

A black and white photograph of a flower bud on a stem with leaves. The flower bud is the central focus, showing its pointed, overlapping petals. The stem is dark and textured, with several large, dark leaves surrounding it. The background is a light, hazy sky. The text is overlaid on the image in a serif font.

SURVIVOR

**DARK
MARROW**

ISSUE TWO

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Rhythm of the Bones: Dark Marrow ISSUE TWO

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Familial Concern
for J.L.F.

When I realized I was a pebble, the ripples were still
present, a reminder of what I was capable—
becoming the blur and the worry that concerned
my mother. She used to say not to lock my door.

With time, the door became stuck,
except when someone
anyone would burst in.

My sister came in once,
as I hunched over my desk laboring over words
& I shouted—penetrating the walls, more than

just echo. After, her note said sorry but it read
like what has happened to you? Later I heard whispers
in the hall we shared—murmurs
asking if her big brother is going to be okay—

Why isn't he okay?
Isn't he going to be okay?

Stephen Furlong

A Theory on Faith

Beyond the sun—a place to call home,
the sun communicates with cloudy daze, drunk
on its own light, spreading tenderness like an uncle
at a party who's had more than he can handle.

Gasping for air like it's something new,
that's the lesson. Faith tastes like air, existing
in abundance, it can't be seen until it blocks our view
like a Sandburg fog, coming over the city line. Over the bridge.
Love exists as a reminder faith exists.
I lost faith when I lost love, I couldn't write
complete sentences because my mind was fragments,
separated like molecules of dusk—

An early lesson: What connects us can also separate us.

Stephen Furlong

The Song of the Bats

Do not go gentle into that good night.

- Dylan Thomas

Bats out of hell got crammed in our nerves,
repressed by your steel and stony reserves,
our iron from battles lost as you closed
the gates of sky, the touch of rose.

Thorns! No Thorns! Thus you protect—
our moves closely monitored, light indirect,
our gardens of plastic hung upside-down,
their scents bottled up so no one can drown.

Living on pages which none dare turn,
we dread your rage, your righteous burn.
And when a bat dares flash its devilish stare,
your razor-look clips us to rodents mid-air.

We fall to the ground, humbled and round,
claws in our fists, our shrieks without sound,
calmed by our fantasies: bats springing out,
fangs on display, feeling their clout,

sharp teeth gnashing through channels within
brainwaves, surges, the veil of the djinn,
and silence, a match for your predator's ear:
the stone of the rabbit, the steel of the deer.

And we wait. We wait for sun through the pane
with its old wicked glare, its fiery mane
with whispering rays, a sign to break free,
fly into nowhere and scream, *Let us BE!*

Siham Karami

the magic in your veins

A taste for blood is not the only thing I got from you.
A talent for magic,
a penchant for the dramatic,
and a beast inside my chest, looking for its best opportunity to claw its way out.

I'm pouring myself into your history,
an epic from before you were born but it feels like you were there,
an inheritance of violence and antipathy and lies,
passed to you by your blood and to me by my affection.
I know what it's like when you feel big: heir to a legacy.
I know what it's like when you feel small: just a boy among giants.

I'm exploring what it feels like to exist inside of your skin.
Yes, I know the magic in your veins,
but also, the pit in your stomach, the sweat on the nape of your neck.
I know your fear, pulsating in your spinal cord even as you sleep;
your anger, terrifying to carry within you;
your shame burning on your cheekbones.

I know every inch of your body and I wear it as my own:
every heart flutter,
every electric touch from your lover, his fingers on your skin,
every bit of shameful excitement growing quietly in your throat,
every buckle of your knees or crack in your voice,
every nervous cough,
every little scrap of your barely post-pubescent inelegance
belongs to both of us.

For every vampire that turns another, there's one that just gets bit.
I'm trying to imagine what it's like to be stagnant,
to be content with one master, in one place, in one body —
a body that already exists as an ideal end state or even has one.
To exist without urgency;
no book will go unread, no spell uncast.
One day you might burn yourself out from the inside like a dying star.
I will be long gone by then.
Somehow, I am still absolute chaos compared to you,
but if you are a monster, then I am a monster too.

Jameson Hampton

Sun Feast

Winedrunk thoughts crawl on slithering fingers across kitchen tiles as I draw pots and pans from my navel. They saunter and sauté in un-salt. I, buttered with a sprinkle of flour, fine-dice this mushroom mind; o scallions! Some bay out there, almost tangible, tells me, keep at bay leaves, syphon them from soup tureen, stop touching mountain leaves. They were wrong cabinet. I gather them for sun, leaves. I fashion them into hair leaves for corn love. I not-mother. I, crone-shirks-her-veil bread dolly salute my not-son. I light a red candle and listen for your mantle, list your teeth (that I can remember.) Your slithering fingers slide along my kitchen, kitchen tiles.

Kari Flickinger

Every Angel is a Terrifying Blonde

Every angel is terrifying.
-Rainer Marie Rilke, "The First Elegy"

Dear me. Dear us. We acolytes who worship at the altar of Monroe. Us babes baptized into the Cult of the Ultimate Blonde. Listen, darlings, we have trained our whole lives for this. Now we pick scents. Cotton candy from a nighttime carnival. Chanel No. 5, rose geranium, the musky funk that collects between our thighs. We anoint. Not a dab on the pulse points but a dousing. Until we reek. We flower and sugar and sex. What little girls are made of. Next, we slip. Into our swish-skirted dresses. Slide feet into pairs of *fuck me* shoes with *fuck you* heels. We whiten. Shine our teeth until they flash like tiny mirrors. We go platinum. Place white-gold wigs upon our heads. We careful, reverential. We are crowning ourselves princess. Oh look how starlet. How diva. How gorgeous, we dumb blondes. Now we adorn. Drape diamonds around our lovely necks. Or rhinestones. Anything that glistens, draws eyes downward to our décolletage. We slick lips. Vermillion, crimson, Ruby Tuesday. We swallow. Bitter pills, barbiturates. We slow nervous systems, shallow our breaths. Have little half-deaths. We closer to corpse. Closer to our queen. How necromantic. Darlings now. Now we stand. Join hands. We shimmy. Shoulder-shake. We start a strip that's just a tease. We earthquake. We sing in our breathiest whispers. *Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you.* The song is a breeze that billows our dresses above our knees. We don't bother to hold them down. We want the world to see. We legion of platinum goddesses. We army of bombshells. We detonate. Mr. Playboy's freshly decaying body rises from its tomb. To feast desiccated eyes upon us. And all the men who call him king. They look. Look at us. We angels of death with a thousand silk wings beating the air. A thousand pouting lips puckered for the camera's kiss. We glam Kalis in barbie-doll wigs. We million miniature Marilyn's. We everything they desire and abhor. Hair and teeth and skin a-shimmer. Rhinestones reflecting the sun. We shine. So bright they want to turn away. They can't turn away. They like to gaze so much. We let them gaze.

