Altar

Issue Two



Golden Hour

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Table of contents

Poetry
Treasure — *Jill Sisson*.....1
Mutable — *Gabriela Faria*.....12
The Persimmons Were Almost Too Ripe — *Pravy Jha*.....18
Ghosts — *Dakota Kitchen*.....22
Time — *N.T. Brown*.....25
Fertile Imagination — *Rebecca Clifford*.....26
This autumn flourishes — *Loralee Clark*.....32
malinger — *Sameer Saklani*.....39
Crepuscle I Borrow — *Hannan Khan*.....41
afterglow — *Virgil Freier*.....46
They Tell Me About God — *Kait Quinn*.....48
What Heaven Allows — *Darius Phelps*.....53
Acorn Season — *Fernando Martí*.....68
You Can't Explain — *Elisabeth Frischauf MD*.....72

Art

Glowing Eyes — *Denny E. Marshall*.....9
Churchyard — *Hannah Tomes*.....21
Golden Hour — *Clarabelle Miray Fields*.....31
golden torso — *Amanda Yskamp*.....33
Where eternity seems unable to become dark. — *Nasta Martyn*.....40
Ghost shuffle — *Annick Cottom*.....43
Ginger Beech — *Jane Bonney*.....47
Inside/outside — *Cheryl Caesar*.....52
Enshrouded — *Angela Patera*.....61
Loch of Gold — *Kai Ray*.....67
Spiderweb — *Hannah Tomes*.....71

Nonfiction

Growing Wild — *Fiona M Jones*.....4
Autumn Asylum — *Pat Murphy McClelland*.....23
What's left — *Anna Gresham*.....44

Review

Bathed in Molten Gold: The Divine Comedy, live onstage in Norwich’s LCR June 27th 2026 — *Andrew Kolarik*.....34

Recipes
Acorn Maple Syrup Cookies — *Wai Mei Wong*.....13
How to Bring Your Soul Back to Life: Spiced Persian-Fusion Drinking Chocolate — *Ariana Akbari*.....28
End of Season Elderberry & Rose Syrup — *Ashley Rose*.....65

Rituals
Apple Ritual — *Rhiannon Lewis*.....2
A Seed at Dusk — *Austin Nix*.....6
Two Candles, Two States of Mind — *Leatrice Alan* 10
coffee divination — *Bailey Loveless*.....15

Spells
A Sweater is a Friend — *Nicole MacDougall*.....62
Perfume Spell/Daily Fragrance Ritual — *Emily De Armas*.....63

Fiction
A Soft And Beautiful Sadness — *Michael Raine*.....49
The Boy — *Howard Marsee*.....54

Contributor Bios.....73

Letter from editor

Hello Reader!

Welcome to our second issue: Golden Hour. This issue brings together writers, artists, and witches as they navigate the complex energy of Fall. The pieces highlight the seasons' mixed dynamic of abundance and waning. Like the golden quality of the sun as it sets and the vibrant leaves before they fall, the tone is bittersweet.

Inside you will find our writers and artists reflecting on time and loss while also taking time to revel in the light. Sprinkled through are recipes that help you make the most of the season, as well as spells and rituals to empower and guide you.

We hope that each offering builds your connection to the season and reminds you to cherish the golden moments that arise in your own life.

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

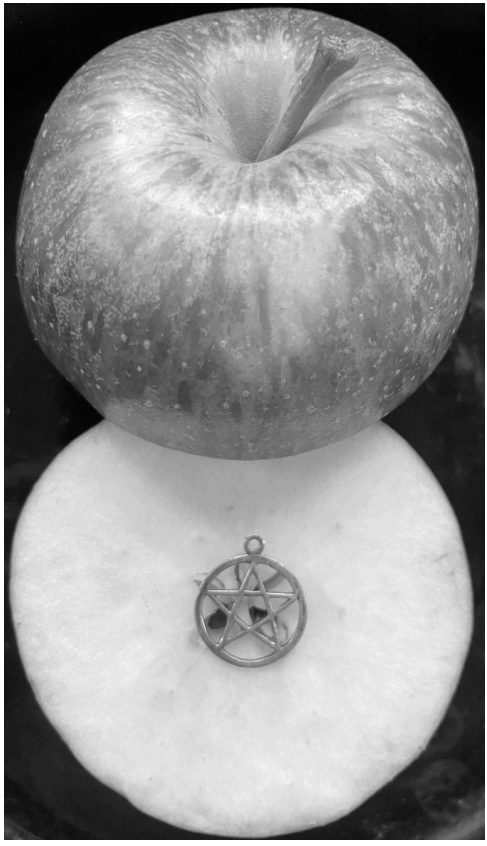
Treasure

Jill Sisson

A pinkie-sized antler
left behind on the forest floor
as dictated – for eons – by the warning
words of winter. Nearly hidden at
my feet among gold-brown debris
brittle twigs and old grass
wet with yesterday's rain
I scoop it up
satin-smooth, the feel of old bone
the only rough patch
where once, it touched
a yearling's smooth skull.
I hold it in my hand
in my pocket, and back
in my palm again
my lucky glance under conifer boughs
a small magic wand, wild and humble
warming to me
when I name it
my miracle

Apple Ritual

Rhiannon Lewis



The golden time just before Mabon's equinox is a time for weighing up gains and losses. It is a time to notice and be thankful for all the good things that have appeared in your life. Meditate on the positive events that have occurred in your life lately. Concentrate on everything you are grateful for, big or small. Apples have links with nature magic, perhaps because if you cut an apple horizontally across its middle, you can see a pentagram shape where the seeds are held in the core.

Ritual:
Cut an apple as described above and remove the seeds. For every apple seed, think of one thing you are grateful for.

Take the seeds somewhere you can bury them in soil without causing damage. Maybe you have a garden where you could do this, or you know somewhere wild, in woods or fields, that will be suitable.

Hold the first seed and concentrate on the gift you have received, then bury the seed in the ground with thanks.

Repeat this for each seed and gift you are grateful for, giving them back to the earth for safekeeping.

Planting these seeds of acknowledgement and gratitude will encourage more good things to grow in your life. It is nourishing to recognize when life is golden, and to give thanks for it.

Growing Wild

Fiona M Jones

If you listen to the people who say the things about stuff, you'll never go looking for wild apples, because you won't believe they exist.

To grow an apple tree, they say, you have to clone and graft, tacking the shoots from a known variety on to a trusted base. If you plant a tree from seed, the random re-pairing of appley genes will almost always result in something less-than-edible, and likewise the forgetting of an existing apple tree will leave it gradually reverting to inedible crabs.

So I don't know what happened around the village of Crossford, near Dunfermline in Scotland, where I and my family used to live. Wherever you wander outside the perimeter of the housing areas, you find wild apple trees. There's a gnarly old one sprawling across a broken stone wall, another under a bridge, another dropping its fruit across the bottom of Waggon Road, and two or three others out beyond the brambles and brackens that took over the disused skating-rink.

Most of these apples are, of course, smaller and sourer than apples in the shops—except for one tree that produces, every autumn, a sparse but mild-flavoured crop around the size of tennis balls. My children used to climb up and collect as many as they could reach, and carry them home with pride. My younger son would also bring home bag after bag of sour green apples the size of golf balls from another tree harder to reach. You cannot tell a ten-year-old you don't

want his gifts, not after he's braved scratches and nettle-stings to get them, so I learned to cut and core them, boil them up in their skins, and then run them through the food processor to make a brownish goop that actually carried quite a nice flavour when added to cakes and pies.

I wonder whether it was someone fifty or sixty years ago who ate apples and tossed their cores away into the undergrowth, where one in a dozen decided to be fruitful and multiply of its own accord. Or whether every apple tree was once cherished in someone's garden, to outlast houses and landowner and to end up lost between a hedge and a stream or a crumbling stone wall.

Either way, it seems only respectful to visit them, and to take their fruit with gratitude.

A Seed at Dusk

Austin Nix

Gather an offering – whole eggs, red wine, honey, garlic, or pomegranates would work beautifully, but use something you have on hand. Start the ritual somewhere outdoors, in a spot you find comforting or peaceful.

The sun slinks down behind ambered canopies, whispering to you one last goodbye. Harvesttide's first chill kisses your cheek and you cup the warm mug in your hand a little tighter. Around you, birdsong fades to stillness. Somewhere, a dog barks – then another. And another.

A canine tempest swells and you stand in its eye. Your vision darkens, your nostrils are warmed with the sweet fumigation of balsamic resins, and you are comforted to know She is near.

