip bags and thank the Zig Zag support staff it's time for portage—carrying the boat a few short yards around the dam, to hit the river once more. *OK, four on each side,* I direct, and grab the rope. *Oh, this we're good at!* They bust out laughing all at once and just like that I get the joke, as they hoist the rubber boat to their broad shoulders—no remains, no burden—just our joy, one more glorious day on the river.

*

Mary Lou Buschi

Today's Objective

Students will experience *synesthesia* by tasting a birdcall, touching blue with their index fingers, while witnessing language as shape form from the mouths of their classmates. They will accomplish this by memorializing the dead in groups of four. Group A will carve a Chinese jade grave suit with only one verbal prompt. Group B will cut a diamond out of the dead—keeping in mind the importance of facets and how light will enter. Group C will construct a rise of hummingbird wings by following written directions independently. Data will be collected on sheets of origami, while students showcase their projects during a gallery walk where they will practice social skills that are considered “normal.” Students will be able to define *normal*—be it behavior or expected patterns of probability distribution, by solving for “x” within the context of a problem; be it 33, banana, heart, or gun.

*

Lauren Camp

Manifesto

All afternoon the gilded bees rocket around
this ozone. Shift fragrance, build heat.
The bees' sugar-dense eyes, the tease
of the river bend, the vascular twist through
tall stems. What do I know of such effort? I get up
and work. I sleep. I don't save the world.
The insects tissue velvet marrow.
They etch a future on their bodies.
Is it baptism? lust? What takes place
means the next plant credentialed. Our sating.
The mouth wants its sweetness, the heart
its leaf veins. Or the mouth wants its secrets,
the heart its familiar, its temporary shelter.
Another summer fizzles from a nozzle.

*

Gary Ciocco

It's Academic

The student has a one-point-six
but pipes up, has good things to say,
you know.

The student has a one-point-six
and doesn't know who Robert Pirsig
was, how he said the best students are
always failing, in a counter-cultural
classic, and how you're not sure what he
meant with that line, or the book overall,
so you don't quote him anymore,
though you think perhaps you still could
and perhaps you still should.

The student has a one-point-six
and has never heard of Route 66,
which may be for the best, as you are
not sure whether there are any
kicks to be had out there anymore.

The student takes a test, gets a grade,
ups his GPA, and does not protest.
And you wake up again, and wonder
why, grades be damned, he does
not seem to protest anything at all,
why social justice seems condensed
into a course now, and what kind
of humanities professors again go
gently but fervently into the
Irish bar, railing to be reborn,
dying of thirst.

*

Andrew Collard

Fit Check

Define *uniform*: coveralls, dress blues, apron with pockets
functionally useless. Our bravest face, our gladiator drag,
second-hand khakis and a golf shirt stitched with the corporate
insignia of FYE or Coldstone. Everyday told to be decent, to lose
our shapes inside of what we didn't ask for, selling movies,
serving food or cooking it, assembling a car we couldn't afford
even with our discount, clad in bowties, straight-ties, nylons,
our scrubs in assorted shades. Somehow, we manage to make it
look so good, the broken-heel best intention, the scuffed jean
and secret hole-ridden sock we don as if in protest of
the daily masquerade. We clear away the leaves, scatter sawdust
on the schoolroom floor strutting in our worst vest, bodice,
government issue coat, embroidered. This, our first recital,
game face, our cover song pitched for someone else's range,
the title that was never ours to which we must respond—
an inheritance, the disquiet that inhabits us by dawn or later,
post-shift, returning to find our children sunk already into sleep.

*

Geraldine Connolly

A Woman's Labor

I have shopped and cooked,
wandered long dazzling aisles
for shiny apples, plump golden
peaches, cloves to spice the chicken.
I have chopped and sliced, grated
and peeled. Here at the counter
I mixed and stirred,
great chunks of my life falling
into stews like raw meat,
great pillows of morning and rafts
of afternoon floating into the sea
as I repaired and mended,
dug and weeded, falling
on my knees to clip mint and basil.

I nursed and tended,
cleaned up blood and spit,
stood at the sink scrubbing.
I polished and buffed, hemmed
and basted, folded and stacked.
Children hung on me like
small animals pecking and clawing.
I ruffled my feathers. I flew
on to the next task. This was
the work I thought I wanted,
the good of it always vanishing
as new work rose up. And the children
grew into their strength and left
the family table, trying their wings,
as they squawked and screamed
at me, knocked over vases, left
the door open as they
flew out into the world.

*

Ginny Connors

Pack Horse Librarian

The Pack Horse Library Project was a WPA program that employed women to travel on horseback or mule to deliver library books to folks in remote areas of the Appalachian Mountains.

They call her The Book Woman. A hundred miles or so each week, she and her horse, Bonny Bee, climb hills, splash through creeks, travel with their load of books over rocky paths. The roadcut rises high, the steep bank eroded by runoff. Eastern Kentucky. Pay is 28 dollars a month. Teacher pauses class when the children begin to shout, *The Book Woman is here! The Book Woman!* Fourteen books handed out, twelve collected back. On horseback, The Book Woman fords Cut Shin Creek, her feet raised high—the water’s bone-chilling. Brings the recipe scrapbook to Katie Block, sixteen years old and newly married. Burboo with Mashed Potatoes. Green Bean Casserole. Stack Cake. Supposing the girl can get the food, she’ll try these out. Visits Hal Barton, laid up with a gunshot wound. Reads to him, leaves him a magazine: *True Detective*. She’s got a copy of *Huckleberry Finn* for Jon McAllister. He’s read two other Twain books—wants more. Book Woman crosses a deer track winding up from the creek bed. Hears the soft whistle of a meadowlark, spies one perched on a twig, feathers ruffled by breeze. Visits Granny Smithers, gives her another reading lesson. Continues on. Pauses to watch a swirl of golden leaves fling themselves to the muddy earth. She stops by Margaret Alred’s cabin, reads bible passages to her. The old woman is half-blind and her cabin’s cold. She’s grateful for company. Book Woman rekindles the stove, shares a bite of cornbread, a sip of huckleberry tea. Must start back.

Wind’s up. Clouds rolling in.
The horse shakes its head, shivers.
Eight miles to go.

*

The Dunk Tank Clown

Somehow I got roped into being the dunk tank clown at this year's company party. "I thought you guys got Bob from accounting to do this," I said. "That was last year," said Chad. "You're next on the list." "Why do I have to wear a suit?" I said. "It's all part of the fun," said Brad. I sat there in the tank as they lined up the kids. "Why again do I have to talk trash?" I asked. "It's your job as the clown to antagonize a little. Get the kids riled up," said Trent. "I'll try," I said. "That's the spirit," said Brad. "Take your best shot," said Chad, handing balls to all the children. "I thought it was supposed to be one at a time," I said. "Shut up and talk trash," said Trent. "Fine," I said, composing myself. "You'll never hit that target, you gassy fribbles," I yelled at the children. "You're nothing but a bunch of dunderheads and blunderbusses." The balls started flying. "You're all a bunch of frothy milksops, mumpsimus scamps, pediculus lickspittles. You'll never get me." Eventually someone hit the target and I went down, hearing the soft explosion of applause from under water. I opened my eyes expecting the muffled scintillation of sunlight, the idiot faces of children, my coworkers pointing and laughing, but I only saw darkness, vast and incalculable darkness. I quickly attempted to brace myself on the side of the tank and found that there was no tank. In fact, there was absolutely nothing. Instinctually, I swam upward and finally, just as I was beginning to panic, broke the surface. I gasped for air under the flattening gaze of a setting sun. As I treaded water I looked all around me, and noticed a series of small fires and a few makeshift huts on the shore. I swam toward them and when I reached land there was a man in a ravaged suit waiting for me. "Melvin, I thought that was you," he said. I looked closely at him. "Bob?" I asked. "Is that you?" He had lost a substantial amount of weight and was covered in gashes. He held a three-headed rabbit in one hand and extended the other to me. "It's good to see you," he said, shaking my hand. "I was wondering who was going to be next." "HR said you found alternative employment in Des Moines," I said. "More money, better hours." "They'll say the same thing about you," he said, placing his hand on my shoulder. "Now come on, help me collect some more firewood and I'll tell you everything you need to know to survive in this world."

*

Heather Coughlin

Résumé

Maybe the first poem
about work
was a résumé.

Fresh box of ivory linen paper
specially purposed,
a blank canvas.

Headliner goals,
direct but lofty titles,
designed as colorful fishing lure

to show and tell
our firsts made seconds,
promotions, blue ribbon bullets.

Education, embolded
for impact and allusion,
inked currency, keep reading

line breaks enjambed,
left and right
aligned.

Experience ellipsis,
we've designed, managed, delivered
proof points, results.

Active verbs chosen
for efficiency and imagery,
our wares to sell.

Passions, a slice of person
are the postscript,
which just made the cut.

But today, we resume
a science of keywords
fed first to bots

and I worry
our poems will be lost
forever to their logic.

*

Barbara Crooker

Patty's Charcoal Drive-In

First job. In tight black shorts
and a white bowling shirt, red lipstick
and bouncing ponytail, I present
each overflowing tray as if it were a banquet.
I'm sixteen and college-bound;
this job's temporary as the summer sun,
but right now, it's the boundaries of my life.
After the first few nights of mixed orders
and missing cars, the work goes easily.
I take out the silver trays and hook them to the windows,
inhale the mingled smells of seared meat patties,
salty ketchup, rich sweet malteds.
The lure of grease drifts through the thick night air.
And it's always summer at Patty's Charcoal Drive-In--
carloads of blonde-and-tan girls
pull up next to red convertibles,
boys in black tee shirts and slick hair.
Everyone knows what they want.
And I wait on them, hoping for tips,
loose pieces of silver
flung carelessly as the stars.
Doo-wop music streams from the jukebox,
and each night repeats itself,
faithful as a steady date.
Towards 10 p.m., traffic dwindles.
We police the lot, pick up wrappers.
The dark pours down, sticky as Coke,
but the light from the kitchen
gleams like a beacon.
A breeze comes up, chasing papers
in the far corners of the darkened lot,
as if suddenly a cold wind had started to blow
straight at me from the future--
I read that in a Doris Lessing book--
but right now, purse fat with tips,
the moon sitting like a cheeseburger on a flat black grill,
this is enough.
Your order please.

*

Jim Daniels

Upon Googling My First Job Looking for Evidence

Payphone Location Information: Marlinga's Party Store, 21497 Ryan Road, Warren, MI

Only one result, and it's wrong, unless
the payphone could be unearthed beneath
the cracked parking lot of the check-cashing joint
now on the premises. I lifted that impossibly
heavy receiver the night we were robbed.
I wish I could hold it in my hand again, throbbing
at the front door to tell the operator
we'd just been robbed—nowhere for nostalgia
to drape its gaudy curtain, no sepia-toned
stills of children's hands smudging the glass
of the candy counter. *Hey*, I shout at my screen,
aren't you supposed to save everything?

I worked there three years and never posed
for a photo. Even the cops left their camera
in the car that night I thought I was going
to die, a pimply kid, my voice changing forever
under the cold timbre of a gun? My favorite job—
cute kids, Polish ham, jelly donuts (paczki),
bakery bread delivered daily from Hamtramck,
reliably desperate but polite alcoholics,
sweeping spray of smokers fumbling change
on the counter, perfect lines of rigid iced soldiers
of beer in stocked coolers, neighbors with their tabs—
paper-clipped pieces of scratch paper they rarely
paid back—stuffed in a cigar box that, like them,
had seen better days.

C'mon kids, give it up on-line for sweet memories
of Lucky Suckers, Bit-O-Honeys, Milky Ways,
blue Satellite bubble gum. I know you're out there
on your magic screens, your unswallowable
and swallowable tablets, grandchildren on your laps
as you tell them about Marlinga's, the sweet, patient boy
behind the counter who took your sticky change,
wished you a good day as if you'd just spent real money.

The owner, Ziggy, dead fifty years. He put a quarter away
for every hour I worked and gave it to me for college
when I left. What I wouldn't give to get him on the line,
talking around a hunk of baloney. Would he remember
when we lay together on the floor, lullaby guns to our heads,
and the robbers told us to close our eyes?

If only the phone was still there, sturdy
as an ancient safe at the bottom of one
of our Great Lakes. Nostalgia drapes
its curtain, and I light that curtain
in the burn barrel behind the store
sending smoke signals into polluted factory skies
hoping someone gets the message. I burned
those IOUs in the barrel when he sold the store.

A quarter for every hour versus a gun to my head.
Calling collect. Accepting charges. Looking through
binders of mug shots for a clue. Ziggy said
*Hell yeah, it's an emergency, we've just been
robbed.* My first one. I walked home
in the dark, jingling the change left
in my pocket, no one to call.

*

Colin Dardis

24 Hour Concern

When two hitmen
work different shifts,
you know they are going
to get you eventually.

The dayshift guy,
he works in the streets,
is hidden in the faces
of strangers and friends
alike, quick on the draw
with a sneer.

The nightshift one hides
under your pillow and waits.
In the morning you wake
with a crick in your neck
from the barrel of his gun.
His bullets shoot
into your dreams.

*

Shira Dentz

Aubade Again

Streets shine
like seal skin.
I long for a
handful of
miscellaneous
textures &
shapes,
though they'd be
extraneous
to the elephant
in the room.
This is a
work poem
yearning
to be lyric.
We take small
steps on pebbles
laid out to cross the
lake mirroring a
boundaryless
vat of grief.
Needles plague
the dock, pink
linen spills,
a waterfall of
blush, an ode
ahead of time.

*

Dolo Diaz

Wood Harvesting

He worked for my father.
Tumbled down the mountain cliff
in the shovel logger.

He was an only child
my father had to tell his father.

*

Mitch Ditkoff

My Uber Driver

My Uber driver, I just found out,
sings in a Mexican rock band.
'80s covers. Spanish only.
That's why he asks me to sit in the front seat with him.
If I sit in the back, he explains,
the State Police will impound his grey Toyota
and he'll never get to gig again.
They will keep his car for two months behind a barbed wire fence
next to a field where many dogs bark.
35,000 pesos it will cost him if he ever wants to see his vehiculo.
You see, the Regional Governor, owns the local taxi company
—100 shiny green and white cabs.
That's why the State Police, in leather boots,
stop Uber drivers in my little town,
but only if their passengers are sitting in the back seat.
Not today, however.
I am sitting in the front.
Like his best friend.

*

Liz Dolan

Picking Up Steam

My father was a car knocker,
the handmaiden of the locomotive
as it rested in the Oak Point yard
enroute to Hartford and New Haven.
After his callused fingers secured
her pistons, bolts, and screws,
he'd rap his iron wrench
on her corrugated door signaling
her safety to the engineer.

Royal, magisterial, her black-velvet flanks
Illuminated by the fat summer moon,
she'd snort smoke, whistling her high soprano,
Tirnagog kicking up pebbles,
looping the American miles.
And my father, an immigrant,
ebonized by her grease,
a part of it, a part of it, a part of it.

*

Sean Thomas Dougherty

Smoking on Break: Diptych: Third Shift

And there is a full moon, blood red from an eclipse, the earth casting shadows even at 3 AM, and I am cupping my hands against the cold spring wind to light a cigarette, before I open the door and walk back into my facility and walk the hall to make sure everyone is asleep or if anyone needs my help, or woke up not knowing where they are, or even my name. To reassure the lost, to guide them back to bed, and I think what would it be like to be the moon, guiding ships home to shore or harbor, and how during his time stationed on the Korean border my friend Steve told me that he was told to cup his cigarette with his hands, in case some brave sniper might want to take a shot at him. Or the way a priest will light a candle and then cup the flame. Oh, moon who now is cupping their hands around me as I stand in the night wind, who is cupping this earth and sending you her long shadow?

But there is work to do: paperwork, and mopping, prepping breakfast, and then a man has peed his bed. I guide him to the shower as he curses me, I must gather his sheets, and chuck pads and take them to the laundry room. I have to help him dress and ease him back to bed. And I close the door and hear him sigh himself to sleep, speaking in low and wisping tones. I do all this with trained detachment. All of this is labor. Do not be fooled. The moon is a cold lifeless place whose light is an illusion borrowed from the sun. But as I bend to pick up my bucket, I look up and out the hall window. I look across the yard to see a herd of does with fawns. They stand perfectly still. Their hides mottled with moonlight, glistening like apparitions, and for a moment I believe I could die right here happy if they are the last thing I will behold on this holy earth.

*

Zach Eddy

Aluminum Apple

For thirty years of service, they hand you inedible fruit.
A mantelpiece memento for the family to remember,
factory-made, alloyed, and mass-produced offsite
from recycled scrap aluminum. I wonder what he thought
when he peered through the metal window frames
of the Ingot Plant, surrounded by so much tree fruit.
1977's *Wenatchee World* reads, "Alcoa Cancer
Studies Show No Cause for Concern at Local Plant."
Outside, a swallow lands on a metal rooftop.
His obituary says, "50 years doing what he loved."
In the hospital, he ripped out his own breathing tube.
Mike kept his apple by the television. Now Mother takes it out
on holidays, resting it next to his canned ashes, polished
so bright a distorted reflection appears, a crystal ball,
the aluminum apple, a tumor, or a metal heart shining.

*

E.M. Palitha Edirisooriya

May 21

Translated by samodH Porawagamage and Kasun Pathirage

Today's first ride was to the courts. A husband's taken a loan, fled abroad and the wife's been served papers. She went with me there. I had to give my ID and pay her bail money too. Such are our priceless services. I only charged her the money for the ride.

NOTE: This poem is from මාවතේ ත්‍රිචල් ජීවිතේ (*Life on Three Wheels*), a collection of poems exploring the subculture of Sri Lankan taxis, known as three-wheelers.

*

Terri Kirby Erickson

Immigration Raid, 1978

In the Polynesian restaurant where I briefly worked, I was one of two non-Asian servers and as such, of great potential value should the immigration paddy wagon roll around to collect all the Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese employees they could round up, none of whom were supposed to be working anyplace in the U.S.A., and deport them, toot suite. It only happened once when I was there, but Diane and I were left with every table in a restaurant full of hungry patrons, so we divided the room in half while the rest of the waitstaff, all male, scrambled to reach the basement before agents swarmed the building looking for people they referred to as *illegals*. Panic was palpable, even worse than the time Duong, who lost a few of his fingers to some sort of explosive device during the Viet Nam War (when he was just a kid) set one of the fake palm trees (scattered around the dining room) on fire while making bananas flambé at a customer's table. It was pandemonium for about two minutes after all the Asian waiters vanished, but Diane and I managed to settle everybody down by acting like it was no big deal, thankful for mai tais and volcanos that had already been delivered. But as tough as it was up top, it must have been terrifying downstairs with all those hardworking men huddled together in the dark, wondering what would happen to them and their families if they were found, although by some miracle they were not and none of our customers gave them away, either. After all, it was the only eatery in town where they could order flaming desserts and cocktails the size of birdbaths. And sometimes mercy isn't just what we beg for, but something we actually receive.

*

Yvonne Estrada

People Say “I Could Never Do Your Job”

1.

It's tricky picking people up
and off the street.
We double glove, mask,
and face shield to restrain
a psychotic, combative spitter
that doesn't know why
they don't want to go
to the hospital.

2.

We watch a triage nurse unwind
a crusty, lymph-stained gauze
from a swollen lower extremity.
Humans can be fragrant,
not sweet and heady like flowers,
but body-slam repulsive
in a gut-wrenching gag kind of way.

3.

We never have to think about what to wear,
our boots are a tax write-off.
Sometimes we get a discount at King Taco,
or Coffee Bean. Little kids wave at us.
We remember a teacher told us
you know you are burned out
when you can't treat a patient
like your family member.

*

Leila Farjami

The Sower's Lament

I soak seeds in straw sacks,
string them from beams.
Before spring, I plow paddies,
harrow clods of dung.

Wading in *gaalesh*,
clay grips my knees.
My palms blister from weeding,
I harvest the heavens bare-fingered.
Moonlets fall into my hands.

I dream of early summer—seedlings lush,
eels curling through my legs, sun gilding
my strands, another baby slung at my waist.

All night, my man watches the fields,
torch raised to wild boars, jackals.

Lonesome, I sing my young
to sleep, each warm
as a bread loaf beneath the sheets—

*Far is the land, and far my home.
Bring me back, O Light's Creator.
Bring me home, that I may die—
Die beside my mother and sister.*

No one sees my teardrops,
hears my cradle-lament, *gaareh-sari*.