Jessie Lynn McMains

Monster

Stop looking for ghosts
under your messy bed.
It's full of secretive dust balls
truth in the clouds
or outside the closed window.
Cease worrying about invasions,

robberies
wars
refugees,

your mind is a prison cell.

Smothering
your fake, counterfeit screen.
Current events, news anchors
babbling like dummy heads,
pop stars,
the bombardment of
layered fake news. Like lemon sponge cake;
it's enough now.

Remember how the familiar grass
felt under young bare feet
at three-years-old?
When your Mommy held the hose
and wet your tiny feet?
Your senses were alive,
her love unconditional
for the first and only.

Close your eyes now.
Think of her youthful eyes;
her lullaby
of dearly hate,
reach out for a hand—
It matters not.

Even as your monster,
she drank your tears for morning coffee.
Swallowed your spirit for breakfast,
lying pretty hope
on the dirty kitchen table.
Tell her:

Aren't we all monsters?

Monsters are the loneliest creatures...

We're not all under your bed
or in your head,

we're all looking at you
straight in the empty eye,
in your mirror
in your head,
lift the covers or just stop checking.

You still love her,
never forget your tiny feet.
One enemy is enough.
Go ahead—
Call her to tell her
you think about her every day,
then go back to hating her.

Christina Strigas

Conversations with the Dead

Never followed Dad's advice.
Wish I did now.
In '89 thought his words archaic,
In 2017 I'd say he was
Pretty damn smart.

My daughter will roll her eyes,
One day remember ancient adages
Maybe in 2050—
Finally agree, nod her intelligent head
And remember this like me.
This is hindsight:

The unanswered phone.
Black Bell phone on the kitchen counter,
ringing endlessly, going to voicemail
no one checking again.

I can hear his voice from the dead—
it's rough, yet gentle
faintly forgotten.
I press play.
I thought you were home. I hate these damn machines.
His broken English sounding perfect to my ears.

This is the cycle;
My mental tangerine peels,
my form of existential awareness
an endless study of the silenced voice
playing back recordings to remember

Because tombstones
Cannot talk back.

Christina Strigas

Coins for Charon

I.

You ignored her for three months,
if you hadn't, it would've brought
war between us—I kept constant
guard and never wanted you to know.
Confessions are pouring out of me.

You say there is no meaning in the attention
you give her now—she ain't coming back
you won't let her, but she's a rotting seed
you planted in me. You let her presence
grow—didn't cut her out to save me.
If you wanted her gone, you would've
removed her from the root—crushed
her leaves beneath your foot.

II.

This is how Persephone died—
poisoned on the table after performing
a self surgery to pull the festerous Minthe
from her belly; using all her strength
to quell the destructive and foolish nymph.

She'll never know if Hades left coins for Charon
resting on her eyes as she faded into oblivion.

Marisa Silva-Dunbar

One last message for Hades

I've swallowed my own form of poison—take a scalpel to me;
dissect and see if any enchantments remain.

I can't stop myself from spilling some sort of prayer
over you even in these liminal spaces; you need to find
the incantations and magick that sleep in your bones
without splitting your own skin.

If I had the same curse as Kilgrave, a simple suggestion
would cease any of your favorite forms of self-destruction.
If I was or Our Lady of the Trees, whatever seeds I planted
around you—would sprout and heal your hurt.

Marisa Silva-Dunbar

Persephone Reborn

In the anatomical theatre, I was the cadaver on the table
—chalk white and empty of body fluids. No one remembered
who I was before the leeches and bloodletting—they said all
the old gods were dead. In absentia—on the edge of consciousness,

I dreamt I was packed with sand and pebbles—growing succulents,
the only plants I could produce through bone and muscle—a body
barely worth returning to. What magic was left in me? Who would want
a Goddess of Spring, only useful in the unchanging desert?

Death always has a job—even if the title is ever changing; he is honored
out of fear. You should've known he despises a life without me,
that he would find a way to cultivate a garden to grow within me.
He filled my torso with peonies, and gardenias; placed chrysanthemums

in my heart so that it pulsed with color. He gently planted narcissus
in my throat and palms; his own way of calling and clinging to me.
Waking, I tasted him in my blood, could smell his familiar scent
as if I had never left—it was inevitable he'd find a way to bring me home.

Marisa Silva-Dunbar

The Second Ophelia

Lining my pockets with stones was the best alternative, my love

I didn't want to skim the surface in a secluded pond,

oily dredge seeping into my nostrils, pores

No,

 this will be a brightly lit lake under a spotlight of violent sun.

Jonquils and jasmine threading through my fevered hair,

a torrent of water gushing through my throat.

Synapses unspooling while silent, clouded lullabies on loop lull me to sleep.

My own mouth quietly singing hymns over the laps of trembling water,

 the tumbling rushes that will govern me

I sing not of defeat, but of the peace I swim so desperately to,

my sinking body a difficult analogy for those born without our defects-

you with a boiling temper and tunneled eyes,

 me with an anvil mind

and a predisposition to permanent loss over temporary joy...

The stormy thoughts that battle within me have no bearing on you, my darling-

they stir and brew, collide behind my eyes-

 weigh like my swelling lungs

December Lace

birds sing inside her brain

Outside the window
darkness arrives.
The silhouette of a robin
takes one last look in.
The electric light bright
hurts her eyes.
All clocks in the house
tick in synchronicity,
each second goes to
the black night.
The dish-washer
a monster
swills out
his mouth
flood and ebb i
n the Solway.
She is old-eyed heavy.
Birds sing inside her,
nuthatch, tree-creeper,
jay, rock-pipit, heron,
they all get to her.
Wing span of the estuary,
a gob full of dreams
never ending water
a slush over mud flats
walloping the underside
of her high bank
where togas,
leather sandals,
thongs,
feet and hands
scrubbed clean
where all outposts are
edge of the land
where she seeks
salt on her tongue,
white a flying egret,
angel inside her brain.

