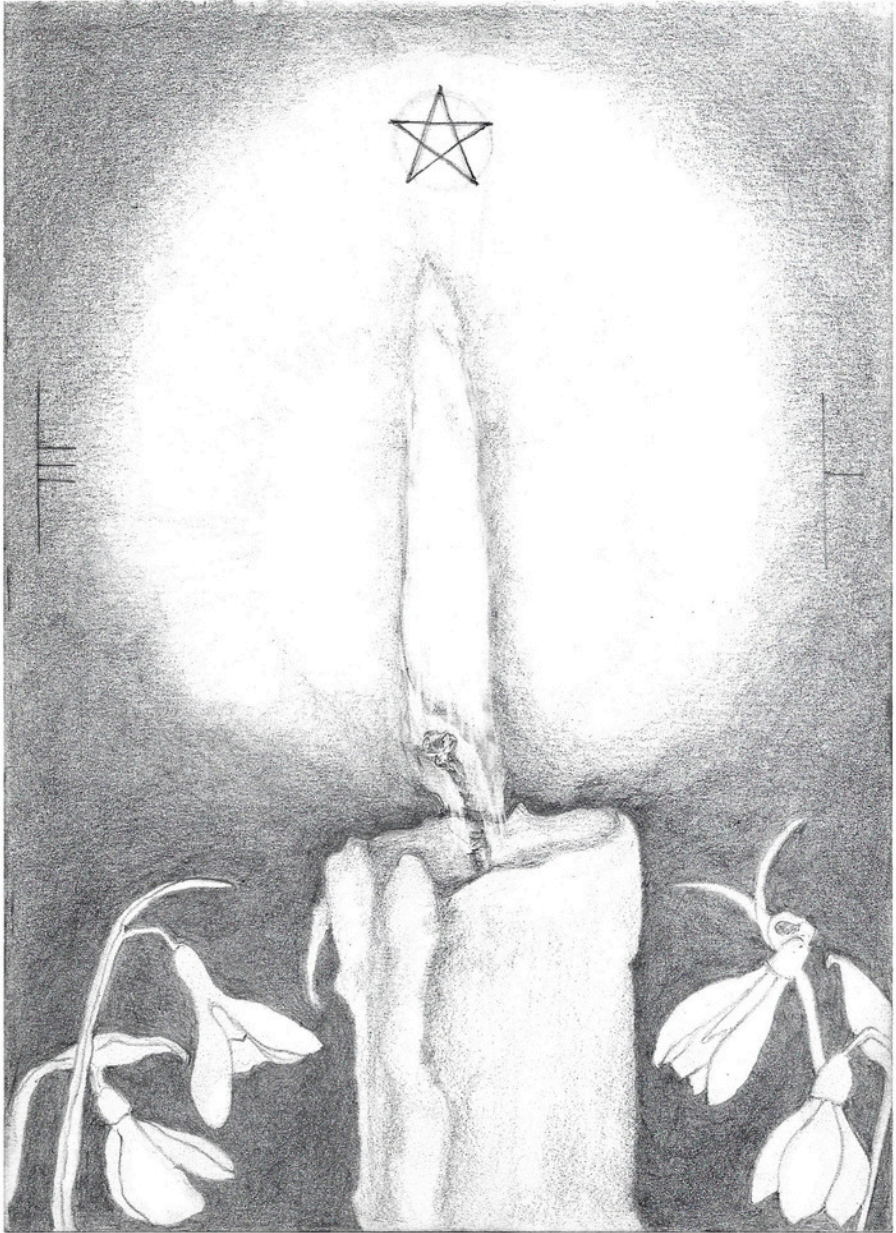


ALTAR

Issue One



SPIRALS & STARS

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LETTER FROM EDITOR

Hello Reader,

Thank you for beginning your journey into our inaugural issue: Spirals and Stars. The journey you will experience is the trajectory of a spiral, unfurling like an ancient fern. Along the way, you will be guided by shining stars found in the sky and in five-petaled flowers that decorate the forest floor.

At every step in the path, you will be fortunate enough to encounter many talented individuals as they also navigate the energy of spring. The form changes from poetry to art, recipes, stories, reviews, and rituals. Or perhaps flowers, a spring breeze, and hatchlings. Each one has been carefully collected and placed on the spring altar as an offering.

In return, spring beckons us to be reborn and to enjoy the magic of the in-between. Revel in the atmosphere of subtle tension and magic. The air is ripe with fresh growth, flowers, and fragility.

Enjoy!

Sarah Voight
Founder & Editor-in-Chief
Altar Literary Magazine



THE FIRST WINDOW LEFT OPEN

DAVID I. HUGHES

The first night we leave the window open
is never announced.

No ceremony, no date circled on a calendar—
only a softening in the wall
between inside and out.

All winter the house has held its breath.
Glass sealed.
Curtains drawn against the rehearsed dark.
We learned the architecture of enclosure.

And then—

a hinge loosens.

Air enters without asking permission.
It smells faintly of damp soil
and something green
still deciding whether to risk itself.

Nothing blooms yet.
The garden is all suggestion.
But the blackbird has changed his hour,
and the pipes do not knock in the walls



the way they did in February.

This is how resurrection arrives—
not as spectacle
but as permission.

A draft across the floorboards.
A sleeve lifting in sleep.
The body remembering
it was built for weather.

By morning, the kettle sounds different.
Light does not insist.
It gathers.

And the room—
which survived its own quiet—
does not close again.



THE GARDEN BEYOND

SUNNY WESTALL



I WILL STAY COLD

ALLISON BOTHLEY

The suspended maple
knows something I don't,
expanding defiantly
like the heart laid bare.

Biding its time at ease.

Sometimes, I worry there's no bloom left in me.
I like the reminder:
even when the world is crystalized,
encased in blank,
it is only half dead.

I know underneath it all
everything is coming alive again,
that Spring is pushing in
from somewhere off-frame.



As a child, I read about a bee
left in a freezer,
frozen in time
that awoke when warmed.
Surely, it can't be true.

But in this cold, this pause,
this hush,
I wonder if your residue remains
on me, waiting to reanimate
once I get hot enough
just to fly away.



WINTER WEAR

CAILÍN FRANKLAND

I am not so much
blooming
as I am

unspooling—
less a fresh petal, more
a loose thread. I trail
from my mother's
cardigan, the cable knit
shrugged off and
tucked away in the
wake of meltwater
running. Days lengthen,
doors beckon—swallows
migrate, the forgetting
begins. I gather dust
in a bottom drawer,
lying in wait for fog's
return to breath, for
petal-rot. A spun yarn
swept astray, primed
for the pulling.



FOOTPRINTS IN THE SNOW

RIGO

Juan holds up the bottle of painkillers and reads Celeste's name on the label. He lowers his chin to his chest, his thick salt and pepper hair falling around the sides of his face as he squeezes his eyelids.

Gizmo, the two-year-old, blonde husky-lab, whines by the front door in the living room where crackles and hisses issue from the dying fire in a wood-burning stove.

Juan pockets the pills and makes a 'tsk' sound. The one-hundred-pound dog trots over. Pulling a treat from the bag hooked to a belt loop on his wool pants, Juan holds up a fist and Gizmo deliberates, then sits. Juan points to the floor and Gizmo locks eyes with him and makes a short, low howl that sounds like 'no.' Juan raises his eyebrows and Gizmo lies down, slow, grunting.

Juan feeds Gizmo five treats then raises a palm. Gizmo lowers his head.

Boots thumping on the hardwood floor, Juan collects supplies and loads them into his daypack. Lifting a bright turquoise harness from the table, he makes another 'tsk.'

Gizmo hurries over, tail wagging and licking Juan's cheek as he straps on the harness.

Juan squats, places both hands on the side of his muzzle, and presses his forehead against the dog's. Gizmo sighs, nuzzles, and then trots beside Juan as he heads to the mudroom to grab a 20-foot leash and a small flashlight.



Daypack strapped to his shoulders, Juan attaches the leash and heads for the front door. They exit onto the salted concrete path that connects the house to a dirt road in the Eastern Berkshires. From the house gutters the last few icicles melt onto brown grass in the clearing around Juan's three-bedroom cabin.

Glancing through the trees at the little college town a mile south, Juan heads north, further into the forest. Gizmo runs up the road to the end of the leash and back, burning excess energy until they reach a clearing with gravel roads that crisscross a hilly cemetery.

Gizmo whines and pulls left toward the gravestones, but Juan keeps right, not looking toward the cemetery as they jog along its perimeter. On the east edge of the rolling meadow, Juan leads them north down a narrow forest trail into thick canopy where the last of the winter snow lingers.

"Tsk, tsk," Juan calls. Gizmo sprints back, tail wagging, as Juan holds up a treat. Gizmo sniffs at Juan's hand, glances back down the dark trail, looks back at Juan, and sits, slow.

Juan smirks as Gizmo eats the treat. Unhooking the leash, folding it twice, he hangs it around his neck. Gizmo licks Juan's hand then bounds ahead into the snowy patches of forest, looking for squirrels.

With a sigh, Juan jogs after Gizmo, splashing mud in places where the trail is sloppy from the spring rains and snowmelt. In the shadowiest places, ice and hard-packed snow still cover the trail. Juan stops often, searching the snow but not finding what he's looking for.

At 10am, the pair emerge from the dark forest to a



cobalt blue pond, silver ripples reflecting the sun headed to its zenith.

Juan stops to inspect the trail. Gizmo circles Juan, who points to the pond. The dog sprints ahead and dives into the water, swimming around then dashing out, zooming around the meadow, rustling up birds and field mice. Frowning, Juan continues to a long, low boulder that's dry from the sun. He sits, unzips his pack and pulls out his painting supplies.

Taking a deep breath, a vivid memory trickles into consciousness from the dark cave of Juan's unconscious, like drips from a stalactite crossing a chasm and splashing onto a stalagmite. The memory is from thirty years ago of his wife chasing their five-year-old son through the meadow. Celeste is thirty-one-years old and wears a sky blue dress, her light brown hair cascading over her pale shoulders. Greg's jeans are grass-stained at the knees and his black curls of hair bounce on his ears. In his watercolor journal, Juan makes a quick pencil sketch, a melding of memory and the meadow before him.

Unfolding his brass watercolor box, he spritzes the 16 dried cakes of pigment with a small spray bottle. He half-fills a metal cup with water, uncaps his travel brush and swishes the tip in the water. Then, Juan looks out at the meadow and sees Gizmo sitting at attention before an apparition, glowing white in a black dress.

Juan blinks and shakes his head and then she looks right at him, her gray hair fluttering. As she dissolves like mist in the sunlight, Gizmo whines then runs to Juan, who strokes Gizmo's cheek and watches the spot where he



thought he saw Celeste. Gizmo lays before him and closes his eyes. Juan pours himself coffee from his thermos while he sits thinking.

