

ISSUE THREE

NATURA



**COSMIC
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Introduction

"What is the good of your stars and trees, your sunrise and the wind, if they do not enter into our daily lives?" –E.M. Forster

"Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts." –Rachel Carson



Sun on the Peach Blossoms

The world is watery through the panes of glass
creamy in the noonday sun
begging to be worshiped and adored
to have something beautiful
to eclipse
with her delicate film of light.
Piercing through eyelids
sinking into deep breaths
lighting up the pink of the peach blossoms
and the fire of the painted cups
she makes her presence known.



Lilydale

The waters of the Mississippi River were higher than the high school version of me on a Saturday night.

I willed my rusted sedan down the winding bends of Lilydale Road, nervously hydroplaning through dirty, cloudy puddles.

Lilydale Road didn't feel the way it used to be, because it simply wasn't the way it used to be. The wildflowers didn't grow there anymore. The squirrels had lost their spunk. The deer that once graced you with their majestic presence had faded away. Even the bald eagles no longer wanted anything to do with this place.

As the water relentlessly overtook the road, I abandoned my little car, waded through the muck, and lunged toward what had remained of the forest. Getting home in time to watch the evening news broadcast with my cat seemed a lot less likely.

The water rushed toward me and I quickly latched onto an elm tree and climbed. My middle school antics had come in handy for once in my life. I reached the top of the tree and sat on a branch. I looked down below as the flooding waters intensified. Everything that had managed to stay afloat was already dead—plastic trash, hollowed branches, fish with their bellies up.

I gazed out at a city that was never truly home. I had a front-row view of the factory smoke that always taints the beauty of the sky.

I glanced across the tree and noticed that there was a lone wild turkey perched on a separate branch. The wild turkey looked at me with uncertainty in its eyes, like it didn't know what would happen next.

After a brief moment, the wild turkey fluttered away, and I sat on the branch for eternity, waiting for the world to smile again.



A Sprouting of a Lesson

There's something unique about a
canary
writing itself a eulogy, as it flutters its
wings
toward the south of this beloved
earth.

Its beauty is incandescent, as the moon
medicates
her to sleep, inviting the
lulling
to protect its outermost being,
warped

in the ashes of its ancestors, feathered in
locusts
where the sun once dictated to bury away
beneath
a fertilizing pothole, left for rotted
decay.



The circle of life
penetrates
what seems severe to a child's
innocent,
beaming eyes – for they believe the
hope

of light is as radiant as another
dawn.

Yet, the truth resigns what's
impassible
in nature's divine
purpose:

that all living things
must return with grace
to the very core they once
sprouted from.



Your Friend, Theresa

It is me, your friend Theresa. I want to know why you are so happy? You, Will, reply you take no drugs and consider each new day a challenge and have lots of lovers. Life is simple, but good, you say. I say but modern-day challenges make most people miserable. Brain apps, in particular, and many people have no job to do. You tell me people should create their own job and one may not be able to do a better job than Androids, but some people want to buy human goods and services, and not Android produced. You say your job is to single-handedly make movies, about the plight of modern humans. Androids don't care much for humans. And you say, you are quite rich, richer than most Androids and it is becoming fashionable to watch your movies. I say I've heard about your movies, but I already know all about the conditions various people suffer in. And I am miserable and don't know what I can do about it. You no doubt say, we should collaborate on works and form a political party and try our best. I say but we have no followers. And most people are out of it on drugs and don't vote, and Androids have the vote and always vote, and most electoral districts are now predominantly Android. You say I am playing the Devil's advocate and am not listening to you. I tell you Androids rule and don't want humans in politics and will persecute any who try to be politically active, and we must all toe the line. And serve the Androids faithfully. If we do not serve them, they'll operate on our brains! You say but Androids have been created by humans originally and should have some sympathy with us. But I tell you, they don't care. Humans can go extinct as far as they are concerned, and they only care about themselves and other Androids. And they control totally human society.



You reply, you are having a ball, all the same. And you say the Androids have put up with you, so far. And you see yourself making movies into the foreseeable future. I say, it's just a matter of time, before they put an end to your phenomenon. Probably, they'll charge you with treason and execute you. You say you are sure that won't happen. I wouldn't be too sure of that if I was you.

And you undoubtedly say the future looks bright, despite everything. I tell you, Candide Will, that there is no room for optimism.

And that was my dream of the fictitious Will and Theresa, I figured people like them would exist in the future, for better or for worse.



Churchyard Lichens

Nurtured in symbiosis
the lichens lay sprawled
across the gravestones
their colours jarring against
the weathered sandstone.
Some speak of the passing years
while others of clean air,
where city smogs do not reach,
but all show the beauty
of an unlikely partnership.
We stop to look and marvel
at their intricate patterns
as the church warden approaches
ready to scrape them away
and destroy this small piece
of brightness in a place
of ancient grief.



Miniscule Disruption of the Universe

An egret unbends
from the pond
where he fishes
and turns to face
a sudden noise.

A few awkward steps
snake up
through his neck.
Then he recovers
grace and languidly lifts
into blue.
The prow of his beak parts
sky that seals behind him
on the line
drawn by his feet.

Beauty writ large
for those
who do not blink
or fail to see
what they see.



White Pine

You look lonely outside my window, the only one of your kind
in a neighborhood of maples whose leaves are long gone.

You stand sturdy with your crown touching heaven,
some of your roots visible, and I wonder if those buried
are reaching wide in search of another.

You have dropped your five-fisted fingers of brown
down onto my patio, now completely covered,
leaving you with only immortal green in your arms attached
at 90 degree angles that shoulder the weight of the burden,
but in my yard in the middle of town, no mighty eagles come
to build their abodes, just the gray squirrels or birds
whose nests are put together with leftover pieces: twigs,
lint from the dryer, fur from a rabbit long dead, the discarded.
Your seed cones too, are all over my yard, but they are wise
in how they only open when greeted with warmth.



I'm amazed at how much you have grown over the 25 years,
recording the passage of time. I'm surprised you even survived
the constant danger of being mowed over. You barely stood out
when you were first stuck in the ground.

I would not call you stately, as you appear a bit sparse now,
but you are wide open, and I love that about you.

Your arms hold the bodies of those who sit in the swing.

You provide shade, a resting stop for the chickadees, wrens
as they make their way to their wooden houses under the eaves.

I'm sorry we dis-armed your lower branches, but sometimes
there was just too much of you getting in the way.

Your trunk is too large now for me to get my arms around
in a single embrace. I am certain you will still be standing
when I am long gone. I notice your creaks and groans,
but still you dance with the chimes. Your stickiness clings
to my soles and I carry more of you than I know inside.



Green Vines in a Dark Field

It should be the perfect day. Late July, summer weather is warm on my skin, the vines are heavy with grapes, and I have all day to paint and play. But this year is different. Normally, from the crack of dawn, my small town of Sézanne is bustling, harvesting its precious grapes until dinner, then parents watch on as kids dash through the fields and the narrow streets. But this year is different. Today there are no boys playing, no wine being sipped on the porches by tired parents, only the sound of stray dogs barking and the distant booms caused by strange men in strange uniforms. Sézanne is empty tonight, and the carefree summer weather and lazy evenings I would usually have treasured are meaningless. My older brother Pierre is off “doing his duty,” and the house feels empty with nobody to walk with me through the fields or chase me down narrow streets. I sit inside now, just as I have for the past eight months, looking at my old paintings of green rolling vineyards and bright, sunny afternoons of before. My art from this summer doesn’t have any of the usual vivid greens and purples of my collection; instead, I focus on the tufts of grey and black floating from the horizon, the bland brown suits of little figures walking through my town with solemn expressions that contradict the radiantly green grape leaves. I imagine my brother is one of them. Marching, long creases on his forehead, going to chase down the invaders like he used to chase me down the vineyard rows. As the days go on, the streets stay empty at night, my brother remains on duty, but my paintings’ colors of nature are gradually replaced by darker shades, and the booming, drum-like sounds in the distance get closer. Eventually, I stop painting in color as the brown-uniformed soldiers stream back through our town, followed by new, different men in grey-blue outfits after.