Penny Sharman

Tell Them They're Dead

Philomela knew when it was over: her voice was remembered only in low unconsciousness of seafoam, fearing she would speak again but unable to recognize it as her own—a measured hell.

She remembers how terrible it was to survive among the returning azaleas, the bend of their noise in early morning. She would tell them to bury their breath low—far past the bloodlines running down earth's privates.

She watched them grow: there were three sisters dangerous as swans, broken into a hundred versions of themselves depending on which day of the week. She watched their morning runs past the wooded fields of perverted grasses,

dulling their muscles into rough axes. They waited years for the phrase *don't worry, be happy* to become lost on them, pirouetting between the toes & neck, dulling skulls to concrete slabs.

They wanted a happiness greater than her past, a past not yet finished. She waited for them on that street to teach them the hate of love.

Joanna C. Valente

THERE ARE THREE GIRLS

i.

He thought if he trained her, she could be
a nice lady with pretty teeth long as skyscrapers—
drink men like rainwater.

Tessa was seven once: that year she passed by
the building he lived in. Her mama would visit
the engineer every week. She said they were just friends.

Tessa knew the building held a love she could not tell
daddy about. Sometimes she preferred this new man
to daddy.

When she'd hold out her hands in rain, they turned
to wet raisins & ask him to kiss them back smooth
—he could not love her that way.

ii.

Would the boat make it back to shore?
It was sailing all around the world.
All the sailors drowned except one.

They sunk to the bottom of the bathtub,
smiles still boiling on their lips. Marianne
dropped the toy anchor to the bottom—

soon she'll take out the plug, watch the soapy
tornado at the edge of her toes, dip her
fingers in the last of the waves—

pretend to taste salt. Her father calls
her to bed. She sits afloat of her quilt until
she can taste the loss of her mortality.

iii.

A baby was born on the fifth day
of June & the mother was afraid
it was too early. When she brought her

home, she watched the toenails grow
in healthy, her eyebrows take the
sickle-shape, veins collecting bad blood.

Joanna C. Valente

Searching for soft parts

I forget how bright light shines
flush off the moon when night
is thick in its bearing.

Scrolled scars on my Braille written body,
iridescent from absorbed breath
and black warmth.

Like tracers from a ghost-
fading as pruned fingertips
wipe lid over lash.

Elizabeth Dickinson

Dancing with Matches:

I.

September breeds thick black storm clouds that linger
atop skyscrapers standing on catacombs, screaming
down on that soaked sunless desert – splattered
sprayed and showered in red sludge and cordite.
The dead tree provides no shelter from this pelting,
persistent, acid rain of man.
Thunder – tastes of rotting flesh and thorn trees;
boomings – marked by gaps of still silence
so loud
it thumps
the chest.

Metallic gates clink and pierce eardrums and latch
and cancerous green vines grip white fences and gag
as flickers of sons fade smaller and colder
until nothing remains of their flaming red match
Cast your gaze down
on that ashen
black match.

II.

The city reeks of cigarettes and sex
covered in piss and stained with regret;
while glowing eyes reflect stories of cunt wars and trump,
brains softened and battered by radioactive meat bruisers.
Where is the meaning, the hope, the Divine?
People scream as they commit suicide.

Muses and Sirens dance and soon fleet,
racing off promptly to Homedale street,
where the soup's always boiling and boiling and boiling
and boiling and steaming
screech whistle
then pop.

Ketamine pills filled with realms of repression
attempting to bite their own smiley faced teeth;
and fathers unleashing their heart-felt aggression –
fuelled by the fear of their sons being gay.

Father, oh father, where art thou you father?
Father, only in heaven you lay,
with wind and wet rain and giant balls of bright gasses,
conduce me your wisdom

with soul
of Tao.

III.

Devour the most beautiful sunset you've ever
witnessed, with your insignificant eyes,
and wonder and ponder the potent perfection
of a magnificent omniscient alive laughing planet.
Floating and floating in harshly cold desolate -
emptiness - twisting with spirals and pray
for skies filled with colour and beauty and starlight -
and green leaves so wet,
dripping recent rain.

Father I see you you are always dancing -
dancing the Argentine tango and rising -
setting - dancing in trees where we're raping
everything give me more money you whore.
More power, more pleasure - please spare me your sorrow
Nature - satiate hungry dismay.

While that match keeps on burning and ashing and cracking
returning to nothing but the black dust of life;
fertilising soil for fresh seedlings to sprout -
to grow and to breathe, to dance and to Die -
to grasp and to clutch and to feel the fresh water
running through veins and sustaining Life.

Nature feeding Nature feeding Nature feeding Nature
we are all Nature - how did you enter that body and wake?
What is it that's reading this page?
The curtains are closing - the end drawing near,
quick now please set the stage.

Nicholas Smith

The constellations are fading

They are descending into
a plodding death, swallowed
by the expanse of black
that will consume each of us.
Remembrance is a shattered
bottle, carelessly littered
over forgotten country roads.
We once danced like the most
brilliant of lights, seen only
in the most remote regions—
a treasured locket that held
heartbeats and promises,
but all stars explode.

Kendall A. Bell

Hyperplasia

You are shucked like
an oyster, hollowed
to keep you vertical.
Doctors cup your hands,
speak softly of this
parasite you cannot see-
an intruder I cannot slay
for you. Upon waking in
a sterile, foreign bed,
you will only feel the pain
of theft, hear the soft hum
of machinery, while I wait
in a room of strangers to
see you-the only home I've
ever known, almost taken.

Kendall A. Bell

Trace this shooting star of sadness across my brain

after Jennifer Rouse

watch it explode in mid-flight
 see the fragments become
 a shower of pulp
 the once beating
once overflowing heart that has now
 turned supernova
 leaving streaks of all the love
that once inhabited this fuselage
 a finale unwitnessed

Kendall A. Bell

A Haunting

Pets, like everything else, die.
The bed becomes less warm at night.

The vet of doom sent you home
with a heavy box. Spade sliced backyard soil.

Kneeling on the edge of the Earth,
you scooped black handfuls of sorrow.

