THE TIGER MOTH REVIEW

ISSUE 12

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A biannual journal of art + literature that engages with nature, culture, the environment and ecology

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The Tiger Moth Review is an eco-conscious journal based in Singapore that publishes art and literature engaging with the themes of nature, culture, the environment and ecology. The journal publishes primarily in English, but also accepts non-English work and their translated English counterparts. We are committed to creating a space for minority, marginalised and underrepresented voices in society.

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Cover image: *Mae Boun Nam* © Ethan Leong

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Editor's Preface

Mae Boua Ngeun © Patrick Rouxel

Remember this girl from the Elephant Conservation Centre (ECC) in Xayaboury, Laos? Last issue, I was sharing about the urgency of raising funds to buy Mae Boua Ngeun from her mahout so that she could spend the rest of her life growing up like a wild elephant under the care and protection of the ECC. Well, we did it! I am so happy to share that through individual and collective efforts, the fundraiser by Patrick Rouxel managed to raise 84, 800 euros, and Mae Boua Ngeun is now officially under the ECC's care since 8 May 2024. When I heard the news, my heart was full of joy and relief. A beautiful girl would get the chance to grow up in the wild and contribute towards the conservation of the Asian Elephant. To everyone who has donated and/or helped to publicise this cause, thank you!

The cover image of this issue by **Ethan Leong** pays homage to interspecies kinships and relational ways of being on earth, themes that we continue to discover and explore in Issue 12. Whether it is "bury[ing] [our] toes in the warm mud/ until there is dirt everywhere" as in **Ilika Motani**'s opening poem, living alongside nocturnal nature in an urban city in *The Urban Common Palm Civets of Singapore* by **Tan Yong Lin**, imagining a woman slowly transforming into whale form in **Elizabeth Hansen**'s *Sea Life*, negotiating our relationship with the wilderness and the domestic in the works of **Adam Anders**, **Alka Balain** and **Johnny Kovatch**, or staying with the more alchemical processes of life, death and the afterlife in the poetry and prose of **Meenakshi Palaniappan**, **Pauline P Lee** and **Lea Camille Smith**, the creative works in Issue 12 remind us of what it means to live on earth in right relationship with others.

Thich Nhat Hanh writes in *Zen and the Art of Saving the Planet* that "You don't need to be perfect. What's important is that you have a path to follow, a path of love." On the cover image, an elephant walks with a man along a path. I wonder, who they are? I wonder, where they might be going? I wonder, who they might meet along the way?

As you walk your own path, may Issue 12 be a gentle companion to you. May you find love wherever you go.

Esther Vincent Xueming
The Tiger Moth Review

Dirt
Ilika Motani

My mother does not like dirt, but I want to run wild through a meadow
and feel dirt and grass beneath the soles of my bare uncalloused feet.
I want to feel the sun in my eyes and wind in my hair. I want
beautiful weeds to tickle my calves, mimosas to close as I brush
against their leaves. I want tangible, physical proof that I am,
and that life is around me.

I want a butterfly to gently lower itself onto my arm, feel its insect legs
crawl across my skin. Though my skin will crawl I want to remain
silent, still, like a mantis before its attack. I want to suppress
all of society's urge to cringe away.

For the tree does not flinch from the bird that perches on its branches,
making itself a home. The flower does not squeal and squirm when
the bee lands on its petals to drink in its sweet nectar.
Life is not repulsed by itself, just as it does not shy away from dirt.
Nature, in its purity, is not clean.

I want to sit by a swift-running river and bury my toes in the warm mud
until there is dirt everywhere I can see and dirt everywhere I cannot.
My mother will bitterly complain, for she does not like dirt.
But I do not want to rinse off the dirt and being from my hands and feet,
for I am part of nature, and I am not clean.

First published in *InkLink Issue 0, 2024*

Two poems by Lizzie Ferguson

My Peace Corp Years in Fruit

First there were guavas, given to me the moment I arrived
and all through those first days in the village, hand-chosen from the young tree
by my twelve-year-old neighbor and my first real friend here.

Then oranges, the sweet citrus stung as the peels fell
into the grave of the brother we buried that month.
Eating four a day, I perfected the corkscrew peeling method
as we drank our orange juice and tears.

Then grapefruit came with the winds of harmattan,
and as the dust stuck to everything, I would make sour sugar water
from the large fruits in attempts to squeeze out dirt and all the anxieties
of living life in this new place.

Then mangoes in the dryness of the sun mixed
with the smell of my own sweat, the heat so heavy I wasn't sure
I could lift it one more day. Marigold colored mangoes like mini-suns
reminding me of redemption.

Yam Harvest in Togo
Lizzie Ferguson

Six women each with a knife
smile while surrounding me
in the middle of the mountain of yams.

The leftover peels spread like streams of running water
beneath their bare toes. Twelve hands that peel
back layers of rough skin as if chipping bark from a tree.

After another hour marked only with the silent sound
of the blade, Zenabou begins to hum a haunting tune,
closes her eyes, still peeling as five other voices join in.

Only mine is silent, not knowing the words
to her grandmother's lyrical language
passed to her from the ocean waves.

I know the ocean but she does not whisper
ancestral messages to me, I know only
how to hold a knife, how to sit still.

In the Shadow of the Flood (Corey Bar)
Avery Martin

in the shadow of the flood
we settle slowly deeper in the river's gut
as summer broadens around us

my mother swears she'll never be like her father

highwater's memory shimmers around us
I swear I'll never be like her
brace and row through the raging past
thick above the surface's melodious midsummer
dance—she laughs over cobbles between storms
our air is transient
seasonal
breathe in the passage we travel these months
where dusty stones and willows house spiders and horseflies

but mind the torrent
pressing through time:

we are guests here and the snow is coming
we will soon be swept away

Mudslide as Grief as Metaphor for Mudslide
California, January 2018
Jenny Boyar

Earth is the steadiest of forms, which when colliding
turns to mountains, so if the ground gives out
on the mountain, which makes the mountain
collapse, what more can be said? Language
dissolves. Paradise was first defined
by loss, and what came after was a hazy memory
of what could no longer rise. Grief was not the fire.
Though it burned. Grief was not the mud.
Though there was no way to see through it.
Grief was in the after: the dust collecting
as a thin layer of time over our lives.
Grief was, finally, in the falling.
What also falls: birds from the sky in sudden
pursuit of prey, cities, stock markets, stars. Fools
for love. A mountain returning to sea in waves.
And writing will not bring the mountain back.
Nor the past.

Abel and the Avalanche
Adam Anders

All of them different, innumerable, free, touching all of creation, creating a single pristine blanket. Snow had that to its character: to come together out of singular beauty into a unifying presence. Abel stuck out his tongue. Despite the flakes falling thick, he couldn't catch one. Several then landed on his tongue at once. Their cold refocused him on his path into the wilderness.

The landscape rolled, undulating between the pine branches hanging low, full of snow. His wide skis glided easily between the mounds covering the earth. Far behind him, he'd left the highway that cut a straight path through the landscape. Before him, pines so ancient they could almost be manifested myths, opened a path as he approached the rugged and uneven walls of forest green. With each new sentinel of the wilderness towering before him, the white waving route whirled its way all the while forward.

Never back, never again. The parched world was now his past. At the last campsite, he'd left his worn, leather boots. The journey through the wilderness would be best accomplished with ski boots. At the campsite before that, he'd left his guitar. There was no one to sing to anyway. Here, where snow lay heavy and the wind whistled through the voids in between, the activities that displaced him in the world of stress and obligation seemed errant, distracting. Those bygone days that ran headlong into one another, blending into a toxic cocktail of doubt and loneliness, rendered him lost, forgotten. When routine became an ephemeral thing, dreams and fantasy came alive to offer a new space, driving him out of the furnace and into this. Echoes died here. Time ceased to steal.

Scratched onto a strip of old paper torn from some once-important document, he immortalized the emotions of the moment in a poem and tied it to a nearby branch with one of the dangling threads of his clothes:

Dawn starts in pale light
Snow washes away the dust
Off encrusted skin

Abel had no real plans, only intuition, skis, and a backpack of basic supplies. The wilderness held impossible promises of remarkable things. Remarkable because they weren't of the decaying world, vitrified in its standardization, in its cold, cyclical mode of production-consumption, of means-to-a-never-ending-end. This snow was just as tireless as the world he'd left behind, only it drifted without the rigor of imposition. Here, a long-forgotten magic throve. It spoke to him in sighs and whispers, drifting on the crystalline petals of a new season.

There was something about these snowflakes, floating where the wind would take them, blanketing the ragged world made up of bits and pieces. Under snowfall, everything came together. Under snowfall, all the fires of industry were tamed, all the abnormalities of creation, the estranged, and the wild, embraced. Someone would tend to this. There must be the few who sought this space. The mountains lay beyond these trees. The wind that ran down its slopes and into the pines carried whispers of hope into his soul:

Ashes of the fire
Black and gray against pure snow
Shadowed by my shape

And so, he marked that spot, as before, plucking a thread from his frayed clothes. For the abandonment of the working world would not mean the abandonment of ritual. Traditions, he knew, were soul-born and soul-bred. This novel, poetic ritual would mark a new life and his enchanted path through the mythic woods.

Sunlight breaking through the clouds illuminated the grandiosity of heaven on earth. Light vibrated through the ice crystals and in his every cell. What the emptiness could hold was the stuff of wonder and freedom. Abel raised his head to the skies again, closing his eyes. Snowflakes landed on his skin in cold kisses. Now faster. He opened his eyes. Above the pines, gray clouds moved towards the sun. The storm was moving back in.

