

Issue XI: Compass

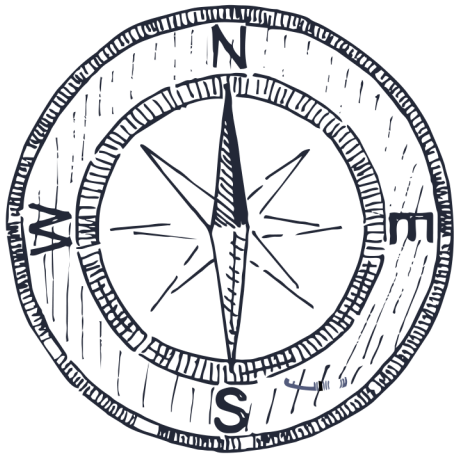


FREE VERSE REVOLUTION



Issue XI

compass



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Note from the Editors

It wasn't planned but Issue XI: compass is our last issue of 2023 and what an issue to end on! The artistic and poetic range within this issue is fantastic and it has been a pleasure to edit, curate and read over and over again. We say it every time, but editing the work of contributors from around the globe together into a publication like this is a sheer joy.

This said, it's also hard work and a lot of hours when both editors already teach full-time. This is what has changed our perspective on how many issue we will publish annually and why we pushed back the release of Issue XI. We have realised that the time we invest is precious but it is also what enables Free Verse Revolution to flourish rather than stagnate and falter. Thus, next year will see some changes in the quantity of work to preserve the stunning quality you submit to us time and time again.

So, enjoy Issue XI: compass - the journeys, the hopes, dreams, and discoveries. There is both light and darkness within these pages, love and loss, memory and the future. It truly is a gorgeous sequel to Issue IX: anchor. And it is truly a lovely way to end 2023 for us.

But... do stay tuned ... we have Pushcart Prize nominees to announce and a Winter Competition coming your way!

Until then, take care,

Kristiana & Nicholas

The Nostalgia of the Time Traveller

Charys Ellmer

When disaster came I dreamt
of living on a star 20 light years away.
I would gaze down through
a George Melies telescope
of noble brass. Such a relief to be
a rotating eye in the sky. Let the Earth rewind
and repeat like a favourite song.
Watch the snow globe miniature of
my family dollhousing together.

In lieu of space travel
I roamed Google Earth. Such a clever trick
to suspend the world in digital amber. And
where do I want to go? Where does anyone want to go?
Home, always home. See my hometown like
sleeping beauty quietly attempting
to dream itself awake. But this is not enough.
I need to dig back further.
Take a deep breath, let us dredge.

The third option for time travel is photographs.
Birthdays and beaches. They are all grief stained now.
All I see is the negative space.
It is the silence
after a smoke alarm. But
as my memories become gently tangled,
they are better than nothing. Beaming faces.
we were happy enough. The photos ring
like hearing loss after a festival.
Like the shadows beating my eyelids
after gazing at the sunshine.

Let me travel in space then,
through the flocks of stars and grit.
Pitch and roll to a gentle orbit
Looking backwards with all the love of
Narcissus staring at his own reflection.
Forever too late to intervene.

Wandermap

Sangeetha

Time looks up at the rain
You look up at me
Our compass adrift
On wordless stories
Drenched in smells of earth
Woven in the sinews
Of that driftwood from long ago

Water falls like light
Crystal bed of rock swallows
Minutes and moments
Mapped on a mirage
Shimmering like reality
Hinting at our one true North
An unmarked trail
To togetherness

Musings of a living ghost

Akshaya Pawaskar

Which is this wharf
where I seem to
have stopped on my odyssey?
Where my ship is moored,
it is ashen but peaceful.
This quay at which I unload
every single thing
and ferry to the netherworld,
is it the Styx
or will I navigate my way
through the Lethe.
The compass,
the sextant all redundant,
sailing without them.
What will I carry as a souvenir
to the afterlife?
The forgetfulness of this water,
an oblivion
or will I dance with its waves,
measure its depth in fathoms
and come back invincible,
except for my hamartia.
Perhaps my ghost
heavy with regrets
will sink to the river bed to
not be a memorial star but
a drifting plankton,
as dead as I was when alive
unable to choose between a rock
and a hard place,
wary of going against the tides.

crow's nest

Jess Roses

bone home crow home.
wool and marrow nest. took
exposed tibia and made a mast.
sails from scavenged skin hang
ragged

like blood wings. clever crow
made ship from human bodies. crow sails its boat
proud, see, it brought
the dead back to life now they
carry him, bodybuilt into eventual shipwreck
but for now just look
how the carrion flies –

silhouetted in the scavengeship nest, haphazard architect throws
black feather flags to the sky
sails in the brackish lagoons like a better pirate than any
i have known
in the bone home, floating.

north

Jess Roses

inside the crumpled paper crane of a wish
i can't remember, the void teaches me
enough to live here. and from here
a year ago looks so
easy. and to believe it's been a year from then
feels like the metaphor you choke on when you try to tell a story
that doesn't have an end yet.

but a year ago, i couldn't have lived today without running down the bathtub
drain
and staining the ocean red.

but i want more from the void than surviving
evermore at the helm of a ship
in red-stained ocean, in a storm without an eye, in a sky
with no horizon.

but i want more from the void than a starless night
so i wager that storm
against mine and find that we have more in common
than i thought
and the void, too, wants more.

so i say, "let's strike a deal, you and me. you are the black hole that lives
between my ribs and i have danced in you for years of revelry and darkness on
the edge of death's cliff like a bar table. but we're older now, know better now,
and we won't make it through the end of the world unless we work together so
- "

" - so we make it through
swim in red oceans and weather this storm, we keep going - "
" - north."
" - to find a better torment."

and while the aurora borealis waits for us we
go north.

and i remember that this is what i wished for.

NYE witchcraft

Hebe Kearney

dancing in the garden in the rain, with
myrrh blurring on our pulse points;
candles hissing out;
wine bottles compressing the grass

we resolve to time
waiting for healing to come puff its
hot breath on our necks.

mixing rosemary with rice, oils,
singed paper scrawled with worries and manifestations
we summon.

our witchcraft causes the rain;
slow, heavy drops bathing us
making us out of water,
letting our skin drown and renew.

the next day smelling like
vomit and magic we stagger into the new year
where we want to be better, because
who wouldn't, right?

begging: give us a year to trust, please;
a year we can hold on to.

it's so hard to want
and even harder to hold
like liquid wax, smooth and piercing
burn gathering, gathering...

choices we make and don't
things we choose to ignore
and memory, old witch,
coming home from war.

don't worry, I say,
with this new year in a headlock,
I'll make it work for us this time, just watch me.

belief, if we find it,
has so much to answer for, and I promise
you're not alone when you're alone
just watching the rain we are dancing in.

and eventually, in a glass jar high on a shelf,
our bottled intentions resonate, pulling us back to ritual
like a moth to a candle
and twice as foolish.

mortality

Hebe Kearney

the hills are vague shapes in sunset air
sloshing warm beer
lines my belly, the rugged coast,
rambling ghost,
leans on a restless horizon

nana tells us
one lime milkshake please,
no expensive casket;
burn me in a simple box

road sick,
crown caps and bleeding knuckles
words tumble

she says
a box of ashes weighs
so much more than you'd think
and she misses her

heaviness,
with every breath
we embody gravity
even after death

chains

Hebe Kearney

i wandered through the quiet
drinking hot air
metallic panic smarting
under a full moon.

i made meals
out of breath mints and mistakes,
i disappeared.

my hair fell
my bones broke easily
the sky merged into the sea.

i wanted the purest nothing,
so corrupt.

it seems now to take forever,
but i remember
how once i went to sleep in the terror of childhood
and woke up adult in form.

dazed, i am still learning living;
open eyes can consume
so much bewildering joy
and i wander.

but i remember it all
and cannot escape
how beautifully the sea's rhythms
stay chained to the moon.

A Woman, Alone in Her Apartment, With Coffee

Helena West

Maybe there is a view out the window. Verdant mountains.
A city spilling toward the horizon. The whole blue ocean.

Maybe there isn't, and hand around steaming mug,
she daydreams about jungle sounds, and the scent of
moving water.

A woman, alone in her apartment, with her white cat.
Her two dogs. She sleeps when she wants. Writes
when she wants. Doordashes cheesecake at ten pm
and isn't expected to share.

A woman, alone in her apartment, at rest with the
easy silence. With Jim and Pam on the laptop, or
Nick Miller's half written book about zombies, or
a movie that passes the Bechdel test, or
doesn't.

A woman dances, alone in her apartment, to
Neko Case, to Taylor Swift, to whatever
she damn well pleases, without any input or
raised brows. A woman. A curl of smoke from the incense.
Something rolled between her fingers.

A woman, uncensored, rumpled sheets, dirty hair,
browsing cheap flights, because a woman alone
is a doorway that leads anywhere.