Tonight you will dream the taut clatter
of dirt, shovel nudging the mound stiff.

That's the first night.
Every night after—the marble eyes

blown wide as Saturn's rings, paws
curled against the dampening box,

the last twitch of whiskers.

Eric Lochridge

The Words for Cat and Moth

All day the cat slept in the window,
eyes creased in geometric inscrutability,
as sunlight cut shadows through honeyed time.

And then a white moth came dancing
out of the cool harbours of dusk
into the influence of twin golden gaze

and a sudden paw print on dusted glaze -
five misted chakras splayed
in the grey hieroglyphs of death.

John Hawkhead

THE DEWY-CHAPPED DICHOTOMY

A dream:

I am a child playing with my mother's makeup. She stopped wearing the stuff in
1993/expiration dates have faded/yellowed/curled into themselves like overgrown fingernails

Even as a child I look so tired. I blend mom's tree trunks on my cheeks and incense ashes
under my eyes/teeth-mouth red with lipstick tinted with grandmother blood/the just-bitten look

I turn on the curling iron/I burn myself on the curling iron. I pin up the curls with
twigs/moisturize with snails/fur and flesh under my small cat claws/the natural look

In a few years, I will wear purple lipstick and glitter eyeshadow instead. I will look back on this
time with great embarrassment/the fresh-faced look

miss macross

Harridan

Call her accused—
replace her name
with crone, harpy,
night wanderer.

Say cunning folk,
malefic mistress,
necromancer
or baby cutter.

Say bloodletter.
Say almond-eyed
opium pusher
and potion-maker.

Say cauldron stirrer,
a broom pilot,
cat whisperer,
and toad collector.

Say brimstone—
or fire or pyre.
Say noose-necked
or thrash. Say

innocence is a stone,
but only if she sinks.

Melissa Tyndall

Ornithology

In dreams, birds cry out in our infant
daughter's voice, beat their flailing bodies
against the glass, long for a way in.
They are red and ink-black, feathered
frenzy, the cardinal voice of hunger—
fledglings whose father fed their mother,
beak to coral beak, with seeds and elm
tree blossoms as she built their cupped nest,
matted with pine needles and crushed twigs,
covered it in leafy mat. Redbird
parents sang and travelled together
then, mated for life. The father fed
his young, defended broods from milk snakes
and cats, stopped fighting his reflection—
but in dreams, the songbird beats his wings,
loses crimson plumes, breaks his body,
wakes up in the middle of the night
when he hears our infant daughter's voice
ring out from her crib in primal song.

Melissa Tyndall

Hail Mary

Mosaic pupils
Look like churches in her eyes
You can see her contrite sins
Even when she's anesthetized
Her affinity for shadows
Courses underneath her corrosive skin
Tiny scabs and track marks are the road maps
To the hell that she's living in
When the lights went out
The world became her tomb With
rosaries around her neck and a baby
in her womb
She euthanized herself with a silver spoon
Hail Mary—
With a maudlin gin and contrition prayer
Hail Mary—
Her crucible was anything but demure
A transgressional ingénue
Whose early grave was neigh
Like the fault was always mine
After all, I'll always be the reason
She couldn't stop getting high.

Eddie Brophy

Post Modern Depression

Neuter my ego
Then shave my head
Botox my apathy
And medicate my dread

Domesticate my envy
Deify my debt
Goad my quest for Shangri-La
Visa is the worst Christ I've ever met

Impugn my suffering
And politicize my fear
Turn my social anxiety
Into fodder for the next electioneer

Infiltrate my mind
Mold my thoughts like play-doh
Negate my relevance
In the quasi status-quo

Turn the lunacy of others
Into your bread and butter
Hydrate the machine with their blood and tears
Working off the mortgage for a life they never asked for,
Another thirty years.

Eddie Brophy

NEVER KNOWING

At the end of the road
one's breath becomes frozen.

Memories of sullen faces
have eyes that are dried of all tears.

In this place where all of us must go,
the signs are pointing to the sky
in which clouds are jagged and menacing.

There's no time left to wash one's hands,
fix a salami sandwich, or turn on the news
which is always filled with bad omens,
forcing us to sleep with one eye open

never knowing if we'll survive another day. . .

Jeffrey Zable

HISTORICALLY

The winds blow as newborns fall from the sky
with eyes that fear ever touching the earth.
Historically nothing has changed. . .
Several centuries earlier a man with some sort of pen
tried to describe the futility of his times:
“Even the butterflies are sad, and the travel stained faces of those
who never reached their destinations are calling out in vain.
A trail of bones is all that will remain. . .”
And now as I walk the floor in a bathrobe that always catches fire
when I stand near the window,
I realize that I died a thousand times before
while seeking answers that forever appear as cadaverous skulls
floating on the backs of poisonous waters. . .

Jeffrey Zable

Romanticism is alienation of passion unquenched

Looking past the weakened flower, sorrow sings
Detached, no longer possessing internal notes
Swept away in the wind to clash with farewell
The mind slumbers into recalling no beauty within

The flowers splendor full of ending agony, indifferent
Abstract visions send insight into obscure notions
Thoughts pay for involuntary insults, flowers fade
Double the distance the minds fatigue, desolate it flashes

Old expirations are renewed, asserted into the universe
Phrases of formulated revisions presume no wrong
Seas in the silent eternal crisis struggle, squeezed
Patterns question doubts in old cesspools lived

Illustrious the silence felt, out beyond the apparition
Where gestures touch is but an insolvent debt to owe
Associations are hung out of sight, sunken blooms
No longer hold the heart captive in the conscious mind

Clint Hirschfield

IMAGERY, AN ACQUIRED TASTE

Time after time, a squirrel leaps
for the seed dish,
falls an outstretched claw short.
This is where persistence
meets an insatiable hunger.

From Robert Bruce and his spider
to my squirrel and my artfully
designed bird feeder,
everything continues to appear as something else.

My wife doesn't suspect that
the rodent launches himself
toward the believable explanation.
She thinks my words fall flat.

She doesn't realize that they struggle
to their feet, scramble up the maple trunk,
launch themselves again.

Once, a snowflake on a pane
was me, alone in New York City.
A neglected dying rose
was the people back home.

It will be night soon.
The squirrel must retreat to its nest.
The oncoming images
will bear their inference no doubt.
It's been dark to me before.