As Gizmo begins to breathe the rhythm of sleep, Juan returns to his sketchbook, painting the sky a dilute wash of ultramarine, lemon yellow, and alizarin crimson. Allowing the paint to blend on the page, then dabbing paint away with a handkerchief to expose the white paper in places, he creates the impression of clouds.

The paint dries fast with the full sun beating down on the paper. Juan does a quick wash of Indian yellow and viridian for the field, adding dabs of rose and cerulean blue to create the impression of wildflowers. His memory, imagination, and experience melt into the pigment on his brush as, with a light wash of gray mixed from burnt umber and ultramarine, Juan creates shadows of Celeste and Greg in the meadow before painting their figures, leaving their faces a simple mix of raw and burnt Sienna.

Juan studies his work and tears come as he lays the sketchbook on the boulder. He slides down toward Gizmo and reclines beside him in the grass, placing an arm around the dog's torso. Gizmo raises his head for a moment and nuzzles into Juan. Two minutes later, man and dog are asleep, bodies pressed together.

After their nap, they continue across the meadow into an older section of forest where gnarled roots cross the trail and vines as thick as an adult's thigh hang from the enormous oak, elm, and spruce trees. In the darkest heart of the woods, they come to a fork and Gizmo stops in front of



Juan, who steps around him onto the western side of the trail loop.

Gizmo trots ahead and blocks the way again, whimpering. Juan steps off the trail to proceed. Gizmo lunges, biting a thick strap that hangs from Juan's pack.

Juan stops, looks around, and spots the black bear 100 meters away, foraging in the snow.

Squatting, Juan massages his scruff, Gizmo's eyes locked on the bear while he scarfs a handful of treats. Juan kisses Gizmo between the eyes and then takes the east side of the loop. Gizmo stops to glance in the direction of the bear for the next few minutes.

Half a mile later, they come to The Ancient Tree, an oak thicker than the other trees in the forest. Two swings hang from its lower branches and a brook gurgles fifteen feet away, melting the last ice on the banks.

At the base of The Ancient Tree, the snow remains deepest. Gizmo circles a faint pair of boot prints and looks at Juan, who grabs the harness to pull him back. But Gizmo sits, away from the prints, and watches break down crying.

Pulling his phone from his pocket, Juan takes a dozen pictures of the prints. Then, he traces around the prints with his right index finger.

Daypack still strapped on, Juan sits in the snow with his knees to his chest. Breathing faster, Juan unclips the daypack and pulls out a bag of dog food that he empties into a patch of bare grass. Gizmo sniffs at the food then eats, still lying down. Juan pours himself another cup of coffee and, like a monk at a candlelight vigil, watches the prints in the snow as they melt.



The sun descends behind the forest as Juan and Gizmo stand beside the brook, facing The Ancient Tree.

Juan pulls the bottle of pain killers from his pack. He sees his thirty-two-year old self pushing Greg in one of the swings while Celeste unpacks food from a picnic basket beneath The Ancient Tree. Juan shakes his head and opens the pill bottle as Celeste's apparition appears before them, just across the brook, misty white in a black dress.

Gizmo trots toward her. She locks eyes with him and points at Juan. Gizmo dashes to the man and knocks the bottle into the brook.

She frowns at him and then mouths the words 'I love you' as she dissipates. Gizmo whines and Juan falls to his knees and wraps his arms around the dog.

"I want to be with you so much," he says, looking at the place where Celeste's spirit stood. "But I wasn't going to take them. I came to dump them. So the temptation was out of the house. I have to find a way to live without you."

It's just after sundown and frigid now. The moonlight overhead illuminates Celeste's and Greg's graves as Juan and Gizmo stand before them. The frozen brown grass beneath their feet, the misty breath of dog and man mingle and ascend toward the stars.

Squatting before Greg's grave, Juan clears a twig with three brown leaves from the base of the headstone with a death date six months old. Juan shakes his head at his son's tombstone and then stands before Celeste's, one month old now. "The last of your footprints melted today," he says. "But you know that. You were watching, weren't you? I'll paint



them so that there's something of them that lasts forever." He takes a deep breath.

"You two left me too much to live for. Your beautiful children, Greg. Your wonderful dog, Celeste." Tears stream down his cheeks.

"Tsk." Juan says, turning away. Gizmo follows across the dead grass and leaves.

At the edge of the cemetery, Juan's phone dings. He pulls it from his pocket, wincing against the bright glow of the screen. It's a text from his daughter-in-law, Arundhati.

'The boys and I are missing Greg and grandma awful today. Can we get together for dinner tonight? Happy to come to your place.'

Juan swallows, wipes his tears, and grits his teeth.

He texts back, 'Home in fifteen. Please come over and let yourself in if I'm not back yet. Tell my grandsons I love them and that I'm here for them.'

He pockets his phone, makes a 'tsk' sound and sets off running across the meadow to the dirt road that circumnavigates the cemetery. Gizmo runs ahead of him, leading the way.

~Two days later~

It's sixty degrees and the snow has all melted. In short sleeves and his running pants, Juan pushes his five-year-old grandson in one of the swings that hangs from the thick lower branches of The Ancient Tree. Gizmo stands in the brook beside Juan's eight-year-old grandson as the boy searches the water, looking for quartz among the stones



tumbled smooth over thousands of years.

Arundhati unpacks lunch from the old picnic basket and spreads muffins, fruit, and small tiffins filled with rice and curries on a thick blanket. Gizmo whines and Juan glances at the dog, who looks out across the meadow beyond The Ancient Tree.

There, Juan sees Celeste and Greg watching, their spirits flickering like mist in the sunlight. He looks at both of his grandsons and smiles. When he looks back across the meadow, the spirits are gone.



FIRST SHOOTS OF SPRING

NICOLE VAMVAKAS

Who told you to rise?
Did they say—*You felt buried,*
but you were planted?



BUDDING MAPLE

LORELEI GREENWOOD-JONES



SPRING CLEANING

JOE COY

I love when the world is washed clean
and everything is fresh
fresh
not perfect, not spotless
because the tightest corners and darkest closets
have just been turned out.

I love when the earthworms come out of hiding
leaving their dry, dusty beds for once
the smell of newly-fallen rain
wet grass, turned earth
it's all so honest.

When was the last time you splashed in a puddle
or listened to the constant "drip, drip, drip"
final vestiges of cleansing?

The smell of wet pavement reminds us
that our manmade things are not separate from nature.

A squirrel on a branch shakes itself
and the tree leaves
free of water so that it showers me underneath
making me a part of the world's ablutions.

It's like a new beginning, a christening of sorts
of course it's not without hard work
but isn't that a fair price for starting over?



LOVE ME SWEETLY SPELL

JULEIGH HOWARD-HOBSON

In spring, take a pint jar, with a metal lid, a cup of honey, pinches of white and brown sugar, a piece of blank paper, a red pen, a dime, and a red candle. Say your beloved's name three times, then write it three times. Turn the paper, and write your name three times across it. Without lifting the pen even once, write 'we love' nine times all around your names. If you break the script throw it away, start from scratch. Fold it in half, twice. Put it in the jar. Add the dime, the honey, the sugars. Close the jar. Drip red wax from the candle onto the lid, shake it once. The spell is cast. Wait for it.



FIRST FULL MOON RITUAL

AMANDA CONOVER

I look through the telescope, see
miss lunar steal the show, shimmer
magic into the lens of my local
library's elaborate tripod setup.

she's round, illuminated by the sun's
leftovers. almost a grey brighter than
other greys, otherdimensional.

our host tells us we can remember
waxing by thinking of hot wax
filling in the moon's craters,
waning by disappearing.

I set my intention: to remember
this moment, squinting into the stars for
a glimpse of sky poetry.



wondering how I could have missed this
before, the familiar glow of something
felt but unseen, known though unknown.
the feeling of being pulled to let go,

even when you don't want to start over.
of doing it anyway because somewhere, somehow, you know
you need this.



PLUCKED

TINAMARIE COX



THE GREEN MAN BLUES

C. PAYNE

I walk through the forest as a part of nature, not apart from it. My feet, composed of leaves and pine needles, kiss the soil beneath me. Should you see me, you may find me beautiful- flexing muscle woven from muscadine vine, my skin a patchwork of thick clover and wild turnip. In spring I blossom, swamp rose eyes opening wide as I nurture bees and shake butterflies from a beard of Spanish moss. When I speak, my voice is the clattering of branches in the breeze. You have heard me, and felt the old ways stir within you.

There were many of us, once. We roamed the swamps and glens, slept beneath cruel snow in northern lands, and ran free through great rain forests. We stood as stewards, nurturing saplings and singing songs through the mycorrhizal network. All that roots were known to us, our struggles and successes shared. For eons we tended the natural cycle, ensuring balance was kept. We watched your kind as you descended from the canopy, emerged from caves with stone and stick, your curiosity piquing our own.

Now, I am the last of my kind. My brothers and sisters laid low, their homes slashed, burned, flooded, drained. Indignity heaped upon indignity until their will to live withered. You broke the balance, and built upon the shattered bones. The soil still holds their screams.



I am the last, but I am not alone. Even now I tend the majestic magnolias, the greedy yaupon, fighting for meaning in my shrinking refuge. The willow and I weep together, our sap staining the forest floor. This is holy ground. This is my sanctuary.

Should you threaten this sanctuary, you will find me terrible- cedar knuckles creaking with a fury gilded in green, fists as hateful and bitter as a moccasin's bite. My heart, once shaped by supple crape myrtle, is now knotted with thorny briar. I have become as unyielding as oak, as insidious as kudzu. You will be treated as the invasive species you are; shunned by the old growth and buried beneath leaf and limb as I reach deep to choke your hungry roots.

Tread carefully beneath my boughs.



UNTITLED (CLIPPINGS)

KAT KLINE

there is a quiet violence in spring
subtle as scalpels, too
sharp to feel the cut until
you're already bleeding, red
blooms pushing up through the
surface, like perennials split
dirt, unexpected color bursting
forth in a rapture of rupture

the softness of the green cannot
change the jarring suddenness of
leaves and buds on branches that
were naked, not two weeks ago – but
sometimes growth is harsh, unbridled
creation, an emphatic discordant
something from seemingly nothing

everything may be eventual, but it is
certainly not gradual – the sun careens
into taurus, asking, what does honesty
look like when you shake off your
shackles, let yourself run
wild – what song will you sing
with blood on your teeth?



I FEEL SUMMER COMING

ELLEN GREENBLUM



BINDING SPELL

JADE HURTER

While you sleep beside me,
emptied, mouth open, I cut

away a lock of your hair
to bury beneath a pomegranate tree

on the riverbank. I braid
three strands into a chain.

I am devising a religion
for magicians. After the kissing, you

unlaced my eyelashes from yours.
I shielded myself from your warmth

with a mirror. You are a strawberry
vine gathering around my ankles.

A bat cuts circles in the violet sky.
I feed you fruit grown in soil

sown with my nail clippings.
Ring of your hair around my finger.