There's a wrought-iron gate before you, its metal singing sharply as it peels itself open.

Soft footsteps approach, and your ears are tickled as a heavy cloak brushes the ground. There's a clattering of chains, a tinkling of keys, and shadows swim around twin torches.

The glow of the flames dances around your grin as you reach out to greet an old friend.

Light a stick of incense and hold it in your right hand as if it were a torch.

Hail to thee, Lady Liminal,
who guards the turning of the wheel.
As the earth surrenders its light to dark,
so too shall I release what is not mine to carry.
Io, Hekate!

Walk to a nearby crossroads. It doesn't have to be a literal one. A boundary line, a fence corner, an intersection of roads, a doorway, a rock jutting out of a stream… All are spaces where She resides.

Hail to thee, Keeper of Keys –
Open the way for our journey inward,
and grant safe passage through the shadowed roads ahead.
I stand where you stand, where all ways cross.
Part thy gate for me.
Io, Hekate!

Lay down your offering. Bury it, if you can. Sit with Her for a while and tell her what you seek to release. Should you wish to divine, gaze into the curls of incense smoke.

Hail to thee who guides the maiden.
I am Korre! Attend me!
Lead me to and fro, nurture me –
I am thy kernel of life:
Still me where I am meant to bloom.
Io, Hekate!

Return to the place where you started. Thank Her for her visit and close out the rite. Invite her in for tea, if you'd like the company. Take a cleansing/purifying bath and light a black candle before bed. Record your dreams upon waking.

Glowing Eyes

Denny E. Marshall



Two Candles, Two States of Mind

Leatrice Alan

One is black and the other is white. One smells like mysterious amber, a cedar fire, and Hecate's powerful, alluring secrets on a dark, November night. The other smells like sunlight, youth, freedom and sweetness. It's Persephone above ground during those six warm, precious months a year.

Both make excellent spell candles, and this is my bid for you to consider finding your own scented candles to enhance your craft.

The magic cast by Illume's "Woodfire" candle is darkly protective. No matter what my mood, when I light this candle up (or pop it under a warmer lamp), I sink voluptuously into memory, but don't get so lost in it that its resinous, woody, smoky charms fail to sharpen my focus. Yet it also makes me think of ancient high priestesses reaching altered consciousness, because "Woodfire" makes me feel like I'd fail a roadside sobriety test. As I was failing though, my mind would be figuring a way out. That's "Woodfire." Smoky, slightly naughty, and smart. There's protection there.

The candle part of "Woodfire" comes in white in larger containers, but is black in its 3 ounce form, which is what I use. That's why I light it for protection and releasing painful emotions.

Through intention, and the headiness of the black candle, I summon a shield of smoke in my mind's eye. It swirls around me as a protective fog, but its mystical vibe helps free me of what holds me back and harms me. The candle creates a kind of positive barrier that my mind's eye can penetrate to see a much-needed truth. It makes me feel both safer and smarter when I'm doing a working.

Its sweeter sister, Detroit Rose's "Tobacco + Bayleaf," is my go-to white candle. It has a fresh, delectable hit of bergamot, just a soupçon of bay, and lands with cedarwood and the scent of fresh tobacco. When I light it for any kind of spell, my head fully clears, and I feel ready to focus on the goal at hand, or meditate. It truly is a stand-in candle for any working for me, because it sweetly charges my mind and energy. It's always about 9 AM when I light this; the day is started and all my cylinders are firing. "Tobacco + Bayleaf" is exquisitely accessible as a spellcasting tool. I never tire of it.

So is this article just a not-very-cleverly-disguised advertisement for these two candles? Not at all. Rather, I'm hoping that you'll see scented candles with specific colors as a potential way of enhancing your work by enjoying a scent you love while getting down to business. Not that unscented spell candles don't get the job done—I use them all the time.

But I'm hoping you'll find your own mind-stirring, senses-blowing waxy torch or two to enhance the intent that vibrates inside of you and sparks your magic.

Mutable

Gabriela Faria

I harvest the dimming light in my arms,

whole sheaves of it like wheat.

She's more tempered than the last, the Virgo sun. Doesn't roar her way

inside. She parts the curtains and my face ripens

for her kissing.

The debris of the waning season

slides right off my bones—weightless gold

pouring into skin, shifting

my body into tender resin

before I wake in the bedding

of quiet life.

Acron Maple Syrup Cookies

Wai Mei Wong



There are many types of acorns. All are edible. Though I prefer Bur Oak and White Oak for their sweeter flavour. The recipe below includes the process of making acorn meal, and leaching the tannins—a bitter compound that may cause an upset stomach and negatively affect nutrient absorption. This recipe is easy to make but requires patience. I thank Mother Nature here for these delicious gifts in Autumn. I hope you enjoy these cookies as well. They are perfect for a cup of tea in the morning.

Ingredients: (makes 24 cookies)
200 grams All Purpose Flour
200 grams Acorn Meal
150 grams Butter, cold, cubed
⅓ cup Maple Syrup
¼ cup Brown Sugar
¼ teaspoon Salt

Process:
1. To make the acorn meal, rinse the acorns under running water. Crack the nuts open and discard the shells.
2. In a blender, fill ⅓ with acorn flesh along with water. Process it until the mixture becomes smooth. Pour the mixture into a doubled cheesecloth or an old t-shirt. Tighten the cheesecloth, then squeeze out the yellow milky liquid. It contains tannins and tastes bitter; we want to rid it as much as possible.
3. Keeping the cheesecloth tightened, hold it under running water. Repeatedly squeeze the bag, until the milky liquid runs clear.
4. Add the rinsed acorn meal in a non-stick pan. On medium heat, toast it until it becomes totally dry, fragrant, and slightly brown. Turn off the heat. Let the acorn meal cool to room temperature. 5. To make the cookies, pre-heat the oven at 350F/ 180C.
6. Combine flour and acorn meal.
7. Add cold butter cubes and salt. Using fingertips, rub to combine everything until the butter becomes pea size.
8. Add maple syrup. Roll a few times just to form the mixture into a dough; over mixing it will result in doughy cookies.
9. Divide the dough into balls, about 35 grams each. Slightly flatten them on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Keep each 2 cm apart.
10. Bake for 15 minutes. Remove the tray from the oven. Let the cookies cool for 10 minutes before transferring them to a rack. They can be stored up to a week in an airtight container.

coffee Divination

Bailey Loveless

- II [the high priestess] shots of espresso brewed from a precise XVIII [the moon] grams of coffee
- a generous spoonful of honey
- fresh milk
- flavor syrup
- a candle and flame
- a spoon
- a drinking vessel

while the espresso brews, place the candle, flickering with flame like [the sun], in the windowsill, then greet the home, “good morning.” add honey and syrup to a drinking vessel of your choice. when the espresso is finished, pour the earthy, frothy bean juice into the vessel. stir three times counter-moonwise to disrupt the cycle of sleep still clinging to the eyelids. then stir moonwise till honey and syrup and coffee are mixed. open your eyes—the seeing eyes and the eyes of the void—then add milk. watch as the darkness of the coffee rises upon meeting the pallor of the milk into rapid blooms of caramel. annotate the first shape you see. offer the coffee grinds to the house or to the worms. then drink, succor, awaken, and enjoy.

***

september 2nd
portent: a spiral

a spiral for a spiral, my body is unraveling. i feel so old, and also so child-like. frailty feels like short circuiting, vaguely like dying. circling down to the center of my nervous system, where i can repeat the spiral again.

***

september 24th
portent: III scratches, III stalks of wheat, I watering can

three small things will hurt today. three nourishing things will grow today. water accordingly.

***

september 25th
portent: a stag in the rain, antlers drawn forward

am i actually needing to fight and be on the offensive, or am i trying too hard to plow through?
to fight the rain is futile.

also, perhaps i will receive deer or other visitors in the garden today.

***

september 27th
portent: a hand reaching down

visit at the hospital today. swallow your pride. take the help.

The Persimmons Were Almost Too Ripe

Pravy Jha

My mother put persimmons
in a bowl on the kitchen table
and told me not to touch them yet.

They needed another day.

This was how we understood time
when I was small:

not clocks,
not calendars,

but fruit becoming soft enough
to bruise beneath a thumb.

I waited.

Outside, the evening turned gold
in that cheap, temporary way
October has of making everything
look forgiven.

The marigolds had begun
to brown at the edges.

Someone nearby was burning leaves.

I remember thinking
that the whole neighbourhood
smelled like something ending.