John Grey

Crushing is the Darkness

Crushing is the darkness
The smell of the air
Makes me forget.
Deafening are the waves,
But the noise brings calm
Unsure of where the sand ends
And the water begins.
Each time the tide doubles-back,
Leaving feet untouched,
No shock of cold
Or burn of salt
A silent prayer of gratitude
Passed lips - flaking and parched.
Taking pause on an ancient shore
Counting how many lives
Slipped into the ocean-
Self-sacrifice
After their paths home
Had been erased by the
Pull of the moon.

Stormy Skies

Control

“I’m crazy,” you warn me,
But nothing is crazier than the inkling you have.
Believing that the universe will be good to you,
as you stand one foot pressing down on my skull.

I will not allow the poison from your unexpected words
to drip down and kill my seed of happiness.

For I have stolen back the reigns of life,
that you were holding on so hard to.
I became the mustang I was meant to be,
one with the wind-- completely and utterly free.

Your threatening siren swirls around my ears
like a deafening echo unable to be silenced.
Desperately clinging onto my insecurities,
like a drowning man holding onto his last breath of life.

But I plant myself so strongly to the ground,
that I uproot courage from the core of Mother Earth.

Megalomania is the obsession to exercise power.
Yet, you fail to be larger than the universe.
You don’t even know the meaning of prayer,
you still don’t understand that
you don’t choose the outcome of this story.

You are not the words that make up my pages.
Your authoritative boot is wearing thin,
and just for a moment,
I am able to extract breath in the creases.

Jenna Faccenda

Ballast Seeds

After the exhibition by Alves, Seeds of Change: New York—A Botany of Colonization

"When we are walking in New York, we do not know if we are stepping on New York or Bristol, Kingston in Jamaica, Lisbon, Rio de Janeiro or Oslo [...] these plants were witnesses to things we would never understand"

- Maria Thereza Alves

I. Milk Thistle

The digging, always the digging.
Worn blades cut dark earth
and drop it into waiting wood
barrows. Hands harden quickly
out here, but some days a new
man's palms might blister, burst,
and bleed, or an old hand might
take a thick splinter between
calluses, and hot blood will flow
and fall like rainwater down checked
ash hafts and crusted iron heads.
And down: to dye dormant seeds
in soil. And up: seeds and all
rolling over the gangway. And down:
down and dumped, piled in the hold.
Soil and stone, seed and sorrow: ballast.

II. Stinging Nettle

The salt, the sea, always the salt.
Sweat-stained seamen sail
by sextant and star. Waves lap
gunnels and swamp the deck.
Baked brine cracks and scales.
And then: the port. Any port.
The long arms of empire.
The knock-kneed legs of land.
And again: digging in the hold.
Swarthy and sun-browned—
shoveling foreign soil, seeds.
And up: up and out and dumped
in great mounds on the quayside.
And down: down to the empty
belly with the cargo—salt and spice,
cotton and cloth. Women. Men.

III. Amaranth

The growing, sudden, almost immediate.
Weeds, yes, but green and gilding
the edges of the mound, at least
until the next arrival and its fresh
blight of ballast. Some seeds, stained
and buried deep, lie and weep and wait
for a year, a decade, a century.
Until, again: the digging, the exposure,
the sunlight and the soil, fecund
and fresh. A lifetime of sleeping in blood
and up: the sprouting. Broad green leaves,
crimson tendrils twisting from cracked
sidewalks, from gaps and gutters.
And down: sloughing golden grain.
As beautiful as everything we forget—
as haunting, as reckoning, as history.

Daniel J. Pizappi

Mars

I live in constant fear of my skirt blowing up, dogs
lurching out of alleys, panting, putting their mouths
all over me. *Tell us how our tongues feel on your body.*
When I cry and say sticky, I feel one hundred teeth.

I feel fairly sure that if a flood of biblical proportions
were to occur, at least one pack would form. Blocking
the door to the ark, grabbing, shoving in - I'm swallowing
water. The animals look on sympathetic, unsurprised.

In the strobe of the bar I want to say no to dancing
without guilt, not be chased down for invisible-inked
IOU's. To work my body like vines through the crowd,
be feral and barefoot without them saying I deserve it.

At a party, a video spliced between bum-fighting
and girls masturbating with Corona bottles plays.
And they laugh. I leave, cautious in the dark, wishing
I'd been born or could go back to some sexless planet.

Trina Young

Titan Arum

Younger, my own Humbert pulled up the edge of my
dress, petal thin, and kissed me quite spidery.
Shut my mouth with pollen and fine webbing daily.

Older, the nectaring was stemmed - I'd grown
beyond nymphet. But his roots stayed in me.
No saw, no spade, no claws could cut.

I think I'll always be rooting for him,
nuzzling my snout into married men, soiling
their lives with wives; what a pig I am.

There is a flower that blooms rarely,
an oxbloodied fountain shape, smells like
dead flesh. I, too, am not so daisy fresh.

Trina Young

Medicine Man

The town hangs its head into my nightfull skylight:
Fat, dirty and unsightly full of itself; nest head crackering
Drawl-in, my own termites ticking in, ticking in the night—

They've an illness spreading wall-to-wall only the Monk can cure,
Big numb Monk with his cursive sea scroll of god.
I'm contaminated and atrophic, under the boot's steadfast

Monk gifts me new feet, charming prescriptive things:
Chlorophylls, filled-in paling marbles, gobby jelly beans
And pink poppyseeds : Buddha's Tincture of Numb.

Thoughts are leaves. They settle their sad stickies
To the crone of gravity. Leaves under mind moor leaves;
How they leave the town raped of all the fleshy brain trees.

Another pink rotting albatross. And my Monk comes,
His leaves leaving euthanized, the gnawed twin mattress raw,
His stethoscope always hanging around my knob,

Monk knocks, tocks—snaps off the arms of the tick—,
I fall face to cure; drop to a soft crawlspace of winter numb
Brood. I'm exorcised of this insectual busyness,

Citylights burn the skinny termites; an ancient exoskeleton
Abandoned and mouthless, I stroll to the bodega— weeds
Dead trees, acmes, statues at their knees. It means nothing.

Alexandra Meehan

mirror, reflections, and self

How easy is to view inside mirrors?
I, made of glass, roam round the room, follow.
Your presence I discern through sloughed figures.