No one hushes, pats my back
but my Mama's ghost.

*

Arvilla Fee

Working Hands

I stare at Dad's hands
perched on my teacher's desk
like two plump pigeons
and my cheeks flush hot;
Dad is wearing his best blue shirt
and a pair of unripped jeans,
but he couldn't clean his nails?
Not even for a conference?
Grease, the labor of a thousand cars,
lies under each nail, black half moons
shedding inky light on the lives we lead—
single trailer, cracked kitchen counters,
a front door that never shuts
without a shove from the hip.
My teacher smiles and shakes Dad's hand,
her creamy skin like fine silk stockings
against his burlap palms.
At home, Dad cooks steaks for dinner,
and as he cuts the tender pieces,
he nods to my plate and says,
that was a '57 Chevy.

*

Gary Fincke

Advice, for Men, on Ironing

Start with the clothes that need the coolest iron.
For shirts, the collar first, both sides, before
Pressing the back and front of sleeves, working
The torso next until it's wrinkle-free.

For pants, the pockets first, then waistband, butt
And crotch. The legs go last, inseams aligned,
The material carefully stretched smooth.
Remember to hang each item quickly,

And always give them space because cooling
Sets the press. You've worked the wrinkles away,
Taken all the creases out like Botox.
So don't, when finished, undo the iron's work.

Still, you'll need to speak with the elderly
To learn about dampening shirts by hand.
Women only, of course, alone all day
In the house, tiny radios playing

The last white crooners who fronted big bands.
Those widows will explain how they once heard
The legends of ironing, the flat surface
Heated on wood-fired stoves, scorching common.

Or the myths of irons warmed by kerosene,
Appliances like lanterns pressed against
A husband's shirt sleeve. And just when you think
You realize what a hundred years can change,

One of those beautiful crones will insist
There were irons, once, that ran on gasoline,
Household helpers so dangerous to use
Those implements, some days, took casualties.

*

Ann Fisher-Wirth

Women's Wear Daily

for my mother

After her parents die and her sister dies
and the man she loves ships out
to she doesn't know where—
for the Army censors make lace of his letters—

she sells the house in Omaha,
takes her third-grade daughter out of school,
moves to New York to study fashion,
and starts her job at the magazine.

Today, she has stayed late at work. Her scarlet nails
click on the typewriter keys. It's hot,
her navy-blue polka-dot *crêpe de chine* dress
clings to her legs, she smooths her damp hair

away from her forehead. Soon she'll leave,
take the subway to her daughter
in White Plains. The landlady will join them,
they'll have *petits fours* and ice cream.

Suddenly she hears blaring horns
and shrieks of rapture.
She rushes to the window. Tickertape
fills the sky. Below her in the streets

people pour from every building.
She turns on the radio, listens,
puts her head on her desk,
and sobs,

alongside her typed description
of a bride in Brooklyn,
the dress of *peau de soie*,
lilies-of-the-valley the bouquet.

*

Molly Fisk

Swimming

*naiad: one of the nymphs who lived in and
presided over brooks, springs, and fountains*

That story about Diana Nyad someone told me,
how she occupies her mind on the English Channel swim
or the hours between Cuba and Key West by singing
in her head—oh, don't we all?—the entire Beatles *oeuvre*
in the order those songs appear on their albums,
and when she gets to The End she starts over, with I Saw Her
Standing There again, in a shark cage or not, her skin
puckered with dehydration and salt, the cold slowly creeping
into her marrow, her lungs working as hard as or harder than
those of John, Paul, George, and Ringo if they'd stood on stage
and sung the whole list in a row one after another, too,
their lives flashing before them as our lives can when we catch
the first chords of Yellow Submarine or Love Me Do,
what high school gym we were dancing in and with whom,
or which brand of rolling papers some hippie dexterously turned
and licked, and does Diana sometimes pray that a submersible
will rise from below to buoy her or is she stronger than that,
does she stay focused on the notes and not let her mind wander
into kelp fronds and manatees, the deep melodies of blue whales,
what conviction does it take to lift one hand from the sea:
wrist, elbow, shoulder, fluid, turning her chin to breathe,
and then the other hand, in the 47th hour of what will turn out
to be 53 before her toes in their neoprene grip the edge of Key West
and she's not hallucinating, or only partly, the voices
calling her name, the afternoon sun refracted by ten thousand
pinpricks of white sand, we saw the video, how she waded
through the crowds, her legs still holding her up, her smile
a hundred and ten miles, thirty years, and five attempts wide.

*

Jennifer L. Freed

My Student Asks Me How I Know

that north is north. How,
if I look at a map of the world, do I decide
which puzzled shape is home?
And in the picture book I gave him,
how can it say pyramids date back four-thousand years
if all the years we count, each time we write the date,
are two-thousand twenty-five?

My student is 27, or 25, or 29—he does not know
for sure. He does not know of dinosaurs
or Darwin, of Santa or satellites or germs or genes,
of how his daughter can look like the returned spirit
of his father, killed
by army bullets many harvests past,
when farmers in his village stood accused
of sharing rice with rebel troops.

But he knows
how to find the best bamboo,
how to cut it, carry it, transform it
into walls and floor and roof to last
three rainy seasons.
He knows how to spear a fish,
how to shroud the dead.
He knows the language of his people,
and the language of the government his people fled,
and the language of the refugee camp
where he grew from boyhood into marriage.
He knows how to write a little of all three of these,
which mattered little, before now,
because so few of those he knew had ever needed
written words.

And now he's learned to read
a third-grade book
in English,
how to drive a car, to walk in snow.
He's learned to live with a silent tongue in a text-rich land
whose people carry Moses, Medusa, Mars, and the moon
as lightly as pennies in their pockets.
He's learned how to stack packages all night
and go to classes in the day,

and to keep going, day after day,
in a language that points to holes
in the world he thought he knew,
holes through which he hopes to someday
fit into another life, easier
than this.

*

Cal Freeman

Elegy for Uncle Christopher

The day you died the skies opened
and they canceled the Tigers game.
I listened to "The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald"
and thought about that morning
at the Pink Pony in Mackinac,
how you walked in, called me out,
and switched me off of coffee.
You proceeded to get drunk and swear
so much I had to take the bartender
aside and explain that you were an ironworker
from Detroit up here to watch
a childhood friend you were in love with
marry a rich guy nobody liked
to keep us from getting tossed.
You slept through the wedding,
staggering out of the bed and breakfast
in a bathrobe and work boots
around midnight, swigging from
a bottle of chianti (she sent one
to every room of every downstate guest),
barely avoiding a collision
with a coach and horse. I guess we get
the best we can of what we've got.
Tomorrow's a doubleheader
with cocktails and Gordon Lightfoot songs
before the evening game. Those Saturday nights
in Corktown, you'd throw your money
like lilies on the Gaelic League stage
until I sang the song.
You always reminded me it was to Zug,
that manmade island in Detroit,
not Cleveland, where the fated ship
was headed when it sank.

*

Monica Fuglei

On the first day of our nonfiction unit

We talk ideas big and small: homes and hearts
broken or mended, we speak of men whose eyes
rest too long, of school shooting lock down drills
we didn't know were drills.

From the back she speaks of paint samples:
the expense of each, of how hard it is to choose,
how her home's light differs from the store,
of how small a thing that is next to the others.

I tell her it's not. How human it is to want
our space to be perfect. How human it is to nest.
To build ourselves something from white walls
and a set of keys. How over time home blossoms
into our imaginings.

My students bond. They trade numbers
and stories. Offer support. Offer love. We make things,
together. Some kind of life. Not fiction.

*

Sanjay Ganesan

Two Dollars and a Spine of Steel

for the women who carry more than bricks

They wake
before the sky stretches
its arms,
feet thick with yesterday's ache
and mouths dry
from screaming into pillows
that never answered back.

A sari tied not for grace
but to wipe sweat,
to hush a baby,
to shield shame.
Their bangles do not jingle—
they rattle like chains
on hands that never stop.

Widows,
or worse—wives
to ghosts who drink the rice away.
Their husbands crumble
before the bottle does,
and still,
she picks the pieces,
feeds the children
with fingers cracked
but never crooked.

They carry sand
on heads held higher
than the ones who spit down.
They mix cement
with dreams
they cannot spell,
for schools
they cannot enter,
for futures
they may never see
but believe in anyway.

The bosses call them
amma,
only when orders are barked.
They are cows
without names,
sheep without pastures—
counted
but never seen.

Yet no one builds
without them.
No wall, no road,
no city that gleams
can rise
without their broken backs
bent like prayer
and just as holy.

\$2 a day.
Not enough to live.
Too little to die.
Still, they rise
with fists of dust
and eyes of fire.

Tell me,
what CEO, what minister,
what god
can match
the muscle
of a mother
who earns crumbs
and still
makes them a feast?

*

Katy Giebenhain

Epidemiology at 5 p.m.

Bewitched
by the lemon rind spiraling
my neighbor's rocks glass
I think of scurvy.
I toast the trick of citrus
and each sailor
too late to receive it.
I sip respecting
that early clinical trial,
Dr. Lind on the high seas
and all who stop misery
through observation,
all who labor out-of-sight.

In class we learn
epi demos logos
the study of what befalls
a population,
a cocktail of Greek words.
We learn that when
public health is working
we don't notice it.

I toast those who do.

*

Marissa Glover

Active Threat Plan

A school-wide announcement over the intercom:
Barricade the door. NOW.

Nothing else is said.
That's how students and teachers know
this is *not* a drill. For once, students are silent.
They do what they're told, pushing
cabinets in front windows, turning
desks on their side like shields, dragging
them to the safest corner, cowering
on the ground, squeezing
into closets.

The frantic texting to parents
begins. Terrified *IDK's* and
love you's fly on crow wings.
Law enforcement descends
on campus. Walkies squawk.
Parents drive to the school, ready
to run inside like they saw on TV.
It's mostly mothers, sharing posts
from social media. Some dads yell
about action, say we should install
metal detectors like the big cities do.

The principal robocalls, praising
police, students, staff for their handling
of the situation—an anonymous tip and a kid
who came to school with an Airsoft gun.
The recorded message: There was never any
real threat, no one was ever in any real danger,
everyone followed the ATP perfectly.

Teachers shake as they move
the desks back into rows and resume
the lesson. Students are on Snapchat,
skull emojis and LOLs.
Some parents sign their kids out—
let them go home early and play
shooter games on Xbox: the brain
triggering a protective barrier
around itself, shutting down
what it's too young to process,
practicing self-defense from the couch.
Everyone pretends they know what to do.

*

Emily Goldsmith

Two Deaths / Deux Mortalités

In Memory of Greg Guirard

A houseboat perches atop the sparkle of the Atchafalaya River.
They call this the land of dead giants, the land of former cypress trees
that once grew at the Southern end of the swamp here.
*Why will a fisherman and his family rise well before dawn
to go out onto the water and do this arduous work day after day?
When there is no time and no leisure for peacefulness to be acknowledged.*

Seafood markets and whims of nature determine profits. Acknowledging
its ebb and flow, they have an unexplainable connection to the river.
When you head out of the swamp '*scraping the bottom bad*,' it's a good day.
When you grow up in the Bayou, you can tell your time and direction by trees.
If you understand how the water moves and when fish bite, you enjoy seeing dawn.
Many men do not want their daughters to marry a fisherman. It's too hard a life here.

Hyacinth in lavender and yellow bloom in small armies here
and beavers, mink, otters, deer, and bobcats don't acknowledge
when less men are out seeking buffalofish and gaspergou at dawn.
They call out mystic in Louisiana French, setting their seines into river.
Places where you couldn't paddle a pirogue now fill with dying-off trees,
and somebody's grande-père sings 'em back with, "tomorrow, a new day."

When the oil companies moved themselves in, it was a day
they would remember. '*Since the pipeline, it will never again be like it was*' here.
The older folk spend time and salt mourning memories of fishable acres and trees.
Bayous sanded up and choked with willows while no one else acknowledges
the lack of plenty, the '*no quarters in the house*,' when destruction of the river
sends Mama running to her rosary, praying herself up a new dawn.

Back on the water, launched off in high spirits with the dawn,
to exchange '*L.Y. (those ales wives or salt water trash fish) for crawfish in a day.*'
'*If the first oil company that ran a pipeline across the Basin would've plugged it at the river,
there would be an unbelievable difference. You would still have a beautiful swamp here.*'
'*The outsiders, people born north of Alexandria,*' don't acknowledge
the water is drying. The Grosbec disappear alongside their homes, the trees.

Some remain in their boats like Monsieur Guirard replanting cypress trees,
wishing for rebirth of the forest as light comes forth each day with the dawn.
Louisiana French and Kréyòl dying with the land, under-acknowledged.
Things were once real plentiful, '*meat with your rice and beans plentiful*,' back in my day
'*before the old trees were destroyed by levee enlargement operations*' here.
The pipelines' sands destroyed their profits. They call out to God and their river.

Fantômes of trees sway with the breeze on the sacrée river
while the echo of fresh dawn is answered by boats pushing off. Here,
each breath is ceremoniously acknowledged. On the water, it is another day.

NOTE: The italicized lines are from Greg Guirard's *Cajun Families of the Atchafalaya: Their Ways and Words*. Chez L'auteur, 1989.

*

Susana Gonzales

Mother's Earth

my hands are as soft as my mother's were
but they don't hold her scars
scratched by barbs of the cotton bolls she twisted
and pulled at in the farm fields under a dead
Delano sun at day's end she earned 87 cents
bought a hot dog from a vendor parked across the road
where she sat eating it in the dirt

the lifeline on my mother's palm was as long
as the row after row of grapes she picked and packed
stacked and trayed these fruits for clean bright tables
far from the dust of the camp she sat and slept in
the land she worked and lived in
field she gave her back to
brown soil on my mother's hands
this dirt of mother's earth

*

Jessica Greenbaum

Time and the Clothes Line

The vine that grows anywhere
a drop of sun will water it,
the line reeled out and back
from high windows,
or plucked at from the ground for the dried fruit
of its labor, you are
the connecting cord of all
our habitats, and I can see you from the cable car above
Mexico City, across apartment patios
or when a plane flies low
over subdivisions (which
you might divide again),
or from the road outside Canaan
where a side yard flickers
with your pennants. My mother
loved you and defied
neighborhood ordinances
for your gift of fresh air,
her dexterity with the simple
machine of clothespins
like a senator reaching for his pen.
I see her carrying the heavy
basket of wet clothes
through the back door of the garage
to that corner of our Long Island yard
chorused by lilacs—
and later, as other mothers knew
when cakes were done,
having unpinned them
with the efficiency of a
seamstress undoing a hem
(there in a space her own mother,
nearly clipped to
the apartment's kitchen, didn't have)
then my mother coming back in
with the dried clothes folded, the
basket lighter, the lilacs
with no one to sing with,
and that was long ago, just now the sky going
dark, the first drops falling.

*

Kelle Groom

Dad Goes to Work

Through the sliding glass I see a mongoose in the hedge
American Pie on the stereo
army helmet bumps on my nose
shadows my eyes
machine gun slung over sunburn
rocks on my hip
I fling myself across the room
in a dervish dance on Sears carpet
again and again when he goes

When he goes
circuit rider on a gray battleship
I climb the dining room table stand
screaming arms raised
a bell calling him home

At night
I rattle God down
with my tribal songs perfecting prayers
a syllable missed could keep him at sea

Mornings I have hula lessons
in a scratchy grass skirt
I play war with the boys in bare feet
smash coconuts open in the street

The lagoon is warm I swim every day

In crowds I keep my arms in close
afraid of lepers and the swing
of an ulcerous arm against mine

In mirrors I see myself noseless eyeless
faceless a red trench
In giant trees
I climb high and tremble

Half a year later we drive to the dock
He gives me a television a typewriter from Japan
A geisha girl in a glass box
But it's the smoky smell of his shirt that I want.

*

Kari Gunter-Seymour

Inclinations

Here in the holler, we tap our mouths
to warm our hands, a rugged edge of teeth
exposed between foggy slips of breath.

All winter our joints ache
and our bodies think of leaving
in ways only ancestors could understand.

Without a trace of irony or blush of shame,
we'll pull the pickup over, watch the foothills
turn russet at sunset, talk to clouds

through February, to the earth come spring,
sit front and center to a weave of nest
set to hatch its crooners, press

hellbent into the great why of summer.
All that matters is the heat, the harvests,
prayers for rain—little we or the plants can do

but endure. When the mulberries cease
their fruiting and maples go kamikaze red,
we plow down the cornfields, gardens, too,

don our flannel, ponder our shrinking
frames, bones calcifying, same way
a crusted plow rusts itself back to nature.

*

Tresha Faye Haefner

#Best Life

Go ahead. Quit your job
or stay. Shuffle papers in a cubicle
or hang a hammock next to a lake.
Wherever you go,
darkness will follow.
And so will light.
You can be miserable
swimming under a waterfall,
or go into ecstasy
when someone plays Mozart
next to the copy machine.
You beautiful donkey. Dumb angelfish.
Stop flipping the channel.
It doesn't matter what you sing about.
Just open your mouth
and sing.

*

Bex Hainsworth

Agnodice

“This one won’t survive.” The doctor hands
my great-grandfather a four-pound parcel.
Pale limbs are petals folded shut. She is dwarfed
by her twin brother, screaming for his mother’s breast.

An all-night vigil begins. Drops of warm milk are coaxed
between miniscule lips. He will not give her up:
they have already lost two children.

By dawn, her face is flushed with color, tiny fists
thumping against her father’s chest. She is named June,
just as planned, despite her early arrival.

My grandmother has entered this world ready
to defy expectations, with a will to fight all her life.

*

1948 and the National Health Service
is crowning. Shaking off the ashes of war,
June is eighteen and one of the first midwives
to qualify in this hopeful era of medicine.

Bobbing over the cobbles of inner-city Bradford,
she cycles from house to house, from birth to birth.
Like Agnodice, she is aware of her own legacy:
she is wise woman, cunning folk, gatekeeper of life.

*

My childhood was spent holding my gran’s hand
through busy streets. We never seemed to reach
our destination without being stopped by unfamiliar faces.
“Mrs Whitaker!” followed by the clucking of old friends,
mention of chocolate boxes and money on the mantelpiece.
Walking away, I would ask, already knowing the answer:
“No idea, I must have delivered her daughter.”

*

June is ninety-two when a great-grandchild
is placed into her arms. Memory is complicated,
but still she knows the secret to the perfect swaddle:
the way her father held her through that first night

*

Marc Harshman

Sacred

It's the week before Thanksgiving—hog butchering.
Angst of the angels, the barn pigeons cooing excitedly.
The ground is slippery with frost and mud.
The women are baking bread and pies.
Knives are honed.
The football game rehashed.
A single shot between the eyes.
A twenty-two enough in hands as practiced as Lloyd's.
I know *Mother Earth* says a blade for dispatch
 but it's the old ways here, not always the best,
 but it's what we know
 and what we know seems to work.
I vow to be silent and useful.
The stench when the intestines spill out into the cloudy light
 unsteadies me but I cling to a slender memory
 of my father doing these same things a generation ago.
Like a glistening pile of steaming white snakes,
 they settle onto the black ground.
The steady slicing and spillage, the parceling out
 of organs and trotters, of what's for us, what's for the cats,
 and what's for the earth
 is done
 as it always has been done.
There are no prayers, and the ritual is habit.
It's for someone else to decide whether *sacred*.
We wash at the old pump and go in to sit at table.
I notice, then, how the white crusts of the pies
 are vented and steaming.
I choose the chocolate cake.

*

Gloria Heffernan

Intensive Care

When the phone rings at ten o'clock at night,
after she has worked a fourteen-hour shift,
I know it's not going to be a catching-up chat.
When I ask "How's it going?"
I brace myself for any number of answers.

When she was a girl
there was always something I could do.
I was good at solving problems
with some sound advice or
a late-night trip to the diner
for sesame bagels and hot chocolate.

Today's problems don't lend themselves
to such simple solutions.
When she's had a hard day at work
it means a patient has died.
It means she has had to break the news
to the next of kin.
It means someone my age,
who reminded her of me,
won't get out of bed tomorrow.

An intensive care nurse,
when her voice is weighed down and weary,
she wants only one thing from me.
So I listen with reverence,
receive each word like a sacred offering.
And I care...intensively...
when there is nothing else
I can do.