A Young Boy in Oia Asks if Pirates were Real Back in Olden Times

Helena West

3:51 am. Kalimera. The flight leaves in under
three hours. The plastic bottle scrunches
loud in the dark. Everyone tells us not to drink the tapwater.

The mattress is firm. I stretch. I think about the rocks in the ocean.
Think about the cabdriver. Think about the anxiety I left
like unclaimed baggage in Atlanta.

Think how safe I've felt with a pocket
full of euros in a crowded city.
Back home I keep a utility knife in my pocket
instead.

Get dressed. The knees of my jeans are coated
in ancient dust & volcanic sand. The part of my hair is
sunburned.

Two nights ago, we had drinks at four bars with 7 people from
5 different countries. We disagreed about what
yamas means, but we clinked glasses anyway.

I wonder if I'll be able to eat without the background chorus of
six broken languages. Without the audience of pigeons and
streetcats. Without the wind and the white rain from the trees.

If I'll remember how to sleep in Eastern Standard Time in a place
where the spade of discovery isn't bringing anything
to light and the air doesn't smell like wild sage & oranges.

Maybe I'll have forgotten how to carry the anxiety when I find it
misrouted & waiting for me in Chicago or Detroit or Dayton.

Instead I'll carry the red earth worked into my skin like pieces
of home.

The Webb Telescope is Just a Time Machine

Helena West

Looking at the stars in the night sky
is the same as looking back through time and
that doesn't seem so unbelievable;
I could fall straight through

to the way it started,
waiting for your green van
among the coreopsis on the front porch
of the cross roads

and the way you kissed my mouth, even while
I was spilling all my secrets in a shaky hangover,
starlight spilling, too,
from the red curtained windows, that full month of
shooting stars and eclipses and space movies
on the busted old laptop in my rented room

another name for coreopsis is tickweed,
and I can't remember how we ended,
but it was others alongside me in dimlit caverns and
bedrooms, foreign vans and unfamiliar couches
the following fall, and not the known universe of your
body in its freckled skin

I hear you're getting hitched soon, and I'm happy
for you, even thinking about
that dusty high summer
and the way our candled shadows
moved against the wall.

An Interview

with Helena West

'A Woman, Alone in Her Apartment, With Coffee' raises the subject of solitude and how freeing it can be. Would you consider solitude to be something sacred we often take for granted?

Solitude is absolutely sacred, and it can honestly be very hard to find, with the constant connectivity, the distinctions between work and personal, social and solitary are so blurred. There's a difference between being alone, and partaking in the ritual of solitude, and I have to be very intentional about carving those spaces out for myself during the week. I'm always longing for more. I don't recommend taking it for granted.

Your work sparked a discussion between us about how places hold specific memories for us that exist nowhere else. How important are places to you in safeguarding your history?

I'm a highly visual person, and my history is chaptered by place (and the people and sensory experiences that populate it) rather than by time. For instance, Christmas is always the scratchy orange couch in our paneled living room, with the big mirrored shadow box full of ceramic Santas above it, mom with a ladle at the brown stove, the smell of paraffin candles, orange peel, and cinnamon, 90s country versions of Christmas songs playing on the radio...I have no idea who lives in our trailer now, and those paneled walls were painted over years ago, but that place and moment in time are eternal for me.

Where do your inspirations come from? Are they musical, literary, ekphrastic or all three?

My inspirations are largely mundane. The title for *A Woman, Alone in Her Apartment, With Coffee* is a direct quote from a conversation I had with friend and fellow poet Isabelle Correa. Many of the lines in *A Young Boy In Oia* are translations I encountered while traveling in Greece last year, including something I read on a plaque at a village preserved (and destroyed) by a volcanic eruption over 3000 years ago. Sometimes I'll write from art, or literature, or music, but usually it's the unimportant details, it's a single word, it's the completely ordinary visuals I can't get out of my head at night. Everything is a poem, if you're open to it.

Central Station

Devon Webb

It's been a month since I fell asleep in your arms for the last time
when we set an alarm in the morning so we could make love just once more
when my suitcase clattered down the side streets to the station that felt like liminal space
where you sat so close to me I wished that you would stay
(though I suppose I was the one not staying)
we said goodbye at Central cos what kind of rom-com would this be otherwise
it was a parting I hadn't come to terms with like surely I would see you again
on the plane in your underwear like home is just a dream & you're the reality
like how could something like this ever end when it's only just beginning
this city is gloomy without you babe I wasn't kidding
this country is too small but it takes half a day to get anywhere
when the only place I want to be is twenty-eight days gone
when the story of us feels like a book I left on public transport
give me a penguin classic for everything I refuse to forget
give me a schedule for getting back to your bed
like there's a train across the Tasman & there's so much more for me to do but drown
it's been a month & I don't love you any less
would we have a future if I just turned up on your doorstep?

Laundry Day

Morgan Hayes

I still wake up much too early for your liking.
As I walk through the cold, fog fills the house.
I left your memory in the bed. She'll sleep until noon,
a translucent arm stretched across her face.
Dreaming, she's oblivious to my footsteps
across the creaking hull.
This sort of work takes all day.
I wait until the floor is a sea of fabric,
until I'm tired of dirty socks,
silt stuck between their toes.
I drag the baskets up the stairs,
an armada in formation.
Separate the colors, rising waves
of pales and darks and reds.
Garments the sails of ghost ships,
still holding the shape of their wearer.
The piles are so much smaller than they used to be.
I set aside the damaged for mending.
I wonder what ocean you're sailing
and if the currents run smooth.
Who sews the patches over your knees now?
The Tempest and the Odyssey beckon
through the mouth of the washing machine;
you don't know if you're seaworthy
until you're tossed into the brink.
Pour in the detergent, unscented,
I've never been thick-skinned.
Maybe I'm that kind of gossamer gown
that disintegrates with the first touch of water.
Fraying silk and threadbare hems.
I've never lived anywhere
besides this blue house at the base of a dam
and damn, I thought I'd die in this valley
praying for the embankment to hold.
Yet, I have a boat, built for two.
I row it alone, searching
for a place where I can hang the laundry to dry.

circular courses

Sai Liuko

a cliché: a tiny burrow between words
where the truth is so much truth that we cannot hear it no more.

but that is what happened in that café, a cliché
: stomach empty heart racing head dizzy where i least expected this is
it this is it when you know you know when there is a diem you carpe it
and you are falling this is why they call it falling in love we will be in
love and it'll change everything it will be tragic it will be all things. you
will go and i will follow. i will dot my i's with hearts and i won't be able
to explain to anyone. i did not even fall in love with myself first. i did
not fix myself.

the one, singular, the big o of ourobouros.
heads or tails? both are you. i'll come to you.

soon enough i will have eaten enough of your tail to become one, the
one, the horizontal eight, how they sing forevermore in songs to etch
themselves into eternity. you and me babe, how about it, so what if
juliet was 14.

which stars did they cross exactly, i need to know.

all the clichés are true as you bite into your salad frisée,
predestined truck tracks.

Footprints Leading Nowhere

Richard LeDue

Let this page stay blank
as fresh snow
never lost to tracks,
and then there'll be no wandering
in circles or words
hollered into a darkness,
where one hopes for someone
to save them,
only to fade away alone
like an abandoned campfire
not fully extinguished,
so to leave behind a legacy
of evergreen trees, impotent embers,
and the collected love poems of a corpse.

The Right Wrong Directions

Richard LeDue

It took him years to arrive at how her lips
probably tasted like the wrong way on a map
that was so clearly marked by someone else
one would have to be an idiot to have got lost,
yet he did, letting his footprints go in circles
and calling it love,
until all his winter walks alone proved
blankets of snow have more patience
than the most naked heatwaves,
even if the cold moonlight made him
find the warmth in her eyes that night,
when he discovered the futility
of words against a shared silence
showing them both where to go,
even if they knew
it was a path they could never follow
together.

Esperanza

Sandrine Letellier

To flee the citadel,
to reach the desert of
my mouth irrigated by sand.
Ravens cawing like humans,
a saguaro with a spine.
My own silence,
swaying on chapped lips,
paradigm of desolation.

Hourglass

Sandrine Letellier

I dream of a house graced solely by windows.
To the north, the desert
to the south, the jungle
to the east and west,
the infinitude of water—
to shatter glass and flow untold.

Off-grid

Sandrine Letellier

I could never find the north on your back.
I followed the valleys of your spine,
rested close to edges
and gaped at the depth of ravines.
A remote territory untamed, wild of Pollock paths.
I don't think you've ever known
where you lead to.

Melancholy II

Paul atten Ash

after Edvard Munch (1898)

In this boreal outpost dusk deepens
where the girl in crimson hides from life,
her raven hair the slow uncoiling of the river.
Beneath rain-smoked dress her body shivers
as the dead day grains away to darkness.