Fear me not, face. Will you break to shivers?
You marched enflamed for change – change rang hollow
lulled by lies of patriarchal fearers.

Hear me talk, face. I see you come nearer;
a woman full of fight in rage wallows,
her skin transfigured her, skin disfigured.

An anodyne sight you seek, a healer.
I see skin scarred, skin that traumas swallows,
scalded tissues scabbed, skin limn its inner

strength. Your reflections creep along your stares,
peek at your final purpose, fleet across
glass; they are just ephemeral figures.

You are the mage and you are the healer.
Silhouetted we flow against a glow.
How easy is to view inside mirrors?

My presence I discern through sloughed figures.

Athena Melliar

For Mary Oliver

A poem is about being ready to
change your mind. Mary Oliver knew that.

Today, Mary Oliver died. And whole moraines
pale blue with blossoms swept the hill inside.

She was one who knew boundaries, and what
honored her own name. Deviating into sensibility,
she was one who made honey mesquite with words-

so hard scanning the darkness, like a small, quiet
rain cloud hovering over yonder. Or a panther rattling
in the thick candelabra forest of sweetheart extinctions.

George Cassidy Payne

every day i am at war

i have always
found beauty in the macabre
they are more honest to me than
songs of light

even shadows admit
there is both darkness and light,
but light wants to say
it is the only one that should exist;

opens a blinding palm known
as the sun
i prefer the night and the silver song
of moonlight on my flesh

she, like the rain, is more sincere
washes away every aching bone that
stings me like a thousand angry bees
because the past has never left me alone

memories inconvenient and heavy
launch themselves against my
heart in a melee of arrows each and every day
my war isn't always against others

sometimes it is against my own mind
who hisses contempt in the darkest of edges
hemming over my happy dreams with dark
nightmares whose anxiety swallows me whole.

- *linda m. crate*

rage teeth

i tried to ignore
the words,
and ignore the bitter
taste they left
in my ears;
but by the third day
i was tired of being asked if i
were a carpet muncher
or if i had sex with trees
so i turned around and punched
that boy in the face
without a second thought
some people see red i saw only
the blackness of my rage
sewn so deep into my being
that i could not sever
myself from the beast—
it was the first day i met the black wolf
because i always strived to be the white wolf
instead,
but there's no denying there are beasts
deep within me capable of ripping my enemies apart;
i just choose that i would rather not be the monster
but they are always there waiting
for a moment of weakness
to crucify any who cross me in the teeth of their rage.

- *linda m. crate*

In The Abattoir

We watch with eyes full of moon
as she crosses the tile floor,
sensible shoes clicking a metered rhyme.
She wears a jacket, like a banker,
but underneath she's as sad as the chipped
glitter polish that lines my fingernails.
Under her examination I am still,
bloodless wounds marking my time,
a lump in my throat that betrays
my voice. She doesn't feel my gaze
as she dips her finger into a pot of
mentholatum and smears it across her lip,
doesn't see my contempt as she steadies
her shaking hands. Those suits will
never take her seriously, not with those
cheekbones. With the snap of powdered gloves
she reaches into my throat, her interest
piqued as the voices outside the door fade.
Their expectations were low, the beer bellies
sheathed in pinstripes and coffee-stained ties,
not bothering to mask their derision. From
the soft pink tissue she pulls a cocoon and
the moth unfurls its wings across my vision. Here
I am there and all the spaces in between. I tell
her my secrets, my throat unstuck,
focus narrowed down to millimeters. I tell
her that she can leave but she'll never get away,
we are all just lambs crying in the night and
the abattoir is always full.

Amanda Crum

YOU ARE A FADING BRUISE EMPIRE:

You are a fading bruise Empire:

Fading slowly

You were once a hematoma

Resting in subcutaneous tissue

Skin blinded into disease

love bound by the control.

Words that hurt, that burn the heart like a cattle prod.

She was made to love, and all she gave you were insults, lesions covering the beauty of your mind.

Social hidings, the mysteries of trusting.

You had guilt, shame, ghosts of self

Form like an empire across your starving heart.

One kiss from the sin of black magic

Leads from one control in one hand into the switch of another mastermind.

Casting the rainbow of colours over your lost hope.

You peaked into your reflection

In those waters you were always frightened by.

Instead of seeing the glass floating in dark shadows, leaving the stamp of tension.

You now owned the freedom of bleeding, crying, the emotions of being human.

Monsters fade back to stems

Oh, to see a fading of corruptive bruises....

Such a beautiful, natural high to breathe the oxygen of your own reborn Empire.

And support is there in the crystals of light

that never blandished to the cult of bruising.

David L. O'Nan

About the Contributors

Rachael Ikins is a 2016/18 Pushcart nominee, CNY Book Award nominee, 2018 Independent Book Award winner author. Both her art and writing have featured throughout CNY & capitol district. Ikins' art has won multiple prizes as well. *Gone Dogs & We Will Not Be Silenced*, Book Authority's #2 of top 100 Best New Poetry Books '19 contain her poetry. She has 7 chaps all with cover art by Ikins, a full-length poetry book, an illustrated novel, & is in many journals. A Syracuse University grad, member CNY branch NLAPW, & Associate Editor Clare Songbirds Publishing. Her illustrated memoir, *Eating the Sun*, with narrative threaded through with delicious recipes and decadent poems is releasing April 2019. <https://www.claresongbirdspub.com/shop/featured-authors/rachael-ikins/>. Later this year her first illustrated young reader chapter book, *A Piglet for David* will join the bookshelf. She lives surrounded by nature, book in hand, happiest with mud on good clothes gardening, windows open, listening to the wind.

Stephen Furlong received his M.A. in Professional Writing from Southeast Missouri State University. He is the author of the chapbook *What Loss Taught Me*, which is forthcoming from *Nostrovia! Press*. His poems, interviews, and book reviews have appeared in *Yes Poetry*, *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*, and *Pine Hills Review*, among others. He currently serves as a Staff Reviewer for *LitStyle*, a subset of the literary journal *Five:2:One*. He can be found on Twitter @StephenJFurlong.