My mother says Pierre won't be home to pick grapes together or chase me in the fields this year and that I need to start helping her sell our harvest, even though Pierre always does that. She asks why my new art is so dark when our vines are still the same viridescent color. There is no response that I can tell her, but in my mind, a dark field now surrounds the green vines.



Easy on My Mind

The way cowbirds know it's time to mow,
and come flapping and flailing to my lawn, like they have
three wings and two left feet. They leave their perches on
the backs of cattle for the greener pasture of my front
yard.

They jockey for spots like horses in a derby to snatch
up bugs in the wake of my mower. Cowbirds make me
smile.

And lovely monarchs waltz on milkweed
in the wildflower field behind my barn.

They dance with remarkable grace and beauty, quite
unlike my three-winged cowbirds.

And how our state line is a beautiful river.

that flows through our lives like passing time. How an
afternoon wind wipes our faces
in the sweltering heat of the summer sun,
so redeeming in its simple luxury that I almost forget the trail of
sweat that soaks my back.

A white-headed fly-over quickens my heartbeat. I stare at
an osprey like he's a hypnotist.

Every circle makes a swirl like a swinging pocket watch. How
bluebirds gather on sun-drenched power lines, then scatter to
perches in pecan tree branches. And how a wild turkey seems to be
grumpy and wants the forest for himself.

Hearing my car as he pecks the roadside,
he runs high tail, strutting with attitude.

And nothing soothes like the end of the day, when light's
sparkle fades in the setting sun. I watched it this evening
in my rearview mirror as I sat waiting at the railroad
crossing.

Kimberly Suzanne Lewis

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I waved to the train like an old neighbor,
its whistle awakening my nostalgia.
There's no congestion in a one-light town,
where the word we say for dinner is supper. Our
busiest traffic is in the world above us
where the heavens turn day to night,
or night to a new morning.
On this night, starlight dots darkness,
like spots on black wings of a swallowtail butterfly. On a big
night sky, there must be a million. Living in the country makes
my life sweeter. Its ways are easy on my mind.



The Posing Honeybee





Fable

The lumbering bear
swung its head

of hesitation
down an industrial

street. Brown bats
dropped onto

river grass;
the terror

of a long
fall. The cherry

spit out
its pit. A spider

Adam Day

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crawled the wall,

tasting the brick

with its forelegs.

If we keep silent,

the stones

will cry out.



Undecided Sky

Out the kitchen window

I see that the sky

has turned as blue

as new shutters

on the house next door.

The sky can't make

up its airy mind, changes

quickly like a pink flamingo

on a lawn that reddens

when dusk comes

and slaps afternoon silly.



Earthshine

Waking in the last bit of light,
the moon grins like an accidental brushstroke,
and those stars, beyond, we thought were ours,
never were, but put out a hand.

At Gum Pond I cup the rich black water,
savoring those reflections. I can see each one but mine.

All day the milkweed waits, it's blooms
like shooting stars, steadying for flight.

All along the bank daisy fleabane held
their sunny faces skyward, singing

“We're a tribe, you and I.”

“This world, and that.”

Lying on the cold ground, I breathe.

In the borrowed ashen light willow
seed drifts by like ghosts of fireflies,

touches my face. I close my eyes. I put out a hand.

Sam Calhoun

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There are those who can't believe.

Never has the world seemed so bright.

touches my face. I close my eyes. I put out a hand.

There are those who can't believe.

Never has the world seemed so bright.



Red Tail

In a sudden shock of silence, birdsong fell
to thickets and moss-softened ground mere
moments before the apparition appeared
in a blue rush of air, light wedded eerily
to its wings, as it grazed a leafless tree-line
banking windwards without wingbeat to
reveal how the raptor delivers death from
above and carries the quarry of late autumn
beneath its plumage – all rufous shimmer and
nimbus stipple. Seeking to reconcile, though,
how it is the underside of tail is not so much
a brush-stroke of warm crimson as it is the
pale orange found in a wound of cedar or the
blurred gold that shimmers in plumes of sawdust.



Spring Rain

The world has turned
its face
a little closer
to the sun;

the wind is warmer
and I, calm, walk through rain
like gossamer, like wet webs,
drifting down
from a cotton stain
passing overhead.

At the same time
these shards of light
from the hidden sun
which illuminate the gardens
and the damp petals
shaking off the shower
and hang in teardrops
from spear-iron rails
and patter on dark umbrellas
and make bus windows shine
like lover's eyes,
remembering.

Ahead, below the smudges
lies blue sky and summer
and I walk there
on paths which smell of earth
and hear birdsong above me:
fingers pulling up a window,

J.A. Hartley

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legs with sock marks yet,
the moon in the sky,
high acacia trees trembling,
city balconies and spires
while behind
swishing
in dark swathes
landwards, still
falls the spring rain
making pale rainbows
which shine
against the mercury sky.



Funeral





Salamanders

We can't believe it's the first time
I'm seeing one in my entire life
on the planet, Josh who is ten
and a collector, a connoisseur
of salamanders, and me his late-
middle-aged stepdad. "They live
on every continent except Antarctica,"
he says, holding it up to my nose for a better
first look at this two-inch worm with a head
and arms and legs and, incredibly,
fingers and toes, that he found
under a rock this morning. And I think
I have been living under a rock myself—
the wrong rock—because I've never
seen one of these little miracles
with digits before. Or maybe I did
and just don't remember because
there was no one around like Josh
holding it up to my nose in the shared
cup of our own amazement. I think we
learn to love this world from those who
loved the world before us. But sometimes—
especially lately—those are the ones who
have come after us, reaching up to touch
our shoulder, saying: Look at this miraculous
living thing I am holding in my hands
and you are holding in your hands, too.



The Sentinel





The Stricken



**Uchechukwu Onyedikam
Christina Chin**

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The Taste

the taste
of water —
submerged farmland
an abundance
of catfish and eels



Ice Fog

Ice fog drifts
over the water's surface
as the groundhog
predicts more winter.
We abandon dreams
of early spring but we
believe that warmth
will free the murmuring stream.
We long for the ice to crack,
the river to explode –
wetting the dusty ground
to wake sleeping tubers –

to hear again
the bright bird song,
to see once more the white
apple blossoms.

But can we ever
be sure that spring
will return?



Signs of Spring

As I open the kitchen window,
I watch the screen breathe like a thin lung
and soon, cats gather like priests on its pulpit.

A pollen of wings stirs ankle-high—
the dognose bees, the pinwheel wasps.
The warm air stews cut grass garnish with rich mower exhaust.

The wind speaks in children's voices,
and birds totter in the neighbor's yard
like punctuation erased in the flurry of a passing car.

Now, the pear tree grows shirt collars of green,
and garage doors open like gaping jaws
breathing the dissonance of distant music.

Summer is a Sunday, an aimless nap-fog,
but in new spring, we rebel with the energy
of a young dog in a new yard.



Sahara, Solo





Sunrise in Joshua Tree





Opening

Walk into a room,
nestle into blank
walls. The ceiling lowers.
The aperture of the window
opens like an eye
into azure.
Tour green fields
under blazing sky.
Distant stands a forest.
Recollections of life
rush past. Hold a lens
over memory's waters,
glistening details.
Meet another wanderer,
compare notes in the field.
Sometimes, go down
into the blue well of self.
Ascend to green,
sky.



Twilight

The sun lingered above the sea,
Saturated with flames and sweat.
Rivers of fury girdled the ferocious star,
And the bright misfiring of alchemy
Roared from its boiling alembic.
As it drew closer to the horizon
The ocean became inflamed and bruised
In colors that reflected the sun's anger:
Lavender, mauve, bronze and cherry -
A pretty abrasion, this aftermath of spite.
And as the sun sank into the protesting waters
Shells were ground by the heel of the star's tepid humor,
And grottos and tridents disappeared,
Becoming rocks once more
In a primordial synergy.
But finally, perceiving the sun's chaotic mischief,
The moon rose, shivering with galaxies.
She consoled the tides,
She healed the scalded waters,
And cast light that yielded comfort like laudanum:
Capturing the sea in a cold languor,
In a lunar tincture of euphoria.