As he slid beyond a stand of trees, the terrain opened. He stopped. In the middle of the glade, stood a child. Dressed for winter, the child was smiling, watching the snowflakes fall in thick chunks. Confusion swept over Abel in a dry wave. Panic threatened to break him, prickling at the edges of his skin, but the child's countenance stayed his wild heart. Those tender green eyes revealed the captivating mystery of all, born in each breath. It seemed the child's every sense fed on the infinite wealth of a moment.

"Hello there. Are you lost?" Abel said as he approached the child.

The child looked at him with the same wonderment with which he looked at everything else. It must have been about two or three years old.

"Are mommy and daddy nearby?" Abel asked. The child only shook its head before it turned to play with the snow around it.

Youthful giggles filled the air along with the snow that the child was tossing up above its head. Abel gave a half-smile, at once amused and concerned. The child lobbed some snow his way.

"Hey!" Abel chuckled and removed his skis, coming closer.

The child laughed and flung more snow in his direction. He caught a mouthful to the child's utter delight. Abel skimmed the surface of the snow with his glove and flicked it in the child's direction. A puff of snow covered the child's face. The child stopped and blinked, open mouthed.

"Sorry!" Abel said.

The child only smiled and walked towards him. When he reached Abel, he took his hand, and looked up at him expectantly.

Abel watched him, not knowing how to react.

"Will you take me to mommy and daddy?" They were the first words that came out without thought, words in which he sought comfort, understanding.

The child waded through the snow to Abel's skis and climbed over them, sinking them below the snowy surface.

"Hey," Abel said, walking over and kneeling so that he was face-to-face with the child. "What's your name?"

The child jumped onto Abel, knocking them both into the snow. The child sat on Abel's chest, laughing, and spreading snow over him.

Abel was also laughing, but he sat up and held the child, observing him.

"Let's go find your parents, huh?" He said, eyeing him keenly.

Lifting the child up and holding him in one arm, he snapped his skis back on and moved towards the spot in the glade where he'd first seen the kid. He searched for tracks that might lead him to others, or to the direction whence the child came, but there were none.

Abel stuck out his neck and called to the wilderness. "Hello?" Nothing. He looked around. The landscape was forbidding and welcoming at once: there were no evident paths to be found, but the pristine snow opened every direction to possibility. He glanced at the child again. He received a smile in return. His heart strummed his ribs. This was not only unexpected, but it was also a responsibility, and, despite appearances, not a small one. He had no idea what he'd do with the child, but he couldn't leave it in the glade. Adjusting the waist straps on his backpack so that they wrapped around the child and held it close to his chest, he kept moving through the woods.

Along with the snowfall and the surrounding serenity, Abel's rhythmic breathing seemed to captivate the child. Its cherub cheeks made it difficult to tell whether it was a boy or a girl, but he supposed it didn't matter. Only the patter of snow, the odd bird's cry, and Abel's breath disturbed the winter air. All the while he wondered about the child's parents, hoping he'd hear them call through the woods. As darkness grew out of the eastern sky, he turned his thoughts to a campsite.

The fire hypnotized the child; Abel was thankful the child knew not to come too close, and that the porridge seemed to satisfy it. When the child soiled itself, Abel found it was a boy, wearing a cloth diaper—easy enough to wash in the snow and dry over the fire. The boy soon fell asleep, wrapped in a thin blanket Abel had with him. While the moon was young, he occasionally watched the boy sleep:

Uncontained wonder
Curiosity heightens
A daunting prospect

In the morning, giggles and flying snow woke him. He smiled but the breath he took weighed heavy on his chest. He was grateful for the boy's endless joy that only seemed to grow when Abel talked or played with him.

While he packed for the day's journey, the child watched him with interest, attempting even at one point to help place the supplies back into his pack. Abel lifted the child and inhaled deeply. The wind brought with it a beckoning: the smoke of a distant fire wafted briefly by.

Less than half a day's journey was laden with a whirlwind of thoughts and emotions. Thoughts of who lit the fire: perhaps the boy's parents, perhaps a forest ranger, perhaps someone like him. He'd grown fond of the boy in less than twenty-four hours. There existed between them an understanding that he hadn't experienced with anyone before. Anxiety racked his lungs and weakened his knees in the deepening snow. He stopped to catch his breath and let the boy roll in the snow:

Uninhibited
Watching him play in the snow
Singular freedom

Just as the sun seemed to be reaching its peak, Abel and the boy met with a river splitting the snowy ground. Over an uneven bridge of sporadic rocks, they clambered across. Then they came across a new space, one born of dreams, of the myth on which those woods fed, but most of all, born out of the world that had ruled humanity out of its equation. A collection of tents and other shelters made of branches and stones huddled in a glade that made a kind of boundary—a natural border wall that felt more like the permanent cushy embrace of the pines and firs. They called it Elysium. In Ancient Greek lore, the righteous and the heroic chosen by the gods to live a blessed and happy life after death would be whisked to these Fields at the edge of the world whereupon they would remain for all eternity. The souls here came from places he'd never been, from places they'd long forgotten. They'd come by different paths to reach the same dawning vista. The Elysians as they sometimes referred to themselves, were the heroes of what being human meant to Abel—seeking solace in community and an off-the-grid life. By Abel's estimation, they were also the renegades, having, like him, refused death-by-rat-race. Instead, they chose to kill that part of themselves that didn't belong to them, the part manufactured by modern society, by the global monetary system and its malignant outgrowths. And here they'd swept in on the winds of nonconformity, blessed with raw life after mythic death. These forgotten few were a new species, a new kind of human—one in love with creation. They worshiped the simplicity and honesty of the season, of the moment.

A woman named Sierra was the leader of this tribe. A pariah whose character was for Abel, of heretofore unmet pre-eminence, it was she who greeted them, bubbling with a simultaneous eccentricity, playfulness, and vulnerability. To an outsider, she may have seemed crazy. But Abel knew that eccentrics were the guardians of true wisdom. She immediately took the boy into her arms. When she asked after the boy's name, Abel explained the circumstances of their meeting.

"Typical for these times," she replied.

"I had no idea," Abel said with some measure of unexpected relief.

Sierra only looked him deeply in the eyes, or perhaps, beyond them, with an expression of understanding.

She invited him into their commonwealth. There, amongst the hammocks made of rope and the Tibetan prayer flags flapping devotions into the wind, children ran freely into the arms of the adults variously engaged in reading, relaxing, or woodworking. One or two

tended to several fires spread throughout the encampment. A couple stood naked, half-hidden by a tree, washing themselves with snow. Still other Elysians ducked in and out of tents carrying foodstuff or knitting. Smoke rose from the center of several tipis built further from the central fires. The boy he'd come with now freely joined the other children.

Greeted by all who saw him, Abel was soon sat in front of a fire and given a meal of dried fruit, nuts, and cornbread. The Elysians asked after Abel's story. What he told them was received with understanding if not familiarity. This piqued his interest, but before he could dig deeper, an outburst of youthful shrieks and air-bound snow grabbed the attention of those gathered around the fire.

A snowball fight had erupted amongst the children and several adults had joined, only to be attacked by groups of kids and tackled to the snowbanks.

"Come on!" Sierra pulled him by the hand and into the fray.

It was the levity. The levity of the snow, of their hearts, of Sierra's grace. Like a smooth slope it opened the way to a simple joy in this simplest of seasons. Abel knew then that the secret of winter was in its abundance. The snowball fight felt like a ceremony, a celebration of the communal blanket, pristine, cleansing, and immortal in its season, year after year. In all its chaos, it held a rhythm, a song that only creatures of the earth in their most natural state could make:

Clouds of sparkling snow
Flies into smiling faces
No competing sides

The campfires burned high after the snowball fight, wicking the damp off the players, and simultaneously sparking a long-dimmed light in Abel's heart. Where life thrived on the freedom of spirit and place, anyone might find their roots.

Elysium soon became a home for Abel, the tribe a new family to call his own. They asked nothing of him but gave him space to be. There, Abel would find he was a prisoner, in a void built by obliviousness.

It was by a dying campfire one evening that he brought up an idea that would set his path before him anew. The fires required more wood.

"We could go up the mountain, find dead branches and ski them down," Abel suggested. He perked up, proud of his plan, and he watched Sierra for her reaction.

Sitting next to him her eyes remained on the fire a moment before they drifted to Kora, an elder Elysian.

Kora clicked her tongue and shook her head. "That, we cannot do." The words rolled out slowly, with deliberation and weight that somehow pulled at Abel's shoulders.

Abel turned to Sierra, "Why not?"

"Tell the story, Kora," Sierra said to the Elysian matron.

"Very well." Kora brought herself forward on her tree-stump stool and stared deeply into the fire. "The beginnings of our tribe were met with significant challenges, as you might imagine. The world being what it is, finding a place and establishing ourselves

required a knowledge of the terrain that could only be learned with time. There was one amongst us, Daphnis, who had a lust for exploration and discovery."

She paused. At the mention of this name, Sierra stood and left for her tent. Abel watched her go, but Kora continued.

"Daphnis suggested exploring the mountain for resources and for terrain that might be suitable for farming with the burgeoning spring, for we had brought many seeds with us. He was dissuaded from doing so on account of his ignorance of the terrain, and the need for most of us to stay behind with the children. Nonetheless, Daphnis would not be deterred. Sierra went with him. Together they hiked for many days, ski touring to the nearest farmable plateau in a too-warm winter. When they reached this point, Daphnis declared he'd stay and clear the land of logs and broken trees before spring, and that he would return in a week's time. Sierra countered that they should take the available wood and berries back to the Elysian camp. Daphnis refused. Saddened, Sierra agreed to his plan.