THE COUNCIL

SHELBY COHEN

They await in a gaggle as you slough off the skin
of a lifetime of worry, of love, and of sin.

In the shimmering cave with its pool of gold healing
the prince and the poet, gypsy, pal, guardian, all kneeling.

With wisdom and insight for the next life to come
helping you be more, with blessings to plumb.

They show up as faces, in trees and in tile
to smirk, to comfort, and sometimes beguile.

This guidance comes to us so brilliant and gilded.
When we next manifest, we are wiser, refilled.

We are beings of love, sent here to enlighten.
The council inspires us, persisting, to fight on.



WHILE THE WATER WAITS

ERICA LIVINGSTON

The kettle begins before anyone speaks.

Not the whistle yet, just the quiet hum, the low animal sound of water thinking about changing. The windows cloud at the corners. Someone shifts their weight in the chair. Waiting has a texture; it gathers in the room like steam, like breath caught behind the ribs.

There is always a moment, just before the boil, when everything pauses, the room holds its breath, conversations halt. The air changes. The waiting becomes visible. I trust that moment more than certainty. It feels like the space between contractions, between decisions, between the self you were and the self that is arriving quietly through the side door.

Outside, spring is practicing its becoming. Spring rehearses itself badly at first. Branches hold tight, then loosen without warning. Birds argue over unfinished nests, abandoning and returning to the same crooked fork in the tree. Honeysuckle tangles where it isn't wanted. Nothing commits fully. The earth does not rush its openings. It remembers winter even while it reaches toward light.



I have sat beside many kinds of waiting. The waiting for labor. The waiting for milk. The waiting for sleep that never comes all at once. The waiting for recognition, the quiet shock of realizing your life has changed shape and your body came with it. Becoming asks for patience we rarely believe we possess.

Some waits are loud. Others hide inside ordinary minutes, under the hum of the refrigerator, behind polite conversation. Sometimes I think waiting is its own kind of work, invisible, exhausting, holy.

In these rooms, tea is never just tea. It is a small occupation of the hands. It is something to hold when words feel too sharp. Something warm enough to anchor a trembling hand. Steam rising like a small prayer no one has to say out loud. I watch them sip slowly while their old selves rearrange themselves quietly beneath the surface.

Spring understands this. Nothing arrives all at once or cleanly. The world softens in small permissions. So does the body.



There are days when becoming feels like magic, bright, electric, full of possibility. There are other days when it feels like standing barefoot on cold ground at dusk, unsure if anything will bloom at all. Both belong to the season. Both belong to the story.

The kettle clicks off like a held breath released. The water is ready, even if we are not.

The Waiting Tea

Nettle

Oatstraw

Dried rose petals

A tea for thresholds.

For the long middle.

For the hours when nothing seems to happen
and everything is changing.

The Spell

A generous few pinches of nettle for steadiness.

Equal parts oatstraw for the nervous system that forgets
how to rest.

Rose for the part of the heart that keeps opening anyway.



Place the herbs in a jar or a teapot, something with weight to it.

Pour water just off the boil. Cover it. Let it steep longer than you think you should. Waiting asks for time.

Watch the color deepen.

The Ritual

Hold the cup with both hands.

Before drinking, notice one thing that is unfinished, a memory, a conversation, a version of yourself still arriving. Do not fix it. Just let it sit beside you.

Drink slowly.

Let the steam rise against your face. Let the warmth settle low in the body. Imagine roots growing quietly downward while the rest of you waits for spring to decide itself.

When the cup is empty, whisper what you are still becoming into it.



GALAXY BUDS

DENNY E. MARSHALL



WESTWARD CALL

CHRISTY UMBERGER

Preparing to move cross-country,
as the plants are reborn, I'm ready
to grow, too, unlike my ancestors.
Light equals night; I'm half
in Pennsylvania—a home I never chose,
and half already long gone
to my choice.

Daffodils sprout, white andromeda
germinates, and the packing is almost complete
—walls drained, the big blue recliner rehomed
to a newborn's nursery,
the dining room table to a different family.

Monday afternoon, between work, therapy,
and car tune-up, a farewell walk,
where I cry, resting a hand
against my grandmother elm,
guardian I fell in love with,
despite my kicking and screaming
for spring before winter.



Tomorrow, after coffee
under the flowering cherry
and one last
breakfast burrito from our favorite shop,
I drop off the keys for the next tenant,
thank the budding green
ginkgo outside the kitchen window,
then drive away, not in a covered wagon,
but my blue sedan, to our new season
with the cat in the backseat.



THE JADE

MARTHA PATTERSON

It was January and I was doing pre-spring cleaning. Distracted by the fact that I owed money on last year's taxes, and aggravated by my landlord asking for a rent increase for the coming fall, I sought relief.

Icicles were on the trees and snow had fallen like moth crystals over the steps to my apartment. I'd tossed unread books, unworn clothes, deleted so-called "friends" from Facebook. I was grateful for the change of seasons, cleaning out clutter, and the arrival of winter. But there was something missing in my cozy apartment. That something was this: I wanted a jade plant.

I'm not sure why I picked a jade - but they always seemed juicy looking and tropical. A friend had one that was two feet tall; she'd grown it from a baby plant. It had thick, rubbery leaves and was deep green and looked beautiful in her red-wallpapered library. She'd had it for years. I began my search for such a treasure.

I went shopping on Amazon. Along the way, I got distracted by ads for underwear and coffee makers and bed linens. Everything I saw on Amazon's pages looked appealing. I was tempted to order new sheets for my bed. But finally, I returned to my original mission - looking for a plant.

Most of the jades displayed in Amazon's photos were expensive, oversized and befitting of a real garden. I wasn't



ready for that. But finally I did find one, four inches in diameter - tiny! - for only ten dollars. I ordered it.

The next day I went out in the snow to get the mail and my neighbor Herc was getting into his car. Herc is a dedicated gardener during the spring and summer months - in June and July he has daisies and lilies in front of his house. He told me he spends more than \$500 a year on plants. He plants them in his yard, in the neighboring park, and along the sidewalk paving our street. If I had problems with my jade, I figured I'd ask him for help.

"Guess what?" I said. "I've been worried about things - I want light in the distance! ...I bought a jade plant on Amazon."

"Good decision." He looked pleased, despite shivering in the January cold. "Sounds like you're focused on something worthwhile. I have my cat for that purpose. But don't water the jade too much, only every couple of weeks. It'll last you a long time." I smiled, glad for the advice, and turned away as he drove off.

Eight days later, my jade arrived in the mail, packed in a cardboard box. When the package was dumped on an icy patch on my patio I worried that the plant might be thirsty. And did I need fertilizer? No; I'd watched a gardening show on PBS that said jade plants were easy to care for and needed no special attention.

I went inside and unwrapped my plant. Like my friend's jade, it was healthy and had thick, rubbery green leaves. But unlike her plant, it was small and dainty - a perfect jade to start with. I placed it on a china plate and



set it on my dining table.

But I didn't know my gardening skills were sub-par. One night, thinking with guilt of the jade after having it for six weeks, I pulled it off the windowsill and peered at it. Small, dead brown leaves cluttered the soil, and two of the stalks were broken in half. I felt the way my mother must have felt when I told her she'd spanked me too much as a child...like a cruel parent, racked with guilt. I'd betrayed a living thing.

I held it under the kitchen tap to soak. The dirt absorbed all the water, I tossed the two broken stems, and put the plant back on the windowsill. I ran into my neighbor Herc the next afternoon and asked him what else to do. He was shoveling snow from the front walk, but paused thoughtfully when I spoke.

"It'll survive. Just don't let it go two months again without water. And don't worry about the broken stems. No harm done. When it gets bigger, re-pot it. Has the plant solved the problem of all your other distractions?"

"Almost," I answered. "If only I'd taken better care of it. But I did stop caring so much about every other little thing."

And it's true, I've just about forgotten my financial woes. Anyway, I'm doing my own good work for the climate, I suppose, just by taking care of a plant. My jade is very **green**.



PURPLE BLOSSOMS

FARIEL SHAFEE



CREAMY COURGETTE AND PEA SOUP WITH MINTH

IMOLA TÓTH

This creamy courgette soup pairs perfectly with the Easter corn bread. It's perfect from fresh ingredients from the spring market, and it's done within 15 minutes.

INGREDIENTS:

2 small onions, finely chopped
3 garlic cloves
1-2 tablespoon of olive oil
2 courgettes, cubed
1 liter veggie stock
3-4 cups of fresh peas
1/3 cup fresh mint
1/4 cup vegan cream
salt, pepper to taste
Italian herb seasoning, to taste

PREPARATION:

1. Heat up the olive oil in a large pan and sauté the onion until it turns translucent. Add the garlic and saute for another minute or two.
2. Then add the courgette and fry for 5 more minutes.
3. Pour in the vegetable stock, add the mint and bring the soup to a simmer.



4. After 5 minutes, add the peas and the Italian herb mix, and continue to simmer for a couple of minutes until the peas are cooked. Season with salt and pepper.

5. Remove from the heat and using a hand mixer, blend the soup until you have the consistency you prefer. I like a bit of a texture, so I always remove some of the peas and courgette before blending, and add it back before serving.

6. Stir in the vegan cream and serve.



DEAR DANDELION (LION'S TOOTH),

LISA ST. JOHN

How many wishes have your stormy seeds
granted? After feeding the bees,
you raise your stem high,
stretch your secret root,

cover your color with green
only to burst again—a crowned crone.
Could you blow
my grays away?

Traveled by wind gusts
and puffs of dreamers,
you swirl seeds
to next year's growing.

Leaving us
to wish on stars.



I BELIEVE IN MAGIC

HARLEY BELL

If ever I stop seeing the magic, please
remind me of the earth.

I give you permission to take my hand
and hold it close to the dirt

to feel the patience of seeds waiting for the first touch
of rain to sprout. I am moved by the wind
as it migrates with birds across the sky.

Look at the trees and the way they transmute
sunlight to sugar and sap. Feel for the roots
and the way water is carried through living things.
How many creatures cast spells of their own?

Feel for the mushrooms and their invisible work
to befriend the forgotten minerals in the dark.



Look for a caterpillar crystallising
inside a cocoon. For the flight
of monarchs and the way they seek
the scent of swan plants.

Look for the night-flowers, blooming in white
and pink to reflect the moonlight
to attract the pollinating wings of moths.

Look for the light and believe everything you see.



A TALE OF TWO FENCES

SUSAN L. LIN



DOGWOOD BENEATH MY FEET

ELAINE REARDON

Pines never stop growing taller, they inch towards
heaven while shadows grow long.

Beneath my feet the way changes from gravel and moss,
clumps of laurel bar the path.

Drifts of white flowering dogwood carpet the forest floor
where
light leaks past shadows.

How can one be lost and at home at the same time?

