Some day they will know what I mean.

Tom Thomson

"Exodus"

Oktavia Brownlow

Steve Denehan

Amanda Karch

Paula Aamli

Claire Taylor

Andre Peltier

Karin Hedetniemi

Danny P. Barbare

John Muro

Nick Dix

Bex Hainsworth

Debbie Cutler

Jacob Riyeff

Diana Raab

Adrienne Rozells

Ifenaike Michael Ayomipo

Allison Potts

Richard Bramwell

Cindy Bartoli

Tim Moder

Jennifer Schneider

Changming Yuan

Simon Lamb

Jackie Kierulf

Tony Daly

Uday Shankar Ojha

Annie Cowell

Jill Kalter

Jérémi Doucet

Robert Pegel

Candice Kelsey

Matthew Miller

Matthew McGuirk

Michael McCourt

Colleen E. Kennedy

Peter Lilly

Jeff Burt

Renee Cronley

Sarah Wang

Dan Farkas

Paulette West

...the answer a faraway echo of birdsong, the robin waking to greet the morning light...

from:

While My Child Naps, I Read a Book in the Sun

by Claire Taylor

Paddler Press Volume 4
Sarah Wang is a writer from Vancouver, B.C, most of her pieces are based on her own emotions and relatable situations people go through. She also loves to draw and paint, specifically watercolor, and of course, reading is another one of her hobbies. She likes a wide range of genres in books and is a huge empath, especially towards side characters. Drawing and painting inspire Sarah to new, unique ideas to write about, and it is also a very relaxing warm-up she does every morning. Her goal is to become a children’s book author and bring joy to children’s education.

**Foreword**

Our fourth volume signals the end of our first publishing year. What began as a one-off publication has blossomed into something beyond what I could have imagined a few months ago thanks to the contributors and supporters of our small press. At a time in our world where many are still facing the effects of the pandemic and wars continue to rage, the need for light has, perhaps, never been greater. I trust the pieces in this volume will shine through and make our world a little brighter.

Best Regards and Happy Paddling!

Deryck N. Robertson, Editor-in-Chief, Paddler Press
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We Used to Be Hunter Gathers at Hancock. We Used to Stalk the Silk and Satins. We Used to Wear Garments Fit for a Queen.

Exodus Oktavia Brownlow

-2003-

At Hancock Fabrics, mama would stalk the aisles of silk, cheetah plush, and sateen. Pick out the most beautiful hides to take to the cutting counter, where the fabric-butcher would grab the meaty calves—husky and thick slices of fabric wrapped and swirled around a cardboard bone box. The fabric-butcher would hold it with a rough grip, and quickly unfold it against the ruler.


A divine number. A perfect number. A holy number, for holy women.

The fabric-butcher glided through the fabric with sharp, soundless scissors. Tendons became broken-off from their meaty calves, their cardboard bone boxes, where end-strings wisp-waved up and down, saying goodbye to what they had once been a part of, and whole to.

The slices, now all bagged up and weighted, dropped Mama’s shoulder’s down.
She placed the bags in the car’s back-belly, a heavy hunt to feed the outside of our bodies, to sheath our skin.

---

At home, on the bed, the slices laid against the bedsheets.

When mama obtained so many cuts, it meant that she needed enough to serve for gatherings in a garment, for the lengths of a glorious gown to be stitched, soon.

To be a woman in the Nation of Islam meant to be fully covered, always.

Head to toes to hands.

The fabric, resting against the bed, glowed so golden that it compelled me to look more closely, and not away. There were pearls etched into its hide, iridescent crystal sequins, and hand-embroidered flowers.

Mama took the golden hide, flicked the end of it up to catch the underlying air so that it floated towards the bedroom’s light, and blossomed and bubbled like a pregnant sun. “You can’t camouflage in gold,” Mama said, “Only gleam. Like a proud Queen on her coronation debut.”

Exodus Oktavia Brownlow is a Blackhawk, Ms native. She is a graduate of Mississippi Valley State University with a BA in English, and Mississippi University for Women with an MFA in Creative Writing. Exodus has been published or has forthcoming work with Electric Lit, West Branch, Denver Quarterly, F(r)iction and more. She has been nominated for Best of The Net, Best MicroFiction, Best Small Fictions and a Pushcart Prize. Her piece Chicken-Girls and Chicken-Ladies and All the Possibility of Pillowcases will be included in Best MicroFiction 2022. Her debut fiction chapbook—Look at All The Little Hurts of These Newly-Broken Lives and The Bittersweet, Sweet and Bitter Loves—is set for publication with Ethel Zine and Press in April 2023.
Midnight at the Petrol Pump

Steve Denehan

Pump in hand
trigger pulled
I breathe it in
the fumes
the forecourt
an illuminated box
of cold light
the faces, few, tired
Muzak plays
sounding far away
I see him then
an old colleague
from an old job
he looks much the same
a little greyer
a little rounder
the usual
I wait for him to turn
for us to catch eyes
he doesn’t
we don’t
I see my face reflected in the car window
a little greyer
a little rounder
the usual
the slam of his car door
takes me from my trance
and I watch him drive away
into all that dark

8
Light Show

Steve Denehan

We stand in the kitchen
looking through the patio door
the solar light, a gift from my father
to my daughter
pulls dreams from the daytime sky
to paint them on the night-time shed wall

in the glass I see the ghost of myself
a translucent me, my daughter at my side
I am fatter
balder
bearded
middle-aged

she, what I used to be, not long ago
smiling, wide-eyed, through the glass
does not see herself, not really
not yet
sees only
is entranced by
the light

we stand in the kitchen
the future
the present
the past
and I look through myself
at stars and rainbows
Steve Denehan lives in Kildare, Ireland with his wife, Eimear, and daughter, Robin. He is the author of two chapbooks and three poetry collections. Winner of the Anthony Cronin Poetry Award and twice winner of Irish Times’ New Irish Writing, his numerous publication credits include *Poetry Ireland Review* and *Westerly*.
Skyglow

Nick Dix

The heavens are a haze
Perpetually kept in sunset glow,
Replacing nightfall with a deathless dusk.

The stars are raging on.
Blazes that shall not fade for eons fail
To lance through twilight’s luminescent blush.

Our lurid neon burns,
Ignites the nimbus drifting through the sky
And sparks the atmosphere to hide the stars.

Uranium is split
By fission, imitating suns to fuel
The lights that conquer night and cosmos both.

The Milky Way is gone,
Occluded by such tiny filaments.
Each time we flip a switch, we challenge heaven.