*

Matthew E. Henry

when asked to read a poem for the Black History Month assembly, again

this time I have to keep certain things in mind—need to find a balance.
knowing the pride of being Blackity Black Black scares the red into faces
clenching fists in their seats. knowing they need to see more than the METCO
struggle bus stories some of them are expecting. represent something other than
slavery, reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the white rage backlash to civil rights
seen in the 60s and 70s, the 80s and 90s, and right now, while still remembering
some of them think racism doesn't exist because we had a Black president once.

this time I should remind them who invented peanut butter, the gas mask,
the stop light, air conditioners, performed the first successful open-heart surgery,
was first to the North Pole, revolutionized blood transfusions, fire extinguishers,
helicopters, fountain pens, and cell phones. but how many of them will pay attention
to that partial list or bother to verify later?

this time I have to remember not to mention ms _____, a “nice white lady”
who wears her DEI support like a white durag on Juneteenth, desperately trying
to impress the Black women in the building, hoping the nearest Brown man
will think she's “one of the good ones” and invite her {to bed or at least} to the cookout.

this time I have to make sure they celebrate not only Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks,
and Oprah, but the other “Hidden Figures” untaught in our curriculum: Sojourner Truth,
Madame C.J. Walker, Shiley Ann Jackson, Ida B Wells, Marie Van Brittan Brown.
this time I should see if they recognize names other than Crispus Attucks, Malcolm X,
and Martin Luther King Jr.—you know, Black men who weren't shot down in the street.

this time I should keep mr _____'s name out of my mouth, despite how often
he's made a paper mâché badge and proclaimed himself the “woke police,” defends
those anti “affordable housing” yard signs sporting a brick monstrosity with angry,
yellow eyes and a dark, “urban” vibe.

this time I might mention how we cut and bag and sell Blues and Soul and Jazz and
Funk and Rock and Roll and Reggaeton and Dancehall and R&B and HipHop and
Queen Bee winning a Grammy for the Best Country Album,
but some might call that bragging.

this time I should highlight entertainment that doesn't include us running with a ball
or from the cops. see if they recognize Douglas, Du Bois, Butler, Walker, Wright,
bell hooks, Brooks, Baldwin, Wilkerson, Ellison, Huston, Hansberry, Adichie,
Kendi, Toni, Nikki, Ta-Nehisi, Langston, Colson, Lucilie, Roxanne, Maya,
and many many others as more than the anti-racist homework that make
their parents' palms sweat.

this time I might put on blast all the examples I'm not allowed to read out loud,
on a school mic, at a school assembly, but you can catch me later and ask
in person about all the things they want to keep on the DL.

or maybe this time I should go back to my original idea, and
read another poem about why squirrels are still vastly superior to dogs.

*

Donna Hilbert

My Dad's Lunch Box

My dad climbs down
the telephone pole,
stretches out under a pepper tree,
opens his lunch box:
black metal,
substantial like a vault,
or a government building
in a Balkan country.
Under its dome
wire arms
hold a Thermos of coffee.
On the bottom floor,
Vienna sausages on a bed
of mayonnaise, white bread.
For dessert, butterscotch
cream-center cookies.
Dad unwraps a sandwich, eats.
He pours coffee into the cup
his Thermos lid makes,
dips a cookie, watches it bloat,
then holds his lips to the rim,
slips the sweet bits
into his mouth.

I like to think
he savors pleasure
before he stands
the box on one end,
touches a forefinger to his tongue,
his damp fingertip
gleaning crumbs
to feed the sparrows who wait
in slender leaves.
Then, one foot
over the other,
he climbs the pole again.

*

Le Hinton

Exit Interview, January 1, 1863

Why are you resigning?

I don't have another job, but isn't no job better than this job?

What did you like about your work?

I once heard that it's easier to pick cotton here in Mississippi than tobacco in Virginia. But I don't know.

What did you dislike about your work?

I miss my boys, Levi and Leroy. I heard they might be in Texas. They were 14 when they got sold.

What were the best qualities of your supervisor?

I guess I appreciated the fact that he didn't kill me, and I only got whipped about twice a year. He let my wife put salve on my back after he finished.

Did you feel valued within the company?

I don't know what that means. They wouldn't let me learn to read and write.

What skills should we look for in the person that replaces you?

You might want to look for someone who doesn't need to get paid for picking cotton and doesn't mind bloody hands.

Would you recommend working at our company to a friend.

No. I can't recommend working here to another soul. I don't hate anyone that much.

*

Leslie Hodge

Lucky

In the Manager's office, second floor,
glass windows overlooking the grocery store,
I was given one uniform dress: blue-green
synthetic, zip-front, a pocket to sport
the *Lucky* nametag. I hemmed it short,
just to my fingertips.

There were no scanners then, the register
an oversized adding machine with dozens
of buttons. My fingers got fast. I recited
prices hand-stamped on the stickers,
weighed the produce, punched the buttons,
hit the Enter key with the side of my hand.
Learned how to bag, and how to dodge
the Assistant Manager lurking in the breakroom
by the lockers and soda cans.

Coming home after work, I'd slip out of the dress,
and lean on the washer in my underwear.
In my sleep, murmur *Wonder Bread*,
50 cents. Pork chops, 2.95.
Bananas, 7 cents a pound.

At the end of my first week, I stood in line
with the customers, to cash my first paycheck.
The dollars and cents impossibly small
for the weight of the fatigue I felt.
With my thumb, I tried to rub out the logo,
the *Lucky* on the check.

*

John Hoppenthaler

Busking

I was playing love songs on a stolen guitar
when the G string snapped, the few limp
dollars crumpled with change on the black fuzz
lining the case. Spring,

Central Park already greening its perennial heart.
I'd be scratching out blues
if there was money in it, but city girls
on the west side want to be honey-

tongued, Motowned, Ah-Angied, Oh Mandyed--
so that's what they get; they get what they want.
Then a cop car wheels by, slowly,
& who could explain the rosewood guitar, the dangling wire?

East side girls want to be Oh Girled, Brown Eyed Girled,
Beach Boyed till dawn,
& summer sun bleaches my hair so blonde
even the suburbs seem possible.

There are girls who'll linger in Nyack, flirt
through Ossining, & I can act, & I can sing.

*

T.R. Hummer

Employed

A foggy morning, alarm of the moon ringing
over the horse pen. Up the road, carpenters return
To their ripaws, and in the middle distance, a farmer
takes a wrench to his balky tractor. A crow considers
The bottom line of a skunk's corpse, while chlorophyll
wipes green sweat from its vegetable brow.
Everywhere you look, sentience is picking up its lunchbox,
glaring at the factory clock, rolling its sleeves
Above the elbow, punching in. Nobody thinks
of the beetle doing solitary work in the dark
Mineshaft of horse dung, crafting a perfect sphere,
pushing it up the slope toward sunrise.
How pointless is it all, really? And how lonely
is this six-legged Sisyphus of shit? He seems
Not to mind if a rainstorm undoes his morning's labor.
He returns to the stinking assembly line to begin again.

*

Kevin James

[My mom carries me, her child,]

My mom carries me, her child,
on one hip,
the rent in her left hand,
and tomorrow
in her chest.
The job says eight to five,
but motherhood
has no punch card.
No sick leave.
No weekend.
She cleans hotel rooms
we could never afford to sleep in
scrubbing away other people's lives
as if hers weren't already
fading
into the corners.
Her back aches from bedsheets,
from silence,
from the weight of "just one more year
and things will be better."
Sometimes
she hums lullabies into the mop bucket,
pretending it's an audience,
that someone's listening.
That someone sees.
She tells me:
Mama is strong.
But strength
isn't always loud.
Sometimes it's just
showing up
again,
again,
again.
And at night
she eats prayers for dinner,
folds her hopes between cracked palms,
anoints my head with oil
so maybe I dream
of a softer life.

*

David Janey

little things you remember

In my head I still hear the tune my dad whistled
every night walking from his car to our front door
announcing his arrival, announcing the end of his
workday, announcing the start of our evening.

I remember how he opened mail tearing a quarter
inch off the edge of the envelope at the end. I always
wondered why he tore along the short edge and not
along the long edge. I still wonder why.

In the days before seat belts, sometimes if he had
to brake unexpectedly, the strength of his reflex-reach
across to my chest pinned me safely in my passenger
seat; his love took my breath away.

*

Ted Jean

framing

aloft in the roof structure, Robert props with
job-built jacks a 2x8 fir perlin fully twenty feet
across the span between the gable cripple walls
to support the rafters, in lieu of trusses, so that
forty years from now prospective buyers will not
see a sadly sagging roof line—the presumable
intent of the cookie-cutter suburban architect

why is our boy simply standing there, like
a dumbass, 28 oz hammer hanging at his calf
while the Mexican foreman yells at him to get
his ass in gear? (truth be told, he is only on the job
because he understands the math of complex roof
framing, a token college-educated carpenter, as he
is otherwise too slow, though not unliked among
his crew of industrious undocumented amigos)

the answer, perhaps: his little sister Annette has
died, just this morning, of pancreatic cancer, and he
is considering, you know, the customary question

*

Julia Spicher Kasdorf

Cognitive Dissonance at a Major Research University

Once, rushing to dinner with a visiting poet and some donors, I was hit by the odor of charred meat, then the sight of young men in camouflage

and boots, holding rifles beside a grill. Misplaced bar-b-cue? No, those were real guns! I mentioned it to the hotel management student

behind the desk at the inn. *No firearms on campus!* he snapped grabbing a phone, but the campus police told him it's just the ROTC guys guarding

the Lion Shrine before the Michigan game. Once, a faculty wife seated beside me at a donor dinner told me she works in a lab testing non-lethal

weapons. Her lips matched her shell pink sheath. Non-lethal weapons? *Wounded troops make more trouble for the enemy than their dead.*

My mind went to the time I sliced a corner off my knuckle grating slaw: pain, blood almost impossible to stop, supper delayed. Best restaurant

in town, homecoming weekend, she giggled, *Not really table talk, I guess, we test them on cells in petri dishes, not mice, which would be inhumane.*

*

Summer Help III

Our county is 837 square miles and yet, we seal cracks in the same road that leads to the first girl I kissed. Liquid asphalt folds onto the road like brownie batter from a spoon. Even the smell has become comforting: sulfur and salt. Heat presses on our parade of fluorescent vests. Our steel-toes shuffle in sync, rubber treads melting with every too-early step on fresh sealant. The foreman has decided he trusts me now. I can't remember what I did to prove I belong here, but I've traded spinning the STOP/SLOW sign to pumping from a five-gallon sprayer, coating the reverse archipelago in a sheen of diluted dish soap. I follow the man filling the cracked road without missing a beat. Both our shoulders dropped: his to aim hot asphalt, mine to wash it clean. If we turn left at the next crossroad, her childhood home will be the first on the right. Facebook tells me she doesn't live there anymore, but her mom still does. Soap bubbles kaleidoscope as they catch the sun. This is the closest I've been to the asphalt melter, its box framed belly rumbling a guttural song to keep us afloat. Only when it chokes, splutters to be refilled do we stop. Disgruntled cars pass us as we slow their morning commute. Jumping down from the hauler, a widower spits brown tobacco over my shoulder, asks if my grandmother is single, says he misses a woman in the kitchen. *and elsewhere*. Grass sticks to my melted boots. I wonder about livers, yellowed eyes creasing as the men laugh. When the melter kicks back on, we fall back to our places. The field we're passing pulls me into its orbit—the oak in the middle echoing the salvation of its shadow. The slow crawl of the hauler creaks under the weight of what I know and my teeth ache with the din of engines. Everything reminds me of her, the girl, my first. I say her name aloud to the wet road, remember how she licked brownie batter from my lips, how we squealed when I dropped her mother's plate in the sink. No one can hear me. A car honks. I don't look. Every soap bubble bursts.

*

Dorian Elizabeth Knapp

Retirement

It's like a permanent vacation you have
to start planning for but never actually
get to take—cocktails in the shadow

of an active volcano, snorkeling
the Great Barrier Reef, an infinity
pool that stretches beyond your

capacity to imagine where the water
ends & the sky begins—as you grind
away at the workplace, whittle your bank

account down to a toothpick,
while simultaneously balancing
a tuba on your head & juggling jars

of aborted fetuses. Okay, maybe that
last bit was unnecessary, but you catch
my drift, or you don't, in which case,

let me poetsplain it to you: retirement
is a glossy brochure designed to buy us
out of a system most of us could never

buy our way into, & anyway, by then
I'll be too old to have sex on the beach,
so why bother when one can't even live

in the present, let alone the impossibly
bright future, which remains impossibly
bright because its purpose is to blind us.

*

Dorian Kotsiopoulos

Learning How Not to Choose a Lover

Once my father got a job to haul away hundreds
of cans of no-name soda that had been dumped
in a piggery. He brought them home.

Nothing wrong with this soda, he'd said, guzzling
a lemon/lime, so we drank generic soda trampled
by pigs so he wouldn't accuse us of acting superior.

My father thought he was a landscaper,
but mostly he carted trash away from businesses
to the dump when he didn't bring it home to us.

We got past-season lipsticks from Rexall, expired
Twinkies, plastic holiday wreaths one spring,
coverless romance novels from Woolworth's.

My sisters and I spent a summer learning how not
to choose a lover from free steamy novels, fueled
by sugar, choosing soda cans with the least hoof dents.

*

Richard Krawiec

Famine Roads

Night pushes away the day.
Even still, they continue
to angle their shovels
into the mucky sod. Sparks
flare when their blades strike
granite. Their chins hang down,
mouths fallen open as if to filter
life from air. In the congregation
of dark, the stars go unnoticed.

So the English dealt with famine,
forcing bodies into ketosis, forcing
the Irish to raven their own cells;
hair and nails grow brittle,
organs fill with toxins, hearts wither
to faulty pumps; like love twisted
from joy to doubt, feeding on itself.

And so, too, my dear, we scrape forward,
lift our spades, plunge exhausted
towards a ground we can only hope
to judder against, just as we ask
the brittle bones of our feet, gauzed
in cracked skin, to deliver us,
to finish this road, pray it doesn't
go nowhere.

NOTE: During the Potato Famine the British, under the 1847 Labour Rate Act, would force starving Irish peasants to build roads that legally could not go anywhere.

*

Haley Lasché

[in traffic approaching plain]

in traffic approaching plain

a little earth pushes up

a little plant life also

an end keeps coming

or a series of endings never resolves

three cranes wear time down

to the bones of the road

it will all go to good use

*

Viola Lee

Cleaning the Floor

My son and I are cleaning the floor because he has spilled rice cereal again. O, God, breathe. My son asks, "What's the difference between a job and work?" I tell him that one has three letters and the other has four. He replies, "No, really." I explain, "A job is something you do to earn a living wage in the world. But work—work is what we do to satisfy our needs and wants, our purpose, our meaning. And meaning is how we feel worthy of ourselves." My son then asks, "Am I a job or am I work?" I reply, "What we have to do together right now is clean this floor. Here is a bowl of vinegar and water; this is what we call working together. We're good. You and I are good." O, God of wealth, O, God of work, remind me that our bodies are worthy; our brief and beautiful bodies are worthy. O, remind me that to live in this house, which feels like the world, I must love. This is my work; there is only this, there is nothing more.

*

Jean Liew

Peaked T-Waves

He shows me the EKG
“These are peaked T-waves”
The tracing rises up
Against the orange grid
“He’s uninsured, undocumented
The ED is his dialysis”
I imagine him stumbling out
Off the bus in Texas summer
His internal clock brings him
Says it’s time, but one day
It will stop—with peaked T-waves

Twelve years, several states later
In mid-afternoon heat
The vote is quickly decided

We sit across a speakerphone
What is one trillion to us
That, we cannot fathom
Not when I filled out my FAFSA
And not even now
Her eyes count dollars
Each visit an imposition
The medicine was a miracle
While she had it
And we had the power to care
But today we’ve lost it

*

Alison Luterman

Vocation

She asked what is your calling and I said I'm an earthworm.
I eat traffic noise, overheard conversation, birdsong,
sadness, elation, revelation, celebrity gossip,
then poop out poems. I burrow through lush gardens
of the rich and survival plots of the poor
chewing everything in my path, making tunnels
of breathing space between event and its calcification
into history. I hide out under the sneaker-soles
of the kid in baggy basketball shorts
kicking an empty take-out box up the hill by the projects
whose head is down, who will not meet anyone's eyes.
I eat his confusion and unanchored longing
which are the same as my own, and I mix it
with the color of the sky today, blue gray with a bank of clouds
and I add some soft bits of my own insides,
and I make this little word-thing for him, maybe someday
he'll read it, somewhere down the road

*

Marjorie Maddox

1974: Making the Beds at the Days Inn

Fifteen and one serious
corner-tucker, frame-duster,

every-inch-of-the-toilet scrubber,
I rose at 6:00 a.m. and hitched a ride

with my older neighbor, just sixteen
and steering her family wagon to the rear

parking lot of Days Inn, where we'd enter
the Employees Only back door and join

for coffee the other cart pushers
and apron wearers, all clocking in

for a back-bending, vacuum-vrooming
morning of We-the-Maids-of-Chain-Motel-USA.

Forty-eight beds to strip and change with only rumors
of those who stretched the used cotton into

pretend-compliance and skipped the deep-clean routine
for bathroom counters and corners (now, I check)

long before the Nineties and Go Green
postcards offered the naked

wrapped in clean towels
or rolling out of stained sheets

the "choice to make a difference." Naïve,
my neighbor and I just scooped up and piled in

bags the dirty and discarded, obeying
at all costs Do Not Disturb signs (except

once walking in on what
no one should see

at fifteen). Learning to time
our bed-making to *Family Feud*

or *The Price Is Right* blaring entertainment
into our boredom, we'd leave for last

the hardest dirt-caked tubs, turn up
the volume of *The Match Game*.

Sometimes, we'd open doors to broken
bottles, overflowing toilets,

cigarette stubs lined up on dressers—
and, annoyed at the aftermath of parties,

stash our \$2 tips in bras. We'd accept
half-nods in the hallway, outright

stares, under-the-breath comments,
or no recognition at all. As teens

in the seventies, we were only
motel maids. Ten years later,

I thought little of who I was
back then, shocked to hear

of Linda, my almost-forgotten neighbor—
out of college, married, diagnosed

with leukemia—suddenly quitting
the day-to-day of living,

stripping clean what she couldn't take
anymore. A decade later, I remembered

again only when some lawyer wrote
how, each day, we were cheated

out of pennies: faulty clocks or
managers rounding down the time

we scrubbed and emptied,
bent and tucked. "Please

accept the motel's apology and find
enclosed a check for sixty-two,

dollars and eighty-eight cents,”
the crisp stationary proclaiming

no sense of timing or justice
for all the laundered years.

These days, I never make my bed,
the tangled remaining as it is.

*

Rachel Mallalieu

Good Friday, 2020

At night, I no longer kiss my
children, for fear the errant
wind of my bedtime prayer
carries dissolution.

I am dust.
My particulates hang
deadly in the room.

I didn't give up anything for Lent,
and then I gave up everything.
No ashes on my forehead, but rather
on my tongue—
my mouth parched
behind the mask.
If this Friday is still good,
the seal will hold.

I am faceless.
I stop smiling at patients,
but I'm close enough to kiss them
when I place the blade
in their mouths, and search for
the pale glisten of cords
when I pass
the breathing tube.

Last week, there was still
time so I let him call his son.
He wept and said *I love you*
then swore it wouldn't be long
before they spoke again.

I never make promises I can't keep.
It's simpler to say
he will die.
And if miraculously he does not,
no one ever begrudges
a resurrection.

*

M.R. Mandell

Olivia Newton-John Riedell Roller Skates

Forty years later and I still
dream of them, gliding floors
of Xanadu. Chalky white boots,
laces, bedazzled with stars,
tied in a double bow. Four sleek
wheels painted hot pink,
purple pom poms bouncing
on top. I rabbit eared the page
in *Roller Girl* magazine, slyly
slipped it under Mom's biography
of Lady Di. Every night I'd peek
into their room, hoping I'd catch her,
receiver tucked between her shoulder
and right ear, giving my size five
to the operator somewhere in Vermont
or Delaware, requesting gift wrap sprinkled
with shimmery polka dots or rainbow
unicorns. FedEx delivery so they'd arrive
in time for my thirteenth birthday.