In this flaking down of last light,
she leaves a spoor of grief in her wake.
This is the way to nothing, dust-moted, bleak.
No sound, only the scolding of blackbirds,
hissing up over a silent North Sea.

Mansions of the Dead

Paul atten Ash

after Paul Nash (1932)

With you, I connect, my late but famed namesake—
through boyhood dreams we cruise weightlessly across unknown country
to arrive at one fixed place: the canvas, the page.

The exhilaration of flight!

That possession of a medium of unsurpassable fluency,
and a sense of liberation from all that is earthly—
these powerful fantasies crystallise before our certain fate
in one shared image of soaring bird,

euphoric master of space.

So through my pencil's slow thread, this point it makes—
these fragile, firm-light structures moored amid cloud,
your weightless Mansions or cat's cradle of the sky

I'll try to pin down,

and say of this hovering architecture's geometry
controlled in a cloudscape of transcendent clarity,
about which flit spirits, dark Swallows encircled
by halo's white, luminous ellipse,

there are no boundaries at all.

Anew, fly gently ahead, while my soul aches—
I'll follow this line and find its end much sooner than I think,
to arrive again at one fixed place: the canvas, the page.

So in anticipation of the infinite,

what need is there at all for religion's Pearly Gates,
incarcerating us as God's inmates?
No, fly Swallow fly—I see you soar ahead,
and soon enough I'll meet you there,

in Mansions of the Dead.

Itinerant Moon

Paul atten Ash

I have stravaiged
journeyed back into the land
where the path peters

out

I have come to know
North's unmappable traces
its borders ghosted

erased

Riven, the grey rack breaks
the upland's face unsunned
East folds in upon itself

forlorn

I am benighted, dreamspun
in the owl-light, mirkshut, gone
South, with phantom birds

in echelon

I have become silent, solitary
vanishing into the West, a song
of obsolescence, its funerary

dust

Transmuted into ashes
scattered across the merkwood
beneath an itinerant moon

forever lost

Peregrini

Paul atten Ash

Pylon-like | votaries cut lines across the moors to Heptonstall |
numbed by wind-wraiths in the dampening dusk | the husks of
dead insects mulching the mossy floor | night crepitates electric.

One of the *peregrini* | she intones lines from ‘November Graveyard’ |
each flint-like word striking in its cool asphyxia | SYLVIA PLATH
HUGHES upon a headstone | a single white rose in perfect repose.

Over Hebden Bridge fireworks scream into being | unwelcome
‘offcumdens’ desecrating the valley’s solitudes | tonight in the slow
bloom of her slumber | pearlescent bones at peace beneath iron hills.

Monochrome silence | morning mist shrouding a greyed-out sun |
eschewing the inconstant bond of man for the true babble o’ the beck |
a solitary defile | from this life’s long babel who would not turn and run?

Last of the pilgrims | footsore she soothes into umber of Hebden Beck |
supine in the umbra of Hardcastle Crag | a stranger to us | uncompassed
to all that is familiar | familial | in the dark quietude of her broken mind |

the cries of motherless children | an endless nothing of northern skies.

An Interview

with Paul atten Ash

‘Mansions of the Dead’ is written after Paul Nash; how important is this familial connection in your artistic process?

I have never explored any familial connection to my ‘famed namesake’ and have not felt any burning need to do so—my interest has always been in the repertory of the artist’s imagery; namely, empty, haunted woods; Druidic circles; mystic flying; the curtain that threatens to lift on the hidden presence. ‘Mansions of the Dead’ (1932), made as an illustration to Thomas Browne’s seventeenth-century essay *Urne Buriall*—a mystical treatise that meditates on death and immortality—blurs the boundaries between Surrealism and an earlier British romanticism, and in Nash’s words it shows ‘aerial habitations where the soul like a bird or some such aerial creature roamed at will’. Through Nash’s Surrealist works the artist shared with us ‘the release of imprisoned thoughts, of poetry and fantasy’. Like Nash, my artistic process is deeply rooted in the subconscious—the inspiration for my poetry being kindled by places, images, and sounds that evoke a sensation of undefined mystery or strangeness, of unseen and somewhat malign presences, of a brooding often eldritch atmosphere.

When we talk about artists we can often identify a distinct style within their work, to what extent can we do the same with writers? Would you say your work has something about it that is distinct to you?

Personally I prefer not to pigeonhole artists’ and writers’ work but rather enjoy each piece on its own merit. With art, as with creative writing, I would say that the formation of something akin to having a deeply original style is something that crystallises perhaps only over the course of an artist’s entire lifetime. At recent poetry readings people have commented that my work is rich in powerful imagery, and I would say that, similar to visual artists, the creation of strong (expressionist) imagery is definitely central to my practice as a writer. Much of my more recent poetry has been written as an ekphrastic response to the work of artists such as Edvard Munch and Caspar David Friedrich, and I would say that this current approach to my practice is now producing a coherent and perhaps distinct body of work.

What advice would you give to those who wish to begin submitting their work to publications and into competitions?

I rarely submit to competitions, simply because the vast majority of them are not free to enter. If like me you are averse to paying submission fees, or have genuine financial need as a writer of low income, I encourage you to seek out the handful of competitions out there that are either free to enter or offer subsidised submission. The same applies to submissions to publications! Recently I've had much more success with submissions for themed call-outs, so if you don't enjoy writing to a particular theme I encourage you to do so—working outside your comfort zone is always a good thing, even if just as a source of motivation. On the flip side of that, of course, it is OK to feel unmotivated to submit your work for publication—above all else, always write for yourself, for your own pleasure, and no one else.

Lands of Time Ago

John Xavier

We've gone down into the
Molten core of the Earth together,
Engineers inside
A groaning submarine

These memories though don't touch us anymore;
Like aged photographs
Encased in dusty glass they stare back,
Lifeless relics to the last and
Whatever electricity once existed between us
And them, has died a ghostly death
Leaving behind only
The flatness of the image

There is no art in duplication,
No volcanic epiphany to astound the mind
Hitherto complacent

And so like the incisions of petroglyphs forgotten
On some weathered rock, our paths
Met and marked out different tangents, but stagnate now
Upon the steep mountain
Of an eternal unbecoming; tectonic principles
Churning ground like an old man's spade
While he's lost in thought
Among the autumn of his garden

Vistas are we perhaps; expanses of conjoined continents
Divorcing by the silent millennia of inches

Into the Infinity
Jahra Tasfia Reza



JAHRA TASFIA REZA

Vivaldi on the Slopes

Marc Issac Potter

Frank O'Hara is his own, is here, is mine. From the top of a blind shadow, rope burns still fresh, I am squirting out over a compass of slopes and turns, the elbows and baseball bats, the broom handles, canyons, foothills, and grocery carts of this unremembered town.

And the five isolated peaks, standing with no remorse. Last winter an avalanche, like an enema, buried alive two of the high school brutes. Finally, now, I am crying because this is human life gone.

If they had lived to be men, maybe one of them could have been a good man, and would have felt sorry ... nonetheless today I pray for a "repose of soul" for these boring boy-men.

Townpeople have begun calling these five peaks *The Killer Mountains*, just privately during that in-breath when the mother, exhausted from a day of 3 snot-infused kids, a laundry peppered by her salesman's unforgiving shirts, the well-bred dog and her 4 puppies, and that same husband who thinks nothing of saying nothing. She gently takes the mashed potatoes bowl in both hands with a whisk that would rival Vivaldi, "*The Killer Mountains*" have struck again Bill - while you were out of town.

Of course, I knew those boys had it coming, and yes I am an apple pie of a person: I laughed. Only later, growing as a human being, in my Beginning Zen class, did I realize the tragedy inside the sadness, inside the abyss of faith. Very little in this life doesn't bleed.

how we fuse across incalculable distance (wormhole haiku)

Lisa Delan

seeking my cosmos
you traverse the galaxy
unbound by spacetime

suddenly expelled
swifter than the race of light
we part untethered

through bent gravity
you tunnel to my mind's eyes
wormholes closed in sleep

this body and i
a universe of longing
await your return

you slip through photons
fluctuating quantum foam
to land in my core

that when you are here
you might unravel the threads
and bind me to you

our union so dense
not even light can escape
the curve of our forms

we are cosmic strings
bridging the future and past
forming a closed loop

holding this new world
we weave exotic matter
to thread through the walls

we thread fireflies too
these virtual particles
destroyed and reborn

your mouth closes mine
our throats a single channel
when time collapses

atoms disappear
fireflies flee the choking flue
its walls sucking shut

*first published by *The Ravens Perch*, March 2023

Angelus Novus

Victoria Spires

My heart's an evacuee -
I bundle it off to the countryside for safety.
London's getting thick with smoke and the rubble of failed relationships,
Wreckage upon wreckage,
Hurled in front of my feet.

Weekends I shuttle the space between us,
60 miles by road or rail.