Nick Dix is a poet residing in north Texas. He graduated from Trinity University with a BA in English and a minor in Creative Writing. Besides reading and writing poetry, he enjoys hiking and kayaking when he finds time to escape the city. He also loves movies. Don’t ask him about movies; he has terrible taste. Nick Dix has been published in The Adirondack Review and Hearth & Coffin. He can be found on Twitter @NickDixWrites.
Towards

Amanda Karch

Heel, toe. Heel, toe. Rhythmic mantra of boots on pavement juxtapose leaves crunching, wind whistling, my breath. Always in a hurry to get nowhere in particular: empty kitchen, impatient coffee growing colder, empty office. Heel, toe. Heel, toe.

tapping and always moving, even in its place -- journey to nowhere

Heel, toe. Heel, toe. Chilled sky catching breath, stumbling over lost air, then regaining stride once more. Always pushing forward, never looking back at what has been, what was, unless hidden under shadows of the moon and stars that glisten in darkness. Overthinking less and less as days crest and nights fall. Heel, toe. Heel, toe.

mind of a dreamer in a poet’s body asks for more than I have

Heel, toe. Heel, toe. For someone so afraid of the unknown, never slowing down, never breaking stride, always moving faster. Wishing away the present and dreaming of the future, but not too far. Fine lines drawn in invisible ink, tendrils trailing from heart to mind to tear ducts that open unknowingly when lines are crossed. Heel, toe. Heel, toe.

destiny decides when breaths cease to exist, yet always moving towards
Amanda Karch is a Babson College alum, honing her entrepreneurship skills through her journey as a poet and author. She self-published a poetry collection, *Her Favorite Color Was Sunshine Yellow*, selling almost 200 copies in its first print year. Her debut nonfiction book, *Poetic Potential: Sparking Change & Empowerment Through Poetry*, was released in December 2021 through New Degree Press, and it is her hope to spread the power of poetry and of female voices to the world. You can find her on social media (Instagram & Twitter) @akkwriting.

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*Air, Earth, Fire, Water* by Dan Farkas
Digital Image, 21” x 16”

Dan Farkas is an itinerant New Yorker currently exiled in Cleveland. His creative outlets include creative writing & photography. His latest published pieces are *Summer’s End on Erie* in *The Birdseed Magazine* & *Ascension Song & The Wedding Toast* in *The Prompt Magazine*. His photo library numbers over 50K images, both digital and film. He spends entirely too much time manipulating iPhone images using the SnapSeed app. @DNARNADan, IG: dan.farkas, FB: Dan Farkas
A Long Portage

Karin Hedetniemi

North Saskatchewan’s going to freeze
soon, might as well go now
jump in the water, drag my
canoe on the muddy shore
hoist it on my shoulders, start walking
make it to Jasper before dark
hard to sleep with all those trains
get an early start over the border
stop for a coffee in Valemount
no birds at Cranberry Marsh
guess migration’s almost over
follow the Yellowhead to Clearwater
stop to paddle in the lake
get some Chinese take-out, crack my fortune
The colour red will be important to you
keep going down through Hope
some man says, why don’t you take the Fraser
no thanks, I say, I’m doing this the hard way
get in line for the ferry
four other canoes ahead of me
but I get on without a reservation
lucky, I guess, except the cafeteria line-up
is too long, they’re scraping the bottom
of the clam chowder soup pot
hike down Pat Bay Highway
Blanshard takes you all the way to the park
past the duck pond, past the goats,
through a parched field of trampled
spear grass, stones, echoes of drums
couple of tents, some new bicycle counter 958, 959, stick library for the dogs down the stairwell, drop my canoe on cold pebbles, low tide, smoldering beach fire no one there, just some prairie moon moored to the sky

Karin Hedetniemi is a writer, poet, and street photographer from Vancouver Island. Her creative work appears in *Prairie Fire*, *Hinterland*, *CutBank*, *Pithead Chapel*, and other literary journals. In 2020, Karin won the nonfiction contest from the Royal City Literary Arts Society. Her photo cover art has been nominated for Best of the Net. Find her at AGolden-Hour.com or on Twitter/Instagram @karinhedet.
Daily Walk (Winter Edition)

Paula Aamli

Another sunrise. Another sunset.
Now I am ambling, distracted –
now attentive, anxious, brisk.

Another sunrise. Another sunset.
Buffeting wind. Rain. Again.

I walk the edges of my life,
/to /from /through/ between.
Time un/spools s-l-o-w-ly.

Another. Another. Another.
Walking. Walking. I am –
every day – most blessed.
The Moon is Courting

Paula Aamli

The Moon is courting Jupiter tonight.
She trails her garment lightly through the waves,
and shrugs off nightfall with the white-blue light
of her full unveiled face. The stars are slaves
as we are, to the universal laws,
but dance towards their ends at different pace.
They seem serene, eternal, free, unforced
and I take comfort at their slow-spun grace.

I know the Moon and Jupiter won’t meet –
that it would be disaster if they did –
yet when they pass, I hope they will complete
their courtship, which the laws of space forbid.

The Moon, the stars – and I – will perish soon,
impermanent, imperfect… Still, the Moon...!

Dr Paula Aamli is a Humanities graduate, writer, and poet, with a day job in financial services. Her thesis, “Working through climate grief: A poetic inquiry”, explores individual and institutional responses to the emerging climate crisis, using arts-based research and poetry. Paula has had poems published in *The Lindenwood Review, The Tiger Moth Review, FreezeRay Poetry,* and *Paddler Press,* among others. One of Paula’s poems in *Paddler Press* was selected for their Pushcart Prize nominations in 2021.

Instagram: @peaamli Twitter: @paulettya Soundcloud: Paula Aamli
Tumblr: https://peaamlipoetrydoctor.tumblr.com/
In Time I Will Be Spring Again

Claire Taylor

an orchid goes dormant, I learned
it’s not my fault when it loses

itself, sheds all beauty
and shrivels into

something resembling death
I know what it is to need

sunlight, rest
to crave

rebirth. wait for me
like so many times before

I will blossom
a garden germinates in

these limbs
you thought I abandoned

come see

the seeds I’ve spread
the weeds I’ve pulled

look at this life
I’ll grow
While My Child Naps I Read a Book in the Sun

Claire Taylor

and it feels like a rebirth
the soul of me
sprung from my body like a seedling
pushing through earth
what good is survival, I ask
on the shortest days
the darkest nights
the answer a faraway echo
of birdsong, the robin waking
to greet the morning light

Claire Taylor is a writer in Baltimore, Maryland. Her work has appeared in a variety of publications. She is the author of a children’s literature collection, *Little Thoughts*, as well as two micro-chapbooks: *A History of Rats* (Ghost City Press, 2021) and *As Long as We Got Each Other* (ELJ Editions, 2022). You can find her online at clairemtaylor.com and Twitter @ClaireM_Taylor.
Sands blown in
from Lake Michigan
since the Pleistocene thaw.
 Those dunes welcomed Anishnaabek
home from hunts,
home from celebrations of
The Three Fires
in Leelenau, Keweenaw,
Mackinaw.
They rowed from St. Joseph,
Manitoulin, Wikwemikong
to rest at the mouth of
The Bear River.
They netted salmon
at the falls where those rays of light
met the great inland sea.
Later, the train came
bringing settlers and farmers
from the dread white south.
Overlooking those falls
from The City Park Grill,
Ernest drank his Death
in the Afternoon.
He shipped out to Europe
and injury from the base
of those dunes.
And on those dunes,
my son sat, among the grass
and rugosa pebbles.
He nursed his lemonade
leaning on his lawn chair.
He awaited the fireworks
as the golden sun
turned pink and red
through western twilight haze.
Like Hemingway
and the early hunters
who made those pine woods home,
he silently watched
as the light gave way
to another endless night.
Solar Winds or the Neon Dance

Andre F. Peltier

Returning home
from Sleeping Bear,
we carried our futures
under our arms,
like Churchill’s brolly.
We returned to grill burgers,
dogs, sweet corn.
Rays of sun broke through
baroque clouds
and rained our hopes
upon the evening.
That night, the neon green
glow danced above
the Harbor Springs highlands,
and we imagined
all tomorrow’s revelries.
We swayed to those polar particles
and we swayed
to the music
of the stars.