Dance of Life

The man stands by the lake

The lake is smooth and quiet

Green water touches blue

The man paints, moving in the silence

He looks down inside the water

At first there is nothing there

The lake is flat and quiet

Now the sun appears

The man's trousers are folded

They nestle above his knees

His legs feel begin to feel the heat

His skin feels the breeze

He looks down again, folds of water roll towards him

Light green, pale, light green, pale

The ripples shimmy in the sunlight

Gradually sights appear

Dorothy Johnson-Laird

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There are long reeds growing upwards
They form an embrace
Some wrap around large rocks
A white fish moves out, touches the lake's surface
In the morning light, it breathes

On the canvas are painted the water ripples
Their slow waves move at the bottom of the page
He has laid his shoes by his side
His feet start a gentle play
In the distance a silent swan sits, she is aloof and proud
She too finds her way onto the page

Slowly, he sees more fish
They are not large fish, but silent, moving in groups together
White swims alongside orange
They skim the water's surface
About the size of his little finger
How small they are together
They breathe in quiet breaths
How small they are to recognize each other

Dorothy Johnson-Laird

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The canvas reflects the flicker of sunlight on gold

Orange in blue water

The lake no longer a mystery

But the gentle dance of life



Islands

Marine iguanas bob up and sunbathe,
bump their chests on slick outcrops,
before pairing off or sliding into waves.

The carcass of a blue whale bulks,
rotting into bones, a target for the birds
who patrol the beach. Sea lions bark

and frolic. Each tidepool jeweled
with purple sponges, brain coral, tropic
fish—they dart and vanish, schooled

in opulent anemones. Offshore, I
dive into the turtled water, fathoms
where few things go famished,

so plentiful with animals and flora.
I drift near plankton, sinking down



where sharks that flank me circle:

survey the grottos of an underworld,

a mottled wound-dark wonderment aglow.

Lift up for air, surfacing through auras.



Recily to Sovery, Some Years Ago

It is the snick of a wolf's teeth over the gentle throat of an unoffending rabbit.

Inherent in the quiet, the quick, the somber, and integral to the pulsing, the burning, the crashing, it has yet to leave. It won't, you know. It hasn't in my lifetime. It won't in yours.

It is within you. Me. In every beat of my heart, every step I take, I feel it. We walk on it, no matter how thick your boots are. You see the hide they're made of? That's it, too. A part of it.

It is you. It is me, even if you think that you're somehow the exception. We were borne from these trees, this dirt, this sky and sun and rain and cloud and blood and stone. Made to walk this earth, made to make our mark and die there and live around it, whatever it is. You become a good archer? Every arrow you fire is made of wood from these trees around us – yes, even that little sapling. It'll tower over us, one day, years in the future. I'll be gone by then. It'll want these old bones back, even if they're cracking and creaking by then!

I jest. But yes, all of this? The intrinsic *being* of all sorts. We cannot create that. It created us, truly. Made us the way we are. Every birthmark you have, quirk, fun thing that makes you you – you were given it. Never waste it, you got that? Good.

Here, sit down. Feel these stones. Hard, right? Rounded? There was a river here when I was young. We'd fish in it. And fish, guess what? They're –

Oh, you, Sovery. You're right! They're it too. That thing that we can't name. The beingness that everything around us is.

Don't cry, love. You're it too. No one can take that away from you. We can lose as many battles as it comes to. Warfare, disagreements, that's all it too. For if they weren't, why would they happen?

There, there. Breathe. Deep, in. With me. One, two, three..now exhale. Three, two, one. Feel my hand on your shoulder? Focus on the warmth. That's it too, you know. It will always be.

Never forget any of this. But even if you do, it won't forget you. Here, next time you're free, walk some minutes into the woods. That trail the deer leave. Follow in their footsteps – or hoofsteps, if you want to be stringent – and walk as they do. It will be difficult, because we have two legs and they four, but do what they do.

Julio Rainion

NATURA
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Look at what they eat, the berries and leaves they nibble at. Stop at the stream you know they drink at, because we took some there last summer and ate well because the fauns were just about full-grown.

Mimic them, and maybe it'll be easier for you to understand.

Do that after lunch, would you? And help me up, because otherwise I'll be stuck here..

Thank you.



Encomium to Trees

Earth's pulmonary magicians,
turning carbon dioxide to oxygen
with the flick of a leaf.

Botanical window washers of the sky,
a tree of a certain age
cleansing a ton of carbon a year,
billions by a forest—a carbon sink
washing away human stink.

Lifeboats of the soil,
that clings to their roots,
rescuing it from floods,
run-off, erosion.

Wizards of the water cycle,
capturing rain as it falls
and sponging up wetness
to return it to the air.

Benefactors of the Earth, donating
of themselves—syrup, cork, spices,
fruits, medicine, timber, rubber, oils,
paper, cocoa, coffee, baseball bats.

Safe harbors for millions—
birds, amphibians, mammals, insects,
taking refuge in their nourishing,
protective embrace.

Beautifiers of the planet,
greening cities and landscapes,
shielding us from heat,
noise, wind, ugliness.

Anne Gruner

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Ultimate civil servants of homeland defense—
rainforest, timberland, mangrove, jungle,
or front yard tree with a swing—
embodying the soul of the ecosystem.

What will we do without them?



Forget Me Not

I ask you to pick the last of the mums, or what I think are the last,
before fall succumbs to winter, the winter of my discontent.
I arrange the dead cut flowers, a lovely mauve, in fresh water,
replacing the withered blooms in the vase on our kitchen table,
setting them outside to await the next stage of their life – the compost pile.
Mum planted flowers, but not that last year, which she didn't know was her last;
although she endured winter, she passed away when spring, her favourite season, began.
You tell me the petunias are still blooming, in spite of the threat of snow,
and I see for myself; the nicotiana in the flower box Dad built before he died,
the one you reconstructed when the mortar crumbled to dust,
still cling to life, or somewhere between life and death – in a vegetative state.
I asked you to empty the flower pots last week, but I have my regrets.
Should we have given the begonias another week or two to bloom?
The impatiens haven't lost their patience, expecting another round of warmth,
nor has the miniature red rose given up on life, the potted one you gave me
and I transplanted to the box, where I lay it in the fertile ground,
and watched its resurrection, the promise of new life in spring – the cruellest season.



I picture the geraniums at the cemetery, hardy plants, Mum said, and so
they guard the gravestone, bright and large as life, red like the roses below lying on her casket.
And now I watch you, trudging to the compost pile, arms full of clipped clematis,
pruned to within an inch of its life, as per my instructions, as it hasn't bloomed,
not since Mum's been gone, the purple flowers refusing to show their faces.
But the bleeding hearts, bless their weedy little souls, choke the breath from portulaca,
denying them sun so their hearts can beat strong, if only for a brief time, before decaying.
And the forget me not I plopped into the box Dad bricked spread like wildfire;
I couldn't kill it if I tried.



An Unplanned Path

My initial garden plans failed. The small ice plants never grew into purple happy flowers. The lava rocks my son and I scattered throughout the empty patches of dirt were raked up by the gardeners in our gated community. My autumn-hued chrysanthemums never re-bloomed. The ranunculus, inside the large planter my husband gave me for my birthday, died.

Despite these unsuccessful attempts, I love my back patio and front garden. The patio bursts with blooming red geraniums, and several years ago, housed a bird's nest. My front garden attracts hummingbirds, and everywhere I look I see pops of color and lush greenery. But it wasn't always like this.

For some time, the birthday planter sat empty. I eventually planted magenta impatiens which looked much too small inside the terra cotta planter. Now, the impatiens grow as if they belonged there all along. We replaced the lava rocks with heavy stepping stones. Instead of chrysanthemums, orange, yellow, white, and pink kalanchoe bloom year-after-year.

My plants and flowers teach me, showing me that beauty and life can thrive even when first attempts don't go as planned. And that rule doesn't just apply to my garden; it is also relevant to my life.

I live with an autoimmune disease — Undifferentiated Connective Tissue Disease (UCTD). UCTD shares symptoms with rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, and myositis. I experience daily pain, fatigue, and weakness in my left leg. Because of UCTD, at the age of thirty-seven, I retired from my twelve-year teaching career. I am now a stay-at-home mom and writer; a woman living a life she hadn't planned.