Northampton is a good caretaker.
You plant it for me among grubby spires and shires and it grows and grows
Loses its hungry city ways.

London fights back,
Every street corner is the straight gate through which the Messiah might enter.

But no -
I've seen the saviour and he has the face of Saint Crispin.

All points north (Express Lift Tower) Victoria Spires

Wit-
Ness
Witless
Cromwell's Needle,
Our baby Grade II.
Witness his mirthless
Finger pointing upward
To sole viable exit. Or
A Becket tunnelling in
Reverse to fabled rain-
bow's end. Nostra stella.
We circle but never find
The footing, rumoured to
Rise from sacred ground
Somewhere in St James,
Town centre of the universe.
Keep your ship of the Fens,
We're knee-deep inland over
Here. Here's our spire of the
Shire, finest concrete Bassett-Lowke
Mail order model money could buy.
Counterpoint: Queen Eleanor's humble crumbling
Cross, 700 years and 2.6 miles SE. As someone put it,
Nice statue but the top's missing. Back to the Bauhaus light-
house. No-one's sure what it's used for these days. Unspecified research,
Charity abseils. Stick a christmas tree on it, light it up, hope the ghosts don't
Breach the shaft. This is what happens when you build a void on top of a void.

Suspended in Motion

Azida Zainal



Shinkansen

Azida Zainal

Rooftops and balconies flash by
Tiles merge into lines, into grey
Doorways meld into walls into
bricks, deconstructed
At three hundred kilometres an hour
I am lost in speed

Lines are no more
slate is a flavour acquired
soon swallowed by the countryside
There is comfort in
this nondescript drone
A grey monochrome

Rain spatters
breaking my reflection
a drop is suspended, neither
going forwards or back
I see through myself, this landscape
where telephone lines beg connection
Then the sky creeps in but fails to be blue

The Kyoto rooftops come into focus
Behind one of the black squares
a little cat plays with a red toy
A mother waits, lettuce draining
over a polished sink
her glass empties

the moon is shaped like a letter-opener

Carella Keil

red satin sunsets, black pearls and blue roses • writing poetry in the sand and whispering secrets into broken seashells • eating flame-licked marshmallows roasted over living-room fireplaces • kissing beneath starlight • pinning constellations of purple lilacs in my hair • tying knots in cherry stems with my tongue • riding a bicycle downhill, arms thrown wide and the wind rushing at me • the smell of peeled oranges • the sound of rain, like thousands of people in glass slippers tap-dancing on my roof • genuine friends and lovers • transforming what is ugly into something beautiful • bringing magic into the lives of others • shiny pennies • positive karma • serendipitous phone calls at 3 in the morning • a healthy dose of exhibitionism • yoga • lockets and mood rings and painted toenails • the purr of a kitten • walking through a snowfall and getting snowflakes on my eyelashes • the magic scent of books read in childhood • dreaming • lost keys and locks only I know how to open

*first published by *Wingless Dreamer: Crystalline Whispers*

Pluto Is Not a Planet (Again)

Carella Keil

She showed up unexpectedly at my doorstep one hot August day, hollow-cheeked and unwashed. Where had she been? We hadn't talked in weeks, seen each other in months. The phone always rang to empty. She refused to open the door.

She must have been backpacking on the moon. But no, she'd done nothing so courageous or adventurous. Her journey was only comparable in its depth of loneliness.

....

The sea is hungry and I've been fighting shadows all night. The muddy shore lunges at me as I stagger into tomorrow. There are magic fishhooks buried here, and I know not what they've caught.

"Would you like me to tell you?"

"Yes" I reply.

....

Aliens bathe in stars, and poor children in dirty bath water. Dragons coil within fragile shells, dreaming of biting down the moon and playing catch with your sun.

On Neptune there are underwater forests, green as the Earth's heart. On Jupiter, we volcano dive and our veins begin to glow like iron in fire. The rings of Saturn are made of ice, shining like broken mirrors to the sky. I try skating but you let go of my arm, and I always fall.

....

If you close the door, I'll just open three more, so you might as well let me spend the night.

*first published by *DASH* Issue 16

Eyes on Me

Carella Keil

Let me be a passenger in your life for a while. I know how vastly unhealthy this sounds. How naïve, needy you must think me. I can't deny, I am still that girl running around with a fist full of broken keys, desperate for the door that will open at her touch.

“(I like to go places I don't belong)
I find silver keys by the handful
I sit and rake them through my insides
So many doors I've yet to find
and so many
I swore I dead-bolted behind.”

Today I discover a trail of breadcrumbs, unnoticed, after plodding through this crumbling city for centuries. It's enough to send me cascading towards the sun.

Mania, my fire. “If I can't burn from the inside out, I'll burn the outside in to get to you. Trust me that I will find you again.”

I'm Alice on the wrong side of the looking-glass, and I can't sleep while you're dreaming. And I've spent so many lifetimes dreaming, now I need to walk through your nights like a cat, picking up the lives I've left behind. Sleeping beauty, with her closed eyes and waiting lips, is no longer content lingering in bed for her prince. Now she sashays down the streets in a trance. And is it her fault she breaks a dozen glass slippers, out for the night at a dance?

Once there was a woman with blue fins and hazel eyes who longed for silver shores. When her scales fell off she unwrapped new legs, pink and clean. She skipped across the beach in delight, her ticklish feet leaving spools of blood in the sand.

I am strange and this makes you smug. But look closer and you will see all the skins I've shed. I no longer wear my weakness as a bruise, a scar, but a beautiful tattoo, unravelling across my flesh like a poem.

Yes, I wrote this. My body is my own canvas. And I drew my colors from the sky, broken tears and the secret in your eye. And don't you see, I need your eyes on me. It's only art if someone's watching.

I walk around with keys dangling from each fingertip, I have a thousand worlds I can enter but I need you to pick me up and take me home.

*first published by *The Stripes Literary Magazine* Issue 2 Vol. 3

Strays

Nora Boyle

my wrists had shrunk in the monsoon heat. & my dupatta hung limp around my shoulders. creased with dust & sweat & too many days of not-washing. women crouched low alongside their wares: pomegranates & flip flops. spices & chai. rhinestones that glinted like beads of sweat. the women wiped their brows & tucked the tails of their saris behind their knees. while sand bloomed up between their toes. into hungry ghosts that prowled the streets.

those days, I was scared of everything inside me & paranoid of everything outside. men shouted catcalls. from the backs of overcrowded motorcycles. & the goosebumps from back home. didn't go away. despite the heat. & distance. stray dogs trotted behind bicycle tires. & in between cows' legs. ate trash from gutters. & overripe fruit melting into roads.

in the evenings. I felt my way along the village walls in the gathering dark. through the labyrinth of alleyways & valleys of thick slurping mud. partial walls with scrap metal roofs. livestock crowding open doorways. I teetered on narrow wooden planks. more balance beam than sidewalk. tracing tight outlines of crowded neighborhoods in the dark. & at the end of that block. when I reemerged into the light. the same timid dog was waiting for me. ready to walk me through its neighborhood. then pass me off to the next.

each dog looked about the same. & I'd crouch low to greet each one. I never thought to bring food. I simply offered up the back of my hand to sniff. a scruffy gray mix with tall ears & long legs. matted coat, too-dry tongue. flies buzzing in infinity loops. around watery eyes. they all looked so similar. but they barked at different octaves & lived on different street corners. pacing the same two-hundred feet. some aggressively. some joyously. some lethargic, their stomachs too empty to prance.

I did not fit in. with the other students. I had not come here to be convinced of anything. & perhaps this was foolish. my mind was always slightly elsewhere. even after hours. spent in meditation. & I couldn't dispel the memories from home. the ones I wanted so much to forget. but every evening. I'd find a bit of respite. walking back to the monastery. escorted by the neighborhood dogs.

some were territorial & would lunge at men's throats. trotting ahead like security detail. only to loop back & walk alongside me. repeating this endless cycle until I arrived safely at the monastery gates. while others followed hesitantly. their eyes flickering up & down. trying to gauge whether or not I felt safe. these dogs shook with gratitude. in the way only dogs can. whenever I spoke to them kindly.

at first only one dog would walk me home. sometimes two. if they were friends. & we'd walk companionably side-by-side. passed the jewelry vendors & chaiwallas. but soon, dogs I'd met from previous nights would bound out. from their usual corners. expecting me. & eventually I was escorted home by a full pack of strays.

Card Games

Rebecca Gutteridge

The “living” room
is always referred to using inverted air commas.
The room for the unwillingly alive
is where we convene to play cards.
The big clock, and the water cooler and the tea and sandwich trolley –
and the “living” room.

Florence, the night nurse who mediates the games
has a wicked laugh and is a dab hand at Switch;
Switch is our raison d’etre
in this place
you can comfort yourself
when someone starts screaming
that within the last 24hrs, at least, you had played a hand.