Andre F. Peltier (he/him) is a Pushcart Nominee and a Lecturer III at Eastern Michigan University where he teaches literature and writing. He lives in Ypsilanti, MI, with his wife and children. His poetry has recently appeared in various publications like CP Quarterly, Lothlorien Poetry Journal, Provenance Journal, Lavender and Lime Review, About Place, Novus Review, Fiery Scribe, Fahmidan Journal, and most recently in ShabdAaweg, Cajun Mutt Press, and Pop the Culture Pill. In his free time, he obsesses over soccer and comic books. Twitter: @aandrefpeltier www.andrefpeltier.com
To Set the Pen Aside

Danny P. Barbare

Says the good deep blue, I’ll help you
write a poem, as if to change your
mood or heart;
as twilight, I’ll let you look
inside of me
the beauty of words across the
page
as if eternity is a moment
in time
to look you in the eye
and happily simply be satisfied
to set your pen aside
and as if in awe, you
can say, I wrote this wonderful sky.
A poem I can live with and call mine.
Snowy Winter Poem

Danny P. Barbare

Simple
as
snow

that
glint
of
sun
and
red
bird
that
writes
a
poem,
so
beautiful
and
cold

it
glows.

Danny P. Barbare resides in the Upstate of the Carolinas. Enjoys writing poetry in free verse about his environment. Lives in Greenville, South Carolina.
Approaching Arcadia

John Muro

Morning’s blurred smooth by mists and wind’s snuffed out by the damp of autumn air. Sun still a brush-stroke of soluble light and leaves once wedded to boughs are now widowed as I sink into the soft tangle of quickening-to-duff needles discoloring the woodland floor and ankles wade into an armada of fern, serrated sails in green-bronze billow adrift beneath the sweetly confusing odor of pines that shadow a silent stream framing the far edge of pasture. Here, the blurred bliss of birds is everywhere: the pump-handled tanager hidden in high grass, the clutch of bitter-sweet – cinder of oriole glistering in nest – or the thin, trailing branch of thrasher foraging for food before the audible slather of a gravelly road, certain these hapless steps belong to something other than compacted stone, preferring the matted contours of a soft and mossy earth that swallow sound and the dim coin-glint of images we would just as soon unsee.
Elegia

John Muro

Perplexed by this poor pretense of a summer day and the lurid opulence of leaves that fall just beyond your window like tiny sails unfurled and back-lit by sun, ghostly transparent, each exquisite in its air-borne decay, some ablaze in yew-berry red or rusted orange fringed with the blush of green-gone-yellow, and I too find myself adrift with little hope in my heart bartering with a grief that memory had managed to somehow tuck away in darkness until sunlight entered the room in latticed scatter, and stifled sobs became eerily still as you cupped my hand with a gesture as soft as sleep and, in a diminished voice, told me that, even when giving ourselves up to grief and pulling away from the world, hope will still find its way back as time staggers on, fumbling faith and forgiveness.
Notturno

John Muro

As if it were feeling its way across the harbor, fog clings to the masts of boats for ballast before making landfall, its pale gold and onyx train rippling like an underskirt of silk, and its gross profusion of fabric unfurling and then refashioning both marsh and meadow before coming to rest upon the snowy terraces of Queen Anne’s Lace and verandahs of Wooly Yarrow. Well-bedded, it will disrobe, whitening hollows, muffling sounds and damping starless air, before lifting its still-gloved hands to extinguish the first tortured light of morning sun.

John Muro is a resident of Connecticut and a lover of all things chocolate. His first volume of poems, In the Lilac Hour, was published in 2020 by Antrim House and it is available on Amazon. His poems have been published or are forthcoming in numerous literary journals, including Barnstorm, BlueHouse, Grey Sparrow, River Heron and Sky Island. John is also a two-time, 2021 nominee for the Pushcart Prize, and his second volume of poems, Pastoral Suite, will be published this spring. You can contact him on Instagram @johntmuro.
Bleaching

Bex Hainsworth

Acres of abandoned city,  
white ruins cloistered like bare trees  
hovering between life and death.  
Static, marble held in a museum.

The water is too warm here. Soaking  
in a salty broth, the coral is sun-drunk,  
starched, broiled. A scale has been  
tipped: balance is beyond the reach

of their chalky fingertips. The agony  
of snowflake shapes baking in  
shallow graves, in blue shadows  
which burn and blister and crystalise.

Bright scars left by an algal exodus speak  
of the hurt, the masochism of banishment.  
This is the collapse of a universe.  
A paradise emptied, drained, desecrated.

A lone turtle passes over the dustbowl.  
She peers into the pale gloom, tongue clicking  
against beaked lips, and then swims, heavily, onward.
Ostrich on Namib Desert Cam

Bex Hainsworth

Early morning, and the horizon is undecided. She enters from stage right, the first visitor to the desert spring, where a spiral of water curls out in the dust like a shell.

Muscular legs stretch beneath a sphere of ashy feathers. She traces the dirt with a scaly claw. There is more prehistory than pigeon about her, despite the head bobbing like a shadow puppet. The downy sleeve of her neck unfolds as she dips a shovel-shaped beak to the water. The dunk-splosh of thirsty pecks is heard only by us and the ink-blot oryx herd shimmering on the sun-line.

Sated, she departs the small oasis, disappearing from view along an arc which curves towards water and a certain sunrise.

Bex Hainsworth is a poet and teacher based in Leicester, UK. She won the Collection HQ Prize as part of the East Riding Festival of Words and her work has appeared in *Visual Verse*, *Atrium*, and *Brave Voices Magazine*. Find her on Twitter @PoetBex.
Paradise

Debbie Cutler

Diamond crystals glitter in the light atop mounds of snow cleared for a trail where cross-country skiers sashay to their swish-swash sounds in the Alaska wilderness.
They stop to rest find peace in the quiet reach for their thermos filled with hot tea steam rising in the winter air the resonance of breath breaks still silence.

Debbie Cutler, a writer of more than 30 years, has been published in numerous mainstream and literary magazines, including *Cirque* literary magazine, *Wingless Dreamer, Journal of Expressive Writing, The Dewdrop*, and others. She currently works at the University of Missouri, writing for seven departments in the College of Arts and Science. She was the former editor of *Alaska Business* and *Alaska* magazines.
When the Sun meets the Ocean

Sarah Wang

The soft sunlight glistens through the heavy clouds, onto the ocean’s horizon.
with the movement of the water, it shimmers,
a perfect synchronization.

The vast royal blue
reflects streaks of bright orange
that all trace to an orb of light,
screaming amber into the sky,
imimidating the dusky clouds

As it descends into the orange-blue,
the last bit of light radiates
into your eyes,
like a flower blossoming only for a minute.
When its time is up,
the gold petals drift off
and sink back under the azure ocean
once again.