Not three days after Sierra's return, an avalanche tore its way from the peak. We could see it had gone in the direction whence Sierra had come, and snow had slowed only just before it reached our encampment, blocking any possibility of ascent and rescue. When the snow had melted, we saw the land had shifted under the weight of the avalanche, and the path was inaccessible.

Several of us, including Sierra, have tried several ways of finding him. To no avail. Nature seems to have claimed him."

The story lay heavy in Abel's heart, and he followed his first instinct to seek out Sierra. He found her in her tent, hugging her knees and watching an oil lamp burn.

"I'm sorry for your loss," he said.

She thanked him without looking up from the flame.

Perhaps it was the tears glistening on the edges of her eyelids, but more likely it was the same force that had brought him there, the whirling void within that sought the infinite abundance of nature, a hunger he believed the aged majesty of a weathered mountain might fill. And travel wrenched at his heart and moved him to spill stubborn words.

"I know winter, and I know skiing. I can do this. And if I do, maybe it'll bring closure, to everyone," he offered.

She tore her eyes away from the flame to stare deeply into his.

"You don't know this snowfall. You don't know this mountain."

"Come with me," he said.

"This isn't my journey to be had."

"You'll feel better, and so will I."

Perhaps it was his determination to go, perhaps it was hers not to join him, but something slumped in her then. "This is something you need to do alone, or not at all," she said.

The flame leapt briefly but seemed to flick in his gut in that moment. He rose and left. But when destiny drew him forward, ritual yet remained. He tied a poem to a tree with a thread from one of the tattered prayer flags:

Mountain deity
Show me your world and I'll know
Where desire meets will

Dawn burned a rosy hue into the pale blue remnants of the evening. In that space where animals still sleep and dreams are most vivid, Abel quietly carried reverie into that first flush. The new day was a blank canvas for a new reality. The support of his skis and the grip of their climbing skins took him sliding upwards into the unknown. The groaning of the snow underfoot sounded for him with perfect clarity. The pace he'd set himself had a particular rhythm, like clockwork moving hands that pointed to every passing moment. Uncountable vertical rise towered before him, utterly remote and removed beyond the world. It grasped his heart and before long, neither the tents of the settlement nor the faces of his new friends could be seen by his tearful eyes except as a vision. When even the laughter of the children had faded, he still sought their song:

All night I listened
To the winter wind howling
At the mountainside

High beyond the world, Abel saw things few would know how to imagine. Sheer stillness in a constant flow, silence resounding at immeasurable depth. The trees were now sparse and scattered, growing crooked like forgotten tombstones. But on he pushed, always under the shifting shadow of the great peak above him. In the evening, he set a small campfire and watched the night. The constellations blinked dimly behind a misty haze. They were hardly recognizable. The sky, though replete with stars, was no longer organized and traceable by man-made lines. Shapes that had marked a thousand-year reign over the infinite, faded into indigo. Pinions to pinholes in the night curtain. Light trembled, drifted, winked. Stars, slack in the firmament. And Abel sat, floating on an aberrant sea:

In the dark starlight
Clutching memories for hope
The fire brings no warmth

When morning came, he found himself stiffened by sleep. To ignore the body was to live in the wilderness of antagonism. And so, he resolved to shepherd himself. Remaining in his camp for the day, he watched the landscape and nature move with it. The bare bones of the mountain protruded at that height. Rocks, thrown together, the color of eternity, covered in soft, warm moss.

Towards evening, a storm rolled in. It swallowed everything. A meager shelter dug into the snow became a shrine to memory, draped in white erasure with the coming of the new day. He'd found the boy in such a new space. He'd found Elysium in such blindness. So, he watched. Each snowflake held the Earth with it, the lakes, and the clouds they once came from, the air that life breathed, the memories of a thousand generations, life and lives untold, unwritten. But in it, always renewal. The cycle of nourishment hypnotized him into abeyance until nothing was left but nature.

Days passed. Time slipped away. The storm broke. The land had changed. All there was left was to ski through it. It happened after several turns into the deep powder. A crack raced across the mountain face and a slab of detached snow began to slide down the fall line. The slope rolled into a churning blend of fast flowing snow, a river of frozen water sweeping away everything in its path. The deluge carried an undertow that threatened oblivion, but two trees standing next to one another offered an exit. Wrapping each arm around the respective trunks, he embraced the wood, clinging to life as the grasping current of snow pulled from below and pushed from above. Breath came in irregular gasps, in the spaces between the cold dust. Life remained in the liminal space between intense focus and surrender, in the not expecting to take breath, but in taking it fully when provided, in the simultaneous flexibility of the trunks and their unwillingness to break. Life existed at the behest of the force majeure, and in the indomitable will to remain. Life was death and rebirth. Both trees. And him. Both the avalanche and the mountain. The avalanche slowed and stopped. He wept. And then he knew.

Nature was a thread, and in the whitest maze of the mountain, the cool droplets of its frayed ends brought him to life. The crystalline dendrites of water and ice held a manifest ancestral freedom. A space always changing, growing, nourishing in the way most needed in the moment:

a flake of ice a fleck of life
the world of life within us

The snowpack was uneven on the downhill return, but every turn was a new chance to experience the freedom of connection. At Elysium, the tribe was welcoming. Every set of eyes provided a new perspective, a unique shepherding modality with which to live free and with purpose. None more so perhaps than the boy's. In them, the reflection of a man grown, the coherence of eternal youth and the earned wisdom of adventure, the reflection of all the parts of a tribe living in community.

They had no plans, only intuition, and the promise of remarkable things. The mountain song resounded with celebration, of a long winter lived well. Each breath, an ode, and an opportunity to dance.

Yellow-spotted Salamander
Nathan Erwin

I watch you come home,
see your headlights pass
across the trees along the yard.

We all shudder like a fire in an open field
as the clouds dance in a dense tumult.
Payattentiontous.

Attention is the first sign of love, attention to breathing & waking
as the worst month ends. The moths
have no marches to attend, without light they scatter.

Have you forgotten?
Uncover. Beneath the discarded shovel, leaf litter
in the frost, beside the glacial boulder.

But instead, you slam the car door, vacant stars, you stay.
You refrain from worry, touching
your glands, your smooth neck.

I was born along the reservoir,
in the furnace of the first glassblower.
My family blocked the Kinzua Dam

with the military might of States,
O–but we are small & know nothing
of force.
Let your disposition do no disgrace
to your approval, & again
The other way. You threw our future

into the fire. Extinguished the lichen.
Eleven and a half months we're under your feet.
As you stand in tears,

the driveway whispers the name of another lover
who asked nicely to be friends.
While confusion curtains your morning,

I cut it up in the vernal pools
Eat worms & lay two hundred eggs
I am an unprovoked thing.

Come past the streams where your Daddy prayed,
& rip out your pituitary, reconnect with your throat,
& I will give you one of us to eat, a smoldering seed.

We are ancestral bodies, on fire, into emergence.
The bellowing loneliness
at reclaiming how to speak. Unburnished,

you are welcome
with a planting stick inside our house. You must give
to understand

why
we call to you
through the silver canopy of rain.

Broken-Winged Heron
Tim Murphy

At a small, wooded pond
near where I live dwells
a broken-winged heron.
He does not exist
to inspire wonder,
though wonder
he inspires.

He possesses only himself,
not pushing parts away
to be whole or belong
to something larger.
For only one species insists
disability must be fixed
or assigned perpetual shame.

The heron does not write
dreams in the night
of his wing mended
but of the hunt that feeds him,
comforts of nest that hold him,
dangers he must ever know
that breathe him into being.

Bedbound for a year,
I still dream of that heron,
still hope we meet again
someday, must believe
the beautiful creature is still
alive, as well as one can be
amidst unsettling times.

Prayer to the Patron Saint of Trapped Creatures
Anna Molenaar

My parents gave themselves a master suite in the basement of our house, and with it came the window well. A small pit four feet deep and surrounded by rippled metal, it made for the perfect pitfall trap. Back when the basement was unfinished, I would tiptoe on bare feet on the cold, dusty concrete to peer into the window, looking to see if there were any critters in need of rescue. Oftentimes there were.

Here are just a few of memorable visitors:

One: Countless toads. At one point a few must have fallen in, and due to the humidity and insect population of the well, decided not to make a fuss and just settle down. They reigned for many years, sitting on the stone windowsill and looking in with grumpy, judgmental eyes, only occasionally moving, and then disappearing for the winter months only to return like magic for another summer of putting up with my brothers and I using butterfly nets to catch and examine them, shrieking when they defense-peed on us.

Let me return like magic, just the same as I was but different. Let me sit still for hours and not mind, making a home for myself in only that space in which I occupy. Let me put up with things without wanting to leave.

Two: Baby bunnies. When you are only a few inches tall, it can be very difficult to figure out what that little metal lip on the ground is for, and why you cannot just jump over it. Every spring a few baby bunnies would tumble down in the night, and my father would carefully coax them into a net and set them free in the yard. Bodies all atremble, they almost didn't seem real, and my dad was careful to work quickly and quietly, so as not to frighten them to death. They seemed so small to be all by themselves, but by the time their eyes were bright and alert and they could get themselves into trouble falling down the window well, they were pretty much self-sufficient and would hop right off into the bushes like that was their plan all along; they just needed us to help them get there.

Let me figure out why you cannot just jump over certain things. Let me fall, confused and frightened into something I cannot describe. Let me tremble for a while. Let me be coaxed into rescue, and then set free.