Years later, I understand
what my mother meant by waiting.

There are things you cannot hurry
without ruining them.

A fruit.
A grief.
A daughter becoming old enough
to understand her mother
as a woman who was once a girl.

The persimmons stayed on the table
until they were nearly too soft to eat.

I cut one open.

It was sweeter than I expected.

Almost unbearably so.

I ate it standing at the counter,
juice running down my wrist,
and suddenly remembered
how my mother used to wipe my face
with the corner of her sari
when I was too busy crying
to notice I had made a mess.

I wanted to call her.

Instead I washed the knife.

There are evenings
when love is not a phone call.

It is the fruit you eat
before it goes bad.

It is the hand you remember
after it has left your face.

It is knowing
that sweetness has an expiration date

and eating anyway.

Churchyard

Hannah Tomes



Ghosts

Dakota Kitchen

There is goldenrod in a vase
and ghosts at our table.
We light the last honey coloured candle
before the sun,
exchanges her vows
and watch as the cold turns everything outside
to brown dust.
I think
I can hear my grandmother’s voice

The ghosts
eat dinner with us,
help us finish the crossword,
wash our hair.
We show them photographs
and ask so many questions
there can be no answers to.
But it doesn't matter
we are like children again
and the candle is almost out.

Autumn Asylum

Pat Murphy McClelland

I am young in this memory, four, five at most.

The red and gold day smells of bark, leaf, and sap; the autumn air so crisp it feels metallic. Sunlight shimmers in lacy patches through the waning leaves of the tall oak that stands in front of my childhood home on Greenwood Street in New Haven, Connecticut. Folklore says the oak was once called "King of the Greenwood." I wonder if New Haven city planners knew this when long ago they christened my oak-bordered street.

At the foot of the oak, fallen leaves have settled into brown and red piles that rustle and swirl when fall winds rise in late afternoon. Tawny acorns, shiny elongated buttons wearing brown tweed caps, carpet the sidewalk between the oak tree and the two-story house where I live.

In front of the house, to one side, is a small black patch of earth surrounded on three sides by bristly green hedges dotted with red berries. I don't remember how and when I took possession of this small secluded space. But I do recall rejoicing it was mine for the taking, for escaping the tumult of large family life; and I remember re-imagining it into my version of the radiant secret garden that bloomed in one of my favorite childhood stories.

I spend lots of time in my solitary sanctuary when I want to pass the time imagining I am invisible, trying to "catch and cage the fairies and the elves," as William Blake characterized a child's pretending.

In its center a vast white hydrangea bush, large enough to sit beneath, rises toward the sun and sky. My snowball tree, I call it. In the cooler nights and shorter days of autumn the hydrangea bush appears to snow, dropping small round petals in a white circle on the black earth.

Most days, when I'm free from family stuff, I slip through the gap in the hedges at the house side of this propitious place and enter the haven where I host tea parties for my rag dolls, the neighborhood calico cat without a tail, and the curious squirrels who drop by to forage for acorns I bury in shallow furrows beneath the snowball tree. Acorns are the primary props in these affairs, variously serving as loaves of fresh-baked fairy bread, or magical scones and muffins. Their caps serve as my porridge bowls and tea cups.

Mostly, I merely sit beneath the snowball tree, day dreaming and listening to the plop of acorns, the rustle of leaves, and the footsteps and snatches of conversations of passers-by beyond my hedgerow walls. Musing about the utility of acorns; compiling possible futures.

When I think back on these rapt moments, all impulse to rue my lot as a lonely child vanishes when I recall an insight of Herman Hesse I jotted down long ago: "Solitude is not chosen, any more than destiny is chosen. Solitude comes to us if we have within us the magic stone that attracts destiny."

Time

N.T. Brown

Ten seasons have passed
since I've had you,
and soon the air will change again
from sultry to crisp,
from Jurassic storms
to swirling leaves.
The alligators will bury themselves
in cocoons of mud
while the wrens return
with their strangely human calls:
virginia virginia virginia,
jeopardy jeopardy jeopardy.

And what have those seasons
done to you, my love?
Did you assail them like Miniver Cheevy,
or sing them like Tom Bombadil?
My beard has more salt now than pepper,
my chin has grown white,
the ravens have stamped their footprints
around my eyes.
And still I wander like a scarecrow
come down from his perch,
leaking straw across the fields
as I search for you,
as I roam through seasons
that roll over me
like endless empty waves.

Fertile Imagination

Rebecca Clifford

The heady aroma of manure. Caustic when fresh;
well rotted*, it's better'n snuff.*
Good for th' t'maters.

There's 'at ol' pick-up crrrawlin' the road…
(the whine of a failing fan belt)

Druzzy bees, blue-black wasps bang against the glass
that ticktack on the pane, an impatient rap - wanting in
or through

A heron glides in to wade, prehistoric
fer small fry 'n' frogs

Fair light glints off the ripples purling
against a shadowed bank.

Swallows chitter in the gutters,
deer clamber the outcrop,
someone's hound sports about the meadows

reminds me of kids in the yard…
all city/bound now,
fergettin' their Da 'n' the farm

when all I wanna do is give 'em the shirt off my back.

There'll come a time when I'll not be well enough,
not be fit enough t' manage…

These days I jest wanna set m'self down on th' porch
'n' dream of the geese
chevronin' south…

How to Bring Your Soul Back to Life: Spiced Persian-Fusion Drinking Chocolate

Ariana Akbari

If you're like me, sometimes your soul can refuse to come forward to the living plane for a variety of reasons: energetically drained, energetically afraid of bad vibes in the air, and maybe also hormonal changes.

If this happens, I have one sure-fire way to at least mostly coax it back to life.

Ingredients:
- A pinch of saffron (do not use if pregnant or expecting to become pregnant) - Allspice or cloves (powdered)
- Cardamom (powdered)
- Chocolate (not the powdered hot chocolate BS – needs to be real chocolate; I buy mine from a niche purveyor that I am currently gatekeeping in the name of reducing capitalist fixation but this can (likely) be made by literally grating up your favorite chocolate bars – I recommend a mix of milk chocolate and dark chocolate)
- Honey (optional)
- Non-dairy heavy whipping cream (optional)
- Nutmeg (powdered)

- Soymilk (Soymilk has protein and is the OG plantmilk – oat milk's sugar or almond milk's waterness will not make this how it should be. Regular milk makes me uncomfortable most times as a concept. Coconut milk could in rare occasions be used as a substitute but is not preferred. Thank you for coming to my TED talk.)
- Water

Materials:
- Electric whisk
- Mortar and pestle
- Microwave or stovetop and pan or kettle
- Two mugs / cups (heat-safe)

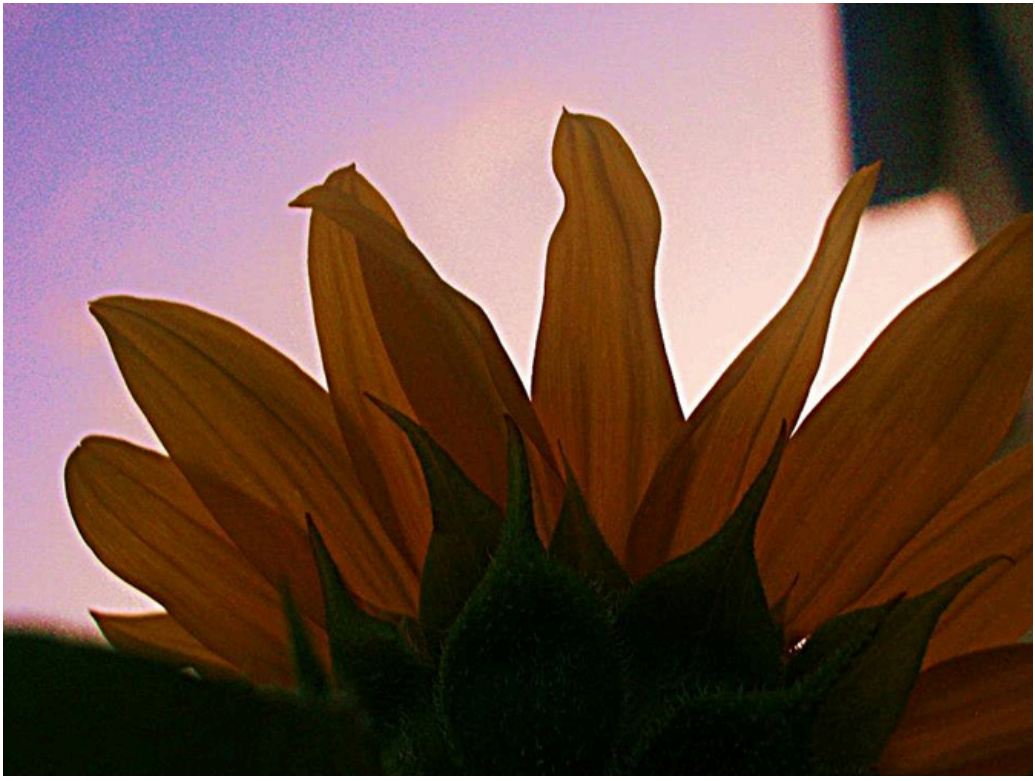
Instructions:
Look, I'm lazy (and/or fatigued when I'm making this) so I go for a 2-at-once approach.