So much happened to jinx my plan.
Another August thunderstorm barreled
through Galveston Bay, blew down
our little town, Sugar Land. Dad lost
his latest contract job, boss tired of tardiness
and tales of family illnesses and death.
Spent his days waiting for unemployment checks.
Mom tried to hold on. Stood in line
every Monday for our square of Velveeta
cheese, box of powdered milk, and tin of Spam.
She pawned her diamond wedding ring, promised
herself she'd earn enough to buy it back someday.
Spoonfed mashed potatoes onto trays for thieves
and drug dealers at the prison a few miles away.
Stretched a net over her curls, wrapped a grey smock
over her dress, buckled white pleather shoes
with rubber soles, so she wouldn't slip
as she skimmed across floors glazed in slop,
unaware of the roller skates spinning in my head.

*

Sandra Marchetti

Against Seven-Inning Doubleheaders and Starting Runners on Second Base in Extra Innings in Major League Baseball

When the infielders were tired
they just dropped their heads,
one after another, in dust
plumes along the basepaths

and big innings occurred,
stroked singles followed
each other into the dusk,
infinite batsmen moved
through their stations.

The sky turned from purple
to velvet, then a glamour
of stars. Ballcaps became
curtains, the fielders sighed
and woke up again, eyes

raised into the ready position.
The diamond itself is a galaxy,
the teams orbiting one another.
Part of the bargain is
the never-ending.

*

Annie Marhefka

To the bartender who tends to more than just the bar

For Jenn

You think no one notices the way you remember everyone's orders, the Corona (no lime) for the guy with the Zeppelin shirt, the sweet tea vodka iced tea blend with extra fruit for the girl with the blue earrings, the cheap wine in the plastic bottles for the woman in the corner. You think we don't see the way your silhouette dips behind the bar, that your voice is drowned out by the clinking of the bottles and the creaks of the barstools sliding on old hardwood slats, and the locals trilling along to "Up on Cripple Creek."

You think we don't notice the way you tend to our secrets, when I told you I was pregnant before I told my friends, the way you winked and concocted a drink that looked exactly like my regular drink but wasn't, for all those weeks. The way you hugged me when no one was looking, the way you whispered to me that I would be a great mom, as if you had sensed my uncertainty.

The way you tend to the band, too, clearing empty glasses from the ledge near their mic stands, refilling their water glasses, reminding the patrons between sets to tip the musicians.

The way you tend to your fellow bartenders, a gentle hand on the lower back as you scoot behind to clean up a spill, the way you restock the cooler before it's empty, the way you smile.

The way it doesn't even feel like we're in a bar, more like someone's living room, like there should be a recliner in the corner and a colorful macrame rug at our feet. The way you make us forget what we're escaping from.

*

Steve McCown

Paperboy: Special Edition

It was difficult then,
even on foot, to keep my balance,
the yellow carrying bag,
half my size, bulging with news,

lugged, hoisted, shouldered--
morning papers too thick at the time
to fold neatly into themselves
and to fling from my bike like Frisbees
over fences and flower beds.

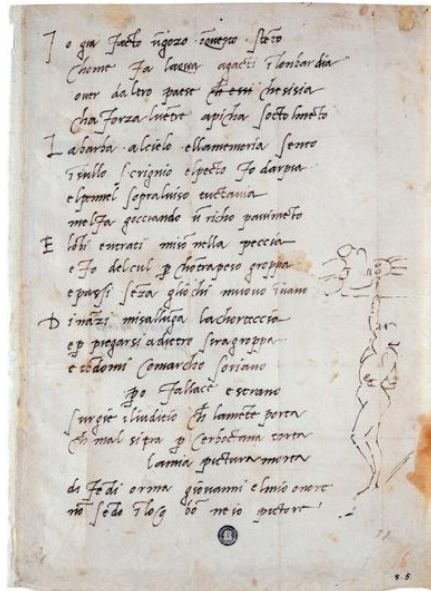
I trudged on. The weight of words
lessened somewhat. Each delivery eased
the burden, though not the pain.

Lightly, I laid black headlines
on neighbors' steps, doormats, porches:
The Cuban Missile Crisis,
Kennedy's assassination.

*

Michelangelo (Translated by John Addington Symonds)

On the Painting of the Sistine Chapel



[To Giovanni da Pistoia]

I've already grown a goiter from this torture,
hunched up here like a cat in Lombardy
(or anywhere else where the stagnant water's poison).
My stomach's squashed under my chin, my beard's
pointing at heaven, my brain's crushed in a casket,
my breast twists like a harpy's. My brush,
above me all the time, dribbles paint
so my face makes a fine floor for droppings!
My haunches are grinding into my guts,
my poor ass strains to work as a counterweight,
every gesture I make is blind and aimless.
My skin hangs loose below me, my spine's
all knotted from folding over itself.
I'm bent taut as a Syrian bow.
Because I'm stuck like this, my thoughts
are crazy, perfidious tripe:
anyone shoots badly through a crooked blowpipe.
My painting is dead.
Defend it for me, Giovanni, protect my honor.
I am not in the right place—I am not a painter.

NOTE: This poem was written to Giovanni da Pistoia in 1509 when Michelangelo was painting the vault of the Sistine Chapel.

*

Jane C. Miller

What the Donkey Knows About Labor

In stained glass, she looks calm, the baby calm.
It was nothing like that. Fact: the trip was long,
sun beating down, sand slipping under hooves.

I followed the slumped back of the man,
as much an animal as me, who led us
into pain, known and unknown. Fact:
delivery comes before deliverance.

Forgotten, her birth water breaking
that she christened me with, dripping
down my flanks, drying with my sweat.

She twisted my mane in her hands
and moaned. What she bore, I bore
walking, the clench and release
inside her like a fist on my spine.

When she could, she would lean
into my rocking, and sleep. Forgotten,
the splitting open, bone pushed against.

In the barn, I breathed in her screams,
her blood mixing with home smells
of mud and dung. When it was done,

the man flashed his knife to sever them.
Rested the child on her belly, who cried
once. "Is he dead?" she asked.

"Not yet," he said. Flies came to nurse
on her afterbirth. Fact: in the stained glass,
I was so tired, I slept standing up.

*

Leslie F. Miller

odd jobs

now who would count mosquito's teeth,
give colors names like puce and quince,
unite two gametes in a tube,
or hybridize the marmalade plum?

who'd wear a red zucchetto and
light candles in the mausoleum?
who'd ride a tightrope on a bike
or measure skulls of antelopes?

would you beget the zygote, clone
a sheep, assemble autos, test
a warhead, chop the onions, add
some salt, a pinch of this, a dash

of that? could you take the oath
of oval office, bang the gavel,
ring that bell that tolls for me,
that tolls for him? and could you see

the future in a deck of cards?
and will you take up arms when they
come knocking at your door? or will
you hold this pen and write these poems?

you might wake up before the sun
extinguishes the stars and work
until the dark has swallowed up
the sky and then do it again

for little in the pocket or the soul.
and is this not the oddest job,
to watch as life slips quickly by,
to watch, to slip, too quick, goodbye.

*

Geraldine Mills

Butter Stamp

for my grandmother Brigid Heveron

First she let the milk cool until she heard
the cream rise to the surface, ripen.
Next she skimmed it off,
placed it in the churn.

Then tuned to the turn of its sound,
my grandmother drew the dash
up and down, up and down the cream,
listening for the flecks of gild to form.

And then the butter came.

Washed and washed again until all milk traces
were pressed out, and salted, paddle-slapped it into shape,
marked it with her stamp, the only solid thing
passed down from her to me.

Its grip burnished to sheen from all that use,
my hand folds over the honeyed wood,
where once her palm pressed it
into the golden round,

leaving a perfect imprint of chevrons,
a cluster of strawberry leaves,
its seeded fruit,
on the gold-yellow spread,

and in that way, overlaid
all that had gone before:
blight blossom, down-lying,
poorhouse.

*

Michael Minassian

The Sweater

Today, I notice
a thread unraveling
on the sleeve of a shirt.

I think of my grandmother
and her sewing box
crammed with needles and thread.

A proud, lifelong member
of the International Lady
Garment Workers Union

she kept her membership
card with her citizenship
papers and the photo

of my grandfather
in his hand sewn shirt
next to her bed.

Yet I knew she worked
in harsh conditions
at a time when clothing

was made in the USA,
and immigrant women
worked long hours

in poorly lit factories
with no ventilation.
America had its own

sweatshops, children
worked in warehouses
instead of going to school.

A survivor of the Genocide,
she walked through the desert
from Armenia to Lebanon in 1915

before coming to America.
At her funeral, I sat
holding her favorite sweater,

a worn wool cardigan
I brought home
from the hospital,

the top two buttons
missing, as absent
as her voice.

*

Erik Moyer

The Painter

The painter arrives to my blue bungalow to touch up the living room ceiling with white stain-blocking paint. The previous owner had left six paint cans. I had selected the two heaviest cans to anchor the swivel tray for the lounge chair in my bedroom. I am unhandy

and thus uncertain which can contains the white paint. I show the painter the four paint cans in the laundry room. "That's red," he says. "That's beige. None of these are white." I go to grab the remaining two paint cans. I am unintelligent and thus place the first can on the swivel tray. I remain unintelligent and thus lift

the second can. The swivel tray topples, sending the fully-loaded first can everywhere and anywhere. It kablooeys across the carpeted bedroom floor and uncarpeted bedroom walls. I look at the painter. The painter looks at the carpet, then looks at me. "That's blue."

*

Wyatt Mischler

“Sorry I’m Late. I Ran Over a Bug.”

shouldn’t that be the way it is?
buddha would’ve said it. jesus would’ve.
if the christian martyrs were employable
(their record of anti-government activity
is a difficult hurdle in interviews) they
would call out of work if the clouds were too pretty.

translate the chatter of whales and dolphins
(it is untranslatable only
to people who have the wrong attitude)
and you will hear a million ways
of providing an excuse. they have a baroque skill
for it. excuses are their poetry.
it’s their favorite kind of speech.

“sorry. i don’t feel like it today.”
the platinum-bedecked starlike angels
have sung that phrase since forever.
they’re singing it now. since you
can’t seem to hear it, all I’ve done
is relay it to you.

you’re welcome.

*

Simone Muench and Jackie K. White

Lee Miller Sparks a Solar Flare

against her assailant, turning the body
from blue hat to halo, confronting

every camera with the camouflage of bare
skin—a salute to her own indestructible

eye. Its metronomic vision shifts from atelier
to field hospital, pearled veil to bullet.

No longer their “modern girl” slipping off
pavement, she cages the birds of white aprons

and gas masks, plucks blond curls with pink claws,
hews the catwalk into a buckeye limb and leaps

from pigeonholes, forward into the frontlines declaring
I’d rather take a photograph than be one.

NOTE: This poem is from a series of poems that engage with the artwork, biographies, histories, and writings of women surrealists who have been historically marginalized.

*

Erin Murphy

Elegy for the 30-Year Career

My mother's father, raised on a farm,
spent his working years at a helicopter plant.
He rose at 4 a.m., left home by 5 sharp.
His lunchbox looked like a metal barn.

Inside: two turkey sandwiches on rye
slathered with cranberry sauce,
a banana, and a Thermos of black coffee,
all packed by my grandmother

when she returned from second shift
at the factory. For thirty years
he drove back roads from Pascoag
across the Connecticut state line.

He had heart bypass surgery in his fifties
to fix the disease that killed
his twin. Insurance kicked in, nothing
out of pocket. He had three weeks'

paid vacation. One spring he used
his time off to build the wishing well
my grandmother had always wanted.
Most summers they visited us down South,

their silver Airstream camper a sideways
silo in front of our house. When he retired,
he had a pension, benefits, and more time
to watch *Judge Judy* and help motorists

who were stranded or lost. And when he died,
he left his wife a house, some savings,
and the memory of a man who never had
a bad word for his company or his boss.

*

Renée K. Nicholson

Curtain Call

The pain behind the patella radiates
like light through a diamond, colorless,
the lock-jawed silence of stillness
points of princess-cut stone on the soft pulp
of connective tissue. Remember
how you were once beautiful, icy,
like the city after December's decadence &
finery. The clear cold of lake-effect
snow, the steel exoskeleton of covered
over-street crosswalks. Of course, the Pabst,
drafty cool, plush velvet cushions pillowed
a thousand glass slippers. Folds of the heavy curtain
pocket memories like the dust bunnies under
the couch, the uneven wood floor—
not home yet. Wings of aches:
ankles, hips, lower backs. Those old ropes
maneuver the scenery where hurt &
love & sweat hover above the pit—
plucked strings, your ligaments & tendons.
The snow heaps outside, cold and heat fuse,
frothy breath like the head on a pint of beer
bottled in the city's bricked heart. The bus
lumbers and knee twitches, past
the family apartments over
groceries, the smell of halupkis, dance
hall filled with old-fashioned polka,
past the closed frozen custard stand,
skirting the angry, ice-crust lake.
The smooth vinyl beneath you, scanning
the flat northern town as if there were
answers, or even clues. The stars are not
gems, but the moon's shine cleaves
the dark swath of sky over this town
named for natives long gone. So too, your
last stop, that lamppost where you depart.

*

Benjamin Niespodziany

Simply Following Instructions

Simply
following
corporate
instructions
I dump
stuff
into
the machine.

We need
more stuff,
my boss yells,
dumped
into the machine.

He looks at me
and when I do not
respond quickly enough,
he throws me
into the machine.

I'm honored,
really, but I
barely
move
the needle.
The machine
needs
more.

*

Mark Nowak

[from ...*AGAIN*]

We walked toward the zenith not expecting a new rising sun, but satisfied with the Cheese Whiz, Zebra Cakes, and Zingers at the end of the aisle at Family Dollar. Maybe eat them with Prozac or Zoloft. Later, take in the pine trees rising behind the cinderblock walls of the Dollar Tree. The American alphabet ends like every American factory ends. Zombies wandering around on Zoom. The new zoology. In the Ocean State Job Lot parking lot, I put the words “cheap America lot” into Business Name Generator and got these results: Balaclava America, Zip Cheap, Burb Lot. Nothing much more needs to be said. Maybe there will be more zebras someday. More songs by a reconfigured ZZ Top (you will or will not listen to them on Amazon music). But for now, there are intermezzos, piazzas, and paparazzi for the elites on their mega-yachts, on their spaceship trips into outer space. Meanwhile, the working class orders a pizza delivered by the working class. Zero tolerance for everything and everyone else. Let the Dominoes fall.

*

Jon Obermeyer

Inside (SF Firefighter)

Fire tests gold, suffering tests brave men. —Seneca

There's the slow swivel of the helmet
before we destroy it: monster, dragon,
that Bastard Beelzebub, the orange-red
ogre of every childhood dream.

Ass to elbow, the hallway floor hump
and spelunk downward into basement;
you carry half your body weight through
every blind fog-bend in the labyrinth.
Dante had no idea of the noise,
the locomotive's locution of collapse
and the load-bearing beams failing.

Take a seat, friend, within the Inferno,
Let the maître d' remove your coat,
silks and topper; The Rapture Show
begins shortly. It's the Northern Lights,
Pink Floyd lasers and the Devil himself
at 150 decibels, on the back stoop
of the Lion's mouth. I will attempt

one day to describe the heat to you
but our language is so inadequate.

*

Gloria Ogo

Ledger of Unseen Hands

for the ones whose names rarely cross a payroll

& for my mother
who cleaned motel rooms six-door keys deep,
folding towel swans no guest remembered
& my father, nightshift at the bottling plant,
palms glowing faint with phosphor when he kissed us awake

for Mrs. Salcedo in the cafeteria—
silver hairnet, hush-voiced Spanish lullabies to the beans,
who wrote tomorrow's menu on steam

for Ernest the custodian
who replaced the flag rope at dawn,
said nothing of his stitched shoulder,
whistled Dizzy Gillespie to the mop bucket's beat
& left chalk drawings on night-polished floors
only the morning janitor ever saw

ode to Grandpa's index finger—
black-grease half-moon that traced carburetors
& taught me how engines remember heat

to Auntie Dez, undocumented angel of rooms 3-12B,
flipping patients, lifting words the nurses dropped,
whispering Psalms to a monitor's blue pulse

praise the warehouse temp
who scribbles the weight of each box in a pocket Bible,
believing numbers are prayers when repeated enough

and the seamstress at the end of Line 4,
humming needle through denim twelve hours straight,
leaving secret cross-stitches under belt loops—
her way of signing the unseen

 I tally them tonight:
all these unpaid gestures,
time-card blinks no scanner caught—
steam rising from a plastic dinner,
the why-are-you-still-awake kiss,
light left on in an empty hall

let this ledger be overtime,
back pay issued in breath & ink;
let it accrue interest in whatever ledger
heaven keeps for hands that never stop moving
while no one is looking.

*

Kathleen Ossip

The Union

*ACT-UAW 7902
December 2022*

The tundra was dying while the particular wired gaze
of administration counted and undercounted,
never moving past the endpoint or outside the spreadsheet cells.
Counting is a mean straight line.
How little can we get away with. How little do they need.

To the living spirit...thought and scholarship must be free.

Who knew the ideal would have this long sequel?
So all we cared about was money,
said the attorney at \$400/hour. A performance with some shade.
So money brought us together.
Well, a communal regard attracts itself to itself

and your concern to my concern
as drops attracted form a pool.

When the mind's locked, the hands blocked,
it must be that someone is hoarding a lot of those green paper rectangles.
I think it's linked
to bodies that do without time or dry-erase markers.
We marched.

We wanted a museum, we got a street party.
From 20 to 90 marched, vivid in our occupation,
on peanut butter pretzels and smoothies from Liquiteria.
Aspirational managers baffled:
Did you ever think you'd be on *that* side?

The side in love with the incalculable.
We wanted no more unpaid labor we got questions,
What will we make? Which side on? the longlasting questions
and that good old companion, the Universe,
the one who watches and never steps in.

During Zoom lulls, Ella sang "Moonlight in Vermont"
to the jazz players, the cranky writers, the knitwear heroine.
For a minute, another world.

That ended in a chorus of thank you's.

Spreadsheet won.

Spreadsheet won and said it lost,

a fine cake to have and eat. Sugary.
But in the tundra of their beds, they toss in their wrong.
The sweats start like diabetes. Mom, Preacher:
Old voices in the head scolding strictly and without stint.
A rich belly does some to numb it.

Begin an ungowning: puffy tams trashed, poplin ripped, the medieval
dream of university sullied from the start, when it was
only the well stuffed, only for themselves.

We want dentists, time, markers, money, and to
afford to give without stint.

From the start, a contract is a diminished thing.
What must be demanded is already scrap.
Apply conviction, still, to every jagged surface.
If you care about yourself and something bigger,
you'll fail (guaranteed) but will you be sorry?

If there isn't an archive, start one.

For a while it was the longest adjunct strike in US history.

When you sleep, sleep as dreamers, not dead.

*

Jimmy Pappas

Saigon Guard Duty — 1970

I taught English as a second
language to South Vietnamese
soldiers before they worked
with American helicopter pilots.
The teachers took turns
walking around the school
looking for bombs and watching
out for assaults on the building.

For one week I walked down
a narrow alley between us
and an apartment complex.

My first day on guard duty
I found a dead man on the ground.
Vietnamese soldiers helped me
carry the body to a vehicle
that took him away.

For some, the street was home.
A few woke up. Others slept.
A pedicab driver in his vehicle
snored with his mouth agape.
Students in traditional uniforms
set off for school. A young man
had little luck trying to catch
a Lambretta bus. He checked
his watch and shook his head.

Addicts were everywhere. An old
man passed a hypodermic needle
filled with a deep purple liquid
to another man. He held the needle
up to me as an offer. *Not today,*
papa-san. We both laughed.
A Vietnamese civilian told me
it was morphine to kill the pain.

A young boy in a French Catholic
school uniform sat on the front steps
of his family's apartment playing
with pet cockroaches he kept

in empty match boxes.
Curious to see how he used
his little living toys in a game,
I squatted down and smiled
at him, but that caused him
to pick up his insects, put them
away in their small homes, go
back inside, and leave me
looking at a closed door.

At the end of the alley, young men
gathered in a circle playing cards
for money. A GI squatted among them.
They spoke in loud voices with much
laughter. I wished I could join them.

An old man walked by with hand-
made toys he wanted to sell. He kept
spinning one of them to make
a whistling sound that attracted
children who followed him as if
he were the ice cream man ringing
his bell. He never even turned
around to look at them, just kept
on walking with his head down
like a figure on a Greek urn.