Darkness patches the midnight blue
The sewn-on reflections barely seen,
still syncing with the night breeze.
When dawn comes, a nascent of
aureate petals rise again,

This time, blossoming for a day.
On Free East Village Organ Concerts in September

Jacob Riyeff

Free organ music here
on the East Side. Gray afternoons
of autumnal equinox, fresh fallen
leaves. So few here in this temple,
eyes shifting in heads as Bach
swirls and glints about Romanesque
archways, the rose window hidden
behind rows of pipes, the Sacred Heart
refracting the bare light of None.
Lilting chords fuguing along
on the eardrum remind the harmony in bones,
that we live and breathe. The upper register
presses ossicles to proclaim that the Lord
is my Rock and in him there is no wrong
Wind cascading in rounds tripling
back, too much for the mind to linger
elsewhere. And so we listen—the bass’s
throb excites the nerveendings,
the soul that much richer. I sit
toward the back on Mary’s side,
not knowing a thing about organ music—
not to speak of, anyway—
and it doesn’t even matter. Here
we have beauty and we have it for free
And no one can rob these glistering melodies
from our ears, our buttocks on wooden benches,
our spines. There is nothing and nowhere
but this rush of harmony now, crystalizing
the mass of consciousness with metal, air,
the depression of bone and blood and flesh
on polymer in strict, tempered proportion.
Jacob Riyeff (@riyeff, jacobriyeff.com) is a translator, teacher, and poet. His work focuses on the western contemplative tradition and the natural world. Jacob lives in Milwaukee’s East Village with his wife and three growing children.

Winter’s Exhale by Cindy Bartoli
Digital Image, 45” x 30”

Cindy Bartoli is an outdoor solitude seeker and amateur photographer who harbours a deep-seated yearning for beautiful language. She finds poetry in the small things – a ripple on the water, a rogue sunbeam in the forest. Her natural habitat is the backcountry of any country though she calls Peterborough, Ontario home. Her work has appeared in previous issues of Paddler Press. She can be found in the virtual universe on Instagram @cbart03 where she posts random shots of places, spaces, and moments that feed her soul.
Message to My Body

Diana Raab

It took a long time
for me to say this

but I do appreciate you—
you have tested me

ever since my first push
into this world. Born less than
five pounds, tonsillectomy
at seven, childhood trauma,
incompetent cervix
leaving me on bedrest
for three pregnancies
then three cesareans,
bout of breast cancer,
then blood cancer.

Over and over again
you tested me and I’ve
pulled through.

My will to survive
will get me through
as I refuse to be the victim,
but rather invite the light right in.

Diana Raab, PhD, is an award-winning memoirist, poet, blogger, speaker,
and author of 10 books and is a contributor to numerous journals and
anthologies. Her two latest books are Writing for Bliss: A Seven-Step Plan for
Telling Your Story and Transforming Your Life and Writing for Bliss: A Companion
Journal. Her poetry chapbook, An Imaginary Affair is due out in 2022 with
Finishing Line Press. She blogs for Psychology Today, Thrive Global, Sixty and
Me, Good Men Project, The Wisdom Daily and is a frequent guest blogger for
various other sites. Twitter: @dianaraab Instagram: @dianaraab
Glimpse of Morning

Allison Potts

It starts with a shuffle and a wimper
Clickety clack nails on wooden floors
Instinctively I hold my breath
Willing her return to sleep
This canine offspring
Roused by sunshine
Sneaking through
unclosed
blinds

Lighthouse Cigarette

Allison Potts

Walking in darkness
Crossing the road to get home
I looked for the light
Bobbing in my dad’s left hand
A cigarette-tip lighthouse

Allison Potts has been writing poetry in fits and starts since early childhood. The Peterborough transplant came to the area for the parks, bike trails, cafes and local music. In 2011, Allison self-published a book of poetry titled Talking on Paper.
San Diego, CA to Cleveland, OH

Adrienne Rozells

I am sunshine by osmosis,
a girl made to glow.
Saltwater sunveins,
subdermal sparkles.
Snowfall and winterspice are
new tastes to melt
on my tongue.
Soft as sugar shaken
over a gingerbread house:
I dig my mittened fingers in
to build the house into a castle,
and when I lick them afterwards,
I find myself
spitting out beach sand.

Adrienne Rozells holds a BA in Creative Writing from Oberlin College. She currently teaches writing to kids and works as co-EIC at *Catchwater Magazine*. Her favorite things include strawberries, her dogs, and extrapolating wildly about the existence of Bigfoot. More of her work can be found on Twitter @arozells or Instagram @rozellswrites.
Retraction

Ifenaike Michael Ayomipo

I stood before the mirror today
and my reflection was adorned with a glow.
Is this not how broken souls don deception every day?
We host an unending ruin like a sophisticated grave,
yet we collect a handful of sheen interjections from passersby.

I’ve walked out of my body many times to places I named after sanctuaries and asylums.
My body, a roofless house, beneath a broken sky.
Do sanctuaries grow thistles?
Do asylums repel wounded boys like me?
Home is a place that caresses our chest
after choosing sandcastles and ice sculptures over it.
In a room full of hurts, I go back to my body.

Ifenaike Michael Ayomipo is a Nigerian writer whose works have been published or are forthcoming in The Quills, The Transit Lit Magazine, Naija Mad Hotstars, Kalahari Review, IceFloe Press, CovidHQ Africa, Shallow Tales Review, Whetstone Magazine, Institutionalized Review and elsewhere. Also, he’s a promising Educationist and public speaker.
Brothers

Tim Moder

Yesterday it snowed.
Dry fluff, uncolored by smog,
Untouched by man or woman.
This is my blanket.
This is my ceiling.
Today it snowed again.

There is a coyote I know
who has wet hair.
Sometimes he comes to visit.
His eyes are the color of
a muddy fishpond.
His legs are thin and knobby.
He smells like blood and
outside winter air.
I think that he is young.

He is a hunter and a watcher.
A cousin and a brother.
I am a flower that was planted
in his backyard.
In his blood is memory
passed on through centuries
of wild kings reigning over
sacred ground.

Slowly he comes,
face down, neck swinging,
each uneven step a balancing act
as his stiff ears search for calm.
Over the snow I hear his swollen feet
coming, out of curiosity,
his nose to my stone,
An empty grave.
And yet he stays.
As if he feels the ceremony.
As if he hears the drums.
As if he smells the smoke.

He walks around until he finds
A place to say his prayer.

He is running down the road.
I know that he knows that the smell
of rabbit in his nose is life
Flashpoint

Richard Bramwell

Few crumbs of sunlight reach the forest floor,
Until a streak of lightning splinters down.
A canopy that can eclipse a sun
Cannot protect against the storm cloud’s lance.

From superheated sap and severed wood,
Tendrils of smoke emerge in wisps and plumes,
And soon a conflagration flares and spreads,
As sparks of flame are carried on the wind.

Birds fly, small creatures scurry, burrow, crawl,
Fleeing the intense heat and choking smoke.
And when the fire has passed and the air clears,
The forest floor looks lifeless, black and bare.

Three summers on, the landscape is transformed:
Seeds nestled in the soil and borne by birds
Have germinated and are sprouting up,
Flourishing with grasses and wild flowers.

More insects and small mammals have returned,
Thriving in the profusion of small plants.
Wildlife on the forest floor now enjoys
A feast of sunshine in the fresh green glade.
Prayer

Richard Bramwell

When people trip and lose their way,
When those in need are turned away,
When we can’t spare the time of day,
Let there be light.