N, the tyrant, is our games master,
the umpire if you will –
of course you will
survive, that is.
They make sure of that here.

Anyway, I digress.
N is severe,
and she has her favourites; I am not one of them.
But she is a true sportsman to the last.
Like the Paddington clock
by the exit always shows true North.

Maude comes to play cards with me in the afternoon.
I must show her I am no longer
mad, and maybe one day
she will not smuggle me in
nail polish
but smuggle me out
home.

Home. I long for slow burning rows
over hair in the plughole.

I long for long nights in camping chairs
drinking cheap wine.

I long for coffee, meaningless sex and some kind of meaning
in cards.

There they are now,
summoning me to play.

Four Deaths

Erin Zarro

I've died four times.

The first time, my body was weak,
soft things where they should be hard,
wrong instead of right. Sick instead of healthy,
never knowing the freedom of a life without doctors,
medications, waiting rooms. Silent stares. Judgments.
Feeling cracked, broken, never whole.

There's something to be said for losing the battle,
having to claw your way out of your own coffin each time.
It's messy, but you grow stronger.
Life becomes clearer. With each flip of the hourglass,
you realize your time is pitifully finite,
each grain of sand a heartbeat.
One day, everything will stop —

I died the second time when my facial nerve went berserk
because of faulty wiring.
Constant pain signals changed the fabric of my life,
the time stretching out. I couldn't hold onto a prayer or peace,
the pain sucked it all away.

The third time, my skull nerve decided to join the party.
More pain signals,
this time throbbing like a distant echo.
Unrelenting for months and months.
Pills only help when the stars align for me.

My fourth death: my neck, arm, and hand. Pinched nerve.
Congested highway in there. Pain down to the wrist.
Fingers I can't feel. It has robbed me of my work, my passion, my life.
Biggest death yet.

Now I'm a mere zombie.
Do I dare get up out of the grave after this one?
Do I watch the sand fall through the hourglass,
listen to the sullen tick tock of the clock?
It tells me to live, live, live. One more day.
And another. And another. Just live.

Four times I've climbed out of the coffin
and into the sunlight.

I find myself between here and there
etching my lifeblood onto the page.
Just one more day. One more word.
One more.

I don't drown

Navila Nahid

in water

i flail in

grey/white

matter

an ocean

of neurons

circling

blood

nibbling

at wound-spun

submission

to sink

i throw in

the child

first

cut out

the heart

next

let them

follow

my living

death

down

i don't drown

i float

as the future

ready

to break

again

holding action
against
self
 this inbred
 anxiety

a line
drawn
down
generations

 of mitochondrial
 flaw

of disquiet screams
netted within
worn-down
souls

 sleepless
dead-eyed
vigilance
 endlessly
 marking
 the new

new
 threats
 battles
 beginnings
 of loss

*and i wonder
if war lives
in our veins
or have
my eyes
never
closed*

Touched Earth

Navila Nahid

sometimes
my toes
curl

a rouse
upon earth—a
belonging

an anchor
I will never
suffer
 but become

forestalling—god
in the machine
to remember

 I am
palimpsest

blood
of my veins
from the blood
of hers

map
of daughters
generations
up

dripped
down
as salt

held

From Forest to Sea

Emily Patterson

I point to lichen like lace on the pitch pines,
but you don't need me to teach you

how to move through this world
in search of beauty. You are in search

of everything, equally: dull limestone,
pinecones plentiful as berries,

the spider's delicate legs.
On the path from forest to sea,

your endless curiosity slows our steps,
your pace propelled by wonder, not

destination. Near the shoreline,
I bend to touch the sand as you do,

to trace the letters you know, then
let the surf have them back—

as if something finished weren't
the point of it, but rather something

known and held, however briefly.

Anniversary at New River

Emily Patterson

*From up here, I said, the trees look like
one kind of tree. But we know better*

now, which is why we can't stay here,
up on Diamond Outlook above

the grey-white water dotted with
miniature kayaks, a state away

from our one-year-old daughter.
We'll have to wade back in,

back down where there is space
between the roots, both needles

and leaves and occasional petals,
clear pebbles mired in mud—

I could go on. *But isn't it amazing,
how all the way up here,*

*we can still hear the rapids
calling our names?*

*first published in *To Bend and Braid* (Kelsay Books, 2023)

Shoulder Season

Emily Patterson

I picture us on a paper map, two dots
connected, gliding from block to block.

Pencil shading for some sky, square
cars tracing wide half-circles around us.

When you fall asleep I keep walking,
even as a coming storm colors the clouds,

even as bulbs of rain pool on the hood
of your stroller, slick the pavement.

I think of how it's been nearly two years
of this grey haze that fades and comes back

again. How I once thought I had to learn
to shake it, or at least to shoulder it in secret.

What I've learned instead is something like
how to walk without watching for rain.

To let go of the maps we draw for ourselves.
To let go of what we think the weather should be.

*first published in *To Bend and Braid* (Kelsay Books, 2023)

An Interview

with Emily Patterson

In ‘From Forest to Sea’ we enjoyed the feeling of the words washing over us like waves, as if your poetry had motion; when you write, to what extent do you consider the oral performance and flow of your words?

Reading my poems aloud as I draft and edit is an important part of my writing process. It helps me pay attention to the sounds, to listen to the rhythm and music of the words beyond how they appear on the page, visually. This strategy also enables me to slow down and be present with the poem, helping to inform its structure as I comb through the language and sounds.

In the final line of ‘Shoulder Season’ you prompt the reader “To let go of what we think the weather should be.” What has the weather come to mean to you and how far can we embrace alternative interpretations?

Letting go of the weather is intended as a metaphor for accepting uncertainty. For me, this is tied to parenthood in general, as well as my experience with postpartum depression. The letting go is meant as an offering of grace—the reassurance that I don’t have to ‘shoulder’ or hide this reality. There is room to acknowledge uncertainty without the pressure to try to change what is beyond our control. There is room, too, for beauty, discovery, and joy.

Two of the poems in this issue appear in your chapbook, ‘To Bend and Braid’, how would you describe this collection to prospective readers?

In my poetry, I explore the ever-changing landscapes of both the natural world and parenting, probing for connections and between the two. *To Bend and Braid* delves into the paradox of parenting a young child who still craves closeness and constant care, while also developing their independence and a separate sense of self. This collection moves through the seasons while considering that continual connection (“braiding”) with one’s child alongside the need to “bend” both individually and together.

Explorers

Madhushala Senaratne

our living room rug
is a map of the world
and my sons are explorers
their backpacks heavy
with essentials
blocks of lego for
food
small square books for
pillows they
chase after penguins
sit on their toy cars drive
from country to country
North South East West they say
learning the points
of the compass

at dawn
they hurry to the shore catch
the giant sun peep
through earth's cracks
later
they'll trek the Amazon
walk
across the belly of the earth
measure her circumference
in footsteps
stop for tea
at their grandparents

and at dusk
they'll return home
their sing-song voices bursting
'beep-beep'
through imagined traffic carrying
tales of foxes on highways
storm-battered slipways
and bear-like waves

tomorrow they say
they will hop North
 spinning
their compass
their sweet faces
bright and blazing
like the sky
at day break.

Transplanting

Katy Luxem

Three summers now in the blue
Disneyland t-shirt. This will be his
last in this specific softness.

I have folded it carefully, for years
in my memory. We do not grow
out of anything all at once.

The Forecast Predicts a White Christmas

Katy Luxem

And I remember when we were snowed in
by bad luck years ago. Flights canceled, grounded
in London, family on a whole other continent.
It could've been Mars. We're always at the mercy
of a storm. But now I think of this cold breath
as a prayer. A clean slate of snow, born again
into the body of a new year. When we can be
together now, it is holy. If not an abundance of time,
surely the muscle of a wing pulling in what is close
is enough. Every day might be a bird flying south.

Lineage

Rachael Collins

My great-great grandfather with his long wiry beard,
grimaces smiles from under a giant round hat in old photos.
One day he drove his bread truck onto the train tracks,
shifted into park,
and waited.

I wonder if yeast perfumed the air and mixed with blood on the tracks
as God took this mangled pulp of a body, spread the jelly thick
with a butter knife, let it relax into the warm pockets of fresh crusty bread.
Endings and beginnings
kissing on the tongue.

My great-grandfather committed suicide
after learning his daughter was engaged to a blue collar criminal.
Unbeknownst to him, future son in law also the child of a man
who slashed his existence to an abrupt end, hands raised in frustration
at the Game of Life before stating
“That's it, I'm done.”

Family secrets under the plush rug and loose floorboard in grandma's
bathroom
kept in a metal lockbox with the legal documents and tissue paper wrapped
jewelry.
Roots of the family tree extend long & purple in white marble, veins thick
with clots of death.
Each new baby is a rotisserie chicken marinating in the pulsating sauce
which thrums with anxiety and stinks of dishes left in the sink for weeks.