An autoimmune disease means your body attacks itself. They are unpredictable. The only certainty is uncertainty — knowing I will inexplicably experience flare-ups and periods of remission.

Initially it was difficult for me to bloom in this uprooted life. When I stopped teaching, my world shrank. I lost my students, their families, and my colleagues. Mostly, I lost a large part of my identity.

Time in the garden generates a mix of emotions. Gratitude for our open space. Appreciation for the natural world. Dismay at the mess left by strong winds during the night. Concern for a plant that is suddenly looking more brown than green. Frustration that my knees don't allow me to easily squat and pull weeds. And so it is with my life. I am disappointed by this medically-induced change of life plans. I am angry that my body fails me and makes it more difficult to do things I want to do — like gardening.

My life has taken a detour. Just like my garden. I hadn't planned for the bougainvillea vine to grow up and around my kitchen window, but it has. I hadn't planned on becoming a stay-at-home mom, but I am. I am not thankful for my chronic illness. I don't see it as a gift. Instead it's acknowledging the bad, the hard, the pain and finding moments of beauty and grace and peace in there too.



Monarch Butterfly Laying Egg





Monarch Butterfly On Lantana





Sanctuary

blossoms of star-white and lilac and pink
bloom on the bark-skin arms of the trees
constellations of leaves, twinkling in green
the sunlight reaching through the space in
between
down
onto the earth below, where hardy, delicate flowers
grow, in petals of an amber heaven, prismatic red,
azure. a sycamore's welcome canopy.

what they must know. these ancient beings
these giant priests of nature. flocks of humans
kneeling

below them, before them, in springtime and
summer. congregations of bees, butterflies, birds
temporary oceans of aster surround an elm's
immortal island. we will forget these guardians when
winter strips them bare, and they will patiently wait.
until the next time we remember



An Arrangement

Azalea, tan tissue marks its end; **black-eyed Susan** watches the daisy's sassy sway; **blue star**, five points sit still under the night sky; **crape myrtle**, crimson cones after managed murder; **daisy**, picky, a puzzle of love's comings and goings; **dandelion**, a deadly danger to the civility of the yard; **forsythia**, that wild one, forsakes proper form; **geranium**, fat-fingered stems twist into buds; **goldenrod** tells the nose what it can do; **hydrangea** hides from the afternoon sun, drains the well dry; **impatiens** invite hummingbirds to their inner sanctum; **iris**, showy, rainbows eyes rimmed by ink green; **lily** resents day lilies and water lilies using its name; **morning glory**, nature's naughty gloat rises with the sun; **mums**, petal-packed pompom for mom; **orchid**, long stem neck to designer bloom; **poinsettia**, holiday holiness red as Santa's suit; **rose** is a rose, everybody knows, but still is told and told; **spirea**, spiraling snakes of white streaming down; **sunflower**, self-satisfied face shades the day; **waterlily**, a platform where the frog listens.



Yellow Flag

After Louise Glück

The light, that low blue-hue of March mornings.
I watch the dogs curled on the end of the cushion,
looking out at the start of the world, bushtits
on the mossy limbs of the gum tree, squirrels
performing acrobatics, dangling upside down
from the suet, morsels grasped in tiny palms.

Steam rolls off my *good morning, asshole* mug
and there's dew coating the tall green grass.
Soon the yellow iris will be in bloom, waving
the flag in the blustery storms of April, but
already daffodils swinging bells of spring.

And yet, still I am unsatisfied. This is the cross
I bear; all this blistering beauty, but I want more,
me always sounding like Belle, *Beauty and the
Beast* my soundtrack, arms thrown wide.

More time with the oldest of my dogs, more
early mornings, the velveteen of her neck
crushed over my arms. Less city and more



fields to walk through, more books and more
clean violet air, sharp-toothed after moonsooning.

And why shouldn't I? The body's continual
decline in illness. Hunger all that is left. In
the distance a neighbor's house leaching
out puffs of smoke from a chimney I
don't yet have. Two crows circle a
cedarwood round and round and round.



Grasshopper





Curious





Boston Winterscape





Dead Wood

Your split and splintered limbs
Helpless, compound fractured,
teeter in the wind's last cruelty
or float there, helpless in the flood.

This winter storm has wrecked
your wooden grace. It overruled
your swaying summer compromises.
Sap spills from amputated stumps.

This row of corpses stiff with rigor
lies ranked and ready for the saw.
Your bones will feed the winter fires.
Your wooden secrets crackle.

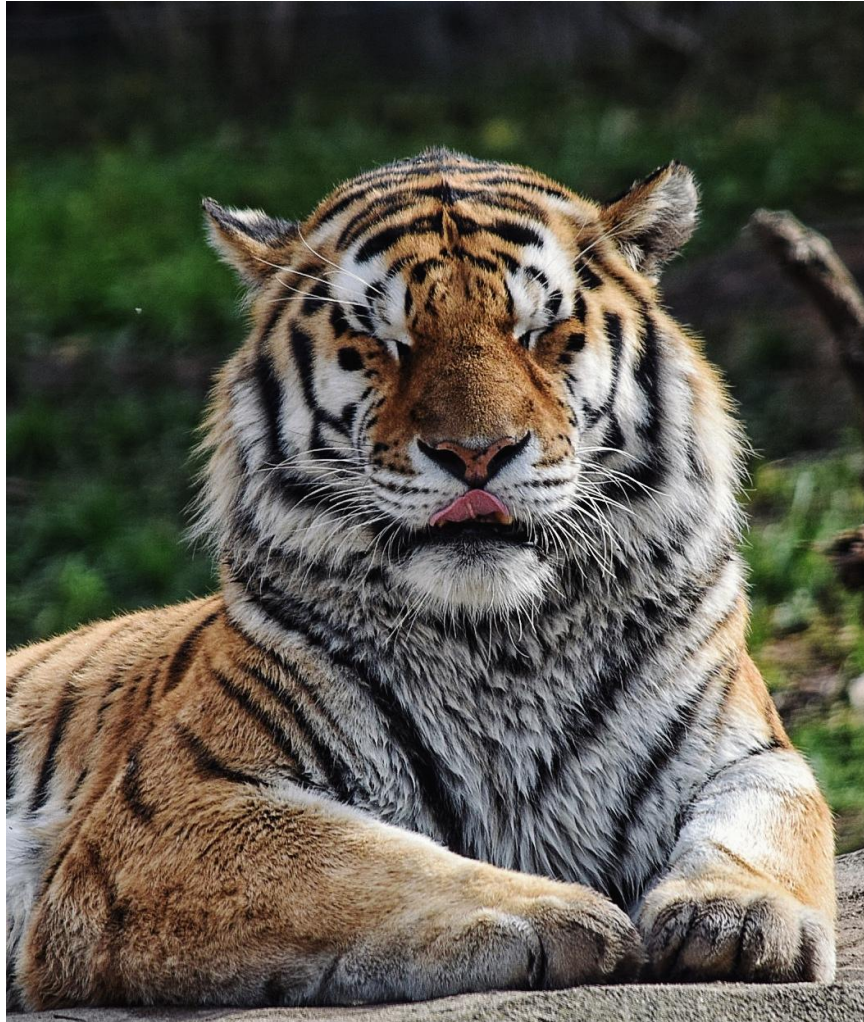


Flamingo





Tiger





Cailleach

for millennia she has played here, barefoot, chasing
sunlight on water as it tumbles over pebbles and rocks – she runs
through rainbows in mists that spray ancient ferns crouched in fetal
position, waiting – she rises and dips with the land, forging forwards,
splashing and kicking until she reaches the brink – she raises her hands –
violet crashes with green
as the water falls,
rushing,
surging
towards
the
black pool below



The Sculpture





Mushroom Umbrella





Elegy for the Peripheral

If ever one should search
For evidence I lived,

May they look between the seasons. There, I still will be.

In the bud who still bares frost,
Glistening upward, hopeful.

In the pregnant sunflower,
On edge of becoming.

In the rotting fruit
Of an otherwise serene forest.

In the anxiety of the red leaf,
Summoning the strength to fall.