Three: A very, very angry muskrat. He must have already had issues with his height, and its betrayal leading him to being trapped made him all the more pissed off. He required more than a gauzy net; this time a bucket was lowered down on a jump rope. Upon being pulled to freedom, however, confused and frantic from all the attention, he leaped right back down. This time he put up a bit more of a fight as we tried to coax him into the bucket, almost as if he wanted to stay down there after all. When we did get him back up he decided he'd had enough, and lunged at us, hopping with bared teeth. I am unsure what he had hoped to accomplish by this. Maybe he was simply incensed to violence from the stress of it all, but I will give him this: he was quick and he almost got me.

My dad stepped in and chased him off, not without a few retreats of his own, and soon the muskrat was breasting the grass with haste, surely heading off to find some other family to terrorize.

Let me hold onto my anger, tend to it. Let me know when I should absorb its heat to keep myself comfortable, and when to extinguish it.

Four: Raccoons. There have been raccoons, and that is all we know. Sometimes all we get is a glimpse before they shake themselves off, look to the moon, and ascend the brick wall to freedom.

Let me know when to save myself, and when I do, show me the way.

The Urban Common Palm Civets of Singapore
Tan Yong Lin

The large trees in our housing estates are the perfect refuge for our population of common palm civets, who have adapted well to the urban environment. In the night, when human traffic is low, these nocturnal civets will descend from their trees to hunt, moving from tree to tree and prowling on rooftops.

One interesting fact about urban common palm civets is that they have a diet that includes fruits, insects, small mammals, and birds. They are skilled climbers and are often observed scavenging for food in trees and on the ground. In Singapore, these civets play a crucial role in seed dispersal, as they help in spreading seeds of fruits they consume to different areas.

Masters of stealth, the common palm civets of Singapore are light on their paws, silently navigating and exploring our housing estates at night. In my course of documenting them through photos, I have seen curious individuals scaling streetlights, or just taking a moment to rest and watch unaware passersby and community cats, with each individual civet showcasing a different personality.

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To the Wild Rabbit I May Not Have Saved
Devon Neal

Sometimes you inherit things by accident,
like a baby rabbit, still breathing,
taken from between the teeth of the cat.

Did you know rabbits can die from stress?

I gathered cut grass and spearheads
of spinach from the fridge into a toy box
and scooped it up for the night.

Some animals don't need to be rescued,

the website said, baby birds warbling
at the feet of trees, squirrels cradled in leaves,
deer folded gently along the brush.

Repair the bunny nest with toothpicks and wait.

They don't see the cat, the neighborhood dogs,
the quick heartbeat in the toy box in the bathtub.
Many well-meaning people kidnap wildlife.

Many well-meaning people kidnap.

I hope the car didn't roar too loud
as we sat in its belly, the low hum
of music soothing enough. I took it

to the tall grass behind the hospital

in the dew-coined morning, in the back
of the parking lot where employees
filled the air with tar. Its obsidian eye

blinked before I left, and then I didn't know

how much poison stress swam inside,
if the damage was already done,
or if it found a way to live

far from the teeth of our well-meaning backyard.

You Taught Us To Make Space
Meenakshi Palaniappan

You taught us to make space
for you,
to adjust books,
beds for your perches,
close all the windows,
fill the room with twigs,
nibbled paintings,

to slide routines,
augment Zoom calls
with your call
– after-school song stop –
wipe down sills,
open up purses
for millet sprays,
vet visits,

to make room in our hearts
for a curved beak,
verdant shades of green
tinted red, aquamarine,
for your name to nest,
to grow around
the gap you left
when you left.

Persimmon
Pauline P Lee

1

Your name: Puah Chew Teh. The Chinese characters are 潘朝潮—the first and third characters have the same three drops of water in them, because you were born by the sea. You also travelled across the sea, and died along a different coast you called home for more than seven decades. The second and third characters have the same word in them that mean "morning", and together those characters named you "the morning tide". The last half of your family name in the first character is the word that they used to describe your entire generation: 过番客, the sojourners, migrants that sailed down the South China Sea to make a home in Nanyang.

You were home to me, but I wonder now if you ever knew it. You loved the house and the compound all around it, even though you never felt like you were meant to be there, because it was your daughter's home and not your son's. You had no sons. In Mandarin, you were my 外公 *wai gong*, but I never understood why my maternal grandfather so dear to my heart should be called my "outside grandfather", the other grandfather. I called you Ah Gong.

2

The fruit trees all around our house were planted by you: papaya and banana in front of the house; jackfruit in the clearing at the back, just in front of the rubber plantation; custard apple close to the back fence; mango that never bore any fruit. When there were any papaya or jackfruit ripening, you'd lean a ladder against the tree, climb up to the fruit and wrap it with some newspaper and raffia string, so that the birds wouldn't get to it before you did. You made a special contraption for harvesting fruit, using a long pole and an empty milk tin—holes on the side of the milk tin, some pieces of wire, a long bamboo pole, the kind we used to hang our laundry out to sun on. This tin would be raised on the pole high up to the tree, and with a twist, the almost-ripe papaya (or at times our neighbour's coconut) would drop into the tin. You were so matter-of-fact about it, your brows furrowed in concentration as the sweat drops trickled down your face. In my memory now, that would have been a moment to clap my hands and jump for joy, when you brought a fruit down. But I was not that sort of a child. So I just watched you quietly.

I only learnt many years later that the papaya plant is dioecious—since each tree has either only male or female flowers, it takes some wind, a passing bee or hawk moth to pollinate the flowers so they will fruit. So much chance involved, and all I saw was fruit after fruit coming down perfectly ripe in your milk tin pole.

Jackfruit harvests were more of an event. The ripened fruit was huge, like a very well-fed baby. You had to climb the tree with a small parang to cut the fruit down, and it only occurs to me now that I have no memory of watching you do that. It sounds so

dangerous to me now, but I don't remember feeling scared for you then. That must have been before I took over from you the duty of worrying, of caring for. The image in my mind is of you squatting in the front yard, old newspaper spread like a mat before you, the fragrant jackfruit already split in two on the paper. You have a flask of salt water with you and many small plastic bags. You cut each one of the sweet, crisp yellow fruits out of the white strands of sticky sap in the rind, then rinse them in the salt water before putting them in the bags. "These can sell for RM2 at the market outside," you say. There is too much fruit for a family to eat, because one cannot eat too much jackfruit without feeling sick from the "heatiness". The sap made your hands itch, so you never let me touch it. I only got the clean fruit to eat. That squeaky sound it made on my fingers, the salty-sweetness of your labour.

3

Before you were grandfather and fruit tree climber, you were a kelong builder in Singapore. You had to dive into the seawater with no gear at all, planting stilts on which these wooden huts on water could stand. You were a natural swimmer, so you never understood why it took so long for me to learn to swim. When I told you I was going for swimming classes, I was already nine years old. You were surprised anyone needed classes to swim—"Just jump into the water and move your arms and legs!" Swimming was just like walking to you; it came easily, a matter of course. But those years of diving into the seawater all day left their mark on your body. The you I knew was so very tanned, and your eyes always had a cloudy film over them. Your vision was poor, and only now am I suddenly wondering: What did I look like to you? What could you see?

You also told me about how, after being out at sea all day in the sun, you would come back to shore and have a cold soda. "It is the best thing, but it is so bad for your stomach. You shouldn't drink so much soda." I never saw you have a soda. Every time I asked if you wanted one, you'd tell me the story of how much you had drunk when you were a kelong builder. Sometimes I offered you a soda just to hear the story again.

I've been trying to find out more about kelong builders in Singapore in the 1950s-60s. I haven't found much. It was not the typical job for migrants from Swatow, China where you'd come from. Most other Teochews were labourers and lived by the Singapore River. I don't know where you lived on work weeks, but you'd set up home in Pontian, Johor, and traverse the Johor-Singapore Causeway every time you went back to your family. You were the first of three generations crossing the Causeway regularly. Apparently, being a kelong builder was a rarer job, and that meant you earned a little more than the labourers did. So you got to take a taxi across the Causeway when you went home, and you would so proudly tell me, decades later, "The taxi driver thought I was a Singaporean towkay. Maybe it is because I was wearing my Montagut shirt." Your Montagut shirt. That was all you wore, when you were not bare-chested or wearing a 555 white singlet. The Montagut polo t-shirts with dress pants were your going-out clothes, and you had them in variations of pastel colours, some with stripes across the chest, some with a faint embossed print. I

have no idea how you came upon them; they were expensive, a luxury in your time, and you looked so very good in them.

I only recently googled Montagut and found out that they are a French family business that was established in 1880, starting with silk apparel and then going into knitwear. I don't know how they came to Southeast Asia, but they're still here, in the departmental stores that young people these days don't go to anymore. For your ninetieth birthday, I bought you a Montagut shirt from Singapore. It was light blue, with bold blue stripes across the chest. It was tricky to get the size right, because you had lost some weight by then. You wore it for your birthday banquet that Mama organised for you, and I have a photograph of you in it, sitting with Ah Ma in front of two big cakes in the shape of 9 and 0, nine tall candles lit. You were in the middle of a clap and you were smiling the biggest smile that you've ever had captured on camera. That was the Montagut you asked to be buried in, and that is what is still in the ground, whatever is left of you and the shirt, in that shared plot with Ah Ma next to the pine tree in Johor Bahru. I wonder how a Montagut shirt returns to the soil.