None of us asked for this inheritance
any more than lazy heart valves or a predisposition to deafness.
I did not choose this but will heal, for myself and all those who came before.
Let honey drip down both unmarked wrists as I nourish my body with thick
slices of bread
so all the wandering ghosts can sleep in peace at last.

I am held, I am safe, I am protected

Rachael Collins

I wish I loved Taylor Swift or astrology
for they always provide something,
from Solstice to Full Moon to Gemini season
or album dropped and tour dates announced
a constant dopamine buzz,
obsession outside the confines of this skin.

I yearn while also aware of the dangers of a living God,
how they are fallible and human,
soft and quick to let those who idolize down.
But couldn't I, wouldn't it be nice to put all my faith in a crystal?
Steadfast and unyielding
trust in the Universe having my back.

I know with the drifting sink of a leaf in water
that the salvation of utter certainty will never arrive.
Mirror's reflection in the song lyric rattling in my brainstem,
God is a place you will wait for the rest of your life.
Time to stop waiting, stop searching
and live.

Find God in connection with loved ones,
and time under the ripple of fluttering leaves
or letting moon pulled tides swirl pebbles around bubble kissed toes.
Anchored in a commitment to caring for this soul and its vessel,
do I need the Universe to hold me if I can cradle myself?
Earth, food, body all nourishment for this soul.

Nasal Magnetite

Bartholomew Barker

I don't get lost—
probably an over-sized
hunk of magnetite
behind my nose
is to blame

My knees raise their flag
from aching yellow
to grand electric red
and I reverse direction
home to dreaded silence

This poem isn't about death
though my cat is dead
I buried her in the yard
and now I'm taking a hike
hoping to exhaust the grief

But the way home befogs
and cutting through woods
I walk under strange power lines
and cross a meandering brook
which was not there an hour ago

A house with a classic car
something from a James Dean movie
in the driveway makes me suspect
I've wandered back in time
and I do not care

No one waits for me at home
my true north has gone
I am for the first time lost
and resigned to the losing

Directions to My Place

Bartholomew Barker

I invite my muse to stay for a long weekend
but finding my apartment is difficult
in this labyrinthine complex.

My text message directions are simple:
Turn left at the old Quaker Meetinghouse, not the new one.
Turn left at the run-down home by the lake in autumn.
Turn left at the divorce you know is best for both.
Turn left at the tree with poems rustling in the leaves.

You might think you've turned completely around
but it's a spiral — I'm just not sure
if I'm at the center or on the fringe.

But she still can't find me
so I tell her to drive to Ohio
fifty-something years ago
that's where it all started
and if she wants to get to where I am,
she'll just have to take the same path.

5.54pm Flight
Jillianna Reign Paat



Flee-dom
Jillianna Reign Paat



I, Sea

Jillianna Reign Paat

I was seven, when summer greeted my skin 'til it was copper

I was already by the beach, (I don't remember which

sea I was longing to embrace, in this archipelago)

pleading my mother to let me in the waters,

to greet my friend, the sea,

I went to a sandbar, noticed that waves turn white

when they break, then pull back from kissing the shore

We smiled, me and the sea

I was seventeen, when I lost

my mother's ring that my dad bought,

when the salty waves in Pulilan were throwing a tantrum

and pushed me hard. The sand below swallowed the ring

and I wept, blamed my friend, cursed the current

I was seventeen, still, when I sneaked off

to see my friend around midnight, the fine line

between the night sky and the expanse of the sea in Panglao

was engulfed by the darkness, and I danced with the waves,

not one soul there to judge my body, just my dearest friend embracing me

I was once more in love with the sea

I was twenty, when I abhorred the beach

in Morong, because it judged my body

like every time I try to swim, the waves want nothing

but to look away, and the sand was scorching

under my feet, so inside me, the deep blue rose,

my eyes, like the basin of the world,

was overflowing, dripping, then suddenly

I have no good memory of the sea, if it only means

to drown me, I'll leave it still and leave it be

I just turned twenty-one, when I went back
to Morong, to greet the waves hello, navigated around the buoy,
found the wrongs, I realized I was the sea all along
it mirrored my very soul, my high tides and low,
like I am my friend, and she was my own
self, the sea doesn't like being restrained, isolated
by the distance between her and me

and so now, I am almost done
being twenty-one, when I've submerged myself
in mirroring the violent tides, when I am outraged,
sea storms rise within, and great earthquakes are created
but I also reflect the calm waters, safe
for the children to splash in, for turtles to race towards,
when I am at peace with myself
I am the sea, I finally see
and nothing can confine me

(I) You Know

Karen E Fraser

You know these mornings well,
when it is hard to get out of bed,
the cold so frigid that it burns,
even the dog makes its way under
the covers, curled around refusal.

You brace yourself courageously
because it's a new day and you know
even this one will offer something
that glistens, a tiny spectacle proving
aliveness still thrives in its own unique way;

there will be rows of icicles to meet,
each a tiny marvel growing upon a handrail,
the frozen white-mane halos of a hundred dandelions
bursting with the seeds of a thousand hellos,
birds squabbling over who should fly the coop first-

a line-up of translucent organza clouds
rapidly evaporates into the crisp-blue dome of sky,
your attention drawn to a slowly peeking sun
drifting over the horizon, pointing toward home and
a light which has never fail to rise within you.

(II) About The Rows Of Tiny Icicles Upon The Handrail

Karen E Fraser

I reach to feel a spikey ridge of tiny mountain-tops,
hovering my fingertips close enough to sense
the chill rising along each length of icy spine,
pull away right before touching them,
remembering the closeness of my presence
determines how rapidly these delicate, lacey fractals
will be returned to mere puddling drips, well
before their short time to sparkle in the sun is over;
I decide to move more gently in the world, allow things
to remain undisturbed, to be just as they are,
and then, as if by some sublime enchantment, receive
the simple majesty of this one, blue-planet glory.

Redwood Forest

Karen E Fraser

after Time travelling through Muir Woods on my way home (Lisa Criswell)

here, the rising damp hangs heavy with
the fragrance of fallen pine needles inches thick,
near-never breaking down in the endless shade
cast by regiments of stoic, ragged-trunked sentinels;
their many, many reaching arms spiraling
up and out, grasping for slivers of light, pressing
ancient shadows onto my insignificance below.

here, I feel renewed, green as each fascicle tip
stretching for the sky, searching for something illusive;
to rest in a forest of familiarity, burst with a canopy of
slowly surging joy, etched by the necessary lines of age,
proving how mightily we try and love, resilient
in vulnerable bodies, in this vast woodland of a life simply
to discover there is no better company in which
to become still and yet, to roar.

We're still poring over maps

Emily Tee

Not on the laptop, but real maps,
the perfect origami of paper folds.
Ordnance Survey Pathfinder maps,
pink cover, a standard inch to a mile,
the symbols they taught us in school
along with how to use elevation lines,
plot the profile of the landscape,
how to read arcane pictogram symbols
bracken heath, marsh, reeds,
windmills, church spires
capturing the world in miniature.
Like all models, somehow reductive -
no substitute for soil under boots
to really ground you to a place.

Our old *AAA USA* driving map shows
the whole nine yards when laid out flat.
The nerd in me loves its gazetteer
with rows of numbers showing distances
and the found poem of place names.
Chattanooga five hours from Lexington,
Buffalo only two hours drive to Erie.
Lists of lettered, numbered squares
pin down those locations like butterflies.
Life would be easier like that,
a *You are Here* to find yourself.

After all these many years together
we prompt each other with our own keywords
cuing responses along a breadcrumb trail,
a shared lexicon of jokes, sayings, curiosities
salted away in our collective hive mind,
a map of history and tracks towards the future.

Some parts still remain a blank sheet -
we'll have to ink in those lines together.
I'm good at drawing coastlines, trees
you can inscribe "Here Be Dragons"
and we're still hunting for the hidden treasure
finding where "X marks the spot".

Hope Tastes Like the Pacific

Abbey Lynne Rays

When I am sad he takes me to oceans
and mountains and places with trees.
Butano, Molero, the Redwoods some days.
Lips salty with each blue-eyed grass dance.
Each Sierra soul search, he hums in the wind
beside me.

He grabs my hand at Lover's Point while white
waves crash the shore. On a bluff of ice plants,
sherbert colored and sea sprayed, I release my
breath slowly with each Pacific wave rumble.

He whispers my name under the Sequoias,
among the ferns, damp moss. My face turned
towards streaks of light, between shadows where
leaves stitch the sky, my breath returns again.

He knows when I cannot feed myself, when breath
and heart are lost to city and self, open spaces will
soften the hunger, open spaces will call me home.

A Gift From Me to You

Abbey Lynne Rays

I kept it all you know.