I will be in the hungry mosquito.
In the bear who wakes from sleep A deep, deep sleep.

Look for me in the starlight of snowcaps. In the shedding fur of the restless, wild dog.

In the bittersweet stench of something Almost, but not quite, being born.

I will be waiting for them there,
Where I've always been.

Chrysanthemum Crenshaw

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In between everything.

This is my home.

The moment before a fresh calf opens her eyes. The final breath of a great grandfather.

Tell them,

This is where they'll find me.

Where beginnings die.

Where ends begin.



Photography Lovers

He cannot love me until I am *Acer saccharinum*,
mothering living creatures in my tree branch limbs.

He cannot love me until I am *Aquilegia canadensis*,
in possession of a showy beauty.

If if I own beauty, it is restrained & quiet.

He cannot love me until I am a landscape,
placid & uncomplicated
& pleasing to the eye.



Lovebirds





Precious One





Time is made of burrs and bristles

A furled sun skims the sky, unbothered. I wonder
how I can curve time, turn it back on itself,

like a silent windblown tumbleweed. You
are laid in a room where the blinds were skewed,

there is no time for them to be repaired,
although they said they'd get maintenance in

to correct it. Everything needs fixing. The ox-
ygen machine rushes like a coming storm, and

the speckled cactus wrens outside the window
fight over a caterpillar, who too wants to fly

if given enough time. They seem clearer
than you, tied to machines. Time is fragile,

but you in your bed hovers between
here and expanse, and I hover with you,

want to be here and also with the wrens,
whose feet are never pierced by thorns.



Ocean's Root





Water





The Same Situation

you thought summer might not end this
year, that autumn had no chance, but
then without warning the temperature
dropped, and it seemed as if over night
leaves changed from green to yellow,
from yellow to red, from red to
purple, from purple to black.

all those faded lemonade sunsets
you chased no longer arrived. all
those flowers you watered at
midnight wilted and died.

you considered fleeing town,
driving to some place with
a name you couldn't
pronounce.

Tohm Bakelas

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but you knew anywhere you went,
no matter the name or the place,
you'd be faced with the same
situation, the same death
of everything, the same
dying autumn.

and so you prepared for winter
by burning blue memories
just to stay warm.

and when the fire died,
there was nothing to
do but embrace
the cold.



Portrait in the Sky

there was a storm
blowing in from the south
all the meteorologists were in heaven
with – *finally* –
something to get excited about

they droned on all day
nattering about how to prepare
for the fury of nature
wind
flood
trees committing suicide
describing in juicy detail
all the dangers in store

and then in soothing voices
reminded us to close and stay away
from windows
garage the car
check flashlight batteries
and fill water jugs
in case the power went south
(that last made me laugh since
according to them
buckets of water will be baptizing us)

it all sounded good to me
life's been as bland as baby cereal
another mouthful of pablum and i might puke

so i suited up in a hoodie and ankle boots
and headed out in the boring suburban night
down to the seawall



to welcome this wayward posttropical depression
that couldn't have been any more depressed than i was

the moon was riding high over an ocean
that apparently hadn't watched tv
the water not quite as smooth as glass
but certainly not unduly agitated

i stood watching the stars
wondering if all the worry about the weather
was just wishful thinking
on the part of the pros
needing a little excitement near the end
of a dreary uneventful summer

then the wind began to sing
do nothin' till you hear from me
and bang!
started mutilating the clouds
while an invisible hand smeared the sky
with the skin of a heavyweight
heading to the canvas for the count

plumpurple bluegray chalkwhite brown blossomed
as one by one the stars winked out
blotted to oblivion by shreds of clouds

and as i waited for the deluge
i saw my soul take shape in the heavens
amazed by eyeless nature
perfectly replicating the bruises nobody sees



Unfurl

Follow me down the garden path

who seek to spy on spring:

past halfawake grassblades and bedfrozen frogs

and blooms hesitating

their way into love.

All things tremble, bumble, bud;

no summer sureness yet.

Each petal a breastplate, each sepal a sword

to guard against sunshine

perhaps only loaned.

Spring is a thing in balance,

a knife-edge-hour, a

close coil in bushstems, a tenseness in soil;

a breath before falling

into the blue —



Refueling

Squadrons of snow geese
speckle the clouded sky.

I look up,
with hope,
as my father did in Italy,
hearing the drone of propellers
and seeing the white and black
invasion stripes on Allied wings
as he slogged through the mud.

The birds gather and then,
as if the command post has decided
which of the many stubbly fields,
still sporting wisps of snow,
will be the refueling grounds,

they glide,
swan-graceful
down and down,

and then with three
wing bursts,
push down,
thrust extended feet,
land, and fold into white blankets.
Hundreds snowing on the brown field,
filling the air with honks and squawks.

On some unspecified day,
orders will come from headquarters

Lorraine Jeffery

NATURA
August 2023



and the geese will launch
in squadrons,
 winging their way north,
 evaporating as they fly,
pulling spring's
banner of hope
behind them.



Pink Daisies





Mother Junco

White edges spear a junco's wings
A slant of light preys on these tips
Four eggs in purpling petunias
await her

She'll return when
I'm out of sight





From the Other Side

The morning light cascades through the trees,
beams slipping through the cracks of
Heaven,
reflecting over the water in
glistening, rippling waves.

The rhythmic

slosh, pull

slosh, pull

mixes with birdsong,
lilting and floating,
waltzing across the water.

A swan cuts through the pond.

Graceful.

Elegant.

Poised.

The murky deep reflects the glowing beams
as the webbed feet frantically thrash beneath
to perfect the illusion on the surface.

The brisk air nips at my cheeks,
kissing the soft skin until it blushes.

The earth runs smoothly under my fingertips,



and I skim my hands over the top of the blades,
each of them taking turns tickling my palms
instead of slicing them.

The trees rustle,
whispering their centuries-old secrets to the wind,
which carries them to safety
far,
far away,
out of reach of troubled ears.
A distant melody hums softly in my mind
as my own troubles fade
deep,
deep,
deeper into the background of time.

Rays of warmth dance across my lips,
and I part them,
inhaling the sweet scent of moss
and loving promises.
Serene, perfect...
and I finally escape the voices
calling me into the depths of the water,
urging my feet to stop paddling,
and let my head fall beneath the surface.

Julia Platt

NATURA
August 2023



As joy begins to bubble up in my chest,
I realize,
I haven't forgotten how to smile after all.



Ode to the Freshwater Mussel

Funny to think of North America
as a 'biodiversity hotspot'

hickorynut, threeridge

but with 300 species of mussels,
we are

pondshell, heelsplitter

70% imperiled, these are the animals
most in danger of disappearing

pimpleback, mapleleaf

First appearing in the Triassic,
they are old as dinosaurs

pocketbook, sandshell

They settle in the sediment,
anchoring our rivers

pistolgrip, elephant ear

filtering water over their gills,
cycling nutrients and letting the sunlight in

spectaclecase, catspaw

Their life cycle needs fish,
to host their babies and allow them to transform

leafshell, sheepnose

Rosalie Hendon

NATURA
August 2023



When larvae are ready,
mom lures fish close with decoys

pigtoe, papershell

She bombards them with larvae,
which ride along with the fish for a few weeks

spike, wartyback

Until they grow microscopic feet
and drop to the riverbed

snuffbox, leafshell

Invisible guardians of our rivers,
these creatures are bringers of light

Author's note: all species in this poem are native to Ohio.



Owl and Flowers





I Talked to a Toad Yesterday

Walking along the dirt road behind my house
I saw a funny little friend resting on a rock.
Wanting to be polite, I said hello to him.
Rrrribbit, he answered.

Well, don't you talk? I sat beside him.
Rrrribbit, yes, he replied,
I extend my finger out for a handshake.
He looks up at my face, deciding.

Accepting, I shake his tiny frog hand.
Thank you, he said.
I ask him why he was weary.
He widened his weird eyes.

I do not trust you people.
He sllllowlllyy turned his head forward.
How come?
I watched a squirrel run across the grass.

Your little ones step on me, pick me up.
The frog shuddered at the memories.
Lawnmowers roar after me. Ribbitt. You
Are the only one who has ever greeted me.