4

A friend of mine is tracing her family history, and it made me want to find out more about the Singapore you came to and knew. But the only geographical marker in your stories was the mention of *chup boi kor*, the eighteenth mile. That would be eighteen miles from the then General Post Office, and there was likely a milestone with a beautiful 18 carved on it that helped you recognise that spot. I texted my youngest aunt to ask her where that might be in Singapore today, since she is my closest living tie to you. "That would be Jurong in Singapore today," she replied, "Are you missing Ah Gong today?"

The milestone may no longer be in Jurong anymore, but somewhere around the eighteenth mile is now an apartment block called Lakeville. That is where I had bought my very first apartment, without knowing that was where you had worked. I suppose, whether we know it or not, we find ways to mark key moments in our memory, and somehow these lead us into our futures.

At Lakeville, my apartment was on the eleventh floor, and I had a potted calamansi lime plant on my balcony. I thought about how you had liked your tea so black and so sweet, and I thought I would add some calamansi into my tea to round it out. One day, as I was watering the plants, I saw a tiny worm on a leaf. You would have known exactly what it was, but it took me a Facebook post and a few helpful comments to realise that it was a lime caterpillar, likely a third instar. I probably hadn't seen a butterfly up close since I moved out of our family home, so I thought to sacrifice my lime plant for it. It ate. It had eaten up the shell of the egg it was in, and instar after instar, it moulted and ate its skin up even as it also chomped little big mouthfuls of leaf off my lime plant.

That week, watching the caterpillar grow was the most exciting thing on my schedule. The earlier instars so resembled the branches that it was hard to spot the

caterpillars—turned out there was way more than one of them—and even after it made its fairly drastic transition into the fifth instar, it was so well camouflaged by the leaves that I had to remind myself to look out for a fat, rounded green creature the size of my pinky. It was so amazingly efficient, the caterpillar. It eats up its old self and has almost everything it needs to grow into its next stage, leaving no trace whatsoever of what it used to be. What could go wrong for them?

Of course, once that thought occurred to me, I ought to have expected that the caterpillars would be gone the next day, which in fact they were. Back I went to my Facebook advisors, and this time I was in a group for caterpillar aficionados. "Birds," some said matter-of-factly. "Pesticide on store-bought plants," chimed in others. "That's life. Better luck next time."

You wouldn't have liked this apartment, even with its view of the lake. A shoebox in the sky, you used to lament. Who can live in those? In my five years of living there, I'd seen so many caterpillars, bought new lime plants, washed the pesticide off the leaves, brought caterpillars into my apartment and plucked leaves off for them, waited for them to pupate, their chrysalises hanging on two fragile threads, then woke up to gloriously fragile butterflies flapping in the container I'd left caterpillars in. That was probably the highlight of my years there, all those butterflies flying off into the distance. And now I've even sold the apartment; it was getting too expensive for me.

5

The park across from where I live now has a jackfruit tree along the trail I take. The fruits grow regularly, but too low on the tree and too small before they are eaten or drop off from their own weight. I think of those days of fruit harvesting you used to do, and wonder what you would say about this tree. When I moved out of our family home to study and live in Singapore, it was my turn then to traverse the Causeway every weekend to go home to you. You were still so well in those years, but your eyesight was worsening, and you were cautioned again and again not to climb the trees and not to walk the tricky path through the drains to our little orchard behind the house. It was probably around then that I realised your favourite fruit was none of what you'd planted, but one that came from your first home in China—the persimmon.

It was always a treat, persimmons. Your eldest daughter who worked in a factory in Singapore would buy them for you on her way back to Johor Bahru, stopping at the wet market in Woodlands just before the immigration checkpoint. Fruit there was fresher, bigger, better. The best imported fruit in Malaysia went direct to Kuala Lumpur and not to a small city like Johor Bahru. But Singapore—so much good produce got imported, and then transported in individual bags across the Causeway. Those persimmons were deep orange in colour, and the darker the colour, the sweeter they promised to be. They were so round that their roundness spilled over into an oval, perfectly smooth and squat. You always waited for me to be home before eating any of those precious persimmons from

your daughter. "Go get one," you'd say from the stringed lounge chair in your room, "and cut it in half. We'll share it."

The Chinese persimmon, diospyros kaki, has a long history in China. I am thinking about the parallel naming of this fruit: "diospyros" was Greek for "divine grain", and incidentally, the Chinese see the persimmon as a symbol of good fortune and longevity. (Then again, anything that is such a vibrant colour and round in shape would likely be associated with good fortune in Chinese culture.) The word "kaki" apparently came from the Japanese word for this fruit, the kanji character of which is 柿, *shi* in Mandarin, and in Teochew, *sai*. If I'd said "kaki" to you in Teochew, you'd have thought I was telling you something about myself—kaki: self. And that familiar adage that unites Teochew people all over the world today: *Teochew nang, kaki nang*. Teochew people, our very own people.

The variety of persimmon you liked is the astringent one, that can only be eaten after it has ripened into a deep colour and is soft to the touch. Then it would be sweet and rich, and so very juicy. The task to get a persimmon and slice it into two was sometimes complicated by the need to pick the perfectly ripe fruit from a box so that none would go to waste from being prematurely sliced, and none became overripe and lost its sweetness in the process. But once I would slice the fruit into two, I'd see immediately if I'd chosen right: the juices seeped onto the cutting board, and the flesh was deep amber, with some strands of fibrous black. The seeds popped out easily enough—I always removed them for you—and the flesh was not too mushy to hold. Some of my favourite memories are to do with us sharing persimmons in your room. You in your lounge chair and I on your bed or on a stool next to you, each of us with half a persimmon, holding it in one hand and cupping our other hand underneath to catch the dribbling juices.

In your final month with us, when you were mostly in bed and could hardly sit up anymore, and when you were not even eating or wearing your dentures anymore, you'd asked one day: "Are there any persimmons?" I'd bought them this time—your eldest daughter had been killed in a hit-and-run accident a few years before—and had been waiting for you to ask. This time, instead of halving the fruit, I sliced them up into wedges and removed the seeds as always, then took them on a plate to your room. You took one wedge and brought it to your mouth, bearing down on it with your gums and sucking the juice from it. "Good," you'd said softly, then returned the half-eaten piece of fruit to me as I sat next to your bed with a plate of wedges and nobody to share them with.

My aunt, the one who used to buy you persimmons, had often joked about how clear it was that I was your favourite grandchild. She called me your *xing gua bak nuhng nuhng*—the most tender part of the flesh of your heart. I imagine that to be as soft as the inside of a perfectly ripe persimmon.

6

Your name is Puah Chew Teh, 潘朝潮. You never learnt to write it, and you would regret never learning to read or write. There are no documents of you, and hardly any

photographs. But you are there in the morning tide, and you are there in every jackfruit tree I see, and in the papaya trees, and the banana shrubs. You are there at the eighteenth mile, but also here in the seventh mile along a different route where I now live. The former General Post Office is now a hotel, and most of the persimmons I find in Singapore now are called Sharon fruits from Israel, and they've removed the astringency so that people can eat the fruit whenever they want, without having to wait. I don't eat them anymore. But some days I still go to the beach in the morning and sit by the reclaimed coast, looking out at the cargo ships in the distance and thinking about the vessel that brought you down the South China Sea, so many years ago.

The water leaves no trace, but there you are, every time the wave comes in.

Nature's Art
Alka Balain

Footprints on the sand walk away from
the East Coast Road in Puducherry.
Clear blue waters stretch to an unseen horizon,
bending its waistline around a jetty.
Moon waves call the shores to submerge.
My hair is ocean air, my lips sea salt,
my soles soft sand.

I collect broken patterns of the Bay of Bengal,
no longer afraid of my brokenness.
Only *kolam* outside houses in South India
are whole and continuous.

kolam: a traditional art on the floor using rice flour usually drawn at the home entrance.

window ledge garden
Manisha Dhesi

As a child, I used to go to the forest to pick moss from the ground. I would bring it home, arranging it like a green cloud on the window ledge in my room, waiting for the moon's arrival to unfold my soul.

I whispered dreams to the green cloud, dreams of building a house of moss. The next day, I returned to the forest to collect daisies in my chunni to decorate the green cloud.

On my journey home, I picked empty tins from bins to fill with soil and stole seeds from the local allotment.

I would show my wooden doll, named Soma, the garden that I was creating as a route of escaping.

I preferred sleeping on the floor, where no man would find me, with the window above me. I imagined my stained carpet as moss growing from the damp. It beckoned like a warm blanket, providing comfort amongst the shouts.

Sometimes, I tasted my own blood from a hit of tough love. I used the blood to paint roses on the window ledge, embellishing thorns to my growing garden.

Every night, I longed for the twilight sky which bathed the world in a soft ethereal glow, to carry me to my garden on the window ledge.

As an adult, I continue to gather green clouds in my coat pocket, carry soil in my bag, and search for seeds to plant in solitude.

I am still trying to find my place in the window ledge garden.

Sea Life
Elizabeth Hansen

I thought I was turning into a whale when the first barnacle appeared. After pulling on my swimsuit, I turned in the mirror to discover one of the crustaceans growing on the back of my left shoulder. I reached around to touch its small shell encrusted on my skin like a spiny scab. It was the day after my fortieth birthday, and I didn't feel ready to begin my slow transformation into sea life. There was still so much life I had to live. Esme had just turned thirteen. Zane was preparing to take his long-awaited sabbatical. I finally thought I'd have time to work on my book.