Ticket stubs and the receipt from the tobacco in Naples where I never got my change. Hotel card keys from our stay in New York, where we booked a room just for a shower between red eye flights. Scottsdale for your friend's wedding. Monterey. The Plaza for my birthday. The town next door after too many beers. I still have the cards from every bouquet sent. Every note you wrote I love you. (How could I toss?)

I thought I'd make a scrapbook. Ordered paper, stickers, printed every picture: pink sky mountainscape, the City at Christmas, all where my face is pressed to yours. All the memories of our first few years, toothy smiles, promises. (What I mean to say is that was the plan.)

The empty scrapbook is in a bag, in the back of our closet. Unbeknownst to you. (Why would I tell you this bruised failure?) Our mementos are still everywhere: old purses, drawers, bottom of the backpack we used to hike The Path of the Gods and Mount Diablo.

Pockets, closets. Never gathered, never tossed, but that is not to say they are less. Their footage now, ever expanding, one wholly anchored memory to the next, scattered like rice or lemon peels, cluttering the monotony of all these days we paused.

Molecular Healing is Done at Night

Abbey Lynne Rays

I am wilting.
A beggar of words,
a half shell formed of dust
and dead syllables.

Phantom locust swarming
in air too heavy to breathe.

Let me lie down.
Let me pawn these hours
to one who might
cultivate something,

a connoisseur of life,
bold on whisky and dreams.

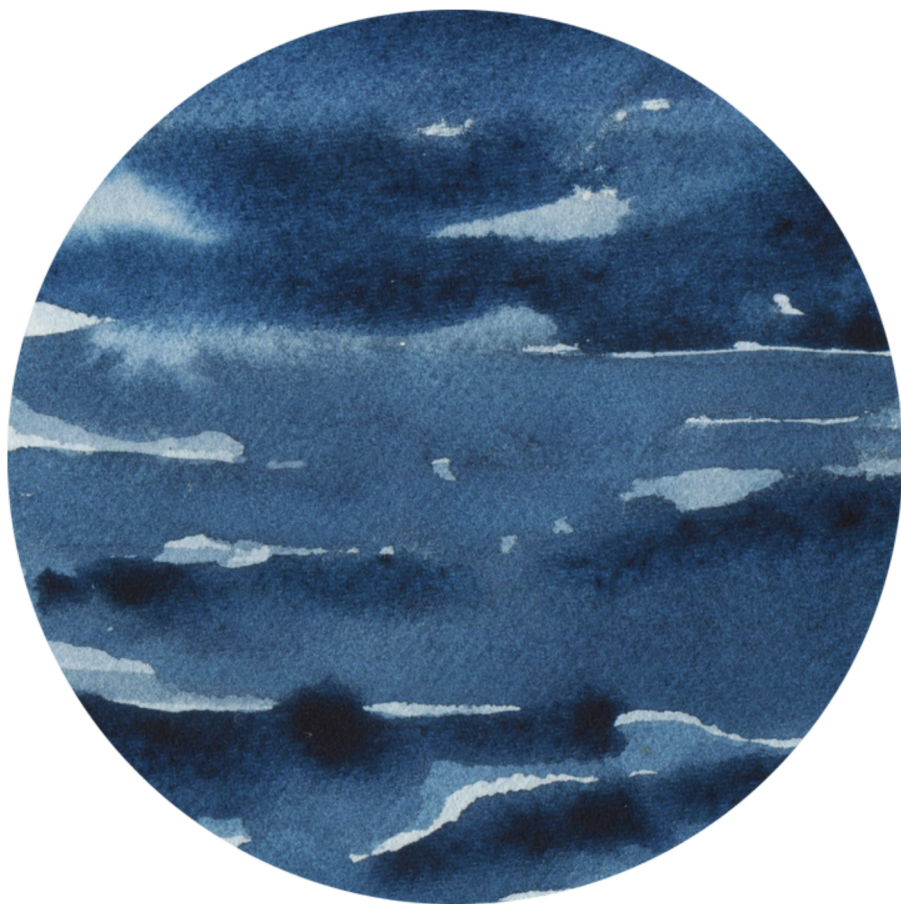
Chronicle your adventures.
Print them out, I'd say,
and I will consume them
by lamplight,
in my amber bedroom,
beneath quilts
and temptations,

drifting anywhere
that will allow me
to reclaim
something beautiful
to illuminate this night.

Directions home from the hospital

Alexa Brockamp Hoggatt

Drive the usual way. Make the same turns. Make the GPS do the work. Listen to the streetlights talking in case the roads have changed. They'll tell you they haven't. They'll tell you that you have, but they won't tell you how. The streetlights will go on whispering. Open the door in the dark and lay down on the floor. Wake in the morning, not having moved. The kitchen lights are flickering themselves on and off. Rise despite these quiet hauntings and make the drive over again to see if more of you makes it home this time. Turn the car left, right, right again, all the way down Pacific Avenue, left, then right. Collect the pieces of yourself that you left in the parking lot, in that room above the city that beeps and sobs to night skies. Tuck the pieces into the back seat, taking care to buckle the seat belt, and drive them home, one by one, until some version of you wakes up in your own bed, forgetting the feel of the floor. Even as the lights flicker in the kitchen. Even as the stillness in that room-made-for-tears persists. Even if you don't recognize the pieces. Even if you don't recognize yourself.



Meet the Contributors

Abbey Lynne Rays (she/her) is a poet and educator living in the California Bay Area. Her work has appeared in several publications including: Havik: Journal of Arts and Literature, Viewless Wings Publication, and Beyond Word Magazine. You can connect with her on her instagram @ [a.l.rays](#) where she routinely posts favorite lines, excerpts, and drafts of her original work.

Akshaya Pawaskar is a doctor-poet hailing from India. Her poems have been published in Tipton Poetry Journal, Shards, North of Oxford, the Ekphrastic review amongst others. She is the author of two poetry chapbooks, The falling in and the falling out (Alien Buddha Press, 2021) and Cocktail of life (BookLeaf Publishing, 2022).

Alexa Brockamp Hoggatt is a poet and writer from the Pacific Northwest. Alexa's work has been published in Beyond Words Magazine, Sky Island Journal, Strait Up Magazine, and Free Verse Revolution. You can find more of her work on Instagram @[alexahoggatt](#).

Azida Zainal is an ENT surgeon who is based in Johor Bahru, Malaysia. Her work has appeared in Consilience Journal, The Wee Sparrow Poetry Press, Sunday Mornings at the River and Blood Moon Poetry. She paints, sketches and writes and loves to be suspended in the zones that merge these forms. You can follow her on Instagram @[azzy501](#).

Bartholomew Barker works with Living Poetry, a collection of poets in North Carolina. He has published a full-length collection, a chapbook and been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. His work has recently appeared in Panoply, an earlier Free Verse Revolution, the Gyroscope Review, Naugatuck River Review, among others. www.bartbarkerpoet.com

Carella Keil is a writer and digital artist, published in numerous literary journals including Columbia Journal, Chestnut Review and previous issues of FVR. Her writing was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Her art has also appeared on the covers of Glassworks Magazine, Nightingale and Sparrow and Frost Meadow Review. instagram.com/catalogue.of.dreams

Charys Ellmer writes confessional poetry with a surrealist bite. Currently she is working on her first chapbook.

Meet the Contributors

Devon Webb is a 25-year-old poet & writer based in Aotearoa. She writes full-time, exploring themes of femininity, youth & vulnerability. She shares her poetry online, through live performance, & has been widely published both locally & internationally. She is the two-time Wellington Slam Poetry Champion & is currently working on the final edits of her debut novel *The Acid Mile*. Her work can be found on Instagram, Twitter & TikTok at @devonwebbnz.

Emily Patterson is the author of two chapbooks: *So Much Tending Remains* (2022) and *To Bend and Braid* (2023). Her work has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and appears or is forthcoming in *Rust & Moth*, *SWWIM Every Day*, *CALYX*, *West Trade Review*, *Mom Egg Review*, and elsewhere. Emily holds a B.A. in English from Ohio Wesleyan University, where she received the Marie Drennan Prize for Poetry, and an M.A. in Education from Ohio State University. She lives with her family in Columbus, Ohio.

Emily Tee writes poetry and flash fiction. Originally from Northern Ireland she now lives in the Midlands in England. She's had recent pieces published online in *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Visual Verse*, *The Nuthatch Mag*, *Gypsophila Zine* and *Aurum Review*, and in print with some publications from *Dreich*. She's on Instagram @emteepoetry.

Erin Zarro (she/her) is a chronically ill poet and novelist living in Michigan. She's married to a wonderful man who is fully supportive of her writing passion. She has published two poetry chapbooks with Turtleduck Press, a small independent publishing company she co-founded, a nonfiction book about managing life with a chronic illness, and several novels in the speculative fiction genre. She is currently working on her third chapbook, *Eterne* (Esperanto for "Eternally") and more fiction, because you can never have too much poetry or fiction. She writes poetry in both English and in Esperanto.