*

Kenneth Pobo

Phone Solicitor

1972. My first job,
a phone solicitor.
5-9 p.m. five nights a week.
I'm the guy who interrupts
your dinner, who asks you
to buy a subscription
to a paper. If you do,
you'll be helping sick kids.
Sometimes people answer
who know little English.
One woman agrees
to getting a subscription
despite not knowing
what she agreed to.

Boring. My spiel begins with
"My name is." I weary
of my name before the end
of the first night. I say
I'm Neil Diamond. No one
challenges me. Who I am
is a bad connection,
the slam of a phone
before I try the next number.

*

T.R. Poulson

Letter to a Route Named 2C

—confession of a UPS driver

I love you when you show me slivers
of Pacific, of San Francisco Bay, when your fog drips through thick
needles, wild. I love your dogs who wag at gaits—I deliver
treats to tongues. I love your storms, though they slick
your driveways muddy and uproot trees. I love your dead
ends backdropped by distant breakers. I love your calves who slip under
their mama's bellies to watch me drive. I love your red
blisters of sunset in gray. I love you, even when you encumber

me with too much of you. When muscles burn
with every stop. When curved roads darken. When boxes jumble
on shelves like pain. When I punch
the clock at nine PM. I fist bump coworkers who taught me turns
and numbers. Where to park to pick up fallen pieces. I fumble
love among things other hands have touched.

*

Stephanie Powell

Subject: re: maternity leave

Dear [name here],

Dear [employee number XXXX redacted]

Dear [unhappy pregnant woman]

Your request for [employer-funded paid parental leave] is:
a worm swallowed but not killed

Your request:
flips in our bellies like embarrassment

Your request is:
denied, [the worm is dead]

Thanks for reaching out,
thanks for getting in touch, thanks
and hope you are:
well, that you are
looking forward to the weekend!
Thank you for your understanding in advance

Please join us in the kitchen to celebrate *International Women's Day*

Bring cupcakes!

*

Vivian Faith Prescott

Boy Crazy

The salmon fisherman hired us 13-year-old
island girls as deckhands on his troller for the summer—
Me and my best friend, the fisherman's daughter.

"Gotta keep you girls from going boy crazy,"
he'd said.

My stepmother had already forewarned me—
At thirteen, kids go crazy. Maybe she was
thinking of only herself, but I was already

sneak-smoking her cigarette butts and letting
a boy feel me up. The best way to keep us
out of trouble, our parents must've figured,

was to send us out on the Alaskan ocean
to work off all that frenzy. At sea, the fisherman
joked about our greasy salmon-scaled hair,

how no boy back home among the islands
would want to chase us and yelled at us
to clean the coho salmon even faster.

Side by side, my friend and I cleaned
and iced salmon, and at night we were like
fish eggs in a skein, snug in our diesel-smelly

sleeping bags tucked up in the bow bunks,
rocking with a wave-lull on the phosphorescent sea.
We cleaned hundreds and hundreds of salmon

that summer, until cleaning fish became muscle
memory—gill the salmon, cut into the anus
and slice toward belly to throat, pull the guts

and scrape the kidney strip. A week into our trip,
during a reprieve from rainforest showers,
we washed our teenage, hormone greased hair

and pimply faces with cold tank water, laid out
on the boat deck in our halter tops and cutoff
jeans and slapped horse flies away from each other.

Days and nights we spent splattered in blood,
with silver scales like falling stars flashing
throughout our hair, our hoodies caked

with dried slime. And on a rare day with
a break in fishing, when we couldn't stand
our own stink any longer, we begged

until the fisherman let us row the dingy to shore.
Keeping an eye out for bears, we girls hiked
up the edge of a cold creek, stripped

to our underwear and splashed and laughed
like river otters, washing our bodies
with snowmelt and moss. And afterward,

near the shoreline, my best friend and I
laid out on the rocky beach, our fingers
reaching toward each other through blades

of shore grass, while the throaty raven cawed
out waterdrop plunks from the forest.
And in that sunlit moment, the prophecy sort of

came true—But instead, we'd gone "girl crazy"
and if someone was looking down at us deckhands
through a cosmic ship's porthole, some might have
called us *first love*.

*

Mike Puican

30 Seconds

It doesn't have to make sense. It just has to sell product. *You're not the same person you used to be. Why are you using the same shampoo?* The actress practices her lines as they apply her makeup. Down the street a woman put stones in her pockets and drowned.

Dryer sheets become spring rain, ready-to-bake desserts are cookies in the oven at Grandma's, floor cleaners: pine forests. Over time the lines dissolve like voices blurring to a steady hum. A couple argues somewhere down the block. A funeral procession turns the corner singing "Amazing Grace."

The focus group told us: too much lather, not enough conditioning. It's not what they expected. Neither is this. You start with a clear line of action. It becomes a story but not the one you want. We let the mourners pass, then return to the shoot. Bring more lights, we're losing the sun. Someone cue the pigeons.

*

Ruben Quesada

Poetry Is Bourgeois

On the way home from work
On the northbound train
I heard a young woman say
Poetry is meant for the rich
Poetry is for the privileged
Poetry is for those who can spend
Time to write words meant for change
It is a life carelessly spent
Writing. This is a lie.

*

Susan Rich

Underage

Who is she?
The teenager with a mission

fighting on the battlefield
of Capitalism

with only babysitting money.

Why does she pause
on the corner of Harvard & Washington—

at small green-lead windows

above the empty window box.
The flower shop sign

reads, *under construction*,
like her.

And suddenly, she becomes

employed. An arranger of orchids
with pussywillow,

curator of terrariums, and her favorite—
anthologist of the centerpiece.

She learns the commerce

of water and sand
as if she knows the ingredients

for an exemplary life.

What she hears of sex, of surrealism
from the older workers,

women approaching their mid-twenties,
surprises her.

You can sweet talk your way

into Salvador Dali's suite
at the Ritz;

or marry a silver-haired Colonel,

to become rich and unhappy.
But what shocks her most

is when she murmurs, *may I help you?*

and finds she can
advise afternoon light, more jasmine, a blue planter.

Another world is here—and it is hers.

*

R. Joseph Rodríguez

Everyjuan/x

arises
before coffee drips
everywhere
faces grace hell
idle justice
knows limits
memorizes
notices
opportunities
permanent
qualification
restores
sanity
thinks
underdog
vows
winning
xenagogue
yearns
zapateo

*

Christine Rhein

In the Dynamometer Lab

Torque. Speed. Temperature.

I watched red dots
climb control-panel screens
while the crew,
all around me, talked sports—
teams and wagers.

They asked about my father's
line of work,
about my husband's, and why
a sweet girl like me
was working as an engineer.

The constant roar
and rumble: engines, running
full throttle, bolted
to their stands, inside metal cages
and grease-smudged
safety glass. The guys sat there
chuckling on that day
one accused me of stealing
my job from a man.

Validation & Durability—
months of testing
were equal to years on the road,
and every afternoon
they piled data for me to gather
as they waited for
failure—a sheared timing belt,
a blown gasket,
or that deeper damage—
a broken piston—
the booming pummels,
screeching shrapnel.

*

Sara Rosenberg

The Mapmaker

Tell me about the time
I shadowed you to work

and climbed up to your drawing table
with its gems of colored pencils.

Tell me about the crisp, rolled maps
shaded with your geologist precision

and how we searched the window
for gulls shearing the mist above the bay.

The receptionist brought me lemon drops.
You swung closed the heavy door.

One by one, they knocked against
the wood—colleagues who wanted your advice,

and you had so much to give, a mind as clear as water.
Tell me how to trace the lines of distance,

to glean richness from the deepest furrow.
I swung my legs into the office breeze

while in their swift canyons of air,
birds dove into the blue. Tell me

about the polished desk. The corded phone.
Tell me that if I rang it, you would answer.

*

Francine Rubin

Labor

I made another person
in my body.
I pushed until I shat
and wasn't sure I
would make it out
alive. One doctor told me
my baby's heart rate was dropping
so I needed to roll myself
and my contracting belly-baby
into a better position.
None of this is
a metaphor.

*

Turab Saiyed

Once a Year

At twenty-two, I kissed my bride goodbye, her hands trembling with henna under Surat's sun. The plane to Dubai groaned like my heart, carrying me to scaffolds and sandstorms, a construction site where cranes claw the sky. Each brick I lay is a promise—roti for her table, books for her dreams. One year, I'll return, I swear, clutching a year's wages in a plastic bag.

The foreman's whistle splits my days, sun scalding my neck, rebar bruising my hands. In the barracks, I trace her letters—"Zainab's first word was Abbu." I wasn't there. I'm never there. Eid comes, and I fly home, a stranger to my daughter's toddling steps. Her eyes don't know me, and my wife's smile hides a new crease.

Years stack like the towers I build. At thirty, I miss Zainab's first day of school, her dupatta brighter than the desert noon. At forty, I send money for her nikah, watching grainy videos on a cracked phone, her joda swaying without me. My wife writes, "The house is bigger now," but her words feel hollow, like the concrete shells I pour.

The flights home blur—once a year, a visa's mercy, a thief of time. I'm a guest in my own life, missing birthdays, fevers, fights. My son, born when I was sweating in July, calls me "Chacha" by mistake. I laugh it off, but the ache settles, heavy as the steel beams I haul.

At fifty-five, my back creaks like old wood. Zainab's married now, her husband's face a stranger's in photos sent by text. My wife's hair is gray, her voice softer, as if she's speaking to a ghost. I sit at our table, one week a year, and the silence asks, Was it worth it? The money built their lives, but I'm outside their stories.

Now sixty, I shuffle through the site, dust in my lungs, my hands gnarled knots. The young workers call me Nana, not knowing I've missed my own grandchildren's names. I send rupees still, wired to a home that's grown without me. Each year, I land in Surat, older, smaller, a shadow at the gate, watching my family live a life I bought but never lived.

*

David Salner

Prophet of Furnaces and Dust

*I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley,
bones that were very dry. —Ezekiel 37*

After Vietnam, he came home to fight
with the dust, went wild with the injustice,
waged war with everyone and lost. He cried
and drank himself raving each night,
but a revelation saved him, of Jesus
in a furnace room, drifting
above the dust, Jesus—and the meds
a Clarksburg doctor gave him. Mood adjusters,
which could dissolve his burnt-out eyes
into a sheepish grin.

An Old Testament
fury crackled in his face
when he guessed I was not only a Jew
but an atheist. Still, he treated me
with the utmost kindness.
He was Ezekiel—
we were the Captives of Babylon,
laboring all midnight shift
amid clouds of dried pitch, death itself,
shouldering plates of cold steel,
threading nuts large as a fist,
clattering them tight with an impact,
working so slowly, so slowly
every move became a deliberation,
because, as he revealed—“Look what this company
did to Bhopal. Don’t bust your ass for it.”

I accepted his revelations but not his Lord,
and he accepted that.

After so many layoffs, we were left
to walk in the shadow of furnaces
caked with snow, shattered ribs of concrete,
crumbling walls of refractory, warped crane rails,
buckets with iron jaws rusted shut,
a shambles of dead pigeons, feathers
packed with carbon, ancient temples half buried
in deserts of desiccated greed, revelations of dust.

I showered—
couldn't wash off the dust.
Then I walked away,
leaving him in a valley of dry bones
that would rise and live.

*

Moudi Sbeity

Something Useful

My grandmother has known war as a staple
in the pantry you never run out of,
like jasmine rice or green lentils,
or the thick viscous olive oil she harvests
which doubles as ointment for deep wounds.
She kept the blood at bay on her gashed ankle
by slathering the slimy blessing, placed a torn
piece of pita, wrapped it all in thin gauze.
Don't ask me what the properties are and how
she knew. All I know is that it worked.
All I know is that when war is a staple in
your pantry, you learn what to do with it,
how to preserve it, how to turn it into
something necessary, into something useful.

*

Jeff Schwartz

All the Empty Spaces

I grew up in a house filled with teeth
crammed into crawl spaces & attic eaves,
strangers' molars, incisors, & gaps

where the rotten tooth was pulled or
a gold crown went missing. Look
at that classic overbite, my father

would say, gripping the plaster cast
he took of Mrs. M's mouth before
depositing it gently into a shoebox

with a dozen others from the M family.
The timbers of our house yawned &
realigned with each generation of teeth.

I hate to think where they are now
having outlasted my father, Mrs. M,
& the house itself.

*

Sean Sexton

Day's Work

After he was brought into his room,
we split a cowboy shirt down the back, eased
his bruised arms through the sleeves
and he assumed the appearance of a sleepy
rancher, taking his noonday nap.

He went to death as to a day's work,
got his shoulder into it as when he was thirteen
working at the dairy, milking a man's worth
of cows before school. He said no to the feeding
tubes in quiet disappointment, having failed

the second swallowing test in the hospital.
Without news secreted among us he'd been
disabled by a stroke and any idea of which direction
to head, he closed his eyes, last words already spoken.
A mineral patience entered his face, same as

the afternoon he sat his horse, tied to the caught
heifer—hung up with a deformed calf I had to puzzle
out of her in the hour and a half it took, and there
he stayed, his pain subsumed as a forest into mist.
Through five days struggle crossing oceans of breath,

he journeyed between realms, the occult mastery
of heart and human tide at work in slow surcease.
The wait, the pain and distance, all he traversed
to overcome himself as we kept vigil, until
he found the narrow, difficult way out.

*

Marcus Silcock

Salad Bar

In America, he worked at Sizzler. Washing dishes, but he wanted to move up to salad bar. It was hard to meet Salad Bar. Salad Bar was slick. Salad Bar was on his toes. Salad Bar aged his wrinkled fingers for 2 years washing dishes before becoming Salad Bar. Good eyes and quick fingers, he said, sliding the shoelace of beets down the slick counter. Also stealthy. You had to look like all the rest of them. Dropping your ear into conversations. His sticky fingers on the pulse of the diners. Slipping something creamy or tangy into the bounties. Salad Bar sometimes popped into the backroom where Tatra was washing dishes with floating cigarette butts and yolky bottoms. His hands wrinkling into baby steps. Keep trying, said Salad Bar. By the midnight glow of his refrigerator, Tatra dipped his hands into crisp lettuce. Salad fingers salad fingers salad fingers, he said. When you say something three times, magic happens.

*

Michael Simms

The Rock Garden

After my father died
I remembered the rock garden
we built years ago

in the backyard. I was fourteen.
From the backs of trucks
poured tons of gray gabbro,

black andesite, turbidite
forged with ancient animal faces,
pocked pumice, starry porphyry,

obsidian like the night sky,
pebbly granite, creased tuff,
flat gray basalt, bauxite,

marlstone, feldspar,
pyrite, flint, graphite, and iron slag
heavy as an ancient obsession.

Backs and arms burning
we stacked the rock in a ring,
filled it with soil, another ring,

another wall of rock
we O'Slaviens called
a *fairy fort* to hold our garden.

Each rock was solid as a fact
but fragile. I dropped a slab of granite
on a round black stone

and it cracked like an egg
with red crystal surrounding white crystal
surrounding a hole waiting a million years

for my mind to tumble in. I traveled far
in that moment until my father yelled
Start digging! The roses have arrived!

Each concentric layer of our hill fort
held a world of its own. First the native grasses
lantana and muhly grass, then the monkey grass,

the heat-loving salvia, star flowers
and the trumpet-shaped flowers
of hope named *Esperanza*,

beautyberry, yellow bells, and above them
yaupon holly, red yucca, purple passionflower,
blue daze, fragrant plumeria, hearty zinnia and azalea,

and finally, crowning the garden,
three crape myrtles with black foliage
and scarlet blossoms.

And decades later, as my family gathered
beside the Llano River in high summer
beneath red oak and yellow cedar

in the music of warblers and chickadees
I remembered the rock garden, far away
in miles and years. My brother stood

on the shelf of pink and blue limestone
and poured the ashes of our parents
into the river that plunges over

marble falls and granite shoals
and empties everything we've ever held
into the sea.

*

Ashleigh Smith

The Labor of Existing Here

It's been one of those days,
the kind I've had entirely too many of.
When I don't want to die necessarily,
but living this existence isn't a torch
I want to carry.
I've had just about
enough.

Dingy cellblock walls.
I can smell the cheap metals of the beds and desks
even in my dreams.
Aggression and hate about to drown
me in their wave. I'm not trying to give
up on life's experiment, but this is
8,000 and something Groundhog's Days.

My shoulders feel so bowed and heavy
I'm doubled up on years lived versus
life contained. My end is in sight
but I can only get there
if I can withstand the weight of each day
living
inside of here.

*

Anna Egan Smucker

Who He Was

Too often, as a worker at the foundry pounded
the iron out of a mold, a sliver would arc
and lodge in one of his unprotected eyes.

Unable to afford a doctor,
the man would arrive in the evening,
cap in hand, at my grandfather's kitchen door.

Although my grandad was his foreman, he was still
one of them. He'd paid his dues—lost his ring finger
in the foundry to a press still in use.

Carrying a chair out from the kitchen, he'd place
it in a spot of waning sunlight, ask the man
to please sit, and using a toothpick, he'd gently, gently,

roll the man's eyelid back,
and with his clean handkerchief
he'd flick that speck out.

Cradling an eye cup filled with warm water,
he'd tilt the man's head back, slowly pouring
the water to clean and soothe that bloodshot eye.

If, when the man was ready to leave,
he began to reach into his pocket,
Grandad would shake his head and touch his arm.

The man, shy, uncertain,
would tip his cap—
perhaps grateful
that my grandad
was who we was.

*

Jennifer Sutherland

Privilege

The Westvaco plant in Williamsport
is closing. You wouldn't know that,
it's something the poem tells you,

just as the poem will have to explain
why it matters. The expectation being,
of course, that this is an unqualified

good, the factory shutting down means
the river runs clear again, not that
anyone will notice, filling out

the unemployment forms, in a living
room if they're lucky, or in a church
basement. Then the men will gather

at Luke's. I've been there, I ordered
a Stella I think it was and the bartender
winked and handed me a Budweiser.

I spent a week there in 1994, the biggest
asbestos trial in local history gearing up
to start, and I interviewed most of the men

and quite a few of the women. The difference
was the men were either dying or they
were too young to have worked the mills

when it was still in use. The women
got it from the laundry, husbands
and fathers brought the dust home

on their overalls, even in their lunch
pails. You shook it out, one of them told
me, while we were taking a break

and she was catching her breath, collapsed
a little in her floral wingback chair.
Twenty other lawyers milling around

on the porch, waiting for her lungs to dry
out enough to continue. We kept a clean
house, she tells me and leans back.

A week later she was dead. I got good
at guessing how much time they had, all
based on the angle of the shoulders.

As the cancer thickened the mesothelium
it made them throw their shoulders back.
Some of them felt around behind them

like there might be wings back there,
like the wings were too heavy
and when they found nothing

on their backs they looked surprised. I was there
to gather what they knew so it didn't die
with them and I did my job, even when one

of the good ol' boys slid a bar napkin down
the marled oak bar to where I was sitting:
BITCH, somebody wrote, in black marker.

I left a \$20 on it. Once, after a very long afternoon,
lawyers all around an old man's bedroom, Ernie –
that was his name, his real one, no point

altering it now because what good would that
do, either you tell the truth or you don't,
if you understand at all what the truth is –

Ernie started choking on the fluid in his lungs.
Everybody left the room fast. His daughter
dialed 911 on a slimline

phone. He turned to me and looked
and he told me something and I don't owe it
to you or anyone to tell you about it.

*

Dustin Triplett

The God of Small Deaths

I am the guy who got the call
when something skittered behind drywall—
a noise too fast to be remembered,
too slow to be ignored.

They let me in
like a priest with a crucifix full of poison.
I didn't bless the space,
just pulled the fridge back,
found a nest of roaches huddled like secrets.

I saw what people live with
when they think no one's watching—
grease-caked counters,
a sticky residue above the sink,
cat shit in a shoebox,
old birthday balloons clinging to the ceiling
like ghosts that forgot the date.

There's a rhythm to the kill:
spray, bait, dust, repeat.
You learn to walk quiet.
You learn where they hide.
You learn what sugar means.

And still—
the crawlspace never dries,
the attic always breathes,
and every wall hums like it's waiting
to be torn open.

I used to count the bodies.
Now I just wash my hands
and try not to think
about what's still moving
after I leave.