Moss Brook splashes past, transparent in some places,
a black pool in others. Trout swim here

and it's where young deer bow their head to drink,
splashing legs high. It's where she used to sit

on that rock as a child with book in hand, lost
to both words, choosing the in-between place,

where the water parted and flowed past.



In those years we picked wild mint,
found rosebuds to make teas, tasted
sweetness on our tongues.

Later she moved beyond the stream, beyond the
rock in the center where she read as a child.

Does she find the bitter herbs now—
elecampane, and dandelion,

and brew these to remember
how to love?

*This small dogwood grows a few inches high at the forest edge
where light can touch the soil.*



TWO OF WANDS

ALLISON BURRIS

You're framing a choice: the myriad masquerading as duality. Only two hands and what to do with them? Dust. Gesture. You pretend you really know what to do with your hair or which marble to flick into the next opportunity. On the average day, you do not wake up and decide what to read next. You weigh. Drift. But what will you choose? You avoid the decision but not the outcome, end up reading 8 books at once getting nowhere. Outside trees are guessing when to bud. They don't know if the conditions are right. It's a hunch. It's a decision the bulb makes unconsciously to burst forth, to sprout. Nothing can spark without a choice.



THE RITE OF THE UNFURLING VEIL

AVRIEL MEJRAH

The Rite of the Unfurling Veil

- Honoring: fertility and awakening while honoring your own sovereignty.
- Season: Spring (dawn / twilight)
- Moon Phase: Waxing

Materials

- small bowl of spring / moon water
- a sprig of rosemary or any fresh green herb
- a white candle (beeswax if possible)
- a found object from nature (not taken from living growth)
- red thread
- a small stone that fits in your palm

1) Opening the Hedge

- Stand barefoot (inside or outdoors) and imagine roots threading downward.
- Dip your fingers in the water and touch your brow (for sight), your lips (for truth), and your heart (for sovereignty)
- Speak aloud "I wake as the land wakes. I rise as the sap rises. I open, but am not taken. I bloom, but remain rooted."
- Light the candle and brush the herb over your shoulders and crown your feet marking your energetic boundary.

2) The Nest & The Wind

- Hold the found object in your left hand. This is a representation of what did not survive the winter.
- Hold it to your lips, give it your thanks, and blow gently across it.



- Speak aloud "What could not root returns to wind. What remains is mine by right."

- Place the object beside the candle.

3) Binding to Bloom

- Take the red thread and wrap it once around the stone and make a gentle knot.

- As you tie it, name aloud one thing you are growing this season. Only one, and be precise.

- Hold the stone to your chest and feel its weight, this is your letter.

4) Listening

- Sit on the floor or earth and blow out the candle.

- Sit in silence for several breaths or until you feel is right. Take in any sounds or feelings but feel them as an active witness.

5) Closing

- Pour water at the base of a tree or in the soil. If you are indoors, pour it outside of your home but on the property.

- Return the found object to nature.

- Keep the stone wrapped in red thread near your bed for the remainder of Spring.

- When Summer arrives, bury the thread but keep the stone.



BLOOMING

TOSHIYA KAMEI

Spring arrives the way her grandmother used to tell Yui it would: not with a date on a calendar, but with a door.

The door creaks open in Yui's bones.

All winter, the harbor has lain under a sky the color of brushed steel. From her small apartment near the edge of Yokohama, she sees the cranes at the port standing like patient herons, their long necks bowed to the wind. The sea moves thick and dark, and freighters slide across it like thoughts too heavy to finish. The air tastes of salt and diesel and cold iron.

She's moved through these months with care, wrapped in wool and silence, practicing her voice in the steam of her kettle. Letting it rise and fall.

She hasn't always been Yui.

Names, like seasons, can refuse you. Then, one morning, they bloom.

The first plum blossoms unfurl along the stone path near Yamashita Park—white sparks against bark darkened by sea wind. Yui pauses beneath them, fingers tucked into her sleeves. Couples walk their dogs. A child points at a ship in the bay. Beyond the railing, the water breathes in long, slow swells.

She steps toward the small shrine wedged between vending machines and a convenience store, its vermilion gate bright against the pale sky.



"Inari-sama," she murmurs, her voice steady.

A petal loosens and falls.

It doesn't land.

Instead, it hovers before her, spinning slowly. The air warms. Out in the harbor, a low horn rolls from a departing vessel, and the sea answers with a shimmer of light, as if something immense has shifted beneath it.

"You've waited," the petal says.

Yui doesn't startle. All her life, the world has spoken to her sideways—through mirrors, through dreams, through the ache that followed being called by a name that bruised. A talking petal feels almost polite.

"I have," she says.

Winter has been narrowing. Clinics near Kannai. Forms stamped and restamped. The sharp, bureaucratic chill of the family registry. She's stood in fluorescent light while strangers weighed her existence like cargo, as if she was another container to be sorted at the docks. Each step forward has been a walk along the pier in a gale, unsure whether the boards beneath her would hold.

Now the tide is turning.

From the shrine's shadow, one of the stone foxes slips free of its pedestal. It stretches, granite softening into fur the color of moonlit surf. Its eyes gleam gold, knowing.

"You've shed a skin," the fox says. "But spring asks more than shedding."

The petal touches her forehead.

She's elsewhere.

She steadies herself on the wide wooden deck of a ship, anchored in a harbor of melting glass. Snow retreats in



glittering sheets, revealing not planks but fabric—layers of silk and cotton and wool. The clothes she wore to survive rise beneath her feet. School uniforms starched into obedience. Office shirts buttoned too high at the throat. Winter coats that squared her shoulders into shapes that weren't hers.

The meltwater soaks them.

From the damp cloth, green shoots rise.

"They fed the ground," the fox observes, pacing the edge of the deck. Beyond it, Minato Mirai shimmers like a mirage. "Nothing you wore was wasted. Not even the names."

Yui kneels. From the collar of an old suit jacket—one that never fit right—a stem pushes up, tipped with a tight bud. She touches it, and it flares into a camellia, the precise pink of the lipstick she first dared to buy in Sakuragichō. She remembers the cashier's neutral kindness, the small mercy of being treated as ordinary.

The ship trembles.

Across the shining harbor, a figure approaches. Tall. Broad-shouldered. Familiar in the way a scar is familiar.

Her old self.

He looks cold.

They regard each other, sea wind tugging at them both. His eyes aren't cruel. Just tired.

"I kept you afloat," he says.

"I know," she answers.

The fox's tail sways like a lighthouse beam.

Winter-self extends his hands. They're rough from gripping railings too tightly, from bracing against storms no



one else could see. She takes them. Solid, warm despite the frost.

“You don’t have to haunt me,” she tells him gently.

“I won’t,” he says. “But I won’t disappear.”

She thinks of the paperwork, the consultations, the long conversations that ended in silence. The boy who stood at this harbor on school trips, staring at the horizon and wanting something he couldn’t name. The son who bowed when told. The young man who learned to navigate like a ship without charts.

“You can be my ancestor,” she decides.

Winter-self blinks.

“In spring,” she says, “we honor what came before. You carried me here. That makes you sacred.”

The harbor exhales. Winter-self doesn’t vanish; he breaks apart into a scatter of seeds drifting across the water. Wherever they touch, blossoms burst from the surface—plum and cherry and long veils of wisteria cascading down invisible trellises, their reflections trembling in the tide.

The fox dips its head.

When Yui opens her eyes, she’s back by the bay. The cranes stand against a bluer sky. A breeze carries salt and thawing earth. The sea, no longer armored in winter gray, flashes silver in the sun.

In her hand rests a single plum blossom.

“Spring isn’t absolution,” the fox says, already stiffening back into stone. “It’s continuation.”

Yui bows.

On her walk home, she passes neighbors who knew her by another name. Some look twice. A man from the



building across the street hesitates, then nods—a small, deliberate gesture, like a ship signaling safe passage.

“Good morning, Yui-san,” he says.

The door in her bones swings wide.

At her apartment, she sets the plum blossom in a glass of water and watches it float, white petals luminous against the pale, sun-struck water. In the reflection of the window, she sees herself—hair neat, lipstick steady, eyes unhidden.

Then she slides the window open. The harbor breeze rushes in, alive with gull cries and the distant thrum of engines. Buds are swelling along the waterfront.

Inside, the taste of green fills her mouth.

Spring has arrived in Yokohama, and it’s speaking her true name.



LET'S BECOME SOMETHING NEW

ONA ABRAM



BERKANA—THE BIRCH

JULEIGH HOWARD-HOBSON

*The birch tree puts its roots down
And releases crowns of leaves to the sky
It births the green fire of the forest.
She who sings softly. - Vilturj (Russian) Rune Poem*

I am the spine of Maypole and the match
of Beltane. I am the ever return,
the verdant blaze that does not burn but breaks
birth from winter's grip with new leaves that catch
and hold the earliest hint of sun. Borne
on roots sunk deep in time itself, life shakes
itself and flexes in my grasp. I bring
fresh starts, beginnings rebegun, I grow
where oak and ash cannot, and not from mere
seed but shoot and leaf—I am everything
that finds a way to start again, to go
forth alone, to recommence. The new year
returned, sacred cycles wound again, earth
sprung holiness revealed as spring rebirth.



FALSE INDIGO TEACH US HOW TO LOVE

HANNAH CLARE JELLEN

I love you like dark prairie soil
embracing baptisia roots, ensuring
that even spring winds can't bend
the stalks, nurturing the growth
and decay every season brings
while new leaves emerge from
burnt remnants. Through every
lick of flame we grow back
stronger from the ashes of last
year's struggle. The dirt holds
coreopsis and rattlesnake master
as tightly as I hold you. Maybe I
even hold you tighter. Our love
blooms like we've never tasted
early frost.



TWO IN A MOMENT

VERENA RABAN



HATCHLINGS

WAYNE LEE

My wish today is that each bird
have a mate, each mating pair
a nest and each nest a blessing,

that each egg hatch healthy
and whole, that each hatchling
have a chance to test its wings,

that each spring this miracle unfolds
new-fledged once more, like leaf
buds, like fireweed, like desire.



GLUTEN-FREE EASTER CORN BREAD

IMOLA TÓTH

Cornbread is well known around the world and very versatile, so it can be consumed any time of day. My family loves to bake it any time of the year, but we have a special recipe reserved only for Easter.