1) Heat a pot of water or a kettle filled with water until boiling.
2) Simultaneously microwave half of a generous mug of soymilk (or other milks, if you dare stray from my plant-based path of righteousness) for 1.5-2 minutes.
3) Grind a pinch of saffron strands in your mortar and pestle.
4) Put the ground saffron in your 2nd cup.
5) Pour the boiling water into the ground saffron cup and let steep for at least 10 minutes.

6) Put a significant amount of chocolate shreds into your heated plant milk and whisk until dissolved and frothy.
7) Add in half of your cup of the saffron tea (saffron can cause happiness in small quantities and in large quantities can technically be toxic), as well as pinches of the nutmeg, cardamom, and allspice/cloves.
8) Whisk again,
9) Optionally, top with a cold cream – I make mine with a non-dairy whipping cream and honey, whisked.
10) Serve with a spoon and let your soul revive!

Golden Hour

Clarabelle Miray Fields



This autumn flourishes

Loralee Clark

This autumn flourishes	like a forked tongue	yellow crownbeard reaches	goldenrod lifts and dances	their seeds
no matter meadow or pot	speaking softly	promising the future	like life from the aether	propagate hundreds more
for all the ecosystem	bursting with the past	sprouting pious	speaking devoutly	fundamental for caterpillars to feast
for mothers laying promises spherical, ovate, conical	announcement for eradicating insect apocalypse	season after season	signaling to wriggling, green larva	sacrificing themselves
cocooning	away from predators: us, mostly	pupa's soft bodies	filled with carotenoids	essential for baby birds.

Note for the reader: This poem is collaborative; it can be as long or short as you like. It can read forward, backward, linearly, diagonally, non-linearly or in a spiral. This poem is ours to write together, just as it is our job to make changes in our own ecosystems, together.

Golden Torso

Amanda Yskamp



Bathed in Molten Gold: The Divine Comedy, live onstage in Norwich's LCR June 27th 2026

Andrew Kolarik

Outside the venue, the sun hangs low in the sky, and reddish light washes over the fields and trees and lake below. Stepping within, the crowd is packed in close together for a sold-out show, and the air is stifling in the stygian gloom of Norwich's LCR. This is the kind of evil heat that The Divine Comedy, dressed immaculately in black, step into when they take to the stage. The crowd roars with delight. Seen in live performance, The Divine Comedy are always excellent. But there is something about the suffocating heat, the time of year, the intimacy of the venue and the pervasive cave-like darkness that make tonight's performance different. The songs evoke 30 years of memories, sweet and poignant, and there is the impression that things have turned a corner; the songs will not be the same anymore. Soon the temperature will cool, and there would not be this weird frantic yearning that completely changes the feel of the proceedings. Tonight, they are fighting for it, and the reward is a completely distinct feel to the show. The strange atmosphere and frenetic energy of the band give a vivid and colourful expression to the music, making the songs feel like dark velvet.

The Divine Comedy, fronted by Neil Hannon, are probably best known for songs like the joyous *National Express*, or *Songs of Love*, the theme of the beloved television show *Father Ted*.

The tour is promoting the new album *Rainy Sunday Afternoon*, and celebrating 30 years since the release of their breakthrough album *Casanova*, which was about being young and carefree. Years later, *Rainy Sunday Afternoon* is about things drawing to a close. *The Last Time I Saw the Old Man* is about Neil losing his father to dementia. *Invisible Thread* is about leaving. With a streak of songs of an orchestral bent, a few years ago they were exquisitely suited to playing beneath the proscenium arch in a vast theatre of epic and fading beauty, or in the breezy summer sunlight illuminating the drawing room of a stately home. But now they are at their best here, in the intimate confines of the LCR, drenched in perpetual, sweaty darkness and torpid heat, periodically bathed in light that glows like molten gold. The smoke machine is on full blast, and a strategically placed fan blows the smoke into weird shapes around Neil as he sings. When the lights drench the stage in red, the place resembles some corner of Pandemonium, which segues nicely into the band's rendition of *Mar-a-Lago by the Sea*, a song that imagines them playing a purgatorial residency. The audience is visibly hungry for the music, and thirsty, in the hot little venue. A drinks trolley is wheeled onto the stage, and Neil makes each band member a lovely looking, cool drink (this also serves as a nice way to introduce the band to the audience). When he holds up a Martini glass, the stage lights make it glow an ethereal blue, and there is a collective gasp of salivation among the audience. A similar thing happens when Neil serves a can of something alcoholic to the bass player.

He holds it up to the microphone, so the audience can hear the satisfying cracking sound of the can being opened. You can almost see the audience drool.

With the easy, effortless chatty humour of Neil ("after this we're off for a communal ice bath!"), the unrelenting energy of the music, and the big smiles of the band, it is sometimes easy to miss the sheer scope and breadth of the songs, which have evolved from lighter beginnings to explore stranger material. *Neapolitan Girl* deals with prostitution as a means of survival in devastated, war-torn Naples. *You'll Never Work In This Town Again* is about being trapped in a web of machines and algorithms. *Achilles*, the first single from the new album, is inspired by the First World War poet Patrick Shaw-Stewart. The song is a work of impatient drive and haunting beauty, with its alien, gothic, monkish backing. The *Casanova*-era sparkling, enduring pop pleasure of *Something for the Weekend*, featuring The Divine Comedy's trademark galloping drumbeat, contrasts with the more recent, mysterious and atmospheric *Bang Goes the Knighthood*, describing a member of the British gentry descending the steps of an illicit club affording forbidden thrills beneath the heels of a high-class dominatrix. The hungry thrill comes from the possibility of being caught, and losing everything ("…bang goes the knighthood, the wife and career"), but the character is desperate to be made to feel something instead of nothing. It is interesting how Neil jokingly distances himself from interest in the subject matter onstage, while coiling the microphone cable into a whip to accentuate the lyrical content.

It remains one of the high points of the Divine Comedy's setlist, and the one for which Neil gives the most impassioned performance. In popular music, only *Venus in Furs* by The Velvet Underground comes close to the weird ecstasy and release of this one.

What a pleasure to see The Divine Comedy at the height of their powers. It is a revelation to see what the sweat and the heat and the darkness does to their performance, pushing them harder and giving a different slant to the songs. Sweat is constantly pouring off Neil, Tosh, Marian and the others, and they are laughing and joking with each other and the audience and playing at their best. They come across as good friends, including the slim stagehand Alastair with his floppy grey hair, personally thanked by Neil, that is ever present to fan them and keep the heat from wrecking the tuning of the instruments. The comradeship and adverse conditions serve to bring out the texture, depth and richness of the songs, making them even more lurid and brighter, so that tonight is a memorably different experience from their live concerts in more comfortable environments. It is a reminder that a band can surprise you with an unusual and unexpected performance, that can only ever be experienced live. You can listen to the records, or hear them on the radio, but you can't see and feel the sweat, or take in the dark thrill of emotion and the passion of the players when they are under pressure. Maybe the wheel has turned, and the songs will never be the same again. There will be no more joyful industrial techno overlays on songs, just for a laugh, from the days of *I've Been to A Marvellous Party*.

The song arrangements are being drawn back to their orchestral origins, but deeper and still buoyant. There is hunger there, and new realms to delve into and discover. Splendid, absolutely splendid.



MALINGER

Sameer Saklani

desultory we wandered
woolgathering
mind in Daedalus clouds

suffering existence
in the dimensional sense

blackdressed mother
sits heavy
on this puerile heart

father
i don’t think i know you

a true thought often unthought

often in the cool of Autumn
we feel free from guilt of sin

soon sit with sag
and sudden gray

gasp:

my,
how as if no middle
felt

Where eternity seems unable to become dark.