*

Rabelani Tshidino

The Union Organizer

I do not knock—I march.
Not with weapons, but with worn-out boots
and the rage of those who've waited too long for justice.
I've seen miners cough blood into silence,
nurses cradle death on double shifts,
clerks weep behind their counters
because school fees don't wait for wage negotiations.
They call me trouble.
I carry that word like a badge,
because I've made the arrogant sweat
at the sound of a worker's united voice.
I've spoken in tongues—Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Tsonga—
but the language of hunger needs no translation.
I've slept in union offices, on floors with flyers for pillows,
because a strike doesn't pause for comfort.
There are days I am so tired
even my dreams need rest.
But I go on.
Because someone must hold the line.
Because someone must say *no more*.
I do this for my father,
whose spine bowed in a factory so mine could rise.
I do this for the cashier who smiled through tears,
for the cleaner who scrubs Parliament's floors
yet eats her lunch outside like she doesn't belong.
I am not just a union organizer.
I am the echo of a struggle still unfolding.
And I am not afraid.

*

Veronica Tucker

Coffee, Lipstick, Turbulence

for my mother, flight attendant, 1974

She wore heels
to serve coffee at thirty thousand feet.
Reapplied lipstick
after every passenger passed judgment.
Her hair was a helmet
of style and survival.
They called her honey,
sweetheart,
asked her to smile
as if they'd bought it
with the ticket.
She knew the evacuation routes
better than her own street.
Could pop open an emergency slide
in under ten seconds
but wasn't allowed
to gain five pounds
or speak her mind.
She used to say
the sky felt freer
than the ground ever did,
though she also said
her ankles always ached.
It was work that looked like leisure,
grace on a deadline,
beauty required.
Now, when my daughters fly,
they see women in flats,
commanding the cabin
like it's a vessel of possibility.
And I see my mother,
still somewhere up there,
carving space
in a world just beginning to change.

*

Cindy Veach

How a Community of Women

Resolved, That we will not go back into the mills to work unless our wages are continued...as they have been.

Resolved, That none of us will go back, unless they receive us all as one.

Resolved, That if any have not money enough to carry them home, they shall be supplied.

—Boston Evening Transcript, February 18, 1834

How my French Canadian great grandmother and great, great aunts toiled thirteen hours a day in the textile mills of Lowell, Massachusetts. How weak the light when they left the boarding house each morning. How screaming starlings flash mobbed them along the way. How they sucked thread through the eye of their foot long wooden shuttles that fed the cotton to the looms. How they called that quick motion of their lips “the kiss of death.” How they could not converse over the cacophonic, clickety-click, clickety-clack of five hundred howling looms. How they walked back in ear-ringing darkness, had dinner, then took up their needlework—crochet, crewel, cross stitch, knitting, mending, quilting, darning—close work, women’s work. My mother taught me, her mother taught her, her mother taught her.

*

Ryan Vine

KFC

*You know what work is—if you're
old enough to read this you know what
work is, although you may not do it.
Forget you.*

—Philip Levine

I slice and dump vacuum-packed bags of raw chicken
into a waist-high aluminum drum—a kind of barrel
on its side—gut the plastic flavor pack, squeeze it in
and wash with water from the swan's-neck tap whatever's
left of both bags then splash that in there, too. I shut
the hatch, spin the squeaky drum, chant 1 3 5 bingo
bango bongo fifteen times and slap the side when it's done.
Kyle's propped the receiving door open. He's smoking.
The snowy wind blows the smoke back in.

After
I've spun the drum and the seasoning has become
inextricable from chicken skin, I give it one last
rotation, aim the hatch at the wheels, roll the catching
cart into position and pull the sticky, ringed pin. Imagine
disemboweling an aluminum pony: all the raw, wet
noises unraveling. Cold air slides across the floor
like a cast spell and Kyle's stopped even trying
to blow his smoke out the door.

I'm only sixteen
but when I drop the pieces of dead bird into the batter box
I understand it's not much bigger than the boxes
these poor birds lived their short lives in. Still, I coat the slippery
chicken in just enough flavored dust, pick ten pieces for a meal
toss them into a rectangular wire basket the size of a bread pan
and lower it into one of the four dirty fryers that Kyle
was supposed to clean. They lean against the wall behind us
smoking like they're on break.

In the middle of what becomes
my last shift, I slam a bottle of Robitussin and within minutes
I can't even stand. I push my foot through the floor and watch it
in the basement knock the white buckets around, down by where
we keep the huge American flags washed and folded. *You should go*

Kyle says. But I don't want to. Even as he bows by the back door
and I'm sucked into the street, even out here where everything
is sparkling snow—and not the falling kind but the finer stuff
the wind pulls from empty parking lots or apartment rooftops—
I don't feel like leaving. I'm not bothered by the boulder
my mind's become, rolling down the hills I'm trying to climb.

*

Word Problems

1. Suppose that worker *I*, who has \$7
in their bank account, uses a combination
of cash and credit to pay the \$40
monthly phone bill. *I* then metes out their 10
gigabytes of data, app by app, until one bounces
back a task that *I* completes in 19
minutes on the way to their temp job.
For completing the task, *I* receives a \$5.03
transfer of funds (after taxes and fees), of which \$4.19
will eventually be used to pay for gas and the
long-term maintenance of *I*'s car. *I* earns \$32.00
(after taxes and deductions) for working 3
hours at the temp job, though will not receive
that money for approximately 8
months, which is how long it will take for
the labor ministry to investigate *I*'s 15
page claim and issue a 25
page order requiring wages to,
in fact, be paid, as per section 22
of the *Employees Are Not Volunteers Act*.
After work, *I* spends \$0.31
on fuel getting to the grocery store.
Once there, will *I* have
enough credibility to
trade for tender
cuts of prime meat
and bright green
pippin apples *I* can
really bite into?

*

Jennifer Elise Wang

Being Roommates with a Stripper

When your roommate is a stripper,
You discover who makes
The teeniest thong
You can legally get away with
And that 7-inch Pleasers
Are not too bad to walk in.
When your roommate is a stripper,
You start going to the gym more,
Not to have her body exactly
But to have the same gluteal control
In order to twerk along with her
In your at-home dance parties.
When your roommate is a stripper,
You see the stacks of 1s,
But not the 5s, 10s, or 20s
She has given to the house and staff.
When your roommate is a stripper,
You stop laughing at jokes about her job
Because her colleague was stalked
And another was threatened
While the bartender laughed
At the image of her possible demise.
Every night, it's a flip of the coin
As to whether she'll be assaulted.
When your roommate is a stripper,
You learn about misogynoir,
TERFs and SWERFs,
Labor rights and union-busting tactics,
And that it's always "sex worker"
And never "prostitute" or the other word
That sounds more apropos for fishing.
When your roommate is a stripper,
You get advice on how to set boundaries
While still smiling at the customer.
When your roommate is a stripper
And getting ready for a night of picketing
While you've come home after overtime
And drink a beer with some Tylenol
For your Carpal tunnel and plantar fasciitis
And blink away your dry eyes,
You realize you are selling your body too.

*

James Washington

I'm from a Time

of department store
elevator operators.
Black women seated
on fold-out stools
in white gloves refrain:

*Eighth floor,
women's and petite.
Watch your step now,
please watch your step!*
All those miles,
traveled up and down.
Politely going nowhere.

*

Susan Weaver

The Makeover

It's late when I come in.
Most shelter residents have gone to bed,
but in the dining room Lena lights
a cigarette. She's cut her hair
and colored it. I tell her I like it
with her freckles and snub nose.
"Always wanted to be a blonde," she says.
"Anyways, if he sees me from the back,
he'll never know it's me."

She's taken a new name,
given one to Cammy too.
"I won't use it till we're on the train.
Some day, when she's old enough,
I'll tell her what her real name is."
I think, "If you live so long"
and bite my lip. I don't let on
I plan to hide my mattress
behind a desk tonight.

*

Sean Webb

To Colleen, for Whom no Elegy Will Suffice

Colleen Quinn, 11/19/1969 – 1/18/2025

It was the harshest winter in years. Another
snowstorm encompassed us and our valley.
An unrelenting season, nearly all pall and dirge.
You were unconscious for days, slowly dying.
I did all I could in keeping you comfortable,
rubbed your feet and legs, arms and hands,
adjusted covers, swabbed your mouth and lips,
applied cold compresses to keep fevers down.
I filled pages of a notebook with meds given,
bodily reactions, moments you tried to speak.
Before the next doses of morphine and lorazepam,
I stood in the doorway, leaning against the frame
arms crossed, watching you breathe, your breaths
labored, then slow. When you died, the gray walls
washed away and the room rose in a golden aura.
So little was left. I gathered you in my arms,
kissed your lips, your face, your closed eyes.
I anticipated your body growing cold quickly,
but warmth stayed a long time, passing into me
each time I pulled you close. I held your hand
that had gone cold, my warmth passed into you.
It took hours for the hospice nurse to arrive,
her travel hindered by the storm. I looked on
as she undressed your body and prepared
your skin with oils. Purple pools gathered
in your back, your skin clung to your joints,
your thin extremities. The nurse dressed you
in clothes I knew you liked. A man serving
in place of Charon arrived in a black van.
He carried your body out in a worn sling.
I stayed with you every moment there was
before he closed the doors and drove away,
leaving me breathing in the dark. Pillows
of snow collecting on everything I could see.

*

William Webb

Working (not working) from home

Turnip does not want me
to type
she paws the keyboard and
wants to be scratched and rubbed
of course
me too

I tell her, *I have to work*
right now she has dropped
a stuffed toy
on the keyboard

the one she is destroying, a lamb
once a unicorn?

Her work is better
ripping apart, sleeping, waiting to be loved
treats
walks with company
I am jealous
laptop open
a deadline
no bones

*

Gabriel Welsch

Jimmy John's in the Jackhammer Street

Eyes the hue of horizon at sea,
He talks in the jackhammer street,
Handing me a sack of sandwich.

At the first cool of fall the bricks
Around us finally not hot to the touch,
I say *nice to be out on a bike, huh?*

The traffic still snarls, but happy in the sun
the way weather makes a mood. Orange vests
lunch on the curb as the bus hisses by.

My mother's down there, he says, pointing
toward where we imagine Florida must be,
in a hurricane path, sustained

winds, storm surge, category number. *She's*
anchored, he says, still gazing to Uptown
and the hills between the rivers

in the double wide in her retirement place.
I start to talk but he still has yet
to look at me. *I haven't spoken to her for years.*

The lunching vests laugh and a bike bell
rings us back in a rush, just missing
a messenger wreck. He waves, bikes away.

His backpack heaves side to side
As his legs pedal and he veers
Between orange cones

like handwriting, a stutter on a post card,
his legs working to get to what's next,
carrying it all on his back.

*

Ed Werstein

Dangling in Mid-Air

I suppose once you are ten feet off the ground,
another hundred feet or so doesn't make a big difference,
but how do they get to that, these iron workers
I watch high above the sidewalk, welders and riveters
trusting the crane operator's ability to place
the girder exactly where they need it
without knocking them from their catwalk,
wrangling the girders into place,
standing on yesterday's work and trusting
its worth with their lives?

At break time some sit up there,
lunch pail beside them on the girder,
feet dangling in mid-air. Down on the street
life goes on, oblivious to the show above them.
For those that do stop and look up
it's like watching a circus act for free.

*Step right up! See the death-defying iron workers
high above you, taming and shaping
the wild flying girders into a new skyline.
Watch the hard-hatted men and women perform
on the girders and catwalks in a coordinated sky dance!*

Iron workers risk their lives, architects take the credit.
Architects plan, iron workers execute.
Architects are seldom killed on the job,
iron workers die every day.

I'm ashamed that I can name several architects,
but don't know the names of the iron workers
who died building the baseball park I attend.

A statue of the team's owner stands at the main gate.
The ironworkers memorial, like an afterthought,
is out near the parking lot.

*

Dick Westheimer

What I Should Have Said on a Dark Sky Excursion with My High School Physics Teacher

in memory of David Laird

The cool kids thought David was a dork,
bucktoothed and meeting us at the door
of his classroom, his lab coat buttoned to the neck,
his brow-line glasses, coke-bottle-thick,

perched on the beak of his nose. His blackboard
bloomed with formulas and tracks
of point-plots and sketches showing planetary
motion in formulas and lines, with explanatory

notes, flow charts and graphs—he was
a preacher possessed, his religion and cause:
the gods of gravity & maths. I was a parishioner
transported, him talking in tongues, me under

the spell of such things. But mostly, his whole being
teemed with stars and how they precessed. He let me see
what he saw, deep sky dreams by day then going out with him
under the sequined night. He'd find a place wholly dimmed

of city lights, free of smog and haze. We'd set up our scopes
and note exactly the moment when a star would pass so close
to the mountains of the moon that we'd see it graze,
pulse off and on like a lighthouse beam. We'd take surveys

for NASA noted in 10 hertz time. Such joy when this good work
was done. We packed up all but our scopes and the astronomer/
teacher pointed up and smiled, *We've one more treat, Mars*, he said.
I went to my eyepiece and he to his and there as if on a thread

the red planet slid into sight, then closer—like an old old friend—
leaned in and then it was quickly hidden from view as if to spend
some time alone before emerging from behind the half
lit moon. I felt so large and small at once, gasped

at the thought of these orbs themselves, dwelling in that
emptiness so full of light and dark, a realm
that, with my basement-made scope, I visited as much as it was
visited on me. I, illuminated by more than the lunar light,

paused and said, quiet as I should under the spangled spell of stars,
Thank you.

*

Karen J. Weyant

Reflections on the Waitress Barbie

*The Waitress Barbie doll designed by Robert Best, celebrates the working woman.
—from BarbiePedia*

Her pink uniform is too perky,
the buttons against her breasts,
a bit too snug. The white apron
and matching hat are too clean.
There are no stains anywhere, not
a spot of mustard or splatter of ketchup.
No drops of gravy, no spaghetti sauce smears.
Her nose is too cute, her blue eyes
shiny but heavy with mascara
that never runs. Her hair is pulled
back but too many strands are loose,
waving dangerously close to every dish.
Her arched feet slip into heels
no waitress would ever wear.
The coffee pot dangling from her fingers
is clear, with no evidence of grinds.
The only thing that is right is her arms.
Permanently bent at the elbow,
they are perfect for balancing trays
and plates, checkbooks and bills,
double shifts when someone
quits at the very last minute.

*

Corrie Lynn White

Elegy for Driving Around

I take a tech job in trucking,
calculate “dwell time,”
the minutes truck drivers
sit with idling engines.
My boss tracks people
tracking packages at home
or wandering Walmart aisles
for seaweed extract
or colostrum supplements,
because no one wants
to be dead in the future.
Truck driving looks
a lot like freedom,
but oil resources are finite
and folks sit on the couch to shop,
so cameras are installed
to track productivity.
As a teen, I drove my Saturn
down the cornfield’s asphalt seam.
Burning tobacco in my fingers
I breathed alongside cut
Bermuda and exhaust.
I hoped God didn’t see
how much I loved leaving.
Here kept changing.
It was a place and it wasn’t.
I could file my life into folders,
and the wind would swirl them
or the combustion engine
would burn them or the ditches
would gather them as thistle.

*

André Le Mont Wilson

Body

your body
my memory
of its weight
when I carried you
from your
wheelchair
to the toilet and back
lingers in my arms
long after
your
death

*

Assignment For My Post-Pandemic High School Students, Who are So Very Careful

1. After school, take a bus to the end of the line. Tell no one where you are going. Wear a woolen hat and big glasses. Dodge the imaginary cameras that follow you everywhere. Bring a paper map and read it badly.
2. As the day dips toward dusk, find a creekbed with bullfrogs and get mud on the hems of your frayed jeans. Forget your date with your fear of failure.
3. Walk back alleys in weather that falls like confetti. Let your hair get wet and fingers cold.
4. Sneak through darkening streets and abandoned factories with dusty windows and metal drums filled with secrets. Be shocked by silence. Watch the shape of your own shadow in the streetlights, how it shrinks and stretches and follows you everywhere.
5. Make a plan to change your hair: be gaudy one day and mossy the next. You're not playing yourself in the scene and owe us no consistency. Remember your ancestors—far enough back, we all have at least one brave traveler to a new land.
6. At night, make a shelter out of bottle caps and fishing line. Get paint on your hands. We've taught you control; now learn to unravel. Teeter. Falter. Don't open your gratitude journal: you're too young for that. Be open-eyed and sensing like an animal.
7. The prom dress in your backpack? Shred it. Reassemble it with wool scraps and pages from abandoned telephone books.
8. Toss the invitation to the wedding of your gradebook to your future.
9. And this: Don't let your bitterness be petty. Not yet, not yet.
10. Many starry years from now, you'll connect your dots, name your constellation, maybe call it fate. For now, glitter in the darkness.

*

Francine Witte

The Mover's Wife

Tired of her husband in other
bedrooms all day, she starts to dream.
How simple would it be to wrap up
a life and move it out one fragile
item at a time. First the heart, then
memories tissue up and boxed. She
dreams this over coffee late afternoon,
before her solo dinner on the
wedding china she uses every day.

At night, her husband comes home, sinewy
and smudged, drops himself down
on the couch like a heavy carton.
Of course, he is taped shut, but she
can't help but wonder what's inside.
Thoughts of other women, purchase orders,
back supports, or maybe a flash of their
first night together here, him cradling her over
the threshold when the future stared back
at them like a blank, unfurnished room.

*

Carolyn Wright

A Truth, a Lie, and a Photo

of my grandfather Harry as a young swell
in knickerbockers and high collar
lounging under the shoeshine parlor
awning, by the barber's striped pole.

East Saint Louis, 1910. But that was only
one lie twinkling in my granddad's blue eyes
with their hazel flecks as giveaways.
He never was in Southern Illinois

and he wasn't born in Pensacola
either. The only Louis was the *Pater Israelita*
fingered on his birth certificate
who Englished the names of his *shtetl* forepapa
under the Lower East Side *chuppa*.

And Louise, his *shiksa* South German mother
who took Jesus' name in vain when young Harry
sauntered out of his P.S. and crawled under
the chassis of yellow cabs in Far Rockaway

and later the dirt-disking John Deere
curry-combing the track at Belmont.
Which is where he took yours truly
one Sunday afternoon of my eleventh summer
--hazel-blue squint in his eyes from the stogie

poking from his bristle-brush moustache. "Kiddo,"
he chuckled as he dropped me at my Aunt Mabel's
brownstone in Queens. "I never shined shoes or cut
hair in my life. And your grandmother" (who was

peering with my mother through Aunt Mabel's louvered
blinds) "polished the numbers on my taxi driver's
badge and counted every fare as I circled
the avenues from 42nd Street to Union Square."

*

Allison Zaczynski

Grocery Store Seafood Ice Case

The art of it all –

smoothing the ice
with the back of the shovel,
sweeping my arms
to create a slope –
the perfect slope –

a midpoint between gravity and eyes –
where the fish can rest on its side
without sliding to a slump.

The exact degree I do not know,
that knowledge instead is stored
in my arms, shoulders,
in my back –
in the muscles.

I patchwork them all
like a patterned graveyard –
white flesh among
the pink, the orange,
the red, the grayish
until the display is assembled.

Erin Wilson

Pewter

I want to hold you gently
and assure you, you have failed.

I want you to hold me gently
and attest that I have.

With the pregnant light,
the moon tenderly wipes
the delicate feet of the heron.

Put down your sorry complaints.
There is much work to do.

*

Contributors' Notes

Sharon Perkins Ackerman has published poems in *Southern Humanities Review*, *Appalachian Places*, *Atlanta Review*, *Broad River Review*, *Kestrel*, and elsewhere. Her second poetry collection is *A Legacy of Birds* (Kelsay Books, 2025). She is poetry editor for *Streetlight Magazine*.

Susan Aizenberg is the author of three full-length collections of poetry: *A Walk with Frank O'Hara* (UNMP/Mary Burritt Christiansen Poetry Series, 2024), *Quiet City* (BkMk, 2015), and *Muse* (Crab Orchard Poetry Series, 2002). Her awards include the VCU Levis Prize and the Nebraska Book Award in Poetry. www.susanaizenberg.com

Derrick Austin is the author of *Tenderness* (BOA Editions, 2021), winner of the 2020 Isabella Gardner Poetry Award, and *Trouble the Water* (BOA Editions, 2016), a finalist for the Kate Tufts Discovery Award and Lambda Literary Award for Gay Poetry. *This Elegance* is forthcoming from BOA Editions in spring 2026. Poem first published in *Dilettante Army*.