Wrapping a towel around my waist, I decided one barnacle wasn't enough to worry about, so I walked to the kitchen, kissed Zane on the cheek and Esme on the forehead, closed the front door behind me, and started down the road in my sandals. It was a short walk to the shaded cove and the long flight of wooden stairs down to the beach. At the edge of the water, the wind pricked my skin and I felt the barnacle rise like a goosebump. The sky was cloudless and the water reflecting the sun gleamed bottle green. The horizon was straight and absolute in the clear light, and I could understand why early cartographers believed venturing to its edge meant falling off the side of the earth. On hazy days, I swore I could see their ships rise in the swell of waves like ghosts against the sky.

I tossed my towel on the sand, drew my goggles down over my eyes, and waded in. This early in the season the water was so cold it stung my skin, and as I dove under, the cold took my breath, the shock of it tightening muscle to bone. It was this feeling that I craved, that I thought about when I fell asleep at night—the sudden numbing and contraction, the cold plunge into darkness. The sea was a rush and a calling, a beckon underwater where I felt suddenly alive, part of a whole different landscape with different rules. I imagined myself a whale, all breath in my lungs and blood in my heart, the barnacle on my shoulder tugging at my skin like a crust of hardened blood on a wound. When I surfaced, I turned to face the shoreline to see how far out I'd gone.

On the shore, time was passing quickly. The sun had risen above the tops of the houses on the bluffs. The beach house was nearly hidden behind an overgrowth of shrubbery—a shingled two-story saltbox that belonged to my grandparents and that I had visited nearly every summer of my life. I'd been swimming in these waters since I was born. Zane started coming with me to the beach house when we were dating, and Esme first swam in these waters inside my belly. When she was little, she would play in the tidepools with the starfish, periwinkles, minnows, and barnacles that grew everywhere along the rocks.

I floated in the cold water, waited for a wave to come along and swell beneath me, carrying me up up up as I sailed on its crest, higher, buoyant, for a moment. Then the cold started to seep into my bones. I didn't have enough blubber yet to keep warm, and so I prepared to dive under again, to hold my breath and kick my feet toward the shallower, warmer waters. When I got back to shore and wrapped my shivering body in my towel, I turned back to look out toward the quiet deep. I could do it, easily. Slip into the sea and join the schools of fish that passed below, calling to me, *Come on, down you go!* But I wasn't ready yet. I still had so much to do.

//

Later that summer, another barnacle appeared. The two sat side by side, a pair of eyes looking out behind me. I ran my fingers along their rough surfaces and picked at the edges of their shells. It was as if they'd bloomed from the deepest layers of my skin. The more time passed, the more barnacles grew.

The year my father died, three more barnacles grew across my back. We had a funeral at the house and tossed his ashes to the sea. Zane spent the first month of his sabbatical helping me clean my parent's stuff from their apartment. We moved my mom to a retirement home. The winter was long and cold and gray. I got sick and spent most of January in bed. I didn't get started on my book. More barnacles grew.

When Esme left for college, I woke up days later with a mound of barnacles the size of a walnut under my arm. I tried everything to get rid of them: balms, salves, creams, scrubs, and tonics. Nothing worked. Soon my skin was the subject of family conversation: "Were they alive?" Esme wanted to know. "Did they latch onto me when I was swimming?"

Zane was concerned about my mental health: "Were the barnacles a symptom of anxiety? Depression? Was I overstressed?" He feverishly googled every issue but found no answers.

The doctors did not understand.

I studied the creatures, observed the way their shells cemented together and overlapped, how they grew in a pattern that branched across my skin like veins. They clung to things along the waterfront like rocks, docks, and piers, attaching themselves so tightly that they would often destroy the things they called home, cracking the hulls of ships and rotting the pillars that supported piers. Sometimes they'd attach themselves to whales, who had the burden of carrying the creatures thousands of miles across the sea.

The older I got, the more the weight of all that shell started slowing me down. My body became a material record of time that refused to escape my notice.

//

The year Esme got married, the barnacles grew in the creases of my eyes.

When my mother died, they grew in clusters beneath my heels.

When Zane was diagnosed with cancer, they grew along the edges of my mouth and in my nostrils, making it hard to breathe.

The year I turned seventy-five, Esme suggested we go whale-watching, so we drove to the tip of the peninsula and boarded a boat. By then the barnacles had grown between my toes, which made balance difficult, so I had to hold onto the railing as we braced against the open ocean.

The sun was high and bright that day, the horizon just a hazy line that made it hard to tell where the ocean ended and the sky began. We had our sights on the distant north, and after about twenty-five minutes of the breeze whipping my hair in my face, our guide

spotted a pod. It was a group of humpbacks. Passengers crowded on the deck taking pictures with their phones. There were cries of delight as one of the humpbacks expelled through its blowhole, spouting water into the sky. I kept looking for the horizon. My sea legs were weak, and I was feeling a bit queasy on the gallop of the waves.

Pretty soon the humpbacks were close enough that we could see the slick of their skin, and that's when my hearing went blank. Esme turned to me with her eyes lit up, her face full of awe, and all I could do was nod as if I understood. It was like the world went silent and all I could hear was the swish of sea in my ears and a low, distant groan.

Then the largest of the creatures passed beside our boat, its silver skin glistening with the sun on its back. The reflection of light on the water fractured into prisms and suddenly my vision went blurry. I was staring straight into the white sun as the great whale breached, a silhouette against the sky, the giant, smooth rolling of its arched back like a wheel turning in water. The barnacles rose along my ribs and spine. I opened my mouth, but no words came. I felt the impact as I hit the water and then I blacked out.

A blur of faces came into focus as I came to. We were back onshore, and Esme and several strangers were leaning over me, blocking out the sun. The paramedics said I had fainted, hit my head on a railing. They checked my vitals, shined a light in my eyes to watch my pupils dilate. They gave me an ice pack for the welt on my forehead, then Esme and I drove back to the beach house where my son-in-law and grandkids waited.

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During the last days of August, I passed much of my time in the wicker chair on the porch overlooking the harbor. That view was so familiar to me, so unchanging, that the only real variation was in the light. One muggy evening when I couldn't sleep, I went out to the porch to get some air. The moon was full and cast a watery reflection on the surface of the waves. That's when I thought I saw several dark spots appear in the moonlight on the water. I tried not to blink so I wouldn't lose them, but my eyes weren't so reliable anymore, so I walked to the end of the porch where we kept the telescope. I scanned the waters with the telescope's eye, but didn't see anything. I waited a while, then sure enough, after some time I saw them. A pod roving along as if they owned the sea. In a way, they did. They'd been wielding the earth's waters for fifty million years since the harbor was still a great ice sheet and supercontinents collided creating the birth and death of oceans.

I waited. I stood on the edge of the porch all night. The barnacles rose on my skin with the tide beneath the moon. I waited for the whales to emerge from the lightless depths, if only for a breath. I kept my eyes steady on the telescope but felt compelled to turn back. I wanted to turn back to the walls of the house and the windows that looked in, where a single lamp cast a warm glow in the quiet of the living room, where upstairs my family slept and where I lumbered to ascend the stairs with the weight of the barnacles. I wanted to turn back so I could stay among them, but I knew it was time. I'd have to watch my grandchildren grow old from the sea. I kept my eyes trained on the pod. I stood with my toes on the edge of the porch. I watched the whales, waiting for the moment, the breach,

then lifted my nose to the bright cloudless sky and dove, joining them in their momentary flight, until I felt that cold, rippling plunge into the deep ancient alien void.

The Big Trees
Jennifer S. Lange

I have this unholy tendency to make art on rubbish. The 'canvases' for this series of tree sketches is packing paper primed with wall paint. I also used some better transparent gesso on it after sketching the drawings with coloured pencils, which improved the handling significantly, but as you can see, the paper has folds and warps and some crimping at the edges. Most of that is hidden now that I matted them from their approximately 17 × 25 cm sizes to 30 × 40 cm, and matting anything makes it look so much nicer! I used to see character in the paper upcycled this way, but I think using good materials is better for everybody, most importantly, the work itself.

That being said, when I felt a need for enormous trees, I rendered a few with AI and used those as a basis (since technology won't go away, it might as well make itself useful). The execution however is all me and I think I have AI mostly out of my system by now.

Epic Trees 2 © Jennifer S. Lange

Epic Trees 3 © Jennifer S. Lange

Epic Trees 5 © Jennifer S. Lange

Epic Trees 6 © Jennifer S. Lange

New
Dale Going

"To wilfully not remember" the way things are

To make a new position

not limited to symbols of lack

For you I will make this universal

Oh I don't want to be too nuanced

What I want is to feel mycelial

our thready connective filaments

To feel that we're trees too

Thoughts While Turning Soil
Lea Camille Smith

This is how I started a persuasive essay in college once: Worms are the original horticulturalists. They succeed at what almost every gardener tries and fails to do: leave the soil better than we found it. Even with opposable thumbs and the contemplative mass between the ears, humans still find ways to make it worse. They sprinkle electric blue fertilizer around new plantings to bolster the growing process, sever the mycelium layer that connects trees together in a sophisticated game of string phone, and plant monoculture rows of the same crop with the same wants year after year.

I got an A, and the professor wrote in his margin notes he, the indoors type, had developed a personal vendetta against gardeners, and would continue being a homebody, thank you.

I dropped out my junior year and started gardening for rent money up in New Hampshire.

//

When I was ten, my father looked at me over *Botany for Biologists*, the book he assigned his BIO l01 students. It was almost charity at that point, that he still taught that class. We were outside in our small backyard, he in a lawn chair with a glass of unsweetened iced tea, no lemon, me, with my kid-sized shovel, digging at nothing, marveling at the small hole I'd uncovered while New York traffic inched by beyond our fence. I squatted down and slid my hand underneath the roundish shapes in the dirt.