INGREDIENTS:

180 gr corn meal

185 gr All-purpose gluten-free flour (or wheat flour)

100 gr brown sugar

185 gr butter at room temperature

375 ml buttermilk

2 small eggs at room temperature

3 tablespoon honey

1/4 teaspoon salt

1.5 teaspoon baking powder

2/3 teaspoon baking soda

pumpkin seed (optional)



PREPARATION:

1. Preheat the oven to 190 °C.
2. Meanwhile, place the room temperature butter in a mixer's bowl and start beating, out clean.
3. Gradually add in brown sugar and salt, and beat them together for 2-3 minutes or until they turn a bit fluffy and the sugar is dissolved in the butter.
4. Add the eggs one by one to the mix. Continue beating.
5. Lower the speed, and start adding the flour spoon by spoon to the mix.
6. Then pour the buttermilk slowly in the batter as well.
7. Then fold the corn meal gently in the batter.
8. Finally stir in honey, baking soda and baking powder, then turn off the mixer. The dough should look fluffy and more like a cake batter than a bread dough.
9. Grease out a large baking tray, or cover it with parchment paper. Then pour the batter into the tray. Level its surface with your spoon or spatula. Sprinkle with pumpkin seeds.
10. Bake the cornbread on 190 °C for about 30 minutes or until it turns golden. You'll know if it's ready if you pierce a knife or long toothpick into it and it comes out clean.
11. When done, remove the tray from the oven and let it cool down before serving.





THE BOYS IN THE CAPE COD CHOIR

RICHARD LEBLOND

A few weeks back I predicted that a tease of crocuses would lull us toward a false spring. But as it turned out, the crocus metaphor arrived about two weeks ahead of the crocuses themselves. While such irregularities are to be expected, it nonetheless reveals how much I have yet to learn about the migratory habits of metaphors.

Another metaphor for a false spring is the arrival of the redwing blackbird. I have viewed the blackbirds as errant bellringers of the annual clock, full of Shakespearean sound and fury, signifying nothing. All they call forth from the sleeping soil is that tease of crocuses.

But I overstate the case for a false spring by equating true spring with a regreening of the earth, which in these parts happens about the middle of May. My impatience with winter's malingering landscape causes me to ignore the spring tidings of animals, or to ridicule them in the case of the blackbirds.

We are not the only vertebrates impatient for spring's arrival, and if we equate true spring with the animal world, then it begins in January, not May. This is when some of our mammals, like the skunk, begin their steamy love affairs, and I have no problem equating spring with love.



It is love that propels the maligned male blackbird from his winter roost in the Great Dismal Swamp to the February marshes of Cape Cod. His annual clock rings on time as he and his brethren swing their real estate deals here with cacophonous currency. In a tight housing market, the early bird gets the condo, and can concentrate on wooing when the ladies arrive.

The great Carusos of spring are the male frogs and toads. They too sing of real estate and sex. Although the males will blat at each other for elbow room and a spot on the sedge tussock, the chorus is the main thing as they announce their discovery of a nursery built of spring rain.

Among some of our frog species, the males have larger ear drums than the females. It has been speculated, but not proven, that these males hear better. This would fit well with the orchestration of most froggy choruses.

Frogs don't hop en masse to a wetland and wait for the choirmaster to raise a little straw baton. They arrive individually, and the chorus begins as a solo, then a duet, a trio, and so on. If males hear better, they will be the first to respond to this quieter chamber music. Their growing number raises the volume of the choir and may announce the carrying capacity of the nursery. The theoretically hearing-impaired females can now make the trek with a greater prospect of success.



Our earliest amphibian singers are the spring peepers, and they have already held their first tentative concert (mid-March at my end of the Cape). These early peeper choruses are likely just try-outs and rehearsals, as it takes a relatively warm rain to get full attendance. This of course is followed by a complete breakdown of choir discipline.

The smaller musical offerings by the peeper clan are something of a mystery. Any rain, even in January, has the potential to awaken a song in a peeper or two. Are these pathetic winter bleatings the work of a few sex-crazed individuals who have been pushed out on a genetic limb, wagering their lives for love? Or is this an insurance policy wisely bought by an ancient lineage that has survived ice ages and droughts, and knows that today's unrequited crooner could be tomorrow's Adam? (These are not two questions so much as they are two views of the same question.)

Come April's first warm rain and all the peepers will be singing. They'll soon be joined by the choirs of the bullfrog and green frog, and the American, Fowler's, and spadefoot toads. The spadefoot is rare, and rarely sings, but Cape Cod is the most likely place in Massachusetts to hear its mournful call.

It is a non-melodious, screeching earth music that rises from swampy hollows on wet spring nights. Some people are



annoyed by the racket and – cursing the Wetlands Protection Act – have looked for ways to stop it. My temper tantrums

about tardy springs haven't helped. By investing my expectation into the sight of spring, and not its sound, spring remains unsprung.

The secret to turning this racket into music is to meet it halfway. This is simply done by consciously listening to it instead of letting it bang away at the nether parts of your brain. Five seconds is all it takes (but don't count). Otherwise, the only sound of spring may be the weekend traffic.



WONDER AND TERROR: MAN AMID NATURE IN TRAIN DREAMS

LIXIN FOO

An idyllic sanctuary for a self-sustaining home. A force of careless destruction. In *Train Dreams*, nature plays a complex but constant role in the life of humans. At times beautiful or devastating, it maintains an all-encompassing presence in the film.

Shot almost entirely using natural lighting, the film is presented in a memorable 3:2 aspect ratio inspired by old photographs from the 1920s. The lush, rugged scenery of Eastern Washington feels less like a backdrop and more of a living, breathing character in itself. From Rattlesnake Lake to Metaline Falls, the awesome beauty of Mother Nature is on full display. Each screencap could well be framed and hung up on a wall as a piece of art.

Yet, unlike Princess Mononoke's forest spirits or *Avatar*'s sentient Eywa, nature resists personification here. Referred to as "the great mystery" and the "old world", it is an unknowable entity waiting to be discovered, yet incomprehensible in its actions and reactions.

Away from land settled and sold by humans, nature provides free sanctuary. When Robert and his wife Gladys begin their life together, they build a home by the woods with their own hands and lumber from the surrounding trees. But nature can be as cruel as it is generous. Returning home from a job, Robert discovers to his horror that a forest



fire has razed the woods to ashes — and with them, his wife and daughter.

Grief, then, is a constant companion in humanity's coexistence with nature. Constrained to earn his livelihood as a logger without options of better-paying working class labor, Robert struggles with guilt surrounding his profession. The magnificent greenery he admires on every trip out into the forests is cut down by his own hand in an act that feels akin to murder. A gentle man by temperament, Robert soon feels haunted by karmic retribution. After his family is killed in the blaze, he spends the rest of his long life wondering if they paid the price for his transgressions against nature, trying to rationalize the senseless calamity.

Yet, despite the tragedy threaded throughout Robert's life, *Train Dreams* is immensely life-affirming at its core. Early in the film, as the lovers lie together on a grassy field under halcyon skies, Gladys professes a connection to the world: "Right now, I could just about understand everything there is." The same realization only dawns upon her husband decades later, in the closing minutes of the film. As Robert soars over Spokane in a biplane, overcome by the sight of the world sprawling out below, he hears his wife calling his name and "[feels], at last, connected to it all". It is a beautiful bookend to their love story, and an ode to humanity's understanding of nature and their place in it.

Poignant and beautiful, *Train Dreams* is a mature meditation on the human experience of carving out a quiet life amid nature. Acquired by Netflix at the 2025 Sundance Film Festival, it went on to receive four Oscar nominations.



THE CHICK FELL THROUGH,

ARTHUR NEONG

the ground its deathbed.

Also its coffin.

Also its death-nest.

Also its cremation,

by knives,

by armies of ants,

and survivor rats.

Anything really,

monitor lizards,

crows,

maybe not dogs or cats,

they are a little more

privileged.

The chick will be carved up into pieces.

Perhaps swept away by the cleaners.

Its parents forced to watch it die everyday

before the merciful end.

There are horrors birds live through everyday

that we are oblivious to

but our own.

Even so, we are not huge enough

to take in the horrors of the world.

The way microbes consume,

ingest their own horrors,

too tiny for us to see,



only feel as that tug in the gut
the itch on our eye.
We drink and scratch or poop
to relieve ourself.
Each motion a tsunami or quake
or gale or flood or hurricane.
What happens for chicks to fall down
to their deathbed?
Somewhere, somewhere, some God
sneezed or farted or fell asleep.



THE SECRET PATH

DENNY E. MARSHALL



IT IS NOT AN EASY PATH

ELAINE REARDON

It is not an easy path.
My grandmother, mother,
and grandchildren stand
at the crossroads
of dust and stars

with questions in their eyes.
Grandmother asks what
have I done since she left.
Did I follow the map she left behind?

There were stars I tried to follow,
when moonlight filtered through
the mystery. I held constellations in my
heart, the whole of me changed.
Looking for what? Do we always
search for those we love?



On earth snow melts into spring's warmth, later
into bloom and harvest. We spiral into winter's night again.
We dream, We sleep and wait again for spring.

Am I in good relation with shadows growing long?
Do I still watch the stars give light?
Can I still discern the Milky Way's path?
Do I still travel it in dreamtime?



FIBONACCI ANCESTRY

LOUHI POHJOLA

We begin

at 1 and 1

whose DNA helices
unraveled, reformed
and preserved a perfect
34 x 21 angström motif
as they twirled in a
pre-zygotic square dance.

Their coded messages arced
in lineal iterations, the same
at every scale, 1.618

for each quarter turn,
like the Romanesco, the pineapple,
the sunflower, and fiddlehead fern.

O! Those fractals of lightning strikes,
the branching of trees, the horns of a ram,
the family trees of bees!

The spiraling outward of generations mirrors
whorls in the ovary of an anglerfish,
pine cone bracts, the shelled nautilus,
a curled seahorse tail, sand dollar, snail.



The One and One left their fingerprints
on the spiraling arms of the Milky Way
as they pointed skywards generations ago.

An undulating umbilicus connects us to them.

Our cochlear coils hold their distant voices.

Rowing backwards along our ancestry's
logarithmic unfolding, we'll travel
the record that humanity keeps of itself,
back to the beating heart of Phi,

back to the first

1 and 1.

Those

from whom

we come.



SPIRAL

RACHEL TURNEY



ONE FOR HECATE, THE OTHER TO YOUTH

MARYJUNE HAINES

The first shoots of green popped up out of the crust of brown grass and hard mud that made up the garden. There was still ashy snow in the shadowy places, banked up against the low stone walls. The stateswomen, Georgia and Virginia – the ancient aunties, owners of the Inn at the End of the Sea – hadn't made time for anything other than the essential paths. Not with nor'easters blowing in one after the other since mid-January. It was enough on their old bones to shovel and clear the walkways to and from the Inn, there being no man to tap for the task.

The day before, and the day before that, I'd tracked dark trails through the morning's frost, my rubber boots beaded up with cold water. But this afternoon, the air was warmer even as it met with the vapor flying up off of the waves. The two made a fog, enveloping the thaw in diffused sunlight.

The back entry to the garden was a gateless jungle of dead branches and leaves grown over and through an old break in the stone. I rustled through it and then dropped to my knees to prune the space I'd made for those specks of green. The shoots were nothing more than vibrant fingertips reaching up toward the sky – pinkie fingertips, weak-knuckled, slim and breakable. I laid down beside them, the ground pleasantly cold beneath me, making me shiver, as if I might catch them growing.



Lie there like that and you're like to become part of the garden."