When people want the upper hand,
When two sides fail to understand,
When we don’t listen, but demand,
Let there be light.

When people hurt and fight and maim,
When teams refuse to play the game,
When we seek someone else to blame,
Let there be light.

Brought up in Yorkshire, Richard Bramwell now lives in north-west England. He finds creative expression in lightbulb moments (when he sees the latest electricity bill). His third collection of poems, *Museaic*, illustrated by Rosemary Dring, was published in 2021. www.richardbramwell.me.uk; email@richardbramwell.me.uk
on greeting the light (of day)

Jennifer Schneider

before i scooped fresh grounds & brewed (strong) coffee - two creams, two sugars - each morning, precisely at 6:04 AM, i was a late riser & snooze presser. An adversary to dawn. A weakness for late nights. As slumber - wrapped in patchwork quilts of lavender & lime, scented of blueberry muffins & soft vanilla mist - stirred in response to sirens & staccato, i’d resist. My thumb always ready to push and press buttons. Claim minutes & moments - one.two. three.five.more. His always eager to please. One.two.three. Open the oak door. Wipe down the shower glass. Raise the accordion blinds. Pull back the velvet curtains. He’d wake early - earlier than needed. Scoop fresh grounds - __ & __ - & brew (strong) coffee. Embody strength.sun.light. Dressed in worn denim, frayed cuffs. Plaid button downs, double pockets. Tricks up all sleeve. Secret ingredients in recipes for blueberry muffins, cherry cheesecake crepes, dust free drapes. Always ready.eager.able to greet & meet the sun. before i scooped fresh grounds & brewed (strong) coffee i was blessed with light. His. shining on me.

4 (plus) ways to greet the light (of day)

2. Sample. Seize. Marinate

Jen Schneider is an educator who lives, writes, and works in small spaces throughout Pennsylvania. She is a Best of the Net nominee, with stories, poems, and essays published in a wide variety of literary and scholarly journals. Collections include A Collection of Recollections, Invisible Ink, and Blindfolds, Bruises, and Breakups.
After spending 30 years in the hustle-bustle of Los Angeles, Jill Kalter escaped to the Applegate Valley in Southern Oregon. She now lives on a small “hobby farm” with her husband/photography collaborator, two border collies, one black cat, and six sheep.
Just Another Blue Day

Yuan Changming

1/ Defining Daytime

Day time is where we
    Can find
All the blanks in life
With our naked eyes
When we just cannot
Help filling them up
    One by one
With our waked mind

2/ Blue in the Kitchen

Birds love to eat red
Insects prefer yellow
While we sapiens like
All colors
    Except blue
Perhaps, which we reserve
Not for our tongue
But for our voice
Deep in Frozen Doldrums

Yuan Changming

As snow begins to
Dissolve, the days of
Winter are numbered

Don’t you feel agitations of spring
Deep underneath your foot prints?

Yuan Changming hails with Allen Yuan from poetrypacific.blogspot.ca. Credits include 12 Pushcart nominations & 11 chapbooks (most recently LIMERENCE) besides appearances in Best of the Best Canadian Poetry (2008-17) & BestNewPoemsOnline, among 1909 others. Yuan both served on the jury and was nominated for Canada’s National Magazine Awards (poetry category).
The Sunday Morning Paddle Boarder

Simon Lamb

I spent Sunday morning paddle boarding, which is the closest to walking on water I think I’ll ever come.

There is a knack to it, of course, once you’re kitted out and out from shore, aboard your board,

first, kneeling as if in time-befitting prayer, then pushing up and into the sky, faith in the air to have and to hold,

and it’s all about the balance, be bold, with bended knees, balance, paddle as new limb, balance,

and breathe, balance, and breathe, balance, and soon, you are walking on water. Behold. So you give yourself to that faith, for you are walking on water! Pilgrim! Paddler! A miracle! But there are no miracles here. The sea is a wild beast. Your faith in the air is no match for a sudden swell of the cold firth, and, at one such swell,

everything dips away, is stolen from you as you fall through the longest shortest moment you’ve ever known,

splashing backwards into the wetness of a world you thought you knew and trusted, pumping wet silence
all around till, on the third second,
you are resurrected into the light, hands clambering for your board,

instead of mere air, and a voice says,
“You came back to us,” and you gasp and you gulp and you gasp

and you gulp. The air! The sky! The sea! Ah,
all is new and fresh and, yes, you are thankful for the fall,

for there is a thrill to being swallowed by the black
sea, only to be spewed back up after a scuffle with the dark.

That’s what paddle boarding on a Sunday morning
taught me: don’t chance your faith on unseen things like air,

but place it in yourself and the wild salt of a black sea.
It is the closest you will ever come to walking on water.

Simon Lamb is a Scottish poet, performer and storyteller. He won the Robert Burns World Federation’s international poetry competition in 2021 with *The Working Birds*, and his poem *On the Loch*, which featured in the inaugural issue of *Paddler Press*, was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. His debut collection is forthcoming from *Scallywag Press*, with illustrations by former UK Children’s Laureate Chris Riddell. *When the Universe Creaks: Poems by Simon Lamb* is available now. www.simonlambcreative.co.uk
@SimonLambCreative — Facebook & Instagram
@approx21words — Twitter & YouTube
The Bluff

Jackie Kierulf

I can no longer ignore being shaken and force my eyes open. A voice hisses, “We’re leaving in five minutes.”

Still hazy, I wriggle out from my sleeping bag and splash some water on my face, slip on my shoes, and throw a sweater over my clothes.

It’s hard to make them out, blotches of what resemble bodies against the blackness. As I draw nearer, they’re shifting their feet in the dampness. “Finally,” someone mutters.

We’re the last to leave.

I see my breath. We walk, single file, slow pace at first, to adjust to the dark. There is no switchback to ease into the climb. Instead, a flashlight shines on a rough vertical path, carved out among fallen trees, the odd log, and other debris. Dead quiet, except for our panting, the pace and slope increase.

Even a short pause means more effort to restore the rhythm. The crackling of twigs underfoot continues. I breathe heavily, pressing onward.

Up ahead, the outline of trees is no longer obscure. Traces of their branches emerge. We are more visible to each other now instead of just dark shadows on the mountain.

The pounding of our soles tapers off. We navigate rocks of various sizes wedged in the ground, still wet from the dew. The
pitch is becoming more forgiving. Trees are scarce, with the odd one appearing on a patch of grass, their root flare jutting out towards our route, making it difficult to avoid. I reach down, take the lead from the person in front and grab a boulder to balance myself. Up ahead, some figures disappear.

Our group, not far behind, arrives.

We perch ourselves on a large flat slab of rock overlooking the vast landscape. Luscious green covers the valley below, the odd blue pool of a lake appearing, but from our vantage point, resembling a tiny pond. A rosy pink sky swallows the moon in slow motion. At the same time, a fiery golden disc appears, pushing its way up through the horizon ahead.

It's the summer of 1973. Huddled together, we each dine on a can of peaches that matches the brilliance before us.