Siham Karami is the author of *To Love the River* (Kelsay Books 2018), which contains the marrow of her volatile, yin-yang life. Her work can be found in *The Comstock Review*, *Able Muse*, *Off the Coast*, *The Rumpus*, *Pleiades*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *Otoliths*, and *Mojave Heart*, among many others. Her chapbook manuscript *Whore of Blue* was a finalist in the *QuillsPress Chapbook Contest*. For more info visit sihamkarami.wordpress.com.

Jameson Hampton is a nonbinary adventurer from Buffalo, NY who wishes they were immortal so they could visit every coffee shop in the world.

Kari Flickinger's poetry and short stories can be found in or are forthcoming from *Written Here: The Community of Writers Poetry Review*, *Moonchild Magazine*, *Panoply*, *MilkJournal*, *Susurrus*, *Falcon Scratch*, *The Daily Californian*, and *The DVC Inquirer*. She is an alumna of UC Berkeley.

Jessie Lynn McMains is a poet, writer, zine-maker, and small press publisher; a collector of souvenir pennies and stick & poke tattoos. Their words have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *The Ginger Collect*, *Vessel Press*, *Sad Girl Review*, *Awkward Mermaid*, *ISAcoustic*, *Juke Joint*, and others; they're also a contributing writer for *Pussy Magic*. You can find their personal website at recklesschants.net, their press at boneandinkpress.com, or follow them on Tumblr, Twitter, and Instagram @rustbeltjessie

Christina Strigas is a trilingual poet, raised by Greek immigrants, and has written three poetry books. Her latest, *Love & Vodka*, has been featured by CBC Books in, “Your Ultimate Canadian Poetry List: 68 Poetry Collections Recommended by you.”

She is currently working on her fourth upcoming poetry book, *Love & Metaxa*.

In her spare time, Christina enjoys foreign cinema, reading the classics, and cooking traditional Greek recipes that have been handed down from her grandmother.

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Author

Marisa Silva-Dunbar's work has been published in work to a calm poetry zine, Amaryllis, Manzano Mountain Review, Bone & Ink Press, Midnight-Lane Boutique, Mojave He[art] Review, and Anti-Heroine Chic Magazine. She is a contributing writer at Pussy Magic. Her work is forthcoming in Constellate Literary Journal, The Charles River Journal, Angelical Ravings, and The Same. Marisa is the founder and EIC of Neon Mariposa Magazine.

December Lace is a former professional wrestler and pinup model. Her work has been published widely. She loves Batman, burlesque, and things that go bump in the night. She can be found on Twitter @TheMissDecember, or in the obscure bookshops of Chicago. She is a contributor of *You are not your rape* anthology.

Penny has been writing poetry for over 10 years and has an MA in Creative Writing from Edge Hill University. Penny has been published in various magazines and anthologies such as The Interpreters House, Obsessed with Pipework, Poetry Quarterly, Outburst, Picaroon, Strix and Marble and also Beautiful Dragons Anthologies. Penny is an artist, photographer and therapist with an eye for the lens and music for the words. She loves to dance when her ageing joints allow.

Joanna C. Valente is a human who lives in Brooklyn, New York. They are the author of *Sirs & Madams* (Aldrich Press, 2014), *The Gods Are Dead* (Deadly Chaps Press, 2015), *Marys of the Sea* (ELJ Publications, 2016) & *Xenos* (Agape Editions, 2016), and is the editor of *A Shadow Map: Writing by Survivors of Sexual Assault* (CCM, 2017). They received their MFA in writing at Sarah Lawrence College. Joanna is the founder of Yes, Poetry and the managing editor for *Civil Coping Mechanisms* and *Luna Luna Magazine*. Some of their writing has appeared in *Prelude*, *BUST*, *Spork Press*, *The Feminist Wire*, and elsewhere. Joanna also leads workshops at Brooklyn Poets. joannavalente.com / Twitter: @joannasaid / IG: joannacvalente

Elizabeth York Dickinson received her MFA in Writing from Sarah Lawrence College. She has work published or forthcoming in *Drunk Monkeys*, *Picaroon Poetry*, *Ghost City Press*, *Riggwelter*, and *Ink in Thirds* among others. She currently resides in Evanston, Illinois.

Nicholas Smith is an amateur poet who took up writing poetry as a hobby after an 8 year career in the military. Disgruntled with the world, this poem was written to reflect his world view - highlighting issues that face society and ending with a call to action. The poem is designed to be an uncomfortable read.

Kendall A. Bell's poetry has been most recently published in Constellate Literary Journal and Paper Trains Literary Journal. He was nominated for Sundress Publications' Best of the Net collection in 2007, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015 and 2018. His first full length collection, "The Roads Don't Love You", was published in August 2018, and he has released 24 chapbooks. He is the founder and co-editor of the online journal Chantarelle's Notebook and publisher/editor of Maverick Duck Press. His chapbooks are available through Maverick Duck Press. He lives in Southern New Jersey.

Eric Lochridge is the author of three chapbooks of poetry, *Born-Again Death Wish* (Finishing Line Press, 2015), *Real Boy Blues* (Finishing Line Press, 2013) and *Father's Curse* (FootHills Publishing, 2007), and the editor of *After Long Busyness: Interviews with Eight Heartland Poets* (Smashwords, 2012). His poems have appeared in many journals, including *Slipstream*, *DIAGRAM*, and *Hawaii Pacific Review*, as well as anthologies such as *WA 129* (Sage Hill Press, 2017) and *Beloved on the Earth* (Holy Cow! Press, 2009). He lives in Bellingham, Washington. Find him on Twitter @ericedits.

John Hawkhead is a poet and artist published all over the world. He specializes in short-form poems, plays and stories, and his book 'Small Shadows' is available from Alba Publishing. His twitter account is @HawkheadJohn.

miss macross (a.k.a. Sheena Carroll) is a Pittsburgh-based writer who loves the Moon and naps. Her work has been published by or is forthcoming in *Philosophical Idiot*, *Soft Cartel*, *Sad Girl Review*, and others. Her first chapbook, *MISS MACROSS VS. BATMAN*, was published by CWP Collective Press in 2018.

Melissa Tyndall is a writer, professor, and Supernatural fangirl with an MFA in Creative Writing from Murray State University. Her poems have appeared in *Number One*, *Prism international*, *Red Mud Review*, *Words + Images*, *Sixfold*, *Gamut*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Coffin Bell* and *peculiar magazine*. Her work is forthcoming in *Sugared Water*. She lives in Nashville with her partner and their infant daughter.