I sat up quickly and glanced over my shoulder. Virginia – the older of the stateswomen by some accounts, though she and Georgia both had hair that caught in some lights blond and others silver-white – ambled into the garden, coming up from the path that led down to the sea, its arched entrance like a picture window framing a small slice of the Atlantic. She plopped down on a bench and put her legs and walking stick out in front of her. "The salt air is no good for most of this," she said, gesturing widely to the patches of varying shades of brown. "It's Georgia's touch makes it grow, not anyone else's. She's got more than a green thumb, you know."

"A green hand," I said.

"Two," Virginia agreed. "And green feet."

"Do you think you have to be born with a green thumb?"

Virginia hummed thoughtfully. "I am not the authority."

My green shoots were open at the top like greedy little mouths, delicate as a baby's soft pout. "Do you know what they are?" I asked.

"Daffodils, probably. The first flowers to bloom in spring, don't you know?"

I did now.

Virginia breathed a deep sigh and pointed her long nose toward the lighthouse. "Strange time of year," she observed.

"Why do you say that?"



“That water – right down there – is freezing cold. Kill you to jump in. But in a few months, everyone will be itching for a dip. In the daytime, in a few days when the season changes over by the calendar’s counting, not by the turn of the sun or the moon, not really, all of this will come back to life. Georgia, bless her, will make her pacts with the soil and think nothing about bringing something back that was dead.”

“You make it sound...” I frowned, trying to follow her argument. “But the plants aren’t dead.”

“Near enough.”

“No,” I said.

Her eyebrows shot up.

“Plants aren’t like people. There can be an in-between. Not dead but not alive.”

“Plants aren’t people, you say?” Virginia’s accent was an odd one. She was the only person I had ever heard speak that way.

I shook my head, smiling. Georgia had shown me before: the green flesh under the bark. A state of stasis like a frozen frog waiting to thaw and ribbit.

“Aye, I’m not arguing.” Virginia said. Not arguing with a child, anyway. “Do you know what those are?” She gestured with her stick to the arched entryway. It was flanked on either side by stone statues: feminine curves in loose draped folds, features worn away by years of salt and wind. One of the statues had three faces, though all but the impression of a mouth and nose and strong brow had been smoothed on two sides. Only the face turned away from the ocean was



distinct, impassive and beautiful. "Altars. You know that word, girlie?"

"Yes."

"That one there, Hecate. The other, Youth. Understand?"

I didn't, so I said nothing.

Virginia chuckled deep down in her throat. "You'll grow up. Like those shoots of your'n."

"I guess."

Virginia tched. "Don't guess. Know. Hear?"

"Yes," I said. "Ma'am," I added.

Virginia huffed an indignant noise.

I laid back down on my side. "Do you think *I* could make them grow?"

"Don't think it matters what I think," Virginia grumbled.

I smiled. I had hoped for a story, once her lesson fizzled out, but Virginia let the silence linger. She gazed out over the sea, letting it smooth her rough edges. I shut my eyes and thought about how I might grow up.

Grow up and down both, like a planted seed. How might it feel to be just a bit of green, a bit of earth, pressing up out of moist darkness? What a life: a brainless – feelingless? – ease. Did plants feel as people did? Virginia didn't seem to think so. Georgia's lesson would have been even harder to parse, beautiful but obscure, the way poetry could be true and lovely but devoid of logic. I wanted to take everything at face value but how could I when the beauty of words got in the way? Music was honest, I'd been told; art was honest; but what did it mean when a poem declared,



Red is Green, One is Two? I tied myself in knots making sense of it.

“The brink of death,” I whispered.

I glanced up and saw that I was alone, Virginia having departed as silently as she’d arrived. I laid down my head and thought some more, about the spring that Virginia believed in, the one that brought the dead back to life. As if Winter always meant death. I knew it did not. The chives and garlic plants still grew on the windowsill. Georgia twisted and pulled handfuls of kale from the vegetable garden, great tufts of fibrous green she made into soup. Winter flowers – snowdrops – peeked their heads out from the snow, reaching up for white sunlight. *They’d* never stopped.

And the branches in the garden weren’t dead. They were studded even now with new buds, pushing up like all the rest, bulbous like round beads of dew.

And I – I had not died in the winter to come back in the spring. I scoffed at Virginia’s little speech, annoyed with myself for having been mystified by it in the first place. The thrum of the earth sounded in my ears as I lay my ear to the ground; its twin sounded in tandem: the push and pull of the sea as it crashed against the shore and the cliffside. The sluggish waking-up pulse of the earth and ocean was in my blood, too. In my ears, in my wrists, in my thigh where the blood rushed under the skin. Roots in the thawing earth pushed up against my body like ants crawling over my fingers, tickling me like oceanspray, like a pinprick drizzle. I smiled, my eyes closed. Through closed lids, the white light of the early spring sun washed out pastel and foggy. I felt



myself sinking. The embrace of the Earth reminded me of my father's strong arms, of my sister's warmth.

I sank into it. I let it hold me.

"Rosemary!"

I opened my eyes. I sat up a little, breaking free of the green tendrils that had grown up over my torso. They shrank away in spurned curls.

"Let it grow natural," Georgia scolded from beneath the wide brim of her hat.

"I didn't mean to," I murmured.

Georgia scoffed, hands on her hips. "As you like. Little fibber. What'll happen when you leave in the summer, hm? They'll be looking for you, and where will you be? Hm? Come now, up you get." Her long braids swung forward as she helped me to my feet.

"Virginia told on me," I accused sullenly.

"Now, don't be sour," she said in a gentler tone.

"I'm not sour."

"Indeed."

"Virginia said they'd been dead."

"And what does Virginia know anyway? Silly old woman. Let it grow natural."

"What about your green thumb?" I said.

"Now, Rosemary," Georgia sighed and leveled her eyes with mine. "There's green witchery and there's what you've got. You should take more care, or the lessons you learn will hurt you much more before they start helping you. See there..."

She nodded her long nose to my feet. I looked down to see the curled green tendrils reaching out like worms,



striving for purchase on my rubber boots. Georgia bent and brushed them down. I watched, frowning.

Georgia touched her soft palm to my cheek. "Tell me what you learned."

"Let it grow natural," I said.

Georgia smiled. She tapped me on the nose. "There's a good girl."

Still, when I looked back, I saw the bits of green swaying up into the cool air, and felt the thrum of the Earth under the soles of my boots. Spring did not wake the dead but it did make the living louder, and in the small shells of my ears, the world was singing.



INNOCENT

SONALI ROY



BOGWOMAN ON SPRING CLEANING

DEBORAH H. DOOLITTLE

Something about the bog just clogs
my brain. All that clutter,
detritus that loiters among the roots

of bog worts and cottons,
none of which get better—unless
sludgy and mucky can be
considered better—with age.

I remember the way we girls
had to sweep the floors
and beat the blankets and rugs

and all those dead carcasses of mice
and bugs. How we washed
our hair with chamomile.
Burned lavender to clear the air.

One day the turf cutters will dig
deep enough, unpack me
one lumpy moist brick at a time,



lay me out to dry in the bright
sunshine. How long must I lie
in wait before I enjoy the fate
of being placed upon the grate?

My smoke will smell sweet,
not bitter. My smoke will linger
in the rafters, under the eaves.
If I had my way, I'd never leave.

Now, don't I feel so much better?



SPRING RITUALS AND MEDITATIONS

RHIANNON LEWIS

Spring is about beginnings. It's about new growth and life and starting again.

It's a simple thing, but one of the most effective spring rituals is cleaning.

Sweep away the debris of winter and last year's growth with your broom. Make space for dreams, plans and inspiration that will drive future creativity.

Clear out the clutter that is no longer serving you. Let last year go.

Experiencing nature is deeply important too. Take a meditative stroll somewhere wildflowers grow and notice the signs of spring in buds and green shoots.

Decorating your home with spring flowers lights up the space and aligns you with seasonal changes.

A small act like lighting a candle can have a far-reaching effect.

One evening, light a candle and give thanks for the returning spring light and the inspiration it brings.

Take some time to sit with your spring candle and bathe in its subtle light.

Think about the old ways and ideas you mean to leave behind. Then think about the new ideas and plans you hope to manifest in your future.

Bright Spring Blessings!



SPRINGTIME 1

ANNICK COTTOM



SAVOURY GLUTEN-FREE ASPARAGUS PIET

IMOLA TÓTH

This asparagus pie is so versatile, it can be used from breakfast, to appetizer, dinner, or even to hand out at parties. So comforting and delicious, it will make everyone lick all ten fingers.

INGREDIENTS:

1 sheet gluten-free puff pastry
2 eggs, at room temperature
goat cheese, at room temperature
3/4 cup grated Pecorino Romano cheese
0.5kg asparagus, trimmed and peeled as needed
2 handful of baby spinach
1 teaspoon vegetable oil
1/4 teaspoon salt
Zest and juice of 1 lemon



PREPARATION:

1. Remove puff pastry from freezer and let stand at room temperature while you make the filling.
2. Preheat the oven according to puff pastry package instructions.
3. In a medium bowl, beat 1 egg with the goat cheese, Pecorino Romano cheese, and 1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lemon juice.
4. When the pastry is pliable enough to work with, unfold it on a sheet of parchment paper.
5. Meanwhile, beat the remaining egg with 1 teaspoon of water, then brush the egg wash around the pastry edges.
6. Transfer the pastry into a lined baking tray. Use additional egg wash on the corners if needed.
7. Lay the baby spinach on the puff pastry, then spread the goat cheese mixture on top of it. Toss the asparagus with the oil and salt, then arrange in a single layer on top of the cheese-egg mixture.
8. Bake it in the oven until golden brown and flaky, for about 30 to 35 minutes.
9. Serve immediately or let cool and serve at room temperature.





FOREST SHROOMIES

TINAMARIE COX



THE SLOW NOD OF TREES

A. MAX TRAPHAGAN

The cool mist of the early morning kissed Kit's skin as they walked toward the nearby woods. The air had started to grow cool, but it was still warm enough to leave their shaved head uncovered, so that they could enjoy the feeling of the misty air all over their head.

It was their favorite time of year - when the air felt perfectly cool, when the sky was that beautiful, gentle gray, and they could find the most delicious mushrooms.

It was quiet this morning. Kit heard only the soft breeze, the faintest birdsong, the swishing of their blue-green robes, and their own footsteps. Still, as they entered the woods, they didn't feel alone. Their nostrils increasingly filled with the familiar woody scent, and they felt the energy of the trees begin to surround them, like the embrace of old friends.

"Hello," Kit whispered, barely parting their smiling lips.

The trees murmured their greetings warmly and nodded slowly toward a cache of mushrooms. The nodding was timelessly sleepy and glacially slow, as the actions of the trees often were. Kit detected it as a faint earthy scent guiding the way. It grew more beautiful as they moved closer to the cache. Soon, they could almost taste the rich flavor of the mushrooms and the mushrooms' desire to nourish.