Nasta Martyn



Crepuscle I Borrow

Hannan Khan

morn runs toward morrow's wallow
i behold the bloody horizon's sallow
each light i fancied must fade & follow
what sears in joy must sear in hollow

yesterday yellows in yearnings' glass
its aurum liquefies as damned hours pass
i graze its ghosts through meadowed mass
& majestically kiss the bloom that will not last

each cockcrow becomes crepuscle i borrow
borrowed luminescence burns into yarrow
the cardium rehashes its doomed marrow
i live to lose what i cognize tomorrow

radiant roses rise then rot in fucking race
their redolence haunts the eden's face
i christen their death a lover's place
& mourn the blossom i can't grace

stay, stay, stay — though time betrays
i trace your sigh through dying days
each pulse chants what fate conveys
a promise that tremors yet obeys

i love the luring loss; the lost in loving
the whisper; the wound; the unbecoming
silent zvezdani collapse in secret summing
what deceases in dark is still worth numbing

clock’s languid hands caress the cool air
each tick an invocation, each to despair
i mirror pantheons who engineer repair
by breaking hearts too downy to bear

so let the cursed morn run toward barrow
i’m the goddamn ash that loves its furrow
what perishes today propels again in harrow
& the freakish time genuflects to its sorrow

Ghost shuffle

Annick Cottom



What's left

Anna Gresham

I sit with the sunset like a dying friend, inhaling the smoke of wildfires. She is resigned to her fate; only my eyes bear the trails of tears. New Mexico dust highlights their path. She knows how to put on a brave face, how to paint the bubbling clouds in cotton candy pink and orange, how to lengthen the shadows over the mountains. She hugs me as I weep, comforts me through her pain. Her winds, perfumed with geosmin, the musty smell of rain mixing with burning timber, brush my hair from my sticky cheeks. She is, it seems, the only one willing to endure my sadness.

I knew her death would come long ago, hopping from log to log in the park as words like "global warming," and "climate change" floated out my parents' mouths. I knew what the words meant, but what they meant for me was still elusive. In college, studying the science of the graphs, the pollutants in the air and soil and water, and the energy it took to keep our cities moving, I could see that the damage was done. The runes spoke in numbers whose twisted forms foretold a future, abstract and distant.

I got to know her better in the mountains, teaching children to ski, living in my car between the pines, and scaling the summer peaks. I sat with her burbling creeks and swam in her cool lakes, and we became friends. For a moment, the numbers and the future settled into a dull hum behind our time together.

The hum grew louder:
Rain on the chairlift in February.
Smoke in every mountain town I saw.
My favorite camping spot burned.
Reservoirs dried up.

Finally, I could see that she was dying, the concept was no longer an abstraction or a question of why I should care; I was losing a friend. I *am* losing a friend. More than how her bouts of drought and floods affect our food supply, or how the heat may take us out, some*one* dies.

She doesn't ask for much in her final years. She wants company. She wants to be seen and enjoyed the way she always has been. She offers the burning of her forests, her ephemeral nature, as a reminder to elevate the time that we have left with her. She offers the sunsets as a display of beauty before the day's end. She offers space to be sad. She offers the opportunity for a full range of emotion, truth and presence in the world we inhabit. She offers a reason to stop delaying through-hikes and ski trips and nights under the stars of an endangered canyon. She offers a moment to sit with her one last time. The bittersweet tones are not to take away from the experience, but to add to it.

As much as I am angry, and as much as I mourn the death the outdoors that taught me everything I know, I'm also lucky to see the value in what's left. After all, the final raspberry of the summer is the sweetest.

"It's not enough to fight for the land, it's even more important to enjoy it while you can, while its still here."
-Edward Abbey

AFTERGLOW

Virgil Freier

as the moon ascends into the sky,
former flames flicker ; the forgotten
try ; the gravedigger collapses into
eroding dirt ; an egg cracks open &
releases itself .

God, do you still listen to
leftovers ? (& again , the
open mouth ,
wishing for rain .)

Ginger Beech

Jane Bonney



They Tell me About God

Kait Quinn

They tell me about god,
I tell them about you.
How we make wings
of clouds and lie down
like foxes under October's
broken chandelier.

We count
falling ginkgos, red-backed
squirrels, meteors on honey
dipped fingers.

With autumn's kiss,
the world shutters to sleep,
and we drink what nectar's
left of a cold sunset.
We gorge ourselves sick on the dark
meat of midnight. We cast all
our wishes on stars of ginger.

A Soft And Beautiful Sadness

Michael Raine

The jarrah of the table was a deep orange, the colour of the last light of day. I looked up at the last light now, gilding the grand canopies of the eucalypts gold. The air outside was cooling quickly. I held my mug of tea in both hands but the heat was too sharp and I set it back down. There was nothing in between the hot and cold, not yet.

My body ached from the exertion of the day. I could still feel the weight of my end of the furniture, carrying it up those stairs. I could still feel the pressure in my shoulder from the old couch that was now my daughter's, the awkward angle to get it through the door of that flat. I could still see the excitement in her eyes, and also the flash of something when I had said goodbye, when my day's work was done.

A trio of white cockatoos arced through the sky, glowing with the golden orange of sunset. I watched them, their wings extended, drinking in the light, curling into a turn towards the horizon. And then they were gone.

My eyes were drawn to the photo album I'd brought out with me, sitting next to my tea on the outdoor table. The light was fading as I opened to the first page. Baby photos. My daughter. Twenty years ago. Soon it would be too dark to see the photos clearly, but now I turned the pages slowly. The smile on her baby face, a joy fully felt. I realised I was smiling too. Time turned fast with the pages, here she was a toddler, then older already, hair longer.

But then there was a gap, a hole, a time of heaviness and loss. A time that was not to be captured by a camera. Then she was older and the next smile was weathered.

I caught movement in the sky and watched a pair of wrens, darting from branch to branch, their bodies streamlined, wet with the wind. I opened my face towards the sky for a long moment. The sky was open, its light softly waning. The orange glowing on the mass of gum leaves was soft and weakening, but still there, still beautiful. I watched the movements of the leaves in the breeze, moving together, but each also alone.

All those years it had been my daughter and I. Just us two. Us two and the hole that was there when her mother, my wife, had passed away. That hole had weight, a weight commensurate with my wife's love for us and our love for her.

How could a hole be so heavy?

The weight of that hole did not dissipate with time, but it grew softer with familiarity.

I remade a world for my daughter. Our world. Routines, spaghetti nights, movie nights. Small traditions, old giving way to new as she grew.

And after today, another, bigger beginning.

Maybe for me, a much bigger ending.

I rubbed at my shoulder, suddenly distracted by a pain, and skipped to the last pages in the album. She was still young here, but old enough to see the face I watched this morning as she went over the logistics of the move with a fresh brewed coffee, leaning against the kitchen bench exactly the way her mother used to.

Her face in the picture, a girl of about eleven, had that look, that ownership of life already. The smile, small, barely there, coy and dancing with the corners of her mouth. My face now both smiling and aching.

I reached for my phone and sent a short message, *Settling in okay? Did you get the bed together okay?*

I imagined her, sitting on the carpet, among the boxes, eating take-away with her friend-now-flatmate. Had they unpacked the plates or would they be eating from the take-away containers? I reached for my mug, feeling for its warmth. Cold too quickly, but I drank some anyway. The light faded a shade frailer.

I thought about the sun.

Its light took eight minutes and twenty seconds to reach us through the expanse of space.

I saw soft light on leaves and realised that, with those eight minutes, the sun, at this moment, was already gone.

Inside/outside

Cheryl Caesar





What Heaven Allows

Darius Phelps

Water has never believed in goodbye.
It evaporates, becomes cloud, returns as rain,
enters rivers that spend their whole lives
remembering an ocean they have never seen.
I think love obeys the same physics.

There are mornings when your name
moves through me like a current
beneath still water, invisible until the light catches it.

I no longer ask heaven to return you.
I ask only that wherever you are,
the same rain has learned your shoulders.

That somewhere, a tide is carrying
our separate griefs toward the same shore.

Perhaps this is all heaven allows:
not the undoing of distance, but
the quiet miracle of discovering
that nothing the heart has loved
is ever truly lost—
only returned to
another body of water.