"Did you find some worm poop, Kev?"

I looked from my hand to my father, and back again.

"The technical term is worm castings, but I say call it like it is."

I let some of the dirt fall out of my hand and compacted the remaining material between my thumb and pointer finger.

"Worm poop is nature's fertilizer," my father continued, "worms move around underneath the soil, eating the dirt and enriching it with minerals, enzymes, and good bacteria. Then, they poop it out. Voila," he said, putting his book down, "the world made better by shi−"

My mother had emerged through the back door with a white headband wrangling her hair and signed with her hands that dinner was ready. Even after she had gone completely deaf from a viral infection when I was six, my father still censored himself when she was around, a hopeful preservation of normalcy.

//

Fifteen years later I'm thinking about worms again at work. While digging a hole for a new rhododendron planting at the local hospital, I've managed to cut one in half with my shovel. I examine the two halves, checking to see if I'd cut closer to the tail end or the head. If cut in half closer to the tail end, an earthworm can regenerate and continue its life. If cut near the head, where the essential organs are, they die. I've done the latter, this time.

It isn't my first kill, and it won't be the last. But killing a fellow colleague never fails to upset me. The part of my mind that I am most afraid to enter is the part that often wonders what the worms have done in a year underneath my father's headstone.

I bury the two worm halves in an inch of soil, patting it down, and stand up. I do so too fast, and my vision blurs for a moment. I close my eyes until it passes. When I open them again, I'm looking through the window of the hospital. Two bodies lean on each other, steadying, a third, stands at a podium with a computer, relaying. The person wearing the blue bandana starts to lean away from the other and turns to look out the window. No eyebrows. I stand next to a tiny grave, with my shovel in my hand, building the new garden outside of the oncology wing.

A few months prior, this hospital charged me almost two weeks' pay to tell me I had sufficient amounts of vitamin D, and an insufficient amount of everything else, and that, according to the doctor whose finger went into my anus, my prostate was normal. He said it was a good thing I was starting the checkups early, given my family history.

Now the hospital pays me to overhaul their entire front garden, which lines the oncology wing. Perennials were scattered years before by the local garden club, then left to flourish into a tangled mess of plants that were supposed to be there, and plants that were not. I am left to deal with the unruly weeds. And yet, weeds are my job security, and because of them, I hope to break even with the hospital.

This is what happens after five years of gardening: Someone might say, *it's like herding kittens.* I say, *it's like raking leaves in the wind.* I have permanent dirty spots on the outsides of my pointer fingers, where my thumb rubs when I grab plant material. I've gone out with a few women who locked onto my hands with theirs and then didn't call me back. I try not to think too hard about whether there's any sort of correlation. If you think too hard about anything, it starts to unravel.

If you don't think too hard about something, it stays unopened, taut, tied up. So when you see your father in a woman's face in the oncology wing window, it's as if some unseen hand has reached out to tug ever so gently on the fraying string holding you together.

At noon I eat a ham sandwich in the car, tasting little more than sodium. I'm parked in a back lot near the emergency department. An ambulance wheels around the corner and stops underneath the concrete canopy. The back of the vehicle is in full view. Two EMTs jump out of the truck and open the back, where another one appears, steadying a gurney. There's blood on the sheets and everyone but the body in the bed is moving fast.

The sandwich feels like a brick in my stomach, so I put the last bite back in the bag. My boss calls as I'm getting out of the car.

"Kevin," she says.

"Kev isn't short for Kevin, Susie." The person on the gurney appears to stare up at the sky.

"Right, I know. I'll remember one of these times. Just keep reminding me," she chuckles. "I have a strange request from Hank, my contact at the hospital."

"Yeah?" The gurney disappears behind sliding doors.

"One of the nurses got in touch with him a half hour ago. Something hit one of the windows by the new garden, a bird or something, and he figured since you're already out there, you could check it out?"

"Sure," I say, "I'm just finishing lunch."

"Good. Probably a good thing to do that first."

"A rhododendron is planted, a worm dies, and a red stained person is suspended somewhere in between," I say.

"What?"

"It's just another day, you know? Never mind. I can take care of the bird."

"You New Yorkers are strange." The ambulance pulls forward and disappears around the corner.

The hawk appeared to have broken its neck on impact and then fell behind a hedge. The oncology windows are confusingly large. A stage for the disease to catwalk its models down. *Look what I can take,* it seems to say through the glass. I crouch underneath the hedge, take a flat metal shovel and with a gloved hand, roll the bird with its lolling head onto it.

Someone coughs near me. A tired-looking woman stands ten feet away from the window where I saw the browless woman and her daughter. They're smiling out of it now, looking at the newcomer. A friend or family member, probably. The woman is holding a stack of papers with words written on them in black marker. *Sorry I can't come in today,* says the first sign. She sneezes, wipes her nose on her sleeve, and drops the sign to reveal another one. *Daryl and Karl send their love.* Drop. *We're all rooting for you.* Drop. *I.* Drop. *Love.* Drop. *You.*

What was my excuse for not writing to my father when he was in the hospital?

I take the bird and walk quickly to the edge of the woods beyond the employee parking lot. It's mid spring but I'm suddenly and profusely sweating. I lay the bird on the forest floor. It stares at me with one beady eye, as if taunting me to walk away without ceremony. It was easier with worms. You can't see the disappointment in them. I walk away.

//

For years, cancer grew like weeds in my father. The abnormal plants which multiply uncontrollably and infiltrate healthy gardens until they are unrecognizable.

At first, I didn't realize that I missed our late-night chats at the kitchen table. But I felt my father pulling away and did not know why. I'd lost a lot of sleep at the kitchen table with my dad during early college summers, listening to stories and facts about how tree rings can help us in determining the Earth's past climate, and how our modern culture has done a "piss poor" job of maintaining the natural landscape. In the early hours of the morning, my father would finish off his black coffee and look at his watch and fake an exclamatory jump and ask me what mom would think if she knew we were still awake at two in the morning with stacks of books and large slices of her zucchini bread on the bare table. It was in those moments that I decided that I wanted to feel, smell, and touch the world my father had illuminated for me every evening.

Then, he started going to bed when my mother did. I continued to sit at that table until the early hours of the morning, waiting for something of which I am not completely sure. But I kept reading, I kept learning, and my father kept getting sicker.

//

The final memory of my father before I fled north like a coward: finding him on the carpet four years ago. Blue and seafoam green woven carpet that was spotted wet with something else. Urine, maybe, I'd figure it out later. He was face down, his monogrammed over-the-shoulder bag still halfway down his arm, a few botany magazines sliding out. It must have just happened. Mom was teaching ASL at the school all day and I'd been out with friends.

"Dad," I said. "Dad," kneeling on the ground.

He lay, breathing deep, unaware of the stress in the conscious world. Dad, who was up at 4:10 every day without fail; dad, who taught at the college for an entry level wage out of the goodness of his heart, dad; who taught me after hours, now face down on the floor. I called 911, I alerted my mother, I waited for them to come. Then I left.

Superman had crashed in front of me. And in that dust cloud came the realization that my father would never join me at the table again.

But that's no excuse for going to New Hampshire and attempting to hide at my job in the gardens like a pink flamingo, miles away from a bedside I couldn't bear to stand vigil when my father's prostate waged war on him for the final time.

//

If I had gone to my father's funeral, this is what I would have said: There is a time in the summer, given ample and consistent rain, where the plants will grow and change at such a pace that I stop each time I visit my weekly clients to make sure I've come to the right address. Every week I find ferns bowing deeper into pathways, brushing against my ankles, which I don't mind but sometimes my clients do, and so I take them away and lay them in the woods; every week I come to find that the Nepeta has leaned farther back, its flowers heavy, and it looks like it's time to go, but if you look closely into the middle, there's a second growth, a second round in July; every week I come to find that a Hosta has sent up a scout in the form of purple or white bell-shaped flowers; every week, the daylilies have bloomed and died and repeated this cycle over and over. Everything grows and everything changes and everything dies and yet they will return next year and bloom again and die again and that is the beauty of the perennial. I prefer them over annuals, which do not come back once they are gone. The world changes around perennials and every year they come back, every year they go through their cycle and are not bound by anything but sun and rain and possibly something I did correctly with my shovel but really, they would be fine without me. Unfortunately, humans are much like annuals.

Thank you.

If I had gone to my father's funeral, my mother would not have written to me the following week: *I'm the silent one, not you.*

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The late afternoon sun warms the air as I finish my day at the hospital. A siren rings as another ambulance pulls up the drive a few hundred feet away. Then I see them. The

woman in the bandana, and her daughter. Their faces both turn to the window. They have the same nose, same grey eyes, same lines of stress. The daughter looks at the newly planted rhododendron. She taps her mother on the shoulder. They both gaze at it for some time, at the changes that had taken place when they weren't looking.

The thing about my name: Kev is short for Kevlar. That material used in things like aerospace equipment, boats, and protective vests. It's supposedly bulletproof. I don't necessarily know a time when I felt that way, maybe when I was digging in the dirt all those years ago, when dad tried to share every bit of ecological knowledge with me at any given moment, and mom still approved of my decisions. Then again, no one really called me Kevlar. It was only when I was younger, when I was still getting tucked into bed each night, when my father would say, listen to this, Kevlar, and read to me. Not from Grimm, not from Seuss, but from plant scientists. I went to bed each night in those times with a head full of Latin words for the weeds growing in every cracked sidewalk in SoHo. *Ailanthus altissima, Fallopia japonica, Digitaria sanguinalis.* Before I drifted off, my father would slide his hands underneath my shoulder blades and pull my sternum towards the side of his head, so his ear was over my heart. If by some strange circumstance, my father and I were frozen in time, stood upright, and observed, it was as if my father, crouching at my chest, was trying to use me for protection.