The mushrooms carried the memories of countless seasons. Each mushroom was a temporary piece of a timeless entity, one that remembered all it had nourished. Kit couldn't know this, not consciously anyway, but this is what always drew them to the mushrooms all the same.

They reached the cache of mushrooms and knelt down to where the mushrooms were. Their smell was almost overwhelming now. Kit felt like they could not only taste them, but that taste was stirring up countless memories. Or rather, what seemed like memories, because as much as this felt like remembering, they felt sure none of this had happened to them, not in this body anyway.

They felt the heat of fire all around them, and smoke pouring into their nostrils. It didn't smell like any smoke they knew. It was much more acrid and alien. It felt like it was tearing their insides apart. They heard sounds of scraping, of thrashing, of screaming. Everything was so dark. Everything was so heavy. Billions of souls were extinguished all at once.

But from the remains of those souls, something new emerged. Cells formed and split apart. Bits of green pushed through so much ash. Those bits became trees and mushrooms and even Kit himself. This had all happened on this land, as it had on other land, in other places, in other times, as it would again. Despite the flood of memories filling them, they could still feel over that flood something drawing them to touch the mushrooms, to forage them as they usually did. They were so often persistent in the face of a task, weren't they?

Kit reached for one of the mushrooms, and it felt like a circuit was completing. Soon, it felt like the blurry torrent of



memories in their mind came into focus. There was an almost infinite array of these memories, arranged in some sort of structure. They were defined but interconnected and extended in all directions. There were so many directions. These memories were theirs and everyone else's. These memories had always been this way, but only the mushrooms knew this secret. Now, so did Kit.

As quickly as this revelation came to them, it dissipated. They were back in the woods, their hand on a mushroom, ready to forage. Everything was just as before.

Kit looked quizzically at the mushrooms, still reeling from this revelation. Their body crumpled into a ball with the weight of this revelation, and they felt tears welling up. When their tears hit one of the mushrooms, they noticed a new smell. At least they thought it was a smell. It was something, some kind of communication from the mushrooms — an explanation, an apology. Whatever it was, it was gorgeous. The mushrooms hadn't meant to overwhelm Kit. The mushrooms simply wanted to invite them in, as a friend with whom the mushrooms wished to share a connection, a secret of the sort that would bond them.

Kit reached for the mushrooms again and felt themselves embraced. It wasn't quite so overwhelming this time. The mushrooms knew the nature of reality unfettered by the bounds of egocentric perception. They only wished to share.

All the crystals of memory glittered at once, forming an energy of boundless love. This was the stuff of the universe. All was connected and all was the same. Everything was united in a radiant purpose that made sense here,



beyond time.

Kit smiled, glittering with love. They eagerly tore some of the mushrooms — the ones that wished to nourish. Those mushrooms would provide such delightful sustenance for this body, through the games of this experience. The mushrooms longed to play, and they would let them. Oh, would they let them.

Kit's hut was warm and fragrant as the vegetable soup cooked over the fire. The mushrooms made the smell of the soup especially enticing. While they waited for the soup to finish cooking and for their dining companion to arrive, they played an improvised song on their jaw harp. The song was a jaunty, bouncy thing, so they danced to it where they sat. It was a chaotic, wiggly dance, and when they closed their eyes, they felt as if they were part of a crystal lattice of other dancers.

They weren't sure how long they'd been dancing when they heard a bright stream of giggles that they knew belonged to Crow.

"I'm sorry," Crow said. "I just love your little dance so much."

Kit smiled up at Crow. They saw Crow's long, silky black hair tumbling down the shoulders of their lavender robes, and Crow's gray eyes sparkling with delight. Crow held a large loaf of brown bread in their arms, and from the smell of it, it was fresh out of the oven.

"That bread smells divine," Kit cooed.

"So does that soup," Crow said. "Even better than usual."

Kit stood up, then tilted their head down to look into



Crow's eyes. "These mushrooms might be the best I've found. They shared so many secrets. I didn't like all of them, but it was all important. I hope they share them with you, too."

Crow smiled widely. "I hope so. I think this wheat has been quite secretive, but maybe the mushrooms will inspire it."

"These mushrooms and your wheat have always made a good team," Kit said.

Soon, the soup was ready. Kit spooned the soup into clay bowls and set the bowls on their low wooden table. Steam swirled gently above the bowls in dreamy clouds. Crow sat on the ground at the table and tore chunks of bread for each of them.

Once Kit sat at the table, Kit and Crow joined hands, closed their eyes, and shared several deep breaths. They felt the warmth of the energetic connection between the two of them and took in the enticing smell of the soup and bread together, the feeling of the cool breeze blowing into Kit's hut, and the distant sounds of the birds, insects, and other creatures that inhabited the land.

After a few moments, they released each other's hands. "I'm so glad I get to share this food with you," Crow said.

Kit beamed. "And I'm so glad I get to share it with you!"

Kit tore a small piece off one of their chunks of bread and used it to scoop some of the soup. The mushrooms grounded the soup in earthiness and ash, but the vegetables and Crow's bread added the sun it all needed to grow. Kit felt



as if they held the whole universe in their mouth, the good and the bad of it, and when they swallowed it down, they and everything else felt nourished.

They looked at Crow, who never felt entirely separate from them, but today they saw that Crow was, like them, another piece of the lattice of the universe. At this thought, an awestruck smile blossomed on Crow's face, even as tears started to pour from their eyes.

"It's beautiful," Crow gasped.

Kit and Crow didn't need to say much more after that. They continued eating together, feeling thoroughly nourished by and through the whole of the universe, of all the creation and destruction that had brought them to this moment. Once they ate all they could hold, they cleaned up together. They did so in silence, save their giggles at the wordless jokes they shared.

The air grew cold as night fell, so Kit and Crow curled up together in front of the fire, each making a delightful cocoon for the other. As the two of them watched the fire's crackling dance, the nighttime sounds of the forest creatures wafted into the hut. The fire's crackle and the sounds of the forest felt like a heartbeat shared.

They shared these simple pleasures as individuals, dear friends, and as part of the universal whole. There was as much pleasure in union as there was in separation, and they realized there was no need to choose. Eventually, their eyes grew heavy and they dozed together, sharing in the warm dreams of the entire universe.



NIGELLA

JANINA KARPINSKA



BLOOM

KAYLEE L. FICHTEL

Dig –

No.

Not like that.

Dig with your hands,
fingers spread wide and greedy
like flowers in the first light of spring.

Dig for all you're worth
and then some more.

Deeper than you ever thought before.

Take a break and vomit all you're made of
and then some more.

And dig.

Tear through the wrought-iron grasses,
the pillow-ripe soil,
rot-fat worms and writhing mycelia.

And deeper:

the stone-clotted, bone-studded, stubborn layer-next.

Hit the bedrock.

Tear your nails out, your hair out, your soul out,
and dig.



Eventually, somehow,
There will be no more down.
There will be no more you.
So.

 You.

 Lay.

 In.

 The.

 Grave.

Cradle yourself in the soft soil.
Let it fall around you –
this part will be easier now.
Cool dirt made like mother's arms
pressing in on all sides.
It will be hard to breathe.
That's alright.
For perhaps you will bloom on the other side.



CONTRIBUTORS



A. MAX TRAPHAGAN

A. Max Traphagan lives in rural Central Texas. Their work has appeared in publications such as *Delicate Friend* and *Chthonic Lit* and in anthologies such as *The Promethean Archives* and *Fearmoji*. Find Max at <http://www.amaxtraphagan.com>.



ALLISON BOTHLEY

Allison Bothley is a writer and recovering MFA (The New School) who lives in Orangeville, Ontario. Her work has appeared in *The Globe and Mail*, *White Wall Review*, *Sad Girl Diaries*, *Literary Review of Canada* and elsewhere. She is the creator and publisher of *Bangs Zine*.



ALLISON BURRIS

Allison Burriss writes whimsical and subversive poems from Oakland, CA. Her most recent publications are in *The Orange & Bee* and *Engine*(Idling. You can find her at the library looking for a magic portal or getting up to some kitchen witchery. She writes about creativity on *Substack at Ink in the Archives*. Connect with her: <https://linktr.ee/allisonburriss>



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AMANDA CONOVER

Amanda Conover is a poet currently based in Peoria, IL, who often explores themes of existentialism and spirituality. She is the Poetry Editor for Carolina Muse and holds an MFA from Arcadia University. Her poems have been published in Atlanta Review, Witches Magazine, and elsewhere. Find her at www.amandaconover.com.



ANNICK COTTOM

Annick's passion is for the environment especially flora which encourages pollinators. She started her creative journey in textiles specifically quilts and embroidery. Growing up Annick spent a lot of time travelling the globe with her family, subconsciously picking up colours, shapes, textures and scents from faraway lands which now inform her artwork and colour palette.



ARTHUR NEONG

Arthur Neong is a Malaysian Chinese. Having taught for 11 years, he now delineates the maelstrom of thoughts and visuals, hoping to make sense of it all. His works have appeared in Mediterranean Poetry, Hemlock, Epoque Press, Eclectica, Ink & Ivy Lit, Parcham, Lunae Literature Review, WayWords, Eksentrika and others.



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Avriel Mejrah is a poet based in Massachusetts. His work explores memory, interiority, and the living world.



C. PAYNE

C. Payne claims to be born in a cemetery, under the sign of the moon. This claim is currently unverified. He can be sighted haunting isolated stretches of the Florida Panhandle, and his work has appeared in *Witch House Magazine*, *Just Keep Up*, and various other publications and anthologies.



CAILÍN FRANKLAND

Cailín Frankland (she/they) is a British-American writer and public health professional based in Baltimore, Maryland. They live with their spouse, two old lady cats, a rotating cast of foster animals, and a 70-pound pitbull affectionately known as Baby. You can find them on X as @cailin_sm.



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CHRISTY UMBERGER

Christy Umberger is a poet currently based in San Francisco with her partner, Christian, and cat, Pepper. Her work has appeared in *Wild Roof Journal*, *Anodyne Magazine*, and *The Closed Eye Open*, among others. Follow Christy on IG: @christyumber or subscribe to her weekly Substack, *In The Middle*: christyumberger.substack.com.



DAVID I. HUGHES

David I. Hughes is a British writer based in West Cornwall. His work explores attention, systems, and the structures that shape human experience, often blending the everyday with speculative elements. His fiction, poetry, and essays have appeared in UK and US literary journals, and he has been shortlisted for several international prizes. He is the author of *The Listener* - a work of speculative literary fiction.



DEBORAH H. DOOLITTLE

Deborah H. Doolittle has lived in lots of different places, but now calls North Carolina home. An AWP Intro Award winner and Pushcart Prize nominee, she is the author of *Floribunda*, *No Crazy Notions*, *That Echo*, and *Bogbound*. When not writing or reading or editing *BRILLIG*: a micro lit mag, she's training for running road races, or practicing yoga, all while sharing a house with her husband, five housecats, and a backyard full of birds.