THE BOY

Howard Marsee

From his seat on the high porch, the boy knew there would be rain. Where the mountain sloped down into the hollow, the dull-green underside of the Sycamore leaves curled upward in the breeze, and he felt a coolness wash across his face. His family had prayed for rain. Without it there would be no water for the garden this summer and, without the garden, little food for the winter. His father was out of work again and in two days would leave for Detroit to find a job in the automobile factories. It was 1953 in the Cumberland Mountains, and he wasn't the only man trekking north in search of survival. Families without an employed bread winner or garden stood in long lines for government commodities: peanut butter, flour, canned beans, and imitation butter that had to be colored with little packets of food dye.

With his father in Detroit, Adam, his mother, and his young sister would have to plant and tend their hillside garden. To water the rows of tomatoes, corn, squash, potatoes, and beans, they would need to carry buckets of water from their hand-pumped well to the field. The well was almost dry, providing just enough for cooking and drinking. With enough rain, the well would replenish, and they just might get by.

"Adam, looks like it'll rain some." His father walked up the steps to the porch. The house clung to the side of a steep hill, and the porch seemed suspended in space over the hillside's hardscrabble slope.

"I hope it does, poppa."

"Think you can operate the plow, or should I see if Mr. Slocum will plow for us?" Adam had just turned twelve and, although he had helped his father plow the steep hillside last year, walking behind the mule to plow a few furrows, he had never harnessed the mule or attached the plow by himself.

"I think so."

"Tell you what, I'll get Mr. Slocum to harness up the mule and set the plow. He won't mind, and that ought to help."

"We'll get by poppa." Adam sensed the concern in his father's voice, and he wanted somehow to reassure him, to reassure himself.

He was beginning to understand the toll exacted by privation. Each day he saw in his father's face the weariness and desperation that comes with "just getting by." This made his father harsh and uncompromising. He demanded much of his family because the world demanded much of him. He lived on an edge with no room for error.

"You'll need to watch for large rocks that might break the plow. Remember the big one down near the road. We can't afford to repair Mr. Slocum's plow--and remember to rest the mule often. Can you do that?"

"Yes, poppa."

Adam resented his father's ever recurring concern for things, his constant anticipation of future catastrophes. They left in Adam's stomach a knot that would not go away. Often, he woke in the night, the fear of disappointing his father beading in sweat on his forehead, the dread of failure pushing hard on his chest and making it difficult to breathe.

"This summer, you'll have to be the man around here. When the crop is in, you'll need to help your mother with the canning. Stack the potatoes with straw in the cellar.

Make sure the chickens are locked in at night; we don't want the fox to get any of them."

The next morning Adam rose early. It was summer, and there was no school, but he had chores to do. He had to draw water from the well for cooking, clean yesterday's ashes from the coal-burning cook stove, collect yesterday's eggs, and feed the chickens. Above all, he had to feed the chickens and release them from their coop to forage free during the day. This year, they would provide the only meat the family would eat. Last year they had raised and slaughtered a hog, but this year there had been no money to buy a pig.

After breakfast, his father walked to town to buy lard and flour. He had sold their car to buy groceries and a bus ticket to Detroit. His father would probably spend the morning in the town square visiting with friends. Adam finished his chores and walked with his dog, Oscar, into the forest behind the house. He had named Oscar for the neighbor who gave him the dog as a puppy two years ago. The neighbor said he was a German Shepard and Collie mix, but no one knew for sure. He followed Adam wherever he went.

Once in the forest, Adam felt free. It was as if the house and the garden, his father, and the voices that said, "you must do more," ceased to exist. He sat for a long time in a deep bed of ferns, his back against a black walnut tree and Oscar's head across his feet. A squirrel scampered down a nearby Poplar, and Oscar ran barking after it. Adam wished he had brought his slingshot. He had never killed a squirrel with the slingshot, but he dreamed of being a hunter with Oscar beside him.

He got up from the fern bed and the two of them spent the next hour just walking. They walked as far as Clear Lake, where Adam skipped stones across the water and then returned home.

Behind the house, his sister was playing with a half dozen newly hatched chicks. Yellow, soft and fluffy, they scurried across the bare earth of the yard, the hen close by and scratching in the dirt. His sister chased after them.

"Adam, help me catch one."

"You shouldn't mess with them."

"But I just want to hold one."

"The hen will peck you." He wanted to scare her.

"No, she won't, and they're so soft."

Adam didn't see any harm, and he picked up the nearby water pail. He'd put the pail over a chick and give it to his sister. He began to chase first one and then another, but they were quicker than he expected. Suddenly, he felt something under his foot. It gave way in a sickening crunch. In his haste to catch one chick, he had stepped on another.

"Adam, you killed one." His sister's voice was shrill and frightened.

Adam picked up the chick, and it did not move in his hand. Adam felt the old, familiar knot in his stomach. It pressed against the walls of his chest and squeezed his lungs. Once grown, this chick would have provided two meals for the family. His father would punish him, but worse still, his father would leave for Detroit fearful that Adam could not be relied on in his absence, doubting that Adam was man enough to tend the garden. Sweat beaded on Adam's forehead. A fear worse than he had ever known swept over him.

His sister sensed his panic and realized her own complicity in the chick's death. "Tell poppa the dog did it."

"Yes," Adam thought, "his father would not punish Oscar. His father's confidence in Adam would not suffer."

His mother came into the yard. She had heard his sister's cry. "What's happened?"

Adam extended his hand with the dead chick.

"Oscar killed the chick," wailed his sister.

Adam wanted to say "No," but his voice failed him. The knot in his stomach twisted tighter inside him.

"We'll have to tell your father," said his mother. "Go bury the chick."

That evening, after they had eaten dinner, his mother told his father about the chick. Adam from the front porch heard his mother and father talk.

"Oscar, has never killed a chicken before, has he?"

"No," said his mother.

"We can't to afford to have a dog that kills chickens."

"Couldn't you punish him?"

"This long after, he wouldn't know why I was punishing him. Anyway, once a dog has killed chickens, it's hard to break them of the habit."

"Adam."

Adam heard his father call him and came inside.

Adam, we going to have to get rid of Oscar. I suspect the Sowders family across the mountain will take him. That's far enough that he won't come back."

Adam wanted desperately to say "No," to tell him that he had killed the chick, but his tongue had somehow gotten stuck to the roof of his mouth. The knot that had never gone away twisted more tightly.

But poppa, he won't do it again. It was just an accident."

"That don't matter. Once he's killed, he'll do it again."

His sister sat in the corner of the room, saying nothing. Would she speak up and tell the truth? If she did, then Adam would be doubly damned. Not only had he killed the chick, but then he had lied. His sister sat in silence.

That night Adam could not sleep, and the next morning his father and Oscar were gone. It was not until mid-morning that his father returned alone.

"The Sowders were glad to take him. They'll provide a good home, and they don't raise chickens." Adam was relieved, but there was still an emptiness that gnawed at him. The next day, Adam's father left for Detroit.

Summer passed. Adam plowed the hillside with Mr. Slocum's help. Adam, his mother and sister tended the garden. The rain was not plentiful, but they got by. Caterpillars had damaged much of the corn. His father sent money home so that his mother could buy canning supplies for the fall harvest, but the money wasn't much. His father had living expenses in Detroit.

His father came home for a week in September, and they ate chicken and vegetables from the garden. His father praised him for the work of the summer. Mr. Slocum had told his father that Adam plowed well. Adam had not forgotten Oscar. He missed the forays into the forest and Oscar's head on his feet. He went into the forest less often than before, and when he did, the old knot came back in his stomach.

Two days after his return, his father went into town. When got home in the late afternoon, he was silent. He said little until dinner.

“I ran into Lem Sowders at the store.” He stopped eating and paused for what seemed like a long time. Oscar got killed by the coal train. Three weeks ago.”

Adam was in turn numb and sick. He left the table and went out onto the porch. His father did not follow. The Sowders family lived near a railroad line that served the Two Sisters coal mine. Adam tried to envision how it happened, but he could only see Oscar’s head on his feet and then under the wheels of the train. Tears welled up in his eyes as he stared down the hill to the creek where he, with Oscar, chased crayfish last summer.

After three days, Adam’s father returned to Detroit. Adam walked into the forest, but not with the same anticipation as before. Would he ever be able to tell his father about his lie or would it consume him for the rest of his life? His sister had been so young that she may have forgotten. He walked to Clear Lake and skipped stones across the water. He knew—the old knot in his stomach would never go away.

The End

Enshrouded

Angela Patera



A SWEATER IS A FRIEND

Nicole MacDougall

Glamour magic is a way to imbue ritual and magic into everyday activities like getting dressed. In addition, caring for the items we have can be a gentle, radical act in a capitalist world that wants us to buy and discard items quickly. You can help counter the destructive energy of fast fashion by tending, mending and caring for your clothes.