Sweeps of sympathy stroked my heart.
The poor little frog,
He can trust nobody.

Makenzie Matthews-Beard

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Do you have any friends? I ask.
Oh, people pass on by, he answered.
But deep down, I am lonely.
I carefully stroked his back.

He tensed.
Please do not pet me yet,
He said.
I stopped.

But you are so very kind, he told me.
My heart smiled. *I hope your future*
Gets brighter.... What's your name?
The frog straightened his body.

Mr. Frog, please. I nod.
We stare at the clouds.
They are talking to us, I think.



March Madness Maple

Pompons on the ground,
lifeless
after their routine.



The Turning Wheel





Fade into Autumn

The dying brilliance of a fallen flower slowly wilting, reminder of impending autumn, even as the thermometer denies that possibility. High above, life-lined to its tree, a surviving comrade provides nourishment for a late migrating hummingbird.

Feel the quiet sadness of the change of the season. Leaves turning, falling, summer birds disappearing, autumn birds arriving, welcome, but yet a reminder of winter's fast approach. Days of monsoon rains giving way to dry, chill winds, high desert once again parched and brown.

Slip out into the chill evening, first to savor Cooke's Peak as the sun caresses him, making him blush to the bare top of his head, only to desert him, traveling lower, gently grazing a cinder cone, before setting fire from under the nearby hills to the whorl of clouds encircling the Burro Mountains.

His last flare into this sky fading, old sol slips into someone else's tomorrow, leaving only pale traces of his presence in fading pink on the lower edge of the clouds. Crickets, who had announced his leaving, refuse to give up their song, defy the chill to chorus just a little longer, adding vocal brightness to the dark sky.

Mourn this loss of light, wake before the sun, watch him arrive slowly, subtly, only to disappear too soon.

Dawn M. Smith

NATURA
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And yet, autumn, unlike the enervation of summer heat that encourages indolence, offers pleasures all its own. Savor the trails of open lands, long too hot to hike after midday, now welcoming at any hour. Thrill to pronghorn herds passing through the open rangeland. Remember to honor each season as it comes.



10 Reasons to Plant Native Flowers in Your Yard

waking early and walking outside you'll spy pollen-dreaming bumblebees caressed by flowers

you'll voyeuristically observe more chintinous couplings than grass blades

winged tsunamis will find solace and sustenance in a single square foot of tended earth

birds will sing sweetest songs before they harvest seeds from sun-warmed stems

an insect will arrive you've never seen; you'll learn *this* plant supports its entire life cycle

nature will grace precious gifts: feathers, stained-glass dragonfly wings, iridescent beetle husks

orb weavers will take up residence, spinning geometric wonders hosting morning dew

thankful solitary bees will nest in stem cavities savoring centimeters to call their own

happy to be home, the native flowers seed, rooting generations

this single choice will thrive a hundred tiny lives



Pollen Dreams





Special Thanks

1

To Our Contributors

We would like to thank you for choosing *Cosmic Daffodil Journal* to house your work. It means so much to us that so many people found our journal and keep submitting to it each new quarter. This journal is a dream come true for us. Thank you, again, and we hope you enjoy our digital issue as well as our first ever ebook.

2

To Kate, Callie, and Kelly

As we celebrate the launch of Cosmic Daffodil's *Issue 3, NATURA*, we would like to thank our INCREDIBLE content readers. It has been such an honor and a pleasure to work alongside you three this quarter. We appreciate your valuable insights and dedication to read through everything. Thank you for being a part of our dream.

With love,

Madi & Jen

Biographies

Moriah Brown is a poet, fiction writer, and full-time student at Syracuse University working towards a degree in creative writing. She is from Fort Worth, Texas, and loves writing, reading, and her cat Nala.

Zach Murphy is a Hawaii-born writer with a background in cinema. His stories appear in Reed Magazine, The Coachella Review, Maudlin House, B O D Y, Ruminare, Wilderness House Literary Review, Flash: The International Short-Short Story Magazine, and more. His debut chapbook *Tiny Universes* (Selcouth Station Press, 2021) is available in paperback and e-book. He lives with his wonderful wife Kelly in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Karlie Shay is a homemaker based in Gatesville, Texas. She's self-published five poetry collections via Amazon Kindle Publishing and holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Elementary Studies from Western Governors University (2022). Shay is active in posting her poetry on Instagram @karlie.shay consistently. On an ordinary day, Shay spends her time tending to her beloved family members and writing to her heart's content.

Tom Ball has published novels, novellas, short stories and flash in 31 publications. His website is tomballbooks.com and the Online Journal Website (he is senior editor/co-founder) is fleasonthedog.com

Glenis Moore has been writing poetry since the first Covid lockdown and does her writing at night as she suffers from severe insomnia. When she is not writing poetry she makes beaded jewellery, reads, cycles and sometimes runs 10K races slowly. She lives, with her long-suffering partner and three cats, just outside Cambridge in the flat expanse of the Fens.

Victoria Garton has chapbooks *Venice Comes Clean* (Flying Ketchup Press, 2023) and *Pout of Tangerine Tango*, from Finishing Line Press, 2022. Her work has recently been accepted or published in *I-70 Review*, *Thorny Locust*, *Gasconade Review*, *The Writers Place Yearbooks 2021-2022*, and *River City Poetry*. Her full-length book *Kisses in The Raw Night* was published by BkMk Press (1989). Non-fiction has been in *Working Ranch*, *Farm and Ranch Living*, and *Missouri Angus Trails*.

Angela Hoffman's poetry collections include *Resurrection Lily* and *Olly Olly Oxen Free* (Kelsay Books). She placed third in the WFOP Kay Saunders Memorial Emerging Poet in 2022. Her work is widely published. She has written a poem a day since the start of the pandemic. Angela lives in rural Wisconsin. facebook.com/angelahoffmanpoet



Tanner Hadden is a 15-year-old student from Austin, Texas. This submission is a historical fiction short story about a young French boy's perspective on the Nazi invasion through the contrast between the beauty of nature and World War II's sadness. His passion for painting the countryside of Champagne is interrupted by the harsh reality of war in 1940. Through his art, the story depicts the boy's struggle between a love for the outdoors and the chaos surrounding him.

Kimberly Suzanne Lewis is a former United Methodist minister, retired educator, and new writer. She has a BA in Speech Communication from the University of Georgia and an M. Div. from Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. Her poems appear in *Rise Up Anthology* and *Matter II, Volume 2* by Oprelle Publications (available on Amazon) and the *Buds & Blooms* issue of *Cosmic Daffodil Journal*. When not traveling, she lives in the historic Kings Ferry community of Hilliard, Florida, amongst an abundance of nature.

Tinamarie Cox lives in Arizona with her husband and two children. She writes and creates visual art to escape her mind and explore the universe. Her work has appeared in several publications, and she is also the author of *Self-Destruction in Small Doses* (Bottlecap Press). You can find more of her work at: tinamariethinkstoomuch.weebly.com

Adam Day is the author of *Left-Handed Wolf* (LSU Press, 2020), and of *Model of a City in Civil War* (Sarabande Books), and the recipient of a Poetry Society of America Chapbook Fellowship for *Badger*, *Apocrypha*, and of a PEN Award. He is editor of the forthcoming anthology, *Divine Orphans of the Poetic Project*, from 1913 Press, and my work has appeared in the *APR*, *Boston Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Volt*, *Kenyon Review*, *Iowa Review*, and elsewhere. He is the publisher of *Action*, *Spectacle*.

Kenneth Pobo is the author of twenty-one chapbooks and nine full-length collections. Recent books include *Bend of Quiet* (Blue Light Press), *Loplop in a Red City* (Circling Rivers), and *Uneven Steven* (Assure Press). *Opening* is forthcoming from *Rectos Y Versos Editions*. *Lavender Fire*, *Lavender Rose* is forthcoming from *Brick/House Books*.