CONTRIBUTORS



DENNY E. MARSHALL

Denny has had art, poetry, and fiction published. Some recently. Denny mostly draws.



ELAINE REARDON

Elaine's two chapbooks, *The Heart is a Nursery For Hope* and *Look Behind You*, won first honors from Flutter Press. A new chapbook, *Stories Told In A Lost Tongue*, published by Finishing Line Press, tells her family story from refugees to assimilation.



ELLEN GREENBLUM

Ellen Greenblum is Faculty Emerita at Prescott College in Prescott, AZ, where she taught for 25 years in the fields of human development and the fine arts. Now retired, she can fully indulge her creative practices as an exhibiting artist and writer



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ERICA LIVINGSTON

Erica Livingston is a writer, storyteller, herbalist, and postpartum-centered doula whose work lives at the intersection of story, embodiment, and ritual. She weaves together personal narrative, plant friends, and everyday practices of care, often including tea, recipes, and small rituals that invite a slower, more attentive way of being with change.



FARIEL SHAFEE

Fariel Shafee studied physics, but loves to write and paint. Her art has won several awards and has been featured by New Myth, Sprawl, Illumen, Stygian Lepus etc. Her portfolio is <http://fshafee.wixsite.com/farielsart>



HANNAH CLARE JELLEN

Hannah Clare Jellen was born among the floodwaters in Southern Illinois. She is a neurodivergent dreamer living with bipolar disorder and OCD, tangled in the beauty and melancholy of her effort to find meaning in all things. Her poetry is the medium through which she understands the magic and tragedy of the universe and the mortal experience. She enjoys spending quiet time creating music and spending gentle moments with her partner and their beloved pets.



CONTRIBUTORS



HARLEY BELL

Harley Bell is a poet from Aotearoa, New Zealand. He has been published in various journals. He spends his time in cafes, libraries, forests and parks. He draws inspiration from the conversation between the natural world and cityscapes. He isn't sure why he wrote this in the third person.



IMOLA TÓTH

Imola is a poet and creative writer from Hungary. She writes to name what is real, disturb what is false, and make beauty from what most people avoid. Beyond the page, she's a lover of classical novels, licorice tea and forests, where she lives and works as a tree planter.



JADE HURTER

Jade Hurter's work has appeared in Verse Daily, Black Warrior Review, The Cincinnati Review, RHINO, The Colorado Review, Iron Horse Literary Review, and elsewhere. A 2025 Vermont Studio Center fellowship recipient, she lives in New Orleans, where she teaches English and is pursuing a graduate degree in mental health counseling.



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JANINA KARPINSKA

Janina Aza Karpinska is a multidisciplinary artist-poet, with an eye for visual poetry. Her photographs have featured on covers of: Adanna Journal; The Hovarian; Aureation Zine, and in: Months to Years; Last Leaves, Kelp Journal, with interview; Voices de la Luna; Lotus Eater Magazine; Heart of Flesh, and Antler Velvet, amongst others. She lives on the south coast of England



JOE COY

Joe Coy (he/him), a practicing witch and poet, has always been fascinated by how a few words and a few lines can speak volumes, touch hearts, and unveil the soul. Joe uses poetry to give a voice to the voiceless and explore themes of nature, spirituality, and connection.



JULEIGH HOWARD-HOBSON

Juleigh Howard-Hobson's work has appeared in Faerie Magazine, Illumen, Enchanted Conversation, New Witch, Eternal Haunted Summer, Under Her Eye (Black Spot), Mandragora (Scarlett Imprint) and many other magical places. She has multiple Pushcart, Elgin, Best of the Net and Rhysling nominations. Her house is sweetly haunted. X: @poetforest +/or @juleigh.bsky.social



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KAT KLINE

Kat Kline (they/he) is a full-time psychotherapist and part-time cryptid, but has collected enough part-time hobbies that they could also be characterized as a 'full-time dabbler'. You can take a blurry photo of him in select Chicago green spaces and coffee shops - just look for the red cowboy boots.



KAYLEE L. FICHTEL

Kaylee L. Fichtel is a poet that became obsessed with magic, science, and words from a young age, and now spends most of her time weaving the three together. She can be found @kaylee_nobles on instagram.



LISA ST. JOHN

Lisa St. John is a writer from upstate New York. The author of *Ponderings (Finishing Line)* and *Swallowing Stones (Kelsay)*, Lisa's poetry appears in journals such as *New Verse News*, *The Poet's Billow*, and *The Orchards*. Lisa believes that art is hope and that there is beauty in possibility.



CONTRIBUTORS



LIXIN FOO

Lixin Foo is a Singaporean Chinese writer. Her historical flash fictions have been nominated for Best Microfiction, the Pushcart Prize, and longlisted twice for the Ink of Ages Fiction Prize. Among other places, more of her works can be found in *Corvid Queen*, *Myriad*, a *Hexagon* zine, and *Crepuscular Magazine*.



LORELEI GREENWOOD-JONES

Lorelei has so many interests that her hobbies have hobbies, but for the last few years, nature photography has been an intriguing journey for her. Using her simple Cannon point-n-shoot, she has been able to get some wonderful shots.



LOUHI POHJOLA

Louhi was born in Montreal, Canada. She writes poems focused on the intersections of human behavior and the natural world and is an avid fly-fisherwoman and river rock connoisseur. Her chapbook, *“Cracking Open the Bones,”* was the 2025 winner of the Elyse Wolf Chapbook Contest from Slate Roof Press.



CONTRIBUTORS



MARTHA PATTERSON

Martha Patterson's story collection "Small Acts of Magic" was published by Finishing Line Press in 2021. Her chapbook of poetry "Luna at Dawn" was published by Bottlecrap Press in 2025. She lives in Boston, Massachusetts.



MARYJUNE HAINES

Maryjune Haines (she/her) is a writer living in the Shenandoah Valley, Virginia. She has a BA in Screenwriting and two cats. Her work reflects an appreciation for themes of mystical intentionality, family, and the power that memory, in all its forms, holds. Her short fiction can be found in the forthcoming Virginia Fantastic: Flash Fiction from the Old Dominion anthology.



NICOLE VAMVAKAS

Nicole Vamvakas started writing poetry 25 years ago as an outlet for her preteen angst. Now, she focuses her writing on children's literature, but poems still manage to bubble up every time she slows down and pays attention to the natural world. When not writing, she works as a birth doula and homeschools her two kids in Kalamazoo, Michigan.



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ONA ABRAM

Ona (@ona_abr) is a queer illustrator and jewelry apprentice. Currently living in Barcelona with her dog, spends his free time reading comics, sci-fi novels and hiking.



RACHEL TURNEY

Rachel Turney, Ed.D. is an educator and artist located in Denver, Colorado. Rachel is on staff at Bare Back Magazine and is a reader for The Los Angeles Review. Her poetry collection Record Player Life is available with The Poetry Lighthouse. Website: turneytalks.com Instagram: @turneytalks Bluesky: rachelturney



RHIANNON LEWIS

Rhiannon Lewis is a mixed-media artist whose work explores the synthesis of nature and the ethereal. She creates 2D images in pencil, charcoal, pastel, paint, or a combination of these. Her work is inspired by magical imaginings and her love of the wild green world.



CONTRIBUTORS



RICHARD LEBLOND

Richard LeBlond is a retired biologist living in North Carolina. His essays and photographs have appeared in many U.S. and international journals, including *Montreal Review*, *Weber – The Contemporary West*, *Concis*, *Lowestoft Chronicle*, *Trampset*, and *Still Point Arts Quarterly*. His essay collection, *Homesick for Nowhere*, was a winner of the 2022 EastOver Press nonfiction contest, and a general nonfiction finalist in the Spring 2023 San Francisco Book Festival.



RIGO

Originally from Texas, Rigo lives in Amherst, Massachusetts with his family. His creative writing has appeared in such places as *THEMA*, *Entre Magazine*, and *Middleground Magazine*. A mixed-race visual artist, multi-instrumentalist, and singer-songwriter, Rigo is querying a YA novel and is a member of the band *Black Door '74* (<https://blackdoor74band.com/>).



SHELBY COHEN

Shelby Cohen's Best of the Net-nominated fiction has been published in *All Worlds Wayfarer*, *Suburban Witchcraft*, *Grey Coven Publishing*, and *Nettle Journal*. Her poetry can be found in *Witches Magazine*, *Anomaly Poetry*, *Arcana Poetry Press*, and *Quillkeeper's Press*. You can find her @Baronessshelby.



CONTRIBUTORS



SONALI ROY

A freelance writer & photojournalist, Sonali Roy, is a passionate traveler and loves framing nature. Roy enjoys painting & cooking and is devoted to vegan diet. Besides, Sonali composes music and practices yoga & meditation regularly. Enjoy the photo of Fuchoo, Sonali's best friend.



SUNNY WESTALL

Sunny Westall is a writer and artist originally from the American Southeast, who now lives in the North West of England. She studied Cultural Studies with a minor degree in Writing. Her work tends to explore personal mythology, nature, quiet spaces, and nostalgia.



SUSAN L. LIN

Susan L. Lin is a Taiwanese American storyteller who hails from southeast Texas and holds an MFA in Writing from California College of the Arts. Her novella *GOODBYE TO THE OCEAN* won the 2022 Etchings Press novella prize, and her literary/visual art has appeared in over a hundred publications. She loves to dance. Find more at susanllin.com.



CONTRIBUTORS



TINAMARIE COX

Tinamarie Cox lives in an Arizona town with her husband, two children, and rescue felines. Her written and visual work has appeared in a number of online and print publications under various genres. You can explore her work at tinamariethinkstoomuch.weebly.com.



TOSHIYA KAMEI

Toshiya Kamei (she/they) takes inspiration from fairy tales, folklore, and mythology. She attempts to reimagine the past, present, and future while shifting between various perspectives and points of view. Many of her characters are outsiders living on the margins of society. For more information, visit <https://toshiyakamei.wordpress.com/>.



CONTRIBUTORS



VERENA RABAN

Verena Raban is a Series-LXXXVII Replicant from the storm-swarmed planet Saturn09. She writes & draws poems & punks & flowers. Her poetry, prose, and art can be seen in Action, Spectacle, Thin Air Magazine, Slipstream, Screen Door Review, and others. She is an Anaphora Arts Fellow, former SVA Multimedia Arts resident, and former Art Editor for the Northwest Review. She holds an MFA in Writing from Pacific University where she studied poetry.



WAYNE LEE

Wayne Lee (wayneleepoet.com) lives in Santa Fe, NM. Lee's collection Dining on Salt: Four Seasons of Septets (Cornerstone Press, 2025) won the 2026 North American Poetry Book Award, and he is a Pushcart Prize nominee. His poems have appeared in Tupelo Press, Slipstream, Writer's Digest and elsewhere.