For this spell, pick a sweater or any other cozy garment you like to wear. A blanket would also work. Say the following words and then put on your sweater:

Cloth of softness
Thread of strong weave
Protection & safety
I ask to receive
Shelter my heart
And keep me warm
Guard my being
Against incoming storms
For this hollowed haven
Deep gratitude I send
And promise to cherish you
As a dear, steadfast friend

Perfume Spell/Daily Fragrance Ritual

Emily De Armas

Perfume Spell

Fragrance is a potent spell. Each perfume is crafted from notes, all of which carry symbolism and meaning. They say Cleopatra used fragrance strategically as a tool to create scented environments, foster favorable negotiations, and anoint her in divinity.

You too, can use perfume as a daily spell.

Below are some associations with various fragrance notes:

- Rose: playfulness, power, glamour, love
- Jasmine: mystery, passion, opulence, beginnings
- Vanilla: comfort, nostalgia, allure, wealth
- Citrus: clarity, focus, energy, awakening
- Incense: spirituality, introspection, sanctity, peace
- Woods: grounding, stability, wisdom, confidence
- Musk: coziness, cleanliness, purity, attraction
- Patchouli: earthiness, transmutation, vitality, freedom

Think about the fragrances you own and what they represent. Scan your life experience, preferences, and memory to create your own associations with specific notes.

Daily Fragrance Ritual:

Decide what you need today. Is it confidence, calm, clarity, power, or seduction?

Choose a fragrance that suits your needs. Let the notes, the bottle design, and the name of the fragrance guide you.

Assign talismanic power to your fragrance. Imagine your fragrance as a vehicle of embodiment.

Visualize what you want the fragrance to impart. Spray the fragrance on your wrists and body, shrouding yourself in the olfactory spell of your choosing. Throughout the day, when you need a dose of its properties, breathe the scent deeply.

The juice inside the bottle is magic. Its meaning is a secret language between you and the universe.

End of Season Elderberry & Rose Syrup

Ashley Rose

As seasons change and the harvest wanes, our bodies often need a little boost of magic to help ease the transition. This syrup combines the magical properties of elderberry, cinnamon and rose, leading to prosperity and emotional well-being during the autumn season.

1 cup dried Elderberries, *for protection*
2 cinnamon sticks, *for prosperity*
½ cup dried rose petal, *for love and emotional health*
2 cups water
½ cup honey (per cup of liquid remaining), *for harmony*

Instructions

- Add elderberries and water to a pot, bring to a boil. Imagine their protective properties as they begin to swirl in the water.
- Once boiling, turn down heat to simmer and add cinnamon sticks. Imagine the prosperity you wish to conjure during the coming season.
- Simmer for 20 minutes stirring in your intentions for fall.
- Add in rose petals, noting their loving energy and allowing them to sweeten the scent of the concoction.

- Simmer for 10 more minutes, allowing yourself to reminisce on the past season in all its challenges and successes.
- Remove from heat and strain into a heat-safe bowl or cauldron. Allow to cool slightly.
- Add in ½ cup of honey for each cup of liquid remaining, stirring well to mix.
- After cooling completely, your syrup is ready to use. It should be kept in the fridge, and will stay fresh for a couple of weeks. A quick stir or shake will help with any separation before use.

To enjoy: I personally take two spoonfuls each morning to reinvigorate my intentions, but it can also be used as you would your favorite syrups: mixed in water or juice, added to tea or poured over oats in the morning.

Loch of Gold

Kai Ray



Acorn Season

Fernando Martí

A few times a year we go to hot springs,
privileged to pay for a night
at Orr, or Vichy, or Morton or Harbin,
Northern Pomo and Lake Miwok
and Wappo medicine waters.
I wonder if the old People still visit,
what kinds of arrangement they have,
the Graton or Dry Creek or Middletown,
Federally “unrecognized” or “terminated,”
with the resort owners and operators,
or if they’ve given up:
this is settler country now,
creeks and grasses trampled by cows and
ordered by vineyard row and Asian chime,
accessible to all, but only if you
make a reservation by credit card.

In October, at Vichy,
it was acorn season, the trails covered
with round ones, long ones, dark ones,
how many kinds of oaks, how many names?
Few remember
and none of us visitors know
the Pomo words,

tanbark, biduh xale,
black oak, dishyi xale.
the Miwok words,
tanoak, katáami.
What happens to the oak trees
when there's no people to gather,
no one to wait for the elders to say now
is the time, to set up acorn camp,
to beat the branches with long sticks
catching and gathering in long burden baskets
of willow, tule and sedge,
to store in granaries lined with mugwort
for the long winter,
to crush to fine flour in grinding stones
hollowed over six thousand years?

Now, November, at Harbin,
there's a warm breeze,
fire season still with us,
the new climate of the Pacific coast.
On the trails all that's left are the acorn caps,
in Pomo, dishiy dabo:ma?,
though the acorn woodpecker
still holds one
tight in its red-crowned beak
before dropping it safely in its
deep knotty cache.
The oaks are brown now,
the ones that survived the fire,
but there are whole new growths,
bay laurel, manzanita and figs.

I am gifted with a jackrabbit
springing under the bridge,
unafraid of snare or rabbit drive,
a mother and child deer a dozen feet away
staring back at my presence in this place,
and as we leave, two red-tailed hawks
playing or flirting or fighting in the air
for whatever one has hanging in her claw.
After the fire, the hills are alive.

In China Camp, we slow at the coyote
wandering in the middle of the road.
He stares at us, unafraid,
like a street dog from my village in Ecuador,
or maybe like Ishi,
wandering in from the high mountains,
the last of his people,
looking at us again, wondering,
what are you doing here?
and who
is leaving prayers for the oaks?

Spiderweb

Hannah Tomes



You Can't Explain

Elisabeth Frischauf MD

Crickets dial up. Air spills cool—you can't explain.
Leaf underside caressed—1 atmosphere is 2— you can't explain.

Sun low, wind chime pipes *gloing* and *dung*,
harmonize a random route you can't explain.

Warm, flush, evening's pungent mouth dials down;
thoughts plume with day beat rush you can't explain.

Energy ascends. *Harronk*, *harronk*, crescent moon cups
the geese in V formation. How they do it, you can't explain.

Last glut of heat, perch leap to eat. Ripples shudder
as sugar maple tinges redder and you can't explain.

Couplets chorus marigold orange scent. One
song ends, the next begins and you don't explain.

Trill, trall, branches solitary, mingle. Leaves leaving;
the middle path exposed you seek but can't explain.

Hear autumnal day join evening's final coupling prance,
'til cold dawn drops in velvet dew you won't explain.

CONTRIBUTORS



Amanda Yskamp

Author and artist Amanda Yskamp's work has been published widely. She is a poetry editor and frequent cover artist for WordRunner E-Chapbooks. Living on the 10-year flood plain of the Russian River, she teaches writing from her online classroom, Wordwise Instruction.
Link to my published works:
https://www.echapbook.com/yskamp-html/Amanda-Yskamp.html



Andrew Kolarik

Hailing from Croydon, in South London, England, Andrew Kolarik spent ten years writing post-punk lyrics for live performance in London and Cardiff. He has written poetry, short fiction and film criticism appearing in publications including Aurealis, Film International, Sally Port, and Utopia Science Fiction Magazine.



Angela Patera

Angela Patera is a published artist, writer, poet, and photographer. Her art has appeared in numerous publications, as well as on the cover of Small Wonders Magazine, Indie Bites Magazine, Gnome & Bone Magazine, and a few more.
You can find her on Instagram @angela_art13 and Bluesky @angela-art13

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Anna Gresham

Anna Gresham is a seasonal job collector, snowboard and ski bum, and hopeless romantic. Though she graduated with a degree in environmental science in 2019, she prefers to explore less well-compensated, but more fun opportunities in the world's remote and endangered spaces.



Annick Cottom

Annick is a watercolourist, printmaker and mixed media artist based in Cheshire, UK. Her art is informed by the colours and shapes of local flora, both wild and cultivated. Her work was featured in the first issue of Altar.



Ariana Akbari

Ariana Akbari is an artist-architect and climate activist. She is a proud Iranian-American most of the time but if you ask her about the current state of affairs she might say that actually she is Italian just to avoid talking about geopolitics. She voted for Kamala.