Sam Calhoun is a writer and photographer living in Elkmont, AL. He is the author of one chapbook, "Follow This Creek" (Foothills Publishing). His poems have appeared in *Pregnant Moon Review*, *Westward Quarterly*, *Offerings*, *Waterways*, and other journals. Follow him on Twitter or Instagram @weatherman_sam, or www.weathermansam.com

John Muro is twice nominated for the Pushcart Prize and, more recently, the Best of the Net Award, is a resident of Connecticut, a graduate of Trinity College and a lover of all things chocolate. He has published two volumes of poems -- *In the Lilac Hour* and *Pastoral Suite* -- in 2020 and 2022, respectively. Both volumes were published by Antrim House, and both are available on Amazon and elsewhere. John's poems have appeared or are forthcoming in numerous literary journals and anthologies, including *Acumen*, *Barnstorm*, *Delmarva*, *Moria*, *New Square*, *Sky Island* and the *Valparaiso Review*. Instagram: @johntmuro.

J.A. Hartley lives and works in Madrid. Twitter: @jameshartleybks Instagram: @J.A.Hartleypoet

Noll Griffin is a Berlin-based linoleum printmaker and illustrator with an eclectic, soft focus on nature, nostalgia, and alienation. Outside of visual art, he also releases self-recorded folk-pop music from time to time. His art can be found in various journals including *Myth and Lore Zine*, *Wild Greens Magazine*, *The Winnow*, *Zanna Magazine*, and *Meditating Cat Zine*.

Paul Hostovsky's poems have won a Pushcart Prize, two Best of the Net Awards, the FutureCycle Poetry Book Prize, and have been featured on *Poetry Daily*, *Verse Daily*, and *The Writer's Almanac*. He makes his living in Boston as a sign language interpreter. Website: paulhostovsky.com



Frances Fish's passion lies behind a camera. She has dabbled as an abstract painter and often shoots hundreds of photographs a day. Her friends call her a 'preservationist' photographer, as her images are of the abandoned places in the desert, covered in graffiti, which change day by day. Some of the images Frances shoots can never be replicated, as the art is painted over, sometimes immediately.

Uchechukwu Onyedikam is a Nigerian creative artist based in Lagos, Nigeria. His poems have appeared in Amsterdam Quarterly, Brittle Paper, Poetic Africa, Hood Communists and in print anthologies. Christina Chin and he have co-published *Pouring Light on the Hills* (2022).

Christina Chin is a painter and haiku poet from Malaysia. She is a four-time recipient of top 100 in the mDAC Summit Contests, exhibited at the Palo Alto Art Center, California. She is 1st prize winner of the 34th Annual Cherry Blossom Sakura Festival 2020 Haiku Contest and 1st prize winner in the 8th Setouchi Matsuyama 2019 Photo haiku Contest. She has been published in numerous journals, multilingual journals, and anthologies, including Japan's prestigious monthly Haikukai Magazine.

Fred Donovan is an author and editor who writes about technology to make money and crafts poems to keep him sane. He has published poems in numerous journals, including WordWrights, Freshwater, and Black Bough. He lives on Cape Cod with his family and enjoys walks along the beach.

Devon Neal (he/him) is a Bardstown, KY resident who received a B.A. in Creative Writing from Eastern Kentucky University and an MBA from The University of the Cumberlands. He currently works as a Human Resources Manager in Louisville, KY. His work has been featured in Moss Puppy Magazine, coalitionworks, Sage Cigarettes Magazine, Rough Cut Press, and others.

Kirsten Smith (she/her) is a photographer, writer, and travel addict who lives and works in San Francisco. Her work has appeared in Esoterica, SPANK the CARP, and more. Check her out on Instagram @the_wallflower_wanderer and on Twitter @Kirsten_Wanders.

Heather Sager writes poetry and fiction. Her most recent poetry appears in Dreich, The Closed Eye Open, Spinozablue, Litbop, Creative Flight, StepAway, Magma, Remington Review, ActiveMuse, and more. Her recent fiction appears in The Fabulist and elsewhere. Heather lives in Illinois.

Melinda Giordano is a native of Los Angeles, California. A published artist and writer, her written pieces have appeared in the Lake Effect Magazine, Scheherazade's Bequest, Whisperings, Circa Magazine, Vine Leaves Literary Journal, After the Art and The Rabbit Hole among others. She writes flash fiction and poetry that speculates on the possibility of remarkable things – the secret lives of the natural world.

Dorothy Johnson-Laird is a poet and social worker who lives in New York City. She received a B.A. in creative writing from New School University and an M.F.A in creative writing from Sarah Lawrence College. Dorothy also works as a music journalist with a passion in African music. She has published journalism with www.afropop.org and www.worldmusiccentral.org. Recent poems were published by Aji, Cantos, and Pomona Valley Review, among others.

Will Cordeiro has work published in AGNI, Bennington Review, Copper Nickel, The Threepenny Review, THRUSH, and elsewhere. Will won the Able Muse Book Award for Trap Street. Will is also coauthor of *Experimental Writing: A Writer's Guide and Anthology*, forthcoming from Bloomsbury. Will coedits Eggtooth Editions and lives in Guadalajara, Mexico.



Julio Rainion is, unfortunately, a fan of Elden Ring. They've been published in Stark Nights, Toil & Trouble, and soon Spark2Flame; they are also associated with Litmora Literary Magazine. They are also a fan of body horror and Neon Genesis Evangelion.

Anne Gruner is a Pushcart-nominated writer whose poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in "Amsterdam Quarterly," "Take Five Journal," "Beltway Poetry Quarterly," "Plum Tree Tavern," "Humans of the World," "Topical Poetry," "Jalmurra," "Written Tales," "Spillwords," "Superpresent Magazine," and "Old Mountain Press" anthologies. She is working on her debut poetry collection. <https://www.annegruner.com/>

Ivanka Fear is a Slovenian born Canadian writer. Her poems and stories appear in numerous publications, including Understorey, The South Shore Review, Blank Spaces, Montreal Writes, Orchards Poetry, October Hill, and Mystery Tribune. Her debut mystery novel, The Dead Lie, was published February 2023 by Level Best Books. A second novel, Where is My Husband? is scheduled for publication October 2023. Learn more at www.ivankafear.com Instagram: ivankawrites, Twitter: @FearIvanka and Facebook: ivankafearauthor.

Wendy Kennar is a mother, wife, writer, and former teacher. Her writing has appeared in a number of publications and anthologies, both in print and online. You can read more from Wendy at www.wendykennar.com where she writes about books, boys, and bodies (living with an invisible disability). You can also find Wendy on [Instagram @wendykennar](https://www.instagram.com/wendykennar). Wendy is currently at work on a memoir-in-essays.

DJ Grant is an award-winning artist living in Southern California. Her artwork has shown in Los Angeles, Toronto and New York. Grant holds a B.A. in English, Emphasis Literature, from The University of British Columbia.

Amy Akiko is an educator, journalism graduate and writer from South London. She enjoys creating various forms of fiction including poetry, children's stories, flash and short stories. Her work is soon to appear in The Tiger Moth Review, and she is currently editing her first novel.

Ronald J. Pelias spent most of his career writing books, e.g., If the Truth Be Told (Brill Publications), The Creative Qualitative Researcher (Routledge), and Lessons on Aging and Dying (Routledge), that call upon the literary as a research strategy. Now he writes for the pleasures of lingering in bafflement.

Shilo Niziolek has written Fever (2022), A Thousand Winters In Me (2022), I Am Not An Erosion: Poems Against Decay (2022), and Atrophy (forthcoming). Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in Juked, West Trade Review, Entropy, Pork Belly Press, and Phoebe Journal among others. Shilo is a writing instructor at Clackamas Community College and is the editor and co-founder of the literary magazine, Scavengers. She is a queer disabled writer who lives in the Pacific Northwest with her partner and their pit bull.

Catherine Yeates is a writer and artist. Their fiction has been published or is forthcoming in Wyngraf, Tree And Stone, and Twin Bird Review. They enjoy hiking and nature photography and live with their partner, cat, and two rambunctious dogs. Find them at cjyeates.com or on [Instagram at cj.yeates](https://www.instagram.com/cj.yeates).

Phillip Temples is still trying to make sense of it all. Writing and photography help. He can be followed at <https://temples.com> or on [Twitter @PhilTemples](https://twitter.com/PhilTemples).