Jackie lives in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Her publications include Saturday in Route 7 Review, Forgiven in Tidbits, and Baking Lessons in the Williams Lake Tribune, British Columbia). You can follow Jackie at cherishingthedeath-process.com and at https://fromsimplewordstorealstories.home.blog. Besides writing, Jackie enjoys volunteering, hiking, reading, and traveling.
The Tragedy of Photons

Tony Daly

It was born a millennia ago
within the heart of a yellow sun,
bouncing and bumping around
with a plethora of friends
until it broke through the surface
of the photosphere,
and reached escape velocity,
starting a journey
spanning light years
and galaxies until, finally
it reached Earth
and was lost in the glow
of a flickering street lamp.

Tragic, I know,
but not as tragic as it’s cousin:
born of a collapsing star,
forever trapped in space and time
within a gravity-well,
bent around objects,
with echos of its cries
falling on deaf ears.

But there is a bright side,
as so many more of their cousins
have more exquisite destinies:
one reflected from an orbiting moon,
then from a still lake surface,
to be refracted in a diamond ring
held by a nervous man
proposing to an overjoyed woman;
another illuminated the smile of a child
experiencing the ocean for the first time;
and yet another, the final tear
of a loved one saying goodbye.

Across time and space the photons
raced past dangers and wonders
unknown to humankind,
all for the sake of the journey’s end,
and to be caught by the human eye.
Digital Screen

Tony Daly

The modern-day bookstore is trapped in a digital screen
Buildings with people and bindings are totally yesterday’s scene
Why risk the interaction with the smiling salesperson
Avoid the complication from your comfy couch cushion
Who cares what people say, at least with their actual voice
The tongue is never tied on your digital board of choice
Who cares about author signings and seeing face-to-face
It’s the mass email forms that really make hearts race
The books will eventually gain that old musty smell
But these ebooks, these digital books, you can never tell
Just how old they are, unless you read the copyright date
And please be honest, when it’s dark and very-very late
Isn’t it nice to have the light emanate from the page
Rather than searching for a lamp switch to assuage
Your fears of the crazy cat creatures that never can be seen
as you stand in the dark, alone with your digital screen

Tony Daly is a DC/Metro Area creative writer. He has work published in
*The Poet Magazine, Danse Macabre, Red Ogre Review*, and others. He serves
as an Associate Editor with *Military Experience and the Arts*. For a list of
his published work, please visit https://aldaly13.wixsite.com/website or
follow him on Twitter @aldaly18.
Camping

Uday Shankar Ojha

Last year I camped
Where I found solid earth
With stable climate,
Leaves lush green with edges dripping,
Trees yielding friendly fruits and
Not apples of discord.

Last year I oft encountered
Moist eyes and drenched hearts,
Rains running in human veins (serpentine though),
Ghostly shadows in dark thickets,
Walls half crumbled and half roofed
Placing a plate full of peace
And quiet breathing.

This year I see change.
Cold eyes, nay responses,
Tall talks with echoes fading,
Whispers killing millions
With slow yellowing death.
Green are the wounds now
And eyes in rains.
Yes, I feel hands shaking,
Fluttering desperately.
Yes, I still see and feel.
I am alive, perhaps,
I feel so.
Surviving

Uday Shankar Ojha

Let us survive through the violence.
The violence of truth unknown,
The chilly prospects
Of images wrought in uncertain rains.
Gloomy, dusky, deadening corners
Breathe nothing but withering winds,
Corroding the castles of love.
I hate such winds, you know.
I loved to bind the saffron air
Blowing through the country green.
Weakening forces
Now fail to impress me.
Here spiders
Weave not webs anymore.

Let not the mind be savage
To blot the bliss of simple faith.

Uday Shankar Ojha is a professor of English and former Dean, Student Welfare at Jai Prakash University, Chapra, Bihar, India. He has authored/edited many books on literature and has lectured widely across his country. He is prone to singing ghazals past midnight. Uday has captained his district cricket team and has been a table tennis player in the 80s. He can be reached at udayshankarojha001@gmail.com
Sunrise Over the Bay by Paulette West
Acrylic on Canvas, 18” x 24”

Paulette West is a visual artist residing in the Blue Mountains. A graduate of the University of Toronto in French Language and Literature, she went on to study visual art at Sheridan College. Known as a painter and sculptor, she also enjoys putting pen to paper. Her visual art and her written work has been included in local public exhibitions. She is a member of the Blue Mountain Foundation for the Arts and Tom Thomson Group. paulettegwest@rogers.com
Union Station: A Suite

Jérémi Doucet

Flat Pigeon

Streetcar tracks catch and bend
the thin wheels of my bicycle
as a Prairie wind visits the city.

I risk a glimpse at the CN Tower,
pumpkins, graffiti, and a Portuguese church
while snaking my way between taillights.

In the maples along Lake Ontario
a murmuration of starlings bickers.
“Don’t stand under them,” she warns.

Passerby in Chinatown

I pluck the stained Libro de Mormón
out of the guardian lion’s mouth

and notice two bananas beneath the statue—
a long way from home.

In a bed of crusted brown blankets nearby
a crossword absorbs a slumped man.

Loud Crash in the Night

The glare of yellow light singes my sleep.
I stand aloof in stretched underwear.

Her freshly painted blue stool upset.
Soil splashed on the carpet.
A broken aloe vera.

She frowns: my fault.
I crunch my toes.

**View from Ragged Lake**

A prickly silhouette of autumn hills
in chilly dusk curves like a silent smile.

Blue and orange flames mix
to the song of courting loons—
their crooked wings flaunted mid-air.

Emma breaks us each a piece
of smuggled dark chocolate.

**Deep Breath**

I drive us home through flat Ontario farmland
while psychoanalysts babble about intuition.

Hundreds of red taillights constellate
on the slow highway—we are close.

When I open the door of her Victorian home,
I notice—recognize—for the first time
its familiar, burgundy scent.

Jérémi Doucet studies Creative Writing at UBC. His writing has appeared in *Contemporary Verse 2*, *Gone Lawn*, and several anthologies. He currently lives in Vancouver.
Sestina for when the sea turned blue

Annie Cowell

The storm succumbed to dawn’s first light;
its barrage silenced by the screaming of gulls;
their discordant aria squalled on the wind.
Like the sea, I was moody for lack of the sun-
tired of being grey - we longed for some blue;
the foaming electric of Monet’s ‘Waves

Breaking’. So I gathered my grey, walked to the waves;
past mounds of marram where puddles of light
revealed devil’s toenails bruised with deep blue.
I wanted that place where the seagulls
had gathered. I envied their faces turned to the sun;
watching the waves go chasing the wind.

The last sullen clouds unwound in the wind;
stretching in time to the beat of the waves
pirouetting to the warmth of the sun’s
serenade. Pastel plumes of indigo light
bathed the heads of the paddling gulls
as they hunted for minnows in watery blue.

When all at once from out of the blue
sounds of the morning bounced on the wind
and the air vibrated with wings of the gulls -
a murmuring prayer which rose from the waves
like a flurry of snowflakes that flew in the light.
Fragments of glass thrown out by the sun.
And those fragments of glass, thrown by the sun became starry motes held by pockets of blue; tiny performers that twirled in the spotlight. And I had been pulled like a kite in the wind to where the beach became one with the waves which a moment before held the feet of the gulls.