John Peter Beck was raised in a mill town on Lake Michigan in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. He is a recently retired professor in the labor education program at Michigan State University where he still co-directs Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives, a program that focuses on labor history and the culture of the workplace.

Mihir Bellamkonda is a DC-based poet. They were a finalist for Black Lawrence Press's St. Lawrence Book Award and have work published or forthcoming in *Variant Lit*, *The Offing*, and the *Nashville Review*, among other journals. @MihirWords.

Joan Bernard has published her work in the *Abandoned Mine*, *Amethyst Review*, *The Main Street Rag*, *the Aurorean*, *Connecticut River Review Journal*, *The North American Review*, and others. She lives in Boston, Mass.

Jennifer Blackledge is a poet who works for a global automotive company and lives just south of Detroit. She is the recipient of the 2025 Zocalo Public Square Poetry Prize, and her work has appeared in *JAMA*, *Rattle*, *I-70 Review*, *Kestrel*, and other places. www.jenniferblackledge.com.

Todd Boss is a poet, Emmy-winning librettist, and film producer working on a series of novels. He hosts the podcast *There's a Poem in That*, on which he writes healing poems for total strangers.

Mark Brazaitis is the author of nine books, including *The River of Lost Voices: Stories from Guatemala*, winner of the 1998 Iowa Short Fiction Award. A former Peace Corps Volunteer and technical trainer, he is a professor of English at West Virginia University, where he directs the Creative Writing Program and the West Virginia Writers' Workshop. www.markbrazaitis.com

Gloria Bromberg has published poetry in *Feral Poetry*, *Brawl Lit*, *Hobo Camp Review*, and elsewhere. They attend the Rainier Writing Workshop, Pacific Lutheran University's low-residency MFA program. Retired from a varied work life as a bookstore clerk, artists' model, sex educator, drug counselor, and psychotherapist, they live in Berkeley. Poem first published in *Feral Poetry*.

Sarah Browning is the author of *Call Me Yes* (FlowerSong Press, forthcoming), *Killing Summer* (Sibling Rivalry) and *Whiskey in the Garden of Eden* (The Word Works). Co-curator and co-host of Wild Indigo Poetry, she also teaches with Writers in Progress and coaches writers one-on-one. She lives in Philadelphia. www.sarahbrowning.net

Mary Lou Buschi (she/her) authored three poetry collections. Her most recent, *Blue Physics*, 2024 (Lily Poetry Review), was a finalist for Contemporary Poetry in The International Book Awards and a distinguished favorite for Independent Press Award. Her poems appear in *Glacier*, *Ploughshares*, *Verse Daily*, and elsewhere. Poem was first published in *Red Lightbulbs*.

Lauren Camp is the author of eight books, including *In Old Sky* (Grand Canyon Conservancy, 2024), which grew from her experience as Astronomer-in-Residence at Grand Canyon National Park. She received a Dorset Prize and was an Arab American Book Award finalist. Camp served as the second Poet Laureate of New Mexico. www.laurencamp.com. Poem was first published in *Funicular Magazine*.

Gary Ciocco grew up near the Rolling Rock brewery and worked there during two summers of college. He lives south of Pittsburgh and teaches for Carlow University and West Virginia University. He has published poetry in several journals, and reviews poetry and philosophy books for the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.

Andrew Collard is the author of *Sprawl* (Ohio University Press, 2023), winner of the Hollis Summers Poetry Prize. His poems have appeared in *Ploughshares*, *AGNI*, *Kenyon Review*, and elsewhere. He lives with his son in Grand Rapids, Mich. Poem was first published in *Another Chicago Magazine*.

Geraldine Connolly has published five poetry collections and received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, Maryland Arts Council, and Breadloaf Writers Conference. Her work appears in *Poetry 180: A Poem A Day for High School Students* and other anthologies. Her latest book is *Instructions at Sunset* (Terrapin Books, 2025).

Ginny Lowe Connors is the author of six poetry collections, including *White Sail at Midnight* (*The Poetry Box*, 2024). As publisher of her own press, Grayson Books, Connors has edited several poetry anthologies. She earned an MFA in poetry from Vermont College of Fine Arts. A Board Member of the Connecticut Poetry Society, Connors is Managing Editor of *Connecticut River Review*. Poem first published in the *Rappahannock Review*.

Joseph Cooper is the author of six collections, most recently *Splash Fields* (VA Press, 2024). His latest works have appeared in *DMQ Review*, *Scud*, and *Assignment Literary Magazine*. He lives in Lewisburg, W.Va.

Heather Coughlin earned an MBA, not an MFA. She is an executive and entrepreneur whose 30-year career has spanned Wall Street to Main Street, while raising two kids. Her inaugural collection, *Out of Office*, documents the work/life emotions found within lifecycles of employees, products, clients, corporations, technology, and human beings.

Barbara Crooker is author of ten poetry books, most recently *Slow Wreckage* (Grayson Books, 2024); *Some Glad Morning* (Pitt Poetry Series), longlisted for the Julie Suk award, and *The Book of Kells* (Cascade Books), winner of Best Poetry Book of 2019 from Poetry by the Sea. Poem first published in *The Devil's Millhopper* (1990).

Jim Daniels comes from a family of Detroit autoworkers. His grandfather worked for Packard, his father worked for Ford's, his brother worked for Chrysler's. He also worked at Ford's—it paid for college. A retired educator, he tries to honor this history, and these lives, in his writing.

Colin Dardis most recent collection is *with the lakes* (above/ground press, 2023). A neurodivergent poet, editor, and sound artist, he is co-host of Belfast's long-running open mic night "Purely Poetry" and editor of the poetry blog, *Poem Alone*.

Shira Dentz is the author of five books, including *Sisyphusina* (Astrophil Press), winner of the Eugene Paul Nassar Prize, and two chapbooks. Her writing appears in *Poetry*, *APR*, *Iowa Review*, *Blackbird*, *Colorado Review*, Poets.org, and NPR. She's received awards from the Academy of American Poets and Poetry Society of America.

Dolo Diaz is a poet with roots in Spain, currently residing in California. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *ONE ART*, *Rogue Agent*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Star*Line*, *Humana Obscura*, and *Book of Matches*, among others. Her debut chapbook, *Defiant Devotion*, was published by Bottlecap Press.

Mitch Ditkoff is a writer, poet, President of Idea Champions, Founder of "Portal to Possibility," Content Creator for PremRawat.com, and host of the monthly Gift of Poetry Zoom gatherings. He is also the author of eight books. He lives in Catskill, NY. www.mitchditkoff.com

Liz Dolan is the author of *They Abide*, a The Robert McGovern Prize nominee. Her second collection, *A Secret of Long Life*, was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She taught English in New York City. A proud grandmother of nine grandkids, she lives in Rehoboth Beach, Del.

Sean Thomas Dougherty works the nightshift as a Medtech and Caregiver in Erie, PA. His most recent book is *Death Prefers the Minor Keys* (BOA Editions).

Zach Eddy is a former aluminum worker. His writing has appeared in *Northwest Review*, *High Desert Journal*, *Terrain.org*, *Poetry Northwest*, *The Confluence*, and elsewhere. He currently teaches English composition and creative writing at Wenatchee Valley College and teaches historical fiction workshops for the Wenatchee Valley Museum & Cultural Center. Poem first published in *Outskirts: A Literary Journal*.

E.M. Palitha Edirisooriya works as a farmer and a three-wheeler driver. He has been a columnist and contributor for several national newspapers. His publications include a book on gammadu, a traditional ritual of rural Sri Lanka. Poem first published in his book මාවතේ ත්‍රිවිල් ජීවිතේ (*Life on Three Wheels*).

Terri Kirby Erickson is the author of seven collections of poetry. Her work has appeared in “American Life in Poetry,” *ONE ART*, *Rattle*, *The SUN*, *The Writer’s Almanac*, and elsewhere. Her awards include the Joy Harjo Poetry Prize, Nautilus Silver Book Award, and the International Book Award for Poetry.

Yvonne M. Estrada is the author of *My Name on Top of Yours*, a crown of sonnets accompanied by original photographs. Her poems have appeared in *Talking Writing* and *Pratik: The Ghosts of Paradise* and several anthologies, including *The Coiled Serpent: Poets Arising from the Cultural Quakes and Shifts of Los Angeles*.

Leila Farjami is an Iranian-American poet, translator, and psychotherapist. A recipient of awards from *The Iowa Review*, *The Cincinnati Review*, and PEN America, her work appears in *Ploughshares*, *AGNI*, *Pleiades*, *The Iowa Review*, and more. She lives in Los Angeles and has been a finalist for multiple book prizes.

Arvilla Fee is from Dayton, Ohio, and is the author of *The Human Side*, *This is Life*, and *Mosaic: A Million Little Pieces*. <https://soulpoetry7.com/>

Molly Fisk is author of *The More Difficult Beauty*, *Listening to Winter*, and five volumes of radio commentary, and edited *California Fire & Water*, *A Climate Crisis Anthology*. Her book of linked historical poems, *Walking Wheel*, is forthcoming from Red Hen Press in 2026. Poem first published in *Terrain*.

Gary Fincke is the author of sixteen collections of poetry published by Ohio State UP, Michigan State UP, the University of Arkansas Press, BkMk, Lynx House, Slant, Jacar, and others. His newest book is *The Necessary Going On: Selected Poems 1980-2025* (Press 53, 2025).

Ann Fisher-Wirth has published eight books of poems, most recently *Into the Chalice of Your Thoughts* and *Paradise Is Jagged*. She is coeditor, with Laura-Gray Street, of *The Ecopoetry Anthology* and *Attached to the Living World: A New Ecopoetry Anthology*. She is Poet Laureate of Mississippi for 2025-2029.

Jennifer L. Freed is the author of *When Light Shifts*, which explores themes of identity, body, and caregiving and was a finalist for the 2022 Sheila Motton Book Prize and the 2025 Medal Provocateur. Recent work appears in *Atlanta Review*, *One Art*, *Rust and Moth*, and *Vox Populi*. She lives in Massachusetts. Jfreed.weebly.com Poem was first published in *Off The Coast*, Fall 2015.

Cal Freeman (he/him) is the author of the books *Fight Songs* and *Poolside at the Dearborn Inn* and the chapbook *Yelping the Tegmine*. His work appears in *The Glacier*, *Potomac Review*, *Panoply*, *North American Review*, and elsewhere. His book *The Weather of Our Names* is forthcoming from Cornerstone Press.

Monica Fuglei teaches in the Department of Composition, Creative Writing and Journalism at Arapahoe Community College in Littleton, Col. A 2019 Pushcart Prize nominee, she has published recent work in *Progenitor* and *Mason Street*. When she's not writing or teaching, she's usually knitting or tweeting on #AcademicTwitter.

Sanjay Ganesan is a writer from Vanduvanchery, a village near Kumbakonam in southern India. His poetry reflects his deep care for nature, people, and social justice. He writes with compassion and conviction, often addressing political and human struggles in everyday life.

Katy Giebenhain is a poet and occupational health tech. She is interested in writing and visual art that speaks to themes of public health. She is the author of *Sharps Cabaret* (Mercer University Press). Recent poems appear in *American Journal of Nursing*, *Poetry Wales* and *Keystone Poetry: Contemporary Poets on Pennsylvania*.

Marissa Glover lives in Florida, where she's busy swatting bugs and dodging storms. Her poetry collections, *Let Go of the Hands You Hold* and *Box Office Gospel*, are published by Mercer University Press. Recent work is found in *Whale Road Review* and *Halfway Down the Stairs*.

Emily M Goldsmith (they/them) is a queer Louisiana Creole poet originally from S. Louisiana. Emily received their MFA from the University of Kentucky and their PhD from the University of Southern Mississippi. Their work can be found in or forthcoming from *Midway Journal*, *Gnashing Teeth Publishing*, *The Penn Review*, and elsewhere.

Susana Gonzales has published her work in numerous literary anthologies and journals, including *The Power of the Feminine I*, *Sheila Na Gig*, *Gyroscope Review*, *One Art*, *The Santa Fe Literary Review*, and *Mobius*. Her poetry explores her Mexican American roots and the lesbian feminist experience. Poem first published in *Red Headed Stepchild* Spring 2024.

Jessica Greenbaum is the author of three poetry collections, most recently *Spilled and Gone*, (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019), which was named best book of the year in the *Boston Globe*. Her work has appeared in *Best American Poetry*, the Pushcart Prize anthology, and *A Century of Poetry in The New Yorker*.

Kelle Groom is the author of four poetry collections including, *Spill* (Anhinga), a memoir: *I Wore the Ocean in the Shape of a Girl* (Simon & Schuster), and essays: *How to Live* (Tupelo Press). Groom's work appears in *AGNI*, *American Poetry Review*, *Best American Poetry*, *The New Yorker*, and *Ploughshares*.

Kari Gunter-Seymour, Poet Laureate of Ohio, is the author of three award winning collections of poetry, including *DIRT SONGS*. Her work has been featured in a variety of journals and periodicals including the *American Book Review*, *World Literature Today*, *Poem-a-Day*, and *The New York Times*. www.kariguterseymourpoet.com. Poem was first published in *About Place Journal*.

Tresha Faye Haefner is an award-winning poet and founder of The Poetry Salon Online. Her first book, *When the Moon Had Antlers* (Pine Row Press, 2023) was a finalist for the Glass Lyre Poetry Prize. thepoetrysalonstack.substack.com.

Bex Hainsworth is a poet and teacher based in Leicester, UK. Her work has appeared in *The Rialto*, *Prole*, *Honest Ulsterman*, *bath magg*, and *Poetry Wales*. *Walrussey*, her debut collection of ecopoetry, is published by The Black Cat Poetry Press.

Marc Harshman is the author of *Dispatch from the Mountain State* (WVU Press), *Woman in Red Anorak*, winner of the Blue Lynx Prize (Lynx House Press), *Believe What You Can* (WVU Press), winner of the Weatherford Award, and *Following the Silence* from Press 53, as well as multiple award-winning children's books. Poem was first published in *Woman in Red Anorak*, Lynx House Press, 2018. Reprinted with permission of the press.

Gloria Heffernan is the author of three poetry books, most recently *Fused* (Shanti Arts Publishing). Her collection *Exploring Poetry of Presence* (Back Porch Productions) won the CNY Book Award (Nonfiction). Her earlier collections are *What the Gratitude List Said to the Bucket List*, (NYQ Books) and *Peregrinatio: Poems for Antarctica* (Kelsay Books).

Matthew E. Henry (MEH) is an educator, prose dabbler, and the author of six poetry collections. MEH's editor-in-chief of *The Weight Journal*, creative nonfiction editor at *Porcupine Literary*, and an associate editor at *Rise Up Review*. He writes about education, race, religion, and burning oppressive systems to the ground. www.MEHPoeting.com. Poem first published in *Cultural Daily*.

Donna Hilbert is the author of six poetry collections, most recently *Enormous Blue Umbrella* (Moon Tide Press, 2025). Her work has appeared in *Eclectica*, *Gyroscope*, *Rattle*, *ONE ART*, *Verse Daily*, *Vox Populi*, *The Writer's Almanac*, and numerous anthologies. She writes and leads workshops from her home base in Long Beach, Cal. Poem first published in *Traveler in Paradise: New and Selected Poems* (Pearl Editions, 2004). Reprinted with permission of the author.

Le Hinton is the author of seven poetry collections, most recently *Elegies for an Empire* (Iris G. Press, 2023). His work has appeared in *Pleiades*, *The Best American Poetry 2014*, *The Progressive*, *Little Patuxent Review*, and outside Penn Medicine Park in Lancaster, Pa., incorporated into Derek Parker's sculpture Common Thread.

Leslie Hodge lives in San Diego. Her poems appear in *Catamaran Literary Reader*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *ONE ART*, *Whale Road Review*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, and elsewhere. Her debut chapbook, *Escape and other poems*, was published by Kelsay Books in 2024. Currently she is reading for *The Adroit Journal*. www.lesliehodgepoet.com. Poem first published in *The Main Street Rag*.

John Hoppenthaler has published four collections of poetry with Carnegie Mellon UP, most recently *Night Wing Over Metropolitan Area* and *Domestic Garden*. His poems appear in *Ploughshares*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *TriQuarterly*, *Southern Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *Southeast Review*, *Blackbird*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and many other journals, anthologies, and textbooks.

T. R. Hummer is the author of thirteen poetry collections, most recently *Eon* (LSU Press, 2018) and *After the Afterlife* (Acre Books, 2018).

Kevin James is a Nigerian poet, tech creative, and theatre arts student who tells stories that live between survival and hope. His poems often echo the struggles of life, pain and mental healing. Whether on stage or behind a screen, he crafts worlds where resilience quietly blooms.

David W. Janey is a Boston-based African American poet and essayist. He writes about racial justice, social change, personal memory/growth, and lessons learned from nature. A recently retired university administrator, he has published his work in the *Solstice Magazine* Features Blog, WBUR's *Cognoscenti*, *Wordpeace Journal*, *Pride and a Paycheck*, and *Pangyrus*.

Ted Jean is a carpenter who writes, paints, plays tennis with Amy Lee. His work appears in *32 Poems*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *PANK*, *DIAGRAM*, *North American Review*, *Blue Earth Review*, and elsewhere.

Julia Spicker Kasdorf received the Agnes Lynch Starrett Poetry Prize, a Pushcart Prize, and an NEA Fellowship. Her most recent books are *As Is* (Pitt Poetry Series) and *Shale Play: Poems and Photographs from the Fracking Fields*. As Liberal Arts Professor of English at Penn State University, she directs the creative writing program.

Emilee Kinney hails from the small farm-town of Kenosha, Michigan. She received her MFA in poetry at SIU Carbondale and currently teaches at the University of Southern Mississippi while pursuing her PhD. Her work has been published in *Passages North*, *West Trestle Review*, *THE SHORE*, *SWWIM*, and elsewhere. <https://www.emileekinneypoetry.com/>

Dorian Elizabeth Knapp is the author of three poetry collections: *Causa Sui* (forthcoming), winner of the Three Mile Harbor Book Award; *Requiem with an Amulet in Its Beak* (2019); and *The Spite House* (2011). She is the founding director of the Low-Residency MFA in Creative Writing at Hood College. <https://elizabeth-knapp.com/>

Dorian Kotsiopoulos has published her work in various literary and medical journals, including *Poet Lore*, *Salamander*, *New England Journal of Medicine*, *JAMA*, *On the Seawall*, *Smartish Pace*, and *The Westchester Review*. She is a reviewer for the *Bellevue Literary Review*.

Richard Krawiec has published poetry, essays, plays, and five novels in France, most recently *Croiere en Quoi?* (Tusitala Press), winner of the Libr'à Nous 2025 Award for Best Foreign Novel. He directs Jacar Press, a Community Active poetry publisher. His awards include an NEA grant and two North Carolina Arts Council grants.

Haley Lasché is the co-owner, co-founder and co-editor of Beauty School Editions and the founder, editor, and designer of *Concision Poetry Journal*. She teaches college writing and literature and has two chapbooks: *Where It Leads* and *Blood and Survivor*. Her debut poetry collection *ONE* was published in 2023. Poem first published in *ONE* (Beauty School Editions, 2023). Reprinted with permission of the author.

Viola Lee received her MFA in Poetry from NYU and is the author of *Lightening after the Echo* (Another New Calligraphy). Recent poems appear in *Barrow Street*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Mississippi Review*, and elsewhere. She lives in Chicago and teaches 4th, 5th and 6th graders at Near North Montessori School in Chicago.

Jean Liew is a rheumatologist and clinical researcher at Boston University Chobanian & Avedisian School of Medicine and Boston Medical Center.

Alison Luterman writes poems, plays, song lyrics, and personal essays. Her latest books are *In the Time of Great Fires* and *Hard Listening*. She has taught at New College, The Writing Salon, Catamaran, and workshops around the country, and has worked as a California poet in the schools. www.alisonluterman.net

Marjorie Maddox is Commonwealth University Professor Emerita of English, *Presence* assistant editor, and host of WPSU-FM's *Poetry Moment*. She has published seventeen collections of poetry, most recently *Small Earthly Space* and *Seeing Things*, as well as a story collection, four children's books, and the anthologies *Common Wealth* and *Keystone Poetry* (co-editor). www.marjoriemaddox.com. Poem first published in *Topology Magazine*.

Rachel Mallalieu is an emergency physician and mother of five. She is the author of the chapbook *A History of Resurrection* (Alien Buddha Press 2022). Some of her recent work is featured in *Rattle*, *Chestnut Review*, *Westwind* and *Whale Road Review*.