Clare O'Brien has worked as a schoolteacher, a journalist, PR to a Scottish politician and PA to an American rock star. She now lives and writes beside a sea-loch in Scotland, which suits her much better. Her first poetry pamphlet 'Who Am I Supposed To Be Driving?', a 13-poem ekphrastic series in response to the music of David Bowie, came out in 2022 with Hedgehog Poetry Press. Other credits include Popshot, Mslexia, Northwords Now, The Mechanics' Institute Review and several British and American poetry anthologies. She's currently also working on a slipstream novel about identity and disconnection, called 'Light Switch'.

Renee Williams's art can be seen in this year's Corolla Wild Horse Fund calendar (September) and on the cover of the 2023 calendar. The winter issue of the New Feathers Anthology has my work on the cover, and the November issue of Moss Piglet includes my work, as well.

Emma Mooney's poetry is inspired by her love of walking and swimming in wild open spaces. Her poems and short stories have been extensively published in UK and international magazines and she is the author of the novels, A Beautiful Game and Wings to Fly. In 2021 she won first place in the Hillfoots Tales photography competition. Emma was awarded a master's with distinction in Creative Writing from the University of Stirling. When not writing creatively, Emma works as a funeral celebrant where she has the privilege of sharing people's life stories. Author website: www.emmamoonney.co.uk.

Amy Wellman Edwards is an art educator in the Dallas-Ft. Worth area. She has a Bachelor's degree in Art Education from Kansas State University and a Master's degree in Art History from Texas Woman's University. She has taught art of all levels for 28 years. She enjoys numerous art forms including acrylic, encaustic, digital art and photography. She has recently enjoyed working in mixed media and has had work published on the cover of Quibble, as well as in Red Noise Collective and Red Ogre. When she's not teaching or creating art, she enjoys spending time with her 6-year-old grandson.

Chrysanthemum Crenshaw grew up in a small town in Texas. She left home at an early age to pursue her passions for environmentalism, animal care and, of course, writing.

Anna Boughtwood lives just over the Dunn Memorial Bridge from Albany. Her writing has appeared in Sad Girls Club, BarBar Magazine, Dime Show Review, and Dipity. She enjoys reading and working on elaborate knitting projects.

Allison Liu is a queer Chinese American writer currently studying in the Boston area. She can often be found working on her novel, photographing the unusual, and conducting bioengineering research. Her work has appeared in or is forthcoming in Yellow Arrow Vignette, The Violet Hour Magazine, The Foredge Review, Under the Madness Magazine, and elsewhere.

Lynn Finger's (she/her) works have appeared in 8Poems, Book of Matches, Fairy Piece, Drunk Monkeys, and ONE ART: a journal of poetry. Lynn also recently released a poetry chapbook, "The Truth of Blue Horses," published by Alien Buddha Press. Lynn edits Harpy Hybrid Review, and her Twitter is @sweetfirefly2. Social Media: Twitter @sweetfirefly2

Huang Chen, a Chinese American, graduated with ALM in Creative Writing and Literature from the Harvard Division of Continuing Education. Worked in a high school for a few years and interned at Regal House Publishing and Metamorphosis Literary Agency. His poems are published in Assignment Literary Magazine.



Tohm Bakelas is a social worker in a psychiatric hospital. He was born in New Jersey, resides there, and will die there. He is the author of 24 chapbooks and several collections of poetry. A new collection is forthcoming from Zeitgeist Press in 2023. He runs Between Shadows Press.

RC deWinter's poetry is widely anthologized, notably in New York City Haiku (NY Times, 2/2017) Connecticut Shakespeare Festival Anthology (River Bend Bookshop Press, 12/2021), Now We Heal: An Anthology of Hope, (Wellworth Publishing, 12/2020) easing the edges: a collection of everyday miracles (Patrick Heath Public Library, 11/2021) New Contexts: 3 (Coverstory Books, April 2022) In print: 2River, Event Magazine, Gargoyle Magazine, Meat For Tea: The Valley Review, the minnesota review, Night Picnic Journal, Plainsongs, Prairie Schooner, Ogham Stone, Southword, The Frogmore Papers, Variant Literature, Yellow Arrow Journal, The York Literary Review among others and appears in numerous online literary journals.

Maggie Palmer has recently graduated from the University of Dallas with a B.A. in English and Classical Philology and currently lives with her family in Fort Cavazos, Texas. Her work has appeared in such magazines as Blue Unicorn, The Lyric, Grand Little Things, and Mezzo Cammin.

Lorraine Jeffery loves spending time with her husband of sixty years and her large family. She has won numerous prizes and published over 150 poems in journals, including Last Stanza, Clockhouse, Kindred, Calliope, Canary, Ibbetson Street, Rockhurst Review, Naugatuck River Review, Orchard Press, Halcyon, Regal Publishing and Bacopa Press. Her first book was titled When the Universe Brings Us Back, 2022 and her chapbook titled Tethers, was published in 2023 by Kelsay Books.

Michelle. L. Steiner is a disability, writer, advocate, and para educator. She published articles on The Mighty, Non-Verbal Learning Project, Dyscalculia Blog, The Reluctant Spoonie, Imagine the World as One Magazine and Word Gathering. Recently she began a blog called Michelle's Mission. Her photographs were featured in Word Gathering and Independent and Work Ready. She works as a paraeducator in a school with students with disabilities. She lives in The United States with her husband and two cats. Website: <https://www.michellesmission.net/>

Laurie Hollman is a psychoanalyst, poet, fiction, and nonfiction published author. An extensive bio can be found on lauriehollmanphd.com.

Julia Platt is a writer originally from Pittsburgh who is currently based in Athens, Ohio. An English student in Ohio University's Honors Tutorial College, Platt studies a wide variety of subject matter across fields. Her writing's primary themes explore dark moments of horror contrasted with glimpses of joy. Platt loves stories that bring laughter, tears, and all the weird in-between.

Rosalie Hendon (she/her) is an environmental planner living in Columbus, Ohio. Her work is published in Change Seven, Pollux, Willawaw, Write Launch, and Sad Girls Club, among others. Rosalie is inspired by ecology, relationships, and stories passed down through generations.

Angela Patera is a self taught artist whose art has appeared in numerous publications, as well as on the cover of Selenite Press and Penumbra Online. Her art usually draws inspiration from the genres of horror and fantasy, but also from folklore and nature.



Makenzie Matthews-Beard is a rising high school senior in North Carolina. She relishes in learning more about pop culture, world geography/history, music, and literature, all of which she tries to incorporate in her art. IG: @makenzie.mb

Mark Blaeuer is a retired park ranger living in Percy, Arkansas. His poems have appeared in 90+ journals, including Avocet, Bindweed, El Portal, Lilliput Review, and Pirene's Fountain. A collection, Fragments of a Nocturne, is available from Kelsay Books.

Colleen Kam Siu is a poet and artist based in the Rocky Mountains. Her work has appeared in POETiCA Review, Fahmidan Journal, Two Hawks Quarterly, Witches Mag, Cider Press Review, Instant Noodles, and Alchemy & Miracles Anthology. In Fall 2022, she released her first chapbook of poetry and paintings, Elements of Being. More information and her portfolio can be found on her website www.colleenkamsiu.com.

Dawn Smith: A fascination with the natural world guides most of Dawn's life, including her writing. She spends her non-writing hours hiking, binoculars in hand, at home in the southwest, or anywhere else that catches her fancy. Her work has been published in Still Point Arts Quarterly, Split Rock Review and several TallGrass Press Black and White Anthologies, among others. She can be found at <https://dawnsmith.com/>

By day, **Kathryn Reilly** helps students investigate words' power; by night, she resurrects goddesses and ghosts, spinning new speculative tales. Sometimes, she even writes the truth. Enjoy poetry in Shadow Atlas, A Flight of Dragons, Last Girls Club, Willow Tree Swing, Paris Morning and fiction in Tree and Stone, Seaside Gothic, Diet Milk, Blink Ink, and Fish Gather to Listen. Her rescue mutts, Savvie and Roxy Razzamatuzz, hear all the stories first. When she's not writing, she's rewilding her suburban backyard. [Twitter: @Katecanwrite](https://twitter.com/Katecanwrite)