CONTRIBUTORS



Ashley Rose

Ashley Rose is an eclectic witch from Portland, Oregon. She has been practicing witchcraft for the past ten years solitaire. Her practices focus on herbalism, earth magick, and talking to the moon.



Austin Nix

Austin Nix is an occultist from Fayetteville, North Carolina, with interests in astrology, mysticism, and theurgy. He grew his following online and hosts the podcast Millennial Magick. Like most modern witches, he spends his spare time buried in a book with a familiar curled up in his lap.



Bailey Loveless

bailey loveless (she/they) is a reclusive collector of ghosts—literal and figurative—haunting a far forest ledge of the Washington coastline. Compelled by insomnia, moss, and other unruly things, she writes between bouts of brooding and conspiring with her many familiars. Dispatches occasionally appear on Instagram (@bailey.loveless).

CONTRIBUTORS



Cheryl Caesar

Cheryl Caesar lived in Europe for 25 years before returning to her native Michigan. She teaches writing at Michigan State University, and serves as president of the Michigan College English Association. Her poems and artwork appear in both volumes of
Words across the Water (Fractal Edge Press), and in literary magazines and anthologies worldwide. Her latest chapbook,
Saving Stars: Poems of Resistance in the Second trump Era (Bottlecap Press, 2026) contains her poems and artwork.



Clarabelle Fields

Clarabelle Miray Fields is an award-winning speculative writer from Boulder, Colorado, who often writes about feminism, scifi, ancient myth, and the spaces in-between. When she isn't writing, she enjoys dark skies, cold nights, and black coffee. You can connect with her further on Instagram @cfieldswriting or at https://clarabellefields.com.



Dakota Kitchen

Dakota Kitchen is a 29-year-old writer based in Barrie, Ontario. They have been newly working in poetry and participate in local open mics and writing circles. Their poetry is often inspired by patterns, relationships, memory, and the natural world. Their favourite bird is the Mourning Dove.

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Darius Phelps

Dr. Darius Phelps (he/him) is the author of My God's Been Silent (Writ Large Press, 2026) and The Holy Ghost Lives In Her Laugh (Kith Books, 2026). His work has been featured or is forthcoming in Frozen Sea, wildness, Diode, Tupelo Quarterly, and many more. He lives in Brooklyn, NY.



Denny E. Marshall

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



Elisabeth Frischauf MD

Frischauf, physician, storyteller, and visual artist writes for today about technology/environmental concerns, memory, relationships in a variety of forms and has two published full-length memoir books in verse. Frischauf lives on a small plot of land north of New York City. Both places inspire her.

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Emily De Armas

Emily de Armas is a Miami-born writer and poet exploring identity, self-trust, memory, and the occult. She is the author of Loved In, a newsletter about personal taste and everyday magic.



Fernando Martí

Fernando Martí (he/him) is a writer, printmaker and architect based in San Francisco (Ramaytush Ohlone). His writing, illustrations and constructions reflect his training in urbanism, his roots in Ecuador, and his residence in the heart of Empire. His work inhabits a space between ancestral traditions and a liberatory Latinx Futurism.



Fiona M Jones

Fiona M Jones writes short dark-themed fiction, nature-themed nonfiction and sometimes poetry. Her published work is available on https://fionamjones.wordpress.com/ .

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Gabriela Faria

Gabriela Faria (she/they) is a Cuban American poet, writer, diviner, and multidisciplinary creative residing in Brooklyn, NY. An avid student of the stars, she explores the liminal, mystical, and unbounded facets of existence through her work. They hold a BFA in English from Georgia College & State University.



Hannah Tomes

Hannah Tomes graduated from college in 2023 and majored in Professional Writing, but she is also passionate about creative writing. She received first place in fiction in the 2023 Maier Awards, along with being a winner of the New Works Screenplay Festival in 2024 and 2025.



Hannan Khan

Hannan Khan — a nefelibata, poet, and scholar of literature & linguistics from Pakistan. He combs through moments of love, death, delirium & relational complexities, seraphically tracing what's breathed and what flickers unbreathed. For a glimpse into his life, find him on Instagram: @hannan.khan.official

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Howard Marsee is a former medical malpractice attorney and currently is an arbitrator, mediator, special magistrate, and novelist. He has published three novels and one non-fiction book. He has authored one unpublished screen play and has published seven short stories.



Jane Bonney

Jane Bonney grew up in London but escaped on a narrowboat at the age of 40 and is now based in the West Midlands. She has worked in horticulture all her life and her essays and fiction often take inspiration from the natural world.



Jill Sisson

I am a naturalist and educator; my home is in western Oregon. My poetry and essays invariably encompass wild species and spaces, usually from western landscapes stretching from the Colorado Rockies to the Pacific Northwest.

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Kai Ray

Kai Ray is a writer, artist, and poet based in London. Recently, her artwork featured on the cover of Atropos Magazine. Her work examines wildlife, myth, and folklore. When not writing, she can be found camera in hand or illustrating the corvids and foxes that roam through her home garden.



Kait Quinn

Kait Quinn (she/her) lives in Minneapolis with her partner and their very polite Aussie mix. Her work has appeared in Anti-Heroin Chic, Exposition Review, Full House Literary, and elsewhere. She is an editorial associate at Yellow Arrow Publishing and has authored five poetry collections. Find her at kaitquinn.com.



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Leatrice Alan is a writer, editor and part-time fairy godmother living in the Midwest.

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Loralee Clark

Loralee Clark's fourth book, Neolithic Imaginings: Mythical Explorations of the Unknown (Kelsay Press), came out earlier this year. Her interests include myth, the natural word and environmental science. She resides in Virginia; her website is sites.google.com/view/loraleeclark. Her Substack, which focuses on the process of creativity, is nosuchthingasfailure.substack.com.



Michael Raine

Michael Raine in an unpublished writer who lives and works on the beautiful Country of the Kaurna People of the Adelaide plains, in South Australia. Michael writes short stories about ordinary people touched by strangeness, darkness, sadness and the common worst of life in Western society.



N.T. Brown

N.T. Brown's work has appeared in Gulf Coast, Matchbook, Silk Road, Pebble Lake Review, and many other journals. He lives in Florida with a rotating cast of animals.

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Nasta Martyn

Nasta Martyn is an artist, graphic illustrator and poet. She graduated from the Academy of Slavic Cultures and also holds a bachelor's degree in design. In 2024, she received a silver prize and a special award for her poster in China.



Nicole MacDougall

Nicole MacDougall (she/her) is a word witch who loves playing with paper and ink. She breathes magic and creativity into the everyday and supports others in tapping into their own artistic, magical selves. She lives in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia with her two cats, two dogs and one husband.



Pat Murphy McClelland

Pat Murphy-McClelland's poems appear in: Nutmeg Anthology of Connecticut Poems; Chronicles of Eve; Caravel Journal; Minerva Rising; ARAS Connections: Image and Archetype; Altadena Poetry Review; and Feile-Festa Literary Journal. Her essays appear in Tales from the Bedside; The Mentor that Matters; Snapdragon Literary Journal; and Evening Street Review.

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Pravy Jha

Pravy Jha is a writer from India. Her work has appeared in Brilliant Flash Fiction, Solarpunk Magazine, Blue Marble Review, and anthologies such as Upon Learning That and Rooted In: Rite.



Rebecca Clifford

Rebecca Clifford lives rurally near a watershed. Most recently, her work has appeared in Poetry Pause (League of Canadian Poets), Poem Alone (UK), Devour: Art & Lit Canada, Antae (Malta), Sola Poẽta, Merion West (US), and Stravaig (Scotland).



Rhiannon Lewis

Rhiannon Lewis is a writer of subjects both real and imaginary, exploring myth, folklore, and the synergy between nature and otherworldliness. Her writing is inspired by magic and her love of the wild green world.

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Sameer Saklani

Sameer Saklani is a Brooklyn-born writer, factotum, and creature of matter, now residing near the equator's heat with his loved ones. He explores the humananimal condition alongside the qualities of language. His recent publications can be found at https://sameersaklani.carrd.co/



Virgil Freier

Virgil Freier is a transmasculine writer and undergraduate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison studying Data Science and English, born at 11:11pm and unable to stop making things since. He can usually be found writing, drawing, or playing Pokémon games. His poetry has appeared in Up North Lit and Infocalypse.



Wai Mei Wong

Wai Mei Wong is an author who lives in Toronto. She likes to write stories that weave elements of paranormal, urban legend, and mysteries of human nature. She would like you to find out more about her on Instagram @wmwongcreator.