Hebe Kearney (they/them) is a poet and librarian who lives in Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland, New Zealand. Their work has appeared in publications including: *Mantissa Poetry Review*, *Mayhem*, *Overcom*, *samfiftyfour*, *Starling*, *Symposia*, *takahē*, *Tarot*, and *Poetry New Zealand Yearbooks*. You can find them at @he__be on Instagram.

Helena West (she/her) is a queer former librarian who grew up in a trailer park outside Dayton, Ohio. Now, she fixes houses and writes manic run-on poems that no one asked for. Her work has previously been featured in *Anti-Heroine Chic* and *Querencia Press*, and in a spoken word video collaboration through *Sinclair Community College* and *YWCA* in support of survivors of sexual violence. Connect with her on Instagram @how.to.talk.about.sunsets.

Meet the Contributors

Jahra Tasfia Reza is a citizen of Bangladesh. She has been a painter for 3 years. She participated in a group exhibition at Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, National Faculty of Fine Arts. She has taken part in many International Online Exhibitions and has been selected for Offline Exhibitions but couldn't participate as artworks are not allowed to be sent abroad from Bangladesh. Her artworks have been featured in Whimsical Contemporary Art Magazine, the past two Lacuna Festivals, the past three Braintree Community Centre online art exhibitions, and in many more publications. You can follow her here: <https://www.facebook.com/jahratasfiareza/>.

Jess Roses (she/they) is a disabled, neurodivergent, emerging writer. Her focus is the transformation of relationships and experiences with pain and the taboo. She explores how these communal experiences form and relate to societal and personal narratives within and without the psyche. She has been published in *Caustic Frolic*, *Coffin Bell Journal*, *Raven Review*, *Grub Street Literary Magazine*, and more. You can find her work on Instagram at @jessroseswriting.

Jillianna Reign Paat, also known as Vastriane, is an undergrad in University of Santo Tomas, taking BA Creative Writing. Her poems, photography, and non-fiction essays are previously published in *HaluHalo Journal* and *Rewrite The Stars Review*, and forthcoming in *The Blossom Magazine*. She is also currently a volunteer staff in *Sea Glass Literary* and an intern in *Adarna House, Inc.*

John Xavier has just recently completed the literary thriller 'Thyrus Falling - A Novel About Evil' which can be downloaded for free at Obooko.com.

Karen E Fraser is a Melbourne (Aus) poet/artist, with degrees in Professional and Creative Writing, and Anthropology. Her professional roles include writer, content developer; and editor of Deakin University's Verandah Literary Arts Journal, and educator/advocate in the mental health and aged care sectors. Karen is published by Freeverse Revolution Lit, Humana Obscura, Querencia, Wee Sparrow Press, Sunday Mornings at the River, Poetica Christi Press, and Bloodmoon Journal, et al. Her poetry embraces the beauty of the natural world; activism, advocacy and social justice; and the essential nature of freedom, love, dignity and belonging. IG: www.instagram.com/be_nourished

Katy Luxem (she/her) lives in Salt Lake City. She is a graduate of the University of Washington and has a master's from the University of Utah. Her work has appeared in *Rattle*, *McSweeney's*, *SWWIM Every Day*, *Poetry Online*, *Appalachian Review*, and others. She is the author of *Until It Is True* (Kelsay Books, 2023).

Meet the Contributors

Lisa Delan's poetry and prose have been featured in literary journals such as *American Writers Review*, *Burningword Literary Journal*, *Cathexis Northwest Press*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *Passengers Journal*, *Poets' Choice*, and *Viewless Wings*, among other publications. She has been nominated for a 2023 Pushcart Prize. Song settings of Delan's poems were premiered by *Festival Napa Valley* in 2022, and she is currently collaborating on a libretto for a new choral work to premiere in 2024. When she is not writing, you can find the soprano, an international performer who records for the Pentatone label, singing songs on texts by some of her favorite poets.

Madhushala Senaratne is a mum of two beautiful boys. During the day, she lectures and researches in media, humanitarianism, and international development. At night (or whenever she finds the time), she loves writing poetry on motherhood and raising boys in today's complex worlds. Instagram: @notesonmotherhood.

Marc Isaac Potter (we/they/them) ... is a differently-abled writer living in the SF Bay Area. Marc's interests include blogging by email and Zen. They have been published in *Fiery Scribe Review*, *Feral A Journal of Poetry and Art*, *Poetic Sun Poetry*, and *Provenance Journal*. Twitter is @marcisaacpotter.

Morgan Hayes (she/her) is a queer and neurodivergent emerging writer based in the heart of the California Bay Area. While she predominantly writes prose for herself and her loved ones, she can be found learning the art of poetry on Instagram at @morganlehay and has been previously published in *Free Verse Revolutions*, *Moss Puppy Magazine*, *Gypsophila Magazine*, and *Swim Press*. She procrastinates writing by attending community college, playing D&D, and walking her grumpy rescue dog.

Navila Nahid is a writer and published poet, currently residing in Brooklyn, NY. Her published works can be found in *Humana Obscura*, *Allegory Ridge*, *Gypsophila* and *The Dream Gods* anthology. She also has a social media presence on Instagram as @navilanahidpoetry.

Nora Boyle is a poet, bookbinder, farmer, beekeeper, & witch from New Hampshire who consumes coffee by the cauldron-full. She is the founder of Lady Book Witch Press, which produces limited edition artist books, broadsides, & a number of collaborative publications, including *The Cackling Kettle*. In addition to her Lady Book Witch Press publications, her poetry has been published by *Folklore for Resistance*, *Capsule Stories Magazine*, *NERVE*, & *Folktales Literary Journal*. You can see more of her work at: www.ladybookwitchpress.com & on instagram @ladybookwitch.

Meet the Contributors

Paul atten Ash is the pen name of Worcester-born poet Paul Nash, who lives in Bristol with his family. His poetry has been published by Acropolis Journal, Apricot Press, BBC Radio 6 Music (Cerys Matthews), Bent Key Publishing, Boudicca Press, Bristol 24/7, Deep Adaptation Forum, Envoi, Free Verse Revolution, Ginkgo Prize, and many others. As a recording artist and composer he has released music and toured as North Sea Navigator (Blackford Hill, Blurred, Kill Crow), written and produced scores for theatre (Raucous, Sleepdogs) and screen (BMG, Felt), and he is one half of choral/spoken-word electronica duo Holmes + atten Ash (Blackford Hill). As a lens-based artist (Saatchi Art) his work has been published by Deep Adaptation Forum and Oscillations (Blackford Hill). Website: <https://campsite.bio/northseanavigator>. Twitter: @NorthSeaNav. IG: @north_sea_navigator.

Rachael Collins first experienced publication of her poetry with the inclusion of an exceptionally over dramatic poem entitled “The Fox” in a grade school writing anthology. Since then, observing the world around her and attempting to share it, as well as her own experiences, through words has remained a lifelong constant. She often writes about feeling anything but heroic while working as a nurse, longing for faith, her mental health journey, and memories involving shopping malls. She lives with her husband and two “lucky” black cats, despite a lifelong fear of felines.

Rebecca Gutteridge is a British writer, based in Dorset. She recently graduated with a MPhil in Irish Writing from Trinity College Dublin. She writes on mental illness, expatriatism and dislocating domestic spaces. She has been published in The Belfield Literary Review, Stone, The Wee Sparrow and Free Verse Revolution.

Richard LeDue (he/him) lives in Norway House, Manitoba, Canada. He has been published both online and in print. He is the author of nine books of poetry. His latest book, “It Could Be Worse,” was published by Alien Buddha Press in May 2023.

Sai Liuko is a writer & teacher from Helsinki, Finland, where she received her MA in English Philology. She writes prose in Finnish, poems in English. Her poetry has been published or is forthcoming in 3Elements Literary Review, In the Mood Magazine, Honeyguide Literary Magazine, Soul-Lit and others. You can find her portfolio at <https://sailiuko.carrd.co/>.

Meet the Contributors

Sandrine Letellier finds inspiration in human nature, music and visual arts. She spends a great amount of time observing, pondering and wandering around her city. From Montreal, she has self-published her first collection *Aftermath* in 2022. Her work has been published in *Firewords magazine* and will be featured in upcoming issues of *Wild Roof journal* and *Sky Island journal*. You can find her on Instagram [@aftermath.poems](#) where she posts daily.

Sangeetha writes on her blog mindfills.wordpress.com. She's at the moment, fascinated by how wandering words tessellate to encase moments...moments she likes to revisit.

Victoria Spires is a Northampton (UK) based poet scribbling in the margins of love, motherhood, nature and philosophy. Her work has been featured in *Flight of the Dragonfly's 'Flights'* e-journal. She can be found on Instagram [@jitterbug_writes](#).

FREE VERSE REVOLUTION

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