Eddie Brophy has been previously published in the 2011 and 2012 issues of Northern Essex Community College's award-winning literary magazine *Parnassus*. The latter publication he was awarded for. He has also appeared in *Z Publishing's 'Best Emerging Poets in Massachusetts 2017'* and *'Best Emerging Poets North East 2018'* and in *'The Poet's Haven Digest: Darker Than Fiction.'* He is currently a graduate student at Southern New Hampshire University with a concentration on Poetry.

Jeffrey Zable is a teacher and conga drummer who plays Afro Cuban Folkloric music for dance classes and Rumbas around the San Francisco Bay Area. His poetry, fiction, and non-fiction have appeared in hundreds of literary magazines and anthologies. Recent writing in *Red Eft*, *Awkward Mermaid*, *Ink In Thirds*, *Alba*, *Corvus*, *Tower Journal*, *Uppagus*, *After the Pause*, *Spelk*, *Chrome Baby*, *Former Cactus* and many others. In 2017 he was nominated for both *The Best of the Net* and the *Pushcart Prize*.

Clint is a Midwestern poet, Navy Veteran, Former Mountain Hunting Guide; growing up in Madison Wisconsin residing now in Rural Soldiers Grove Wisconsin finding a poem ago reminds one of a story once lived.

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident. Recently published in the *Homestead Review*, *Harpur Palate* and *Columbia Review* with work upcoming in the *Roanoke Review*, the *Hawaii Review* and *North Dakota Quarterly*.

Stormy Skies received her Master's degree in Publishing from The George Washington University. Her works can be found in *STRAPPED* zine, *ABSENCE* Literary & Visual Art Review Magazine, *Junto Magazine*, *Civil Coping Mechanisms*, and *Anti-Heroin Chic Magazine*. She currently lives in Southwestern Pennsylvania surrounded by wilderness.

Jenna Faccenda is a Philadelphia-native who enjoys writing twisted tales while cuddled up on the couch with her black cat and 4-year-old son. Determined to read books for a living, Jenna is the Co-Founder of *Writely Me* and the Publicity Manager for *Running Wild Press*. Her works have been featured in *The Literary Hatchet* and her debut chapbook, *The Phoenix From the Ashes* (2018).

Daniel J. Pizappi lives in Knoxville, Tennessee. He is a PhD student, Managing Editor of *Grist: A Literary Journal*, and co-editor of the anthology *Kentucky Writers: The Deus Loci and the Lyrical Landscape* (Des Hymnagistes Press, 2016). His work has appeared in *Still: The Journal*, *The Mantle*, *Your Impossible Voice*, and *Burningword*, among others. Visit him at www.danielpizappi.com. Twitter: @DjPizappi

Trina Young is a poet in Chicago. She has been published in *Afterimage Online's Inklight Gallery*, *Superstition Review*, *Burning House Press* and placed third as a *Gwendolyn Brooks Poetry Award* Winner in the *Illinois Emerging Writers Competition*. Her writing themes often include mental illness, marginalization, and the absurdity of life. @tcyghoul

Alexandra Meehan is a Gainesville, FL native who enjoys traveling, painting, and listening to music. She is a graduate of Santa Fe College and The University of South Florida. She resides with her husband, four rescue cats, and carnivorous plants. She enjoys a good pun, loves wordplay, and has a fascination with philosophy.

Athena Melliar is a feminist poet and essayist. Her work has appeared in *Rhythm & Bones*, *LEVELER*, *Memoir Mixtapes*, *So to Speak: a feminist journal of language & arts*, *Moonchild Magazine*, *The Light Ekphrastic*, *The Mystic Blue Review*, and other literary publications. She has been profiled in *Maudlin House*. Twitter: @AthenaMelliar, Instagram: @athenamelliar.

George Cassidy Payne is a poet, photographer, essayist, and social worker. George works and lives in Rochester, NY. Over the years his poetry has been included in a variety of domestic and foreign journals and magazines, including *Chronogram Magazine*, *Allegro Poetry Journal*, *Mojave Heart*, the *Red Porch Review*, *Albany Up the River Poets Journal*, *Teahouse*, *The Adirondack Almanac*, *The Mindful Word*, *From The Edge Poetry Magazine*, *Talker of the Town*, *Pulsar*, *Moria Poetry Journal*, *Ampersand Literary Review*, and many others. When he

is not writing or taking photographs of natural landscapes, George works as a domestic violence counselor, adjunct instructor of philosophy, and social justice activist. He has a beautiful wife and two wonderful children named Mendon and Ellison. He can be reached at 585-703-9230/icaj2000@yahoo.com.

Linda M. Crate's poetry, short stories, articles, and reviews have been published in a myriad of magazines both online and in print. She has five published chapbooks *A Mermaid Crashing Into Dawn* (Fowlpox Press - June 2013), *Less Than A Man* (The Camel Saloon - January 2014), *If Tomorrow Never Comes* (Scars Publications, August 2016), *My Wings Were Made to Fly* (Flutter Press, September 2017), and *splintered with terror* (Scars Publications, January 2018), and one micro-chapbook *Heaven Instead* (Origami Poems Project, May 2018). She is also the author of the novel *Phoenix Tears* (Czykmate Books, June 2018).

Amanda Crum is a writer and artist whose work can be found in publications such as *Eastern Iowa Review*, *Blue Moon Literary and Art Review*, and *Dark Eclipse*, as well as in several anthologies. Her first chapbook of horror poetry, *The Madness In Our Marrow*, made the shortlist for a Bram Stoker Award nomination in 2015. She currently lives in Kentucky with her husband and two children.

David L O'Nan grew up in Western Kentucky & lived one year in New Orleans, LA. Winner of several Spoken Word Poetry contests in Southern Indiana, he has read in several venues throughout Southern Indiana & Western Kentucky including featured reader spots for poetry honoring John Lennon, Leonard Cohen, Jeff Buckley, & reading works of Charles Bukowski, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Jack Kerouac, Robert Frost & T.S. Eliot. He has self-published 2 books on Amazon which are a compendium of poetry and short stories written between the years of 2003 and 2018: "The Famous Poetry Outlaws are Painting Walls and Whispers" and "All of Our Fears in Tunnels" (being revised) with more books on the way.