M.R. Mandell is a poet based in Los Angeles. You can find her words in *The McNeese Review*, *HAD*, and others. She is the author of *Don't Worry About Me* (Bottlecap Press) and *The Last Girl*, forthcoming in September 2025 (Finishing Line Press). She is a Pushcart nominee. Poem first published in *SWWIM*.

Sandra Marchetti is the author of three books of poetry—*DIORAMA* (Stephen F. Austin State UP, 2025), *Aisle 228* (SFA UP, 2023), *Confluence* (Sundress Publications, 2015)—and four chapbooks. Her poetry appears in *Ecotone*, *Poet Lore*, *Southwest Review*, *Subtropics*, and elsewhere. She is Poetry Editor Emerita for *River Styx Magazine*. Poem first published in *Blackbird*.

Annie Marhefka is Executive Director at Yellow Arrow Publishing. She has a BA in English/creative writing from Washington College and an MBA. She is currently an MFA candidate at the University of Baltimore. When not writing, she is usually trying to find her way back to the water. www.anniemarhefka.com. Poem was first published in *Door is a Jar*, was featured on The Slowdown, and is forthcoming in *Strangers We Know* (Garden Party Collective, 2025). Reprinted with permission of the author.

Steve McCown has published multiple books of poetry, including a collaborative anthology called *We Look West*. After teaching English in California and Arizona, he now resides in Northfield, Minn., where five of his poems are stamped in the sidewalks.

Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564), known as “Michelangelo,” was an Italian sculptor, painter, poet, and architect whose most notable works include the sculpture “David” and scenes painted on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. This translation by John Addington Symonds is from 1904 (*The Sonnets of Michel Angelo Buonarroti*, Smith, Elder & Co., 2nd edition). Readers may also be interested in a contemporary translation by Gale Mazur in *Zeppo’s First Wife* (University of Chicago Press, 2005).

Jane C. Miller is the author of *Canticle for Remnant Days* (2024) and coauthor of *Walking the Sunken Boards* (2019). Her poetry has appeared in *RHINO*, *Colorado Review*, *UCity Review*, and *Bear Review*, among others. She co-edits the online poetry journal, *Quartet* and lives in Wilmington, Del. www.janecmiller.com

Leslie F. Miller is a lifelong poet who lives in an “ingredients house.” She likes to break things and put them back together in a random, yet tasteful, order. Her first nonfiction book was published by Simon & Schuster; it’s about cake.

Geraldine Mills is a poet and short story writer who lives on the west coast of Ireland. She has published six collections of poetry, three of short stories and two children's novels. She has won numerous awards and fellowships. She is currently working on her next short story collection.

Michael Minassian is a Contributing Editor for *Verse-Virtual*, an online poetry journal. His poetry collections are *Time is Not a River*, *Morning Calm*, *A Matter of Timing*, and *Jack Pays a Visit*. His collection *A Thousand Pieces of Time* will be released this year by Sheila-Na-Gig, Inc. <https://michaelminassian.com>

Erik Moyer is a teaching fellow and doctoral candidate in creative writing at the University of North Texas. He holds an MFA from the University of California, Irvine, and a BS from the University of Virginia. His work appears in *Arts & Letters*, *Epiphany*, *Oxford Poetry*, *The Pinch*, and elsewhere. Poem first published in *The Summerset Review*.

Wyatt Mischler is the 26-year-old janitor of a gay sex club.

Simone Muench is a recipient of an NEA Fellowship and the author of seven full-length books, including *Lampblack & Ash* (Sarabande; Kathryn A. Morton Prize) and *Wolf Centos* (Sarabande). She is faculty advisor for *Jet Fuel Review*, a senior poetry editor for *Tupelo Quarterly*, and poetry editor for Jackleg Press. www.simonemuench.com

Zita Murányi is a Hungarian writer. She graduated from the University of Szeged with a degree in communication. She is the author of three books of poems and four novels, including *Mirrorpalace (Tükörpalota)*, winner of the Sandor Bródy Prize, and *On Mr. Darcy's Sofa*.

Erin Murphy (Contributing Editor) is the author or editor of more than a dozen books, most recently *Human Resources* (2025). Two of her previous anthologies received Foreword INDIES Book of the Year Awards. She is professor of English at Penn State Altoona and poetry editor of *The Summerset Review*. www.erin-murphy.com Poem first published in *Human Resources* (Grayson Books). Reprinted with permission of the author.

Renée K. Nicholson is a writer based in Morgantown, W.Va. She is the author of *Fierce and Delicate: Essays on Dance and Illness* and three books of poems. www.reneenicholson.com.

Benjamin Niespodziany is a Chicago-based writer whose work has appeared in *Indiana Review*, *Fence*, *Booth*, *Conduit*, *Bennington Review*, and elsewhere. His writing has been featured in the Wigleaf Top 50 and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, *Best Microfiction*, and Best of the Net. neonpajamas.com.

Mark Nowak is the author of *Shut Up Shut Down*, *Coal Mountain Elementary*, *Social Poetics*, and *...AGAIN* (forthcoming), all from Coffee House Press. He has been awarded fellowships from the Guggenheim, Lannan, and Creative Capital foundations. He is founding director of the Worker Writers School. Poem first published in the Academy of American Poets' Poem-A-Day series.

Jon Obermeyer has published fourteen poetry collections and is a three-time finalist for the Applewhite Poetry Prize. He earned an MFA from UNC Greensboro. His poems have appeared in *The Greensboro Review*, *NC Literary Review*, *Northern Virginia Review*, and elsewhere. <https://jonobermeyer.wixsite.com/mysite>

Gloria Ogo is an American-based Nigerian writer with multiple published novels and poetry collections. Her work has appeared in *Brittle Paper*, *Metastellar*, *The Easterner*, *Daily Trust*, and elsewhere. She received her MFA in Creative Writing from Old Dominion University and was the winner of the Brigitte Poirson 2024 Literature Prize. <https://glriaogo.wixsite.com/gloria-ogo>

Kathleen Ossip teaches at The New School and at Princeton University and has been a fellow at Harvard University's Radcliffe Institute. Her most recent collections of poetry include *July*, one of NPR's best books of 2021, and *Little Poems*, a chapbook.

Jimmy Pappas won the *Rattle* Chapbook Contest with *Falling off the Empire State Building* and won the *Rattle* Readers' Choice Award for "Bobby's Story." A multiple Pushcart Prize nominee, he moderates a weekly, themed Zoom event called "A Conversation with Jimmy and Friends" that encourages audience participation.

Kasun Pathirage (translator) is a freelance writer and translator based in Colombo, Sri Lanka. He is currently working on his first book, a collection of Lovecraftian horror with a Sri Lankan twist.

Kenneth Pobo (he/him) is the author of twenty-one chapbooks and nine full-length collections, most recently *Bend of Quiet* (Blue Light Press), *Loplop in a Red City* (Circling Rivers), and *At The Window, Silence* (Fernwood Press). His work has appeared in *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Amsterdam Quarterly*, *Nimrod*, *Hawaii Review*, and elsewhere.

samodH Porawagamage (translator) is the author of the poetry collections *becoming sam* (Burnside Review Press) and *All the Salty Sand in Our Mouths* (forthcoming from Airlie Press).

T. R. Poulson, a University of Nevada alum, works for UPS in Woodside, California. Her work has appeared in *Best New Poets*, *Quarterly West*, *Gulf Coast*, *Barrow Street*, and more. She is currently seeking a publisher for her first manuscript, tentatively titled *Broken Feasts, Broken Forms*. www.trpoulson.com.

Stephanie Powell is a poet based in Melbourne, Australia. Her latest collection of poems is *Invisible Wasp* (Liquid Amber Press, 2024). atticpoet.com

Vivian Faith Prescott was born and raised in Wrangell, *Kaachxana.áak'w*, a small island in Southeast Alaska. She lives at her fishcamp on the land of the Shtax'heen Kwáan. She's a member of the Pacific Sámi Searvi and a founding member of Community Roots, the first LGBTQIA+ group on the island.

Mike Puican is the author of *Central Air* (Northwestern University Press, 2020) and *30 Seconds* (Tia Chuca Press Chapbook winner, 2004). His poems appear in *Poetry*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *New England Review*, and elsewhere. He teaches creative writing to incarcerated individuals at the Federal Metropolitan Correctional Center in Chicago. Poem first published in *30 Seconds* (Tia Chuca Press). Reprinted with permission of the author.

Ruben Quesada is a poet, translator, and editor. Publications include *Best American Poetry* series, *New York Times Magazine*, *Orion Magazine*, *Harvard Review*, *The Believer*, and *Poetry Foundation*. His poetry collection *Brutal Companion* won the Barrow Street Editors Prize. It was recognized as *A Notable Book* by the University of California. www.rubenquesada.com

Susan Rich has authored nine books including *Blue Atlas* (Red Hen Press) and *Gallery of Postcards and Maps: New and Selected Poems* (Salmon Poetry). She is editor of *Birdbrains: A Lyrical Guide to Washington State Birds* (Raven Chronicles Press). Her work appears in *Harvard Review*, *One Art*, *Ploughshares*, and elsewhere.

R. Joseph Rodríguez is the author of *This is Our Summons Now: Poems* (Flowersong Press, 2022). He teaches at an early college high school in Texas where he and his students read banned, challenged, and confiscated books, which include classical works and contemporary classics. @escribescrue. Poem first published in *Critical Storytelling: Multilingual Immigrants in the United States* (Critical Storytelling Series, Volume 5), edited by Luis Javier Pentón Herrera and Ethan Tinh Trinh, Brill, 2020. Reprinted with permission of the author.

Christine Rhein is the author of *Wild Flight* (Walt McDonald Book Prize; Texas Tech University Press). Her poems have appeared in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Rattle*, and *The Southern Review*, and in anthologies including *Best New Poets* and *The Best American Nonrequired Reading*. A former automotive engineer, Christine lives in Brighton, Michigan.

Sara Rosenberg is a graduate of Hollins University and Emerson College. Her poems have appeared in or are forthcoming from *SWWIM*, *Radar Poetry*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Pine Row*, *Passengers Journal*, *MER*, *Literary Mama*, and the *Ocotillo Review*. She lives in Austin, Texas.

Francine Rubin, a stay-at-home mom to her three young children, is the author of the chapbooks *If You're Talking to Me: Commuter Poems* (dancing girl press), *City Songs* (Blue Lyra Press), and *Geometries* (Finishing Line Press). francinerubin.tumblr.com.

Turab Saiyed is a content writer from Canada who loves reading and writing poems in his spare time. @scribblesbyturab

David Salner worked as iron ore miner, steelworker, librarian, baseball usher. His recent poetry collections are *The Green Vault Heist* and *Summer Words: New and Selected Poems*. His award-winning novel is *A Place to Hide* (2021). His poetry also appears in *Threepenny Review*, *North American Review*, *Ploughshares*, and *One Art*.

Moudi Sbeity is a first-generation graduate student from Lebanon studying Transpersonal Counseling at Naropa University. Prior to Naropa, they operated a restaurant in Salt Lake City, which served as a queer safe space. As a person who stutters, they are as passionate about writing and poetry as practices in self-expression and relational healing. Poem first published in *LEON Literary Review*.

Jeff Schwartz grew up in Ohio and lives in Connecticut, where he taught for 35 years. His first book was published by Alice James Books and his next will appear in 2025. He has also written for books and journals on student-centered learning, including his co-edited *Students Teaching, Teachers Learning*.

Sean Sexton lives on his family's Treasure Hammock Ranch outside Vero Beach, Fla., where he paints, writes, and manages a 700-acre cow-calf operation. He is the author of three full poetry volumes including *Portals*, (2023) Press 53. He regularly performs at the National Cowboy Poetry Gathering in Elko, NV. Poem first published in *Cimarron Review* (Winter 2017); from *May Darkness Restore* (Press 53, 2019). Reprinted with permission of the author.

Marcus Silcock is an Irish writer who co-edits surreal-absurd for *Mercurius* magazine. His poetry has been translated into Slovak, Turkish, Polish and Danish. His book of prose poems and microfictions, *Dream Dust*, is available from Broken Sleep Books.
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Michael Simms lives in the old Mount Washington neighborhood of Pittsburgh. His poetry collections include *Jubal Rising* (Ragged Sky, 2025.) He is the founding editor of Autumn House Press and Vox Populi. In 2011, the Pennsylvania legislature awarded Simms a Certificate of Recognition for his service to the arts.

Ashleigh Smith is a writer of creative nonfiction, advocacy journalism, memoir and poetry. She is a B.A. student in Eastern Michigan University's College in Prison Program. She was recently awarded the Jury's Choice Honor from *Cellar Roots* magazine.

Anna Egan Smucker, a Pushcart nominee, is the author of nine books, including *No Star Nights* (Knopf), winner of the International Reading Association Children's Book Award. Her chapbook *Rowing Home* was published by Finishing Line Press. She lives in Bridgeport, W.Va.

Jennifer A. Sutherland is the author of *Bullet Points: A Lyric*, finalist for the Eric Hoffer Medal Provocateur and Foreword Indies Poetry Book of the Year, and *House of Myth and Necessity* (forthcoming). Her work has appeared in *Plume*, *Hopkins Review*, *Best New Poets*, *Denver Quarterly*, and elsewhere. She lives in Baltimore.

Dustin Triplett is a poet whose work scrapes against the grime of labor, memory, and survival, blending grit with lyricism. He writes from the Midwest, where the walls hum, the belts never stop, and something's always crawling just out of view.

Rabelani Tshidino is a South African trade unionist, poet, and final-year LLB student. Based in Soweto, he writes poetry rooted in working-class struggle, African identity, and justice. His work weaves law, labor, and lived experience into lyrical resistance. He believes in the dignity of both word and worker.

Veronica Tucker is a lifelong New Englander, physician, and mother of three whose poetry explores the intersections of medicine, family, and being human. Her work appears in *redrosethorns*, *Pulse*, and *Paddler Press*, and elsewhere.

Cindy Veach is the author of three poetry collections: *Monster Galaxy* (MoonPath Press); *Her Kind* (CavanKerry Press), an Eric Hoffer Montaigne Medal finalist; and *Gloved Against Blood* (CavanKerry Press), a Paterson Poetry Prize finalist and Massachusetts Center for the Book “Must Read.” She is poetry co-editor of *MER*. Poem originally published in *Sou’wester*. From *Gloved Against Blood* (CavanKerry Press, 2017). Reprinted with permission of CavanKerry Press.

Ryan Vine is the author of *The Cave* and *To Keep Him Hidden*, winner of the Northeastern Minnesota Book Award, and two chapbooks. His poems have appeared in the *American Poetry Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Poetry Daily*, and *The Writer’s Almanac*. He is professor of English at the College of St. Scholastica in Duluth, MN.

Jade Wallace (they/them) is a queer and disabled poet, novelist, and critic. Their most recent books include a genderless novel, *ANOMIA*, and a collaborative poetry collection, *ZZOO*, both from Palimpsest Press. Wallace's poetry collection *The Work Is Done When We Are Dead* will be out with Guernica Editions in 2025.

Jennifer Elise Wang (they/she) is a nonbinary femme in STEM and punk rock pretty boi poet from Dallas, Texas. When they’re not in lab or writing, they enjoy action sports, cosplay, dancing, and volunteering at the animal shelter. Their work has appeared in *FERAL*, *Penumbric*, and *Bethlehem Writers Roundtable*. Poem first published in *The New Verse News*.

Jim Washington lives in Hanover, NH, with his wife, MaryLucille. His poetry was inspired by Countee Cullen’s “Incident.” His mentors include Charles Simic, Rena Mosteirín, and Vievee Francis. His poems have appeared in *The Anthology of New England Writers*, *Evansville Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *Obsidian*, *Rattle*, *Touchstone*, and elsewhere.

Susan Weaver edits *Ribbons*, journal of the Tanka Society of America. In addition to tanka and tanka prose, she writes free verse, including poems on her work with abuse survivors at a local shelter. A former bicycling and travel writer, she lives in Pennsylvania with her husband and two cats.

Sean Webb is a past Poet Laureate of Montgomery County, Pa. He was recently awarded the *Asheville Poetry Review* William Matthews Poetry Prize and the Tucson Festival of Books Literary Award for Poetry. His work has appeared in *North American Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Quarterly*, *Nimrod*, and elsewhere. seanwebbpoetry.com

William Webb lives in Berkeley, Cal. with his husband and their dog, Turnip. He is a Faculty Associate and is on the Advisory Board of the *Institute of Writing and Thinking* at Bard College where he teaches educators how to create and sustain a writing-based classroom.

Gabriel Welsch writes fiction and poetry and is the author of four collections of poems, most recently *The Four Horsepersons of a Disappointing Apocalypse*. His first collection of short stories, *Groundscratchers*, was published in October 2021. He lives in Pittsburgh, Pa., with his family and works at Duquesne University.

Ed Werstein, a member of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets, spent his working career in manufacturing, workforce development, and union activity. He published his first poem at the age of sixty when his muse awoke and dragged herself out of bed. edwerstein.com

Dick Westheimer lives in rural southwest Ohio with his wife and writing companion, Debbie. He is winner of the 2023 Joy Harjo Poetry Prize, a Rattle Poetry Prize finalist, and a Best New Poets of 2025 nominee. His poems have appeared in *ONLY POEMS*, *Rattle*, and *Whale Road Review*, among others. www.dickwestheimer.com

Karen J. Weyant is the author of two chapbooks, *Stealing Dust* (Finishing Line Press), *Wearing Heels in the Rust Belt* (Main Street Rag), and a full-length collection, *Avoiding the Rapture* (Riot in Your Throat Press). Her poems have been published in *Chautauqua*, *Copper Nickel*, *Harpur Palate*, *Rattle*, and elsewhere.

Corrie Lynn White has published poetry and nonfiction in *Oxford American*, *Arkansas International*, and *Terrain.org*, and elsewhere. Her poetry collection *Gold Hill Family Audio* won the 2021 Cowles Poetry Prize and is distributed through *Bull City Press*. She lives in Chattanooga with her husband and son.

Jackie K. White is the co-author, with Simone Muench, of *Hex & Howl* (Black Lawrence Press, 2021), a Society of Midland Authors Honoree, and *The Under Hum* (Black Lawrence Press, 2024). Her collaborations have appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *Bennington Review*, *Ecotone*, *Salamander*, *Pleiades*, *Shenandoah*, *Phoebe*, and elsewhere.

André Le Mont Wilson is a Black Queer poet whose poems on essential workers have appeared in *Workers Write! Literary Journal*, *Rattle*, and *Quiet Lightning* (a Pushcart Prize nominee). He teaches the Ability Write Now writers' workshop for adults with developmental and physical disabilities at Ability Now Bay Area, Oakland.

Erin Wilson has published poems in *Atlanta Review*, *Lake Effect*, *BODY, EVENT*, *Fiddlehead*, *Verse Daily*, and elsewhere internationally. She has won a Pushcart, a Silver Medal with the *National Magazine Awards* in Canada, and will appear in *Best Canadian Poetry 2026*. She lives a small life in Northern Ontario, Canada.

Tarn Wilson is the author of *The Slow Farm*, *In Praise of Inadequate Gifts* (Wandering Aengus Book Award), and *5-Minute Daily Writing Prompts*. She is taking a break from prose and shamelessly flirting with poetry. She has been published in *Only Poems*, *Pedestal*, *Potomac Review*, and *Sweet Lit*, and elsewhere. www.tarnwilson.com

Francine Witte is the author of *Café Crazy* and *The Theory of Flesh* (Kelsay Books), along with several award-winning chapbooks. Her full-length poetry collection, *Some Distant Pin of Light*, is forthcoming from Červená Barva Press. She lives in New York City and is also widely published in flash fiction. Poem first published in *The Indiana Review*.

Carolyn Wright received a 2022-2024 Fulbright fellowship to Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. Her latest books are *Masquerade: A Memoir in Poetry* (Lost Horse Press, 2021) and *This Dream the World: New & Selected Poems* (Lost Horse Press, 2017), whose title poem received a Pushcart Prize and appeared in *The Best American Poetry*.

Allison Zaczynski (she/her) is a deaf poet. She has an MFA in Creative Writing from Lesley University. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Epistemic Lit*, *SWWIM*, *Yoga Journal*, and *Freshwater Poetry Journal*. She placed in the Asnuntuck Community College Student Poetry Contest in 2011 and 2012.