The cerulean sky swallowed those gulls as they flew like Icarus close to the sun. I watched whilst my gloom was drowned in the waves-felt the sea breathing that grey into blue-and whispers of cloud snagged in the wind, silvery moths mesmerised by the light.

The wind had blown the gloom to the sun And just like the gulls it had melted in light. The waves, like myself, were rejoicing in blue.

Annie is a writer who lives with her husband and two rescue dogs by the sea in Cyprus. You can usually find her out walking or in a coffee shop. Determined to prove it’s never too late. Poetry published and forthcoming. Twitter @AnnieCowell3
Light of Hope

Robert Pegel

There’s a thin blue light that lives in the sky connecting my son to me. It can’t be seen but rest assured it’s there. It has no boundaries and transmits constantly. If we could only travel on this light what a joy it would be. Its energy would infuse our spirit as we traveled higher. Peace would be the only requirement to approach it in any direction. This soothing light would heal and remove all the stored pain within us. It stretches across the sky and protects anyone who senses it and believes in it, securing them safely as they sail on troubled waters or fly into a thunderous lightning lit sky. This thin blue light is a direct line to heaven. It finds us when we are ready to find a reason to believe.
Spring Forward

Robert Pegel

Don’t pay attention
to the distorted feedback
from your mind.
You’re among the breathing
don’t be blind.
Though your world is dark
there’s still truth to find.

A faint light from the sun
looms in the clouds.
The crickets chirp in the brush
during the nighttime
no matter what else
is going on around them.

Spring is here and with it
the promise of rebirth.
Lean not on
your own understanding.
Move forward
though your best plans
may be thwarted.
You will be forced to cope
in a world you seldom understand.

Take my hand.
We will walk together
through the fire and the trials.
The distant miles ahead or behind
mean less than ever before.
Try to find love in this day
in any way.
It’s a test for all of us.

Promise me you’ll be okay.
It’s no longer just talk.
You’ve learned
to survive and walk tall.
Restored and born anew,
high above the clouds
of this temporal existence.

Robert Pegel is a husband and father whose only child, his son Calvin, died in his sleep of unknown causes at age sixteen. Robert writes to try and transform his grief by creating. Robert graduated from Columbia University where he majored in English. He has been published in Sledgehammer Lit, The Madrigal, Remington Review, Trouvaille Review, Lothlorien Journal, Goat’s Milk, Fahmidan Journal, ZiN Daily and others. He has work forthcoming in Backchannels, North Dakota Quarterly and Toyon Literature. Robert lives in Andover, NJ, USA with his wife, Zulma.
Wander into the Wilderness

Michael McCourt

Wander into the wilderness, where sunlight hits you hot and there are no longer borders between what is permanent and what is fleeting. No edges to define where one might end and another begin. No garden wall around a green and ripened place that might keep a serpent out. No protection from the clawing wind or the oppressive sun spreading out in a wounded sky. No, this is the hard land. The untamed land. A wasteland. Where fear curls itself around you, wraithlike and cold. But, this is also the land of searching and finding. Of death and rebirth. Of restoring what is broken. Of confronting the serpent within, where raspy prayers are offered up under the silvering moonlight, and a heaven made of stars, fires blazing bright, lights the way home.

Remember, you too are light;
You are made of the stuff of stars.

Michael McCourt is a high school Music and English Teacher, and has had work published previously at Paddler Press, and also Every Day Fiction, Green Ink Poetry, and Paper Swans Press. He writes poetry, flash fiction, short stories and is working on his first novel. He lives in Kingston, ON, and is married to a wonderful, brilliant redhead, and together they have two kids and a cat. His writing can be found at goodwords.substack.com  Twitter: @mikejmccourt
Slow Mornings in the Mountains

Matthew Miller

_after B.P. Miller_

It’s good to know that there will be another morning here. But this one: the clouds a foggy canvas behind mountain knobs, and my wife stroking her thumb across the pages of her novel, like smoothing out wrinkles from bed sheets, moving her hand away every once in a while to swirl fingernails behind my ears. Swaying slow, the limbs and cones of pitch pines nuzzled by the smoky breeze of the brook, winding below our cabin. Tomorrow could be different, maybe I will brew Ethiopian coffee before she wakes, maybe whisk some pancakes. The tree trunk ceiling beams would be steeped with dark roasted maple and wildberry. I might splay on the long pile rug, warmed by the fireplace, and sketch the gray ridgeline. She might step from the bedroom, bare feet on cold concrete, arc her back, stretching arms wide to breathe in another morning.
Why the Sun Hesitates

Matthew Miller

She blinks awake, thin elbows poking through the clouds. Covers roll over her shoulders, sliding aside like fog on her exhale.

The clock gives a coy flicker behind the lamp. Quickening voices from the floors below where bare feet brush the concrete.

In leafless trees, thrushes echo with song. These whispers crawl the horizon, hidden calls desirous of her light. After mute winter,

she is embarrassed to rise and be seen by expectant eyes. She fears she is not enough.

Matthew Miller teaches social studies, swings tennis rackets, and writes poetry - all hoping to create home. He and his wife live beside a dilapidating orchard in Indiana, where he tries to shape dead trees into playhouses for his four boys. His poetry has been featured in Whale Road Review, River Mouth Review, EcoTheo Review and Ekstasis Magazine. His work can be found online at mattleemiller.wixsite.com/poetry.
Strip it all away and aren’t we just atoms
pulling breaths in and letting them out,
living beat to beat?
What makes winking glass across a night sky so perfect
and white soap waves crashing so mesmerizing?
Why do sunrises look better in person
and how do the oranges, purples and reds of sunsets
hang in the sky so long?

Caught in orbit from the start,
a universe built in unsuspecting moments,
but like shards of metal collecting at a pole,
you pulled me in.
Still unsure what makes your eyes
mined and polished gems
or what makes your chest rise and fall just right,
but somehow our molecules match-
uneven pieces fitting in all the right places
to make us whole.
How easy it is to forget that you weren’t always there,
but time wrinkled just right to bring us where we are.
Unmarked Seeds

Matthew McGuirk

Just like an unmarked seed,
she comes into the world as anything,
possibilities running in our mind.

Each seed pushed into the soil
grows through opportunities,
some made by them and others made by those around them.
Some are bound to bear fruit,
others to help pain,
some will be crowded out by those that are stronger,
but others will thrive where they are planted.

We push those seeds into the soil,
add necessary nutrients, apply water
and fend off pests.
We make the environment just right,
cultivating success and happiness
even through the onslaught of weeds
and torrent storms.

Matt McGuirk teaches and lives with his family in New Hampshire. BOTN 2021 nominee with words in various lit mags and a debut collection with Alien Buddha Press called Daydreams, Obsessions, Realities available on Amazon and linked on his website. Website: http://linktr.ee/McGuirkMatthew Twitter: @McguirkMatthew Instagram: @mcguirk_matthew.
The silliness of sparrows—
those most delicate
of birds,

the color of mice,
softer than sound,
smaller than the palm
of a child.

These are the birds that don’t flee
the brutality of Buffalo winters.

Huddling together on a bare, ruined branch
chattering and puffed up
complaining about the winters together.

Not unlike all your aunts
gathering for coffee after mass,
spilling into the kitchen,

and all of them looking alike and
singing the same song—
family, church, money problems, the cold, the snow.