The worms might get cut in half closer to the tail end, dust themselves off and continue as stewards of the soil. We're not like that. We can leave the kitchen table and the books and the zucchini bread earlier than usual and not tell our sons that we're feeling ill. We can leave them wondering. We can also be the sons who don't ever ask what's wrong.

Remedy
Johnny Kovatch

Feeling stuck, unable to identify why,
I move the snake plant
from the office to the living room.
Then the crib from our bedroom
to the office. I hang black-out drapes
so my newborn can sleep
then unplug the printer
knowing I'd forget & wake him.
Back in the living room,
I open blinds for natural light
to filter over the slender leaves.

I want to believe this shift
will nurse its edges,
sun-starved & browning,
darken the green it walked in with
after I brought it home.

Now, I move it from the window
where sunrise broke
to the window facing sunset.
Maybe that's it—
morning light, a blank slate.
Natural light, what waters it.
But the light it now receives,
the heavy-hued, sugary beams,
contain a full day of insight.
Leaves synthesize—
wisdom we can breathe.

Contributors

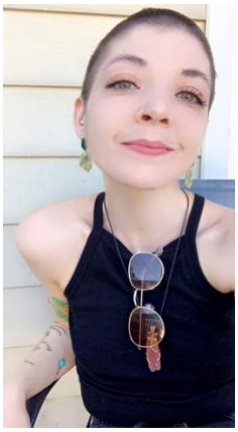
Adam Anders is a Canadian writer and teacher, living in his ancestral home of Poland. His writing draws on the broad range of histories, landscapes, and cultures he's savoured over his lifetime. His work has appeared in *The Opiate, The Writing Disorder, 7th-Circle Pyrite,* and *The Wilderness House Literary Review*. Find him on Instagram (@anderstanding.writing) and online (adamoanders.com).

Alka Balain's writings have appeared in *Kitaab, AlSphere, Usawa Literary Review, DREICH, The Green Journal, Poetry India, The Hooghly Review, Wordweavers, Shot Glass and Amethyst*, among others. She is a wanderer who lives between Singapore and India, and she is presently in Auroville. Her first book of poetry, *Parijat Petals,* will be released this year. She has read poetry at prestigious festivals: Poetry Festival Singapore, DLF Gurugram Festival, St Stephen's Litfest, Asian Literary Society Litfest, and elsewhere. Her poems have been well received at the Poetry Festival Singapore-Catharsis (2021/2023), Wordweavers Contest 2022 and shortlisted for the Glass House Poetry Award 2024. She chairs the Writing Enthusiasts' Club of the Indian Women's Association, Singapore and is also the Chapter head (Singapore) of the Asian Literary Society, India.

Jenny Boyar is a medical writer and holds a PhD in English from the University of Rochester. Her poetry has been published with *Choeofpleirn Press, Maudlin House*, and *FEED* lit mag, and her academic writing has appeared in a variety of scholarly publications. A Fulbright recipient, she has also been a reviewer for *Publishers Weekly*. She lives in St Petersburg, Florida.

Manisha Dhesi is a poet and researcher who intertwines nature's healing potential with psychological concepts in her writing. Drawing from her Indian heritage, her work explores the spiritual role of nature in mental health and societal norms. As an advocate for minority groups, Manisha is committed to refining her craft and making valuable contributions to literature.

Nathan Erwin is a land-based poet raised on the Allegheny Plateau, the northernmost tier of Appalachia. A community and institutional organizer, Erwin currently operates at the Pocasset Pokanoket Land Trust building healthy futures for indigenous farmers and organizing around land, food, and seed sovereignty. His writing has recently appeared in *The Journal, North American Review, Poetry Wales, Bombay Gin, Hunger Mountain,* and *Ninth Letter*. His organizing and his poetry are conversant, and so he writes about foodways, myths, medicine, and wanting.



Lizzie Ferguson (they/she) is a Chicago based poet. Previously they have been published in the Gardy Loo and BottleCap Press. Their 2022 Chapbook, *I Never Leave Lost Teeth Under My Pillow*, is an investigation of the narrator's spirals of the mind, from innocence to experience. Lizzie holds an MA in Religious Studies and focuses much of their writing on the intersections of mind, body, and spirit in the human experience.

Dale Going is a poet/printer living with disability in the canyons of Manhattan after a former lifetime in the sacred mountains of Northern California. She has published two poetry collections and five chapbooks. Her work has received support from Fund for Poetry, California Arts Council, Yaddo and Djerassi Fellowships. Her Em Press letterpress editions of poetry by women are archived internationally in prominent library special collections. New work appears in *VOLT, New American Writing, Blood Orange Review, Banyan Review, Equinox, Griffel, Landlocked, Nelligan Review, Stone Canoe*. A new chapbook is forthcoming from Albion Press. www.dalegoing.com

Elizabeth Hansen lives in Oakland, California. She writes fiction and personal essays that explore the blurred lines between self and story, and how what we believe about ourselves informs our relationships—with those we love, strangers, our environment, and our pasts. Her work has been published in *Smoky Mountain Arts and Literary Magazine, Mamalode*, and elsewhere.

Johnny Kovatch's work appears in PEN America's anthology: *The Sentences that Create Us*. He authored *59 Hours* (Simon & Schuster). He founded Unlock the Arts, a nonprofit focusing on expressive writing for incarcerated teens. He also teaches at Pelican Bay State Prison in Crescent City, CA. Featured poems appear in *The Los Angeles Review, Barrow Street, Sou'wester, The Atticus Review, The Headlight Review,* among others.

Jennifer S. Lange is a self-taught artist creating illustrations for books, games, posters, and world-building projects. Her work has been shown internationally and in online exhibitions. Jennifer lives in northern Germany with her partner, and a lot of cats.

Pauline P Lee is a writer and educator living in Singapore. She was born in Johor Bahru, Malaysia, and grew up listening to stories set in other coastal villages in her family history. She is interested in the interactions between the natural and the human, and the unseen/ overlooked connections that tie flora, fauna, fungi and homosapiens. She enjoys spotting flowering weeds and is trying to learn as many plant names as she can.

Ethan is the poetry reader for *Tiger Moth Review*. He loves mammals, poetry, philosophy, film, critical theory, and spoiling his dog Ealga. He was the former Head of Marketing at the Singapore Book Council. His writings have been published on *Brack* and *The Library of Rejected Beauty*.

Ethan is interested in environmental literature that illuminates the kinship between human and animal, and the intersections between one's relationship with the natural environment and mental wellbeing.

Avery Martin is a transgender, nonbinary river guide, runner, ski instructor, maker, and doer of odd jobs. They live in the mountains of Idaho (Nez Perce and Shoshone-Bannock land), where they try to be outside as much as possible. Avery grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area and attended Mount Holyoke College in western Massachusetts.

Anna Molenaar is a writer of poetry and prose concerned with nature, humanity, and the messes that occur when the two mix. Her work appears or will appear in the After Happy Hour Review, Common Ground Review, Smoky Blue Literary and Arts Magazine and Imposter: A Poetry Journal. She lives in St. Paul, Minnesota, where she received her MFA from Hamline University. She works as a preschool teacher and teaches writing courses at the Loft Literary Center.

Ilika Motani is a student by day and a dreamer by night. While Singapore is her home, these dreams bring her around the world. Ilika loves all things books, writing and chocolate. Her literary talents have been showcased in the creative writing program's collection *Mementoes*, the youth literature magazine *Inklink* and she has won third place in the National Poetry Competition 2021. When she isn't scribbling in her notebook, you can find her reading, figure skating or surveying coral reefs.

Tim Murphy (he/him) is a disabled, bisexual environmentalist and poet from the Pacific Northwest. His writing explores disability justice and our complex, tenuous relationship with the more-than-human world. Tim's poetry appears in over a dozen literary journals, including, *Louisiana Literature, Humana Obscura, Wordgathering, Honeyguide Literary Magazine, Writers Resist*, and in the books, *The Long COVID Reader* (2023) and *Songs of Revolution* (2024). Instagram and Twitter (@brokenwingpoet).

Devon Neal (he/him) is a Kentucky-based poet whose work has appeared in many publications, including *HAD, Stanchion, Livina Press, The Storms,* and *The Bombay Lit Mag*, and has been nominated for *Best of the Net.* He currently lives in Bardstown, KY with his wife and three children.

Meenakshi Palaniappan draws inspiration from the everyday in her poetry, in particular nature. She enjoys playing with words to think, dream and make sense of the world around her. An educator by profession, her poems have been published in *The Tiger Moth Review, Shot Glass Journal,* the *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore*, and *Voice and Verse Poetry Magazine*, Hong Kong.

Lea Camille Smith is an MFA student at Stonecoast, a fiction editor for the Stonecoast Review, and a freelance writer. She resides in the Mount Washington Valley of New Hampshire. Her work can be found or is forthcoming in Island Ink, Maine Organic Farmers' and Gardeners' Association, MWV Vibe, and the Conway Daily Sun.

Tan Yong Lin is an award-winning photographer from Singapore who has been documenting the country's biodiversity from the busy city to the coasts and mangroves. He hopes to tell the story of coexistence between wildlife and humans through his photos and to inspire people to care more for their local biodiversity, regardless of where they might be. His other photography projects involve documenting disappearing places and landscapes in Singapore.