As though every February isn’t the same,
the color of a migraine, muddied mounds of snow,
the sun glinting like diamonds off the pristine layer.

If you really look,
you can even see their breaths
just a puff, a wisp of white.
And they look like smokers
huddled outside a bar in winter
in puffer parkas and chattering loudly about sports.
Clutching onto hope—
like the birds clinging to icy branches—
that this will be the year
and how the Bills almost made it all the way.

but next season
but next season
but next season.

The winters in Buffalo always feel like they’ll never end.

Many of the other birds—
the honking majesties of Canada geese
or the harbingers of spring, robin redbreasts—
all fly someplace else, someplace warmer,
maybe near a beach or a place with a view.

Like your well-to-do cousin in Amherst
who takes the family down to Disney
for a week each winter.

But all the sparrows together
with every chirped declamation
against Buffalo’s winters
cry out:

While I breathe, I hope.

Previously, a university instructor of English and Theatre, Colleen E. Kennedy is a writer and communications professional. She is a contributing writer for District Fray, Classical Post, and Washington City Paper. Her poetry has recently appeared in The Decadent Review, The Dillydoun Review, and Heron Tree. She lives in Washington, D.C., and tweets nonsense @ReadColleenK.
Unfamiliar

Peter Lilly

‘... in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand.’ Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Question every earthly authority
The way molten rock challenges mountains
With heat and glow, and a slow, considered,
Hypnotic resolve. Such calamity
As is caused when the foundations fountain
Through the summit, like ants ordered
To war by an innate complicity,
Is not the call of being and breathing.
But to live at a different temperature.
As heat, to melt rampant duplicity.
As light, illuminate daylight thieving.
As liquid, transform our cold container.
Make strange the accepted forms of control,
For each context demands parts of your soul.
Harrowed

Peter Lilly

Speak me into existence, I am yours. 
Or, the you that is yet to be. Transformed by
The speaking, the creative change that pours
From the wellspring of language. As the tide,
Unstoppable and incessantly true.
Yet warm, as the most familiar embrace.
There is a great light in the future’s view,
And new terrain for the radiance of grace
To display across fresh contours, shadows
Exquisite, and abstractly portraying
The inner-workings of the artist’s soul
In ecstatic breath, a visual praying.
For all our doom, we yet have tomorrow,
A landscape of soil, freshly harrowed.
Spring

Peter Lilly

Winter has hidden its frosty face
For another few months of future.
We stand with heels in the snow,
And toes touching the thaw.
Wet, green, and flowing.
Fresh as a spring on timid skin.
Wanting the crystalline cling of water
To give into its moving.
For the brittle to become a torrent,
And to be carried in current
To another here, where
The spring light can change everything.
Keel and Song

Jeff Burt

Even now, amid hatred, violence,
self-achievement and greed,

I raise my head in the morning
like a small bird below the large feeder

watches the jumble of others arrive,
snatch, and depart swiftly

before a raptor lands and sweeps a wing
to scatter fluff, flax, and millet.

Amid flutter and chirp, keel and song,
a new day’s light, I am grateful.
Eau Claire

Jeff Burt

Twelve, I pushed the rowboat
from the pier in the twilight of dawn
when we could tell tree line and east from west,
slipped to the prow ahead of two uncles.
The windless lake still lapped the pier, slurped.
Oars carved eddies in the dark purple of the lake.

The prow aimed at a single yard lamp
across the flowage that dimly searched
the pines and scarce hardwoods.
Water burned, as if a fire
of submerged radiance and starlight.
Oars dove, rose to the air,
wet wood shone as if luminescent,
the way the last wood in a campfire appears to be out until you poke
the white ash and embers reveal.

Often I find myself traveling
to that steady beating of oars,
like a child churning water,
trying to uncover truths
by sifting the ashes of fire.

Jeff Burt grew up in Wisconsin, was tempered in Texas and Nebraska, and found a home in California, though landscapes of the Midwest still populate much of his writing. He has work in Williwaw Journal, Red Wolf Journal, Rat’s Ass Review, Rabid Oak, and won the 2017 Cold Mountain Review Poetry Prize. Other work can be found at https://www.jeff-burt.com.
The Last Waltz of the Firefly

Renee Cronley

I remember those electrified summer evenings, when we ran through the backyard woodlands; the stars fell from the sky and danced around us, as if choreographed to the music of our laughter.

Our innocence infused with the forest air, making the smell of damp moss, wet tree trunks, and flowers just that much sweeter.

It felt like we were breathing for the first time.

They were pieces of magic we caught in our palms and moved into mason jars to light our way home. We whispered goodnight and set them free, watching them set the night on fire in beautiful chaos.

These memories echoing back at me are almost drowned out by the urban sprawl. Pesticides overwhelm the remaining flora that promise to protect the nearby crops.

I have no choice but to breathe through it.

Exterior lights of manicured yards flood the night—a tiny glow waltzes alone in the distance, desperate to synchronize his flashes to a partner before he loses the language of light.

I memorize the flickering before it dims and the sequel to my childhood blinks out.
Renee Cronley is a writer and nurse from Brandon, Manitoba. She studied Psychology and English at Brandon University, and Nursing at Assiniboine Community College. Her work has appeared in *NewMyths.com, Love Letters to Poe*, and many anthologies and literary journals.
For Wink

Candice Kelsey

She had faith in a one-eyed Pitbull named Wink. He lived across the street during the lonely stay-home days of 2021. After teaching on Zoom all day, she would ride her bike through Westport Heights, a few miles from Los Angeles International Airport. She couldn’t hear the engines overhead, but the streets were named Kittyhawk, Flight, and Boeing. She noticed something poetic about a lockdown, an airport, and a girl on a bike but forgot what that was exactly. Her neighbor took Wink on long, slow walks every morning and afternoon. Once he couldn’t get him to stand up and keep moving. The girl on the bike waved every time she saw them. It made her happy.

She remembered that George Harrison’s mother played weekly broadcasts of Radio India while she was pregnant, hoping the Eastern music would be calming. She also remembered George Harrison’s ashes were scattered across the Ganges. Her own mother chain smoked while pregnant. She imagined an ashtray beside her mother’s hospital bed in Labor & Delivery. A text came in a year later—Wink had to be euthanized. She wants to forget he will be reduced to ash. She plucks the spokes of her bike like a sitar.

Candice Kelsey is in her 24th year of teaching and currently lives in Georgia. She serves as a creative writing mentor with PEN America’s Prison & Justice Writing Program; her poetry appears in Poets Reading the News and Poet Lore among other journals. Candice’s first collection, Still I am Pushing, explores mother-daughter relationships as well as toxic body messages. She won the Two Sisters Writing Contest, was chosen as a finalist in Cutthroat’s Joy Harjo Prize, and has been nominated for a Best of the Net and two Pushcarts. Find her at @candicekelsey1 and www.candicemkelseypoet.com
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Some day they will know what I mean.

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Jérémi Doucet

Robert Pegel

Sarah Wang

Dan Farkas

Paulette West

Light...the answer a faraway echo of birdsong, the robin waking to greet the morning light...

from: While My Child Naps, I Read a Book in the Sun by Claire Taylor

Paddler Press Volume 4

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